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Archible, Leroi

Archible, Leroi. Bronx African American History Project
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Transcriber: Gregory Peters

Mark Naison (MN): This is the thirty-seventh interview of the Bronx African American History Project, and the interview is with Leroi Archible, a long time Bronx community leader, political activist, and coach and organizer of youth athletic teams. So, first question Mr. Archible is, could you give us a brief description of your family background? Where were you born and educated?

Leroi Archible (LA): First of all, I'd like to mention my father. I'm from a southern descendant and a Jamaican descendant; my father is from St. Ann's from Jamaica and my mother is from Tennessee and lives outside of Memphis called Stanton, where my grandfather at the time was the constable. He was only allowed to lock up black folks. [Laughs] Black folks he detained. I was born in Memphis. I went to grade school at that time and junior high school. Later we moved to Lola, Kentucky and that's where I attended and finished high school. During my senior year, I was able to come to New York based on my behavior, and I kept coming and coming and coming until I got out of the service and I --

MN: --Now did you have relatives in New York that you visited?

LA: Yes, I had two sets of relatives, most of them are gone, it was the Lindos who were of Jamaican descent and the Bells who were Jamaican.

MN: Now where did they live?

LA: They lived on 169th Street and Brook Avenue. The Lindos lived on Wilkins Avenue just off of Boston Road.

MN: So, you had relatives who lived in the Morrisania section.

LA: Yes.

MN: And do you know what years they moved there?

LA: My father came to this country in 1928 and that's when I started realizing they were there until junior high school and I would say that this is in the early forties.

MN: Now when you visited your family members was that neighborhood a mixed neighborhood, or was it a predominantly black neighborhood?

LA: It was mixed, it was relatively mixed and matter of fact, because we lived –when I stayed with my aunt on Wilkins–there was a Jewish family that lived across the street from us. Don't remember the address, but I think one of the landmarks is still there.

There was a laundry across the street off of Wilkins and Boston Road.

MN: Yes, Consolidated Laundry.

LA: Consolidated Laundry, right, right, right, I remember that and also I would like to throw this in, that from Wilkins we used to go to Crotona Park. And when you get in the park, being of African American descent, sometimes when you hit the park, the cops would come. Chase you out of the park.

MN: Now this was in the forties.

LA: Yes.

MN: And there was definitely a sense that there were certain places, if you were African American, the police would discourage you from being there.

LA: Oh sure. Oh sure.

MN: Crotona Park was one, what about the Grand Concourse?

LA: That was definitely, the only way that we used to go there if you had a shine box, and we would shine your shoes and work with somebody.

MN: So if you walked up to the Grand Concourse, if you didn't have a shoeshine box, the police would say what are you---

LA: - - You know it's strange, from West Avenue going west and once you went up those steps, which was Clay Avenue you were in trouble. Once you hit the first step, by the time you got to the top one you were in serious trouble here.

MN: So there were definite boundaries.

LA: Yes.

MN: And you knew when you crossed them.

LA: Yes, Yes. You knew when you crossed them. After reading some material, it was written down in the bottom in the Valley. There was some hidden, I would say segregation or discrimination, or however you want to put that.

MN: Now, did you go to college in the South?

LA: Yes, I did two semesters at Kentucky State at the time and it later became a university. I went there from 1947 to the early part of 1950.

MN: Now you had a unique Marine Corps experience because you were part of the first group of African Americans—

LA: --African Americans to be integrated into the Marine Corps. Not only was the Army-- the Armed Services itself was segregated, the Marine Corps was, so, and I found out something later after I got into the Marine Corps I had to take two tests to see if I really passed the first one and I found that out on Parris Island. Out of seventy-two marines in our platoon there was one other black and one Hispanic and my ID card stated Negro and his, the Hispanic kid's ID card stated Caucasian. And that's still prevalent in a lot of the military. The Marine Corps, I learned a lot in the Marine Corps. It was hard on

me and I was always told I had to produce at 150 instead of 110 because of my ethnicity.

That was an experience and after the Marine Corps, I stood tall and did what I'm supposed to do, and there's one job in the Marine Corps, in boot camp; you can get in your level carrier pack on your back and that's to guide and once you could control those seventy-one other guys. And just having a little ruckus in the barracks one morning and I earned that right and I marched with the flag that whole time I was in boot camp. While in the Marine Corps, I became a tank repairman, went to Korea; I had five tanks and never lost one. I lost track of one and I lost a friend and put the track back on while I was in Korea. I just want to make a little side statement here, it's cold out there now, that's warm compared to Korea. We would wear our shirts off on a day like today. People are saying it's cold and I think it's mind over matter and I've learned to deal with the coldness.

MN: Now, is there anything else you want to tell us about that experience in Korea? Or shall we move onto - -

LA: - - It was even segregated to a point in terms of what we call liberty, the freedom. You know when we went out to play a little, most of the guys in the service understand what I'm saying, there were certain places you couldn't go in. I used to hear about the African American with the tail, and in Korea it was so evident that's why some of the women over there didn't want to be bothered with you. They'd ask you to hold up your shirt because there was a rumor that if a black GI was in the military he had to cut off his tail and that's where that came from. They looked at us as monkeys.

MN: Now, when you came out of the service did you go back to Kentucky? Did you move directly to New York?

LA: No, I lived in Corona for a while until I got my bearings with my family - -

MN: - - Corona, Queens?

LA: Yes, that's where I spent my first, I think, six or seven months until I got a hold of where my family was in the Bronx. Then I worked for a supermarket, there's a story about the supermarket called Food Fair. I went there for a job; I thought I had all the credentials that it takes for a job. I went to Burns; I guess most of you know that Burns is one of the oldest, probably, detective agencies in this city. The guy reading my application and my qualifications, he said, "I got just the job for you." And I said, "What's the job?" He said, "I've got a job for you being security in a supermarket." I said, "What do I do in the supermarket?" He said, "You walk around and make sure everything is under control and don't let no shoplifters take anything, and at the close of the day you escort the manager to the bank." They used to do the night drop. They don't have that anymore. And I used to ask him, "What kind of weapon?" And he said nightstick. And I laughed at the guy and I said, "You know what, in the Marine Corps. I was watching empty dunes with a four clip, so what makes you think I'm going to go to the bank with somebody with three or four thousand dollars, back in the sixties that was a lot of money. So I didn't take that job. I later went on to work in one of the factories in lower Manhattan, in the garment district. Speaking of the garment district, if you wanted a good job you had to it almost seemed like to me to go to the garment district because if you ran around in the ice and the snow outside and you qualified for an inside job they would definitely hire you because they believed you were more responsible for being able to come to work. And I worked for a movie seat covering company called I. Magnus and all they did was recover movie seats.

MN: Now, did you start off pushing carts outside or did you get an inside job right away?

LA: Well for them I used to deliver in the day, because I had seven children, I used to deliver (Laughing).

MN: (Laughing). Ok, let's back it up. How did you end up with seven children?

LA: Seven children in the course of when I met my wife she had three boys and I had one girl. I was a single parent right out of the service and we had four children together.

MN: Wow, ok. And where did you meet your wife?

LA: I met my wife on the L, the Gun Hill - -

MN: - - You met her in the Bronx?

LA: The 3rd Avenue L.

MN: You met her in the Bronx?

LA: Yes.

MN: What year did you meet her?

LA: In 1962.

MN: Ok, wait a minute. So I just want to back track because you got out of the service in '53.

LA: No, I got out of the service in 1960.

MN: Oh, you stayed in - -

LA: - - Ten years, I was in the Marine Corps. For ten years.

MN: Wow!

LA: Oh yeah.

MN: So you moved to New York in 1960.

LA: Yes, the reason I got out of the Marine Corps, I should have done twenty but I had had enough of the racism, and at that time the Marine Corps was really racist. And mainly it would come from your first sergeant when you report, because the question with us is that we were allowed to wear double-soled shoes, you know like the platform shoes they are wearing now, I was in a different Marine Corps. So when I came back from Korea, I reenlisted and then they sent me to Pearl Harbor and then I ended up in the United States again and that's when I met her. I met her, she used to teach dance on 96th and Broadway, and I used to meet her on the train. I'll call her stuck-up because she didn't want me bothering her. We started talking and I'm getting married and having children.

MN: Now, did you live together first in Corona?

LA: I was rooming; oh, you know I used to room in a rooming house at 1712 Longfellow and there - -

MN: - - That's in the Bronx, right?

LA: That's in the Bronx. This is in the '60s and there was a nice lady who took a chance on me and my partner. Because there was two of us who got out together and we used to go hang together. And if we didn't get a job we were going back. And we went for this job, like I said, at the supermarket. And then we ended up in the garment district. When I moved on Longfellow most of the folks there was of European descent.

MN: This is Longfellow between where – on 173rd or something?

LA: Off of Freeman Street. Up to here between I'd say Southern Boulevard. And more or less the Sheridan Expressway.

MN: Ok, so that was in the early '60s, still mostly you know Jewish, Irish, Italian.

LA: Yes, and the lady said, you know, seeing you guys were just out of the service, she would take a chance, and we lived in a room half the size of this. He'd sleep on the floor one week and I'd sleep on the bed. It was ten dollars a week.

MN: And you still, you had your daughter with you at that time?

LA: My daughter was with my mom. We made a pass and after - -

MN: - - Where was your mother living at the time?

LA: My mother was living in Monroe, Michigan and she moved from Lola to Monroe.

MN: Ok.

LA: It was a struggle and my wife had had three boys and they was young boys. And two of her boys were away with their father's parents. And one of the boys she had with her, and we sat down and discussed this and we moved. After moving, first we moved to 118th St. and Lenox Ave., and we lived up over [inaudible – Muhammad St.] back there. Then we later moved to 147th St. and Courtlandt Ave., where Courtlandt and 3rd come together. And we lived in a kitchenette.

MN: Ok, so now did you know people in that neighborhood? How did you find the apartment? Was this from an advertisement in a newspaper?

LA: At the time I think *The Post* was the leading paper that would carry a lot of renting apartments and rooms. Rooms were real prevalent then, you know you could find a room almost anyplace. Just a reminder then, we later moved to 159th St. and Courtlandt Ave., which was Italian, Irish and Italian again. My wife and I were standing on the corner reading a newspaper, and this guy walked up to me, which was one of the largest landlords, Rosenberg and Diamond. I met one of the Rosenbergs, he walked up to me, slick looking guy, you know. He said, "Hey, buddy are you looking for an apartment?"

And I say, "Yeah." He said: "I got a place for you." So I told my wife, "You stay right here on the corner, she was pregnant with our first child together, and I said, "If I'm not back in forty-five minutes call the cops." And this guy laughed; I was serious, he was joking. So he took me to 323 East 159th Street, that's between Courtlandt and Park. And on the way up there he tells me, "I'm going to give you this and if you move in here you will be the first Negro at that time in this building. You down?" I said, "Yes, I'm down, I have no problem with it." I think the reason I was down I had that Marine attitude, you know.

MN: Now that neighborhood would have been called Melrose?

LA: Yes.

MN: Yes, it was Melrose.

LA: We were up the street, about a block and a half from one of the famous restaurants that was there which is no longer, it's Alex and Hendricks.

MN: Yes. What was that?

Jim: Italian food.

LA: Italian food.

MN: Alex and Hendricks.

Jim: That was a catering house as well as a restaurant.

LA: Yes, we moved in the building, a month, two months later, my floor was empty. People were moving left and right. In the deep of February when my second daughter was born, my wife said to me, "It's cold in here. Go downstairs and see if the super will send up some heat." I go downstairs and I knocked on the door, and the door opened wide open and it scared me. I didn't know what happened, but being gutsy I walked

inside and looked around with nobody in there. So I went back upstairs and I called Mr. Diamond and I said, "There's nobody there." He said, "Didn't I tell you?" I said that I couldn't think because I was cold. He said, "Do you want a super's job?" I said, "I don't know about being a super." He said, "Well, all you got to do is sweep the halls and pull out the garbage and I come and give you a lesson on how to stoke the coal." We had coal burners then. That was a break in my life, from the Bronx, that I think the reason why, as I said earlier, that I do more for the young people, because I was given a chance. And I became a super, and it gave me a chance. After that I started having, that's why I ended up having these seven children, and I had the space and a yard and a - -

MN: - - Ok, so in other words when you became superintendent of this building you were able to leave the garment factory?

LA: Oh yes, I'm leaving the garment factory and I got a job with the Parks Dept. as the maintenance and groundskeeper at the time. And I used to do the golf course and I used to do a school up at Taylor and Story called P.S. 1. I ran into a little racism again. I used to, they had the sand traps back in those days. When you raked the sand. And [Inaudible - James], with no housing, sits in the middle, and there was a little white kid who used to come every morning when I got there and bust a Coke bottle. He had his bottle, and I told him one day if he busts another bottle then I'll give you a little whack on your little behind. He goes home to tell his mother, and few people knew our commissioner for the Parks Dept. was a black guy, was Davis. He called me down, he sat me down in his office, he said, "Archible, you can't be whooping on people's kids." I said, "I wasn't whooping nobody's kids." He said, "Let me say it to you, they don't want no blacks

bossing their kids.” So they transferred me to Van Cortlandt Park, and that’s where I worked until I started finding other jobs.

MN: What year did you move to Courtlandt Ave.? I just want to get a sense of - -

LA: - - I was on Courtlandt Ave. from about 1961 to about ’63. And from there I moved up north here, I moved in where I live now, it’s Boston Secor Houses which is up across the highway from Co-op City.

MN: So, in other words you were actually in the South Bronx living from only ’61 to ’63.

LA: Yes.

MN: But you remained active in the community.

LA: I did and what started me getting involved in the community, you know being from the South and a military background, kids don’t play in the streets. And my brother-in-law, who was a young guy at that time, I think Claude was about nine or ten years old they used to play football in the streets, you know that tag thing. And jokingly I said to those guys, “You ever played football here?” And at that time Gayle Sayers, Dick Butkus, Jim Brown were at the top. And all these kids were one of those guys. So we began to organize ourselves. When I had no money and didn’t know nobody in terms of the recreation program and I did know about the restaurants. So one day my wife said, “Why don’t you guys ask the guy in the restaurant to buy you some jerseys?” So I go down to Alex & Hendricks and I didn’t know what to say to this guy, and I just told him I was doing something for the kids. And I find out from him that the kids have been breaking in at night, robbing his basement of liquor and stuff. So he said, I guess he was saying maybe there was a chance we were keeping it, they planned this out. So there

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used to be a sporting goods place on 156th St. and 3rd Ave. And I didn't know and I went in there and the guy sold me some jerseys. Sold me about thirty-two jerseys for \$200 - -

MN: - - Deviga?

LA: Yes, and the first game they ripped the jerseys off, so then I ditched them. So I was in Macombs State Park one day and this guy came by, he was wearing a suit and tie and he asked me what center was I attached to? I said, "None." He said, "How would you like to do work for the center?", not knowing that my ballplayers were statistics, somebody needed to get more money. [laughs] So I said yes and I went home and told my wife somebody is sponsoring my team. And it so happened a real good friend of mine, we later became real good buddies. His name is William Satterfield, but we called him Bill. And at that time he was running John Lindsey's prep guys, he said he helped us get money and it went on from there, and I made a commitment to myself that I have my opportunity to work with youngsters and I will continuously do that.

MN: So you started this football program when you were living on Courtlandt and 159th?

LA: Yes, we called ourselves the Courtlandt Colts. Then we later went to Morrisania Youth and Community Center, which there was another center, which was called Morrisania, that the CPC of [Inaudible]. Everybody used to get us confused, but we were on the West Side we were over there on Sherman Ave., 1021 Sherman Ave.

MN: Sherman in between where and where?

LA: Between 165th Street and 164th Street.

MN: And that was the Morrisania Community Center?

LA: Morrisania Youth and Community Service Center Inc. And we were one of the first youth programs in the Bronx that created the multi-service concept. We felt that dealing

with the anatomy of the youngster, he needed all those services. And at that time the gangs were unrest. Not knowing that I was getting involved with the Youth Services Agency, which was YSA. I don't know if you guys are familiar with a gentleman named Ted Gross?

MN: I've heard of him, yes.

LA: I began to work for him and I was the numbers that they needed and I already controlled them. From there we went into Claremont Village, which had the most unrest Community Center, I guess maybe because you had a large population of people. In any city you can get sixty thousand people out of that community and we got involved in coaching kids. And that's where it went and we went from there to where I met the president and we called ourselves the Bronx Colt Youth Services.

MN: Now when you first, when you came back to the Bronx in the early sixties, was there a gang problem of any sort?

LA: Yes, I didn't understand the thing there, because my interest was in, and I was finding out from Bill and all the rest of the guys, we called ourselves the Street Workers, and built an organization called Street Workers Inc. From that we went out and got corporate sponsors to pay all our workers' salaries and then it was The Spades, The Shingalings.

Jim: The Ghetto Brothers.

LA: Yes, the Ghetto Brothers.

MN: And this was in the early sixties?

LA: Yes.

MN: So, the Black Spades go back to the early sixties?

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LA: Oh yes. And then the Five-Percenters. They were really relevant. That's where I met Arthur and was helping him out with them. And what we wanted to do is get these young folks involved. This time we had two unrest schools over on that side of Morris Ave. and was Toscanini 145 and Junior High School 22.

MN: Now where were these located?

LA: Toscanini was off of 156th St. and Teller, Findlay, and Park Ave.

MN: So this is all Melrose again, not Morrisiana?

LA: Well, the geographics were cut a little funny.

Jim: Yes, because that was an area, there's a viaduct that goes over the rail yard.

MN: Right, yes.

Jim: And right there is where Toscanini is.

LA: Right.

Jim. And 22 is on - -

LA: - - is on Morris- -

Jim: - - is on 167th St.

LA: Yes, 167th and Morris.

MN: Right now, what about heroin? Was there a visible drug, heroin problem at that time?

LA: Some of the late teens and a few instances we had run into young kids as low as nine and ten years old getting high. At one time heroin and heavy drug scene in the city was the in thing. You had to know somebody who knows somebody to get involved. It's not like nowadays, you walk up on the corner and a group of kids are standing around. You ask who got it and somebody gonna tell you.

MN: So it took a lot of work to find it.

LA: Oh, yes.

MN: Now when did you first become involved in the Jackson Democratic Club?

LA: Well in Morrisania we were building so fast and you could give us twenty-four hours and we could get you a thousand young people. And why we were able to do that is because we were giving away t-shirts with the logo of a body and with all the anatomy marks. That's what we did for services. Once the youngsters signed with us, then we contact with them. And we'd always use this list to call kids to do things with us because we were saying to help young folks we'd put some of those kids out front to demonstrate for us. Then we became Morrisania Youth and Community Service Center and we became a model for all over the country. We used to go to California, especially San Francisco, Chicago.

MN: So how did this lead into politics, into dealing with the elected officials?

LA: When Morrisania, we used to always say was sabotaged because I think it was building too fast for some folks, then they started pulling us out. In Morrisania we tried to go into the economic development. Then we'd find problems so then everybody after that we all split up, and went our ways. And then I met a young man named Norman Taylor, and he was up there on Boston Rd. And then he said Arch we could use you in the club, we need a nice person to deal with kids. So I went up there and got involved, at this time - -

MN: - - Now what year was that?

LA: 1975.

MN: Ok, so you didn't get involved in the politics until the seventies.

LA: Yes.

MN: And that was after you'd already moved up north, you were doing youth programs in Morrisania, but were living up in the north Bronx.

LA: North Bronx, yes.

MN: Well, let me go backwards then because I want to get that whole entertainment scene in Morrisania. You mentioned Club 845. When did you start going to 845?

LA: I started going to 845 in 1961 [Laughs], because, you know I was a young guy in the service and I was hanging out regularly. And my wife had a cousin that lived up there on Prospect on 69th St. She lived across the street from Jobo's.

MN: And what was Jobo's?

LA: It was a jazz spot.

MN: Ok, because that's a jazz spot nobody told me about. Jobo's was on Prospect Ave. and 69th. And was it a bar? Was it a club or both?

LA: More a bar scene in the back. Guys would come and sit in, you know, You had instruments, you come up here and you play.

MN: Who used to play there? Was it prominent guys or a more a low-key venue?

LA: I know [Inaudible] McClark was a popular person. I knew him and I'm trying to think now. I don't know anybody other than [inaudible] that I can remember that still is around.

MN: So you used to go there and then when did you start hitting 845?

LA: Well, one night we came up from Harlem on the train, my wife and I. There was a whole group of us and we were trying to find some place in the Bronx where we could go out. And we see this big sign, so we go in there, and we had a little problem getting in

because we all looked young. So at that time you could get an ID card made on 42nd St.

[Laughing]. You still can. So my wife was a young person, her sister, and I was older and my cousin Harry and some of his friends – we were of age so we went in and we started hanging in there and then Slick King came up and asked us some questions - -

MN: - - Who's Slick King?

LA: That's the male stripper I was telling you guys about [Laughing].

MN: You were approached by the male stripper? [Laughs].

LA: Right, because we looked like fresh meat, he said. You know, and he asked us some questions and we said yes. And he said, "Well I can help that." And we began, that's when we began there. That would be our spot.

MN: Ok, now could you describe what the club looked like as a space? You walk in and what's there?

LA: When you walk in, there's a bar. The bar when you walk in there, the bar's from the door and the rest of it went straight back all the way to the wall. At that wall you see a curtain, we didn't know what it was and it was a stage and on that stage the band would be there.

MN: Ok, so the bar is on the left or the right?

LA: When you walk in it was on the right.

MN: The bar is on the right and you walk back, and was there a place to dance in the club?

LA: In the back.

MN: Ok, so there is a stage and a curtain and the musicians are on the stage.

LA: Right. Now what they were saying that you had to be twenty-one and older to go behind it.

MN: Behind the curtain there is something else.

LA: They had the shows back there. Now if you were a regular person, looked like you could control yourself, then you were allowed to go by there. So we went in there so much and there was no problem, we were part of the - -

MN: - - Now what was going on in that back room?

LA: Male strip shows, they had a guy called Lock Jaw Davis, you heard of him?

Jim: He used to pick up tables with his teeth [Laughing].

LA: [Laughing] Yes and they had a lady back there and you could stack coins on the table and she would dance over and up they go. [Laughs]

MN: Ok, so they had female strippers and male strippers.

LA: Yes.

MN: Exotic dancers. Did they advertise this outside or was this all word of mouth?

LA: All word of mouth, all word of mouth. Because at a certain hour, and from my understanding back then, after twelve o'clock when the bar closed, you could stay at the bar, but you couldn't sit at the bar. You sat away from the bar.

MN: Right.

LA: You stay away from the bar, so then if you weren't old enough to be in there for that action they would tell you, you have to leave. Or you were the guy who seemed like you liked to create a problem or maybe even thinking that the police. As I think back now I don't think it was too legal.

MN: Now is this a place known to be run by the Mafia or the Mob, or not particularly?

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LA: I found out later that they had a little piece to do with that because I had a cousin of mine who later became a barmaid in there. And I know Tina, like she couldn't have been no more than eighteen or nineteen, but she had a big body like a mature woman and they would use her. She didn't drink but what she used to do if you buy a drink she'd give it to me or my man and she'd play drunk and we'd be drunk [Laughing]. Because she didn't drink, and that's where we used to go.

MN: Now was there live music there also?

LA: Yes, oh yes. I don't remember some of the bands but also the stripper was a guitarist.

MN: Now you mentioned meeting Arthur Crier at that time? Or was that later?

LA: During that time they used to do the 23 Park because Arthur lived on 166th and Union Ave. And they used to be out there in the 23 Schoolyard, because that's the only place they could go because of the playground they would go in the schoolyard in the back and do their Doo-Wop. And of course you could hear them.

MN: So there was Doo-Wop on the streets in the early sixties?

LA: Oh yes.

MN: And who were the people, and so you met him in the 23 School, it was called the 23 Schoolyard?

LA: Yes, I met him at 23 Schoolyard and then later on running around with The Feasters.

MN: Now The Feasters came out of The Chords, right? That group The Chords?

LA: The Sha-Booms. I met them and some other guy I can't remember and I started hanging with Arthur and Arthur and I later ran into each other when they started having

problems up by the Bronx Zoo. That was prior to building the Lambert Houses. And when they built the Lambert Houses there was a thing that the way Lambert wanted to do it was to get involved with people in the community that knew the street action so to speak and had kids. And so then Arthur, they were doing basketball up there already, so they wanted to do football because we felt that football would bring in a large amount of young men to get involved and I got involved with Arthur, and the program was called TIP - Tremont Improvement Program. Which was sponsored by the Phipps houses, which was one of the largest developers in the city. And they did Penn Plaza, a lot of stuff on 2nd Ave., a lot of stuff in the Bronx they just built. So I got involved with Arthur, then Arthur and I, we needed money so what we used to do is do dances and on Elsmere Place and 7th Blvd. There was a YWCA and we used to throw dollar bump dances in there. You know we used to pack that in there and what we do is we'd give some of the money back to the kids.

MN: What is a dollar bump dance?

LA: Well, you could get into the dance for, you'd have a buck contest cost you a dollar a head. And we used to pack it with the kids. And it got to be, Arthur and I became very good for those things. And Arthur used to do talent shows, he used to do talent shows and nobody was turned away. And sometimes we would do a talent show that starts at six and went over to one or two o'clock in the morning. Understand our method, thing was to keep young folks busy, and keep them real busy, and that's why sometimes him I talk now that maybe you should let the rappers have a rappers' contest and you get all the kids and you could kind of control them. You got to use, I always said the thing of the day for young folks to pull them through. Then Arthur had stopped singing, he sung with

a group called The Halos, but they used to use the mop heads for wigs. [Laughs] Yes, he'll tell you guys about the beginning here, he and I became good friends because I learned from Arthur and he was a talent show guy. And we went up there by the Bronx Zoo. At that time we were up in there because the Five Percenters were the gangs for up around the Bronx. And because they couldn't get any jobs in the Bronx Zoo, I think the kids were going over the fences. That's why you see fences are a lot higher in the Bronx Zoo than they were because the kids were around there. And then when the Lambert Houses were built, you know before the Lambert Houses were built, along that strip from the train all the way back to the Bronx Zoo, there used to be little booths, we used to have games and that stuff. So then we were able to help those youngsters, some of them turned out to be good. The group called the Rhythm Makers, they used to sing in the bar over there on Crotona Ave. called the Fair Tree.

MN: The Fair Tree, now that also had live music. That was Crotona between where and where?

LA: It was on Crotona between the Cross Bronx and East Tremont I'd say.

MN: Oh, so this was up a little further north?

LA: Well, see what was happening was people were migrating from Harlem and from the south part of the Bronx. It was steadily moving North.

MN: Yes, now going back to the early sixties, you mentioned Jobo's and 845. Were there any other places where you went to hear live music in the Bronx?

LA: Sometimes in Goodson's.

Jim: Goodson's on 169th?

LA: Yes on 169th St., and Freddy's - -

MN: - - Now did Freddy's have live music?

LA: Sometimes, not too often, that's on 168th St. and Boston Rd. There was a place right around the corner from Morris High School on what do you call it now? It was one of the guys, a black guy named Booster, you know incidentally coming up as a youngster all up in that part of the Bronx, was known as the Sugar Hill of the Bronx. Because all of the elegant - -

MN: - - Now which neighborhood was known as The Sugar Hill? Which street?

LA: I would say from Franklin Ave. going back to Boston Rd. and maybe over to Stebbins or somewhere in there where all the elegant people lived.

MN: So where you lived would be considered 18th St. [Laughing.] [Crosstalk] Around Prospect was the Sugar Hill.

LA: Well the reason why it was I guess, after reading the history a little more of the settlement began in the heart of that is because the story goes that your apartment porters and homemakers lived there - -

MN: - - And postal workers.

LA: And postal workers, yes, lived in that neighborhood, and they were what we called elegant people. They had jobs. And if you ever do any title research you look and you can find out there's a lot of black folks that still own property. Was there until the city started developing and because of taxes and everything.

MN: So where were the poorest blocks? The real tough blocks. Was that more along Third Ave.?

LA: In some areas down in there.

MN: If you're saying the elegant, the Sugar Hill, was up around Prospect, where would be the real tough place that the Prospect kids wouldn't go to?

LA: Well you wouldn't go on the next block in those days if you didn't have the change jiggling in your pocket.

MN: Right (Laughs).

LA: Yes, you'd have to pay. You know none of the guys would jump you, but if I wanted to come over and see my sister, he'd stop me on the corner and ask me for something. If I don't have it then I can't come see my sister.

MN: Now this was in the sixties so there was like - -

LA: - - the '50s and '60s, yes.

MN: So there was a tax?

Jim: The thing is the rough areas were probably along the commercial stretches along 3rd Ave., where the area that was commercial and maybe not doing so well - -

LA: - - No, right.

Jim: So the housing was, the rent was lower.

LA: The Flats.

Jim: The Flats.

MN: Yes, the flat areas and the hard areas would be, where would you say?

LA: When I say the Flats, I always called them railroad flats - -

Jim:: - - And the area along Park Ave.

MN: Right.

LA: Yes, right.

Jim: In that area over there, that's where they had room to build the Flats.

MN: And that's, the place where they built Claremont, that was the toughest section.

LA: Right.

Jim: Well, you know you spoke earlier about Clay Ave. being up on the hill and you didn't go up there if you were black.

LA: Yes.

Jim: First of all because it was elevated and it had a staircase - -

MN: - - And that was near Claremont Park or ? - - -

LA: - - There were steps all along that street there.

Jim: You know like Clare Ave. runs along a ridge - -

LA: - - Right.

Jim: And then it drops to, I don't know what the first street is - -

LA: - - Webster

Jim: No, beyond Webster. There's a little street that runs along there, parallel to Webster.

LA: Brook Ave., would it be?

Jim: No, going the other way. But anyway, the black people lived at the bottom of the hill, like Harlem Valley.

MN: Right, ok, and - -

MN & Jim: [In unison] The white people lived up above it.

Jim: Closer to the Concourse.

MN: Right. Got it.

Jim: the closer to the Concourse, the whiter it got.

LA: Yes, the whiter it got.

MN: Right. Then the other side, the Hill rose up a little less sharply towards Prospect, and the wealthier black people lived at the top of that hill.

LA: Right.

Jim: So 3rd Ave., I mean Franklin Ave., Boston Rd., that was the highest elevation - -

LA: - - Highest, yes.

Jim: If you look, Morris High School is the highest, is one of the highest elevations in that part of the Bronx.

MN: Now, was Prospect a little wealthier than Boston Rd.? Or not necessarily?

LA: I don't think necessarily, but it was a different atmosphere.

Jim: Yes, the people moved on Prospect before they could move to Boston Rd.

LA: Yes.

Jim: So my folks lived there in the '30s and then later on Boston Rd. opened up.

LA: Opened up, because there's a story that goes, and I met a UPS guy in St. James Park, an old-timer, and he enlightened me that UPS is not a new delivery program. That he was a UPS guy, and he lived on Prospect and he used to always go down in Harlem on the weekend, and he was telling me one morning, he woke up on Prospect and they had on the fire escapes mail written to blacks. See they didn't rent to blacks always, even though we have a hotel on Prospect, the Carver Hotel.

Jim: Yes [Laughs]

MN: Where was the Carver Hotel?

LA: Right across the street from St. Augustine's

Jim: Like 160 - -

LA: - - 5th. 165th Street.

MN: Now when did that hotel open?

LA: Oh man, I don't know.

Jim: It was an apartment building originally, and some guys bought it and they turned it into a hotel. I never knew anybody who stayed there but we knew that there was a hotel in the neighborhood. And the building is still there.

LA: The building is still there and right now the hotel is still there, but right now they use it for welfare recipients.

MN: Right. One of my students is going to be looking at when Bronx landlords started advertising in the Amsterdam News. Start looking at, as you know, as a way when you are starting to solicit and also what they say – Do you have things like quality colored tenants wanted? Which is a code word for you know - -

LA: - - And that's true because when I got this place with the Rosenbergs and Diamonds, the guy said, "I don't think I need to check you." Because what they would do when you would apply for an apartment, even coming from Harlem, they talked to the neighbors on both sides of you, across the hall, and at the bottom of you. If you were a reckless guy, you wouldn't allow them. It was almost the same thing as the New York City Housing Authority was at one time.

LA: They got complaints, you know –

Jim: They come to where you live before you move to the new place.

MN: Now did you ever get into Latin music?

LA: Only for dances at Hunts Point Palace. I later found out that if you want to dance with the Latino girls, you had to dance. If you couldn't dance - - [Laughs]

[All Laughing.]

MN: So you used to go to the Hunts Point Palace?

LA: Yes, sir.

MN: Was this in the early sixties or before then?

LA: Well, before then in the '40s.

MN: So you used to go to the Hunts Point Palace in the '40s?

LA: Yes, like I said before, I was coming to this city a lot and then in order to, that was my thing, because I came to New York and go back home and I had some of that street, you know - -

MN: - - You picked up a little street to bring back to Kentucky.

LA: Yes, I used to bring that back.

MN: So you were going, coming up in the late '40s, you were going to dances at the Hunts Point Palace?

LA: Oh, sure. I was a teenager then.

Jim: I remember that that area began to become heavily Hispanic.

LA: Yes.

Jim: Until later in the '50s

MN: but the music was there even in the - -

Jim: - - The music came up from the, what was that place, the jazz clubs down in Manhattan.

MN: The Palladium

Jim: The Palladium and places like that. And then when there was a real Puerto Rican community, that was the first Hispanic community down there. And then they began to have a culture within the neighborhood.

MN: So you weren't politically active until the '70s?

LA: Until the '70s.

MN: You got involved, this was sort of, I guess you call it the Anti-Poverty Program.

LA: Yes, and then later when Norman said one day, "You guys want to make some money?" I said yes, so we got to distribute some stuff for Gloria Davis, that's how I met her. One of the fashionable guys was Ed Stevenson, Jr., who lived on Jackson Ave., behind Morris High School. So then he began talking, so that's why I didn't know what they were doing to Mrs. Diggs. And it took Mrs. Diggs up until now, maybe three years to even speak to me because she used to always see my face because I was the outgoing guy at the Jackson, I had a little - -

MN: - - So you went to Jackson in '75, and they made you a District Leader?

LA: No, not right away. In the '80s I was - Ed Stevenson said to me that he was stepping out - "Arch, you seem like you got hands-on with people." And that was what that was about.

MN: So you were at that time working with the Morrisania Youth Program and in the parks?

LA: I was working at the parks and in Morrisania and we got what we called broad sided and a lot of the political stuff that I didn't understand that happened to us over there. In Morrisania, we had a dream that we wanted to be self-supporting. So we tried to get into the economic development, and at that time we was a member of the Church of the Master, and Dr. Calendar, Eugene Calendar said to us, "You guys got, if you don't want to get government money, you got to go places - -"

MN: - - Now the Church of the Master is in Harlem, right?

LA: Yes.

MN: Now that's an interesting question, because did you and your wife go to a church in Harlem or in the Bronx?

LA: I went to the Master only because the program, because they started a group of young guys called the Street Workers Inc. And the reason for Street Workers Inc. was to get guys out on the street and get corporate sponsors to pay their salary because none of us was working. So Dr. Calendar at that time was head of the Urban League. And he suggested that we go that route. And we started working for, the first line I had was for U-Stack Trucking, was one of the largest trucking firms in the nation, I don't know if they still exist. But that's how we got paid. And when we decided to do the Economic Piecing we didn't know what was happening to us - -

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE. BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

[Crosstalk]

MN: - - So you didn't go to any of the churches in Morrisania?

LA: No, to be very honest I was raised in the Baptist in the religious, and it never, somewhere in my growing I got to the point about churches and the money part. You know while I was living in Harlem up on [Inaudible – Martin's Peak], I would have become a Muslim but it was the food thing, and at my house we was pork-raised folks. Every time I mentioned that I would hear a whole program. I couldn't sit down with my family without hearing a lot of stuff and then some of their rules was too far fetched. And at that time the Muslims, from my understanding, was only dealing with the ex-offenders, such as the prostitutes, the pimps, and the hustle and the color thing. They had a real color thing, if you was light, real light, they figured you was born of the devil. Or

whatever the hell that was. It used to be strictly black black, so I didn't want to get involved with that. But religion, I've attended several churches regularly and I tried to deal with it but for some reason, I go to church now but I don't belong to a church. When I get the feeling, that's usually twice a week, I'll go to some church. Since I'm speaking on it, I found a church here in the Bronx that my wife and I attend regular, and because, I think, the feeling I got in there. Maybe we're changing in our old age, trying to make it right before I get out of here, but I go now pretty regular. And I haven't become a member, I do good will, because I, like Reverend Savers, as the minister and as a human, he can talk trash and drag the bushes behind and some truth but not know a real down and worse. I'm real comfortable there.

MN: Now did you have any contact with the Bronx chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality?

LA: Never, only in conversation with Roy, we sometimes - -

MN: - - That was after Roy Innis took over, but not like in the early '60s?

LA: No

MN: What about the NAACP, were they much of a force in Morrisania?

Jim: They had one, but it wasn't - -

LA: - - Yes, when I met there's a guy named, I tried to get involved, there was a guy named James Alexander. And he used to work for one of the prominent community activists named Albert Goodman who left a landmark.

MN & Jim: Yes.

LA: Yes, Al Goodman, and later this is just my personal, I believe in strength and it's the seriousness, when in the borough you have such a magnitude as this you got two or three

different chapters and none of them is on the same wave length and they don't seem the same. But the NAACP, never.

MN: Now when I mentioned Ramon Velez to you, that brought up, what was your first contact with Ramon Velez?

LA: I used to live on 141st St. and Brook Ave, that's when he first came on the scene and I used to do a summer daycare for a lady called Lucille Murray.

MN: Now this is before you moved to Courtlandt?

LA: Yes, and her name was Lucille Murray, and I was looking for a job and I wanted to get involved with children. So I went to her and she just liked my resume and my stand up. Like I said, I was fresh out of the Marine Corps and every time I talked to somebody there for a long time I stand at attention, then she told me about a meeting one night and there was some monies coming, the model city's money was coming to the South Bronx and she felt that if she and I went we could play our role in getting involved with it. And she called this guy Little Caesar, Ramon, because I found out later that that was his IQ or MT, whatever you want to call it. We met in Berger - -

Jim: - - Junior high.

LA: Junior high school and he said before he lock the door I'm locking everybody in and everybody's down with me everybody who want to get down can get out of here then.

Then my wife panicked, I can't stand that, so if she's leaving I'm leaving. Then later on the monies came to a big squabble and when you talking about and there was some assumptions made that he would take lives for the power and that's when they began to shut us out. When I say shut us I mean African Americans out. And I used to always say to all them, no one ethnic group in this borough is going to run nothing. And I think they

are trying very hard to do that. If you wanted to get out there, you got out, if you didn't then there's allegiance that you have to pay. And a lot of these young up and coming Hispanics is allegianced to him, but he was a hard cookie. He visited my home several times to talk to me because I guess he said he liked what I offered because I had control of young people because I always had a bunch of them around me. But I never, I was always pro-black and I guess that's the southern in me and I didn't understand why can't we mix and make this thing work? So I never really got involved to where I owed him anything, and not even eight hours for pay so. He was a hard guy, he didn't play, he's very serious, very demanding of his people, and he built a power base and most of the young Hispanics are reaping from it. And that's where it brings to that other part, and I says to the young Spanish boys then, you guys need to build a history like we began to move, and struggle to leave something here because I don't think if somebody, if you will ever decide to pull this thing together with the African Americans in the Bronx, have done us a service because we have been left out and if you read any previous writings on this borough we're not included.

MN: Yes.

LA: And I said since then it ain't about the control of ethnicity, but if you're telling your child that he should be like so and so, who should I be like? And I think that's one of the mistakes that Ramon might have made, is although, there is some blacks that will work for him and been successful, but they're not pro-black and that kind of worries me a little bit.

MN: Now when did you start noticing a black political leadership starting to get organized in the Bronx in a really dynamic way?

LA: Al Goodman, he was a district leader, prior to me, he had tried to merge all the blacks and make things happen politically. The stab in the back, from what I see now is, it was Gloria and Estelle. I didn't know until I sit and talk to Mrs. Dates and feel the people that they was cronies. You know that's like, he and I are hanging out and he come to work the next morning he got no job, but I was sitting in his place. And I didn't understand that. I didn't understand that was the political way of doing things. When you split people and they are trying to do to the community, you get a disservice in the middle of that because as one part they get nothing done, and if you ain't down with the know in here, whether you're black or pink, and it's happening more to the blacks because he can remember one time Boston Road. If you walked from one end up the street to the other everybody speaks. Then they came along with the community boards which really split us, because Al Goodman was a good guy and he was trying to keep the so-called powerful African Americans, someone who could make decisions on the community but when you went to this board meeting Galiber had his people, Gloria had her people, and the Congressman at that time I think was Herena Valentine.

MN: But he was the City Councilman.

LA: They had thing, and they'd come to the meeting to sit because I'd get him according to an issue, him and him, no don't vote on it. But not giving it a thought as for me to tell him. Let him be the decision maker in the seat, because you got me representing you. And that was one part of that that I never, and I still don't understand that today. It's a little better. And they used to get physically, physical fights in there.

MN: So these community board meetings became a place for power struggles within the different factions.

LA: Yes, so then they boiled it down to the point that if Joe wants somebody on the board he would call up the borough president who was Stanley Simon at the time - -

MN: - - Right.

LA: Or Bob Abramson, ok Joe I owe Joe a favor I'll put somebody on. When they came down at the City Council, now supposedly, recommends people and not appoints them and let the borough president himself do the interview, but it's still a hook-up.

MN: Now, what was your impression of Joe Galiber? When did you meet him the first time?

LA: I met Joe Galliber, the first time was in 19 - I met him when I first went to the club, but I wasn't allowed to get close to him.

MN: This is in '75.

LA: Yes, I wasn't allowed to get to him until he found out I could do sound.

MN: Now, who brought you down to the Jackson Club for the first time?

LA: Ed Stevenson Jr.

MN: Ok, so Ed Stevenson the father, this is the Junior you spoke about before?

LA: Yes the Stevenson's, Ed Stevenson Sr. was the second person of color to be elected to Morrisania for the assembly. The first guy is Walter H. Gladman and from Ed Stevenson Jr., that's when he was the leader he was trying to replace him. He must have thought I was younger than I was but he always believed in that young thing and he said Arch I getting ready to go someplace, he wanted around forty and I got support for the thing. To speak on the leadership, the leader does not have a quality that they had when we was younger because the district leaders made a decision as to who to run, not the assembly, not the senate. Now what they do now, I'm gonna run regardless what Kevin,

the leader says so the powers lost because the leaders which I had, had the constitutes [constituents] he wanted to become inspector then you come see me, take it to the Board of Elections and tell who is in charge up there this is my leader. And what that leader was supposed to do was have enough constituents out there that worked on the poll and could watch the polls I understood that later and to get signatures and qualify you. He might do your building, he might do your building, your building in there, because he was inspector for the AED you know, he lobbied those folks at the time to vote for whoever. But that's how I got involved and that changed.

MN: Now, when did you first start to notice, you moved up to the North Bronx in what, '63?

LA: Yes.

MN: But you were working in Morrisania?

LA: Morrisania.

MN: When did you start to notice that the neighborhood was really going down and, you know?

LA: In Morrisania?

MN: Yes.

LA: Well, oh man, I'd say when the burnout started happening.

MN: When did the burnout start happening?

LA: It was in the '70s, '80s.

MN: In the early '70s?

LA: Yes and what that was if you want to go an apartment you had to be burned out and go to the relocation and you do your thing. You remember the time that garbage used to get thrown out the back windows - -

Jim: - - Air mail.

LA: Air mail, it used to be, [Crosstalk] I'm telling you man and matter of fact that book I got on Morrisania you see two of my workers standing in a pile of garbage that was in the backyard.

MN: People used to throw their garbage out their window.

LA: Yes, sir.

Jim: The way the buildings were constructed, some of the people lived in the rear of the building and there was an alley or air shaft between each building so the kitchens were on the air shaft so people would throw their garbage out because the super would never come up and take the garbage out. So if you lived on the fifth floor you had to haul your garbage all the way down to the basement. That wasn't going to happen so they would just throw it out the window.

MN: Now when did that start happening? Was that going on in the '50s?

Jim: From overcrowding in the tenements and it wasn't invented in the Bronx.

[Laughing]. That was probably invented in overcrowded tenements.

LA: It was probably in the '50s.

MN: But when did at a certain point though, where people, you know, - -

Jim: - - It created health problems because you had rats and all kinds of problems.

MN: But I mean, when you were growing up, was this going on?

Jim: Yes, well see where I lived, Sugar Hill he called it, my backyard faced Prospect Ave. and there were tenements along Prospect Ave. And we could actually see people throw garbage out of the window from the tenement in the alley.

MN: So this was going on even in the '50s.

LA & Jim: Yes.

Jim: Whenever the landlord or the super stopped doing his job.

MN: Right.

LA: See, the supers used to pull the garbage. You to set your garbage outside the door and he's supposed to pull it. When they stopped doing that that's when - -

MN: - - But, ok, so this is going on but why does the building get burned in the '70s rather than the '50s?

Jim: The difference in the economy. I think, but I'm not sure about this but I think they instituted caps on rent.

MN: Rent control was started in the '40s.

Jim: But the economy changed and the landlord couldn't afford to, they weren't making any money on their buildings. Ok, so it was easier to have it burned down than it was to try to update it because you could never get enough people into those places to make them pay for themselves. So they would stop providing services, and when people moved out then you began to get either squatters or people moving in. Then eventually the building would mysteriously have a fire and the people would get the message and move out or it would have another fire.

LA: And then the project was a place to go to. You know if you get burned out and relocated you would go to, the Housing Authority, one time was from my understanding was a move up.

MN: Right.

LA: Because of the free rent, elevator building, clean hall, you know the – what's that thing where you put your garbage in?

Jim: They had a garbage chute in the projects.

LA: The garbage incinerator they called it. You could throw water down in there and they would pack it up. I'm just using an example, but I believe that we had a little rough way to go back then in terms of being who we was in the neighborhood. Because as he said earlier, some of the landlords just, they didn't care anymore, I'd rather get rid of the building then try spending the money to fix it up. Then I find out later that took that, it took Koch or somebody to make a point is that you can't sell this building until you settle taxes. See what the thing was then, you owned the building and I'm your brother, your name gets screwed up you could sell it to me and keep the apartment. So now they say anything you leave got to be cleared up even before you give it to me so that's one of the changes that came.

MN: Ok, I'm going to cut this short now because you know when we do the next one we will go from the '70s on and I don't want to, before we close this, Jim do you have any other questions about what we have covered or Kevin? Basically from the '40s and what he said.

Jim: No, I find a lot of what he said I could swear to you because I witnessed it in some of the people in some of the organizations, I wasn't completely familiar with but I know

that they existed. So our neighborhoods were like border to border in terms of being with in the Morrisania community.

MN: What about you, Kevin?

Kevin: I can't really think of anything.

LA: [Laughing] He can't think of anything.

MN: Ok, in conclusion, Arch you know again the next portion is going to be from the '70s to the present. Anything that you didn't say or that I forgot to ask?

LA: No, I think it will probably come up later when I am sitting around thinking about some of the stuff I should have said. But I think if someone is going to view these, that's the history part and I'm glad it's happening. Because if this is aired in some fashion, some of the young folks are here and know a little bit and find out whatever's happening now they came a long ways from some of those of us have been an input, in making the quality of life better, him as a teacher, and I'm quite sure he has tried hard to stabilize the mind of the young folks that he taught that this is your land, you have to make it work.

One of the kids said a thing at the Martin Luther King that, we have to find a means of stopping young kids from standing on the corners. And I think one of the things here is if all of us sitting here would check our garments, none of it is made here. And we have to get--one of the things kids are saying and I think they get it from their parents, is "They don't pay enough." What is enough when you don't have nothing to qualify you for something better? You know when we grew up, the garment district was a place to go to work even if you was going to school at the same time - -

MN: - - In other words, there were places you could get jobs when you were growing up, you know legal jobs.

LA: Oh, sure.

MN: You know you didn't have to , you know, go to the corner to make money. So you could go to the garment district. Were there jobs in the neighborhood also?

LA: Well, I would say yes for some of the stores, but when the mom and pops came in, I understand it, their family came first. Some of the young kids nine and ten year olds can bag in the stores, and they don't have nobody to bag.

Jim: You might have gotten jobs along 3rd Ave. and 149th St., which were commercial strips. You could get jobs in Hearn's or Alexander's or some of the furniture stores that were down along the whole strip. Temporaries, where they would hire high school kids to help, you know, put stuff on shelves and some of the food stores Safeway and A&P were the two main stores in that area. Woolworth's you know, those kinds of places offered opportunities for temporary employment, nothing career.

MN: Right, yes.

Jim: Other than that, you had to go downtown.

LA: Because sometimes you can have young people get a taste of money, then they want more money, then they got to stay in school even work part time just to say this. I don't know if for some record it is important, I have a six year old that's my daughter's, my granddaughter, but she's my mother and my wife. I don't care what goes down, when she comes home her first thing is to do her homework. She had a fit this weekend because somebody told her she was off for the whole week and she said "No." You can come to my house and hide in the closet when she came to the door with her books and homework. And we have to try to instill in our young folks and the number one, I remember this and I tell them you have to go to school and sit down and be able to listen

but you can't be able to listen and sit down if your parents don't teach you to sit down.

And my pops used to always tell me, "Boy, you are going to school, and you don't do nothing but sit down. And if you don't learn nothing in school, you learn how to sit the hell down."

[All Laughing]

LA: Yes, and I think that's why I always stood on the thing, when I wanted to come to New York I knew I had to be like my granddaughter and sit down and get it over with and I have a whole weekend not to worry. Everybody else be struggling in the morning in the house and she already got her clothes on ready to go to school because hers was done and I think if we take our children with the history we were given and you guys are putting together, it will become meaningful to some of the young people. They might want to think about it and take a look at this because some of the places they walk and I always say this, see people on the Concourse don't take all of the places. We weren't even allowed to walk up here. You know and when somebody sees you it's not all of us, it's just that little few that hurts all of us is the way you direct yourself. And on the bus school kids don't have respect. They'll curse and you'll look at them and turn around and they'll tell you to shut your mouth or some other stuff. But I think to me history is very important. To the young folks, to see we have come a long way, but it seems like we have fallen off because parents are not parents. Who learns - my mother and father and I've learned, I had never been a parent but I was raised to tell you how you respect someone. And my thing, you probably hear me say this when somebody don't speak to me in the morning I say "Excuse me my name is good morning." I say, "What did I say

my name was?" They say, "Good morning," I say, "Good morning, thank you"

[Laughing].

Jim: But you know that's cultural, in the South because my family is southern too.

Perfect strangers will come off the street and they will greet every single person they pass by. If they are sitting on the porch rocking in a chair and someone comes up the street they're going to speak to you before they get past your house. And it's a tradition, and I found in the schools there were people from other cultures who would walk by you as if you didn't exist. And I found that offensive and rude.

LA: Yes, me too.

Jim: That they weren't acknowledging my presence.

MN: Now was there a time when Morrisania was a predominantly African American and southern African American community, when you had that hospitality on the street?

Jim: I think that that is how it started. I think the people who moved from Harlem to the Bronx, you know black people, were mostly of southern background. I think the large influx, probably Jamaicans, came later.

MN: Well, they went to Hunts Point.

Jim: They went to Brooklyn and then they eventually moved to the Bronx much later on in large numbers, established their own community.

MN: Right, and there was that kind of hospitality.

LA & Jim: Yes, oh yes.

LA: They say, "Hey good morning my man how are you feeling?" Like now you say something to somebody they drop their head. And I was always told you know I got a thing I look down I don't want to walk over money, that's what my uncle told me. And

when I get to somebody I say good morning and they look up and I'd say oh, man I know how you feel man. That's heartbreaking man, not to speak, not to be courted, or your kids don't have manners. I see old ladies, old people, handicapped people standing in the bus trying to struggle and these kids just scoot on by because they are moving so slow. And I think that something we have to do is bring that respect there. And also, I'll agree, I had a cousin come from down South to come up to live with me, man I watched him change in a month. Yes change, man, I mean he thought he don't know nobody he got slick he was working and he didn't want nobody in the house to know he was working. I had to put him out. I'm not asking you to pay me, I'm saying when you come in with your food don't take it in the room and lock the door. Ask everybody if they want any, you know what I mean. And people do that, the thing that happens in this city the immigrants pick up the bad news more than the good news. And if you learn a language you can easier remember a curse word than you can a nice word.

Kevin: Those are the first words you learn. I have a couple more questions. You say you didn't get political until '70s?

LA: Yes, '75.

Kevin: Did that have something to do with the past Martin Luther King assassination and like the rise of the Panthers?

LA: Oh, no it was always there but to understand the working mechanisms of the political strategies they used to do things and how they overlooked certain people that I would say is deserving that more so. The family thing always had a thing, this country is founded on family so that's a different story, but I'm saying if you've been out there fighting hard for the rights and here you never see them at a rally, ain't doing nothing

with kids, my example is Joe Rivera and his daddy. You know take the boy Ortiz who used to work with me and Arthur Crighton, and he had a community board set up with kids, not in my backyard when he first started. But how you take a guy like that do that's degrading and push them aside because you want to play the family tree with an inexperienced kid. He's going to learn but why not, ok Ortiz, I'll work with you but you got to get my son a deputy's job or chief of staff and that's where we go. And I think it's done in some other circles but why not here in the Bronx, or anywhere?

Kevin: So that's when you began learning the ropes.

LA: Yes, and that's what I learned because I had Ed Stevenson Jr. was in my back and telling me and I became a radical. District leader, I made district leader the year when George Friedman was a county leader because I think he kind of shafted me, and it wasn't the fact that I was trying to take, I didn't want no county leader's job. But I wanted to make all the district leaders and the state committee people let him know that he don't run this, that we run this, because we got the bodies and the constituency. You just can't tell me to come up and vote for Joe Blow and I'm to go back and tell my folks come hear Joe Blow, tell everybody that's got to walk through here has to sign a petition man. Is what they need to know, then they'd feel better. They'd do it for me without even hearing this guy because it had this piece attached to it, and that's that money and that job. But because I'll give you a little example, when I became district leader, I had a thing that any candidate that comes to my club to sell my club, his ability to deliver the services comes with a blank check. Not for me, it's for the club because those people have to eat. They have to get back and forth when you come and you sell a bill of goods and you'd sell it to them in a way that they'd leave you, when the forcer came in front of

my group and he sent [Inaudible – Firebrecks] and I told Firebrecks we want the horse and not his tail. And they got an attitude from there so did Gloria, Joe didn't but everybody else felt that I was right. One dude gave a speech and the ending of his speech I think turned people off. I got some green slips over there will you sign them? If you don't sign them then why are you here? You don't say that to grown adults that's been around. That's why sometimes when the politicians reach out in the woods and grab somebody when there's been folks in this club a long time in line. I didn't want no seat, I didn't mind being district leader and the reason why I didn't mind being district leader is because I had a chance to do two things; to get my little ego off and recruit those kids they had in their hostel and begin our sports program. And that was the only reason. I think I was a look up point at a point, if you get down with Mr. Archible and his football program he going to look out for you. And in our program we developed some hell of kids.

MK: Okay let me make sure this is working. Yeah, okay, the sports program.

Jim: No there was a sports program down around 149th St. and there was basketball, and national sports foundation?

MN: Sports Foundation, Art Williams.

LA: That's my friend he's no longer there. He was tired and I think he got a little sick. That was a program, the Sports Foundation, man, Bob and I go with Roscoe, first went to the Bronx community. And we'd try to enlighten any – the only thing that caught on out of that was volleyball we used to do volleyball. Bob let us up, I mean Roscoe, let us up to do volleyball in the corner. And it the same thing I was saying to Johnny Memphis, him and his boy Richard Nelson, tried a long time. Just to come to school, they didn't

want no money they want to put to a basketball program in there, but that school and I think now that we going to try to get our football program in Toscanini because one of the kids that play baseball for me is a principal at 145, Roberto Hannibal. And his father very influential and we have to, New York, and he a teacher that some all of at school here. At one time there was no athletics lay in none of these schools.

Jim: And the talent was there.

LA: The talent was there.

Jim: The talent was there.

LA: And we still can't get half of these to sniff a board.

Jim: So Eport Lane and Archible they were good players and they excelled almost on the college level. But they lived their whole life before they got to college. And there are many, many, more people who had probably as much talent who never got the chance.

MN: Right.

LA: And a lot of people don't know that Mathis wasn't a teacher, he was from the outside.

Jim: No, he was a physiotherapist.

MN: Okay.

LA: Alright.

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO.]