Interview with **Quentin Young**
Date: October 19, 1988
Interviewer: Terry Rockefeller
Camera Rolls: 3030-3031
Sound Rolls: 314-315
Team: C

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation
Interview with Quentin Young, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 19, 1988 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3030]

[sound roll #314]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK. How is it—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Microphone.

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

—that you started working with the Panthers and setting up a clinic?

00:00:21:00

Quentin Young:

Yeah. Well, I was pretty active in the civil rights movement. I was most related to the Medical Committee for Human Rights nationally and locally in the burgeoning coalition that ultimately brought Dr. King here. I was active in both and I'm a physician and was very interested in the health issues involved in those movements, those movements. And early on, Al Raby, who had emerged as the youthful leader of the CCCO, the Coalition of Community Organizations, and himself a teacher, he gave up the teaching to lead the group. Nevertheless, he had contacts with young students, Black students, and he asked me if I would see a youngster, couldn't have been more than 16, maybe 17, who had the nickname Doc Satchel—Ronald, I think, is his real name. Doc Satchel was sent to me because he was interested in the health issue and he was a young Panther. He was very un-Pantherlike. He was a very slight young man, maybe five foot seven, probably more like five six, weighed about 120 pounds dripping wet, very soft-spoken, very, very modest in his presentation and I was, of course, excited that a young high school student would be interested in the health issue. And he came, not with a lot of formal knowledge but a, a real sense that this was one of the programs, they had breakfast programs, and they had health clinics in their founding place in California and this was the Chicago expression and he wanted to learn all about it.

00:02:06:00

Interviewer:

So, now, did Fred and Doc work together on establ—on, on, on getting the, the plans going for the clinic here?

00:02:12:00

Quentin Young:

Eventually. I met the, with Doc, gave him some books, I remember telling him what I tell everybody I lend books for. The only way to really make me dislike you is to fail to return your books. If you return them, I'll give you more. He returned them and I did give him some more. And very soon after—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Quentin Young:

—weeks at the most, Fred Hampton and some of the oth—you know,

00:02:36:00

Interviewer:

We're just gonna have to change the film. We were at a little close to the end of the roll on that last bit.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Bill?

[cut]

[camera roll #3031]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark. Speed.

[slate]

00:02:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible].

00:02:45:00

Interviewer:

OK. So what, what were the ideas—

Quentin Young:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—coming together that you were gonna put—

00:02:49:00

Quentin Young:

Well, but at the time we're speaking of, there were s—a, a proliferation of so-called people's clinics, community clinics, not merely in Chicago but in the nation. It was a real movement and they, they had several characteristics. They were based on indigenous activity, they,

usually particular communities or constituencies, we had a half a dozen or so. The, the Panthers were among the last to come in but trading on that other experience and with a rather clear notion of what they wanted. They wanted in their community where their largest number of supporters and members were, they wanted to establish a free clinic, a clinic where people could come for care in a way that they couldn't get elsewhere. I mean, there certainly were other places where these people went for care but no place that was, so to speak, their own where they—was no charges, that was, there was no sliding scale, there was just no charges. And we talked about those considerations, we talked about details like the actual physical plant, what kind of room you'd nee—what kind of, more than room, space. It was, in its fullest expression after it was built, a very nice, attractive place. It wasn't like so many, just kind of jerry-built with hand-me-down equipment and ugly appointments. It was, for example, it had superb brick layering to replace the kind of storefront it had and—

00:04:16:00

Interviewer:

How many people were actually served in the clinic?

00:04:18:00

Quentin Young:

OK. In terms of numbers, it would be hundreds. I'd be very hard pressed to come up with a hard number now. Equally interesting is how many people worked for the clinic. The, the Panthers, no question about it, had an extraordinary appeal for the kinds of volunteers in the health workforce, the young doctors who were either in training at the hospitals or already out in practice. Nurses, technicians, all the elements that go into a, a good-run medical center, they had few problems in attracting people. The Panthers were, no question about it, in some respects isolated and thought of as being too militant but it didn't reflect itself in either a lack of volunteers of the professional type and technical type on one hand, or patients, the patients certainly didn't stay away.

00:05:08:00

Interviewer:

What, what was that appeal? Where did the, what, what was the appeal to someone like you to come work there?

00:05:12:00

Quentin Young:

Well, I was perfect frame of mind for it, the idea that people would work for the, their own solution of their own problems. Recruiting, of course, poured from elements that could help

whether it was professional time or, or liberating, in the best sense, equipment and, and supplies, drugs, medicines for the clinic. That, to me, was a, a very sound way to go in that particular period. And certainly the community they picked was about as downtrodden as you can get in America. It was the very center of the west side ghetto which is extremely depressed, very high joblessness, a very high dependency of, on, on welfare, all the attendant problems. So, they were going to no easy touch and they wanted to do it just that way.

00:06:07:00

Interviewer:

You told me a very kind of humorous story—

Quentin Young:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—about working for a while and can you just repeat that for me?

00:06:17:00

Quentin Young:

Yeah, I would like to do that. The, it was very interesting. I, by every standard, was a, a senior citizen, even though I was much younger than I am now, having been in practice perhaps some twenty years at that point. And I guess my presentation and, and way of conducting myself professionally, I was very much a, a conservative. I wore a three-piece suit, and without, I hope, being particularly haughty, it just felt that was the way I'd like to do it. Meanwhile, most of the doctors and other people there were part of the, the culture of the movement which included a, a clothing code which was quite unusual. Blue jeans was already formal dress and sandals and barefoot were OK and ties were a sign of selling out. Shirts while they could be clean, could never be pressed, etc. And they were very dedicated young people and I'll testify they were very skilled at what they did. And they liked this idea of organic unity with the patients, who dressed better than they did, let the record show for all their poverty, were neater and, and more concerned about their presentation. And when I say they weren't concerned, they were concerned, the idea of looking unruly was their way of expressing themselves. After about two weeks in the clinic, the Panther who was in charge of running it called all the doctors into what was a very comfortable kind of a break area where you could get coffee and sit around and chat in between patients at appropriate intervals and it was different. And he said he wanted to tell us something, we thought this was going to be very important, a change in policy, what have you. He says, he says, I got a problem, we have a lot of patients come here who see doctors, they see them in the clinics, they see them in their doctor's offices on occasion, and the doctors present themselves with coats, stethoscopes and even ties and you're confusing the patients. [laughs] He said, What we've

done is, is, is, is get a, a large, a variety, assortment of, of doctor's jackets, and he pointed to a rack that had easily 50 of all sizes and even colors, Pick the one you like but we'll expect you to wear a jacket here so the patients will understand that by the outward symbols you are indeed a doctor in addition to your great desire to serve the people, that was a Panther slogan. He was being not sarcastic but ironic. And it worked. I mean, a little grumbling about bourgeois and selling out but they got the point. And while it's a small point, it did indicate if you're going to serve the people don't give them added burdens of worrying about whether you're a real doctor because you don't dress like any doctor they ever saw. That, put simply, it's an indulgence on your part to, to demand that they accept you as you try and mimic what you think their, their style is.

00:09:24:00

Interviewer:

How was it that Fred appealed to you to come work—

Quentin Young:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—in the clinics and, and, and help get them going? What was it about him?

00:09:32:00

Quentin Young:

Well, it was, Fred was a, an enormously appealing human being. It's really hard to put to words without sounding maudlin or romantic. And, I, in the long life, have met a lot of people, many of whom are outstanding in their expression, their political understanding, and their leadership qualities. I'm almost certain I've never met anybody who exceeds him and probably few who equaled him and I've had the privilege of knowing Martin Luther King, knowing major leaders of the civil rights movement and other movements. So, what I'm saying is based on a serious comparison and the most striking thing about him was that he was youthful. Not in his manner. He was a young man, and couldn't conceal his youthful vigor. He had a beard and, in the style and so he didn't look overly callow. And that's hardly the point, the point is that, that he was so young to have so many skills and his skills were enormous. He had enormous communication skills, he was a very impressive person. I'm tempted to say charming if I wouldn't be misunderstood. He won you over. It wasn't—

00:10:34:00

Interviewer:

Why did he, what, what was his dream about the clinic?

Quentin Young:

Well, the clinic was part of a larger thing, I don't think he was obsessed about the clinic.

[beep]

Voice on intercom:

Dr. Young, Ms. Allison from WBEZ on line one.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Quentin Young:

I really apologize. Usually, they wouldn't do that.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[laughs]

[beep[

[cut]

00:10:50:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, and marker.

[slate]

00:10:54:00

Interviewer:

OK, just in that one last question, what—

Quentin Young:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—what was it that Fred—

Quentin Young:

OK.

Interviewer:

—and the others were able to pull together?

00:11:01:00

Quentin Young:

Yeah, yeah. Well, one can stress, as I have, the, his enormous attractiveness as a human being, his great communication skills and so on. But the message, obviously, was what was most important. And his message, even in those times of great ferment and great pronunciamentos was special. We were moving into a period of, of Black nationalism, of separatism which I think everybody understood. And the Panthers, I think, to most people, friend and foe, were thought of as a, a part of that. But that was not, that was not what Fred Hampton talked about. He was very much a person who went beyond bounds of, of, of mere racial unity and advance of the race. He, he spoke consciously and explicitly in terms of across the racial barriers and indeed, to put it in the old terms, in terms of the human race. And that was a very exciting vision because mid-'60s, no one knew where things were going to go at all but people knew [beep] that there was a tremendous—

00:12:03:00

Voice on intercom:

Doctor West or Doctor Nicely from Michael in emergency, line one.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[cough]

Quentin Young:

That's a big mistake because we can just volume that out, I can do that. [unintelligible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:12:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

And marking.

[slate]

00:12:23:00

Interviewer:

OK. One, one last time.

Quentin Young:

The same thing?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:12:25:00

Quentin Young:

Yeah. OK. The, the thing about Fred's message was extraordinary for those times at a time when the movement was moving in the direction of Black separatism and emphasis on the Black pride, Black unity, things I think every one of us understood and, and could deal with. His message went beyond that and it was explicit and not veiled, explicit cross-race unity and to deal with things in terms of a, of a movement that, that could work together. He emphatically appealed for White participation and support in the numerous projects that he and his colleagues were putting together and that was extraordinary because in that sense, it was counter-current. It was visionary and clearly found a place in, in what he was trying to do in terms of organize and elevate the most explicitly downtrodden sectors of our society. He was asking all people to participate in that effort and that was a very, very attractive appeal.

00:13:34:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. OK.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:13:42:00