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A Transcript of a Recorded Interview

with

L O N N I E K I N G

Former Chairman
Atlanta Committee on Appeal
For Human Rights

John H. Britton, Interviewer

Washington, D.C.

August 29, 1967



PREFACE

This transcript is the result of a tape recorded interview conducted by John H. Britton, staff associate of the Civil Rights Documentation Project, with Mr. Lonnie King in Washington, D.C. on August 29, 1967.

Mr. King was the first chairman of a student protest organization in Atlanta known as the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights, the group widely acknowledge to have been one of the best organized and most effective student anti-segregation protest units to emerge in the South in the early '60s.

Mr. King later moved with his family to Washington, D.C., where he attended the Howard University Law School for one year. Later, he was employed on the professional staff of the Washington Urban League and was director of one of the largest community action projects accredited to the United Planning Organization, the anti-poverty agency of Washington, D.C. At the time of this interview, Mr. King was again employed at the Washington Urban League and devoted much of his free time to activities associated with his role as president of the District of Columbia Young Democrats. Shortly after the conclusion of the interview, Mr. King moved with his family back to Atlanta, Georgia, where he joined the regional staff of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as a civil rights compliance officer.

In this transcript, Mr. King recalls, among other things, his leadership of the student civil rights movement in Atlanta in 1960, his disappointments with the adult leadership in Atlanta, including that of Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., his activities in Washington aimed at preventing civil disorders, and his early involvement with the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

This statement represents the nearly verbatim record of the unrehearsed and more or less spontaneous conversation between Mr. King and Mr. Britton. The reader, therefore, should bear in mind at all times that he is reading a text of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

Mr. King has read and approved this transcript as corrected and the transcript is available according to the terms specified in his contract with the Civil Rights Documentation Project.

BRITTON: We have with us today Lonnie King, former chairman of an Atlanta student protest group called The Atlanta Committee on Appeal for Human Rights. He is now president of the Young Democrats in Washington, D.C. and a member of the staff of the Washington Urban League.

Lonnie, would you bring us up to date with some details of your background--where you were born, in what year, and so forth?

KING: I was born in Arlington, Georgia, in 1936, on August 30. I /^{came} to Atlanta, Georgia, at the age of eight, and I lived in Atlanta the rest of my life until I went to the Navy in 1954. I did a tour in the Navy and then I came back and re-enrolled - after having spent one year at Morehouse College - re-enrolled at Morehouse College. I left Atlanta in 1961 to come to Howard University Law School here in Washington.

BRITTON: You did finish Morehouse, right?

KING: No, I did not finish Morehouse. I needed just a few hours to finish Morehouse, and I came on to law school without getting my B.A. degree.

BRITTON: Would you tell us something about your work experience since the time you left Atlanta?

KING: Well, I came to law school and I was elected president of the freshman class. When I arrived in law school, there were a few other persons there who had come from other parts of the country who had also been active in the student protest movement. There were a number of

things that we felt at that time were wrong in the administration at Howard, so we set out to try to change some of them. We held a boycott of the law school one day and only seven out of 120-some students came to school. Being the president of the freshman class, I was the one who had the largest class. My class supported us 100 percent in this effort. On the heels of that we were able to get all the demands satisfied that we asked for.

BRITTON: What were some of the things you were seeking at that time?

KING: We were seeking simple things, such as we protested against the inaccessibility of the dean of students at the law school. We found that it was virtually impossible to have an interview with him. We complained about the scheduling of classes. Oftentimes we would only have two classes in one day. We would have one at eight o'clock in the morning and the other one would be at three-thirty in the afternoon. Many of us who were married would like to have held a part-time job. It was virtually impossible to hold a part-time job with this kind of schedule. We researched the top 50 law schools in the country, the reputed top 50 law schools, and we found that a significant number of these law schools either had a night school program, which would facilitate the working of some of the students, or they had a session wherein you could take your classes between eight and one in the afternoon. We found no logical reason why Howard would continue to schedule the classes the way it was.

The dean and other faculty persons told us that they were scheduled that way to try and keep the students from working. But it is well known that the Negro students, to a great extent, have to depend on part-time jobs and other little hustles in order to make it because we don't have the financial base in our families that many of the white kids have. So, we were protesting about the scheduling of classes. We were also protesting about the scholarship fund, or the way it was being administered. We found that persons who happened to come in from Virginia were getting more scholarship money and aid than others. We felt that something was wrong on that point.

BRITTON: The dean of the law school at that time was from Virginia, is that right?

KING: Yes. We found that there was one person who spoke up who was on a \$1,500 scholarship and who had told the dean that he didn't need the money. The dean still gave him the money. Then here I was and a number of other people who couldn't even pay their rent hardly, who were trying to get money to try to stay in school, who couldn't work, and we couldn't get a scholarship. The scholarships weren't necessarily based on academic background. / We were in a bind. Then the seniors in the University had a number of gripes. They felt that the grading system-- and the freshmen agreed with them--they felt that the grades, should I say, should not have been published by name. If you were to flunk a couple of courses at Howard and your name was John Jones, they would post you out there, "John Jones flunked this course and that course."

We felt that in that there were identification numbers, it would be more advisable to actually post a person's grades by number. If a person flunked out, it would at least allow him the dignity of going out the back door. But the way they had it, they would plaster it up there and we felt that it was an invasion of privacy. Maybe we were wrong, but, nevertheless, they agreed with us on our petition and we won all these points. There were two or three other points, too, that I don't recall; it's been about six or seven years now. Those were the highlights.

BRITTON: At any rate, the press of financial responsibility did not allow you to finish Howard Law School?

KING: It wasn't so much the press of financial responsibility; that was a part of it. I was elected president of the Student Bar Association at the end of my first year, and I was told by a supposed informed source that I should withdraw from school because I had created quite a stir at the University. I did not believe that I would be put out of school because I had just come from the rigors of the battle in the South with the white man. And I felt that certainly if our cause was just in dealing with our own people I would get a just hearing. Well, nevertheless, at the end of the term I was punched out of school. I cannot prove that I was punched out deliberately. All I can say is that in the opinion of the instructors at that time, I should not have been allowed to continue my academic studies at Howard University. There are rumors that I cannot substantiate as to why I punched out.

BRITTON: So that the things that you were doing then were the predecessors of the things the kids in the law school are leading on Howard's campus now under the name of black power?

KING: Oh yeh, I was doing this back . . . Well, we didn't call it anything like black power, but the net result is that I got kicked and out/they got kicked out.

BRITTON: Lonnie, you first attracted attention through your leadership of the Atlanta student movement. Tell me, was that your first experience in civil rights?

KING: Before I go into that, let me try to answer the other part of your earlier question. I came out of school and I went to work at the post office. I worked there for about 12 or 13 months. Then I just got tired one day and I quit. I didn't have a job, and finally I went out a couple of weeks later and passed the taxi driver's exam and became a taxi driver for about six or seven months. Then I made a New Year's resolution in 1965. I decided that before that year was out I was going to get a decent job, I was going to work my way back into the mainstream of things, and that I was going to get back into law school, if I decided to go at that point, but certainly I was going to begin to make some money in a professional career, using my chief talent, as I view it, which was organizing people. Anyway, I began work that year, after attending a series of leadership development seminars, with the Washington Urban League as a field representative in the On-The-Job

Training program. My primary responsibility was to develop the IBM contract for customer engineers. And I went from there to . . .

BRITTON: What, by the way, is a customer engineer?

KING: A customer engineer is the title that IBM has given to the young men who repair all their machines from typewriters to the 360 computer.

BRITTON: I see.

KING: This was a virtually closed field to Negroes. The National Urban League had worked out an agreement with Mr. Thomas Watson to get 300 customer engineers all over the country in one year. This is a small amount of people, but still it was an inroad. I was responsible for the Washington part of it.

I left the Urban League after a few months and became the director of the United Planning Organization's Alexandria office. This is the local anti-poverty agency which has a metropolitan base. I spent nearly a year there directing out of the Alexandria office. Then I was promoted to the directorship of the largest anti-poverty program office in Washington, at 14th and Park Road. I stayed there for seven, eight, nine months, and then I was accused of conflict of interest by an opponent of mine when I ran for re-election in the Young Democrats. He wrote the local newspapers and accused me of using my professional position as a vehicle to enhance my political position. The charges were later proved to be groundless and I was exonerated. However, the Office

of Economic Opportunity, through UPO, said, "Well, you may be exonerated, but it looks bad. Maybe you ought to resign from one position, either your paying position or your non-paying position." So I decided that if I had any hope of having a political career, not only in Washington but in any other part of the country, since these kinds of things have a habit of following you, I decided that it would be politically wise for me to resign the paying position. I resigned as the director of the anti-poverty program at this center and took my chances on finding a job that would pay me a commensurate salary. That was when I was offered the position back at the Washington Urban League, this time developing or directing their Leadership Development Program where I am presently employed.

BRITTON: What does that involve?

KING: The Leadership Development Program is a Rockefeller -
e funded grant which is in ten cities. It is designed to find untapped leadership at the neighborhood level, get these persons hooked into the system or get these persons attuned to what the role of boards and commissions are in their respective cities, and to try and get the individuals who appoint persons to these boards to be more amenable to appointing truly representative people. In other words, we try to get the people acquainted with the functioning role of these boards and get them to want to get on these policy-making boards. Then we talk to the people who appoint the boards and try to get them familiar with the program and the fact that these persons who have been left out traditionally

should be given a voice.

BRITTON: This has mainly to do with the urban poor, is that correct?

KING: Right. In Washington, for instance, we have Northeast and Southeast Washington virtually unrepresented on most of these boards in the District of Columbia. One of the ways we can get people on them, we think, is through this program. It's my job to try and negotiate and get people to begin to make some appointments to them.

BRITTON: All the while, during your sort of hectic career in and out of jobs on the basis of principle, you were married and had children, is that correct?

KING: Yes.

BRITTON: How many children do you have?

KING: I have two.

BRITTON: Right. I have heard reports, let's say, that your present job also involves keeping kids cool, not rioting, etc. Is that true?

KING: Yes, I'm also the director of another program for the Urban League called 'he Police Community Alert Council Project. This is a program that is designed to try and prevent flare-ups in the community by virtue of the police going into an area and actually wantonly hitting someone or disrespecting someone's person or property in such a manner

that it would cause his friends or other onlookers to want to find some vindication for the alleged wrong. We went out and we hired young men from the neighborhoods to actually police their friends to try to keep them from becoming hotheads on this issue. We have found that if a police has falsely charged a young man, it's a lot better for the young man to go on to the police station and then let us get him out later than it is to try to take the man away from the police at the time the police is trying to arrest him. All that happens is that the police calls for reinforcements and the reinforcements come in and then they start open season on shooting black people. I think that Detroit and Syracuse and Rochester and Newark and other places, I think, certainly vindicates this position. Ninety-some percent of the people who get killed are Negroes.

BRITTON: Can your program in any way be compared to the so-called White Hat kids in Tampa, Florida?

KING: No, no, no, no, no. The White Hat kids in Tampa, Florida, basically were organized after the riots started. I think we were wise enough here to try and get young men who have had problems with the law organized before anything happened. We have been able to avert a number of very tense situations this summer by virtue of the fact that our guys knew the people who would create the rumbles there and they would talk to them.

BRITTON: How do you prevent your guys from gaining the reputation of being what neighborhood people would call a police pimp?

KING: It's very difficult for our guys to play this middle-of-the road position. They have been called police pimps in some parts of town. However, because they grew up in the neighborhood, it makes it a little more difficult for them to be called police pimps by their friends who have ^{known} / them for years and years. But it's a very delicate public relations thing that they have to play and, so far, they have been able to handle it.

BRITTON: How many guys do you have on the streets, approximately?

KING: We have 27 people on the streets in all.

BRITTON: Is this funded by a foundation of some sort; is the Urban League doing it out of its own budget, or what?

KING: No, it's funded by the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice.

BRITTON: And you think it's been successful so far? I mean we have not had any riots. . .

KING: Let me put it this way: Washington has not had any riots, and I would think that our program has been one part of the reason why we haven't had any riots. It would be presumptuous of me to assume that only because of our program we did not have a much larger conflagration here. I feel that we assisted, or we aided in abating a more serious thing. My concern is just that black folks not get killed by white officers who take any flare-up as an open season--just come in and just start

shooting.

BRITTON: You mentioned that your kids were able to stem some rather tense situations. Could you think of an example and just tell us briefly how they were able to walk into a tense situation and put out the fire, so to speak?

KING: Well, there was an incident on 18th Street, near Kalorama Road, wherein a Negro proprietor, or a Negro manager of a delicatessen killed two other Negroes who were trying to rob his store. A coroner's jury acquitted him of any malfeasance, or any charges--murder or wrongdoing. The friends of the two deceased young men, on the day of their funeral, spread the word throughout the community that a white policeman . . . no, that a white guy, the owner of the delicatessen, had killed the Negroes. So they were trying to turn it into a racial thing. Well our guys got the call and they went over to the community. The ones who were known in that community began to try and sift fact from rumor. We killed that first rumor - that it was a white delicatessen. Then these same guys tried to run the rumor that a white policeman had shot them, and that was running throughout the community. And guys were around trying to talk to little groups of guys, saying, "That wasn't what happened. It was a Negro who shot two other Negroes." Finally, they called a meeting for that night. Many of the groups of guys called a meeting for a place called The New Thing. We senior staff persons were barred from that meeting, but our guys--and most people don't know who they are; many of them don't--were in the meeting. They tried to talk

to the people and talk some sense into them, but they weren't able to do so, it seems, in that organized setting.

BRITTON: The New Thing, I believe, is sort of a night club frequented, let's say, by the black nationalists groups in town?

KING: Well, I don't know whether it's a night club or not. It's kind of a gathering place run by Colin Carew. I understand it seems to be a pretty good place for the young persons. It's better to have them coming in there, I guess, than out on the streets. But, anyway, our guys left that meeting and they faded on off into the night with these guys who had indicated at that meeting that they were going to blow up the delicatessen that night. Our guys faded on off into the night with them. All I can say is that the delicatessen didn't blow up. Our guys stayed with those guys until two and three o'clock in the morning talking to them, trying to keep them from doing this kind of thing.

BRITTON: Your war is basically with words?

KING: Right.

BRITTON: Tell me, from your experience with this program this summer, why is it that these rumors get started? Are they rumors started by people who want to riot or are they rumors that get started from unknown sources?

KING: I think that it is a combination of things. I think unknown sources surely start some of the rumors. I think some of them are

started by people who want to create the atmosphere that's going to precipitate a riot. I think that either way, when it gets to the ears of your more conservative people or the ears of your community leaders, and what have you, I think the thing oftentimes is blown out of proportion. Their responses and reactions to the fact that a riot is supposed to come off precipitate the riot, precipitate the condition wherein a riot might very well emerge.

I can remember once being out in northeast Washington helping a woman at the employment service. They were trying to get hundreds of kids in line. One young lady said to me, "Mr. King, you'd better tell that girl to stop jumping in front of me, because if she keeps jumping in front of me again I'm going to riot." What I'm saying is that all this talk of riot and rumors of this kind of thing creates a kind of hysteria, I think, in the community that is not good at all for the community.

BRITTON: Why do you think that some of those people who apparently want to create the atmosphere for a riot want to create this atmosphere? Do they believe that the riot now is a real protest technique, or what is it?

KING: Many persons feel that you've got to tear down the ghetto all the way to the ground in order to get a better shake. Many people have really lost all confidence in the elective officials, both Negro and white, in trying to pass the kind of legislation that would give them at least a scintilla of the American Dream. Now, the mass media of communication have taken into every home, every hamlet, every hovel

in this country, from Appalachia to Vancouver, Washington, from New Mexico to Maine, high fashions in the newspapers; they take in the society page wherein people are eating stuffed pigs and barbecue; they look at television or they go to the movies and they see these beautifully laid out homes, what have you; and then they go back to a rat-infested area. I think that maybe they weren't too aware of it years ago because this has been going on, I'm sure, for a long time--the dichotomy. But I think that you've got a number of people around now who are causing people to be aware of the dichotomy, who are causing them to take a second look at their own environment. They're beginning to realize that they really are not getting a fair shake. When they go to get a job, they find that the high school diploma, which they were told earlier that they would have to have in order to move up, is really counterfeit because they weren't taught the kinds of things that would qualify them for jobs in the 20th century. So I'm saying that the mass media of communication, the advocates of change, the anti-poverty program - all these kinds of things have caused a new awakening or a second look to be taken by the disadvantaged people in this country. I think it cannot be stopped. I think it's an irreversible trend. The irony of it all is that the people who have the responsibility for running this country are doing what the ostrich does--they're burying their heads in the sand and they're pretending as if this thing is going to go away. It's not going to go away, and I think that the more they bury their heads in the sand, the more the advocates of a violent overthrow of the existing system are going to be able to pick up recruits. I would cite for you merely the welfare

move yesterday that was on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Let's face it, ten years ago you would never hear of people on welfare coming to Washington to berate the senators and congressmen. I'm saying that ten years from now these people are going to still be demanding change, a larger share of the American Dream.

BRITTON: Lonnie, one would think, with the critical atmosphere we have in this country, that police departments would be carrying on the programs that the Washington Urban League are doing in police-community relations. Now, I do know they have, I think, a human rights unit of the police department here. Yet, it appears that the Urban League's operation is more successful. Why?

KING: I think a lot of it has to do with the attitude of the people running the program. You can have the best program on paper, but if you don't have the right people in there . . . You can have a good recipe, but if you don't get the right grade or quality of ingredients that are supposed to go in that recipe, then the end product which you get is going to be inferior. I think this is the case with the police department in Washington in their human relations division. I think that, by and large, the people who are put in there, number one, are not as skilled as they ought to be and, number two, they don't have enough staff, even if they were skilled. Let's say that all the guys in there are the best people in the world. Well, if it takes 25 people to have a good human relations division and you only have five, then you aren't going to be able to get the kind of results that you would want to have. I

think there's a lack of commitment on the part of the establishment in this town, the police establishment. There's a lack of commitment to really bring about an equality to the administration of justice.

BRITTON: Have you run into any flak from the police department? Does anything that your guys do conflict with what the police department is trying to do? Has the police department's unit resisted you in any kind of way?

KING: You mean the police department as a whole?

BRITTON: The unit . . .

KING: Oh, no, no, no. We haven't had any problems with them. We've had problems with individual captains and individual policemen on the beat. Let me remind you that, by and large, the police department is becoming more receptive to what we're trying to do. One of the reasons why, I'm sure, is because public pressure, public acceptance of our program is causing them to have to make a change. I'm not sure that it's a voluntary shift.

BRITTON: Going back to Atlanta, I said before that you first attracted attention, I believe, in the Atlanta student movement. Were you involved in any kinds of civil rights activity before that point?

KING: The only thing I was involved in . . . well, two things; one, I went into the Navy in '54. I had finished a year of college and I was made educational petty officer of my boot camp company. It was my

responsibility to train the other young men on how to pass the test and study in order to get out of boot camp. I found that 90 percent of the people I had to train were white guys who came from the hills of Kentucky, and what have you. Well, when I finished boot camp, I had the responsibility of taking about 60 guys to California. I was the guy in charge and they had to follow my instructions. We all went aboard this one ship called the USS Ariskanee. When I got there I saluted the officer of the deck and the flag, came aboard and handed the man the orders. We all went into what was known as the X-1 Division. I had the highest GCT of anybody that I had with me.

BRITTON: What is GCT?

KING: I've forgotten exactly what it means now. But it's the same thing as an intelligence test that they give, an aptitude test. Anyway, we were in the X-1 Division . . .

BRITTON: You were in the X-1?

KING: Yeh. Now, this was the indoctrination division. We spent a couple of weeks in the indoctrination division and then they began to assign jobs to us. I and a guy by the name of Lamb, who had slept next to me in boot camp, were assigned to the Fourth Division. I didn't know what the Fourth Division was. The rest of the guys . . . and I was the only Negro in that group . . . the rest of the guys, all white guys, were assigned to the personnel office, disbursing office, fire control, the electronics division. I wanted to become a personnel officer at that

point. Well, anyway, I was put in the Fourth Division, and when I got out to the Fourth Division I found out that it was really the deck force. In other words, those were the paint chippers. I went up to my petty officer and I said, "What am I doing in this division?" So he said, "Well, they assigned you up here, you know." His name was P.T. Finn. And so I said, "Well, let me go back down." I went back down to talk to the man who was in charge of the X-1 Division, and I protested. I said, "Sir, look! I don't quite understand why I'm up here chipping paint. I don't think my mother . . ." I was 17; my mother had to sign for me to go in. I said, "I'm sure that it was not her intention for me to come and chip paint. I could have chipped paint in Atlanta, Georgia." "You're in the Navy now, son," he told me. I said, "But my general aptitude test was the highest of anybody that came on this ship." I said, "Now, why would you send these other guys to other spots and send me to the deck force?" "Well, they need somebody up there and you're a big, strong, husky, young man, and we thought you ought to go up there." See, I had been harboring under this thing all my life. Everywhere I would go people would base my job on my size. I think that many people feel that if you're big and black you ought to be out there doing all the heavy work, and if you're skinny and, maybe, light you ought to be doing some office work. I imagine had I been a frail, fair-complexioned Negro, I probably would have been assigned to a personnel office. Anyway, I argued with the guy. He said, "Well we'll get you out of there as quick as we can." Well, I was down there every week or two. I was chipping paint. Finally, P.T. Finn said, "Well, I'm going to take you out of the deck force chipping

paint." So, they put me in charge of cleaning up the bathrooms. My job was to keep the "head" as they call it in the Navy. I was the guy who was in charge of keeping the "head" clean for all the boys in the deck force. So, I said, "There's nothing I can do about it. I'm in here." So, I was the guy that kept that place clean. What I did was this: I had to pray a little bit and psychologically I had to get attuned to it. I went in there and I kept that place so clean you could almost eat in there. Once I got it cleaned I only worked about an hour a day. I worked out a deal with the other Negro guys on the ship to get all my clothes laundered and starched in the ship service division. I ended up working from about 8 to 9 in the morning, and from about 4 to 5 in the afternoon, at the very most. All the rest of the time I was just walking around the ship, reading books and this kind of thing. That caused a great problem among the white guys in the deck force. All of a sudden they all wanted to come up and clean the "head". It got so bad until the third class petty officer bidded on the job to knock me out and he came up to clean the "head"--a white guy - because I had made it look so easy. Anyway, I put in to become a dental technician. They sent my application off. While I was waiting to hear from that, there was an announcement in the plan of the day of the ship that they were looking for volunteers to come down and begin as apprentices in the disbursing office, handling the money. I went down there and applied. They said, "Can you type?" I said, "No, I can't type, but you asked for an apprentice and certainly I can learn how to type." They said, "Well, to be perfectly honest, we don't take Negroes down here." I said,

"I don't quite understand." "Well, we don't take Negroes down here." I went to see the chaplain of the ship and I told him what happened. He said, "Oh, they didn't say that, now did they?" I said, "Come on." He called down there and they told him that they said that. So he said, "Well, you know they got some Southern gentlemen down there, and they aren't used to working with Negroes." This is in '55 now, because I went in in August. I went to see my division officer of the deck force and I asked him if he could help me. He was from Louisiana - Lieutenant James E. Horne was his name. I told him what happened, and he said, "Come on, let's go down there." So he went down there and he asked the disbursing officer if he had told me that I couldn't come in because I was a Negro. He said, "Well, you know, it will cause problems." So, Lieutenant Horne told the ensign who was in charge that he had two weeks to get my name in the plan of the day, and if he didn't, that we would both write a letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel to find out how he ever got to be an ensign. The next morning my name was in the plan of the day to be transferred. I guess that was my first real battle. I was the first Negro on that ship to ever get a white-collar job.

BRITTON: Can you tell the name of the ship?

KING: The USS ⁰Ariskanee, CBA-34, Aircraft Carrier.

I went in there and no one spoke to me at all for the first two or three weeks I was down there. I was just there, sitting there. Nobody would show me anything. Finally, a guy who had been in about $3\frac{1}{2}$ years,

named Welty Wolfe from Seattle, Washington, came up to me and said that he thought that somebody ought to teach me what I was supposed to be doing. He said, "I've been in here almost four years. I've never made any grade, but I went to school and I know all of this stuff. This is just a four-year lark for me." He swore his family was rich out there. He just came to the Navy.

I stayed aboard ship with this boy for about three months and we studied every day, night and day, until I learned all that disbursing stuff. I went up for third class. I made the highest mark of anybody aboard ship for third class. The guys who didn't want me down there in the disbursing office - I ended up being their boss. The whole scene changed when I became their boss. They all got very friendly and got very liberal after I became their boss, because then there were only two persons above me--the ensign and the first class. I was the other person. So then I was responsible for making them do their job. If they didn't, I could run them up for court martial and everything. They all got nice. You know, power is a funny thing. Anyway, that's where I got my first experience. Then I moved the other Negroes down in the personnel office. When I left the ship, I was made second class and I went to typing.

I had a similar experience there, but I was already in rank and there was nothing that could be done about it.

BRITTON: At what point did you leave the Navy--what year?

KING: 1957.

BRITTON: '57. And then you returned to . . . ?

KING: . . . to Morehouse.

BRITTON: At what point did you become aware that you had to fight this system of segregation actively rather than on a man to man basis?

KING: I really believe that it was that experience in the Navy when I saw the subtle collusions that were involved between the religious guy, the chaplain. You see, I was naive enough--I was only 17--to believe that because the guy was a chaplain and he was from another part of the country, the North, I was naive enough to believe that he was honest and right. I just thought that he would certainly help me in my fight with these Southerners. I found that the only person who really helped me in my fight with the Southerners was another Southerner who also felt that it was a wrong system back in '54. That's the thing that has kept me from, I guess, really losing all confidence in people. There is no black or white. You can't say that all Southerners are the worst white people in the world. You can't say that all Northerners who come from liberal states are the best people. Prejudice is a relative thing and has little to do with geographical location. A lot of times it's due to people's . . . well, the sum total of their experiences and what they've been taught.

BRITTON: You came back to Morehouse and . . .

KING: Well, let me tell you why I came back. I was offered an

opportunity. I was a boxer when I was in the Navy. I was supposed to go to the University of San Francisco and join their boxing team. But I had a girl back in Atlanta and my family was there, too, and I told another friend who was going to make his home in San Francisco that I was going back to Atlanta, in the South, because I felt that there was going to be a change in the South--this may sound a little corny, but this happened--and I said that I wanted to be there to be a part of it. I don't know, those things that I told this guy in Hong Kong, China, in 1956 are some of the things that I was involved in four years later.

BRITTON: It has been said of you that you were the leader of the first organized effort to overthrow segregation in public accommodations in the South. It has been said, moreover, that the Greensboro experience was more or less an accident of history - four guys got tired; two guys from the North taunted two guys from the South, and they sat-in. But you became leader of the Atlanta movement, which was, perhaps, the largest and the most organized student movement. First, I want to know what is the anatomy of assuming leadership? How did this idea come to you? Who was involved with you in deciding to challenge segregation in these places of public accommodation? Were you just sitting in your chair one day and, "boom," it hit you? How did it happen?

KING: No. No. On the 1st of February, this "accident of history" happened in Greensboro, in 1960. On the 2nd of February it was carried in the Atlanta papers. I would always eat breakfast at Yates and Milton there in Atlanta . . .

BRITTON: That drugstore?

KING: That drugstore on the corner there. I was a football player, and I knew a lot of people and I would always have someone around. So, anyway, this particular morning as I sat there talking and reading the paper, Joseph Pierce, another friend of mine who went to high school with me, was with me. We were talking about the fact that something needed to be done in Atlanta because Greensboro is not an isolated situation. Things were segregated in Atlanta, too. If we could somehow move in Atlanta, just as the kids had moved in Greensboro, we would be able to foster and move forward, we had hoped, in Atlanta. We talked to another young man that I had met when I had just come back from the Navy by the name of Julian Bond, who was sitting further back in the drugstore. The three of us sat down and we talked about it. We went through all the ramifications of it, and we said, "Well, now, are you willing to go to jail?" We said, "Sure." We'd never been. None of us had ever been to jail before because it sounded very bad. So we said, "Let's go talk to an attorney." So we all jumped up and ran down to talk to Attorney J.C. Daugherty, who is now in the House of Representatives there. And Attorney Daugherty told us, "Well, I'll take the case; I'll be your lawyer, but I'll have to charge you \$25,000." So we said, "Hey, what are you talking about?" Anyway, we talked with him further and he said, "Well, why don't you go and talk to Reverend Samuel Williams." We ran back over to the campus to talk to the Reverend Sam.

BRITTON: He was what?

KING: He was the professor of philosophy at Morehouse.

BRITTON: He was also the head of the NAACP?

KING: He was the head of the NAACP, right. So we talked to Rev. Williams, and in his usual way he was very cautious. He said, "You know, there are several risks involved. The NAACP has always taken the legal approach, so why don't you go talk to Attorney Donald L. Hollowell?" So we ran down and talked to Hollowell. Hollowell was very cautious, as a lawyer usually is. Nobody wanted to commit himself. Finally, I said, "Well, let's go sit down and plan this thing because we aren't going to get anywhere talking to these old people." The three of us went and we sat down and we said, "Well, now, Morehouse College students have a problem in this town. All three of us are from Morehouse and if we get out here and call a meeting of just Morehouse people and we get it started, then we have a battle between Morehouse, Clark, Spelman, and all the other schools. So, what we've got to do is somehow devise a method whereby we can get all the schools in this system working together."

BRITTON: There was sort of a jealousy of Morehouse guys?

KING: Yeh. I decided I would go talk to the president of Clark student body. Joe was supposed to talk to, I think, the president of Morris Brown. All in all, we talked to all the presidents of all the student bodies and we got them pretty much committed. We called a meeting which was held in Sale Hall all the way at Morehouse, and I was explaining what it was all about and the fact that we ought to move here

and that we ought to organize a committee of some kind. Joseph Pierce, who has been kind of my ^{teacher} ~~barker~~ for a long time--even in high school, he pushed me to run for president of the student body down there in high school--Joe jumped up as a hatchet man and said, "Well, I think there's not but one guy qualified to lead this group, and that's Lonnie." So they said, "Yeh". And they pushed me in. That's how I became chairman, at least temporary chairman of the organization.

BRITTON: What was that organization called?

KING: Well, it didn't have a name; just kind of a group of people coming from all six campuses. We decided that we would go and talk to Dr. Mays. Julian Bond, Joe Pierce, and I made an appointment to go talk to Mays since Mays had been considered the most enlightened college president at that time. We went in to see Mays, and Mays said, "Well, you know King has an income tax problem--M.L. King--down there, and it's going to be attributed to him whatever flare-up that comes here." He had just come to Atlanta. We said, "Well, King doesn't have a thing to do with this. He just happens to be here." Dr. Mays said, "Well, why don't you wait and let us try it another way." I said, "Well, Dr. Mays, how can you get up in chapel and preach to us that we're going to be leaders of men tomorrow when we've got a chance to lead today, and you say 'don't get involved'?" Dr. Mays never answered that question. We just ended the interview and we left.

A day or so later--we were still organizing, and they knew that--the secretary to Dr. Clement cornered me in the drugstore and said, "You're

wanted in the Administration Building in Dr. Clement's conference room." She told Joe the same thing and told Julian the same thing. I said, "Oh, God, you think they're going to kick us out of school?" So we said, "We don't know." We all went over there. We had never been in that big conference room up there. I didn't even know where it was. So, we went in and, lo and behold, these three guys and all six of these college presidents had gotten together--plus Samuel Williams. They said, "Well now, what are you guys trying to do?"

BRITTON: Before we get into that, who were those six college presidents?

KING: Benjamin Mays, Rufus Clement, Dr. Brawley, Dr. Manley, Dr. Harry Richardson, Dr. Frank Cunningham.

BRITTON: Right. Okay, they asked you what were you trying to do?

KING: Yeh. And so I said, "Well, we may as well tell them." So we told them what we were going to do. They said, "Well, we ought to offer some help if we can. Why don't you articulate your position in a newspaper article?"

BRITTON: Who was this spokesman who was saying all of this?

KING: I think Clement and Mays basically were talking for all. I'm sure they'd had a meeting and decided. We said, "Well, we don't have any money to pay for any newspaper article like that." They said, "Oh, we can raise the money." Then they said, "Well, why don't we put it

together." Then we had another meeting, and at that time there were some other students--their kind of students, like--called in and we formed a committee to sit down and write it. Julian Bond and I and a guy named Donald Clark, Marian Wright, who is now in Mississippi, . . .

BRITTON: That's a girl, by the way?

KING: Right. Rosalind Pope sat down to write. Rosalind Pope and Julian Bond were really the people who wrote most of it. As you know, Julian is a very good writer and Rosalind is a brilliant woman who is kind of unheralded; but she's really brilliant. They were the ones who really . . . I was there, but I was not a writer in the sense that they were. But it was Rosalind and Julian who put in such words as, "We will use all legal and nonviolent means to secure these citizenship rights that we feel should be inherently ours."

BRITTON: A shade of the Declaration of Independence.

KING: Right. It was a beautiful thing. We brought it back to the college presidents, and they watered it down on us. It was too strong, they thought. But anyway, we set forth in that appeal--we called it An Appeal for Human Rights--and we published it in all the daily newspapers.

BRITTON: In town?

KING: In Atlanta. This caused Governor Vandiver to say--he

was the governor of Georgia at that time--that this was a document that was surely hatched in Moscow. It could not have been written by the Negro students in the Negro universities. In other words, he was saying, in essence, that the students weren't that good. How could they write this kind of thing? Anyway, it was a combination. I still feel that the stronger document was the one before the college presidents tried to water it down. But, anyway, we set forth inequities that were in the lunch counters, in housing, education, welfare, voter registration - just public accommodations, period. From there, we then moved to simultaneously hit - I forgot the exact number - a number of places on March 15th, 1960.

BRITTON: That had military-like precision. I was there at the time and people were quite shocked by the precision of it. Was this a planned sort of a thing?

KING: Oh, yes. I am an advocate of this kind of thing, of synchronized action. I was the one who lobbied to get this thing done at the same time. I felt that it would cause pandemonium in town if the segregation was hit simultaneously in as many places as we hit. At the exact eleven-thirty hour, people were walking in and sitting in all over town.

BRITTON: Initially there were all Negro students, right?

KING: Yes, all Negro students. I've been told that one young man, who has been permanently converted to the cause of civil rights, was working at the Dinkler hotel - John Gibson, I understand. John had never

been really active in any thing like this. They came over the public address system and said, "The niggers are sitting in all over Atlanta." And John said, "What the hell am I here for," pulled off his apron--you know he was waiting tables--and ran out. He hasn't been back to waiting tables anymore. Now John has done a great deal of work in the civil rights movement, but . . .

BRITTON: How did you mobilize these people to follow you? I understood at the time that there were secret meetings and the date was kept secret. You apparently had at least 200 or 300 people behind you that day. How do you mobilize that many people and keep your date a secret?

KING: Well, it was difficult. We didn't talk about the date until almost the night before it was coming off. We got commitments from people to agree to go into the effort and we asked that they keep it secret. We got a person to handle each lunch counter, and this person was to get his group together. It was an accident, I guess, that probably we cannot repeat, but we were able to get hundreds of people out there, well-screened people who were able to move. One thing that we had in Atlanta that you don't find too much of in these movements now is that wherever we had a demonstration going on, there was only one spokesman. The rest of the people were there to attest to their belief in what was going on, but we had one person in each area who was supposed to be the spokesman. It was my feeling that if you put on a demonstration, it ought to be well thought out. You shouldn't have everybody out there

trying to explain what you're trying to do because most people might have a different connotation of what's going on, and the whole picture gets distorted.

BRITTON: Were you arrested? Were there many arrests that first day and from then on?

KING: I wasn't actually on the line that day. I was in a car and I was watching. I went all over town looking at what was going on.

BRITTON: Speaking of this military precision, you also had walkie-talkies that day?

KING: Well, not that day. We got those a few weeks later.

BRITTON: Right.

KING: Yeh, we got walkie-talkies in cars. And we had a communications center back in our headquarters where people would let us know instantly when lunch counters would open, and we could close them down, you know.

BRITTON: Just by sitting in?

KING: Yes.

BRITTON: But were there many arrests during that whole demonstration?

KING: Yes, they arrested 80-some people, I believe, or more

people that day.

BRITTON: Do you recall the charges that were put on those people at the time?

KING: Georgia had just passed, in fact most of your Southern states passed anti-trespass laws quickly, right after the thing started happening. I think Virginia was the first one to pass the anti-trespass and then several other states passed it. Georgia's, in essence, stated that if you were accused of anti-trespass, ^{the law says} the police would have to come in and read the citation to you, or the statute to you, and then they would tell you that you have the option to go. If you preferred not to go, then they would arrest you. They always gave you the out, you know. I think most white people felt that if they intimidated you enough, you'd get up and leave and then they wouldn't have to go through this bag of taking you to court, and this kind of thing. Maybe, you were saying, that the anti-trespass laws were unconstitutional, if not on their face, really, in their application, you know.

BRITTON: Was anybody actually convicted and required to serve time on these charges?

KING: On these first charges?

BRITTON: Right.

KING: No. On those first charges we were charged with anti-trespass. We were bailed out. But I think they dropped all those charges

completely. I think that Governor Vandiver was able to get everyone who signed the Appeal on a conspiracy charge. The irony of that whole thing was that no one knew who was in the lead in the Atlanta movement for a long time. All they knew was that things were happening, but they didn't know who was leading it. I wasn't arrested the first time. I wasn't arrested until we actually began to move later on to really hit Rich's Department Store and the merchants downtown. We chose Rich's because it was the biggest thing down there. We felt that if we were going to go big, we ought to go big, and that if we could break Rich's the rest of them would just run in line.

BRITTON: Before we get into that, let me ask you a couple of more questions. Who paid the bail for you?

KING: Oh, the ministers ran down there. Every chicken eater in town ran down there to try and pay our bail. People who were opposed to us and who denounced us were running down there. It was almost like getting in line for a freedom call. Everybody wants to . . . or getting in line for . . . You know, everybody wanted to go to heaven, and they thought that was one way of going.

BRITTON: You also mentioned your negotiations with lawyers before it happened. What lawyer finally came to your aid?

KING: Mr. Hollowell, I would say, eventually became the lawyer. There was another woman who was active with us for a while, but she kind of disappeared. I don't think it was of her own volition. There was some

other problem involved which I'm not at liberty to disclose. What was her name? . . . Mrs. Powell, but I think she operates under the name of Romie Turner.

BRITTON: Right. When you hit Rich's, you were not only sitting in at their cafeteria, but you also instituted a boycott, is that right?

KING: Right. We instituted a selective buying campaign, and before we put on the selective buying campaign, we ran what we called an economic indoctrination campaign. In other words, we felt that if we really wanted to get the broad-based community support that we needed to pull this thing off, we would have to get the public educated to what a selective buying campaign was all about. We came up with the gimmick called The Student Movement and You. We used to put out a publication each Sunday called The Student Movement and You. This thing served a dual purpose. Number one, we were not getting the coverage in the Negro press, The Atlanta Daily World of Mr. C.A. Scott. You be sure to get his name on the record. We were not getting the coverage from him that we should have gotten, so we thought the best way to do it was to put out our own publication. We were putting that out, and speaking at these churches and passing them out at churches and slowly but surely people began to come around. Finally, one day, John Gibson and I were standing on the corner of Auburn Avenue and Butler, and he said, "Man, you know we ought to start a newspaper." We talked to J. Lowell Ware. . . Well, we called a meeting for Ralph Long's house. These are things that most people probably don't

remember or don't know what went on. We called a meeting for Ralph Long's house and we got Ralph Long over there, his wife, Jim Gibson, John, two or three other people whose names I've forgotten now were there. We started talking about the formation of a newspaper. There was another guy involved. His name . . . He did a couple of years at the University of Chicago Law School. He used to be the editor of The Inquirer . . . Bill Strong. Bill Strong got involved. Anyway, to make a long story short, we got some other people - Mr. Q.V. Williamson and all - to threaten Mr. Scott; in fact, they did. They took their newspaper ads away from Mr. Scott and called Julian Bond and me to a meeting to tell us that they would support us in setting up a newspaper. Well, we told them realistically that we did not feel that we could set up a newspaper, but we knew a guy who had a press. No, I'm sorry. That's wrong. We had already put out the first issue, with Bill Strong writing the first editorial, and Julian Bond and Charlayne Hunter and Jim Gibson . . . In other words, the deal I made with Ware was that I would provide students to write the thing if he would let us use his press. Strong was involved in it, too. We got in and we all wrote. Then Q.V. got the people to take their ads out, and they put them in The Inquirer a couple of weeks.

BRITTON: That paper was named The Inquirer, right?

KING: The Atlanta Inquirer, right. They started there. Later on, some wheeler-dealers, like Jesse Hill and others, got involved and The Inquirer was incorporated. It's history now. It's still going. But, basically, the first free labor was provided by the students in Atlanta

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who, by and large, were, I think, kind of messed over in the whole deal as it kind of went down and the more mercenary guys got involved.

BRITTON: Tell me this, Lonnie, was there much violence connected with the demonstrations that were carried out in Atlanta; I mean, much reaction from the whites?

KING: Well, we had violence, sporadic instances, I guess. We had sporadic instances of violence. I think one boy got his glasses broken. Another girl got slapped. Somebody else got spat on. I got roughed up a couple of times.

BRITTON: I think you're being modest. I was trying to get to the point where you had acid thrown in your face.

KING: Well, it was some kind of alkali base, according to what Dr. Clinton Warner and some other people who examined me had to say. I don't think it was really a potent acid, as such, but if it had gotten in my eyes, I probably would have lost them. Fortunately, when the guy threw the stuff on me, I had on sunglasses. I stumbled across the street to this service station--there was a Gulf service station there on Gordon Road near this supermarket--and I went in to get some water, and the guy wouldn't let me put any water on me. So I went on down the street to another service station. In the meantime, they were calling for an ambulance. But an ambulance never came; a police car came. I finally went in and I doused myself with this water. Then, finally, the police came. But before the police got there, a young man by the name of Ronald Yancey

arrived. You know, he's the first Negro to finish Georgia Tech. I think you may remember him. Well, he arrived. He had been smart enough to run to the ten-cent store and buy some vaseline. He ran up and started putting the vaseline all over me, and it eased the pain somewhat. Then the police car drove up and they took me to the hospital by a very circuitous route. When I got there, they gave me this bath and put all of these ointments and stuff on me. Captain Little, a man I shall never forget, took my shirt, and all, while I was in the hospital and I never got them back. Then they came out in the papers saying, "Well, it wasn't really acid, it was just." . . . They didn't say what it was. They just said it wasn't acid. In other words, they tried to discredit that anybody in Atlanta would be throwing this kind of stuff around. My only comment is that it should have happened to them and I think they would know how it felt.

BRITTON: In talk about the Atlanta Student Movement, there are two names of two adults that continue to crop up. One is Carl Holman, who is now with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; the other is Whitney Young, who is now with the National Urban League. These were the academic people who visibly seemed to be sort of in support of the students as advisors, and so forth. Besides them, were there many others?

KING: Yes, Whitney Young was my first advisor down in Atlanta. When I was needing adult advice and support, Whitney Young, being in the School of Social Work . . . I think his position lent credibility to what I was trying to do. We had a lot of meetings and he would always

fight with me whenever I had these fights with some of the more conservative Negroes. When Whitney left, I would say that Carl Holman kind of became my closest advisor on this whole effort. Then there were some other people, like Johnnie Yancey, Q.V. Williamson, who contributed several hundred dollars, if not thousands of dollars of financial support to the organization.

BRITTON: He's now an Atlanta alderman, right?

KING: Right. Leroy Johnson was at all the meetings that we held. We had Jesse Hill, who attended the meetings and offered strong support. I would say that, by and large, most of the college presidents offered whatever support they could. I think Dr. Mays and Dr. Harry V. Richardson, I would say, were the strongest supporters of the movement; Dr. Harry Richardson was, or may still be, the president of I.T.C., The Interdenominational Theological Center. There were some other people. I mentioned Miss Rombe Turner, and maybe some other persons that I may have forgotten - M.L. King, Jr., and his father. Oh, Rev. William Holmes Borders was one of our advisors. He was the adult counterpart to my leadership with the students. Rev. Samuel Williams played a very important role. Rev. B.J. Johnson continuously took a part in it. There was a young man who was neither fish nor fowl; he wasn't adult and he wasn't youth. That was Rev. Otis Moss, who was involved with us. A.D. King - but A.D. was considered a youth at that time. You know, he was enrolled in school and he was involved with us also. It's bad when you start calling names after so long. You kind of leave out somebody.

Attorney Hollowell was active. Oh, gosh, Mr. John Calhoun, a man I used to have breakfast with almost every morning and who taught me almost everything I know about political organization . . . I mean, this man is a genius at how to organize people. I've inherited a great deal of what he had to offer. I could not forget him. I mentioned Rev. King, Sr., who was sometimes with us and sometimes against us, depending upon, seemingly, which side of the bed he got up on. Maybe that's a bad thing to say, but he wasn't always our strongest supporter. There were other people whose names I don't recall. I guess if I could think about it a few minutes I'd be able to come up with them.

BRITTON: Right. Now getting down to the negotiations, you had your sit-ins, you had your selective buying, you had all kinds of protest activity going. You finally got to the point of negotiations to settle the selective buying business. There's a famous incident that occurred in Atlanta, and I think it culminated in a Methodist church on Ashby Street where people, at that point, were seemingly ready to riot. It seems that an attorney there who is now deceased, A.T. Walden, was supposed to have made some deal to call off the selective buying campaign before any real barriers had fallen. It seems also that, according to the rumor, the kids were very angry about that. Could you tell us what really went on?

KING: There are some things that lead up to this. I was contacted one afternoon when I was down to Atlanta Life at a meeting with Rev. Borders and company by Jesse Hill. I was told to come to what may

be the most important meeting of my life. I said, "What kind of meeting is this?" So Jesse said, "The Chamber of Commerce wants to meet." I said, "Well, I've met with them before. What's so important?" He said, "Well, they want to talk about integration." So I said, "Why can't I meet with them two days from now?" Well, anyway, to make a long story short, Herschelle Sullivan, who was my co-chairman at that time, and I went. But, first of all, we stopped by the Southern Regional Council. We wanted to get some facts and figures to take with us because we had been told through the grapevine that the power structure wanted to hang the integration of the lunch counters on school desegregation. So we said, "We ought to go by Southern Regional and find out whether or not this particular argument has any logic." We went by there and we researched the thing and found that just the reverse was true. I mean, most of the places where your lunch counters had fallen, the schools weren't integrated. So there was no logic to integrating the schools first and then the lunch counters. So when we got to the meeting, we walked in and everybody was there except the two students. We didn't realize how much power we really had until after the meeting was over. After the meeting was over, we found out from Mrs. Yancey that the Chamber of Commerce wasn't going to hold the meeting if we didn't show up. You know, all these other most magnanimous leaders were there. I think that bothered a few of the old-timers that had been fighting for 30 years in that town because they had never had that kind of meeting before. Anyway, when we got in there, Mr. Ivan Allen, who is now mayor, and Attorney Walden were at the head of the table. They sat down and

said, "We want to work out an agreement here to integrate the lunch counters." They said, "We want to integrate them if and when the schools are desegregated in the fall." I said, "Well I'm sorry. I can't go along with that." So we had a long hassle. Mr. Frank Neely, who had said that he'd never sit in a meeting with me anywhere, was sitting next to me. Neely kept hitting me on my knee with his cane. I said, "Now, should I tell this man to cut this crap out, or should I just go on?" Finally, Walden kept trying to push his point home. You see, Walden was being used. Walden was being used by the white people to no end. They'd always prop him up. He'd always go to sleep in the meetings, but they'd prop him up. Whenever they wanted an "amen" from the Negro community and figured that the "young turks" were going to be against them, they'd hit Walden and say, "Isn't that right, Mr. Walden?" And Mr. Walden would wake up and say, "Yes." I saw this so many times it was ridiculous.

Anyway, Ivan Allen was selling this point, and I was disagreeing with him. I got up and presented all my facts and figures and Herschell presented hers. We beat down their whole argument about trying to tie the integration of the lunch counters in with the schools. Finally, M.L. King, Sr. got up and said, "Boy, I'm tired of you. I've been around here 30 years and this is the first time we've ever been able to get all these folks in here. These restaurants have never been integrated before; you're demanding that they integrate them now, and they're saying they're going to integrate them in September." I said, "Well, Rev. King, that's the problem. You all have been around here 30 years and you haven't gotten them integrated." I said, "Now there is no logic." And we had

a big argument there. So, finally, Mr. Neely got up, of all people, and said that he agreed with me. He said that he thought that I ought to go back and talk to the students, which was my earlier position.

BRITTON: Who exactly was Mr. Neely?

KING: Frank Neely was the chairman of the board of Rich's Department Store.

BRITTON: Right. Okay, go ahead.

KING: He said that he agreed. He said, "This boy is the only elected person in here and he ought to go back and talk to his people." King said, "Naw, we can make the decision. We don't have to go talk to anybody. I've got so many thousand people in my church." And Borders said the same thing, and all that kind of thing. But, you see, these weren't the people who were really running the movement. So Ivan Allen said, "Maybe you all had better talk to this young man." So they called a recess and took me out in the hall. That was when I really saw some things that basically made me leave Atlanta, Georgia, that made me decide not to stay at Morehouse and finish those last few hours and get my degree.

BRITTON: Tell us about them.

KING: Well, I saw the people whose names appear in the headlines now - many of them - I saw them crumble under the pressure of the white power structure because they were so afraid that if they walked out of that room they'd never be able to get back in there and get those kind

of gains. But what they didn't realize was that they wouldn't have been there in the first place if they weren't causing harm to these people in terms of their economic stability. King browbeat me out there - King, Sr. William Holmes Borders browbeat me out there in the hall. He said he was going to leave me and desert the whole thing "because all you all are just trying to do is get headlines." Leroy Johnson, who had been at every meeting and who, I thought, would at least step forward and say something--you know, the younger ACCA element--walked down the hall and took a powder. Otis Moss took a powder. The only person out of that whole group that was in that meeting--Q.V. Williamson didn't know what to do--the only person who really tried to be compassionate and to understand the load that I had on me at that moment was Dr. Clement. I didn't expect it from him, but Clement said, "Well, son, it's a difficult decision, and I think you're right." Clement admitted this. "But it really isn't that long and maybe we can work out something." I cried out there in that hall. I wasn't crying because of the pressure; I cried because these were people that I had looked up to since I was a boy. And when it really got down to the brass tacks, these people did not have the moral courage to stand up for their convictions that they preached on Sunday morning. So I made the decision to go along with the agreement, provided that we would have a planned series of meetings and negotiations and work out all the details so that it would be a smooth thing, etc. So, we went back in.

Before we even left the meeting, before we could even get to a meeting that was being held in Northeast, Ivan Allen had gone on television.

He said, "The nigras have agreed to call off the boycott. The lunch counters will reopen tomorrow morning, segregated." And they didn't say a thing . . . No, no, and he said, "The lunch counters will integrate in and when the schools desegregate in the fall." At that point there was still some uncertainty about the schools desegregating. I called up Ivan Allen and I said, "Mr. Allen, (and Herschelle Sullivan was on the other line) you did not tell the truth as to what the agreement really was." I said, "Now, I'd appreciate it if you'd go back on television and clarify that agreement." He said, "Well, I talked to Mr. Walden and he approved the statement that I made." I said, "Well, look, I'm having all kinds of problems and I think that you ought to deal with this thing." I said, "Now, we were supposed to be operating in good faith, etc." He said, "Well, that's your problem in dealing with the young Negroes out there," no, ". . . the young nigras out there." He said, "I've done my job." And I agreed. He had done his job. His job was to discredit me if he could. Anyway, I went back to the office and I talked to the kids that night. We had a room full of people. I told the people that I felt that I had let them down because I listened to the wrong people. I resigned. Some people accused me of resigning while knowing that I was going to be reinstated. But that was . . . you know, I really felt that the students could best move forward by repudiating me. And if I wasn't there they could say, "Well, we have repudiated the agreement and we're moving forward," and I would step on the side. But they gave me a unanimous vote of confidence. Then they went out to this meeting the next night and really whipped some of the older people upside the head. I

think it was only the oratory of M.L. King, Jr., that saved that meeting from really turning into a riot because King, Sr., tried to get up there . . . Oh, let me see. Here's what happened. Jesse Hill tried to get up to explain the agreement and he couldn't explain it. Then they tried to ask me to go up there and explain it. Carl Holman said, "I'll be god-damned if I'm going to allow you all to kill this boy." He said, "You all who forced him into it, get up there and explain it." He said, "I ain't going to let him say a word." So Holman sat there and sat on me and sat on Herschelle and wouldn't let us say anything and said, "Now, all you people that pushed him in this stuff, you all explain it." So they all got up there and all of them got shot down. Borders got shot down, and King. They really brutalized King up there, and I think that's what made his son . . . I think his son probably made the greatest speech he's ever made that night because tears were in his eyes as he saw his daddy being castigated by those people. My own feeling is that he brought it all on himself, really.

But, I had a hollow feeling from then on. That was about May, I guess. I had a hollow feeling about the whole thing from then on because I had gotten people to go to jail; people had sacrificed their education; I had sacrificed mine, and I just felt disillusioned about the whole thing.

BRITTON: This was May of 1960, right?

KING: '61.

BRITTON: '61.

KING: So, I got in touch with Howard Law School and got accepted and I came on up here. I wasn't there when they integrated the lunch counters and the schools and that kind of thing. They went on through with it--and this kind of thing. But you see, it's not so much that they were not going to give us the victory, but it's the way you get a victory sometimes that is just as important as getting the victory itself.

BRITTON: Evidently, they did wait until September, right?

KING: Oh, yeh. You see, there is a great deal of psychology involved in how you win as well as in winning. Some people feel that--the older Negroes to a greater extent--just since you win; that's all that's important. But that's not all ^{that's} / 'important because dignity is involved. I don't believe . . . well, there wasn't a premium on dignity 30 years ago. There is a premium today, and I'm very happy to know there's a premium. That's what this whole question of black power is about. It's about a man wanting respect. I think that until people realize that that's all people are really saying . . . It's not really . . . Sure, some people are out talking about "let's burn down the cities and tear up everything." But I think the prevailing sentiment, if you were to take a common denominator of people on this black power thing, is that it really means dignity.

BRITTON: How does a young fellow like yourself maintain confidence in your decisions and your leadership when almost everybody is telling you that you're wrong?

KING: Well, it's very difficult. You begin to re-examine yourself and you begin to say, "Well, now, damn, do I have a premium on all the knowledge?" This is the kind of soul searching that comes about. I learned a great deal in Atlanta and it has caused me to have more confidence in my position after I have analyzed all the facts. I think I'm stronger by virtue of having gone through some of the trials and tribulations there.

BRITTON: Who would you pinpoint, if you had to, as the most courageous person that you met there in Atlanta, either in the movement or outside of the movement; the person who, perhaps, did the most courageous deed in terms of what he had to lose.

KING: In terms of what he had to lose?

BRITTON: Yes.

KING: I don't know. I don't know.

BRITTON: Okay. Well tell me this. How do you feel knowing that you're leading people into a situation where you know somebody might get killed or injured or maimed? Is this a heavy burden?

KING: It's an awesome responsibility. I imagine it's similar to a general who is leading his men into battle with the enemy. You know that some lives may get hurt and some may get killed, but you look at the broader gains. I think one of the things, though, that you have to do is if you're going to lead people, you've got to be up front

yourself if you intend for the thing to be successful.

BRITTON: What about nonviolence? Was that an innate belief or was it, more or less, a technique for you and the students to use?

KING: We in Atlanta never, never looked upon nonviolence as a way of life. I've always said in all of my speeches that, to me, non-violence was a technique. It was an instrument for social change. It was one that we needed to employ at that time.

BRITTON: One other major category and we'll be through. I believe you were at the meeting in Raleigh in which the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was organized, is that correct?

KING: Yes.

BRITTON: Could you tell us briefly how that came about, the organizing of that student group, and what it was for, as a matter of fact, in the beginning?

KING: Well, let me say, first of all, that the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee came out of Atlanta, Georgia.

BRITTON: Right.

KING: Marian Wright, Julian Bond, and I went to see M.L. King Jr., a couple of times with the proposition that the system that we are fighting is an organized system and that the only way that we're going to be able to effectively deal with this system is to organize ourselves.

All the students all over the South should be in one organization that would serve as kind of a clearinghouse. King listened to us very patiently. A couple weeks later we got a telegram saying, "Come to a meeting in Raleigh," But we were the ones that put the idea . . . in fact, we were the ones who got him into the movement, period. You know, King was just there in Atlanta. We went over and got him involved. In fact, I'm the guy that talked King into going to jail in Atlanta the first time. He was skeptical about going to jail because of the problems that he had had with . . . What's the lady's name who wrote Killer of the Dream?

BRITTON: Lillian Smith?

KING: Lillian Smith. King had been arrested with Lillian Smith out in Decatur, Georgia, and he was a little hesitant about going to jail. But I indicated to him that he was going to have to go to jail if he intended to maintain his position as one of the leaders in the civil rights struggle, that he could not philosophize about it in the pulpit and not be there when the gates are opened. So he and I both went to jail from Rich's Department Store. He said, "I'll meet you on the bridge."

BRITTON: By the way, you're no kin to Martin Luther King, are you?

KING: No, I'm not.

BRITTON: Go ahead.

KING: So, we met in Raleigh and we organized an executive committee and we moved forward from there. The rest, I guess, is history. I resigned from SNCC in 1962, not necessarily for any malicious reasons. It was just that I didn't feel that I should be holding that honored position on the executive committee when there were a lot of other people coming along who needed to get the benefit of the leadership development, and this kind of thing, that I had gained by being in there.

BRITTON: Lonnie, I was told by some people that SNCC was originally intended as a clearinghouse, as you mentioned, to handle the money and channel money to student groups individually all over the country, and that somehow it changed when SNCC began adding staff members and operating the whole thing itself. Is this true?

KING: Well, it wasn't so much a clearinghouse for the channeling of money. It was a clearinghouse for ideas, more than anything else, and for coordinating efforts. You had two schools of thought in SNCC. Number one, you had some people from Nashville who were very jealous and envious of the people from Atlanta. SNCC is in Atlanta today by virtue of a compromise. You see, at that point I was considered the strong guy from Georgia, you know; the individual strong guy. And you had a strong group out of Nashville. Well, King and Ella Baker could never control me in Atlanta, but they could have a lot to say in control of the other people. We were not awed by M.L.'s presence in Atlanta. I guess this was because

we had known him a long time. The other groups were, to a great extent. Some people were pushing me to be head of SNCC. So what they did was this: They came up with a compromise. They put Marion in, Marion Barry, as the head of SNCC. And to keep from having too much of a fuss out of us in Atlanta, they moved the national headquarters to Atlanta. But they were gaining something out of that too because we had more money than anybody else. See, we had several thousand dollars. We financed SNCC for the first few months of its operation. We let them have office room with us and we paid Ed King's salary, the guy who came down to work for them.

BRITTON: He's the guy who is now in Louisville, isn't he?

KING: He's somewhere. But it was a clearinghouse for ideas and coordination of programs. Then SNCC got a further refinement. You got the influx of people like Timothy Jenkins, of the National Student Association, who had never really been involved in anything. But he was a very eloquent fellow, a nice guy who wanted to get us hooked up in voter registration, which is fine. But I didn't think that that was the moment for us to go into voter registration. I thought we ought to pick out major industries, like AT&T, and decide that we were going to make SNCC the clearinghouse, and we were gonna hit AT&T all over the country, get people to cut off their service for 30 days, just 30 days, as a show of what we could do, and force AT&T to start hiring telephone operators all over the South. We were going to hit Woolworth's. We were going to all these places and hit these national chains all over the country and refu.

to let up in any one city. "I don't care how much you integrate here, you've got to integrate in Jackson, Mississippi, too." In other words, it's got to be an across the board thing where you really do it. But there were people who felt that we shouldn't organize that much. They felt that it should be a loose confederation of individuals and groups. I felt that was ridiculous. That had, I guess, more to do with my quitting SNCC, if I really trace it back. I guess that had more to do with it than anything else. I felt they were going down the wrong road. They were too hooked up on organization. There was a lot of talk at that time about anti-bureaucracy. I'm opposed to red tape for the sake of red tape. But, you see, some of this red tape is necessary in order to have a smooth operation. I think we had demonstrated it in Atlanta. So, anyway, I was fought on that issue, and I only had . . . well, I was supported by a couple of states. But I wasn't supported by the powers that be.

BRITTON: What capacity did you serve in with SNCC? You say you resigned.

KING: Well, I was on the executive policy-making committee, representing the state of Georgia on there. It had a lot to do with a lot of their policies, the formulation of them.

BRITTON: What is your opinion of the direction the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee has taken to date?

KING: Well, I think that . . .

BRITTON: Could you belong to it now?

KING: No. No, I could not be a member of SNCC today because I don't believe in many of the policies that they're advocating. I can understand why they're advocating them, but I just don't think . . . but for me, in my house, you know, I cannot go that route. I mean, I can see why they're doing it, some of the people involved, but it's just not for me.

BRITTON: Many of the people like yourself who were involved in the student protest movements are now in the political area. You're head of The D.C. Young Democrats. Julian Bond is in the Georgia State Legislature. Ben Brown is in the Georgia State Legislature. Curtis Graves is in the Texas State Legislature, and Clarence Mitchell is in the Maryland Legislature. Do you consider this to be a logical extension of the fight for civil rights, in the political area?

KING: In 1961, I made the decision, after viewing a lot of what was going on, that the arena for us to be in in the next decade or two is going to be the political arena. I felt that sit-ins and picketing were going to become passe. I'll tell you what made me reach that conclusion. I'm an economics major, and there is an axiom in economics called the "law of diminishing returns." I felt that the law of diminishing utility, was going to come into play in the protest movement and we would have to move to a new plateau. What I was concerned about was that we make the maximum usage of the sit-ins, and what have you, before

we moved to a new plateau. It is a logical extension. I think that we have to begin to deal with problems before the fact rather than after the fact. You see, sitting-in and picketing are usually against something that's already a fait accompli. Now, who caused it to be a fait accompli? The legislatures, which means then that we need to get our guys into the houses of Congress and into the legislatures in order to write the laws or block these anti-Negro laws before they ever get a chance to go on the books. I have a dream of putting a citizenship education program together to really go down and talk to some of these people in these marginal districts in this country, in the South especially, to get Negroes to not put their votes just in the Democratic party, but to vote for a Republican one time and a Democrat next time to destroy this seniority system which is really inured to the benefit of the conservative elements in this country. I can elaborate more about that, but I'm talking about a political philosophy and it's a philosophy that's not completely wedded to any one particular party, although I have chosen the Democratic party.

BRITTON: During your leadership of the student movement and since, you have had a lot of dealing with whites who resisted the civil rights movement and with middle class Negroes who either did or did not resist the civil rights movement. How do you feel towards them now? Are you embittered toward whites and these other people who were against you?

KING: Well I'm not . . . well, what do you mean when you say embittered, Mr. Britton? Do I carry a personal long-standing grudge or

do I just not like them as individuals?

BRITTON: Right.

KING: I don't like them as individuals and I would never invite them to my house, you know, and that kind of thing.

BRITTON: What about whites? Are you in a position . . .

KING: I mean Negroes and whites.

BRITTON: Right.

KING: I have very little faith in segregationists, Negroes or whites, and there are some Negroes who believe just as firmly in segregation as white people. They're in Washington. They're in New York. They're in Atlanta. They're all over. I think more and more this whole question is getting to be one of not race as it is one of the vested interest versus the nonvested interest, the haves and the have-nots, some people call it. I think that a C.A. Scott in Atlanta is just as dangerous as a Lester Maddox in Atlanta because C.A. Scott will refuse to write the truth in his newspaper. What he does somehow feeds into the kinds of things that a Lester Maddox would do. In the long run, their actions come out really to the same thing; that is, they hurt the Negro.

BRITTON: One last question, and it's two parts. In your civil rights experience, what are the greatest lessons that you learned from that experience, and what do you think you contributed, say, to Atlanta?

KING: Well I think the greatest lesson that I learned was to be tolerant of other people's opinions; but if you have an opinion and the facts seem to bear you out, or tend to bear you out, to be tolerant but to persevere. I think I learned the need to be thorough if you're going to go up against a well-oiled opposition. I think I learned how to organize people and how to deal with the mass media and think before you make comments that are going to go out for publication unless you, you know, . . . well oftentimes . . . In other words, I think I learned not to be too loose-lipped in making my replies unless I intended to be loose-lipped.

What contribution did I make to Atlanta? I don't know whether I can really give an adequate assessment of that. Only the people in Atlanta can do that. Well, to make a stab at it, I would say that I, along with two or three other persons, served as kind of a team which was a catalytic agent that set in motion many changes that are coming into Atlanta today. I would dare say that those of us who sacrificed our lives, incomes, and, sometimes, families and education in this effort will probably be forgotten in Atlanta as time goes on. And people who, by and large, made very little contribution, who sat on the sidelines, are going to probably be the ones who will be taking bows in history books, and what have you. But this is the way things go, you know. Oftentimes the people who really do the work are not the ones who get the plaudits. But I think if you do something just to get plaudits, there's something missing in it. As I told you, I first got involved in this dichotomy that exists in the U.S. Navy. I guess if I

really traced it back - 'cause I had to have a little fire when I was in the Navy - and I guess if I really traced it back, I'd have to say it was a combination of my mother's perseverance and her refusal to accept the segregation and her teachings to me. When I came to Atlanta, I'd never seen a bus before. I'd never been on a bus.

BRITTON: And you were eight years old?

KING: Yes. I came from the "bigfoot" country, man. My grandfather was a farmer, and he had reared me until he died. I used to ask my mother, "Why do we have to sit in the back of the bus?" And my mother used to never answer those questions, you know. But I kept asking, "Why do we always have to get in the back or go around to the side?" I remember asking those questions when I was little. So my mother used to tell me that things were going to change. She said, "Maybe the next generation will be able to do something about it." But one thing that she told me really stuck with me. She said, "Son, they can enslave you physically, but they cannot enslave you mentally." She said, "Always think free." And I've always thought of myself as being equivalent to anybody else regardless of what my physical surroundings may have been. I really believe that this is the one thing that has helped me to, I guess you would say, come back in Washington. Now, I think you know that when I got put out of law school, there was a great deal of talk about, you know . . . like the fallen angel had gotten put out of school. It was my mother's perseverance and talking to me that caused me to realize that I'm no more a prisoner than I think I am. I moved to go

and do something about my plight. I started back, as I mentioned to you earlier in this interview, and I got involved in the Urban League, the Young Democrats, and some other things. Now people who frowned upon me earlier want to talk to me about helping them get some favors done, and this kind of thing.

BRITTON: Did your mother live to . . .

KING: She's still living.

BRITTON: She lived to see some of the things that you helped bring about?

KING: Yes, she's still living.

BRITTON: One last thing. Where would the country be now if it were not for the student movement?

KING: Well, I don't know. Let's see, where was it when the movement began? There was segregation all over the country and our foreign policy, by and large, is just as it was then. We were giving money out and we were in Vietnam, and everywhere else. So what I'm saying is that I think that the country probably may have moved a little bit more to the left, if I may use that as a frame of reference, but I think it would have been so imperceptible until you would not have been able to notice it. I think that the young people who went out, many of whose names we don't even remember--maybe we never will remember the thousands of people who sacrificed education, etc.--are probably the only

people that have been truly revolutionary since we fought and threw that tea in the Boston Harbor up there. The other people kind of joined in and helped out. But they were truly idealists. John, you would have to have been with some of these people. They were willing to give their lives to just integrate that lunch counter, to just get a Negro in that drugstore. John, just to show you how idealistic these people were, I saw a whole class walk out of a final examination just to march on the Capitol. The teacher said, "Well, you're going to miss your exam." And they said, "We don't give a damn." I don't know now you explain it, you know. This was May '7, 1960, when we marched down there. These were truly idealistic people, and I feel humble to have been a part of it. I think we could not have done it without the help of God and His looking over us.

BRITTON: Thank you very much, Lonnie King.