

Interview with **Tony Gittens**

Date: October 16, 1988

Interviewer #1: Judy Richardson and Louis J. Massiah

Camera Rolls: 2005-2009

Sound Rolls: 203-204

Team: B

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.

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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 #2005]

[sound roll #203]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer #1:

First AD somewhere.

Tony Gittens:

First AD somewhere.

Camera crew member #1:

OK, rolling.

Tony Gittens:

Once the first AD.

Interviewer #1:

Always.

Tony Gittens:

Always.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

OK, Tony.

Tony Gittens:

Yes.

00:00:22:00

Interviewer #1:

Go back in time, in 1966,'67. When you first got on campus, what disturbed you so much about what you found there?

Tony Gittens:

The way they treated students—

Interviewer #1:

Incorporate my question. Like, What disturbed me so much was—yeah.

00:00:39:00

Tony Gittens:

OK. When I first, when I got to Howard back in 1965, what disturbed me so much was the way they treated students, the way the Howard administration tended to treat students, like children, as though we couldn't take care of ourselves, and, and their job was to, to make us more cultured Black people, that they felt that we were these negroes from the field, and that we were to be treated like kids. And I found that absolutely insulting. I found the whole idea of this, the largest, most prestigious Black institution in the country, wanting to view itself as the Black Harvard, as opposed to setting out its own identity. And in general, I just found their whole attitude condescending towards students, and it was insulting, and just something that, you know, I just thought shouldn't be stood for.

00:01:33:00

Interviewer #1:

What now—what's known as the Black Harvard, it supposedly had this proud tradition of civil rights. What, you know, what were you not finding there, then?

00:01:42:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, what, I, the, the whole civil rights history of Howard, first of all, was carried out by few individuals, and as we looked at a little closer, there were always people who were thought of as a bit unusual there, and there were people, there were people in the law school, attorneys and such. And then, there were some students, like Stokely Carmichael and Courtland Cox, and other students who had gone there. But they, they left Howard out of resentment for the fact that Howard wasn't following them along and taking a more progressive stand. So, the civil rights tradition that Howard seemed to carry was more an individual kind of tradition, that, that Howard just sort of hooked onto. The other thing is that, around that time, *the whole attitude of the civil rights movement was shifting, and Howard wasn't shifting with it. The attitude was that—one of integration, of assimilation. And the whole movement was beginning to shift towards one of self-identity, and, and self-empowerment, and Howard was resisting that as opposed to carrying that forward.*

00:02:45:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, why did you and other students begin to get into this Vietnam protest? What was your personal feeling in connection with it?

00:02:51:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, we were totally against the war. We were against the draft. We felt that the, the Vietnam War was totally unjust, and that especially Black people should have no role in the war. And Howard at that time had compulsory ROTC. That was another aspect of it that most men there found just absolutely appalling. We felt that Howard should not be a factory for Black officers to go into the war, and that we were not going to just participate in it. As a matter of fact, we were going to say no to it. And so, there were protests against that, and to let the world know that, you know, Black people were not going to participate in the war, or at least we're gonna be strongly opposed to it.

00:03:34:00

Interviewer #1:

Were there friends of yours or people you knew who had been going, who had gone over, and been drafted, any of that—there's a personal connection?

00:03:40:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, between I, the time I got out of high school and when I came to Howard, I went to school at night, and I worked, and so I had a lot of friends in Brooklyn who were not, didn't go to college either, and I did have friends who were drafted and one or two who were killed in Vietnam. So, there was that kind of personal attachment, and identity I had with how terrible the war was.

00:04:03:00

Interviewer #1:

And, and you, you talked a little bit about the Black consciousness stuff that was going on outside of campus. How did that infect the campus, and was there an attempt by the administration to stop that from coming on campus?

Tony Gittens:

There was, there were demonstrations, as you know, around that period.

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me.

Tony Gittens:

Yes?

Interviewer #1:

Don't say, As you know. If you could, just start again.

Tony Gittens:

OK. Tell me what you said. I, I—

Interviewer #1:

No, I mean, there were demonstrations, just leave out the, As you know.

Tony Gittens:

OK, so you're not supposed to be there.

Interviewer #1:

I'm not supposed to be there.

Tony Gittens:

Oh good, OK, right. [laughs]

00:04:30:00

Interviewer #1:

Just kidding. [laughs]

00:04:32:00

Interviewer #1:

Sorry.

00:04:33:00

Tony Gittens:

The whole Howard movement was impacted by what was going on outside of Howard. There was a lot of activity in the South. There were Black colleges in the South, where students were taking very militant, very firm stance against discrimination. And here, there were the students of Howard, who were considered to be very middle-class, and sort of away from a lot of that. So, there were some students at Howard who believed that, that should not be the case, and that in fact, that Howard, if it was to be a leader amongst Black universities, should take the firmest of stance. And we pushed to have, make Howard do that. And the resistance to that took the form of, for example, there were people who would come to Howard who—the organizers who wanted to have demonstrations here in Washington, and they would come to Howard to try to get Howard students to participate, and there was always resistance on the part of the administration to such people coming on campus. There were speakers who we wanted to bring to Howard, towards the earlier days, not so much during the later days, and there was always resistance to these speakers being brought to Howard. And so, the university as a whole felt that it should not be in a controversial position, that, that it stated in documents that they felt that a good deal of money was coming from the federal government to support Howard, and that Howard therefore should not, and Howard students therefore should not be antagonistic towards the government. We, on the other hand, felt that where

Howard got its money was its own business, and that we were adults, and able to make our own decisions, and take our own stance on things.

00:06:17:00

Interviewer #1:

When you talk about the student demonstrations, can you talk about going down to Orangeburg, and maybe give me a little bit about how you went first to Lowndes County the summer before. And then, go into Orangeburg and what that did to you.

Tony Gittens:

Oh, it was the summer, I believe, of '66, that I first went down south. And it was a SNCC project, and they had come up and asked some students if they would come down and work in the South. I think it was during the spring. I can't recall. I'd have to check my calendar and such, my—and so, some of us organized then and took a—

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me.

Tony Gittens:

Yes?

Interviewer #1:

Could you just start with Lowndes County again?

00:06:57:00

Tony Gittens:

Go back, start with Lowndes County.

00:06:57:00

Interviewer #1:

Start with just, refer to the fact that you went down to there, and talk maybe about the strength you saw in the people, and then go very quickly on.

Tony Gittens:

Got it.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

00:07:07:00

Tony Gittens:

OK. So, when we were in Lowndes County, it was incredible to me to see this determination on the part of rural Black people who had much less than, than we at Howard had. And it, and then to see the, the determination and the strength on the part of the SNCC organizers that were there, who had left college, who had decided that this was what they were gonna do with their lives, and it was just incredible to me, that, you know, [laughs] people were willing to put their lives on the line, you know, day after day for this, and it just had a tremendous impact on me. This was in Lowndes County. Then, later, some students had been killed in, at Orangeburg, at a university there. And I went down with some of the journalists to look at that, and there met these students who, because of a demonstration, the same kind of demonstrations that we were having, actually people had been killed and, and shot. Again, it had a tremendous impression on me, because these people had been willing to give their lives for something. It was not a game for them. It was not a media event for them. And the impact that it had on me and other people whom I related it to when I got back was just incredible. ***And then, what we were doing at Howard, and the dangers there seemed minimal compared to what other people were willing to face for the same kind of reasons.*** And those were experiences that just totally changed my view about the role of a student, my role of a student and what I began to define as the role of other students.

00:08:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Why did you start the manifesto? I mean, what was it that made you say, We've got to do something now?

00:08:57:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, there was no, there was no real clarity at that point. There was an emotional kind of resentment towards the way we were treated and the lack of role students were, Black students were playing in changing society. And the manifesto was a way to put into words, to codify what it is we were about, what specifically we wanted, what it is that we wanted, and what if we did not get we were going to further be, be more active about getting. So we demanded in a symbolic way the resignations of the President of the university and some of his lackeys. And it was totally, it was specifically we wanted these people gone, because they represented a, a school that had been more in the way than it was progressive. We, we

demanded that ROTC be, compulsory ROTC be abolished. As a matter of fact, we got everything we wanted, after many, many months and years of struggle. And there were about ten of these demands that we had, and the reason was to codify exactly what we wanted, and to have people rally around these causes.

00:10:15:00

Interviewer #1:

Can you talk about going into Dean Snowden's office? First of all, talk about why you had such a problem with Dean Snowden. What was it about his attitude toward the students or what he represented?

00:10:25:00

Tony Gittens:

Dean Snowden, he's a chap I, I never, I can't say I know him, but he represented this total Black Harvard mentality all the way through. There was nothing nationalistic or really Black about him. Now, I know, the [laughs] I, I hate to, like, pick him out, but at that time, he was the person who personified everything that we did not like about the university. He had all of his degrees from Harvard. Now, this is not to say that, that's bad. You know, it's not to say that it's bad. I want everyone to get an excellent education, and his expertise was in the Greek or the Roman classics, you know? And he was dean, and he, he had a snobbishness about him that just rubbed not only the students—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Tony Gittens:

—but a lot of the faculty the wrong way.

00:11:17:00

Camera crew member #1:

Run out. Sorry. We have to pick that up on [inaudible].

Tony Gittens:

[unintelligible]

00:11:21:00

Interviewer #1:

You are truly swell, kid.

[cut]

[camera roll #2006]

00:11:22:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark, two, three, four, five.

[slate]

00:11:30:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Let's go back to the Snowden thing. Tell me again, what was it about Snowden that, that was most irritating? What did he represent?

00:11:42:00

Tony Gittens:

Snowden, Dr. Snowden, represented a whole attitude that civilization meant White civilization. He was a very educated man. He had all of his degrees from, from Harvard. Which, we had no personal problem with. However—

00:12:03:00

Camera crew member #1:

Let's stop.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

00:12:04:00

Camera crew member #1:

We've got a camera [inaudible].

[cut]

[camera roll #2007]

00:12:07:00

Camera crew member #1:

Rolling. Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

And what you said before was perfect.

Tony Gittens:

If I can recall.

00:12:13:00

Interviewer #1:

Yes. It's all right. OK. Talk again about what Dean Snowden represented. What, what was his attitude, that was so—upset people.

00:12:23:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, Dr. Snowden represented the whole attitude that civilization was White civilization. He was a very accomplished scholar. He'd gotten all of his degrees from Harvard. His expertise was the classics, classical civilization, Greek or Roman classic civilization. And he, he had this snobbishness about him that tended to just rub a lot of people, not only students but also faculty in the wrong way. And so, in everything he said and, and did, the way he carried himself, his attitude towards people, the way he dealt with people, he just personified this whole, the, the attitude that the only way to be considered a civilized, cultured person was to be as White as possible. And so, that's what he represented. He represented that, as long as I was at Howard and as long as he was at Howard, and a lot of, most people felt that way about him. So, he became this symbol, this focus for us to sort of key in on. To say that, no, that's

not the way it is. [laughs] That, you know, there are a lot of other civilizations that are very developed, as how about your own African civilization that was very developed, and good music need not be classical, or European classical, music. That acceptable, civilized dress need not be bow ties, which he wore daily. That they could be dashikis and, and women could cut their hair in Afro styles, and men could allow their hair to grow out, and these were things that he tended to be, tended to, tended to oppose. So, he became sort of the, our focus for, for confronting that whole attitude.

00:14:19:00

Interviewer #1:

When you mention the Afros, was there a problem when, when people were wearing Afros on campus?

00:14:23:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, the first woman, the first person who cut her hair into an Afro, she did that. She was very involved in the civil rights movement. She did that, and reports all kinds of animosity on the part of the dorm mothers as they like to call themselves. And her faculty, people who said, you know, Child, you should just go straighten your hair again. Then, there was, there were always problems with women especially, with Afros. And then, there was the whole issue of when Robin Gregory was chosen homecoming queen, and Robin had an Afro. And that brought about all kinds of furor on the parts of people who felt that, you know, that was just totally inappropriate. That, in fact, it was ugly. And as a result, she took a lot of heat for it.

00:15:11:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, talk—back to Dean Snowden. Talk, talk of, describe the day when you go in, and you throw this American flag and this manifesto on Dean Snowden's desk. What was that like?

Tony Gittens:

Well, it, it was, we had planned to, after we developed the manifesto, to make a statement, and we held a rally on campus. And we went. We took down the American flag, and then there was this fence. There was this fence that the university [laughs] had, had built around the girls' dormitory. So that—

Interviewer #1:

Just a second. Forget about the fence. We can't do anything with the fence.

Tony Gittens:

We're not getting to the fence.

Interviewer #1:

Don't get into the fence. Go right from the rally into going into his—

Tony Gittens:

OK, skip the fence. We didn't go to the fence.

Interviewer #1:

OK. Start from the beginning.

00:15:50:00

Tony Gittens:

Ask me the question again.

00:15:52:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What—describe the rally and going into Dean Snowden's office, when you, when you throw the manifesto on his desk, with the flag.

00:16:01:00

Tony Gittens:

All right, well, well—we decided to have, after we developed the manifesto, we decided to have a rally, and to tell people, the students, to state to them what our demands and our stand was. And, we went, and we lowered the American flag that was on campus, and then we took the flag, and, and the manifesto over to Dean Snowden's office. We just walked in, didn't—just barged into his office. There was, there were about, there were number of us, twenty, twenty-five, fifty students there. And we put it on his desk. And he was quite shocked, and he was absolutely shocked, and he was shaking. He was trembling, and then we just told him that his time had come. That people like himself and, again, focusing on him, not as a person, as a personality but as a symbol that people who had the attitudes that he had, that their time had come, that they had just spent, they'd done their due, and it was time for them to sort of move on and make room for more progressive attitudes towards what Black people should be doing in this country. And we did that. [laughs] I remember shaking my finger at Dean

Snowden, and him just sitting there trembling. It was quite an experience for both of us, I'm sure. And then just leaving, just walking out and leaving him there.

00:17:09:00

Interviewer #1:

Did he say anything to you?

Tony Gittens:

Not a word. He did not say a word. He sat there smoking his pipe—

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me. Could you say he didn't say anything?

00:17:16:00

Tony Gittens:

He didn't say a word to us. He didn't say a word. He sat there smoking his pipe, in, in bewilderment, not really understanding. See, they all had this bewilderment. They didn't really know what this was all about. They, [laughs] they, they, they never really sort of understood what it is we wanted. And that's one reason we made the manifesto. Never knew how to really resp—and never took it seriously. They, I mean, their Achilles heel was that they really thought we were children. They really thought we were these kids from the fields. And their job was to keep us in line, and they, as a result, you know, they, they took a lot of damage for it. They were, just never took us seriously.

00:17:57:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about Charter Day and what it was like going into the auditorium, and there were all these people amassed, the alumni are there. What was it like?

00:18:06:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, Charter Day was a day at Howard that, where they celebrate the fact that the university, the charter of the university was signed. And, we wanted to make a point there, too, that, that need not have been an auspicious day. That [laughs] Howard was there, and its history was spotted. And so, I remember the night before we planned. We planned the, the demonstration, and I remember the meeting. And no one was really quite sure how that was

gonna go off. And we [laughs] decided that we were gonna go into Cramton Auditorium, and we seated ourselves sort of in different plot spots around the, the auditorium. And I can't remember the signal. The signal was something like either myself or someone standing up, and I remember, I was sitting next to Adrienne Manns. And we're sorta looking at each other, saying, Gittens, she was saying, Gittens, [laughs] you know, we really don't have this quite together. And we were saying, We gotta do it. You know? And we just said, Well, it's time. [laughs] We stood up, and then all these people stood up, and, and started going towards the stage. And Dr. Nabrit was there, and there was a, someone getting a, some kind of award. I can't recall who she was, and, and I remember walking up on the stage, and just saying, you know, This is all over. You know? This is over, and then people gave speeches, and students would stay there, and many people left, and a lot of students stayed there, and, and listened to the speeches. I mean, we just totally disrupted the whole thing and, and left to make a point, to make a point that, you know, Howard just had to change.

00:19:45:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Now, describe—

Tony Gittens:

Can I add to that?

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

00:19:48:00

Tony Gittens:

Yeah. So, I, I don't want to give, and leave the attitude that this was a frivolous activity. That I, I just want to make the point [laughs] that, you know, we were human beings, and our activities came out of a stand that we took to make a difference at the university, and in, in that process, there were a number of times where we often weren't absolutely sure about what we were doing, how the demonstrations would go down. However, we knew that we were gonna make that place change. You know, that we were gonna make a change, that it just was not functioning adequately, and it was just gonna have to change. So, it was not frivolous at all. So.

00:20:33:00

Interviewer #1:

You talked at one point about the connection between, that they were trying to keep the university separate from the community. Can you say something about that?

00:20:42:00

Tony Gittens:

The uni—Howard University is located in a community that, parts of it are developed, but it, there's a whole strip along Georgia Avenue that's not very developed. And there's always been this confrontation, this, this conflict between what in that, at that point were called these block boys or, or gang kids who lived in, in the area, and Howard students, whom they viewed as being middle-class and snobbish. And our feeling was that the university had to relate to its immediate environment if it was going to live up to its mandate. I mean, it, you know, we, [laughs] we couldn't be creating officers for ROTC to go fight wars thousands of miles away and then have a community that's, I mean, not even, like, right next door, but right at your door, that where there was all kinds of problems. Economic problems, and social problems, and not really—health problems and not really do anything for them. And so a lot of things now that—

00:21:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. If you could say, and if you could talk a little bit to the camera.

Tony Gittens:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

So, what did you want the university [inaudible].

00:21:56:00

Tony Gittens:

So, we wanted the university to just, what we call, relate to the community. You know, to have events that would, would be attractive enough for people in the area to come in. To, you know, to have concerts and things. We wanted them to relate to act, all kinds of activities that were going on in the community. There were social groups, and church organizations that were doing things, and, you know, we had students that, we went out, and we tried to participate in them, and bring speakers in, and from those communities. We, we talked about all kinds of things that never really took place. But, daycare centers for, for young mothers, and, and med school doctors who would go out and spend some time, you know, working

with people there. So, that, that was what we were looking for. That was our, our utopia for what the university should do for people who live right there.

[rollout on sound roll]

[rollout on camera roll]

[cut]

[camera roll #2008]

[sound roll #204]

00:22:54:00

Tony Gittens:

Pass. They're going fast.

Interviewer #1:

That's right.

Tony Gittens:

They're here to pass. They're the past.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

[slate]

00:23:00:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, talk about the takeover, and, and going up from the rally, and how you really didn't think that it was gonna be a takeover at that point, and how many people were in this rally.

00:23:10:00

Tony Gittens:

We had decided that we were going to have a sit-in, in the administration building. And we met the, the militant group, UJAMAA and some of the student government people, and the university was going to have hearings again, to try students, some of the students who had

been more active on campus. So, we had rally in front of Douglass Hall. And we said that, you know, We were just tired of this, tired of the way we're being treated, and that we were going to have a sit-in, in the administration building. And I remember different people gave speeches, and I gave the last speech. That was part of the plan. And we had these bags of food that we were carrying in, and we're saying, and I said, you know, We're going to go in. You know, we're gonna go in. We're gonna sit down, and we just, we're not gonna get up until they just refuse to have these hearings. And I remember just walking off, walking away from the steps, and going down. And I was out front, and there were some people by my side. And then I remember turning around, and just seeing all of these students. [laughs] And, it, it was just so movingly incredible. I mean, I had, we had never been able to get this response before. Just, to—and, and just realized that all these people were also tired, and I just, we just walked, and we walked around, and we went into the first floor of the administration building. And everybody sat down, you know, just sat down. [laughs] And we, when we went in there, we had planned this that the night before, you know, we figured that, you know, we'd just sit on the first floor, and that would be it, and we would just stay there. And then more students, people began to hear about it. And then, the whole first floor was filled, and the whole second floor was filled. Then, they went up to the third floor, and the whole building was just filled with these students who had come out of the dormitories, come out of their classes, to just participate in this. And it was incredible. It was just, it was just amazing. I mean, after all that time, all that work, that, you know, someone was actually listening. And so, we just stayed there. It was then about noon, and we stayed there, and the newspapers began to hear about it, and reporters began to show up. And the university, the faculty people who worked there just left. They just left the building to us. And so, then, we said, Well, we have to organize this. So, we had meetings. It was this group that we called the central committee, and we met, and we started having chairmen of certain committees. There was a sanitation committee. There was a communications committee, and there was a food committee, and a security committee. There were all these committees, and we met, and there were just some incidents there that astounded me. Like the switchboards had to be manned. You know, and so, we just made an announcement. From somewhere, someone came up with a PA system. Someone went and got a PA system within an hour, and it was there we said, Well, we need some people to man the switchboard. And all these, these women got up, and went, and took over the whole university switchboard. I remember looking into this room, and they were just, just very professionally and efficiently running the switchboard. And I said, How do you? You know, how? And they say, you know, These students work, you know, doing this kind of stuff, you know, part-time. And everyone was saying this, they were saying on their own, The youths are, the university is closed today. The students have taken it over. Yeah, and that went on for days. And they developed a schedule for taking care of that. Then, there was, there was food that all these people from off-campus, this community who the university, up until then, had very little relationship with. People began to bring food, you know, with—ladies would bring these, these bags of food, and churches would take up collections, and bring us all this money, you know, and they would give it to us, and, and then these cultural groups would come in and say, you know, We wanna do something, you know, can we perform? And there'd be plays, and, and all kinds of things would go on, and people from around Washington would come and give all these supportive speeches, and say, “Whatever you want, let us know. You know, we—and then, people who could not get into the building, there were all these students outside of the building who were just there, you

know, just there. You know, just willing to participate, and signs were made. Howard University, the Black university. You know, and people would—then, teachers would come up, and they said, you know, what can we do? And we had classes that were going on. So, because some students would be afraid they were getting behind, and these faculty members saying, You know, don't worry about it. We'll take care of it. And people would come in and have, we'd have seminars. It was just quite, it was amazing. It was amazing, you know? Just, and we met every morning, and we met periodically, to take care of the issues. And it was just an incredible experience, to just show that, you know, the administration, these people who thought that we were kids, you know, were just so off-key. Just so wrong about the whole thing.

00:28:13:00

Interviewer #1:

When you sat they were off-key, what—what was the university—what, what did it show the university?

00:28:18:00

Tony Gittens:

There, there was a— [pause] the way we defined what it is we're about in, in the broadest sense, was that the May, the first debate around the role of Black education took—

00:28:36:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, I'm sorry. I'm giving you the wrong question.

Tony Gittens:

Oh, I just wanted to say that.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. Let's stop for a second.

Tony Gittens:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

00:28:41:00

Tony Gittens:

I, I guess I wanted to say that. I was—

Interviewer #1:

That's fine.

Tony Gittens:

—gonna get it!

[cut]

00:28:44:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

It'd look good if you leant-leaned on that pillow.

Tony Gittens:

Lean this way? OK.

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah, for a while.

Tony Gittens:

OK, good.

Camera crew member #2:

Thank you.

00:28:53:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about, just briefly talk about what the organization in the A building showed the university in terms of your being adults.

00:28:59:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, I think that the demonstration showed the university, the administration there, that they were not dealing with helpless children, that they were dealing with people who were quite capable of taking care of themselves in a very serious, organized fashion. It also showed them that there were not just these few militant minority students who had these, these grievances with them, that in fact there were thousands of students who were disgruntled and were willing to take a stand, to put their education on the line, to let them know that, that they were just off-base with understanding who it is they were and what they wanted out of their education, out of Howard University.

00:29:47:00

Interviewer #1:

And talk about the fear you had that the police might be called on campus, and what was the context for that fear. I mean, had they, had they been called on other universities?

Tony Gittens:

There, the context, well—

Interviewer #1:

If you can start with, You were afraid the police would be called.

Tony Gittens:

Well, I—that wasn't too true.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, OK.

Tony Gittens:

I didn't.

00:30:03:00

Interviewer #1:

No, ahead then.

Tony Gittens:

About what?

Interviewer #1:

However you wanna answer it.

00:30:07:00

Tony Gittens:

Oh. The—there was a, there was not a, there was some concern that the police would be called in. However, we felt that we had so much community support that, there was so much recognition on the part of the media, who, whom were covering this event, you know, in the nightly news, that no force—that the university was not going to use any force to, to remove us. That so much community support had come to us, that, you know, we felt pretty safe that no police were gonna be called in.

00:30:41:00

Interviewer #1:

And if you could talk about the negotiating team. How did you decide that, about the negotiating team, that there would be so many women on that?

00:30:48:00

Tony Gittens:

Mm-hmm. *At some point, the university trustees and administration, they, they wanted to negotiate. They wanted to sit and talk with us to find out what was going on. And so, we put together a negotiating team, and the team was headed by Adrienne Manns and some other folks there. And it was quite interesting, that a lot of women were on the negotiating team, and the reason was one, is that people like Adrienne and, and, and Carol were just so bright. I mean, they were articulate and bright, and was, were able to go toe-to-toe to, with anyone in terms of a debate or in terms of the discussion about negotiating something. And then [laughs] another thing is that, a lot of the men tended to like to be in front of the camera. A lot of the women tended to like to maybe not be in front of the camera, and to get along*

with the work that needed to be done. So, that's why we had a lot of women on the negotiating team, and all through the demonstrations and the organization that we did. Yeah.

00:31:48:00

Interviewer #1:

And why did you end the takeover? What did you, what did you accomplish?

00:31:55:00

Tony Gittens:

With the takeover, we just, a couple of things happened that made us want to, to end the take, the takeover. One was that we had gotten a lot of what we, we said that we came in there for. We told them what we wanted, and the negotiations were very successful in, in our regard. We had made a very strong point about it. Couldn't see a lot of, of reason to stay there outside of just being belligerent, and we thought that, that would be immature to do that. And so, we decided that, as we chose to go in, that we would be adult, and mature, and responsible enough to choose to go out. And we talked about it at length, and came down one morning, and just made the announcement that we felt that it was time to go. And we had an open microphone. There were no press there. We put all the press out as far as we know. And we had an open mic, and anybody could come up, and say whatever they felt about it, you know? And there were some people who felt that we shouldn't go, and then the vast majority said that we should go. We took a voice vote, and so we walked out. And we just left the place. Cleaned it. Put everything as much back in order, as much as we could, as we recalled it, and we just walked out that day. And students went back to the dorm, and we went back to doing what it is we did before we went in.

00:33:22:00

Interviewer #1:

How did you feel? I mean, how'd you feel? You, I mean, you're, you're now, you've gotten what you wanted. And you present these students, and you're about to leave. How did you feel leaving, and what was the envi—what was it like, you know, you could talk about what was playing on the loudspeaker.

00:33:34:00

Tony Gittens:

Well, let me say a bit about getting all that we wanted. We didn't get everything that we wanted. I'm thinking back on this. There were some issues that still had to be negotiated. I, I remember in leaving though—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Tony Gittens:

—that there was singing. That people—

00:33:57:00

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible] we've run out.

Tony Gittens:

Yeah. OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #2009]

00:33:59:00

Camera crew member #1:

Rolling.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

All right. What did—

Interviewer #2:

Can we stop a second? I'm sorry.

Interviewer #1:

It's all right.

Interviewer #2:

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

00:34:07:00

Interviewer #1:

OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Tony Gittens:

Swell? I haven't looked swell since I was—

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Tony Gittens:

—[laughs] Easter Sunday when I was a kid.

[cut]

00:34:14:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK, marker.

[slate]

00:34:19:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, talk about what you, what you got, and, and the feeling as you all left the A building. And just describe as if we have no footage, what was it like?

00:34:28:00

Tony Gittens:

The negotiating team had come back, and they, the, they—we had gotten a lot of what we asked for. The students were there. *We talked about it that night. And that morning, we got up, and we went down, and we said, you know, It's time for us to go. And we gave our reasons why we should go. And we asked all the press to leave. We were there, and we had open mics, so students can come up, and they could say whether they were for it, whether they were against it, whatever the reason. That went on for about an hour, hour and a half, two hours. We took a voice vote, and the agreement was that, that we should go.* And as we went out of the building, people were, we cleaned the building. There was singing. People were singing. And what I felt best about was that no one got hurt. That we were walking out of there. We chose to go in. We were choosing to go out. We weren't forced out. And that we'd gotten a lot of what we went in there for. And I think that experience changed the life of every single Howard student that was on campus, that they—everyone felt proud. And as we walked out, I felt very good. And the students tended to feel very, very good about themselves, and about—they just felt their whole self image of what a, a, they were as Howard students just changed. They felt part of the whole world of, of Black progress. So, it was quite, it was a wonderful feeling to have ended by choice and in such a positive way.

00:35:56:00

Interviewer #1:

Perfect. OK, let me ask. Don't, don't stop yet.

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Is there anything else that you have always wanted to say? That was—it's in the context of the takeover.

00:36:07:00

Tony Gittens:

[sighs] I could tell stories, but I'm sure you, you—

Interviewer #1:

That's OK [inaudible]

Tony Gittens:

—don't want any stories. All right, wait, wait, wait.

00:36:11:00

Interviewer #1:

Let's cut for a second.

Tony Gittens:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, cut.

00:36:13:00

Tony Gittens:

Oh.

[wild sound]

00:36:16:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, so if you could talk about going down to Lowndes County with the SNCC effort, and the peop—the strength of people, and then go right into how you felt about Orangeburg, and why you went down there.

00:36:26:00

Tony Gittens:

OK. The, I went down to Lowndesburg. Oh, sorry—

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] It's OK.

Tony Gittens:

—I went down, I went down to Lowndes County with the SNCC effort. There were SNCC people there working. And I wanted, while I was there, I was just struck by the strength of the people who lived there, and how they were willing to take a stand against discrimination. And also, by the strength of the SNCC people, most of whom are about my age, who had

dropped out of school, and were down there working around this issue. Then, a little while later, I went to Orangeburg where some students had been killed around demonstrating, and when I, both of those experiences began to make me see that there were people who were willing to give their lives for the same things we were talking about up at Howard. And made me realize that what we were doing at Howard was small potatoes compared to the kinds of issues that were going on in the South, and that we really had to do more at Howard. Is that good enough?

00:37:32:00

Cut. Yeah, that's fine.

Interviewer #2:

Let's just try one more.

Tony Gittens:

Yeah, sure.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, You're gonna try and make it? OK.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Tony Gittens:

OK.

00:37:35:00

Interviewer #2:

When did you go to Lowndes County?

Tony Gittens:

Lowndes County was in sixty-

Interviewer #1:

Tell you what, K? Is it possible to keep rolling?

Tony Gittens:

—six.

Interviewer #1:

If you could, say, I went down to Lowndes County in—

Interviewer #2:

Or, I had went down to Lowndes County.

Interviewer #1:

No, that wouldn't—[pause] I had gone down to Lowndes County in six—

Tony Gittens:

I had gone, as opposed to I went.

Interviewer #1:

—even that—

Tony Gittens:

I've been, I'd been done gone down to.

Interviewer: #1

[laughs]

Tony Gittens:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

It's [inaudible]. Just start it out that way, and let's do it just one more time.

Tony Gittens:

All right. Let me, I think I went to Lowndes County in '66 and to—in 1966.

Interviewer #2:

I'm sorry, just [inaudible].

Tony Gittens:

In 1966, I went down to Lowndes County, and there I was struck by—

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me. If you could say, I went down to Lowndes County as part of the SNCC effort there. And then go into it, yeah.

00:38:21:00

Tony Gittens:

I went down to Lowndes County as part of the SNCC effort in, in that area—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry—

Tony Gittens:

—and there—

00:38:28:00

Interviewer #1:

If you could get both [inaudible] and the SNCC record, SNCC [inaudible] together. I'm sorry.

00:38:31:00

Tony Gittens:

All right, good. All right.

Interviewer:

OK.

Tony Gittens:

I went down to Lowndes County in 1966 as part of the SNCC effort there, and there I was just very struck by the strength of the people as well as the strength of the SNCC people, most of whom were around my age, and their stand against discrimination. Then, in 1967

[sic], I went to Orangeburg, and there some students had been killed as a result of a demonstration they were having. And both of those experiences made me see that there were people who were willing to give their lives for what we were talking about at Howard, and if they could do that, then I'm sure that we could do even more than we had been doing at Howard at the time.

00:39:17:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, good.

Tony Gittens:

Same?

00:39:21:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, OK.

00:39:24:00

Tony Gittens:

In 1966, I went down to Lowndes County as a result of the SNCC effort there, and there I was just taken by the determination and the courage of both the people there and the SNCC workers, most of whom were our age. In 1968, I went to Orangeburg, where some students had been killed and others shot, as the result of a demonstration. And as a result of those two experiences, I began to really see that what we were doing at Howard, that there were people who were willing to give their lives for it, and that therefore, you know, we could take a firmer stand, and demand more from the university.

00:40:03:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, cut, yeah.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible].

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:40:06:00

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