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Martinez, Maximo

Mark Naison

Interviewee: Maximo Martinez
Interviewers: Mark Naison and Lisa Betty
Date of Interview: February 14th 2020

MARK NAISON (MN): Hello, we're honored today to have Dr. Maximo Martinez join us. He contacted us three weeks ago about starting oral histories that document the Garifuna population in the Bronx and also having an initiative that is publicizing the ethnic cleansing and the displacement taking place among Garifuna communities in Central America. And we're honored to begin not only with this first interview but also a whole initiative, which hopefully will lead to some kind of forums that publicizes both of these issues. So, Dr. Martinez, welcome.

MAXIMO MARTINEZ (MM): Thank you very much, thank you for having me.

MN: So the first question we ask virtually everybody is, tell us a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx.

MM: My family came from Honduras, Central America and well first, my father. He was a merchant marine seaman so he left down the country in nineteen forty-five and his brother left nineteen forty-four and he was just sailing around the world. And got to the United States in the nineteen fifties and he kind of settled down, down south in New Orleans, Louisiana.

MN: Wow.

MM**:** So he lived there, he also had a child with a Creole woman and a major life, a very outgoing person. Then eventually my mother she immigrated to New Orleans too, but she immigrated later, in the nineteen sixties. And then all of a sudden both of them they ended up immigrating to New York, nineteen, late nineteen sixties also. So they got married nineteen sixty-eight in New York City and I was born in nineteen seventy-one.

MN**:** Right. Now, did they already have family living in New York when they moved here **interrupted by knock on door** there's somebody– yeah was there any family living in New York?

MM: My aunt, my father's sister she was living in New York already and my father's uncle, my grandfather, Timothy, he's been, he was here since the nineteen twenties, nineteen thirties.

MN: Wow. Now were they all living in the Bronx.

MM: They started in Harlem and eventually they migrated in the nineteen forties with the working-class Black population that was migrating to the Bronx.

MN: And they were a part of that migration.

MM: Yes, a part of that migration.

MN: Right, now did everyone in your family self-identify as garifuna or were there other forms of identification.

MM: From my readings and studies and discussions, saying “I’m C-Arawak” was the common name back in that time period from the Black carib and Indian Arawak and then eventually it became Garifuna over time. But yes, little by little they began identifying as garifuna

MN: Now, when your parents came to the Bronx was there already an established organization of the Carib or Garifuna people here?

MM: Yes, there were several, in fact I had my uncle here too. I had uncles here who were here quite a while and there was the Carib American Association that was in function— that was started in nineteen forty-four— another organization started in nineteen fifty-nine, the Phoenix Organization, and we had the nineteen sixty-five organization the Honduran football soccer club.

MN: Oh wow

MM: So they had organizations already and then they had community organizations from the villages too

MN: So your family came from honduras?

MM: Yes

MN: Were there also people from Belize who self-identified with the same organizations or did they have their own organizations.

MM: Yes, in fact, my grandfather, well my father's uncle, he established the Cairo American Association with the Belizean Garifuna. So they were all combined as a group, it wasn't separate.

MN: Now in these associations what was the primary language spoken?

MM: That's a good question because I'm interviewing people from that time period, I mean I'm gonna, I'm gonna ask more but I believe it was Garifuna but also English and Spanish. It was pretty diverse. It was a social club they had people–

MN: Right so there's a separate Garifuna language that is spoken that is different from the Spanish spoken in Honduras?

MM: Yes in Honduras, yes Garifune is one of the languages of Honduras… among the Black population, but there's also English Blacks also not only Garifuna.

MN: So tell us a little bit about the origins of the Garifuna people of Honduras. Like you know, how they ended up there, how they maintained their distinct identity? You know, the ambivalent relationship with the Honduran government and so forth?

MM: The common story is that there was a shipwreck of a slave ship from Africa in the fifteen hundreds, sixteen hundreds. It ended up in the island of Saint Vincent and that marooned group of Africans meshed with the Arawak and Caribs and that's where the culture began. And over time the French were trying to colonize that island and so were the British. So, there was a war that took place in seventeen hundred, seventeen ninety-seven… seventeen ninety-seven that's when the war took place and they were ousted. And about four thousand left or were rounded up and two thousand made it to Roatán. They were sent to Roatán Island, and Honduras wasn't a country yet so these people, the marooned people, they ended up, two thousand that made it alive, they arrived in Roatán and then from Roatán, they dispersed to Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras

MN: Oh! Wow, so it's more than just Belize.

MM: But there's also another version that's more common now that's being presented, a dialogue in the community in terms of the correlation with the large stone halves that… Essentially, the idea is that the Garifuna, that they were already here before Columbus. So that's another story that has been evaluated.

MN: Yeah now so you, you were born in the bronx and where were your parents living when you were born?

MM: They were living in one hundred eightieth street. I was born in Fordham hospital i think the parking lot was where the old hospital was.

MN: Right and you're one hundred eightieth between where and where?

MM: One hundred eightieth and wow I don't recall exactly but it was in one hundred eightieth street and then eventually we moved to Forest project–

MN: To the Forest Houses?

MM: Yes

MN: And was this in the seventies?

MM: Yes, we moved to Forest in nineteen seventy-two more or less

MN: And so your first elementary school was PS one hundred forty?

MM: Yes. I was at Forest Day Care Center.

MN: Right.

MM: Which is the Gwendolyn Glen Day School, and then eventually I went to PS one hundred forty. I did first grade there.

MN: Mmhm. Now when you were growing up, were most of your playmates from the same Garifuna or Carib population or were you part of a whole multi-ethnic group in the Forest Houses?

MM: It was predominantly African-American. I used to hang out with not too good kids back in the time, back in the day. So we were like a posse group

MN: And this is how old? When you were in elementary school?

MM: PS one hundred forty, exactly

MN: You're already in a posse group?

MM: I wouldn't say posse but a group of young kids who were not doing good things.

MN: Mmhm. Now how is that possible… Did your parents notice this and have issues with it?

MM: I used to get in trouble a lot

MN: Mmhm

MM: So being, you know, picked up by the principal office that kinda thing was pretty common.

MN: Uh-huh. So, how do you explain that? That, that ended up happening to you?

MM: Which part?

MN: You know, the getting in trouble.

MM: Peer pressure, hanging out. I was just trying to make sure that I was accepted by the other kids.

MN: Is this in part because you, you know, you were an immigrant? And were you perceived as different by the other children?

MM: Going back, thinking back, I never saw a difference. It was just, we just were rebelling.

MN: And what was PS one hundred forty like at that time?

MM: It was nice. Nice and clean, the yard, and my only recollection is really not treating a teacher well. That's my recollection. I wasn't too good to a teacher.

MN: Now you had mentioned before that your family ended up going back to Honduras–

MM: Yes

MN: –And how old were you when that?

MM: Exactly. So, I finished PSone hundred forty. I just did one year there and then–

MN: And what grade, what grade did you do in psone hundred forty?

MM: I did first grade.

MN: Oh so you were, after first grade?!

MM: First grade. My parents were planning to relocate back to Honduras. My father, he was, he's a little older than my mother, like fifteen years, so he had worked a long time. So, they were buying property over there. They were going to move back, so they sent me and my brother ahead. So, I went to live with my grandmother meanwhile with my brother. So I did second grade and third grade there.

MN: Now, were you getting in trouble there or–

MM: There? Oh I wasn't. The discipline, it came very strong on me. Yeah, the discipline was very strong. My grandmother, the belt was very strong.

MN: Right. And so, when your parents, what year did, after two years your parents moved back to?

MM: They moved back–

MN: Did they keep the same apartment in the Forest Houses?

MM: Yes, the same. Because my mother and my sister, they were living there while my father was still in the seas, doing merchant marining so–

MN: Oh, wow!

MM: They, they stay there and my grandmother too

MN: And so and when you came back, what year was this, like nineteen seventy-eight?

MM: I came back, yes, exactly nineteen seventy-eight/nineteen seventy-nine.

MN: And where did you end up going to elementary school at?

MM: I went to Saint Peter and Paul's School.

MN: And what street was that on?

MM: It's in Brooklyn

MN: Okay and was that a very strict school?

MM: Oh, very strict. The nuns, caucasians, they used to slap the kids, hit their heads on the table, make sure the uniforms are very strict… extremely strict.

MN: Uh-huh, and did you ask your parents to take you out of there or–

MM: Oh, me and my siblings, we just, we had no choice. We had no choice because they wanted us to make sure that we ended up on a good road, because that era wasn't too–

MN: Yeah, well this is the beginning of the crack era and very, very difficult. Now this is very interesting, one of \my students from I guess the eighties, Marlon Molina–

MM: Hey, I know him.

MN: –Remembered you from junior high school.

MM: We were in school together, yes.

MN: And he said of his junior high school friends, the crack epidemic swept a lot, some died, some ended up going to jail, so you were one of the ones who escaped?

MM: Yes. My parents were extremely strict, extremely strict. We had like three locks on the door I remember. We had to be home by a certain time. Crack violence was all around. There was pockets of the community where people were, were just walking like zombies with needles in their, in their arms and even in the winter too–

MN: Yeah, no. Because it's, it's very interesting… One of the people who talks about crack in the Forest Houses is Fat Joe–

MM: Yes

MN: –Who actually, is deeply identified and remembered as a crack dealer in Trinity Avenue. Did you ever run into him?

MM: By that time I was in college already, but I did see him all the time come by. Because he lived in a building like two buildings from my building, and there was other rappers who were around that area too, Lord Finesse–

MN: Lord Finesse, yeah!

MM: –Went to school with my brother.

MN: Really?

MM: In the same grade school, and so rap was pretty big.

MN: Did you ever get attracted to the hip-hop scene?

MM: I was on top of all the new music and new sounds. My cousins, they were DJs, so they, whenever I went to their house in Motthaven, there would be a blast and they would be DJing the community, all around. But, I was watching video music box… ralph mcdaniels, Ninety-eight.seven Kiss fm, all that. Anyway that was pretty popular.

MN: So, after your first grade adventures you pretty much stayed out of trouble?

MM: Yes. I stayed out of trouble. And just became a very devout Catholic, too, very devout. And I had a lot of health issues, too, a lot of health issues. So, I developed a deep sense of faith, and then seeing the things around, things were not too nice in that era.

MN: Yeah, no. I mean unbelievably

MM: Yeah, me and my siblings, we didn't even know if we were going to make it.

MN: Right.

MM: You see certain, you know, the demolished buildings the crack, the fights that are going on in the streets in the daytime and the police they will just watch most of the time.

MN: So during all of this did you have any contact with organized Garifuna community life, were there any things that your family would participate in?

MM: My family would participate in, they would call small groups in the village communities. There were usually festivities, so they would participate in those.

MN: Where would they be located, apartments or social halls?

MM: Social hall at Club Cubano, Jimento, we would have events there, it would be rented. I was baptized in the St. Anthony of Padua church.

MN: Oh yea. On one hundred sixty-sixth st and prospect

MM: That was our church. We would have events there. We had what we call a chahgu. We would have different masses, cultural, honoring an elder that passed.

MN: So at St. Anthony you would have, were you able to have masses that celebrated Garifuna culture?

MM: Yes they were starting that they were already opening that. That and Brooklyn, old Lady of Mercy, we used to go there--

MN: Ok so were most Garifuna Catholic?

MM: The majority.

MN: And this is true in Central America as well?

MM: Yes Catholicism. Just recently there has been the growth of Evangelicals.

MN: Mmhm. So where do you end up going to college?

MM: I went to SUNY New Paltz college.

MN: So what highschool did you go to?

MM: I went to like three different highschools, but I spent most of my time at South Bronx Highschool. I was there with Martin Molina.

MN: Oh right martin. So had you ever attempted to come to Fordham?

MM: Fordham, we saw Fordham as kind of ritzy. Just predominantly the caucasian right you know, just like a separate world. separate from everything

MN: Some things don't change!

MM: Even coming here after a while it's like stepping into another world, just stepping inside

MN: You're coming in the gates.

MM: In the gates yes yeah exactly

MN: And it was that way back then as well

MM: Yes

MN: So you saw SUNY New Paltz as more culturally acceptable.

MM: Yes it was. My brother went to college before me so i went to visit him there and it was like that show, the program that created the different world, it was similar like that, the fraternity, sororities… It was the african culture, the Black halls.

MN: Wow

MM: It was nice so I was attracted and appealed to that.

MN: So in your family what was their distinctive cultural celebrations that were let's say different from your neighbors.

MM: Yes we had those masses for the deceased so that was different that we did and there would be another apartment that would be drumming, they had food offering, so that was totally

MN: Wow

MM: There was Folk Catholicism.

MN: Folk Catholicism. So what sort of drumming was done in your household?

MM: It wasn't in my house but when we went to different houses, yes.

MN: So there was a tradition of hand drumming in the Garifuna community?

MM: Exactly yes you know, just to call in response songs just that was part of that time when there was no drumming available they just sang in response.

MN: And the songs were in garifuna or spanish largely or also english.

MM: All Garifuna. Sometimes the prayers would be done in spanish.

MN: So was there like Garifuna literature written in the language that you would read or a newspaper written in Garifuna or this was mostly an oral tradition?

MM: It was oral but also written, my grandfather he gave me a bible in Garifuna.

MN: Really! Wow.

MM: Ever since I took it wherever i went, I took that bible with me and I practiced a little bit, all the way until the complete Garifuna bible came and then the audio bible which I continued and I brought a copy to share

MN: Oh you did? Wow you have one with you, sure. Yeah, let's see what it looks like this morning.

MM: So that's part of my goal, I've been increasing my proficiency in the language. I'm at sixty percent okay.

Brings bible and “People’s Garifuna Dictionary” out of bag. Dr. Gill and Dr. Naison look at them.

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MN: Have you seen this? *(speaking to Dr. Gill) Wow. We're doing exhibits, okay. The People's Garifuna Dictionary. Wow.

LISA Betty: I can ask a few questions.

MN: Sure, absolutely Lisa yeah please.

LB: So so i know that the UN has kind of positioned the Garifuna people as an indigenous people .

MM: Yeah.

LB: How is that, controversial? Because I know you spoke about Vantitama and then also just the Garifuna being in that space? I mean regardless of if we're there before columbus, we're, you know, like, we're still there for five hundred plus years um but how has that kind of allowed the Garifuna to advocate for themselves? And then where are the drawbacks with scholars or people being in conflict with their Indigeneity?

MM: Well you know you're starting to touch on Black versus Indigeneity.

LB: Yeah, yeah like Black not being indigenous but is it, you know? There are a lot of complexities at least in the Americas.

MM: And it fluctuates through generations because there's some different generation of Garifunas that had different concepts and different perspectives versus those in Central America and some of them were educated had different perspectives but from my understanding the language, language is very indigenous. Forty five percent and twenty five percent Arawak and Carib.

LB: Really? Now, forty-five percent Arawak and—

MM: More of the details are there but forty five percent are Arawak, twenty five percent Carib more or less and then—

MN: And Arawak and Carib are indigenous, both indigenous peoples?

LB: Yes, to to the circum-caribbean.

MM: Yes, both Amer-indians. And then the religious practice i've been doing some reading on it and I also visited visited certain temples, and I also visited indigenous groups too, and I've come to the understanding thus far that it's very indigenous, the religion. People have some african elements in them.

LB: How are you all connected with other marooned communities that aren't Garifuna here, like Jamaican maroons or maroons from Suriname. How are you all connected?

MN: There's some activist groups from honduras that have been organizing Black hondurans. They've been connecting with the afro-colombians who are also striving for their rights and have also similarly experienced assassination, but to a larger extreme. So they've been contacting those organizations and also Odeco, another Honduran organization that we're in contact with, the congressional Black caucus too. And also I think the leader would be very much involved with with Colombians but he visited honduras too with a delegation. Mike Honda was there, but yes they're the connection. Then there's the central american Black organization which is a composite of Black from Central America and the president right now is miss Mia Shacolon, she's the the the president of the casa yurume in the Bronx right here.

MN: It's called casa casa... how do you spell it?

MM: y u r u m e, which is a translation for saint vincent, the island.

MN: Okay so is this, so this isn't a formal organization in the bronx?

MM: Yes it's an organization and it's a place where meetings take place—

MN: Oh so it's a like a social hall?

MM: Exactly, a social hall.

MN: And where is it located?

MM: In prospect avenue. And not only a social hall it's a place a forum for a meeting, also the classes they have the Garifuna classes there saturdays.

MN: What's the address?

MM: I can get it.

MN: Okay right so when you were growing up, your cohort was mostly African American. Was there any tension between Puerto Ricans and African Americans or everybody ran together.

MM: Everybody was together. We all got together and in fact, I grew up with a Puerto Rican family, they were our next door neighbors and i think the son eventually died at nine-eleven. And well also african-american neighbors also we used to have parties together, we used to go to their house, they would come to our house, we used to celebrate one another. So it was one whole family, we had a tenant patrol, we had a garden, everything was nice and clean. Now as time advanced things changed.

MN: This was before crack. Or it lasted even during the crack years?

MM: During. But it was things started kind of kind of coming down afterwards but everything was very community atmosphere, everybody knew each other. Yeah my father was very outgoing, speaking to everybody in the building, so we all knew each other.

LB: How was that, because when you have the Garifuna population has a very like interesting position. They're english speakers and they're also Spanish speakers so did they have a particular role? Did you see your father as kind of cultivating relationships with all these different types of people very easily in a way that, there was no like language barriers or were there language barriers?

MM: No, none at all because my father he was used to the international and traveling abroad and also Americans because the fruit companies, they used to have they used to have english schools. In fact my grandfather from my father's side, he worked with the united fruit company. So they used to have interaction with people, americans, italians they used to be part of our— I wasn't born in that time— but part of our household. So his english was perfect.

MN: Right, was your father a member of the union by any chance?

MM: Oh yeah. The National Maritime union.

MN: Oh okay now do you want to know the history of the National Maritime Union was this incredibly progressive union who had the first Black vice-president treasurer Ferdinand Smith.

So this was it was organized by communists but it was one of the first multi-racial unions with Black leaders. So your father was a loyal member>

MM: Oh yeah we were part of it, we used to go there all the time, we didn't get classes we used to, oh they treated us well.

MN: At the national maritime union hall.

MM: Fourteenth street and then they built another one, a larger complex

MN: Right

MM: So they should be part of our upbringing.

MN: So you were brought up with a trade union tradition and a politically conscious trade union fighting for justice.

MM: Yeah.

pause

MN: So are you still living in the Forest Houses?

MM: I'm still there, since I came back.

MN: And when did you return to—

MM: I came back twenty-thirteen back to the Bronx.

MN: And so how are things different now from when you were growing up in the very difficult crack years?

MM: Before i left i experienced police excessive use of force and when I came back that happened again too. Just leaving the building. So that's still the same. I see the building kind of run down. It fell apart.

MN: So you think things are worse now than when you left, right now?

MM: Yes, things are pretty hard. I've seen roundups going off, the crips and the bloods are there. Certain things i can't talk about on video.

MN: But the police presence is very oppressive?

MM: Oh, not oppressive. It's kind of positive because we want protection and security but when they become deceptive it's not done too well. I've seen helicopters running in the mornings, searching for suspects, I've seen squad cars like twenty or thirty squad, squad cars just come in the middle of the day and pursue. I hear gunshots in the mornings when I look out the window i see a bunch of young guys just gathering together, so I'm seeing a lot of things that—

MN: A lot of negativity

MM: Yes a lot of things that are—

MN: Well that's unfortunate.

MM: The methadone clinic close to yankee stadium is still there too, it was there when i was young too, but it's not a crack spot like it used to be in the past, and the hub it's

MN: It's getting fixing, the, yeah.

MM: But it was worse in the past. But now I've seen this coming back.

MN: Right. So, in terms of the organizations you said your grandfather was involved in founding of the first carib organization

MM: Yes he was.

MN: So what did the term Carib mean at that time and why is it that now people use a different term.

MM: Discussing with certain people they see Carib as derogatory, because some say that was placed by Columbus, that it means cannibals eating people.

MN: Really?

MM: Right. So that was seen as derogatory. But the name of organizations, Garifuna organizations, back in nineteen thirties nineteen forties was Carib in Belize specifically, so that's where i'm guessing that that's where the Carib American association got translated here in New York because organizations and Belize and Garifuna organizations that were called Carib were very common. My father and my grandfather from my mother's side, he used to say all these Caribs, used to refer to it as Carib when you converse.

MN: Right, now what about the Hondurans soccer club, is that, did you have any contact with that?

MM: Yes, soccer was part of our upbringing on what, part of our family, get together we would go to Van Cortlandt and watch the soccer games, we see the Africans and Caribbeans, the cricket players and that was part of—

MN: There were cricket games you were going to as well?

MM: They were playing cricket while we were while the soccer game was taking place.

MN: Right, same time, so cricket was something that was more Trinidadian or Jamaican and soccer was more Central America.

MM: Yes.

MN: Okay. Lisa you have?

LB: Yeah so what about like invisibility? A lot of people don't necessarily, even to this day, know that there's there's this Garifuna population specifically in Central America. There's invisibility itself with also just Black Central Americans. So how have you dealt with invisibility just, in your childhood explaining that you're from Honduras and then also how do you see invisibility in the history or the narrative?

MM: It's gotten better because growing up was very tough. I have stories that i, i don't want to digress but—

MN: Oh no no digress this is the time.

LB: No, digress.

laughter

MM: Back in high school and they put a feminine hygiene pad, because my name Maximo, so being taunted a lot it was very common. But on the positive side i was able to catch latino brethren when they used to talk negative in the bus because there weren't too many Blacks at that time so I was able to catch them and correct them when they were talking negative about,

MN: About people—about Black people?

MM: Yes

MN: So you could hear them and tell them—

MM: Oh yes. It's getting, the visibility is increasing now because the the newer generation, they're promoting more. And there's an organization the Garifuna coalition based here in the US so they, they've been trying to highlight Garifunas who are popular in the U.S. that people don't know. We have the coach of the Miami Dolphins, he's Garifuna.

MN: Oh really, he's, Brian Florez is Garifuna!?

MM: Yup, he's from Brooklyn

MN: Wow, from Polly Prep.

END OF VIDEO ONE

MM: And we have Nunez, who played for Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay buccaneers, he's Garifuna. We also have in the NBA that, someone who played a long time ago, Palacios, he was Garifuna too.

MN: Oh!

MM: Tuskegee Airmen, the Tuskegee Airmen they were Garifuna too. And then my friend, [inaudible] Garifuna, American Veteran Association, he had been tabulating. So it's, it's becoming more prominent.

MN: Now what about the latin music or Hip Hop, is there any like, Garifuna—

MM: Yes!

MN: Presence that we don't know about?

MM: Yes exactly, , Evil E and Hen G? Hen G is Garifuna, they're from Brooklyn, they went to the West coast. Henry Garcia, so he's Garifuna too. There's others, there's a lot of DJs.

LB: Wait what's his name, there's a new guy, he was under, he was under Busta Rhymes.

MM: Uh…

LB: You know who I'm talking about, he's from Belize.

MM: Ok, I'm gonna find out. My cousin would stay on top of that.

LB: I'll remember.

MM: I have a cousin who's a rapper too, he does a lot of rap.

MN: Is he based in New York?

MM: Yes, in Brooklyn.

LB: OG Genesis! That's the guy I was looking for.

STUDENT RESEARCHER ONE: Really!

LB: Yup! (laughter) OG Genesis.

SR1: Did not know that.

MM: Ok, OG Genesis.

LB: To my best knowledge, but I'm pretty sure.

SR1: (chuckle)

MM: So , yes the [inaudible] are becoming more prominent, Blue Angel Garifuna too.

MN: Excuse me?

MM: A Blue Angel, the aviator, I've got some pictures if you want to see—

LB: Blue Angel you said?

MN: Yes sure, let's see it.

MM: This is Hydall Blue T. That's an art still, he's been doing a good job with the Garifuna American Heritage Association, collecting… So this is Hydall, he collected some of these items. These are some of my own collections here.

LB: So I'm going to selfishly ask about the, Club Cubano Americano. You said you all were able to rent space from them. Were people members as well or how, how did you collaborate with other Black Spanish speakers?

MM: Since I wasn't in the director of my family, we just were supported, we went for the events but I'm not sure as to how they did the orga- the organization.

*pause

MN: So what sort of music did your family listen to?

MM: Oh it was diverse, very diverse. A lot of the Afro-Cuban, Sonora Matancera, Celia Cruz, , Marvin Gaye,

MN: *laughs

MM: Otis Redding, Fats Domino. My father was friends with Fats Domino in New Orleans—

MN: From New Orleans! Wow.

MM: We had the Neville Brothers—

MN: Ooh, good taste.

MM: Michael Jackson, back in the days when he was in the Jackson Five. And then Sam Cooke that was very popular in the household, we had we also had a lot of Reggae, Third World was, was popular. We had some African music too. My father brought music from, when he traveled abroad he brought a lot of ornaments but music, he brought a lot of music.

MN: And was Fela Kuti part of that?

MM: I think so.

MN: So are the artifacts still i— are the artifacts that your father brought still in the apartment?

MM: Yup! It's all still there. I have.. all the things… yea.

LB: So we know that , Honduras and the Garifuna drumming culture, what about sound system culture? I mean to what, DJing, how has drumming transformed into sound systems, is it a part of that culture as well?

MM: Yea I'm, in music I'm not too versed, but I have family members who are in it, but I know with music now there's a lot of electronics used, as in the past it wasn't as much. But the drumming is still, the drumming is still done.

MN: Do people ever drum outside on the benches outside in Forest Houses or is that something that's pretty much discontinued?

MM: I've seen that recently I've seen Garifuna parties in forest, they take the whole bench, because a lot of them they migrated and they live in Forest now.

MN: So you have more recent Garifuna migrants coming in!

MM: Another—

MN: Another wave, wow!

MM: Yup.

MN: Do any of them go to PS one hundred forty?

MM: I haven't been—

MN: Cuz the principal's a friend of mine.

MM: Ok. But they must be.

MN: So it'd be interesting to talk to Bocannan to see if there's a Garifuna presence because I'm sure a lot of the young people from the Forest Houses go there, and that's a very good school.

MM: Yea, yea, there should be. My sister she went to Dunbar highschool.

MN: I know where that is, yea.

LB: What about racism that was faced? This was an era, ya know, nineteen forties, fifties, sixties, and even seventies and eighties, what was your experience? Yea racism that you may have faced during that time period.

MM: Racism back in the day or you mean now?

LB: That you've faced, that you've witnessed, just as Black immigrants.

MM: As Black immigrants, not as per say, I haven't that I've noticed, of course just a typical local in the door when I'm passing by, is common. Racism… I lived in West Virginia so I experienced a lot there I saw there. I even saw the KKK there.

MN: Did you go to a University there?

MM: Yes, that's where I went.

LB: Well what about with say, white latinos was there any exclusion with there, you know with that background did you feel welcomed or excluded or were there other—

MM: Yes there were several times, yes but nevertheless it's not overt, it's more indirect. But no I can't think of any incident.

MN: Now is there, because of the recent migration, is there more of a Garifuna consciousness in the Bronx? Is that something that's growing this sense of identity, and desire to have the culture preserved?

MM: Yes the thing that I've noticed is that most of the organizations are run by Garifunas born outside, and when a person doesn't speak the language completely and fluently there's a different generation… those who don't speak the language who can not speak the language, those who don't even identify with Garifunas. I have cousins who have english names too and they can just pass as African American

MN: So how much of, is that something of a phenomenon, people passing as African Americans, and you know, just, taking a general Black American identity

MM: Oh that's very high, like a lot of my cousins join a Black sororities, fraternities, they just…

MN: So if people who are Garifuna go to lets say a college that has a Black student organization and a latinx student organization, which are they more likely to join.

MM: Depending. I was more inclined with the Black student association but I made sure I attended the Carribean function, with the Latinos, but I identify more as Black based on my experiences and understanding. When I was a senior in high school my brother, was really gravitated to that green little book "Introduction to Black Studies" that he brought written by Maulana Karenga, now it was larger I actually believe. And my father used to tell stories about what happened, the racism he experienced because he was living in the south, it was during segregation, how he couldn't sit in the bus like general people and he used to curse out the bus driver when he was getting out, he kind of told him to sit in the back. My uncle too, he's in one of those pictures too, he told me stories about racism he faced when he was drafted to the Vietnam war and when he came back, the racism he experienced was very harsh. He wrote a letter to president Kennedy too! He told him about, that. My grandfather used to talk about Malcom X about how he used to be in Harlem speaking, they used to listen to him, and my father he said that he used to love what he talked about, but he couldn't quit pork either, he loved meat and pork so that's why he didn't join the nation of Islam. But we always grew up hearing and knowing the challenge of being Black.

MN: So how is that playing itself out in Honduras right now, and I mean, I've seen what's going on in Colombia, assassinations and ethnic cleansing, in predominantly Black communities, is that also happening in Honduras now?

MM: Yes unfortunately, there are issues with the land taking place there and there's, migration taking place northward and land is being sold- land is supposed to be, its not, there were organizations that were able to attain communal land status in which land is only sold to Garifuna within itself but certain people have sold it to foreigners too. But that's not always the case, sometimes the foreigners are threatening them so, it's kind of mixed. A lot of things are taking place. There's like about, forty seven villages and so a lot of different cases are taking place, and there's three major resorts already built: one in the cajeo region area, La Syeba, and also Tella region.

MN: So this is relatively recently that the these areas have been opened for, you know, resorts.

MM: Yes, exactly.

MN: Now who has been encouraging that?

MM: The government, they've been supporting development, in terms of tourism, not only , interior but also for the coast. Their program is the coast. Development, summer homes, Canadians are…

MN: So a lot of this is Canadians.

MM: In the Tajeo region, Canadians.

MN: And so how is this triggering violence?

MM: The violence comes about because when the people there refuse to give up the land, to move to relocate, they've hired people to come and try to push them out. There was a case that happened in August, they tried to push them out and the people with machetes there, they refused, and they put, some of them were able to get their own equipment to protect themselves, but the police they basically just stood and watched. But yes there has been assassinations, I believe the most recent was last year twenty-twenty there was about three assassinations in Masca, the community of Masca. Because they wanted to build a hydroelectric system in the water in Rio Masca so they killed an activist in twenty seventeen and they killed another one last

year, and they killed a bodyguard, their leader's bodyguard and then they killed her sister, and she died January too.

MN: So the article you wrote is something to publicize this?

MM: I like to bring awareness as to the situation. Yes.

MN: So have you had this published, this article or this is going circulated by word of mouth.

MM: Basically I, since I finished my university, maternal degree, I've been just researching between different communities researching New York, visiting Central America different Garifuna communities just trying to learn more and grow more and publish what's been happening, yes.

LB: What's interesting is that you hear all these green initiatives and hydroelectricity is a part of it and I know that in that article that you wrote I saw that it was the UN that was supporting this hydroelectricity. So how does that work, UNESCO supporting Garifuna populations but at the same time the UN attempting to do progressive things that are actually destroying indigenous communities. How have you been tackling that.

MM: Basically I am very cautious in terms of my approach and even publicizing too cuz i've got family members and right now, dangerous situations are taking place there. I have a relative of mine who, she also faces a situation. There are a lot of individuals in exile, right here in the Bronx, who are involved in issues over there, or even in other parts of the united states, they're in exile because their lives have been threatened.

MN: Wow. So there's been a lot of people leaving because of fear.

MM: That's one of the reasons. Fear, economic situations, and narcotics is also a part of it, so. The trafficking that takes place, battles for turf, people get caught in between.

LB: So what about the caravan, they're going through, you know, the plain and and they have family here but those without family they're going through like, the caravan going Central America through Mexico and the US border— how is that process or how is the politics within that.

MM: Yes i've been reading different points of views, and I went to a forum last week and they were discussing the caravan at NYU and one of the speakers she stated that the governments they sponsor those migrant caravans because they're able to push people out of the country who will end up in the US and they can depend on the remittances, which is a part of their GDP, over there.

MN: So honduras is encouraging this migration.

MM: According to what I learned in the meeting that I went to, when I went to last week and i've also heard when I was visiting over there I talked to different people they say that the opposing political group is sponsoring the migration too.

MN: So do most people who come here send remittances back?

MM: Oh yes, remittances that was common, we, our family, we were always sending, helping out others, back

MN: Is that still going on?

MM: Yes remittances that's a part of it, helping those.

LB: How many Garifuna are in Central America versus in the US, and is it like a dream where, at this point, is there going to be an indigenous Garifuna population still in Central America with everything that's happening?

MM: On one of my tours, I've gone to different communities and what's taking place now is in a lot of the schools, enrollment has dropped because most of the mothers have left with the children so, there've been other migrants, Latinos they come to the community, but part of the lecture I went to last week they said that it's kind of positive for those who are trying to take the land because the people they migrate and then other people they just come in and they can just make use of the land. So schools, very minimal, and a lot of older males are in the community so there's different estimates of what may happen, they may mesh in with the Latinos too. But school enrollment has dropped.

MN: So younger people are coming to the United States?

MM: Yes.

LB: You said Latinos?

MM: Well we call them Ladinos, but latinos yea.

LB: Ohhh, okay and what's the difference—

MM: Or Mestizos

LB: Oh Mestizo

MM: Yea it's the same

LB: Oh so oh Ladino is like a Mestizo

MM: Mestizo, si

MN: A mixed— these are mixed race indigeneous-European-African

MM: Yes yes a mixed race Spanish and Indian most likely.

LB: What people would think a "central American" person looks like.

MM: Yes exactly.

LB: Instead of it, ohh that's right. So, I had a friend, who I think is your cousin (chuckles) Janelle Martinez say that being garifuna she had no problem being Black and feeling African and being proud of it. Is that kind of the garifuna ethos, the latinos who are, you know, unequivocally Black and that's who we are?

MM: It's different it varies for different people and different generations, yea so I don't think there's one type. I personally embrace my Blackness because I, that was my major I like Black studies and I believe Blacks in the America they were influenced, their movements were influenced by Blacks in the United States and the movements here benefits other people all the immigrants who are coming in too, civil rights movements have a high respect, and I always try to emphasize that when I'm with the Garifuna, the leaders, I try to emphasize our African-American heritage. Many of them, they're in a lot of denial, som– well not denial but

they like to say isolation, more in terms of "oh, I'm Garifuna, proud Garifuna" but I always identify with the elements. We're also part of the diaspora, we also have a lot of similar elements in fighting within one another that take place within Latin American communities, so we have a lot of similarities.

MN: So in the Dominican immigrant community there's a lot of ambivalence about the African cultural background. Is the Garifuna community more willing to claim Africanness than let's say, the Dominican community?

MM: Oh yes, yes they are, more willing, especially the newer generation with the perspective, the theory that they were here before Columbus. They really proclaim the Africanism.

MN: So Black consciousness is on the rise among younger Garifuna

MM: Yes, it is, I see that, taking place.

MN: Uh huh.

LB: Are there complex relationships with other Spanish speaking communities?

MM: Every now and then there are certain .. especially with the incident that took place in terms of the stabbing of a Garifuna in a grocery shop last year. And it was a brethren from the Dominican Republic who stabbed him. So I'm hearing certain people— there's Garifuna who are married with Domincans too. So it's isolated cases.

MN: Yea. So our students researchers do you have any questions about this, cuz you're part of this as well.

SR1: *whispers* Why y'all looking at me?

STUDENT RESEARCHER TWO: So, in terms of your Catholicism, you talked a little bit about, finding traces and hints of African roots and Africanism within your religion, can you talk a little bit more about that because, I have found that, within a lot of south American and Central American religions, within small groups especially catholic groups, there can be traces found, so just, can you speak a little bit more about that.

MM: Yes the Africanism I will say in the masses in which they are allowed to bring the drums inside, in the processions, the shakras they incorporated here are called them pastoral groups. When Pope Francis came, they invited the Garifuna to come into collective, into St Patrick's cathedral and do an offering.

MN: Really? Wow.

MM: Yes and so they embrace it—

MN: Now what about St Anthony of Padua which is a predominantly Spanish speaking, you know, parish, is there a Garifuna presence in it now.

MM: Yes Garifunas, West Africans also they also are heavily present there. The Dominicans, Garifunas, but back in the day were more Puerto Ricans, Garifuna.

MN: Right, so now it's it's more African-Car— African, Garifuna, and Caribbean.

MM: Yes, that's what I've noticed.

SR1: Do you feel like there are some tensions between Catholics that practice more Africanist forms of the religion versus those who practice more colonized forms of the…

MM: No, the conflict right now is with the Evangelicals with a lot of the Evangelicals. They criticize the Catholic or those practicing traditional religions and I'm an Evangelical but I don't criticize those practices because when you begin to understand those roots, where it came from… But that's where the conflict's very heavy and it's causing at times division because they just criticize and criticize.

SR2: You briefly mentioned how you said that your father was in the South he had that experience of like segregation where they were telling him to sit in the back of the bus, can you speak a little bit more to like, maybe, your father's experience or maybe your own experience about, kind of not necessarily understanding the systems of racism like here in America and that type of transition coming from a place where that's not really a main concern to where you can't really choose whether or not you identify more with like latinos or Black people and you're kind of forced to choose one.

MM: Ok. So in terms of my personal experience?

SR2: Your experience or your dads experience or—

MM: Yes, he always talked about different instances that happened in the ships too, he always was a storyteller. I've had a lot of experiences, I've done a lot of traveling in the Americas and Brazil, central America because of doing research and also with the church too. So I've had police think that i'm a suspect and put the gun to my head here, as well as in Latin America in different places too. So that's very common…

MN: Wow. You've had a gun up to your head in what cities?

MM: Well I wouldn't say my head but, close by.

chuckles all around

MM: Costa rica, costa rica. Here right, third avenue waiting for the bus, they suspected me of being a criminal when I'm waiting for my sister.

MN: This was how long ago?

MM: This was in the nineties. Because I was waiting for my sister, she was going to Lehman college that at time and I wanted to make sure she got home safe and sound so I was awaiting by the bus stop

MN: At third avenue?

MM: At third avenue and one hundred sixty-third st and the crosswalk, and, some brothers there were smoking drugs across the street, the police came in the car, in the squad car, and it was a Black, two Blacks and a Caucasian, and then the Caucasian got off from the back and he just came straight to me and said "whatchu doin, take your hands out of your pocket" and… *with both arms stretched out, points finger gun in front of him*. And I was like, I was very upset, so I went to the precinct, to report him and the officer he just, he looked he just kind of, he just tore it apart. So that incident— going to New Paltz going to college, undercover officers come in and tell me "open my bag" and harass me so that was a common occurrence that I've had. I was in the Peace Corps, doing two years, two years and a half of service. It was time for me to come back to the US— that's how I got my scholarship money, going to the Peace Corps— so I was in the airport like two hours, waiting for the airplane, and twenty minutes before it is time to board

the plane, undercover officer from Costa Rica come "Hey where you going?" He said "You're not going any place" and I said "If I miss this plane there's going to be a major lawsuit here" and I was very upset and they talked to another agent from Venezuela so they escorted me to the plane and put me in first class, the other agent. So I got to ride in first class it was ice cream from the first time from that incident. In the DR, I was crossing from haiti to go to Dominican Republic, and I had to fight for one hour with a border agent who was dark like me too. He said "No no no, you're Haitian, you're Haitian." No no no I said "No I'm not Haitian look at my ID" and "Haitian, Haitian". My plane was gonna take off over there, so he let me go after a period of time. So there's lot of different incidents that have taken place. My friend in Brazil said— you know a white Brazilian— he said "hey please don't put your hand in your pocket because they're going to suspect you of things". And I've become very good friends with some white Brazilians who have said: "oh you're not like other Blacks, you're different". That's happened to me also in Cuba, "you're not like other Blacks, you're a different person". And I said wow but we're all the same. So those are some incidents I've faced with race here and in the world.

SR2: What does it make you think about your relationship with those communities, if that makes sense. Like does it make you feel, like, not as connected to like your latinidad or anything or does it….

MM: Not connected to…

SR2: Like your like, being like, latino. Does it like, make you feel like separate from your community or do you just kind of look at it as isolated incidents?

LB: Or Black latino, what is that like.

MM: Oh basically, basically I, I came to a conclusion back, back in college that I'm Black, by my, hypthonemy *referring to skin with gesture*, Latino by name, and the culture I learned the Latino culture when I was in college, and I also forced myself to speak Spanish because I couldn't speak Spanish at a period so, I forced myself to learn the culture, latino culture, and I, chose I got immersed in the Black culture when I went to church and got in Christ. And so I hope that, I lost the question again. Oh yes do I think I'm latino, yes I see myself as well, I'm Black but I also have this part of this heritage with me and this other part of heritage with me. But I'm Black because if an officer is looking for a suspect, I'm Black, I can be targeted. Yes?

STUDENT RESEARCHER THREE: So when you put all these books out, one thing that caught my eye, you also alluded to it earlier, this Garifuna understanding of death. I was

wondering if you could like, talk a little bit more about your experience with that, if that was growing up or whenever.

MM: Yes, the spiritual world is kind of big, you hear stories that take place, my father, they were very affluent, back ya know do with out the family, and all of a sudden he started losing his sisters, one sister died, another sister died, another sister died. And his mother died. So, they found out that they had placed certain things under the house because of jealousy. “Obial” they call it, “obial”. So, my father was very much into the practices *chuckles* but that’s separate, in terms of the Garifuna, the Garifuna spiritualism it was the masses, the masses for the deceased. They had food. They put food there, and the altar and the picture of the deceased, and make sure that in the mass, the priests and in the service, he mentions the deceased person. So in terms of spiritualism that. And there's a big ceremony that needs to be done, they call it the Dügû. It has to be done, back central America, in which they sacrifice animals and food, so it’s more broad.

MN: Mhm. Is there any connection between these spiritual practices and santeria?

MM: Yes! I was doing a study, and, a research, with like, Pocamea, pocamea too, and through my readings I learned that there's some African elements to, and there was a time in st Vincent they lost the pantheon supply that they had, because Santeria they had different pantheons, but, culture changes over time and religion changes over time, little by little and this is where they’re at now, they don’t have the pantheons, shango and all the other gods. But there's still the reverence to the ancestors, it's still there, because they’re still there, in Africa.

LB: And you said Obial which is usually what jamaicans would say. How connected, because the Belizians I know, they’re very, you know there's rasta culture a part of it, there's some rastafarian and like, what I connect as english speaking caribbean or at least the east of cuba, how things are done there— it's very similar. How does Garifuna culture or your home culture in Honduras compare to or is connected to English speaking caribbean culture, Rastafarianism and all those other things.

MM: Yes, yes, the spiritualism the call and response to singing, that is the connection. They call it the (*john-canoe),* we call it (*wa-na-da-gwa*) in terms of the war dance where they have costumes. I think they have (*john-canoe)* festivals in the Caribbean, so there’s that connection in that sense to the other carribeans. Soccer is one of the areas. The herbs! I lived with an Afro-Caribbean community when I was in Limon, Costa Rica and bush medicine, bush tea, we also have the same. We have bush tea, bush medicine my grandmother would go out and get

some fever grass, same in Limon to, in West Indian. We have rown down, the plantains the fish the culinary dishes so it's similar in the caribbean.

End of video Two

LB**:** So that's very interesting. My last question… let me just make sure I have everything. Is solairidaty, I mean you spoke a little bit about solidarity with Black Americans, but can you speak more about that? And maybe even how the Garifuna culture and I think Dr naiosn referred to this how you see, in like drumming, in certain things, we know how like afro-caribbean culture may have slipped into African American culture, but what is the Garifuna contribution

MM: To?

LB: African American culture, Black culture that we wouldn't necessarily think about.

MM: Thus far I can't, I'm not too familiar, I think they haven't grown as a population yet.

LB: Or community building or ways that you all have fused into the community.

MM: Community… Well there's a partner with the legislators here in the community with the afro puerto rican Ruben Diaz Sr.. He's kind of welcomed and embraced the Garifuna, he's had events, as he has for all the minority ethnic groups, he also had one for the Garifunas too. Also from the district the Morrisania district. First it started with michael Benjamin when he was in office and then moved to Blake, Stevenson too he was also giving—

MN: Is Vanessa Gibson—

MM: Oh she's very supportive too of the community. She's had activities, organizations annually so they participate in that too.

MN: Right. So is this a growing population in the Bronx?

MM: Yes it is growing. But also its growing but at the same time many people are leaving due to the housing crisis here.

MN: Ok so they're being pushed into the suburbs.

MM: They're moving to, in the suburbs there's a substantial community in Middletown, New York. And also a lot of them have gone, have family down in Texas too.

MN: In Texas! So they are leaving because of the rising rents in New York are pushing them, which is happening all over, you know, they call it demographic inversion. Wow.

MM: Mhm, so Maiden, North Carolina, Seattle, Washington, I have family there too. California, I have my sister there too. She's been there quite a while.

LB: So the Garifunas been in New Orleans for quite a while?

MM: Yes, quite a while.

LB: That's very interesting.

MM: Yea, a long time.

LB: Cuz New Orleans is the Caribbean of the United States, you know that's how people see it because there are so many, particularly Haitain, French…

MM: Yea, all my grandfathers, they were there, they had houses there too. My mother went there too. My sister's still, I still have a sister there too. But they were stuck there with Katrina, yea many of them..

Collective *mmms*

MM: Oh yes. They tried to send money to the—

MN: Right. So part of the— yea?

SR1: I think this will be our last question. So me and Veronica were in "Being Black in the Atlantic World" class and were kind of talking about the role of global Blackness and basically, almost, how do we perceive Blackness. Is it just a regional thing like there's a culture that evolved in one place or is there like some, global type of Blackness that everybody can connect to. And based on your Garifuna experience what do you like think is more accurate, that there's a Black culture that develops in one place because of colonialism and slavery and all of that, or there's a global thing that all Black people can kind of connect to.

MM: In terms of, the connection among what is being Black?

SR1: Yea.

MM: Like the state of being Black? My view is that there are different degrees and different expricernes. With hip hop it's kind of become welcoming. Even non-Blacks… Always in West Virginia they called them the withers, back in that time period. *chuckles* In Asia, japan it's very big. Personally, I felt my sense of Blackness growing up in the hood. And experiencing, living the life in the Black church, which…

MN: So the black church as the Black catholic church or also Black pentacostal.

MM: The Pentacostal, church of God in Christ. Yes, my freshman year in college I, I switched. But I still support the Catholic church. I go there with my mother when she goes there.

MN: So is there a church of God in Christ in the Bronx?

MM: Yes there is, there's a couple! But when I'm in New York, for some reason I am not involved with the Church of God in Christ. It's just when I'm outside.

LB: And you finished your PhD?

MM: Yes, I did.

LB: Oh when did you finish?

MM: I finished in two thousand nine, yes.

MN: So one of the things, is, you know— we'll wind up and have the food come in, because well yea— is we were talking about having a forum or mini conference dealing with Garifuna culture in the Bronx and also with the crisis in central America; is that something that you would want to get involved with if, if we try to do something like that here?

MM: Sure I'll support it.

MN: And are there other people who you'd like to see interviewed for this?

MM: Yea there could be a couple. I know a lot of people who could be interviewed for the project.

LB: So give us those names, we'll contact them—

MN: Yea no we also want you to feel like this is your second home, even if it's in the middle of this white island in the middle of the Bronx. Ya know. So, this is very exciting because a lot of us have seen references to this community but you're the, this is the first time we've started to do it in a somewhat organized manner, and it's very, very important, especially given what's going on in Central America.
Ok, any more questions? Ok, let's bring in the food!