Interview with Michael Fields (Class of 1969)

Interview with Michael Fields, who was a student at Swarthmore College from 1964-1969. Mr. Fields was regarded as an independent black student and was not affiliated with Swarthmore African American Students Society. The interview took place on Saturday, September 27, 2014 in the Black Cultural Center of Swarthmore College. Interview and transcription by Olivia Ortiz ('16) and Anisa Knox ('15). The transcription is word for word with the exception of unnecessary conversational words such as "um" and/or stutter starts which have been edited for the sake of cleaner reading and clearer understanding.

Note: Michael Fields is denoted MF, Anisa Knox is denoted AK, and Olivia Ortiz is denoted OO

AK: Good Morning, Mr Fields. How are you today?

MF: I'm fine. Good morning.

AK: Thank you so much for allowing Olivia and I to interview you today. We are enrolled in a course with Allison Dorsey titled: Black Liberation from 1969-1972. This class is challenging us to uncover part of the narrative of black students at Swarthmore College during that time, focusing on the spring of 1969. We hope that your insight and your memories from your time here as a student, we will be able to reconstruct a deeper, more factual chronicle for future persons.

MF: Sounds like a plan.

AK: Okay. Great! We're going to get started with the interview.

MF: Okay.

AK: Alright. Can you briefly share your memories of your time at Swarthmore prior to the events of the spring of 1969, including a few words about your educational background and what drew you to the college?

MF: OK, What drew me to the college, in a sense I was an accidental Swarthmore student. I grew up in Washington DC, public schools. Was not a star student, but was not a goof-off either. In a funny way, my mother picked out Swarthmore out of the one of those Barron's college listing places. I wanted to get away from Washington, get away from my family. I actually wanted to go to Antioch. That was my first choice and back in those days Antioch was a lot stronger and there was a lot of people at Swarthmore that the Antioch, Oberlin, axis or Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Swarthmore axis just as many as people were doing the Harvard, Princeton Swarthmore access. My mom saw it in the catalogue and it looked like the price was right and I

applied. My guidance counselor didn't think I would get in. But she said, "Hey, what the heck. We'll go for it" and I did. This was the first year Swarthmore had gotten money from the Rockefeller folks for minority students, so they were looking for people like me at that particular time. As far as what life was like before the crisis, I think freshman year was tough for all of us. I originally started with the class of '68 and so I started in 1964. It was a lot of culture shock for all of us on a whole number of different dimensions. The work was a lot harder. There were a lot of kids here who were a lot smarter than I was. There were a lot of kids here who had very different growing up experiences than I did. Kids who were from small towns, from rich suburbs, kids who had had a lot more experience with a lot more things than I had. Plus that time a lot of us were thrown into some really intense identity crises which were intensified by Vietnam and the issues around the war because believe me if the episode 1969 had not come along we would have been spending a lot more energy sort of focusing on what we were going to do when we graduated about the draft. That became a constant theme certainly from '66 on, it may have been before that. We did teach-ins and a lot of discussion about whether the US should be there and what we were doing there and personally what we were going to do about our military service because all the guys had to deal with the draft board in one way or the other. So, I dont know. Does that address, is there a follow up?

AK: I think you answered the question perfectly. I'm just curious to know as to your background at Swarthmore. Did you feel compelled to join the war after? What informed you about your decisions with joining different sit ins that were happening on campus?

MF: No, actually no I didn't say. Actually, what I was saying: there were teach ins, which were very, very different. These were educational events where faculty generally from the more progressive point of view would bring in speakers, resource people to offer information about what was going on in Vietnam from their particular perspective which was to be candid, generally an anti-war perspective. But what, being a Swarthmore student, that sort of encouraged me to look at a lot of different kinds of information and not just necessarily read all the stuff on their reading lists but look to see pro-Vietnam, pro-involvement stuff. Just to clarify that point.

AK: Also, according to your November 1968[1] letter, it identifies you as an "independent" black. As an "independent" black student at Swarthmore, can you explain more about your relationship to SASS?

MF: Sure, I think that is a very, very important element and issue in the entire, in the way the whole thing was playing out, the way the incident played out. First of all, you should probably talk to other folks about this in their relationship to SASS. SASS was not, shall we say, the most welcoming of organizations to folks. There were a lot of other issues that we may not have been aware of at the time, that were informing some of the issues internally that SASS was dealing

[1] "Open Letter to the Swarthmore Community", November 13, 1968, Black Liberation archives

with. There was pressure at times to be a separatist, not to or to minimize associations with white students. That may be overstating the case a bit, but they weren't necessarily friendly and welcoming to a student like me who, for a variety of reasons, may not have had their experience. My experience with white people may have been different from their experience with white people. I think they're may have been some class and some color issues as well, too, because in those days the color issue--it is still out there, but it was really out there back then. And I say, when you look at me, the color of my skin -- there have always at times in my past been issues with darker skin folks who resented me or me sort of not necessarily wanting to associate in that direction or with darker skin folks because of things my parents had taught me which I was still figuring out. There was a lot of pressure from SASS at that time to conform what their thought on what the black identity or what it meant to be black I think. I was raised--basically nobody was going to tell me who my friends could and could not be. Also, but at the same time, I was interested in what they were doing and what they were trying to do, and since, quote, the organization was open to all black students on campus, I mean it had to be by definition by its mandate etc etc. I went and participated in many of the meetings but although I never officially joined the organization. Now as the events unfold early on, one of the first tactics by the administration was an attempt to delegitimize SASS, to basically say that SASS did not speak for all of the students, black students on campus. One of my initial sort of understandings of history of the way things played out is superficial, is young and immature as it was at the time that I knew that divide and conquer was a game that had been played in the past and it is still played today etc etc. Because I had a little standing on campus and because I knew a lot of different people in a lot of different groups, I felt that it was important to speak out and to try to get past this who does SASS speak for and who don't they speak for. Which as I said in the letter, regardless of who they do or don't, I didn't say regardless of who they do or don't speak for but the issues they are raising are important and significant issues and that the administration needs to address them instead of dealing with all this white noise, all this nonsense. One of the other things I also did around the letter - there are two other things that I did around the letter that probably aren't in the documents but may be in the faculty minutes, and this is again a part of my relationship and some of the tension I had with SASS. SASS went to go address, were invited to address the faculty. I asked Clinton if I could be apart of that delegation. I think he had some initial reservations, but he allowed me to come and I gave a speech before the faculty basically saying that we were all in this together. Unfortunately I don't have a copy of that speech which I wonder now that I understand now that the faculty minutes from those days, whether that still exists - I do remember ending with a Malcolm X quote: what's a Black or Negro PhD called? He's called a nigger.[2] I do remember that. I also do remember Clinton saying, "This was better than I thought it was going to be." It was more effective. It was more helpful. The other thing I did, which I think no one knows about. I went to more of the disaffected black students and basically asked them, didn't tell them but asked them to chill and basically I went to some folks

[2] Malcom X Quote used at the end of "Supplement: Mike Fields Reacts to Morrow Letter" Published in *The Phoenix* on January 11, 1969.

and said, “Hey, look. I know that SASS has pissed you off, they’ve pissed me off, too.” But I think they need to be allowed to make this play, and if you get into it because we know what could be said that’s what’s going to become the issue, not the, quote, demands. And most of the folks that I went to talk to whether I was an influential or whether for reasons of their own decided not to so then as things went on and the efforts of the administration to delegitimize SASS seemed to be gaining some traction that was when I felt the need that somebody had to come up and say, and I felt I was the person because like I said, a lot of people knew me. I hoped they respected me, I mean I thought they did, but who knows back in those days. With great trepidation, we spent a night wrestling with the memo machine and going down to the campus wherever you had to go to get things mimeographed and all that kind of stuff, and the letter that you guys have seen is the result.

AK: So, basically you talked about how you knew a lot of different people and different groups on campus and you were able to rally people together to know more about the issue of the administration’s delegitimizing SASS and their efforts on campus. Can you talk a little bit more about in what way you were able to leverage your connections, like what organizations or committees you joined?

MF: Okay, I’m not a joiner. That was another one of the reasons why I wasn’t part of SASS. I didn't have a, quote, formal or official role in what was going on until a little bit later where there were some things that I tried to do to help out. It was more of an informal thing. One of the things you have to understand in situations like what was going on then in those kinds of events, public opinion is very, very important. And even though I didn't quite sort of know in a way I could articulate back then, I knew what people were thinking and were talking about was important. Once the takeover occurred the campus then organized itself to focus on those elements of campus: the activists, some who were already organized around the war, others who were beginning to become organized around student power issues as well. So I wasn't operating formally. I was sort of what you may think more of a stream kind of flowing and I might see some friends of mine who may not be the activist activist people but they might have been some of the folks who were part of the drug subculture. But they were interested, I mean they were focused it was not like they were stoned all the time or anything, so don’t get me wrong. But they weren’t necessarily people who were part of the hardcore activist but they were important, because they were in a position of supporting SASS and the demands. The more people that are supporting SASS and the demands, the more the administration has to take what’s going on seriously.

AK: You mentioned that you approached Clinton to be apart of a certain delegation to basically present a speech in front of the faculty. Clinton Etheridge was a SASS Chairman, as you know and Don Mizell was the Vice Chairman, 1968-1969. Sam Shepard was the first Chairman of SASS. Did you know Sam and can you share your memories of him?

MF: Unfortunately I can't. I didn't know Sam very very well then and I don't have unfortunately any real anecdotes that I can share. Sam was a very very shy and maybe he was shy maybe he was not. He was a very quiet person, and we just never crossed.

AK: Ok and what about Clinton Etheridge or Don Mizell?

MF: Don, we sort of crossed a little bit because Don and I had some interest. On the other hand, Don was a year or two behind me because I was a senior and I think Don was a sophomore at that time. I don't need to tell you or maybe I do but the underclassmen that the senior men were interested in were more the underclass women than the underclass men. We were acquainted with each other but we did not really know each other. The black students in fact and then again, the black students that I knew were in the class of '68. The class of '68 was sort of the first class that had enough black folks in it to even begin to have the idea of critical mass. One of things we did was form an all black intramural touch football team, which I think became very very important more so in a funny way, more so because it was something visible and maybe non-threatening to the campus community. We were out doing something that fit in the mainstream of what was going on. What was threatening was that we were kicking their butts. That's a whole another story. It was interesting because the first year...the second year of the team...the first year there were some folks who were in fraternities and they played on their frat teams instead of playing on the...it was called the Grand Army of the Crum, Black GAC. But the second year some folks decided to play for that team. The folks that I knew and were close to mold mainly around that experience and were folks who were in the class of '68. Whereas a lot of the folks who were involved in the activist part of SASS were class of '69 people onwards, so people like Bill Dorsey, John Morrow, a guy named Al Chepel, Sam Brackeen that we all played on the football team, a guy called Michael Graves who is in fact, I guess, did emerge as one also in the activism period. So those were some of the people that I was closer to.

AK: In your January 11, 1969 letter[3] in response to John Morrow's letter to the faculty and the administration challenges Morrow's assessment of the college and calls for racial unity. Can you share what you remember of your motivations for writing the letter?

MF: I'm not sure I remember the January 11th letter. Do you have a copy?

AK: We'll come back to that one. Okay, excellent. Can you recall the takeover of the Admissions office on January 1969? And, on January 14, *The Phoenix* reported your reading of a statement that explained your decision to join SASS members in the admissions office. What led you to join them?

[3] From *The Phoenix*, "Supplement: Mike Fields Reacts to Morrow Letter" Published January 11, 1969

MF: My reaction to the initial takeover was, like a lot of other folks was sort of surprise and I would say maybe a little shock because being on the outside I had no idea that anything was going on like that. Initially after the takeover there was a lot of excitement okay what are we going to do, whats this whats that, what is the next step, how is it all going to play out? As far as the decision the statement that I then later in the controversy I don't want to say a publicity stunt per say but going back to what I said earlier about things like this have a dynamic, that it's important to try to influence if and when you can. And one of the techniques on the other side is we're going to wait you out, were going to drag things on eventually people are gonna get tired of this crap, they're gonna want to go on, get back to business of business as usual and all of that. There were signs we were beginning to move into that stage. I was not one of the original group of folks that went into that admissions office. There were some of us that were not part of that group but were more outspoken in whatever in support of SASS. Well as things are starting to slow down, I get the idea that one of the things to keep the pressure on if you will is if we... and also too what make this event and again I understand what you're studying the history of these kinds of things versus what happened at places like Cornell and some of the other things. The rules of engagement were very very clear on both sides almost right from the beginning. It is one of things that makes this a really really fascinating event in that SASS knew that as long they did not do certain types of things, like destroy property etc etc. they didn't have to worry about police being called in or anything like that. The issue of amnesty, again, as long as certain borders, certain boundaries weren't exceed at the end of day because of Swarthmore's Quaker tradition as long as you were acting within that you were good, so this was a way to try to keep the pressure on, try and continue to develop momentum while staying within the rules of engagement. So hey we're just going to put more people in the admissions office and still haven't done what you need to do and were getting tired of it out here. So went around to some folks, and said what about this? They thought it was a good idea. SASS people thought it was a good idea. And again, I am not in the inner circle, I'm working, I don't want to say quite as a free agent but more as an individual trying to support them. It is not like they're coming to me to say, why don't you do this or why don't you do that. But it is me offering things for either things that I knew or thought I knew or saw that maybe they couldn't see or didn't see because we had different perspectives.

AK: So you remember stepping into the admissions office during the takeover, can you talk a little bit about your relationship with the people that were already there and what were the dynamics of the room like?

MF: You know I really don't remember a whole lot because a lot of us were sort of out during the day. We were just sleeping there because there were things, there were meetings, there was stuff you needed to know about. But you know, basically we were all in our sleeping bags and sleeping on the floor and to be honest I don't remember that part of it very very well at all.

OO: Alright. So now that we've momentarily jogged your memory about the letter that you also gave as a speech in response to John Morrow's letter[4], do you have anything in addition since you've already spoken about it, to talk about your motivations for writing it?

MF: Well, again, I thought it was important for somebody who was not in SASS to respond to John. I guess that's the only thing. Looking back on it, I don't know why I thought that exactly at the time, but I think I was a little disappointed and upset when I saw John's letter because we had been friends. I was sort of surprised for him to say some of the things that he was saying at the time. I think in particular the notion that basically students shouldn't--the whole idea that student power wasn't. Because I think when you go back and look at John's letter, there's a point where he says something to the effect that students shouldn't be involved in these kind of issues at all. I thought it was, again, important for somebody who wasn't necessarily identified with SASS to respond to him, and I think that was part of the motivation for that as well.

OO: Thank you. So five of your classmates from 1969 graduated with a concentration in Black Studies.

MF: Mmhmm.

OO: Did you have an interest in pursuing such a concentration?

MF: Not in a formal way, no. I was a Psych major, and I guess my study about things black was not as organized or not as focused. I wasn't--in a sense, that was one of the things that probably, that my education at that point was deficient in. Because racial identity was not a big thing in my family. Because, again, there was a belief in those days that black people were just like white people with different colored skin, and there were a lot of people who believed that when you see the references to, quote, the "integrationist" ethic. In a sense, that was that underlying attitude that that refers to. That was how, what my parents believed, and that was what I initially was taught, too. I had, we had our episodes. People calling us the n-word, and things like that. There were also some strange things that happened to me growing up as well, when people thought I was white. There'd be times when I'd hear that conversation when white people talk about black people when they think there aren't any black people around. In terms, at that time I didn't feel, quote, "the need" to focus on things African American or black, per say. Now one of the things I learned, or one of the things that I think we've all learned, is that black people aren't just white people with different colored skin, that there is a whole bunch of other things that inform our existential situation, that do make for some important differences even though we may ultimately all want the same thing. We all want a roof over our heads, a certain degree of self-esteem, and etc. etc.

[4] ibid, "Supplement: Mike Fields Reacts to Morrow Letter"

OO: Did you have a relationship with Professor Asmarom Legesse?

MF: No, I did not. And that's again, I wasn't at that point particularly interested in Africa. And I didn't--there were some folks who sort of, again, sought out, were looking for a way to put blackness in perspective or some kind of black experience within the context of Swarthmore. I was not one of those people.

OO: On April 15th, later that spring in 1969, *The Phoenix* reported that you and Nancy Boyd had decided to leave the Subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee that was making recommendations for the post-enrollment support program for allegedly 'high risk' students.

MF: Right.

OO: Could you talk a little bit more about your decision?

MF: Basically after the committee was set up--at that point, this was after President Smith's unfortunate death that a number of things had gone forward, and this was one of the things that had gone forward. By that point I was working more closely with SASS, and basically they thought it wasn't a good idea, and I concurred. On the one hand I was ready for the trip because I always like to travel and go see new places and go to places that I hadn't been before, and I would've been going to some schools and meeting some folks that I hadn't met before. But at the same time I also understood their argument. Since the report, the significance of any report that we came back with, it was not clear. Also too, one of the other things that we were finding out, and it's a fact of college life, was that we were starting to get slammed by academics again, so that there wasn't always the time to put into this stuff that it would have taken because it would have been a full time job to do some of this.

OO: Just to clarify, because it wasn't clear in the article, and I hadn't realized until you said it, there were funds that the administration was going to be giving to you to travel to these schools to help inform the report, and you declined them.

MF: Right. That is correct. I forget. I think I was going to try to go to three or four schools in the Northeast--I don't remember the details--now, during spring break, and then try agin to put together a report, not to mention whatever else I had to do during spring break to catch-up with getting to be a graduate that year. So, yes, that had an effect as well.

OO: You also said that by this point you were working more closely with SASS. Would you still say you weren't a member of SASS?

MF: I would still say that. Again, member, when you say that, that means a lot of different things, depending on how you conceptualize what it means to be a member and things like that. I

may be waxing a bit academic here, but if you think of SASS as a club, I was an auxiliary, if you will, rather than a full member of the club. Because I'm sure, again, because I wasn't on the inside with all of this, that they may have felt that I was injecting myself into this situation. Because, again, one of the other things that happens that you didn't ask about which is also referenced, one of the things that happens as a result of my letter, my all-campus letter, is I get an invitation from Courtney to come see him, which kind of scares me because, hey, I'm just this little, hey, I don't need to be going to see the President of the college. But he wants me to basically set him up with Clinton, which I then tell Clinton, "Well, I just met with Courtney. Courtney would like to meet with you." It never occurred to me to say to Courtney, "Well, hey, if you want to meet with Clinton, why don't you put a message, a note in his mailbox just like you put a note in my mailbox to come see him," but I did that, and then again, I stepped out. Not being on the inside of the planning, again, they may have been suspicious. I'm not fully trustworthy. I'm a wildcard as far as they're concerned.

OO: Do you have any other memories about the social or cultural climate of Swarthmore? I know you'd mentioned the intramural football team.

MF: Read me the question again.

OO: Share any other memories about the social or cultural climate of Swarthmore?

MF: Swarthmore is and was, it was, as they say, the best of times, at times, and the worst of times. The intensity was intense. The educational opportunities were, in a way, extraordinary. In those days--I imagine it is still the case--it'd be pretty hard to be here for 4 years and not be educated. You would have to work to not be educated because the people, I mean, the people were always talking about what it was we were doing. I learned probably as much in talking to people at lunch or at dinner or hanging out in the snack bar, talking about folks' projects with classes that I wasn't taking. One of the things that was interesting again was the Film Program. There used to be movies on Friday night and movies on Saturday night. And the Friday night movies were generally arty and foreign films, and the Saturday movies were more mainstream, and back in those days, I guess the college was a lot tighter about who couldn't have cars and that kind of thing, so folks didn't go, so everybody went to the movies, but--where I'm going with this is one of things I realized afterwards was that, in those 4 years we had seen some of the more significant works of cinematic art, so that even on our time, on our off-time, we were getting educated, being exposed to directors like Fellini, and Kurosawa, Truffaut, Ingmar Bergman. At one point or another, all of those movies, and when you go and read the history of film in the fifties or in sixties a lot of the movies that we saw those nights. There used to be a guy, an Astronomy professor, who had one of the largest Charlie Chaplin collections in private hands. Every other week he would show Charlie Chaplin movies, so by the time you had graduated you saw almost all of the--or you could have seen almost all of the major works that he had done. So in terms of the education, that was something that was extraordinary. In terms of

growing up socially, there was quite a bit to be learned elsewhere. Let's just put it like that. Swarthmore was not--you didn't necessarily learn social skills here. One of the things that I wasn't as good at doing was networking with the faculty, sort of finding a mentor or whatever to help me further along, and that was one of the things, that if I had to do it over again, if I knew then what I know now about the importance of mentoring and relating to faculty, then I probably would have taken a different approach than I did.

OO: Is there a particular professor or faculty member that you remember still that you think you would have--?

MF: There were some folks that I liked. Hans Wallach in the Psychology Department, and there was another Psychology professor--Ken Gergen who came in my junior year, and he probably would have been my sort of mentor my senior year if he had been here my senior year, but apparently the deal that he made--I think he had been at Harvard--and the deal he made was "I come a year, I get a year off, and then I'll be back." So he wasn't here. And he was probably the one person that I kind of connected to as a person. Here's one of the other things. The way I was raised was to respect authority, and you're over there, and I'm over here. That's my place, and that's your place, and it's not necessarily something that we're going to form a mentoring--the level of closeness that has to be, that a mentor and mentee have to have.

OO: Returning back to when Smith asked you to join him, do you have any thoughts as to why he chose you as opposed to--

MF: Because I had taken the public. Again, he--one of the things we did learn through all of this, which I think was an education for both a lot of white kids, was the way institutions operate in the service of the status quo, if you will. My taking that stand, in doing it the way I did it, which printing off that letter on mimeograph and putting it in everybody's--like I could have taken it to *The Phoenix,* but I didn't know that everybody would have seen it if I had taken it to *The Phoenix* because not everybody read *The Phoenix.* That way I knew everybody was going to see it, and I hope sort of, "Hey, wait a minute. He's got a point." And I guess it got Courtney's attention, and that way, too, I think he also may have been looking for, quote, "an ally" to be his eyes and ears, to be--I don't want to be to harsh and say to be his boy, but looking back on it I could see that I could have been being positioned to be a pawn on his side, which is why, again, after I took the message, I said, "I've done what you asked me to do. I've taken the message. Clinton said he's going to get back to you. I'm out. At least as far as this process is going on."

OO: Do you have any other memories of Courtney Smith that you'd like to share?

MF: I thought that Courtney was a decent guy. Everybody said he looked and acted like a college president. I thought, like--I'm not going to say like everyone--but I was hit hard when he died, and one of the reasons was that he died the morning of what could very well have been the

decisive day in the struggle. I don't know whether it's clear to you guys; it should be. It became clear, to us it was clear very early because various commentators, letters and "John says" that the administration looked like it was going to give SASS a lot of what they wanted even before all of these things happened. The question was, as the question is and always shall be, who is going to have control? The issue is going to be power. While they were going to do some things, they were going to have control. SASS felt, rightly I believe, that in order for it to be meaningful that they had to have some meaningful input. One of the things I don't know if anybody has said this or will say this, but one of the things that one of my professors said, couple of days, maybe a week or so after Courtney's death that sort of intimated that he died of a broken heart and that, not that he died on purpose--don't get me wrong. But he was ill, and apparently he did not--the view of this faculty member was that he did not manage the crisis taking into account his bad heart. As I said, the day of his death was to have been what was, in my memory, and I could be wrong on this, going to be the decisive faculty vote, and SASS had done such a good job that, in my estimation--Clint, some of the other folks might say something different--but I thought going in we were 50-50, which was a hell of a lot better than we had been when this whole thing started out. And that would have been historic because you would have had a college basically voting to give up some of its power and prerogatives, and that had not happened. I don't think it ever has happened. The fact that student power, not just black student power, was at play here was that the white radicals, the white activists, understood very very clearly, almost from day one, or if not from day one certainly form the morning of day two, what the real real game that was going on here. They were having discussions about "Okay, what can we do support SASS? Should we go take over another building? Should we take over the library? Should we take over this? Should we take over that?" And basically SASS said, "Cool it. Because if you do that, you're going to give them an excuse to come down on all of us." Also, SASS didn't trust some of the white kids--some of the white kids were crazy. Some of them might have in fact trashed the library or done some of those kinds of things which would have given the campus, the administration an excuse to escalate in terms of their response. And again, that's the thing that SASS, that's the genius of the whole thing because SASS had Swarthmore square up against its ideals. And as long as they were able to say, "We are acting within the framework of your ideals. You have got to play, and you have got to play. I mean, we are prepared to play by your rules, and damn near beat you with your rules." And that again, I think, is unfortunately, because of his death, one of the things that we will never, never know. One of the things that I do remember was when we first heard the word, there was some initial skepticism about whether in fact it was true or whether it was a ruse to get us out of the admissions office, and there was some initial hesitation. Some of the black kids, some members of SASS decided not to go back to campus to deal with his death because there were people who were blaming, who had said, "You killed Courtney." That was heard afterwards. But then there were some others of us who the next day wanted to be part of how the campus was mourning and dealing with his death, and some of us came back to be a part of what the community, how the community was dealing with it.

OO: So you came back on the day after?

MF: I don't remember the specific timeline. It may have even been that night. Yes, time to wrap. Okay.

OO: You had said earlier that you entered with the class of '68, but we know that you graduated in '69. If you could briefly address that, if you want to. I'm curious. I've been wondering.

MF: Curiosity is a good thing. Sophomore year I had, quote, an "identity crisis," end quote. So basically instead of doing my books, my academics, that year, I played bridge probably 6 to 8 hours a day. Starting after 9 o'clock classes, there used to be a bridge game in Parrish. There used to be a parlor in Parrish. There used to be a bridge game there. Played till noon, and we went to lunch. Then maybe I spent some library time. Then there was an evening bridge game, after dinner until Parrish parlor closed, and some of us went down to the snack bar and played there. I was also in a very stressful, crazy, dysfunctional relationship. So between those two issues I was not spending a whole lot of time tending to my academic garden, and at the end of the year they suggested that I take the semester off to find myself. The mistake of that was that was also the time when the Army[5] was looking for us big time. There was a time where if you had been out, the college didn't have to tell the Army that you were out, but they changed that, and shortly after I got out, I got a draft notice. I was in fact drafted, and because of some of my experience here, I had learned some of the ways to jigger administratively the system, so I was fortunate enough to do that. And in the mean time, you could say I was scared straight after coming close because, quite literally, I had my suitcase in one hand, my letter from my shrink in the other. I was either going to be going to basic training or going back home. Fortunately, I got to go back home instead of going to basic training. Then I got back to school, and the rules were you had to maintain a certain average to get off of probation. I got off of probation and successfully completed my academic year to become a credit to the university or the college and the alumni and blabla and blabla.

OO: I just want to ask, after everything you've said, if there is anything else you'd like to share.

MF: I don't think so. A couple of thoughts. I've been thinking about some of this, obviously. I think one of the things, and some of the tension, one of the things we have learned.--in those days, SASS may have been trying to define "the black" experience, and seeing something as "the black experience", which if you didn't have, maybe you weren't black. I think one of the things that we have learned is that there is not "the black" experience but there are a number of black experiences that have validity. I think that would be one way that things have changed. I think that at that time white people and black people were really, really strangers to each other. And I think we're still strangers, but less strange than we were then. I think that also informed how this played out and the dynamics of it. In going back, one of the things I think is interesting, and two

[5] Vietnam War draft

things that you might be thinking about. When I looked again through some of the documents I have, and I'm looking in some of the letters and things, people referred to "the blacks," which, when you think about it, is a kind of semantic construction that separates them, that emphasizes the difference, if you will, rather than the similarities. Something else. Looking at what SASS meant by 'risk' students. That, to me, was an interesting word because in a way I was a risk student, but not in terms of what they meant. Because what I see, when I think of Hargadon[6], and my experiences then, there were some black people that white people were comfortable with. There were black people that white people do not feel comfortable with, and any black person who Dean Hargadon felt uncomfortable with could very well be defined as a 'risk' student. That is a term that covers a multitude of sins, and why do I say this? I say this as someone who worked for NPR for 20 plus years, and watched NPR struggle with trying to hire minorities, which is kind of the same issue with admissions. There problem, Hargadon's problem, is being able to evaluate quality, or make evaluations based outside of their frame of reference. As I'm suggesting that any student, black student, that they didn't feel comfortable with could very, very well have been defined as a 'risk student,' and that might have been someone who had gone to an inner-city school, somebody whose skin color was too dark, somebody who just had had a kind of experience that was totally alien to what most or any upper-middle class, middle class white people had had back then, and to a certain degree now. Something for you guys to do as part of your class, I don't know if this is one of the questions you're going to be answering, but what happened to the SASS demands? What did Swarthmore--what changed, what didn't change, and how does it inform the Swarthmore of today, or maybe that's the third semester.

OO: I think we definitely are considering those. Thank you so much!

MF: Thank you.

AK: Thank you so much Mr. Fields.

[6] Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon