

The Charlie Douglass Legacy Internship

Learning From a Life of Resilience, Education, Service, and Purpose

A Fuller Road Living History Internship

Inspired by the life of Charlie Douglass and *Fuller Road: The Science of Purpose*

On August 31, 2026, Charlie Douglass turned 86 years old.

Early that morning, his nephew Art Fuller called and asked what he planned to do for his birthday.

Charlie said he was going to the gym.

That simple answer captures the spirit behind the **Charlie Douglass Legacy Internship**.

This interdisciplinary internship invites undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students to study one extraordinary life—and then use what they learn to better understand history, education, resilience, healthy aging, technology, community, family and purpose.

Charlie Douglass grew up in Lowndes County, Alabama, during Jim Crow segregation. He walked miles to attend school while white children attended a school much closer to his home. He experienced educational inequality firsthand. He watched his school burn. He eventually attended Carver High School in Montgomery, excelled in basketball and skilled trades, attended Alabama State University, served four years in the United States military in Germany, developed expertise in electronics, and returned to Alabama to become an educator.

He spent decades teaching technical knowledge to young people.

At 85, former students still remembered him.

He also became a builder, craftsman, property owner, community member, church leader and one of his family's most important keepers of historical memory.

At 86, he remains active.

His life provides the curriculum.

The Central Question

The internship begins with a simple question:

What can one person's life teach us?

Students will use *Fuller Road: The Science of Purpose* as a primary source and Charlie Douglass's oral-history testimony as a case study.

Rather than simply reading about history, interns will investigate how history is experienced by individual human beings.

Charlie experienced segregation not as an abstract historical concept but as a child walking miles to school.

The Great Migration affected him when his mother traveled north for employment and he remained in Alabama to be raised within a multigenerational family.

Educational inequality affected where he could attend school.

Military service took him from rural Alabama to Germany.

Technological change transformed the electronics he learned and eventually taught.

The Civil Rights era transformed the communities and institutions around him.

Generational change eventually transformed Charlie from the child listening to elders into the elder whose memories younger generations now seek to preserve.

Areas of Study

Interns may develop projects across several interconnected areas:

Oral History and Family History

Study how interviews with elders preserve information unavailable through traditional written records.

African American History

Examine Charlie's experiences within the larger histories of Jim Crow, segregation, the Great Migration, Black land ownership, education and community development.

Education

Study Charlie's journey from a child confronting educational barriers to an educator whose former students remembered him decades later.

Technology and Skilled Trades

Explore the progression from brick masonry and early electronics to military technical training and classroom instruction.

Military History

Research the experiences of Black American servicemen stationed in Cold War Europe and examine how military technical training contributed to civilian careers.

Land and Economic Independence

Investigate the significance of Black land ownership, property preservation, intergenerational wealth and the historical threats to Black-owned land.

Healthy Aging and Lifelong Purpose

Use Charlie's continued activity—including regular gym attendance into his mid-eighties—as an entry point for examining movement, social connection, independence and purposeful aging.

Intergenerational Learning

Study what happens when younger people create safe spaces where elders can share what they know.

What Interns Will Do

Each intern will begin by reading selected sections of *Fuller Road* concerning Charlie Douglass.

Students will identify major themes from his life and develop a research question connected to their academic discipline or professional interests.

An intern studying education might investigate the transformation of Black education in Lowndes County.

A history student might reconstruct the schools Charlie attended.

A public health student might explore healthy aging and social connection.

A technology student might examine the evolution of electronics across Charlie's lifetime.

A journalism or communications student might produce a multimedia oral-history feature.

A genealogy student might verify portions of the family history through archival records.

A business or economics student might investigate Black land ownership and economic independence.

A student interested in sports might examine Charlie's basketball experiences and the role athletics played in Black educational institutions.

Students are therefore not expected to study Charlie's life in exactly the same way.

They are expected to **discover something meaningful within it and build something useful from what they discover.**

The Living History Project

The central deliverable will be a **Living History Project.**

Depending upon the student's discipline, this could include a research paper, oral-history archive, documentary short, digital exhibition, interactive timeline, genealogical project, educational curriculum, podcast, public-health resource, historical map, youth learning activity or another approved product.

Projects should connect Charlie's individual experiences with larger historical or contemporary questions.

The objective is not simply to celebrate a life.

It is to **learn from a life**.

Learning From an Elder

A central principle of *Fuller Road* is that ordinary conversations can contain extraordinary knowledge.

Students will therefore be encouraged to identify an elder within their own family or community and conduct an ethical, respectful oral-history conversation.

Questions might include:

What was school like when you were young?

What obstacles did you encounter?

Who taught you the most important lessons of your life?

What skills did you develop?

What has changed most during your lifetime?

What do younger generations misunderstand about your generation?

What should we make sure is never forgotten?

What gives you purpose today?

The goal is to help students recognize something that Charlie Douglass's story demonstrates powerfully:

History is still sitting in our living rooms.

Sometimes we simply need to ask the questions.

An Eight-Week Journey

Weeks 1–2: Listen and Discover

Study Charlie Douglass's story in *Fuller Road*. Identify themes, questions and connections to the student's discipline.

Weeks 3–4: Research and Verify

Connect Charlie's testimony with historical records, scholarly research, archives, photographs, maps, newspapers or other credible evidence.

Week 5: Intergenerational Reflection

Share findings with other interns and mentors. Discuss what Charlie's life teaches about resilience, education, service, aging and purpose.

Weeks 6–7: Build

Develop the Living History Project.

Week 8: Pass It Forward

Present the final project and explain what future generations can learn from the work.

Who Should Apply?

The Charlie Douglass Legacy Internship is intentionally interdisciplinary.

Students may come from history, African American studies, education, public health, gerontology, social work, journalism, communications, digital humanities, genealogy, sociology, anthropology, technology, engineering, business, entrepreneurship, sports studies, political science, archival studies, library science, film, music, art or related disciplines.

What matters most is curiosity.

Can you listen?

Can you ask good questions?

Can you respect someone's story?

Can you connect an individual experience to something larger?

Can you create something that allows knowledge to reach another generation?

The Lesson Behind the Internship

Charlie Douglass's life does not fit neatly into one academic discipline.

That is precisely the point.

A child walking barefoot to school can teach us about educational policy.

A family farm can teach us economics.

A grandmother can teach us sociology.

A military assignment can teach us technology.

A classroom can teach us leadership.

A former student calling decades later can teach us impact.

An 86-year-old going to the gym can teach us something about aging, discipline and continuing purpose.

And a conversation between an uncle and nephew can become historical evidence that helps another generation understand where it came from.

The Charlie Douglass Legacy Internship exists to make sure students learn to recognize those connections.

Because one of the greatest resources available to the next generation may already be sitting nearby.

Ask the question.

Listen carefully.

Document what you hear.

Learn from it.

And pass it forward.

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A Fuller Road Living History Initiative

Celebrating Charlie Douglass — 86 Years of Moving Forward