Black Power Chronicles: Anthony Gittens (2017)

Tony Gittens, a first-generation American from Brooklyn, discusses his involvement in the Black Power movement at Howard University. His parents, immigrants from Barbados, instilled a sense of pride and self-respect. Tony's political awakening began in high school and was furthered at Howard, where he joined the campus newspaper and became active in student protests. Key events include the 1967 Hershey protest, which led to his expulsion, and the 1968 takeover of the administration building, which lasted four days. Tony highlights the internal dynamics of student activism, the role of faculty support, and the broader context of Black Power movements. The conversation details the student-led protests and negotiations at Howard University in the late 1960s. Key events include a February 16 protest, a March 19 rally, and a March 23 takeover. The students demanded amnesty, the firing of a dean, and the transformation of Howard into a "Black university." The discussion also touches on the establishment of Drum and Spear, an educational center and bookstore promoting Black literature.

Jocelyn Imani: This is Jocelyn Imani, here at the University of the District of Columbia [UDC, Washington, D.C.]. It's Thursday, July 27, 2017, and I'm here with Tony Gittens.

Anthony Gittens: Hey, hi, Jocelyn. How are you? Thank you so much for inviting me by to do this. It's a lot of fun, and so good to see you.

Jocelyn Imani: I'm glad you're here. So we'll jump right into it. We're doing this interview for the DC Black Power archives, and what we want to do is highlight your life, your time in DC, Howard [University, Washington, D.C.] years, your involvement in the Black Power movement. So we'll go through kind of a bit of story arc.

So let's start with a little bit of your background. Can you tell me where you're from?

Anthony Gittens: I'm from Brooklyn, New York. My parents, both my mother and my father, came from Barbados, and they came very early, 1920 something, 30 something, they arrived in Brooklyn.[1] They were married for a number of years.

I was my family's first child. My mother had some medical problems over the period, so they had been married about 20 years, and then they had me, and then my sister came on about 13 months later.

[1] The migration of Barbadians to the United States during the early 20th century was part of a larger wave of Caribbean immigrants seeking better economic opportunities. Many settled in urban centers like Brooklyn, contributing to the cultural and political fabric of these areas.

So we were first-generation Americans and went to the local public schools, which were very good at the time, but we had a very good life in Brooklyn. You know, you learn to get along. Good education. It was good. It was good.

Jocelyn Imani: What was your political consciousness? Or your parents' political consciousness? Did they talk to you about Blackness [racial identity or the sociopolitical concept of Black pride in the U.S.]?

Anthony Gittens: Oh, no.

Jocelyn Imani: Community or any of those things?

Anthony Gittens: No, they were making a living, and my mother was a maid. She did what was called day work. My father was a mechanic, which is where he made his money. But he also was a musician. He played Calypso [a genre of Afro-Caribbean music originating in Trinidad and Tobago].[2]

This was a time—I know it's hard for you young people to imagine this time—but there was no Internet, there were no tapes. You weren't going to find Calypso on the radio, and if you wanted to have a party, you would hire three pieces—my father [did] and he'd bring a couple of other [musicians]—and that would be your music for your party.

Then he played in concerts. There's a tradition of band concerts in the West Indies, especially in the British colonies, [e.g., Barbados and Trinidad]. So he used to head up one of these bands and play there, and that was his fun. That was when my sister and I, we were pulled and dragged along to go see these concerts, and we'd see him perform.

But in terms of politics, they were always Democrats. There was no thought of voting Republican, there was no thought of that, or any other kind of party. But if you were Black, you were, or Negro—as called in those terms—that those times you were going to be a Democrat, and I was born into that.[3]

It was like being born into a religion that, you know, so your parents have a certain religion you're born [into] and that's kind of where you wind up. But what there was though, because they were West Indian background, there was this sense of being in it, but not of it.[4] That there was this other place they came [from], they called home, that was their home.

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[2] A genre of Afro-Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago. It became a medium for storytelling and social commentary, especially during colonial and post-colonial periods.

[3] By the mid-20th century, most African Americans, particularly in urban areas, aligned with the Democratic Party due to its progressive stance on civil rights after the New Deal era.

[4] Many first-generation immigrants from the Caribbean maintained a strong cultural connection to their home countries, fostering a sense of belonging "in" the United States but "not of" it.

And even though they were here, making a living and raising a family and such, their home was this other place. So there was this little separation between us, our family and my family's friends and America, you know. They appreciated America, but there was this sense that, you know, there was another way, there was another way of doing things, and that made a big difference.

When I talk to other people who've had that experience—first generation, no matter what country—they have that same kind of analysis and feel about where they are in the country.

Jocelyn Imani: I forgot to ask for the record. Can you state your birthday?

Anthony Gittens: I was born on December the 25th, 1944 [Christmas Day].

Jocelyn Imani: Oh, Christmas Day.

Anthony Gittens: Christmas Day. That's a whole other story that I'll spare you.

Jocelyn Imani: Back to this notion of this other identity, this diasporic identity, and another place being home, they're Jamaican. Is there any connection to [Marcus] Garvey or are there any connections to Jamaican heroes?[5]

Anthony Gittens: No, they were from Barbados.

Jocelyn Imani: I'm sorry. I apologize, they were from Barbados. Did they identify with any kind of Caribbean heroes of resistance?

Anthony Gittens: Their attitude was—I mean, they weren't militants in any way. More of their intellectual and emotional allegiance was to the British.

Jocelyn Imani: I was about to ask you.

Anthony Gittens: It was to the British. That was the way to do things, and that American—it was sloppy. Barbados is a very conservative [part] of the islands. It's a very conservative island.[6] But their attitude was, "No, the British know how to do it and that the Americans are sloppy about it."

And even the American Negro, as they would refer to people other than West Indians, that they couldn't quite get—I mean, they were very arrogant.

They were very arrogant about it because there was slavery in Barbados. That's how they got there. But there was this sense of America was this place that was kind of sloppy, that there was

[5] A prominent Jamaican-born political leader and activist who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). His philosophies of Black self-reliance and Pan-Africanism significantly influenced diasporic identity and Black empowerment movements.

[6] Barbados, often called "Little England," has a history of strong cultural and political ties to Britain, reflected in its education system, governance, and societal norms. The conservative mindset was shaped by colonial influence and traditions.

tradition and order in the British Empire of which they were part. They thought the Queen was a big deal. That's how they thought about it.

Jocelyn Imani: So how then do you come out of that framework and get into this Black community kind of awareness? At what point do you get politicized?

Anthony Gittens: Well, part of it was—also with that is—"the white man don't treat me that way." There's a lot of self-respect, there's a lot of self-respect. I'm capable because I came from this country where the accountants were Black and people owned property and the school teachers were Black, you know, I know we could do that. And, you know, you got to pay me to work. I'm not going to work for free. And, no, no, you ain't going to do that. You're not going to do that to me.

Jocelyn Imani: That's their response when they encountered American racism.

Anthony Gittens: Yeah, yeah, and in their daily lives, you know, they're not gonna—if anybody tried to abuse—they tried to take advantage of us. I remember that as a kid watching that in my house, people trying to sell us stuff that was not gonna—and they wouldn't be taken advantage of.

They were polite and they were courteous, and they were not militant in any way. It was no real resist[ance]. But there was this thing of, "No, no, uh-uh." There are a number of civil rights people who came out of the West Indies when I saw—you know, it's that same kind of feeling, "No, no, no, Man, you ain't going to do that." You just, you know, right? If you do that, then they ain't gonna work out for you.

Jocelyn Imani: How do you see that quality, that trait, becoming then, influential and instrumental in your later life?

Anthony Gittens: How later?

Jocelyn Imani: Emerging adulthood.

Anthony Gittens: After Howard?

Jocelyn Imani: During Howard.

Anthony Gittens: When I got out of high school, I hadn't talked about myself. I hadn't remembered that part of my life in a long time. It's kind of interesting trying to put that in some kind of context. So I went to school primarily, this was a public school, and when I went, I went to elementary school there, to high school. I went to college, to my first part of college, so there were public schools. But most of the kids in the school were white.

We're almost all first generation, and education was our way out. So I was used to being around a whole bunch of different kind of people. And when I got out of school, though, out of high school, my parents didn't have any money to send me to college. So I remember waking up the day after my graduation and had no sense of what I was going to do, none.

I mean, the counselors in the school weren't preparing me to go to college. They were dealing with the other folks, you know. So what did I do? [I] had to figure that out and to make a long story very short I got a job.[7]

Anthony Gittens: I had a series of jobs, and I worked, and I was out of high school, and the jobs taught me responsibility, that this wasn't about handing in papers and grades and stuff. They expected me to do my job, to do it at a high level, and if not, they were going to fire me. That's all it was about.

They weren't my friends. I'm there to teach me. I'm there to help them, right? And so I learned I had this level of responsibility. I didn't come directly from school into college. I had this period where I was working. I used to work in a bank, Carver Federal Bank in Brooklyn [NY] and in Harlem [NY]. And so I was a bank teller. I was dealing with people, counting figures, learning all kinds of stuff that I had never done.[8]

By the time I got to Howard [Howard University, Washington, D.C.], I was an adult as far as I was concerned, and they were trying to treat me like a kid.

Jocelyn Imani: Were you 20?

Anthony Gittens: Was I 20? I don't think I was 20, maybe 20, maybe 19, 20—had to think back on it. But I had a job. I really had money. I lived in my parents' house, but I was still taking care of myself. I had friends and [a girlfriend], and I'm gonna come here, and they're gonna tell me I have to take ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], and I have to live on campus, and I gotta do this.[9]

That was the first straw. And everybody around me, all these other kids, were going for this. They were just doing this stuff, and I was living in the dorm. I had to stay in the dorm, and these guys around me, and they were just doing what the curfew. I can go on and on about that period.

Jocelyn Imani: Did you stay in Drew Hall?

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[7] The narrative highlights the socioeconomic obstacles faced by first-generation Americans, such as the immediate need to join the workforce due to financial constraints, despite aspirations for higher education.

[8] Carver Federal Savings Bank, established in 1948, was one of the largest Black-owned financial institutions in the U.S., serving as a cornerstone for African American economic development during segregation.

[9] During the mid-20th century, Howard and similar institutions required ROTC participation for male students as part of a broader alignment with U.S. military policies, though such mandates faced resistance during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

Anthony Gittens: I stayed in Drew [Drew Hall, a residence hall at Howard University for male freshmen].[10]

Jocelyn Imani: Do you find that it's at Howard that you become really politically active, or were you already kind of on that quest?

Anthony Gittens: I was on that trend. So there was a point—there was a summer after I got out of high school, and I got this job at this camp. It was a camp counselor [job]. I needed the summer job. And, I mean, I didn't particularly like kids. I couldn't swim. It was[n't] probably the best job for me. But I needed a job, but I was going to do what I could to get some money because I wanted to get out of there.

Anthony Gittens: But the camp turned out to be a very progressive camp. It's a very progressive camp, and so I was beginning to meet these people my age, some younger, some older, who had been thinking about these things, that were thinking about union issues and internationalism.

Diversity was a big part of the theme of the camp, and that was represented on the staff, and the kids who were there. [It was the] first time, I think, I really met someone from Africa. Her kid was there, and I got to talk to her about things, and that is what gave me some political context with some of the thoughts that I was having. I was already pretty rebellious, but it began to give me some [knowledge].

When I got to Howard, I was looking for people who shared that kind of view with me, that interest in seeing the world's a bigger place, and then being very concerned about—I'm going to use this term Negro—or Black people at that point. You know, James Baldwin was someone that I read everything that I could find that he had written.[11]

Bayard Rustin, I'd run into him in the park and just chat with him for a brief moment.[12] All the plays I could find that had Black characters or Black themes, I was going to see them. Often, I'd go by myself. I was going to the jazz clubs, Thelonious Monk and Cannonball Adderley were playing. And I would go after school. They let me in; I'd be there in these clubs.[13]

Jocelyn Imani: Are you having to go to Manhattan?

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[10] Drew Hall, one of Howard University's residence halls for male freshmen, has long been a focal point of campus culture and political activity, influencing students' social and ideological growth.

[11] James Baldwin: A prominent writer and activist, Baldwin's works such as *The Fire Next Time* and *Notes of a Native Son* critically analyzed race, identity, and social injustice in America. His writings were widely influential in the Civil Rights Movement.

[12] Bayard Rustin: A key strategist in the Civil Rights Movement, Rustin is best known for organizing the 1963 March on Washington. He was a staunch advocate of nonviolent protest and LGBTQ+ rights.

[13] Jazz Clubs in Manhattan: During the mid-20th century, Manhattan jazz clubs were cultural hubs, offering not only musical innovation but also fostering discussions about race, politics, and social change. Artists like Thelonious Monk and Cannonball Adderley were key figures in this vibrant scene.

Anthony Gittens: Yeah, I had to go to Manhattan. None of this was in Brooklyn that I could recall. And I'd get on the subway, find out where it is, and then just go down there. I was too young to drink, I'd buy a Coca-Cola or something to try to hide in the background so the waiters wouldn't hit me too much, and that's what I'd do. I'd go to plays and movies with subtitles, and that's a whole other part of my life.

It was just this exposure, and because I was in New York, and because most of my high school friends were going to college, I was by myself a lot. I had to make my way, but also my activities were around my interests at the time. I didn't have to compromise with my other friends who might be interested in other things to do it.

So it wound up being a formative period in my life. But by the time I got to Howard, I'd had that experience of doing those things. For me to then show up and have them try to treat me as a child—and I'm paying tuition and all that—I found it insulting.

Jocelyn Imani: Why Howard? Why, of all the places you could go for school?

Anthony Gittens: Because I wanted to know more about Black people, that is it. I had other choices. I'd applied [other] places, but I wanted to go to a place where I could be around Black people to learn more about Black people. That is it.

Jocelyn Imani: But why not Morehouse [College] or Hampton [University]?

Anthony Gittens: I didn't know very much about Morehouse. I looked at Central State [University]. My sister went to Central State, and so I went down there to look at it. It was a bit too rural for me. It wasn't me. I was talking to my sister about this the other day. It was hardly good for her, but she stuck it out. And I knew that wasn't going to be it, and Howard was the capstone.

I mean, that was the Black college in the United States, and I felt if I can get in there, that would be great, you know, so I applied, and they said yes. I'd never been to Washington, DC in my life. [laughs] I'd never been there. I went down, I got a bus ticket, I got on the bus. It was mid-semester. It was mid-semester.

Jocelyn Imani: Why mid-semester?

Anthony Gittens: I had to work, I didn't have any money. I had to make enough money—I had enough money to make it through one semester. And, you don't want to hear this now, the tuition was like $250 a semester [equal to $2,495.99 in 2024].[14] But that was a lot of money at that point.

[14] The $250 per semester tuition reflects the affordability of higher education in the 1960s relative to today, but it was still a significant financial burden for many families at the time.

I said, if I get enough to get through one semester, I'll figure it out from there. So I had just enough, I went down, I got on the bus, and I got there, and I had some kind of expectation [laughs]. I was really very [indistinct]. I thought somebody would be there to meet me at the bus, say "Welcome." Nobody was there, it was nighttime.

I don't think I've ever been to the cab in my life. You know, I took a cab. I took the subway, everywhere in New York, you know. On a bus, no. And I had my bag, and I got there, and I got to Drew Hall, and I said, "Hi, I'm here." You know, they had no record of me coming. He said, "Sit there and I'll call." Nobody was there, but this guy, you know, and I'm sitting there. And finally, this guy, who I think is head of the hall, I can't remember his name—strange little man—and he has no record of me coming. I showed him a letter and said, "That's what they told me." [He says] "Oh God, how was the trip." So he put me down in this room in the basement that had no heat. You know how it's [indistinct]. I was the only one in the room.

Jocelyn Imani: About what time of year is this?

Anthony Gittens: So it was, like, November, December, up in there. It was cold, it was cold. It was cold.

Jocelyn Imani: Classes are already happening.

Anthony Gittens: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Jocelyn Imani: Were you just gonna catch up?

Anthony Gittens: I had to. I had gone to Brooklyn College at night because I'd worked during the day and gone to college at night, so I had some grades and stuff to do that, but I had to catch up. That's all it was to it. And I did what I had to do. I'm not a great student, but I could read and write.

Jocelyn Imani: And then just another question, so you come to Howard. What is that? The fall of [19]63 or fall of [19]64?

Anthony Gittens: I get to Howard in [19]65.

Jocelyn Imani: So it's fall [19]65.

Anthony Gittens: Yep.

Jocelyn Imani: That's very funny. It's very believable, and I could see that happening right now in my head. As you were talking, I saw you going to Drew Hall. I tell people all the time, it's every Black thing …. Stokely Carmichael was not wrong.[15]

Anthony Gittens: It is a wild place. Like my other friend said, it's ….but there are a whole lot of Black people there. What's his name, Ta-Nehisi Coates?

Jocelyn Imani: Coates.

Anthony Gittens: He talks about it. He says he got there, and he said, "My God, you know, there are all these Black people here."[16]

Jocelyn Imani: So that next day and the couple of weeks after—[laughs]. That's a great way to meet Howard. That's a great introduction. Welcome to your Howard University experience. So the next day you wake up. You're in the mix. As you discover the campus that you've arrived in. What do you see? What do you find when you get to Howard?

Anthony Gittens: I gotta think about that. I remember meeting some people, the administrators. I had to take exams and stuff to get in, you know, where they figure [out] to place me and all this other stuff. And I say, I could handle this. This is not like New York. I can handle this. I can figure my way through this one. You know, this is not like going to Brooklyn College, where they were, like a 1000 very hard instructors, and just this feeling of I know I can deal with this. Then I remember going to—I heard about this ROTC thing, compulsory ROTC.

Jocelyn Imani: But even as a transfer student—

Anthony Gittens: See, it's for your time. If you were a young man, and you were in your freshman and your sophomore year, ROTC was compulsory. You had to take ROTC.

Jocelyn Imani: So did you transfer in as a sophomore?

Anthony Gittens: I came in. I was either an advanced freshman or close to a sophomore, close to a sophomore. But it was no question that you had to take ROTC and Howard, at that point—it might be the same case now. It was the Army source of Black officers.[17] That was the source. Most Black officers who were in the Army at that time had come to Howard, and they wanted to keep that going.

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[15] In his autobiography, Carmichael described Howard as a microcosm of the Black experience, embodying "every Black thing and its opposite," from intellectualism to social life, activism, and apathy. This diversity contributed to Howard's identity as a hub for Black identity and culture.

[16] Coates' reflections in *Between the World and Me* emphasized Howard as a formative institution for understanding the breadth and depth of Black culture, community, and intellectual development.

[17] Howard played a pivotal role in the training of Black officers for the U.S. Army during the Civil Rights era. The program was part of a broader effort to integrate the military while fostering Black leadership within its ranks.

You had to take it. So I went to see this guy, and I said, look, man. I'm an objector. I don't want to take [ROTC]—and I was sure I could convince this guy, but he kept saying, "No, no, sir, no, young man, you got to do it." I said, well, okay.

I was in the dorm then, and that was a little of [an] adjustment to me. So I'm there, and they think I'm the weirdest thing that ever showed up in the door. I didn't care about pledging, I wore jeans all the time.

Jocelyn Imani: And everybody else is wearing slacks.

Anthony Gittens: Everybody was wearing slacks. And there was one guy who told me they used to go through my stuff while I wasn't in the room, and say, "He's a communist." Because I had some newspaper I brought back. I used to read this stuff, you know. So it was an adjustment. They didn't quite know what to do. But anyway, you had to take ROTC.

And even then, I had a pretty full head of hair. And I said, look, guys, I don't want to do this ROTC thing. I don't want to mess you guys up because—they had it in the marching [referring to Howard University's ROTC Drill Competition and Uniform Inspection] and stuff. I wouldn't cut my hair. I wouldn't cut it. My group said, "Look, you could have won that weekend, whatever the marching around thing was, except for Gittens, you know."[18]

Anthony Gittens: So they came to me, and I said, look, I told them I didn't want to do this thing. The next week, they put me in the newspaper where I'd have to march up in there. Why I never had to go down there, ROTC.

But then, when we got deeper into the protests—this was a protest led by Michael Harris, who was a freshman, a great class, the [19]67 class, and they went up there, and I was with them, protesting ROTC, and they stopped that. Two weeks later, they stopped it, and it's no longer compulsory.[19]

So all the men who've gone through it since then, who didn't want to take ROTC, could look to Michael Harris for that. They were the ones. With Howard, the thing is, you know, you tell them, you try to reason with them. Then you just got to say no and put your foot down. Just put your foot down and say no.

Jocelyn Imani: No, that's good. I've come up on compulsory ROTC, and even you explaining it gives it new depth in my brain. As you're finding the rules, the curfew, the paternalistic kind of structure. When you first start to feel uncomfortable in that space, are you talking to your

[18] Gittens' refusal to cut his hair for ROTC drill competitions illustrates the tension between individual identity and institutional expectations at Howard, reflecting broader cultural shifts in the 1960s.
[19] Michael Harris' leadership in the [19]67 ROTC protests led to the abolition of the compulsory program at Howard, marking a shift toward student autonomy and activism.

roommates about it? How do you go from personally, thinking this is not cool, to vocally, you know?

Anthony Gittens: I go to the campus newspaper, I picked up *The Hilltop*, and I said, okay, they're at least talking about some issues and problems. And I go up and I say, look, I want to be a reporter for the newspaper. And that's the start. All through my time there, that's where my friends, my civil rights and movement friends, and on campus, that's where we were.

Jocelyn Imani: When did you join the newspaper?

Anthony Gittens: The semester I got there. The semester I got there, I marched up there and said, look, I'd like to be a reporter, a features reporter. And they said, "Okay." I remember Miriam Makeba was performing on campus, and I got an interview with her, which was great. Aretha Franklin, I think she was there for some event. I went and got an interview with her.

Jocelyn Imani: Was somebody already doing that?

Anthony Gittens: No. I mean, I was brazen, brazen. I mean, I'd go backstage and ask for the interview. I said, look, I just need five minutes, you know? She's great. The students love her, they really want to hear her. And they'd say, "Okay, come in." And they'd be sitting in their dressing room. I'd say, I hate to bother you. And then I asked them questions. Bam, bam, bam. I was out of there. I was able to write a great article.

And then there were other things that I wrote, and I got the award for the best features writer that year on the newspaper. And then the next year, they asked me to be features editor. But anyway, that's me. But anyway, that's where I met brilliant people like Adrienne Manns [-Israel], Carol Carter.

There were a couple of other people up there, and they became my colleagues, my friends, who would talk about Howard and talk about the movement and talk about the country at large. You know, what was going on. But they were the ones. They were reading, they were thinking, and that's where my friends were. And other people who came through the newspaper while I was there.

Jocelyn Imani: So what student group in your first year in that [19]65, [19]66 school year, do you remember going to any protest or going to any bull sessions led by any student groups? And if so, what's the political climate on campus like?

Anthony Gittens: Well, the climate is—there's some militant folks. The year before I got there, I think it was [19]65, Stokely had left during [19]60. But Stokely's time, Courtland Cox, Charlie Cobb, I can't remember this—Smith.[20] I can't remember her first name. I'm sorry.

[20] Figures like Stokely Carmichael, Courtland Cox, and Charlie Cobb exemplified Howard's role as a training ground for Civil Rights leaders who worked with SNCC in the South.

Jocelyn Imani: Jean?

Anthony Gittens: Jean. Jean Smith [Young], who was the first Howard woman that got an afro and got all kinds of grief about that. Brilliant. She's now Dr. Smith. I mean, she's really great. And those folks had left. They had gone down south to work with SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. So when I got there, there weren't many of those folks there. There were a couple of people.

But anyway, it was somewhere in that semester. It was after [Andrew] Goodman and [Michael] Schwerner and [James] Chaney got killed.[21] And I said, I want to go down there, you know, I just want to do something, go down there. And I had a friend, I think her name was Carol, who had been down before, and she said, "I'm going down and some of the other students, do you want to come?"

Anthony Gittens: So I went down with her to Lowndes County [AL], and I was down there. It was some kind of break. It might have been the winter break or some kind of break, Thanksgiving or something. And I remember going down with them, and that's when I met Stokely [Carmichael] and Jim Forman, Bob Mance, some other folks that were down there and talked to them to see what they were doing.[22]

I said, this is it, you know. So then that's when that group then became my friends and colleagues and Charlie—I don't know if Charlie [Cobb] was down there at the time—so that's when I got to know them, and got involved and talked to them about Howard, and talked to them about what needed to be done and understanding the place a little bit more. And that's when I went back and I said, you know, this is it. I came back.

Jocelyn Imani: And you come back when?

Anthony Gittens: It was in [19]66 I think? I was back then. I wrote articles about my experience there, and that just solidified my involvement with [the movement]. But there were always groups, there were always these militant groups that are protest groups of students that were there. And because the school obviously went from year to year, and people would graduate and go on, it was hard for these organizations to sustain themselves from year to year.[23]

There was the student rights organization—there were really two issues around Howard. One was student rights, due process. The university felt they could just put you out any day, any time,

[21] Their murders during the 1964 Freedom Summer galvanized student activism at Howard and other institutions, inspiring participation in the Civil Rights Movement.
[22] The Lowndes County Freedom Organization, created by SNCC, challenged systemic racism and voter suppression. Its symbol—a black panther—would later inspire the Black Panther Party's imagery and philosophy.
[23] The transient nature of college populations posed challenges for sustaining activist movements year to year. Howard students navigated this by building networks with national organizations like SNCC and the NAACP.

for any reason they deemed necessary. And that happened with some women, because they had come in late from curfew and [a] number [of other things].

But they could put you out for any reason. And students felt "No, there should be some due process." Nobody has the right to do that. And the other was the role—towards the end of my time there, especially in [19]68—the question was, what's the role of a Black university? What responsibilities does a Black higher education institution have in the country, in the world?[24]

And those were the two protest areas, the questions, the differing opinions, the people who had been embedded in a certain way of doing things, versus the younger people who saw a better, different way, a more active, militant way to change things.

Jocelyn Imani: So at what point do you first come into contact with the term Black Power or the idea of it?

Anthony Gittens: Well, like everyone else, when Stokely Carmichael got up and made—I think it was in [19]67, I can't remember [19]67—and he made that call. Then we said, oh, okay. Because prior to that, with the exception of the SNCC people, it was pretty much the Dr. [Martin Luther] King [Jr.], passive resistance, Selma march, turn the other cheek philosophy, except for the Malcolm X, Nation of Islam people.[25]

And even though people—especially in the students—we very much had nothing but admiration and respect, and nothing but respect for Malcolm, when it came to the tenets of the Nation of Islam, there was pushback. There was pushback. We weren't ready for that. Didn't really understand it.

So prior to those two camps—and then when Stokely said that and Black Power began to become embedded, and a call for action among Black people, especially young Black people, Howard just fell into that. We couldn't have done what we did at Howard without that context. It [was] always done within the context of what other people were doing outside and had done before us, all around us, that was going on. And so there was a search of what role is the university going to play in that conversation?

Jocelyn Imani: So you come into the term [19]66, you're already thinking about the concept in terms of what it means. At this point, what is your aesthetic like? You know, are you wearing the [da]shikis yet? Are you wearing afros?

Anthony Gittens: Afros were happening in [19]67. I mean, it was some of us who just had long hair. I didn't bother cutting my hair, and others were like that. But it became a statement. Like in

[24] Howard University's internal debates about its responsibilities in addressing systemic racism paralleled broader conversations about the political and cultural roles of HBCUs in empowering Black communities.
[25] While Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam focused on separatism and religious ideology, Black Power offered a secular approach that appealed to broader segments of the Black community, including students at Howard.

the class of [19]67—it was a strong class. They had been out, they were ahead of us in a lot of ways of thinking about it. They'd come from Chicago [IL], Newark [NJ], and Los Angeles [CA], and they were militant before they got to Howard.

So it began to show there. The notion of Africa and African culture showed later on. That's when we started wearing dashikis and the girls—the young women students—starting to wear geles [referring to a traditional Yoruba head tie] in their hair. That showed up, according to my recollection, a little bit later. My memory might be a little fuzzy in terms of, was it [19]67 or [19]68, but it happened around the Black Power conversation.[26]

Jocelyn Imani: So then, can you tell me some of that? What, besides the yearbook, what are some of the clubs that you participated in, or activities? I mean, not yearbook, newspaper.

Anthony Gittens: Not very much. There was a literary magazine that my wife showed me and said, "You were an editor." I didn't even remember doing that, but that was pretty much—the militant groups, wherever they were at the time I was somehow involved with them.

Jocelyn Imani: Ujamaa?

Anthony Gittens: Ujamaa came later. Ujamaa came towards the end of [19]67 and up in [19]68. That's when Ujamaa came. You want to talk about Ujamaa now?

Jocelyn Imani: Yeah. Well, is there any group before Ujamaa that you joined?

Anthony Gittens: There was a Black committee. There was the student—SRO [Student Rights Organization].

Jocelyn Imani: You were in SRO?

Anthony Gittens: Yes.

Jocelyn Imani: Okay, I want to work through those organizations to get to Ujamaa.

Anthony Gittens: Ok I got to think about it a little bit. I have some notes that I tend to write down, but I don't know if they're going to—if I have everything. There was the Student Rights Organization. And then there was the Black Power Committee. I think I was up in there as well. And then there were these cultural groups.

There was something called the Presidium. These young people who had another group over there, and they would put on events and things off campus a little bit. That's my recollection. There might have been more, I have to think about it, and it changed right here. That changed

[26] The emergence of Afros, dashikis, and geles among students at Howard was part of a larger national shift within the Black Power movement, emphasizing cultural self-expression and pride in African heritage.

every year, because folks would go, and then folks would come, and we understood that. We understood that.

One thing I gotta say [is] that, there was Adrienne and myself, maybe Carol. If I remember the conversation that we had, [we] said, we're going to stay here. We understand the issues, and we know we could go other places.

Jocelyn Imani: What do you mean stay? As opposed to?

Anthony Gittens: At Howard.

Jocelyn Imani: Oh, like transfer?

Anthony Gittens: They were putting us out. They had expelled me, right? They had expelled me. So, I could have gone off to something else, but the decision was made that we were going to stay. So all that is to say that when these student organizations, [would] be [here] one year, they disappear the next, that we were involved over the years. We were there, whenever it happened to be, we were going to be there in some role, because our interests were broad, and commitment was broad.[27]

Anthony Gittens: I don't want to make that sound like there was something kind of special. That was just the way it was at the time. I really don't want to make it seem that way. What I'm speaking about now it seems, you know, bam, bam, bam. But at the time, there was a lot of not being sure, being indecisive along [with], "What are we going to do about this?" You know, indecision, confusion, is a fuzziness. That's about stuff. So it wasn't bam, bam, bam.[28]

Jocelyn Imani: I think that's important to highlight that. That's a useful contribution. Because I think looking back, it looks like, "They had so much together and they knew."

Anthony Gittens: No, no, no [laughs].

Jocelyn Imani: "They had this political stance." I mean even—and even for historians—part of the reason why I wanted you to explain your organizations leading up to Ujamaa, is what I know from even my own research, is that there's these ways—my own research, as well as my own lived experience with whatever political organizations I've been involved in, in school—that it is because student populations are transitive by nature.[29]

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[27] The decision to stay at Howard despite expulsion reflected a broader commitment among student activists to institutional change. Their ongoing participation in student organizations ensured continuity in the fight for justice and representation.
[28] Gittens' recollection challenges the oversimplified narrative of student activists as hyper-organized and ideologically unified, emphasizing the uncertainty and confusion inherent in grassroots movements.
[29] Imani's comment about the transitive nature of student activism reflects how the same core individuals often organized under different banners, showing the fluidity and adaptability of activism at Howard and other campuses.

It is just kind of ebb and flow, and it'll be the same people with a different name the next, except for one founder. So they made this group, and these people made that group. It's really the same people jumping back and forth.

Anthony Gittens: There you go. Yeah, that's it.

Jocelyn Imani: So in terms of—I know, for my work—in terms of being able to trace, to even be able to identify, some sort of genealogy, for lack of a term, just kind of a documenting it. But it's easy, this, this notion—I want to peel back the layers a little bit more where you're talking about this emotional side of it, in terms of what it feels like to go through these organizations.

You know, I'm a [19]80s millennial, so my cohort of folks have grown up romanticizing you guys. From the red, black and green [referring to the Pan-African flag], to Malcolm X and you know, and so forth. And kind of almost as [a] bit of performance of activism.[30] Have you ever seen the movie *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood*?

Anthony Gittens: I don't remember.

Jocelyn Imani: There's this caricature, that's now in modern media, the trope of the Black Power activist who is maybe wearing a Kufi [cap], maybe wearing a camouflage jacket, or army fatigue, kind of jacket. Talking about The Man and what we gonna do.[31]

And there's this idea looking back, retrospectively, that there's clear through lines—that there's a sense of knowing, of purpose, of understanding, having read the [indistinct reference], mastered this literature, that as activists, you guys are sure, but you know—and I know this is a long setup.

If you can just talk a little bit more about what it felt like and the not knowing and the uncertainty, talking about the internal dynamics of these organizations that you're in. If you can, and as much as you can, identify which organizations in what time periods they are.

Anthony Gittens: The organizations were not very organized. The organizations were not very organized. They'd be people who had—the one thing we had in common is that we were going to change this racial structure in the United States. We saw—as my Marxist friends would say—the contradictions, I guess because we were students, but we saw the difference between what people pronounced and said and what the reality was.[32]

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[30] The red, black, and green flag and Malcolm X's legacy became iconic symbols, often romanticized by later generations who reinterpreted the movements of the 1960s as more unified and purposeful than they were in real-time.

[31] "The Man" is a colloquial term used to describe oppressive systems of power, typically representing the government, law enforcement, or other institutions that perpetuate systemic racism and inequality.

[32] Gittens describes how activists, inspired by critiques of systemic racism, sought to dismantle structures of inequality through direct action. This involved adopting theoretical frameworks such as Marxism, though not universally among activists.

And we became more aware that there was a system to it, and that we had to somehow bust up this system in some way, and people much braver and smarter than I am, and was, were doing that in The South and doing that in other places. We were empowered. That's where we were.

And the feeling was, okay, we agree we are going to do this. Now, how are we going to do this? I remember, before some demonstration, sitting next to people saying, "What [are] we going [to do]?" I'm talking about, we get ready to jump off and do something in the next 5, 10 minutes. And I remember Adrienne was looking at me and saying, "Gittens this is really unorganized. What [are] we gonna do?"

We just stood up and went forward, you know. There was a sense of, we gotta do something. We gotta do something. And some people had better ideas about it. But the point that you were making earlier, that somehow—and I've had this experience with other younger people who thought, and I've been talking to other people about this, who really do think that what was going on back in the [19]60s was this [idea that] everybody was clear and marching forward with one idea. No, no, no.[33]

And it's important for people, your generation and younger, to know that so that you don't—there was a lot of failure, there was a lot of mistakes, there was a lot of confusion and internal disagreement.[34]

There was a lot of that, just people who just didn't see it the same way, a lot of dishonesty that went on. And then there were some very brave people and committed people who just said, "Okay, let's settle this down. We are not the problem, that's the problem out there."

That's the problem, and get over that, get over that. And somehow, over the long run, you're able to get over it. But your point is very well [made], it was not that cut and dry, it was just not that. And anything, in my opinion, not only just this, but in life, it's not that cut and dry and to accept there's going to be failure and sometimes you just don't know what to do. You just don't know.[35]

I don't know if that answers your question, I'll think about it a little bit more, because there's just some people you don't like, you don't trust them. Where were you when we were doing this and you show up here now?

Jocelyn Imani: I'll give you a question I'm going to come to and then where I want to go now. Because I was thinking in my head—

[33] Younger generations often view 1960s activism as cohesive and unified, but Gittens highlights the disagreements, failures, and uncertainty that were part of the movement.
[34] Activists faced interpersonal challenges, including mistrust and frustration, while maintaining focus on external goals. This balance was critical to the longevity of movements like those at Howard.
[35] Gittens emphasizes the importance of embracing failure and uncertainty as inherent to activism and broader life experiences, encouraging a realistic understanding of change processes.

Anthony Gittens: I'm going to think more about your question as you go along. It's a good question.

Jocelyn Imani: Please do. Please do. And this is useful information and it's relevant. I wouldn't come back to it if it's not relevant. I wanted to ask you about spirituality and how that comes into play, in terms of Black folks recognizing themselves, or Negroes coming into a Black consciousness, recognizing spirit.

But this thing you just said about not trusting people, right? How much did y'all know that you were being labeled as militant, surveilled, etcetera, etcetera, how much of that was clear then? How much of it, reflecting back, do you think was paranoia, and how did your knowledge or assumed knowledge of surveillance impact your dealings with one another? At that time.

Anthony Gittens: You talking about the FBI?

Jocelyn Imani: In general. FBI, the state.

Anthony Gittens: We were obviously the militants. There was no question that when they saw me, that's what they saw and my other colleagues. I'm pretty sure when they saw them, that's what they saw. It was clear.

Jocelyn Imani: Because of your aesthetic.

Anthony Gittens: Because of our history. That's what we did. That's what we did, you know. I mean, there were people in our group who wore suits and ties, and the ladies who wore skirts and heels. But that's what we did. I mean, we did that. We did it, so they would see. And the aesthetic, to some extent, because that's what I wore, you know, that's what I wore. But there were other people who didn't wear that kind of stuff.

Jocelyn Imani: Just for the record, what were you wearing?

Anthony Gittens: I was wearing jeans, and I had a couple of shirts. I was never a big dresser. I had this, what I used to call my uniform. I went down to the Army and Navy store and got an Army jacket. You know, I was ready [laughs]. I'm thinking about it now. I had all the uniform stuff on, but it's just what I wore, you know. I don't know, it's what I wore.[36]

Jocelyn Imani: Did y'all have any sense of being surveilled by the state, whether it's the FBI? Or harassed by police?

Anthony Gittens: You and I were talking earlier, about the FBI? No. I had no sense of it. Only now that some people are asking for the records from the FBI files that I could see that there

[36] Gittens' "uniform" of military surplus clothing symbolized defiance, reflecting the aesthetics of resistance during the Black Power and anti-war movements.

were people there and other things that we did that put us under surveillance. We were pretty much known as the militants on campus, and I don't know how far ahead to get of your story.

Jocelyn Imani: No, jump in.

Anthony Gittens: So there was one of the demonstrations that we had, there was a guy, I can't think of his name now, I can look it up. He was head of the recruitment service, selective services [referring to U.S. Selective Service System or SSS].

Jocelyn Imani: Hershey.

Anthony Gittens: General [Lewis Blaine] Hershey—what was in student awareness, which is another story—they had brought him on campus.

Jocelyn Imani: Oh. Project Awareness.[37]

Anthony Gittens: Project Awareness, which I used to head, by the way. Not the time they brought him up, after that. I became head of student awareness. I brought [Maulana] Karenga [previously known as Ron Karenga] and Muhammad Ali and all these other folks.[38]

So he [Hershey] was there. We said, "This guy? Why would he [previous Project Awareness head] bring this guy up here? Why would he have to—?" And we just went up there and broke it all up. Stopped them, chased them off the stage.[39]

Jocelyn Imani: Who decided that?

Anthony Gittens: I can't even remember.

Jocelyn Imani: I have in my records that you're part of that protest, that Robin Gregory is a part of that protest?

Anthony Gittens: Robin, I don't think, was there. She could have been. It was a long time [ago]. It was another one of these things like, okay, we're going to stand up and do this. I can't remember.

Jocelyn Imani: Adrienne was there?

Anthony Gittens: I don't know if Adrienne was there. I can't remember. It might have been the freshman guys who were there. Michael [Harris] was there, Sam [?].

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[37] [NAG (Nonviolent Action Group) members were the driving force in organizing "Project Awareness," an effort that aimed to "help liberate the minds of students" by inviting notable speakers to debate nationalism and non-violence.

[38] Figures like Karenga and Muhammad Ali embodied the interplay between cultural pride and direct political action, fostering dialogue at Howard.

[39] Demonstrations like the protest against General Hershey highlighted Howard's dual role as a site of intellectual debate and a stage for national activist movements.

Jocelyn Imani: I thought that was the spring of [19]67. So it might have been the fall of [19]67?

Anthony Gittens: Could have been. I could look it up again. But no, no, no. It was on March 21, 1967. So spring '67, and he [Hershey] was up there [and we said] no, no, no, no, no. So we broke all that up, right? And that's when the administration began—so the next day, there's a congressman who says, these students don't appreciate all we've given them. They're a bunch of radicals there, and we should look into the budget of Howard University. And that was it.

That was when the administration said, "Oh, these people are messing with our money." At that point, 56% of the university's budget came from the federal government. And then they had something at stake that was beyond campus.[40]

The next couple of days, Nabrit, President [James] Nabrit [Jr.] at the time, goes and apologizes, and he sends him this letter saying, "We're sorry. It's just these, these outside agitators that are doing this, and we're going to take care of this. We're going to take care of it."

And that's when they start making this march towards gathering the names and the photos of the students. That's when they began to do surveillance on us. That's when they have a list of the students that had, like 59 students on this list. They got it down to like 30 something.

They started looking at photos of things, events that we were involved in. They went and they got news footage. Because the press, the local press, was covering the student activity, and they were taking [indistinct photos], and they went and looked through all that, and they picked out the folks who they thought were the ringleaders of these protests.[41]

And that's when the surveillance started to show up because we had no sense anybody was taking photos or paying attention to us. We just found that out. You know, when all of a sudden they decide that, oh, we got to get rid of these people. And that was driven because of the Hershey protests and the fact that they were concerned that the government was going to punish them for not being able to control us.

And that's when they said, "We'll take care of that and bring it back to a nice, quiet campus where people come and study to learn how to be good, good white people." That's essentially what they wanted.

Jocelyn Imani: For everybody to be nice clerks for the federal government.

Anthony Gittens: That's what they wanted.

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[40] Federal funding dependency made Howard administrators cautious, often leading to public apologies to protect financial support while balancing student activism.

[41] The administration's effort to catalog and monitor activists reflects a broader national strategy, epitomized by COINTELPRO, to stifle dissent.

Jocelyn Imani: I want to ask another question about this notion of internal dynamics. Do you remember any ideological or personality splits that halted or threatened to halt, moot production? Anything lasting beyond, you may be irritated today in that meeting, but we'll come back to the next meeting.

Anthony Gittens: It was nothing major. It was a lot of people. I mean, there were people who were integrat[ionists]. They believed in King. And we weren't talking about any violence.[42]

Jocelyn Imani: Was this Gloster Current?

Anthony Gittens: Gloster was president of the Student Government, or something like that. And there was this, this level of student administrators, right? And Gloster was Gloster, and Ewart Brown was part of that initially, and there were these other students who were there. Gloster, I think his father was a big something in the NAACP, and so he had to go back and sort of account to his father about what was going on, because his father, again, was NAACP, who believed in a different way than we believed in approaching the same subject.

So they were committed, and they were interested in moving the race forward. It's just that there was disagreement about how best to do it. That crew, they even called a press conference to say the same thing. That here's a small group of students that are disrupting things. It's not the vast majority of students here at all, and it's going to be okay, it's going to be okay. We'll take care of it.

So those folks just disagree with us. The fraternity people disagreed because we were challenging the reason they came to Howard. You know, we were challenging what Howard stood for, the way Howard viewed itself, the way Howard viewed its students and even its faculty.[43]

So they had a lot at stake, and they were not going to come to our side. But we were getting depressed. We were the ones who were shaking stuff up, and they wanted to play some role in that. But over a period of time, this was especially true of Ewart Brown, good brother, who began to see our side of it, because they went and they tried to reason with these folks, they would have meetings and committees set up, and they would want basic kinds of things, and they were getting nowhere.

And Ewart especially said, "I've had enough, I'm tired." And he was on our side, which was a good thing, because most of the students weren't identifying with us. They weren't against us and stuff, but they identified with people like Ewart. He was head of student government. He was a

[42] Divides between integrationists and radicals were emblematic of the Civil Rights Movement's evolving dynamics, where strategic disagreements often led to factionalism.
[43] As a student leader trusted by more moderate peers, Brown's alignment with radicals highlights the power of lived experience to bridge ideological divides and expand coalitions.

fraternity brother of some sort. He was on the track team and a very good, an excellent athlete, and so they trusted Ewart.

It was good to have Ewart as part of our group. Then he becomes part of the conversation. And so we had our people who were coming, and now we also had his people coming. So that was a lot of people.

Jocelyn Imani: Now, who? Who's your people? Your core group?

Anthony Gittens: Myself, depending on what time, myself, Adrienne Manns, a woman named Carolyn Carter, and we were the three that were there most of the time. Then there was Michael Harris. When Michael came in, in [19]67 he and a guy named Sam. I can't think of Sam's last name. A guy named Butch, I think, can't remember his name. A guy named Yui. Can't think of Yui's last name. But Yui was the one. He came in with a big afro and said, "I ain't cutting my hair."

Jocelyn Imani: That man's name is on the tip of my tongue. Because he was in the class of [19]67 as well? He came in 67?

Anthony Gittens: He came in 67. I can't call his last name.

Jocelyn Imani: Was Maisha Washington there?

Anthony Gittens: Oh yeah. There were the women. Robin had been there with Stokely and them, and got involved in SNCC stuff when they were at Howard. She lived off campus a lot. That's a whole other—the Robin Gregory story.

So there was myself, Adrienne, Carrol, and there was [a] couple of other people, but we were older, because we had been there longer by the time [19]68 came, we were seniors. And [Yui?] was coming in at [19]67, but they were good brothers. They were strong brothers. That was sort of the crew. Ewart's group came in a little later.

Jocelyn Imani: Ewart came in [19]67? I mean, that came to Howard, came into the fold. He was your classmate, right?

Anthony Gittens: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jocelyn Imani: But in terms of him changing his politics, or not so much changing as much as it is affiliating with you guys and having conversations with you guys, that's [19]67?

Anthony Gittens: That's [19]67, [19]68. Yeah. I mean, we'd always talk. We just wouldn't agree all the time. But Ewart was a smart guy. He went on to become Prime Minister [Premier of

Bermuda], which I think is something that he always aspired to. That's where he was from. He was another first generation—but he was from the Caribbean.[44]

Yeah, we talked about that earlier, you know. But he came along, and he was very well respected. He got involved, he stayed involved. Once he got involved, he stayed involved. And even after he left and went to med school there, he was a leader in the med school for some things.

Jocelyn Imani: I want to move us forward to get to the takeover. Hershey, spring [19]67—that's what gets you kind of identified and on the list and expelled, because they expel you over the summertime, right?

Anthony Gittens: They expel us. I think they're about 17 or 20 of us that they sent the saying, don't come back, you can't come back, that you're out.

Jocelyn Imani: Were all of those people actually involved, or were some of those people misidentified?

Anthony Gittens: Some were misidentified. Some of those who were misidentified, they took care of them, you know. They said they made an error. They took care of them.

Jocelyn Imani: After getting this letter that says, don't come back, thanks. What's your response?

Anthony Gittens: Yay, let's go get them. It was like, wow. I said, oh yeah, okay, okay. It was okay. Let's go. So we came back. I came back. It was during the summer. They stayed. They were cowardly in doing that when everybody had gone home and nobody could really, you know, but it also meant that we had time to resist.[45]

So when I went back, I was home. I remember I was helping my mother, doing stuff in the house and stuff, you know, home, and getting on the bus and coming back, and we came back.

Then the folks who got kicked out, we got together, and then we had some very good faculty who were helping us, Andrus Taylor for [the] English department, [Dr.] Acklyn [Lynch], I don't know if Acklyn was around. Then Acklyn Lynch. Greg [?], can't remember Greg's last name, but there were faculty there who also—they might not have had their contracts renewed as well, because they were supportive of us.

And then Jay Green. Jay Green was a law student at the Howard Law school, and Jay was very smart, and he was older than we were, and he said, you know, let's see if we can mount a legal

[44] Leaders like Brown brought a global perspective to Howard's activism, linking diasporic struggles for liberation to the Civil Rights Movement.
[45] Activists leveraged Howard's federal funding and legal ambiguities to challenge their expulsion, raising significant questions about due process and institutional accountability.

response to this, because the question was due process, because we said, you have no right to put us out just like that without any due process, you haven't talked to us. You haven't heard our side of things.

Jocelyn Imani: But don't do anymore protests.

Anthony Gittens: Don't do anything.

Jocelyn Imani: What's your relationship with the activists in the art department? Like, are you in conversation with Akili Anderson at this point?

Anthony Gittens: Yeah, yeah. There's a photo I had in the book we talked about Ron at the time. You know? He was the AfriCOBRA [African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists] arts guy.[46] Jeff—

Jocelyn Imani: Donaldson?

Anthony Gittens: Jeff [Donaldson] came to teach there later. Jeff was in Chicago at the time, but he was part of the whole folks that were asking the question of, what is Black art? What is Black art? And how does that break with European traditions in art? And he was one of the folks—there were people actually in music all over the place. Everywhere was fascinating.[47]

People were struggling with this question, how does Black Power get itself expressed in what you're doing? The theater—

Jocelyn Imani: Are you guys doing other programming, besides breaking things up? Are you guys, as organizations, besides going to protest and shutting people [down], you know, going to speeches and telling people, nah?

Anthony Gittens: I don't know if we were doing it. There were other people who were doing it. They were our friends. I don't remember writing poems and stuff. There were folks who were doing that.

Jocelyn Imani: I mean, but even something, are you guys creating—here's a program to think about Black masculinity, and we're going to feature music?

Anthony Gittens: There were people who were doing that. On the campus around [19]67, [19]68 they were doing that. There were a lot of people who were doing plays. I remember going into one thing, and I don't even know how it wound up in this room, but they were talking about

[46] A collective of Black artists founded in Chicago in 1968, focused on creating art that celebrated Black identity and empowered the Black community.
[47] Artists and musicians at Howard, like those in AfriCOBRA, used their work to challenge Eurocentric norms, creating new paradigms for Black cultural and political expression.

Black economics, and they had a guy there, can't remember his name, brother from Africa, and he was talking about different approaches.[48]

Harry Quintana. Harry was in the architecture school. He was Puerto Rican. He was from New York. And Harry was looking at architecture in Black communities. And is there some different way of looking at that? He talked about alleys, and how maybe, as opposed to alleys being the back of the house, how do you make them the front of the house so that people would commute—I'm not an architect or associate, but I mean, it was those kinds of conversations that were going on all over the place. Now, whether we were involved in them or not, I would show up.

Jocelyn Imani: So moving forward to March [19]68. You sue, or threaten to sue, get the lawyers involved. Summer [19]67 you come back. Fall [19]67 semester, [are] you still involved with the anti-ROTC?

Anthony Gittens: Anti-ROTC might have been gone by [19]67, [19]68.

Jocelyn Imani: I thought you said Michael came in—

Anthony Gittens: Michael came in—yeah so [19]67 is when he's gone.

Jocelyn Imani: Is there anything else of note that happens for you guys fall [19]67 that you could think [of]?

Anthony Gittens: In fall of [19]67 and Hershey—we broke up the convocation.

Jocelyn Imani: You broke up the convocation. I knew there was one I was forgetting.

Anthony Gittens: We broke up the convocation, I just can't remember exactly why, but it was something. We had a good reason, whatever it was.

Jocelyn Imani: If I'm thinking in my memory banks, right, I want to say it's because you guys had some demands that still were not being met.

Anthony Gittens: We had demands.

Jocelyn Imani: There's these demands that you guys issue. There's multiple sets of demands. But I remember reading that opening convocation is broken up to the demands. I'm going to march forward to—we get to February 16, 1968. One of my favorite days in all of Howard history. Because you guys draft up that two-page mimeograph and I wish I had brought the copy of it. I have a copy of *Spirit Shield*.[49]

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[48] Beyond protests, Howard students engaged in intellectual and artistic programming, from plays to discussions about Black identity and economics, as part of the larger Black Power movement.

[49] The *Spirit Shield* was a key communication tool for Howard's activists, used to spread demands and mobilize the student body.

Anthony Gittens: Good. *Spirit Shield*.

Jocelyn Imani: That two-page mimeographed list of demands that you made. And instead of just taking it to President Nabrit, [instead] of taking it to [indistinct]. Y'all take down flags.

Anthony Gittens: Yes, we do [laughs].

Jocelyn Imani: Y'all rip up the iron wrought gate.

Anthony Gittens: We do, we do.

Jocelyn Imani: And burn these people's effigies and throw this on their desks. Can you tell me how that day unfolded?

Anthony Gittens: We went and we disrupted the convocation [a traditional event often targeted by protests], and we read our demands to the people who were there. And then was it the next day, or the day after, they decide that they are going to put us out. They wanted to put us out. And then they started trying to hold these hearings. And I think that Robin Gregory was the first one. Robin Gregory was the first one.

I'll speed along. I can get too much into detail. Robin was the sweetest, nicest person you ever want to meet. And she had an afro [symbol of Black pride]. She had run for homecoming queen and won. [Robin's win disrupted traditional expectations of apolitical homecoming queens.] And they would really treat her kind of badly. All the stuff that usually, traditionally goes with homecoming queens, that wasn't for Robin. It was tough on her.

And anyway, she was around one of these demonstrations, and they saw her photo, had issues with her anyway, and they were now having this meeting to discuss it. And of course, we were there, we were there.

So that was one thing. Anyway, so speeding along. So then we just got tired of this stuff, we broke up the convocation [protests escalated]. They were really mad at that. They tried to put us out again. And that's when, not only we said no, everybody else around us said, "no, no, no, no, no, we aren't going to do that."

So that's when we start burning stuff in effigy [a common protest symbol], taking down the flag [a rejection of institutional authority]. You know, some people were burning their draft cards [anti-Vietnam War protest].

Jocelyn Imani: Right. By this point the draft is getting more intense.

Anthony Gittens: Getting more intense, it was during the Vietnam War.

Jocelyn Imani: Are you knowing people who are not coming to class because they've been drafted?

Anthony Gittens: No, once you're in class, if you were a student, then they wouldn't draft you [student deferments were common]. Okay? There's a whole other conversation about [that]. They wouldn't draft you, but everybody had to get a draft card. I imagine it's the same. Now, my sons have draft cards when they got to a certain age, but they weren't going to the Army, right?

So they had done all that and then people just got tired of this stuff. Then, we had this rally. It was in front of Douglass Hall [a historic Howard building]. If people who don't know how it is, it's the quad with the area there. And then there's Douglass Hall, which is an old Howard tradition. Old hall, but filled with history and stuff there.

Jocelyn Imani: Has graduation moved from being in front of Douglass?

Anthony Gittens: No. When I graduated, it was still at Douglass. They put chairs out on the grass and when the weather was fine you came out and did your stuff. But I remember that after doing all that stuff—and again, Black Power was going on all around us. We did that much, Black Power did this much. In the context, people who did stuff were doing things outside of the campus, who did stuff way before we got there. We would just happen to be there at that time. No heroes at all.[50]

And I remember that the night before we had had some meeting where we said, Okay, let's go sit in, in the administration building [a focal point for protests]. We were there, people making speeches. Jay, who had left school, he had left Howard. I think he was at Yale, then he'd gotten a scholarship to Yale. Jay [?] said some talk. And then I said, some talk, right?

There was the usual, 25 of us of the 50 out there and we said, okay we're gonna go do this. I remember turning around, walking towards the administration building, and Adrienne and Carol—they were very close to me at the time—and walking and I turned around, and there were all these students behind.

It's one of these moments that is just so surprising. So surprising. I turned around and there were all these people that were behind us and were marching in with us. When I think about it now, it was quite incredible. And these folks who we'd been trying to move for years, were then there.

I don't know if Ewart was there or not and we marched in and filled up all the floors at the height of it. We were there from March 19th to March 23rd. That's four days we were there and took up every floor in that building [a defining sit-in moment].[51] I think it's about a four floor building.

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[50] Gittens emphasizes that their actions were part of a larger continuum of Black Power and Civil Rights activism, rejecting notions of individual heroism.

[51] The sit-in became a landmark event, symbolizing student unity and resistance against institutional injustices while demanding systemic reforms.

Students were on all the floors there sitting. It became this, this incredible experience that I don't know how to for us—and I'm pretty sure you've had that experience, and so many other people have had that experience—where it becomes life changing.

And we looked around, there were all these people and that's when we took over. We took over the building. We took over the school. We took it over and I was so proud of us and the students there. And it was like, "Well, okay, what are we going to do?" And they said, "Well, we don't want to cause any problems. People are calling the switchboard, what do we do?" And I said, well, you know, I don't know.

And all the young ladies started going to the switchboard [students temporarily managed university operations][52]. And I said, how did they know to run the switchboard? That's what they do. They got these jobs after school. They know that's part of their part time [jobs]. They went there, and there are photos of this, and they're just taking it over and saying Howard University is closed today. Amazing.

Anthony Gittens: Then people said, "well, what are we going to eat?" And there were some folks who went down and said, "We'll take care of that." Then there was Bob [?] in communications. We had walkie talkies [used for internal coordination during the sit-in]. We had ways of communicating with each other. We set up classes. Stokely was in there, with Courtland and Charlie, Ivanhoe [Donaldson], these other folks who were SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], people who were in town at the time. I asked them, I said, "Look, could you do some African American Studies classes?" They came down and had schedules of African American Studies classes.[53]

Jocelyn Imani: We're going to come back to this. No, we're going to come back to where I was going. But since we're here, let's unpack the takeover. For the record, I do want to tease out the difference between February 16th and March 19th, because it's two separate demonstrations. But since we're talking about the March takeover, because that's really important, you mentioned the people who are coming to teach these classes. Did you have professors who were already faculty at Howard who came and taught class in addition to?

Anthony Gittens: Oh, yeah.

Jocelyn Imani: Who were some of those people?

Anthony Gittens: Nathan had gone. [Dr.] Nathan Hare [sociologist and activist] who was another major figure in [19]67, especially [19]66, [19]67. Nathan, he taught sociology—Dr Nathan Hare—and he was always there with us. He was probably the most militant, outspoken

[52] Students managed operations such as the switchboard, showcasing their ability to self-govern during the protests.
[53] The African American Studies classes taught by SNCC leaders during the sit-in highlighted the intersection of activism and education, bridging grassroots organizing with academic discourse.

professor there at the time. They didn't renew his contract. And in [19]67 he went to San Francisco State and became head of their Black Studies program.[54]

And Andrus, of course, always Andrus Taylor, but there were faculty members who, when they heard about this, and the students got concerned about their grades—because it was towards the end of the semester—and some were seniors in their earliest grades, and they started teaching that.

There were French classes and sociology classes and English classes that these faculty members who were sympathetic said, "We'll take care of that." And they would teach. They would have classes in the classroom. We opened up some of the classrooms and they went and they did that. We always had faculty who were understanding.

Sterling Brown [legendary poet and professor]. I would see Sterling because I was an English major and took every class I could from Sterling Brown. Amazing man. He's a hero. I see Sterling, and we shake hands saying goodbye, and I looked, and he had left $5. He said, "go buy some mimeograph paper. So you guys need something." Those are the kinds of folks that were there.[55] A.P. [Arthur Paul] Davis—

Jocelyn Imani: Do you remember Chancellor Williams or, [the] Ambassador [of] Luxembourg [referring to Patricia Roberts Harris]?

Anthony Gittens: Nope.

Jocelyn Imani: Patricia Roberts Harris.

Anthony Gittens: She was in law school, I think. I didn't know her. They were all there, and they were—I mean it was the liberal arts group, and then there was the med school, and the dental school—

Jocelyn Imani: Do you remember them being around during the takeover?

Anthony Gittens: No, but my memory could be bad. It could have been there. My memory is bad then; it's terrible now. I mean, really, I don't remember. What's your name? [laughs]

Jocelyn Imani: You mentioned the students, assuming the switchboards and doing the other things that are part of their work-study duties. How else do you guys come in—with the walkie talkies. What are some of the politics as the board of trustees are beginning? So they send Kenneth Clark—

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[54] Hare's influence extended beyond Howard to the national stage, cementing Black Studies as a critical field of academic inquiry and activism.

[55] Professors like Sterling Brown and others actively supported students, both by providing resources and participating in intellectual discourse, underscoring the collaboration between faculty and students during the movement.

Anthony Gittens: Oh, they don't send Kenneth. The administration's happening, right? And then they call the board meeting. So all these people come in and said, "you know, this is terrible, or this is—all right?" And the division there is that the hardliners said, "let's call the marshals and take these kids out of there." Which meant it could get rough. There were some folks there who really wanted to resist, and people would have gotten hurt.[56]

And then there were the other moderates who said—on the board, from what I understand—said, "Let's talk to them. Let's figure out if we could make a way to go in." Along the way, Kenneth Clark—Kenneth Clark was a psychologist [known for the "Doll Test" and work in school desegregation] who had been writing about the Negro Problem, the Black problem, in terms of psychology. I forgot where he was—at Columbia, or NYU or something, I don't really remember.

And Kenneth Clark was on the board. Was he on the board?

Jocelyn Imani: Mhm hmm.

Anthony Gittens: He was on the board, and all of a sudden they tell us—we'd established a place for the leaders to be. We found an office up there, and we were just sort of, that's where we were. Ewart, Carolyn and Adrienne and some other folks, Harry,—somebody had to make decisions, and it was us, right?

So they brought Kenneth Clark up, and he came in. I had never met him and he had someone with him. And he came and he started to cry because he loved Howard so much, and he felt that it was being destroyed.[57] He was like, "Can we find a way. Can we find a way to make this work? You know, I'm sympathetic, I know, but these people were going to get ready to do this, and we don't – I don't want to see anybody get hurt. I don't want to see the university being damaged."

And we're listening to him, then he goes away. He gets back to the board and makes a plea. They say, "Okay, we're going to have one more chance where we can talk about this." So we put together a negotiating team. It was Adrienne, Ewart and it was a couple of other people who I can't remember offhand, but they ain't sending me. Adrienne [and I] we both agreed I'm not the one to go there, because I'm going to split the, you know, and that that was not going to work in this situation.

And Adrienne, who was brilliant—I think she was head of the debating team and she would be fine with that. So she went, Ewart went and they had some meeting. We had our demands [demands included calls for academic reforms, institutional accountability, and protection for student activists]. So they agree to some, but they don't agree to others. Definitely, they don't

[56] The contrasting responses of Howard's Board of Trustees—ranging from calling marshals to negotiation—illustrate the institutional tension and stakes of the student protests.
[57] Clark's deep love for Howard and his fear of its destruction demonstrate the personal and institutional stakes of the protest.

agree to amnesty. They feel that, no, no, no, these people, these leaders, people who were going to put out, who broke up the convocation that, no, no, we're not going to do that and a number of other things. And they say, “No, they're gonna do that.”

So then we do it. There's another round of that. By this time, you know that that's going to happen. I want to talk a second—does that answer your question?

Jocelyn Imani: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Anthony Gittens: —about the experience of being in that building. It was almost like having self-determination.[58] Here we were the students who were running this in an organized fashion. I mean, everything, there was no [arguing], you know, no fight[ing], none of that.

There was a security force, the [indistinct] force. Eric Hughes headed that up, and their job was to really make sure that everyone who came, who was involved, was a student. They weren't there to control the students, but they didn't want any vandalism, and they didn't want people just sort of wandering in. So everybody who came in the building had to show their student card [security ensured protests remained orderly and limited to students].

Then these folks started coming in from the community who were sympathetic. Ministers would come in, and city council, David Eaton came in, who was a major civil rights figure in the city. People who were political folks, they would come in and they would stand there behind us.[59] And then there was an Entertainment Committee.

And there was one—there were a number of these—but it was one I remember where Melvin Deal, who—if you're in DC, you know who he is. He brought African dance to DC. Brilliant stuff he did. And they gave concerts, jazz things were going on, they came in, and that was going on without any problem. Self-determination all the way. Decisions were democratic.

A couple of times, if we had to make major decisions, we call a meeting of everybody and go back out. That happened about twice, especially the last one. And it was this feeling that—I think when I see people after it, and I don't see a lot of these people anymore. Lives have gone on in different directions, but they talk about how that experience affected everything—I won't say everything—much of what they did after Howard.[60] That they felt this feeling of pride to be a part of that.

The last thing I'd say about that is, it's the kin—and the movement stuff that we did—it's the kind of experience and education you cannot get in the classroom. We were kids, and we were

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[58] Students exemplified autonomy and collective decision-making, organizing everything from security to entertainment.
[59] The involvement of local leaders and cultural figures underscored the connection between campus activism and broader civil rights efforts in Washington, DC.
[60] The sit-in and protests were transformative, shaping participants’ future activism, careers, and perspectives on leadership and resistance.

figuring this stuff out. And the folks who had gone down south, also the SNCC people, especially, they talk about "me and my life after that." I mean, these were things that you can't—there's no class that could teach you how to do that.

You know, you grow up real fast, and you make decisions real fast, and your decisions have some impact on, in some cases, your physical safety and just an incredible experience.

Jocelyn Imani: I need to get past the protest. I want to just narrate briefly and run down the chronology, tell me if I got it right. So we have February 16th, you guys have that protest where you take the spirit shield and the flag and everything, drop it on [indistinct] desk, drop it in Nabrit's empty office, and you give a certain date to respond. They don't respond.

Charter Day happens. Y'all shut that down again. Right after Charter Day, now it's March 19th. You have a rally at Douglass, which turns into a takeover. Four days later, these negotiations, narration, you come out. The only piece you don't agree on is, you know, you don't agree that there'll be amnesty.

Anthony Gittens: There might be more. I don't remember every detail.

Jocelyn Imani: I know that you don't agree that Nabrit will get fired, and you don't agree that Howard will become a Black university, because the conversation at that point is how it needs to become a Black university. I've seen in the literature the idea that turning it from Howard University to Sterling Brown University is a conversation on the table.[61]

March 23rd you walk out. Just two weeks later, King is murdered. DC burns. You guys set up Student Response Center [created by Howard students to assist during the 1968 DC riots]. Then we get through the rest of the semester into the summer. We open back up in Fall [19]68, and amongst other things, the Ujamaa folks have run successfully in the spring for student government. So we have Q.T. Jackson as president, and [a] couple other people have offices that are running on this Ujamaa platform.

Fall of [19]68 they negotiate using this political consciousness. They utilize how University Student Association funds [will be] put together towards a Black university conference [a gathering focused on defining the role of Black universities]. Can you tell us some about the concept of a Black university at large, and then about this conference in particular?

Anthony Gittens: I can tell you about the concept of a Black university. I cannot tell you about the conference. I was not there. I was out of the country. I was traveling in Africa and Europe at the time. So there are other people who can. Acklyn Lynch can tell you and Courtland, they could tell you a lot about that. When I came back, they had already been organized. I think it was in the middle when I returned back to Washington, DC.

[61] Reflects the desire to redefine Howard's mission to center Black cultural and academic excellence.

So I'm not the best person to answer that question. What happened was because I had graduated, I was out of Howard. Acklyn was still there. Michael, Q.T.— no, Michael, what if Michael was there or not? He might have left. But anyway, there were students who were there. The university had acquiesced to almost everything that we had asked for.

But the question was, well, what is a Black university like? The same question of, what is Black power? You know, what does that mean? And people were trying to define that, so they had this conference whic—reading the documents and talking to people about it—was a major step nationally forward.[62] But again, the actual details of it, I'm not the right person there. I'm sorry.

Jocelyn Imani: Can you share a little bit about the concept of the Black university?

Anthony Gittens: When I got to Howard, the goal they were trying to accomplish was making Howard a Black Harvard [University]. So Howard was going to be the Black Harvard. And we were saying no, Howard was going to be the Black Howard. It would show up in things like the curriculum [Howard's curriculum began incorporating African American Studies].

The radio station that was not there until after stuff that we did when somebody said, "Let's give these people a radio station." There was a television [station]. I mean, there was a lot that was given to them that became run and administered by Black [people] with the intention of serving the Black community.[63] And that was what the push was, to serve the Black community.

Howard was here. There was this community around it, very little interaction between those. Training students to be again, be of service, not to ROTC, but to be of service to the Black community. How do you do that? How do you have people study whatever Black economics is? How do you have people study that? What is that? And that was the goal, that's the thought was, how do you create this place of intelligence and education?

And when people come there, they know that's what they could expect, that was the brand that they came there, and that's what you could expect.

But what is that? That was the conversation and what we wanted to do, as opposed to create people who were going to go into the Army or go work in big corporations and be the Black faces that they needed in these places to justify what it is they were doing. In a nutshell.[64]

Jocelyn Imani: No, that's good. You just said a good phrase "to justify what they were doing." And that what they were doing. In the interest of time, I won't ask you to fully unpack who

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[62] The conference was a turning point in the movement to conceptualize and institutionalize the role of Black universities in liberation struggles.

[63] Initiatives like Howard's radio and television stations were part of a broader push to create Black-led spaces that served the community's needs.

[64] Activists challenged Howard's traditional function of producing graduates for corporate or military service, advocating instead for service to Black communities.

“they” is and what they were doing. I will ask if you can connect this idea of knowing who they are and what they're doing to Drum and Spear, what you guys were doing there.

Anthony Gittens: One of the tenets of Black Power is that racism travels through institutions. So you have to establish institutions to combat it.[65] You know, institutions can combat institutions. So Charlie, Courtland and some other folks created this organization that opened a bookstore and had a school and a publishing company and such. And when I got out of Howard, I became the first manager, I guess Charlie was the first manager of Drum and Spear.

Drum and Spear was a bookstore. It was a bookstore and an educational center. The books became a means for educating, providing information and literature for Black people or people who are interested in the subjects. And so we did the best we could, and we would have authors come in with their books and do book parties and go out and speak to people about books, doing book sales and stuff. And that was the intention of it, and other things happened there.

Jocelyn Imani: Can you name briefly, some of the authors, some of the books that you can remember?

Anthony Gittens: It's going to be hard, because my memory is so bad. I remember Gwendolyn Brooks being a very good friend of the bookstore [Brooks, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, was known for her works on Black identity]. It's hard. I can't do it.

Jocelyn Imani: Okay.

Anthony Gittens: There’s too many, and I cannot remember.

Jocelyn Imani: That's alright.

Anthony Gittens: Everyone who possibly might have had a Black book came through Drum and Spear as we did the best we could to provide them to the community.

Jocelyn Imani: To wrap up, I just want to kind of get you to freestyle a little bit, to use a colloquial term, and just give some kind of closing thoughts about what Black Power was, how you understood it at that time, how it was expressed in Washington, DC, and kind of any reflective thoughts about that period of your life.

Anthony Gittens: I came into Washington in 65. It's been a pleasure to watch the progression of the Black community of Washington, DC and America. There is a difference. It's better now. It's a long way to go, but it is better.[66] Even when I was coming, it was better than what my parents

[65] The bookstore exemplified how Black Power emphasized self-reliance, education, and the creation of alternative institutions to counter systemic racism.
[66] Gittens contextualizes the improvements in the Black community since his arrival in Washington, DC in 1965, while recognizing ongoing systemic challenges.

had to face. What they had to face was incredible. All of our parents were heroes, are heroes, and so that progression has been really impressive to see and to see what, how Howard has changed.

And I only know that because you're a Howard graduate. I mean, you're an impressive young lady. I mean, you came through, and I'm sure you have friends and other young people I've met who have graduated from there have come through with consciousness and wanting to do the best for their community and their race, with a deeper understanding of how we got where we are and the forces that brought us here. We did not come to America by choice.

We were slaves. My mother was a maid. My father was a mechanic. And we all have our backgrounds there, and it was very hard to do that, and I'm glad to see that that's improved, that Howard has gotten a little bit clearer about its role in the United States and in our community.[67] They've gotten a little bit clearer about it.

There are still problems there, I understand from people, the same kind of problems I faced when I showed up in 1965. What are you doing here—the kind of thing that happens, but it's changed and it's gotten better. There's a lot more to do. Being Black is tough in this country. Again it has improved, and what we've had to go through to get where we are is incredible, and what people—my parents, your parents—have gone through to take care of us, to get us to this point has to be acknowledged.

And for our children, it's a little better, but the country is just going to be better off when they get over this thing. When they just—you know, folks, we ain't going nowhere. And the country will be better and the world, if they just get over this thing and let us be.[68] You know, just let us be.

We'll be okay. Take care of ourselves. Take care of them. Just let us be. Gotta get over it. As long as it's sort of operating in the background, it's gonna be discomfort, anger. It's not good.

Jocelyn Imani: And on that note, I'd like to thank you so much for your time.

Anthony Gittens: Thank you, thank you, thank you. I hope I didn't go too long. It's my pleasure.

[67] Howard University's evolution to focus more clearly on service to the Black community reflects broader shifts inspired by the Black Power movement.
[68] Gittens' plea for society to "let us be" underscores the Black Power ethos of self-determination and the desire to dismantle systemic racism for mutual benefit.