INTERVIEWEE: JAMES M. NABRIT (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

March 28, 1969

G: This is an interview with Dr. James Madison Nabrit, Jr., the president of Howard University. Today's date is March 28, 1969. Dr. Nabrit, I'd like to begin this tape by briefly introducing you and providing for the tape some background information, at the end of which time I'd like you to fill it in or complement it in any way you feel fit.

You were born in 1900 in Atlanta. In 1923 you received the bachelor of arts degree from Morehouse College in Atlanta. In 1927 you received your Doctor of Jurisprudence from Northwestern University. You have received quite numerous honorary degrees, including schools such as Morehouse College, Lincoln University, Catholic University, Northwestern, West Virginia State University, and so forth.

From 1925 to 1926 and from 1927 to 1928 you were an instructor at Leland College in Baker, Louisiana; from 1928 to 1930 you were the dean of the Arkansas State College for Negroes in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. From 1936 to 1960 you have been a member of the faculty of the School of Law at Howard University.

N: You don't want to put in there that from 1930 to 1936 I practiced law in Houston, Texas?

G: I'm going to get to that. From 1938 to '39 you were the Administrative Assistant to the President of Howard University. From 1939 to 1960 you were the Secretary at Howard University. From 1940 to 1950 also were the Director of Public Relations, again at Howard, and from 1958 to 1960 you were the Dean of the School of Law at Howard University.

From 1960 to the present you were the president of Howard University. As I understand it, you will be resigning at the end of this school year.

N: Retiring.

G: You were admitted to the practice of law by the Texas Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court. You were a practicing attorney in Houston from 1930 until 1936, and you maintained a limited legal practice while serving on the Howard faculty from 1936 to 1960. In August of 1965 President Johnson nominated you as the United States Deputy Representative to the Security Council of the United Nations. You are also a member of a number of organizations including the Civil Liberties Union, the American Juridical Society, the National Society on Medical Research, and the NAACP. Is there anything you'd like to add to this?

N: Do you have the American Bar Association?

G: The American Bar Association.

N: I think this is enough of those. I'm on the board of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company and the First National Bank in Washington.

G: Fine. I think we can add to the transcript of the tape this biographical information.

I'd like to begin by asking you when you first came to know Mr. Johnson.

N: My first knowledge of Mr. Johnson came when I was in Texas as a practicing lawyer and he was a young man at that time, had been working in Washington, and was just beginning his own activities as a candidate and as a Congressman. The occasion to become really acquainted with him did not arise until he was actually the Vice

President of the United States, although I had met him as a United States Senator. But as the Vice President of the United States and then serving as the head of Equal Employment Committee as a designee of President Kennedy--I had served on this under President Eisenhower and for the first part of President Kennedy's Administration, and therefore this threw me in contact with him. I got an opportunity to see how he dealt with this question. And he impressed me as being deeply concerned with the inequities in this field. I talked to him on several occasions about the general problem, and he always seemed to have been interested and to have the time to pay some attention to it.

After he had been Vice President a short while, I became president of the University. I took office and I became President in 1960. So at my first commencement, I wanted to have him as the speaker. So I talked to him and told him that I thought the interest which he had shown in his previous position to our problems and the fact that he was now the Vice President and that while he had quite a wide reputation in the United States, in general, but that I thought his image wasn't as well known nor was he as well thought of among the Negro population as a whole because they just didn't know him. And I said, "Also, you come from out in Texas and the Southwest." I said that although "They know that it was your efforts that primarily helped get the first civil rights bills through Congress in almost a hundred years. But still this does not suffice. And I would be much interested, because of my essential concern in this grave problem of race, if you would come out to Howard and say what you think about this."

So he said, "I'll think about it." So he thought about it and he called me and said, "I think that's a good idea. I'll come."

And he came out and on this occasion made one of the greatest speeches ever made in this whole area. That was the one which is quoted very much, and he made it when he was the Vice President.

Mrs. Johnson came with him and they both made such an impression on the students and on the faculty that we thought we'd have them out again if they were agreeable to the idea. So we had them out again and again to various things like visiting resident hall groups--Texas students--and things of this sort. And each time they had a greater impact on our community, so that by the time he was elected President he was very well related to and beloved by the University.

I had been serving the government for many years in various ways. I had reorganized the executive branch of the government of the Virgin Islands under the Eisenhower Administration. And I had made many trips to Geneva with the ILO and to Puerto Rico and Saint Thomas, V.I. with the minimum wage law enforcement bureau under the Labor Department. This was continued under the Kennedy Administration. When President Johnson became President, this not only continued but it widened, and he gave me many more opportunities in which I might get involved in these things.

But when he became President, I said to him, "You know, you spoke out at Howard in my first year as President when you were the Vice President. I know you're busy and I know you can't come to Howard whenever we want you, but you know how they feel about you, and you know how I feel about you. I would like to have you come out and deliver our commencement address as the President of the United States, but you don't have to give me an answer. If you decide you want to do it, let

me know." I didn't hear anything at all for months.

I selected a commencement speaker, a young minister in this city--Reverent Fauntleroy--to be our commencement speaker, made out a program and everything. And about a week before--commencement is on Friday--on Saturday he called to tell me he thought he was coming out to make that speech, but not to tell anybody. Well, I was just delighted. And he said, "Have you got a speaker?"

I said, "You don't have to worry about that."

So he said, "I think I'll be out there."

I couldn't tell anybody that he was coming--he told me not to. Yet I couldn't have the President of the United States coming out there with no preparation. So I didn't hear anything from him Sunday, didn't hear anything Monday. Tuesday--and remember, our commencement was Friday--Tuesday the Secret Service men came out to see me. I talked to them, and I said, "How am I going to have you get in touch with our security people and keep quiet. This community isn't crazy. They're going to know the President's coming." So they said, "He's going to call you in a few minutes." So sure enough, he called me and authorized me to notify the Howard community.

But the President came out accompanied by Mrs. Johnson and Lynda Bird, and he made a tremendous impression. The people were so in tune with what he was saying that the whole thing just grew almost out of proportion. He had one of the young black women who was a secretary in the White House with him, and he had Pat Harris, who had been one of the people involved in the election campaign. Anyway, this was a very great occasion, and it made a wonderful impression.

The next big occasion for his coming to Howard University again

was at another commencement.

G: What year was this?

N: This was in 1966, I think. I can check it for you. But anyway, again, I told him, I said, "You know, I'm always ready for you to come out. Don't tell me, I know you can't keep coming here with all these people wanting you, but I just want you to know."

So he surprised me. He called me up and said, "I'll be out there."

So he came, and he made a speech--each one of these speeches just went down--they're the speeches he's quoted for whenever anything arises concerning the Negro people. His speech wasn't directed at Howard; it was directed at the country. We just furnished the platform and the background in which he could do it. He felt at home here because we had given him our affections when he was the Vice President and a very lonely man, because he was kind of shut off from the center of things. So when he got to be President, he didn't forget it. I was down at the White House almost once or twice a month to dinners or luncheons.

G: This was while he was President.

N: While he was President. He would have me down to the signing of those different education bills. Almost anything he would have we'd find ourselves there, so that he felt that here was somebody he could talk to and who understood him, and who had no personal desires he was trying to get satisfied.

For instance, he would get worried about the young people and he would call me down to talk about it "what did we think we could do?" Or he would pick up the phone on Saturday evening--and there's the

President on the phone--which is incredible. No Senator or anything else calls me--Here some secretary would call me, I'd get up--here he's on the phone. And he says he wants me to give him some suggestions about persons that might be put on the City Council, and "obviously don't divulge this, but get all the information you can about them and let me have it."

And this is Saturday. I said, "When do you want it?"

He said, "Any time tomorrow will do." This is incredible again. How could I get this that I didn't have anything to do with. But I got it, and I got it in to him or--he would ask me to leave a dance and get in touch with a person he was going to appoint but wanted to tell the person before the announcement was made public.

We were having dinner with George Hayes who was a member of our board and a member of our faculty, and it was down at the Hilton. I was one of the speakers. They called me to the telephone, and it was the President. He wanted me to find somebody for him. He wanted me to find the right man because he was going on television at 11 o'clock, and he wanted to tell these people what he was going to say, what they were going to be doing before they heard it on television or somebody told them. So then I had to give up the dinner until I got this person.

I say this to say that he believed that he could have me do these things and I would never say anything about them, which I never did. I say this here because it is going in a part of the historical setting, and I think he would want it there. But I never mentioned this as long as he was in the Presidency. But I had a great affection for the man and I saw how he could operate, because he could pick up a phone

and call me--this put me in a frame of mind where there was just nothing I couldn't do for him--that I wouldn't do--because this is just not done by people as busy and as important as he is and was. But this is the way he was. He came to me to take his recreation from work. That is, to pick up the telephone and talk to somebody to him was recreation. Other people want to play golf, he might play golf on a compulsion, but I mean, this wasn't his way of doing it. And I've cited these various things to show you how he operated.

I was on a trip around the world, on leave, when he appointed me to this post as ambassador to the United Nations, and I was in Rome when Stevenson died, and I was in Beirut when Goldberg was made the Ambassador. Then when I left Hong Kong, people said, "The President has been trying to get you."

So I thought, "I wonder what president they're talking about." I never thought about the President of the United States. I thought maybe it was some association in Hong Kong.

So when I got to Taiwan they said, "Have you called Washington?"

I said, "No, what do I want to call Washington for?"

They said, "Well, they're trying to get you. Have you called the Department of Labor?"

"No."

"Have you called the Supreme Court?"

"No, I haven't called anybody." So I still didn't bother. We were spending our days on this vacation.

But when I got to Tokyo that business was over there. They had the message there for me and said, "Tonight you will receive this call from Washington."

So at 3:30 that morning I got the call, and it was from Arthur Goldberg. He said, "The President has been trying to get you. He wants to appoint you as Deputy Ambassador to the Security Council."

I said, "He can't do that, I'm on leave from the University and I'm on my way back. I've made no preparations. I've been gone about four weeks and I had another month. And I said, "I can't do that."

He said, "You'll have to do that."

So we left it like this. The next night, same time he called again. And he said, "The President said he's going to have to appoint you, and you'll have to accept."

I said, "I can't do that, because I have to consult with my trustees and other people. I can't do this."

So he hung up, and in a little while George Weaver, Assistant Secretary of Labor, called. He said, "The White House has been after you."

I said, "I know."

So the next night Goldberg called again about 4 o'clock and he said, "The President says he's going to announce your appointment at 10 o'clock unless you, when I hang up, pick up the phone and call him and tell him you're not going to take it. I don't think you're going to do that."

I said, "You know I'm not going to do that, but I've got to consult the trustees--"

He said, "Oh, the President told me to tell you he will consult your trustees."

I said, "Oh, no, don't let the President consult my trustees. Just tell him I'll take it, and you get off the phone so I can call the trustees."

So I then got on the phone and called the chairman and the associate chairman and the chairman of the executive committee of the Board of Trustees of the University, and I got it straight. But, again, this is the way he operates. Now, actually there was no reason in the world why it couldn't wait until I got back.

G: He had never talked to you about this either?

N: Because he couldn't get me, you see. When they tried to get me, they couldn't get me. Nobody--you see, the post wasn't vacant--I was in Italy when Stevenson died. And as I said, I was in Beirut when Goldberg was appointed to the U.N.--I saw it in the Herald Tribune, but I didn't associate it with me. I mean, I never have sought any kind of office, any kind of political thing--any! But I tell this to show how he dealt. Now to prove it to you, when I went to see him and I told him, "Mr. President, I'm taking this because you asked me to. I think if I can do something to help the things which I have always wanted which you, in my judgment, stand for, I will do it. But I'm taking a year's leave of absence with the understanding from the board that at the end of the year I'm coming back."

He says, "All right."

At the end of the year, in about ten months I sent in to him a letter expressing my great appreciation for the appointment again, and stating how much I'd enjoyed it. Oh, in the meantime he had made me second-in-command, and I'd been back before the Senate, and I'd been confirmed for this. So he said to me, "Well, you know, you're now the Deputy to the United Nations, you are the second officer. You can't leave now." So he just hung up.

G: He said, "You cannot leave now"?

N: Yes. So I waited about three weeks and I wrote another letter, and he

didn't call me. He had Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State, call me. "The President says the General Assembly is beginning, and he hasn't got time to be doing anything about it. You're upsetting his schedule, and you can't leave." So I asked the University to give me a leave until December.

So then I wrote him a letter in September saying I would stay during the session of the General Assembly, and then I would like to go back to the University at the end of the year. I didn't hear anything in October. I didn't hear anything in November. I picked up the papers one day about the 10th of December, and it was in the paper that the President had said I had resigned to go back to the University, the President accepted it, and there was warm praise for my services and everything. So I said to myself, "Fine, I'm out."

Then a few days later I got the letter. So when the Assembly closed, I closed out all my relations with the government, gave up my apartment and town house in New York City and brought everything back down to Washington. Got down for Christmas, and in January I started back at the University. And I felt so good but the last of January the President sent word that he had appointed me as a member of the Committee--what's the name of that committee--it passes right out of my mind right there. But anyway, forget it.

I was to leave for New York immediately. So I said, "Well, I can't go because you know I have already given up my apartment, and I've turned in all my papers. They've all been processed."

He said, "Oh, no, the papers haven't been processed. You sent them in, but they haven't been processed. You go on." So I had to go back to New York and i spent the whole month of February and part of the next month. I had to go out to Bangkok and up into Canada. I had to do all these things,

and then when it was over, I came back--It was the Committee on the Trust Territoy.

So I say all of this to say that he is a man very difficult to say "No" to, and a person who, if he can do it himself, he'd rather talk to the person himself than have you talk with him. Most Presidents would rather have you talk to me, or me talk to you, and that keeps him from having to do it. But President Johnson liked that. And also I think he just liked to persuade people.

But I would have done almost anything for the man. The man was incredible. His memory for people--I can give you one thing. This is almost unbelievable. I was at a reception which they were giving for a visitor. I was going through to get to where I could see the President and his visitor, and he saw me, and he called me from across the room. I went over there and he introduced me to the guest. Then he said, "Now, I want to tell you. I'm going to appoint you to the Board of Visitors of the Naval Academy. Will you serve?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

"Will you try to get some Negroes interested, or get the Academy interested in getting some into the Academy in larger numbers? And getting some Negroes on the faculty?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

And he went on with this man, and I came back home with my wife. We were in the car, I told her what he had said. And she says, "Shoot, he isn't going to remember about it."

I said, "I know he isn't going to remember it, but it's just the idea that it would come to his mind!"

Two weeks later I pick up the paper, and there I had been appointed. Now this is what you can't conceive of a man like this who carries something

that little around in his head, when he has Viet Nam and all these big things on his mind--anybody could have done that for him, you see. I knew the people around him, from Valenti and all the rest of them. We played cards together. But he did it, and he remembered.

But the climax of it is that the next year--this is a three-year appointment--I was going down a receiving line and he was there receiving us. And he said to me, "You didn't do what you said!" I couldn't remember what he was talking about. "You haven't gotten any more Negroes at the Academy, and you haven't gotten anybody on the faculty."

I said, "Well, I've just been on there one meeting." He said but "I expect for you to get some action." Well, that year I did get some--I'd been working on it, but sometimes--but anyway, we got some more in there. And I got a professor--a Negro professor of chemistry--on the faculty as a professor, of course. So again, we were out there at the Foreign Scholars entertainment on the lawn of the White House, and President Johnson was there. So we went up to speak to him, and he said, "Well, I'm glad to see you. I see you finally did something about the faculty and the students."

You see how he follows up things? Some people thought he spent too much time after things like this, but I felt it was one of the ways he wanted to be sure to impress people where he wanted something done, that they wouldn't just take this as something off the top of his hat. But I can tell you case after case where he did things this way, and the only way I could account for it is that this was his way of indicating that on this subject he had an interest and that he wanted something done about it.

As I said, to me, he made a great impression on us because he not only willing to talk about these things, but he was willing to work at it. And our institution was drawn into it. He had people from this institution all over the world, as Ambassadors or others in AID or in this or in that. It didn't bother him to put them on commissions or anything. People like Hobart Taylor was from here. He put him on the Export-Import Bank, just like he was putting him on a bicycle. Thurgood [Marshall] he put in the Solicitor's Office, and then put him in the Supreme Court, and he never made any speeches about it. These are the things that we had been dreaming of, having no notion of attaining them at any time soon. President Johnson appointed people to these things without even bothering --even a member of his Cabinet, a member of Atomic Energy Committee, and a member of the Federal Reserve Board.

And it just didn't seem to cross his mind that he'd done anything. He didn't go out and brag, "Look what I did." He never did it. He didn't have to. We did it for him, because it was incredible, that a man out of his background would so change the whole image as really presented in our government, but he did it as if he had inner compulsion to do it.

G: I wanted to ask you about this. You mentioned that you had first come into contact with him while he was a Senator.

N: Yes.

G: And you said when he became Vice President, you took it upon yourself to urge upon him larger--or more exposure--so that more people would come to understand what he really was like, what he really stood for, and so on. His record in the Senate on civil rights up to 1957 and that great achievement--let me put it in the form of a question. Was that record such that it would inspire confidence in him?

N: No. This is what I'm saying--that other than that work which he did in piloting the civil rights measure through, he had no image that would appeal to the Negro. In fact, he had no favorable image among the Negro people at all. I got the favorable image of him, both in the way he took on himself the obligation in the civil rights fight, but primarily by the way I was impressed and the fashion by which he went at this question of equal employment--and without any sort of paternalistic attitude. This is just something that ought to be done, like its time to plow the land--just plow it. I mean, this kind of thing.

This was why I wanted him to come out to Howard, because I felt that if I were right, the University community would reflect it. If I were wrong, I would know this. I was positive I was right. But I would not have known had I not asked him. He's a person who appreciates things. I think at the time I asked him this and the opportunity he had and the results he got from his speech, I don't think he will ever forget that. Therefore, I think this put us as the Howard people within his affection and thought and also for the first time, gave him the view of what his national possibilities were. In other words, that it is possible for a Southerner to break loose from this and be accepted as a man and as a Presidential person. I think when he got this reception he got out here, he had never seen anything warmer in his life, and I think he felt himself encouraged to go further. Therefore, each speech that he made was stronger because he found it was increasing his national stature and not destroying the basis on which he had come up all along, but was broadening it.

The part I played in it was a simple one. I simply saw the Vice President there who could be the President of the United States.

I thought he had an interest, and I wanted to cultivate it, and I wanted to give him some exposure. And it went far beyond anything I could have dreamed, because I never could have dreamed of what he would do.

G: In other words, it was your experience, while with the Economic Employment Opportunity Commission--

N: And watching him in that fight where the civil rights bills were put through--because they couldn't have been put through without his help.

G: You mean the '57 bill?

N: Yes. It couldn't have been done. The Negro people noted that, but to them, they had a certain skepticism about this, which I shared some, too. Because you wonder how all these years you hadn't seen this. But then I also thought of what I just said here, that I thought a man has to be elected if he's going to be a Senator. And if he can't be re-elected, he's not going to be a Senator. So maybe now, since his sights are no longer towards this, he may be free.

G: It's the difference between having a sectional constituency and a national constituency?

N: Right. For example, I would never go around thinking he was prejudiced--but a person in my judgment, had he been a Northerner--would have easily been President. Two others I can name, if they had been Northerners would have been President were Russell and with the same abilities, was Lister Hill. Johnson was the only one of this group of Southerners who was able to make the transition because he had never been a segregationist at all costs. You couldn't elect either Hill or Russell in a thousand

years as President. But Johnson, since he was from Texas--it's a little west; it wasn't quite in Alabama or Georgia--he could make it. But he was a fighter, and he'd just fight with all the tools that he could get. He was a rough person too.

G: May I ask you, how long were you with the EEOC?

N: I was not very long because--

G: I mean, after 1961?

N: No. I was not very long on that because I was no longer--this was a different setup, and Hobart Taylor and them were going to be into this. But it wasn't a time factor. It was just listening at the Vice President.

Also, I think one of the things that gave me my view was Hobart's view of him. Of course, I had known Hobart and his father all my life. Hobart, of course, was very close to the President, probably as close as any of the young fellows. So this gave me my view.

But I just thought a man like Johnson would be the only man who could have done the things which he did. Javits or Church or Kennedy--none of those Senators could have done what he did, and they couldn't have done it as President. His split in the country, his decision not to run had nothing to do with that. That might have been icing on the cake--his creating of such deep fissures on this Viet Nam business, and hatred. But if he hadn't had that burden on him, he would have--he may yet--but he would have gone down as one of our great Presidents. But he had that Viet Nam thing on him. And if Nixon isn't careful, Viet Nam will get him too.

I also think he will be a bigger President because he didn't run.

He would have gotten the nomination. He might have beaten Nixon, but the country would have been almost back in the Civil War situation. There had been so much hatred, which had no rational basis. I mean, if you don't like the way the President personally deals with this, there's no use to be personal about it. But this is what we have.

G: You mentioned just a little bit ago that you thought that Johnson had the capacity for getting things done, and that you didn't think a Kennedy--and I assume you meant Bobby Kennedy--

N: In the first place it's kind of hard to compare John F. Kennedy--although Schlessinger and them in their "Thousand Days" and other books, have done a great thing. But you couldn't--he was a man of spirit. He gave us the spirit, the élan, that kind of thing. But if you go look legislatively or that sort of thing, he didn't do it. So you can't make it up. You can't look at what Johnson did and say this is because of Kennedy. This is just as if you'd say that Kennedy's spirit was from Eisenhower. It's just not true. So I would say that I don't think John F. could do it. With Robert, I'm not sure.

G: What I was going to ask is that Robert Kennedy had some involvement with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and with your contact there, some of the interpretations that I've seen is that Johnson was really a cautious individual in terms of wanting to go very slowly and go deliberately, go moderately, in terms of getting fair contracts and so on.

N: I'll put it this way. For the sake of argument, let's assume that's so. Where do you see any proof that Robert went faster, or had less hesitation! What do you point to! I mean you or anybody who takes

that position--what are they going to point to!

It's just like Franklin Roosevelt. In his first hundred days he got all that legislation before Congress began to balk. I don't care how much they balked after that--he laid his record in that hundred days, and you can't take it away. And you can't compare somebody else--his was there. So when you come to Johnson, he laid his basis. These other people have to rave on. They can't imagine what they would have done. You have to put it down. That's the only way you can judge historically.

Philosophically, I'll always be for a person like Bobby Kennedy. I have to be! But also politically, I wonder how much he could get and whether he could get as much as a person like Johnson. But I guess just in a normal political sense, I would be for Bobby Kennedy, first. But having known Johnson, I'd be for Johnson over anybody I know.

G: Was this your view back in 1961, or were you more committed to Jack Kennedy?

N: I will tell you what my view was. I was a Republican all my life. I was a Republican when Kennedy ran. I campaigned for Nixon--traveled all over the United States. I voted for Nixon. This is why I say I wasn't in this business long after they got through. But, in 1964, my wife and I were in London on our vacation. We were sitting up there and she said, "Let's turn and see if we can find out what's going on in California." We were on a BBC broadcast. Here was the convention nominating Goldwater. I didn't think Goldwater had a chance when I left. So I looked kind of funny and she said, "What's the matter."

I said, "Let's go home."

She says, "Why?"

"I've got to go home, and I've got to change my party."

We left and came home about ten days before we were coming, and I got in touch with a number of my friends in the Republican Party to tell them I was going to leave, and they said, "No, don't leave. We're going to form a party for the Democrats, but it will be a Republican group."

I said, "No, I can't do that. I can't do that."

Then I got in touch with some of the Democrats, and I said to them--to Dawson--I had been Dawson's secretary in the Third Ward Republican Club when I was going to school in Chicago. He was a Republican then, and he became a Democrat. All these years he had been trying to get me, and I wouldn't become one. So I called up his office and I told him, I said, "I'm going to change into a Democrat. I can't go along with the nomination of the Republican party."

He says, "All right. They're having a big testimonial for me in Chicago--Mayor Daley and all of them--and you will be the main speaker. And at that time, you can make the announcement." So that was about two weeks.

So sure, enough, they had this big thing; they had about 5,000 people, they had all the politicians and everybody--Daley and the Governor, and all the people--everybody was there. From O'Hara on. And I was the main speaker. So I tied up our relationships when I was a student and clerk in the Republican Party. I told them about all these years that Dawson did't let the people remember that he'd been a

a Republican, but now since I was coming over to the Democratic party, I was going to tell it.

Then I immediately set out to work. I had two reasons: I didn't like Goldwater, but the other reason was I liked Johnson. So this was a good time for me to change, and I changed. And I can tell you most of us changed, and most of us still haven't gone back.

In my own view, I think it would have been much better if we could have stayed about like we were, with a good number of us over there. But I couldn't tell other people to feel that way when I left, you see. All the years that I'd been over there, all my associates were practically Democrats, but I just thought it was good. But I couldn't swallow my own medicine in 1964, plus the fact that I wanted to campaign for Johnson. So I did it, and was just as happy as I could be. And I didn't think he had a chance of losing. I didn't think this country would elect Goldwater.

G: Did you have any contact with him during that summer of '64 during the campaign?

N: No, except he knew my position and all. I had no mission I wanted but the work I did, I did freely. I worked with the people here, just as I'd done all through the years. I know most of the Senators and a large number of the Congressmen, and I would do whatever it was that would help along the thing.

G: What were your impressions of the Democratic convention, especially with reference to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party?

N: Sometimes we are more critical of the people who are closer to doing what we want than we are to the people who really are doing us the

the greatest damage. And I say this is true in this case. A great many of our friends, and a great many of us, were highly critical. At the same time, these people were doing more in trying to get something done on this than were the Republicans. I guess this is just part of the way things operate. But I'm not naive about politics. Really, great reforms for me are mostly imaginative. I just don't think that you can do that.

We are a sloganeering country. We believe in putting big signs up for the world to see, and for everybody else to go by that, but we're going to do what we please. So this is the way it is with politics. It's a wonder we get the kind of Presidents and Governors and Senators that we do get.

I mean, it's a wonder we've got any good people, the way the system is operated. If you ever worked down in the precincts, as I have, they'll tell you anything can go on down there from murder to death, and it usually goes on. But you come up and get some wonderful governors and Senators and Congressmen, Presidents--and you get some bad ones.

But on the whole, as bad as the system is, it yields some very unusual and unexpected results to me. And I think we get just about what we earn, and sometimes we get more than we earn.

You take a man like Truman. Any kind of a philosophic person--a prophet or any other view of Truman could not have projected a man who would have done the things he did, and in my judgment will stand out as one of the three or four great Presidents of the United States--I don't care who compares them. And Truman is not an intellectual. There was sometimes a question about his intellect,

but he certainly was not an intellectual. He was not dynamic--television--didn't have the charisma. He had guts. He could make a decision, and he believed, and he operated on it. He's incredible. I've used that word three times, but I'll use it again because that's the only way I can explain Truman.

So I would say that we get much better results from the system than the system is geared to produce. We get the best people sometimes for governors or judges or Presidents or Congressmen in spite of the systems.

G: Are you saying that in terms of 1964, and the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party challenge, that they apparently were expecting too much at one time rather than--?

N: No, they were not expecting too much because they only way a person in the position they were in can ever reach his goal is to expect his goal. So no, they were not expecting too much. Those of us who were on the sides pulling for them were expecting too much because we were blinding ourselves to the realities of politics. These people were under the thing. They had no way to see any realities. All they could see was here they were down like this and they wanted this thing to be done. Over on the side, you and I were looking at it, and all these cliques and clans from Chicago or Kansas City and New York and Newark and Baltimore and Atlanta--we saw no way in the world for them to get it. But they should have expected and they should have acted just as they acted. To them that's the realistic approach. To us the realistic approach would be to exactly what they did, but not to be too much upset because we didn't get what we wanted.

G: This was also in the same year, the same session, that the 1964

Civil Rights Bill had been passed. So there was no disenchantment on your part that this was an Administration which would not act?

N: I have not been disenchanted with the actions of the Democrats since I have been in the party because, again, I have been in the Civil Rights fight so long. I've seen it from so many angles, and I know what has to be done in order to move some of these barriers, that I don't have the same reaction to failure of people who do not get the things they want. Because in the nature of things, they're not going to get them, and some of them they aren't going to get until there's a revolution and until a lot of people are killed and there is also a great suffering. So I don't have this reaction. There I think--

For instance, take Vice President Humphrey. He should be President of the United States. But he had some very unrealistic people carrying his campaign, people who had an idealistic view of politics. They had a pragmatic world, and just foolishly tossed it away--his chance to be President of the United States. He went to certain places where they didn't have fifty votes, three and four times, just to speak, when he needed to speak in Illinois. Why, he could have carried Illinois. But these idealistic people were responsible for this. A hard-nosed political man like Foley could have managed him into the job of President because as it was, it was real close. But he tosssed it away. It's incredible what he always was doing because of this little intellectual group there. So I have this to say, disenchantment in many instances is due to our organizational mistakes and to our failure to take advantage of everything. Nixon made his quota of mistakes before. This time he didn't make many.

G: You said that Johnson had a habit of calling you for a number of

reasons, and that you had fairly frequent contact with him. Did you ever act in the capacity as an adviser to him on questions of civil rights?

N: Only questions that he asked me. I had a great aversion to people supposedly tendering advice to the President--In the first place I felt the President had adequate people to advise him.

G: Who were some of those people?

N: I mean, people on his staff; people who were heads of various organizations that he would invite down, like Young or Wilkins or King or anybody. And he had people on his staff--Alexander and all these fellows.

G: Clifford Alexander.

N: Yes, from Brooklyn--Weaver and all those others. As far as I was concerned, I was ready at any minute to serve and to give advice if he asked me. I just didn't want to walk up to him and say, "Mr. President, I'm going to advise you to do this." No, I didn't do that.

G: What I was getting at is what are the kinds of things that he would ask you--more to do with local matters?

N: He would ask me about persons that he and Macy were considering to get some idea of what I thought. He would want to know how this person was thought of at the University, and things of this sort. He would ask me about this situation in a certain place, who were the knowledgeable people--something of this sort. Or he would ask this, and give him some names of young people that he might have them in to talk to them. This would be the type of thing. Have you got anybody out there who could do specifically X, Y, Z. This is

the type of thing.

I would never think of volunteering to give the President advice on anything. If he'd ask me, I'd tell him. The one thing I would volunteer was I volunteered to give him advice about coming out to Howard and making a speech. Now, this I did three times, and he took it each time. But that I would do because that was my own ship, and I felt that I could do that. But I wouldn't volunteer to go down there and ever advise him about the District government. I couldn't do it.

G: How would you evaluate Johnson as President regarding his record on civil rights and the matters with which you would be most concerned--Education?

N: I told you. I would give him number one position in our history. That doesn't exclude anybody, Lincoln or anybody else. He is the number one President from our standpoint without any question. There's not even any debate about it among us. We have settled that flap and have moved on to something else. He is Number One with us without any seconds or thirds or fourths--he's just number one!

G: You mentioned earlier that you felt that Viet Nam was the primary cause of the fissure in the kind of support that he had had in 1964 which he simply was not going to get in 1968. Do you feel that the American Negro community was split in terms of supporting Johnson?

N: No. I believe that if Johnson had run Nixon might not have got as many votes as he did get. He sure wouldn't have gotten any more from among Negroes. In fact, Humphrey wouldn't have gotten the votes he got if the President hadn't spoken out so strongly for him in the

last two weeks. And in some places Humphrey may have lost to Nixon because of the Negroes who didn't vote at all, who just stayed away from the polls.

G: In other words, you're saying that those very people would have gone out and voted for Johnson.

N: They would have been out there. I tell you another man they would have voted for, I must say. I think Robert Kennedy would have gotten almost all the Negro votes. I just want to make it clear. This has to do with something else, this is charisma, over Humphrey. If Kennedy had been running against Nixon, as far as the Negro people would have gone, he would have gotten the vote. Other analyses of what the rest of the vote would have been, I'm not in the position to say.

G: Are you suggesting then that had Johnson run that he would have pulled in the very large vote--the traditional Democratic vote?

N: I think the truth of the matter is I would have been hard put as a a political analyst, in trying to say which votes Nixon would take from Johnson. Because first of all, Nixon was not soft on the Vietnamese war, and Johnson was no harder on it, if as hard, in his posture as Nixon was forced to be by the voters. I think some of the suburban areas where riots and other things had frightened people, they may have, as they did, given Nixon the majority of the vote, but they wouldn't have given him any more. And these huge city votes would have equalled this. I think that it would have been hard for Nixon to beat Johnson. Nixon may not have beaten Johnson because Wallace may have cut more heavily into Nixon's vote.

G: What I'm trying to get at is that, to some extent, I think you faced

here at Howard in some degree some of the same problems of alienation, of disaffection, of whatever you want to call it, that Johnson seemed to face as well among the American Negro community in terms of the nation.

N: Yes, but you see, first of all, let us take Viet Nam. You asked about our position on Viet Nam. Obviously, we are not warmongers. We don't run around looking for wars. But you talk about the mass of black people. When they look at the Army, the Army was good compared to Vicksburg or one of these ghettos, and they see a bigger future. That's why we have more Negroes volunteering and reenlisting, and still do now in the Army percentage-wise, based on their per cent of the population, far more than we do among whites. So our relationship to the Army can't just be put on the basis of peace and war. It ought to be put on economics and the sense of identification and respect and opportunity. So we don't approach it on the purely peace and war business. So we would not split down the middle like the whites would. We have an area where a large part of us--this is a place of maybe last or first resort, whichever way you put it, but this is the place where you've got to advance or you cannot participate effectively in the society. And this is why so many of our people are in the armed services, far out of our proportion of the population.

We turn around and use the same thing for another reason. We turn around and say we're in there because we have a bad draft board deal with us. We also engage in some demagoguery, too. But that's not the whole story, because the draft board won't make me reenlist. But we do as everybody else. We use whatever we have for an argument.

G: What would your comment be to the kinds of criticisms that were leveled

at the Johnson Administration which said, "Yes, you've passed the Poverty Program; yes, you've passed the Voting Rights Bill; yes, you've passed the Fair Housing Bill; yes, you've passed the Civil Rights Bill in '64 and so on. All these measures are a part of your record, but in terms of money allocations, in terms of the extent or the depth of these programs and so on, they simple don't do what's needed. The ghetto is still here; the race problem is still here." In other words, the Johnson Administration record has been good, but it hasn't been that good. What would your comment be on that?

N: My comment would be first, we in this country operate in large measure according to a climate. It takes many things to make a climate. For years, we operated in a climate which was unfriendly to anything being done for us. The two wars, the depression, the Korean war, all these little wars, migration, and gradually some liberal people getting into the office and other things. There was a change in the climate.

Then there were the years in which those of us who were fighting in the courts, kept hammering away and changing the interpretation of these laws and the Constitution--and slowly the climate was improving. So by the time you got to '57 and '58 when these sit-in demonstrations and that sort of thing started and when these bills were passed in Congress, following the decision in '54--the subsequent decision--even though all these things had failed to do what we want--and haven't done it yet--they did one thing. They changed the climate in the United States from being unfriendly to at least a concerned climate. I'll put it that way. Therefore, for the things that you wanted to do, there was more possibility of a favorable reception.

But then still having the climate and having gotten certain things accepted case by case, this is primarily an executive and judicial process.

The Congress has been slow, and even where they have acted, they are always slow about putting money where the Southerners don't want it because they have the chairmenship of these various committees. They can't keep you from passing legislation and they can't keep the courts from doing something, but they can pull back on the paystrings. So I would reply by saying that these things that Johnson did, first of all, contributed greatly to this change of climate. Also, irrespective of whether they put up enough money, there are very few things for which we put enough money in at first, irrespective of the inadequacy of these funds for doing these things, they were funded and steps were taken and many experiments undertaken.

I just say that to the extent that we've become more involved in a war, no matter what war, that makes less money available for something else. NASA was a tremendously expensive thing which is a result of Sputnik. So this is another thing. You have only so many dollars. You can work people up over a war or outer space. It's very much more difficult to work them up over these other things which have been around all these years. So this makes difficult funding. But nevertheless even the Republican Administration is going to find it difficult to not fund them at all, you see.

So the step has been taken, and it'll be like Social Security and these other things. It's going to have a hard go. The country is committed to this kind of thing, and I think my own reply to your question, that Johnson is the person whom I would say is largely

responsible for the commitment, and therefore the person whom I would give the credit, although I know there's a fabric of things woven to make it up. But I would say he was one of the chief architects of it.

G: May I pose another rhetorical question to you in asking for your comment. I think it was in 1965 that Johnson came to Howard and made the speech that preceded the White House conference to fulfill these rights. And I think it was the Moynihan report which was the basis of that speech. Of course, as you know, that raised a number of issues, and it created quite a controversy. Then I am looking ahead to the Kerner Commission report which in a way doesn't reverse the Moynihan report, but goes and focuses on white society and racism as a white problem--in other words, the Moynihan report seemed to focus on Negro problems of family structure; the Kerner Commission seemed to focus on the problem of white racism. And Johnson endorsed the first but--and I'm not sure if this is the correct interpretation--seemed to reject, at least delayed the publication of the second. Could you explain that?

N: I can't explain that. I can comment on it. I think that the Kerner Report came as a great shock to Johnson and a number of people. They recognized this business has come through the hands of the whites who are in control. But for him to endorse a classification of all the whites as racists, I think would have been too much for him to swallow. Because in his experience he didn't believe that they were all racists, although they had been participants in these things that created many of these conditions. Most of the things that the Kerner Report found he agreed with, but just as they took

that phase of it, to say that he was dragging his feet on the Kerner report or the Moynihan report--

Moynihan's report was made for one purpose and was interpreted by people for another. Moynihan is now giving a third view of his report.

All of them, the whites in the case of the Kerner report and the Negroes in the case of the Moynihan report, became too emotional over something which didn't make much difference to me one way or the other. Just like this fellow Jensen who has just written this report about hereditary defects and environmental handicaps. People who wrestle over something which is one study by one man, one view, as if this had been adopted by everybody, and therefore this thing is over. As for me, I don't do that because I can go to any university in the country right today and get their theses, and I can get something on anything you want with any kind of view. Nevertheless, these things should be looked at and should be criticized.

But sometimes the way we criticize, we give the something, a person and what he's saying, more importance than they really should have. And they set Moynihan up as some authority or something when Frasier right at Howard was the authority on the family. Moynihan is no authority on the family, not even on his own family. And I wouldn't take him for one. So either way you go, this is what it is.

And another thing, I would not say that everything Johnson does I would endorse, because I don't endorse everything I do. We have to recognize that our acts and deeds and our words are shaped by many conflicting factors--by time and coincidence, by necessity, all kinds of things which affect something. You're not in a vacuum thinking

intellectually and arriving at two-plus-two is four. You're not doing that. You're out in the midst of a thing where you're trying to have an odd number of people cooperate with you and work toward the goal, and you have people of lesser and greater qualities, and of lesser and greater integrity, and lesser and greater imagination, and lesser and greater persistence; and all of these factors have to do with what you finally decide.

So, in my judgment, he's a tall Texan with a great spirit and genuine interest in people--black people, Indian people, Mexican people, as well as white people. This is my view of him. But I wouldn't say everything he's going to do I'm going to endorse beforehand. As I say, I wouldn't endorse mine.

G: You mentioned earlier that Macy--you mentioned his name--

N: John Macy.

G: --what the context of it was. Did his job hunting project--the thing that he had set up under Johnson--did this involve or coordinate with Howard University at all in terms of their graduates?

N: It coordinated in the sense that any time that Macy or his staff wanted information, we would undertake to get it for them. In the first place we had great respect for him, and we knew him. Many of us had worked with him on various committees and groups for years, and he was one person that we just knew. He was interested in seeing that everybody got a fair break inside the government under Civil Service rule, but also and much more important to us, that people were sought to break into these various areas in government. He did this tremendous job in this. I don't think anybody would deny that.

G: Off the tape we had talked before the interview about Howard's special

relationship with the government and with the Office of Education and HEW. I'd like you to restate if you would for the tape your impressions, having been with Howard, connected in one capacity or another since 1936--what your observations have been regarding the change in Administrations, a President's relationship with Howard, and so forth.

N: First of all, in order to understand the peculiar relationship between Howard and the Federal Government, I'll give you just a short historical statement. Howard, from its inception, has been the recipient of gratuities and aid from the federal government--except for a period of early years--throughout its history. But in 1928 a law was passed which authorized Congress to make appropriations to Howard University in partial support of its expenses and building construction. This law has regularized this long support by the government to Howard so that it has become a part of the appropriation procedures. HEW, under which we really are, which is carved out of Interior and the others--we were moved from Interior over to HEW--HEW is the agency with which we deal in our relationship with the government, which contributes about 52-percent of our budget. The Office of Education, which is a part of HEW, has immediate governmental regulation, supervisory relations--whatever kind of relations we have--with Howard.

In the course of the years the Office of Education examines various sections of it. They examine the administrative section, they examine the medical section, the dental section, graduate school, student personnel etc., and make reports and recommendations with respect to what they find. The GAO audits us for the government. Of course,

we have our own auditors, but we have to be audited by this office because of this federal appropriation.

We have hearings before the Bureau of the Budget of HEW, before the Bureau of the Budget of the President; and after we have been authorized, for what we may approach the Congress for, we go to hearings before the House committee and the Senate committee--subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee and Labor and Education. And these committees are the ones--for a long time we were under Mr. Fogarty from Rhode Island in the House and Mr. Hill from the South. We're now under Mr. Flood from Pennsylvania, who succeeded Mr. Fogarty, and we don't know yet who we'll be under in the Senate. So I have been appearing before the Congress for over twenty years, either as president, as acting for the former president, or in company with the former president.

My own notion or idea of this relationship is that it has been one of the best examples of how the federal government can contribute to education without attempting to dictate the policies of the institution. I have been here thirty-three years, and nobody has ever in the government made the slightest attempt to get us to appoint somebody to president or dean or professor or anything else. People will write and say they've had inquiry from one of their constituents by name so-and-so-and-so; and I will then ask them to send me a suggested reply. They will send the suggested reply, and then I will answer it. But I've never had any kind of intimidation. Once or twice of course, it seemed like we might get it indirectly during the McCarthy era, but we didn't. So my first observation is that this is a good example of

how the federal government can operate in higher education in the United States without getting into the control and operation of it, which is what higher education feared before these recent education acts. They don't fear it any more. Plus the fact that whether they feared it or not, they've got to do it because they don't have enough money and the resources. But this is the first thing.

The second thing is that Howard is also a good example, which the government sees as well as we do, that in a country where progress is not even and where there is, without any question, racial discrimination and color discrimination, that it is good for the government to participate in the exhibition of what is possible in our society. Therefore, Howard University is again a good place for the government support because it was founded just as an institution. Of course, it was founded for the children of the recently freed slaves and for the recently freed slaves, but there's nothing in the charter which says this--it simply said they should organize and set up a university with all the parts. The first graduates were white girls. It's a denial on the face of it that this is all this was to be--a black university.

But it was to have a special concern for the Negro people. And it has always had it. It still has it. But one-sixth of the students at Howard are foreign students from forty-seven foreign countries. Students at Howard come from all over the States except probably two or three in the upper Northern part of the West. We have white students in all the schools and colleges in representative numbers, but I would think that with the white members of the faculty and the white members of the board of trustees, the white students, and these

foreign students and the Negro students, that this is one of the best illustrations of what you mean when you talk about an integrated institution. It's not just integrated having one student out of eighty students, but it's integrated by having a large number of students, by having a large number of employees--clerk, staff people, other people. It's integrated by having the operation control of the University through its Board of Trustees, almost equally divided as it is with a slight majority of Negroes, with about a third of the faculty white. This is what you mean by integrated. Therefore, I think that it's good that the government exhibits here, by its support, what is possible in our system--so I think that's also true. I think that most of the people in higher education in the United States see this, and we have very good relations with them.

We have a consortium in Washington with five universities--Georgetown, George Washington, American, Catholic, and Howard--in which we work together. We pool resources, we pool staff and other things, and we have students from all five schools going to the others. We arrange the costs among ourselves. So this I would say, although an exceptional type of thing, has also been demonstrated to be not only workable, but to be an advantageous thing.

G: You've had the opportunity to observe Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, and now Nixon. How would you evaluate these Presidents in terms of their involvement or interest in Howard?

N: I would think all of these Presidents were interested in Howard. Roosevelt was out here when he was President. He came out to dedicate the chemistry building. He didn't have the kind of contact himself with Howard, but Mrs. Roosevelt, who was on our Board for years and years, did

furnish that tie-in so that I don't think you could have had any closer relationship than we had with the wife of the President who was herself one of the strongest women and one of the best-loved women in the United States.

In the case of Truman, who was out here two or three times, I think he was interested in Howard, but he was not as much interested in the field of education as some of the others, but he was interested.

In the case of Eisenhower, he was interested. He was out here several times. I knew him very well. Again he had been in the Army and then had been up at Columbia and all of this, but he still was a soldier--his special interest was not universities, as his brother's was. But he was interested in his way. He was sort of an aloof man, above the crowd.

In the case of John F. Kennedy, he was one to be very close. He had spoken at Howard many times before he became a candidate for the Presidency. We knew him, and we knew his wife, and we knew his brother, and we knew his brother's wife. When his campaign took place for most of the people in the University--he was in my own family. They just went for him, and he was always of the University flavor. And one of his first major speeches was this one that he made there at Howard during the campaign over there. So he was very much interested, and we would expect him to have demonstrated it in many ways. His brother came out twice to speak during the short time that his brother was President.

I told you about President and Mrs. Johnson. I don't think anybody could have been more interested then they were in Howard and the people at Howard and the students at Howard and then the people that Howard

University represented. I don't think you could have a quick answer. But I would say that over these years I have never seen any greater or more genuine interest manifested in Howard than by them. Especially is this true of President Johnson.

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES M. NABRIT (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

March 28, 1969

N: Over this period of years, in my judgment, there has been no significant difference in the measure of support and interest given to Howard University by either the Republicans or the Democrats. It has not been on a political basis; it has not been on a non-partisan basis. I can recall no real issue or subject or appropriation which has been dealt with on that basis. And I have had the highest cooperation from both parties under both Administration--or [under] either Administration it hasn't made any difference. It just meant that if a Republican Administration were in, the chairman was a Republican. If a Democratic Administration was in, it was a Democrat. But interest and the measure of support, and the treatment accorded us, has practically no state of difference in either case--in over thirty years.

G: Has there been a Congressional concern about the predominance of Negro students at Howard, despite the fact that it is integrated?

N: Oh, no. No concern. They would be very much concerned if we excluded whites. I don't think we could survive. I think they would feel that Howard should be a reflection of the country. If all over the United States, or in a great majority of the United States, Negroes are given free access, not just to the anteroom, but to employment and the whole structure of higher education without regard to race, they would expect that the pattern of Howard University would increase the same way. But as it stands now, it's obvious we have larger numbers here because these practices still exclude them

from most institutions. This is in many cases the only place they've got to get medicine, dentistry and other things.

G: May I ask whether or not in going before the Bureau of the Budget of HEW and the President's Bureau of the Budget, there has been occasion when you would have liked to have seen more money appropriated to Howard than actually was? Or do you usually get what you ask for?

N: I usually get everything I ask for. But what I ask for in turn is limited by the President's budget and HEW. But I have never seen the time when I wouldn't like to have more money. I don't know of any institution of higher education, even Harvard, that wouldn't need more money and want more money--and certainly we would. We could always use twice as much money. But I have not had any difficulty of getting money from the Congress that has been authorized. I've had to make the argument and answer the questions, and sometimes we've had long hearings, but the result has been that we've gotten exactly what we've asked for. So I have no quarrel on that score.

G: In the last three years, I think it has been, Howard has faced a pretty dynamic period of change involving student demonstrations and protests and disruptions of one sort or another. Have you had any comment from either HEW or the White House vis-a-vis this kind of event?

N: No comment. Questions. That is, "How are you getting along? How are you handling it? We know you are having the same kind of trouble they're having in other places? Is there anything we can do?" This is the kind of question. The Chairman of the Appropriation Committee of the House asked me about this situation last year, and I gave him a summary of the various things that had taken place, and gave it as

my opinion that looking at the whole business, I thought that Howard University would come out very well, although in many ways we would probably be the place everybody would expect to be the worst of all but that places like Berkeley, San Francisco State, and Columbia had run away with that side of it. We were very happy that we didn't have their difficulties. We had enough as it was,

So we were always asked, when things happened like we had this year--where we had some of the buildings occupied, including my office--and I said to them, "Well, we're handling it among ourselves. My own view is that as long as we can do this, it will be better for Howard University. I have this problem, and I think I can handle it. If I'm wrong, I'm just wrong, and we'll have the kind of thing they've had at other universities, but I have had every kind of thing that could possibly bring you into that sort of condition. But I have so far kept Howard out of it." And I said, "I still have dialogue with the students when there is trouble, but I've been having trouble with people who have rough ways of dealing with me all my life, so this doesn't bother me very much."

G: In other words, the interest that was expressed was in the form of inquiry rather than pressure to take a particular kind of direction?

N: Oh, yes. This is the one place where I balk, because I don't want people to tell me how to run Howard. If they want to tell all institutions how they should do this, where the President is going to make the kind of speech he made at Howard, all right. But don't come telling me because--

G: The reason I asked is because of the recent grappling with the situation by Congress and the White House and the suggestions that were made that

in the case of student disruptions to withhold--

N: That doesn't apply to Howard alone; that applies to all the schools in the United States, and I would expect that the schools in the United States would respond generally the same way. Of course, we don't expect to be excepted from all the schools in the United States. Neither do we want to be taken out as the only school in the United States in which these things could apply. You see, nobody can give you a rule as to how you should operate X college, because they don't know X college. They don't know what the factors are, and therefore you've got to work out your own.

You know two things: one, you cannot operate the school unless you can have order and safety. This you know. The question then is how much of this sort of thing that goes on at universities can you do before you take a drastic step. Whenever they've interfered with the classes or occupied this building or interfered with the use of the buildings, I have taken the step. We have had compliance with the officers' orders and that has been it. But I don't interfere everytime students are out there at noon shouting and making all these speeches-- I tell our people to go home to their lunch and don't be bothered, and don't be bringing it to me because you can run this sort of thing in the ground. These students use crude terms, some obscenities, but not as much as occur at some places. They discredit us and they do a lot of things that we don't do or like. A lot of things we didn't do when we were young, because we didn't know that they could be done, and we didn't know how. But as I said, I've had everything from a fire bomb cast upon my home to hanging me in effigy, to occupying my office, to barging up on the platform at a public function.

But I have never ceased my dialogue and have never felt uncomfortable any way on the campus, because I'm the president, and obviously, I'm the symbol of the whole thing. But I don't decide the merits of the complaints by students on the bases of how they submit it, and this is what you have to do because your faculties tend to be more conservative about their business than anybody in the world, and more radical about everybody else's business, you see. So you have difficulty with them. But I think they're loosening up a little.

G: I just have a couple of more brief questions. One of them is, in 1968 with Resurrection City here in Washington, was there any connection between Howard and that kind of--?

N: The government asked me that and I answered the government--the Appropriations Committee. I told them, "Yes, we were cooking all their meals--hot meals for all three thousand people out here. The food was stored in our iceboxes, and the demonstrators furnished the cooks. But our people, on a voluntary basis, helped them to prepare food and that that was not used that day, we put it in our ice box and kept it. The Army gave the District some food containers because they claimed that the way the food was being brought down there was not sanitary, and the District declared it surplus and gave it to us, and we used this to transport it. Our medical and dental schools serviced the people down there with clinics. People in law rendered legal advice, helped get the license for the people in there, and our architects helped to lay out the place, people in the social work division helped house the people while the place was getting ready. Our students collected things for them and took them down. I raised some money at the campus, and we took it down. So this is what we told them.

Then finally they said they were going to hold a university

and I said we would make place for the classes. That didn't come off like they wanted, but we made the space available. They didn't have bath facilities the first part of their stay. And we made the use of the showers in our gym available for so many per evening.

So they wanted to know from me as to whether or not I was using any federal funds for this purpose. I said, "We're not using any federal funds, but let me tell you what we are doing, and you can make your own assessment." And I wrote out just what I've just said to you, and I never heard any more about it from then until now.

But I couldn't sit here with 3,000 people down there in that mud and slop--all of them Negroes--and go through some sort of rigamarole with myself as to what I was going to do. I was going to do something. And I recognized then that the question was going to be raised, which you raised. Thus we were in pretty good shape.

G: Is there anything that you would like to add to this tape?

N: No, nothing. I hope history will be fair, and I hope it will be kind, and not ascribe all of the involvements in international relations that we got in to machinations of President Johnson, or even Rostow--but certainly not to the President of the United States. He's also bound by events and things that had been done before he comes into office, by forces and things which he cannot very well master. A peculiar great relationship exists in this country, which had been referred to by Eisenhower, among other people, between industry and the military. And it's a very hard thing to control. But I hope that history will take these things into account and put them in their proper place. And as they do, this man, this President, Lyndon Johnson, will emerge more and more as a great President.

And I'm just as sure of that as I'm sitting here. He didn't get us into Viet Nam in spite of what everybody says.

G: Dr. Nabrit, thank you very much.

N: Thank you.

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By James M. Nabrit

to the

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