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Wattly, Wayne

Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewee: Wayne Wattley
Interviewer: Natasha Lightfoot
Date: October 18, 2004

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): Ok, ok. Alright, I can hear everyone. This is Natasha Lightfoot, we are beginning the 78th interview of the Bronx African-American History Project with Wayne Wattley, and also present is Dr. Mark Naison. The date is October 18, 2004, and it is taking place in the office of African-American Studies on the Fordham Campus. Ok Wayne, just to begin, if you could just tell me when and where you were born?

Wayne Wattley (WW): Sure, I was born on January 5, 1974 in St. Kitts in the West Indies.

NL: Could you just give me a little sketch about what your family life was like growing up in St. Kitts?

WW: I would say it was a lot of fun, I remember having a lot of fun growing up. I was raised in a pretty strict home, in terms of discipline and then my parents, the focus was very heavy on education and my mom being a teacher for 22 years, and my dad was a business man, a professional, and they both attended post-high school educational facilities, so there's a very big focus on the education with my sister and I. But I remember also having a lot of fun. My parents were very fun parents and are very fun parents, it was a fun environment.

NL: What kinds of activities or organizations did you and your family participate in while you were growing up in St. Kitts?

WW: Primarily church-related activities; there's a very big focus on the church and I grew up in the church, taking part in certain groups in the church.

NL: What denomination?

WW: Episcopalian.

NL: Ok, alright. And I guess, the one thing I'd love to know about, you know, during your childhood, exactly how, you know, what kind of impressions you might have gotten about life in the states, life in New York in particular, or about the Bronx even; like what did you know about,

you know, just being here while you were living in St. Kitts, did you come and visit, you know, things like that?

WW: Yes, we came to visit relatively often. There was a point, I remember we first went to Barbados because we had to get Green Cards of some nature, and then we came to New York and we were; I know now we were permanent residents at the time; being a kid I just thought we were coming to New York a lot, but we'd come to New York pretty much every summer for about a week or two weeks. My mom's youngest sister had moved to New York many, many years before that, and lived here in New York, so we'd come and visit her. While I was in St. Kitts, before I came to New York for the first time, I remember thinking of New York as this very far grand place because my aunt would come and visit and she would always smell great [Laughter] and bring a lot of things that were fun for my sister and I, and a lot of treats and candies and toys and clothes for my mom and things like that. So I always thought of New York before I actually came as this grand place that I absolutely had to get to.

NL: Right, right. So when exactly did you come here to live permanently?

WW: I came to live permanently in 1989.

NL: Ok, ok. And what prompted the decision for you and your family to come at that time?

WW: Well primarily, I think it was an educational decision. I was in 10th grade, just completed 10th grade at home, my sister had just completed 11th grade, so my parents felt that we were at a place educationally, where we would hit, I guess, sort of the ceiling of our educational journey. At home, there aren't that many educational opportunities, certainly not as many as there are here in New York, and in the United States period. So I think, in talking with them, they kind of felt that the educational opportunities here were so much more vast, that they wanted to move at

the time when we were still relatively new in that process and we could take advantage of the opportunities here.

NL: Were they worried about their own careers, stopping those in St. Kitts and trying to start anew here?

WW: At the time, I don't know if they were at the time. I think hindsight has allowed me to see that they were and the huge sacrifice that they made. My mom left a 22-year career and my dad left something like a 28-year career, and uprooting and left family and friends and both left their parents there to move here. I've always reflected on that, and really appreciated really what it meant for them to leave their parents and their brothers and sisters and their home that they built together and come here so that my sister and I can make something of ourselves. At the time, I don't think I really appreciated it; as I got older and matured and understood really what it involved I think I've come to appreciate it more.

NL: So now, what were your very first impressions when you were here permanently of what life was like and what the people were like in the Bronx?

WW: Well initially, when we first moved, I think it was very much a fantasy come true type of fairy land experience for me. We moved in the summer, and so school was out, so all I did all the time was play with my younger cousins, and go shopping a lot. My parents were looking for work - - I was 15 at the time so I was old enough to understand they had to find jobs, but at the same time I didn't have a lot of responsibility in terms of the home, having to put the meal on the table, so for me it was fun.

Mark Naison (MN): What neighborhood did you move to?

WW: We actually moved to, I guess it's considered the South Bronx; it's between Castle Hill and Soundveiw here in the Bronx.

NL: Did you like the neighborhood where you were living?

WW: Yes, I did. I felt happy, I felt safe. I ended up going to high school right down the block, and that I guess - -

NL: Where did you go to high school?

WW: I went to high school at Adlai E. Stevenson High School, which is on Lafayette Avenue in the Bronx which was, I think, within walking distance of where I lived. I think once I started high school, that sort of changed my perspective of the neighborhood and maybe even of the Bronx.

NL: Tell me a little bit - - if you could elaborate a little bit more on what that - - on how your opinions changed being in Stevenson.

WW: Well I think the fantasy fairly left, [Laughter] the perspectives came to an abrupt and harsh end. Stevenson was a very interesting high school. I went to Stevenson between 1989 and 1991 and at that point it serviced a number of varied areas in the Bronx. It would service students from Castlehill, from Hunt's Point, from Monroe, from Co-op City sometimes, from Lafayette, from Soundveiw; and at that point, these were all rival areas, so for a young student coming from the Caribbean, coming from an educational system where your teachers can discipline you, the headmaster can discipline you, to a high school of so many different types of groups of students where, at least to me, everything was just half-hazard and there was no type of structure in terms of disciplining the students; it was a very rude awakening for me. And I think it really changed my perspective on the way I was.

NL: So you started to feel a little bit less safe, you think, in terms of walking around the neighborhood or being in the high school?

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WW: Definitely. I think it definitely shook the feeling of stability I had and security in a number of personal experiences. But just even from observation because there are so many rival areas in that one school which, you know, - -

NL: And did you know what the source was of the rivalries between these different areas?

WW: I think it's just because they were from different areas. I think just generally what was happening in the Bronx at that time, the mindset of a lot of young people was if you're from this area, then you have to rep this area and if you're not from this area, then you're just naturally going to clash because you're from different areas and to put all of that in one high school - - this four-story high school - - it was a very different environment from - - just four blocks away it was a private house or happy-go-lucky.

MN: Now this was a time when I think crack was a pretty powerful force on the streets of New York City. How aware were you of drugs and drug-related violence and rivalries in that period; was that a factor also?

WW: Not so much for me. I think maybe one of the reasons I wasn't too aware of that part is because I got involved in athletics, I played soccer for my high school and I didn't really get to see that portion. Not so much for me - - I mean, I knew it was happening maybe peripherally, but it wasn't direct, it didn't hit home for me at all.

MN: Right. The other question I would ask would be about hip-hop: was hip-hop something that had a very different impact on the Bronx than it did in St. Kitts in terms of the consciousness of young people?

WW: Oh definitely, definitely. One, because it's not as prevalent in St. Kitts, I mean, the primary sources of music, the primary types of music are Soca, Calypso, Reggae, and, you know, - - back when I moved, hip-hop wasn't as much as strong an influence there as it is now. Now

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there's a lot of hip-hop influences, MTV, that type of thing, but when I moved it wasn't so prevalent there in the Caribbean. And for me coming here, there was almost a period of having to play catch up because I became friends with a number of people including Natasha, and they knew that hip-hop and they knew artists and they knew things - - so it was a period of this was new to me, what was good, what wasn't good, what was common, but at home it wasn't so prevalent in St. Kitts.

NL: Did you feel like when you were in high school there was a pressure to assimilate to an American or an African-American way of life, or any other cultural signifier of some sort?

WW: Definitely, definitely. From just the high school itself, there was definitely a lot of pressure to assimilate in terms of the way you dress - -

NL: What were you wearing?

WW: Well, I think I was shaped - - what I was wearing was very much initially shaped by my aunt who was dressing two boys that were much younger than me, so they were in a lot of Bugle Boys and I was in high school in Bugle Boys and everybody else would be wearing Cross-Colors at that time - - and I'm in Bugle Boys and, you know, you didn't quite fit in. There was a lot of pressure to fit in, you had to have fresh sneakers, or you had to have the new jeans and the Champion sweatshirts at that time, and the Chucker Timberlands, so there was definitely a lot of pressure to assimilate, more so in terms of the dress and in terms of understanding the music and doing things socially, hanging out, cutting class, that type of thing.

NL: Where did you hang out?

WW: Well, - - [Laughter]

NL: When you weren't cutting class? [Laughter]

WW: This is being recorded? [Laughter]

NL: Yes it is. [Laughter]

WW: We went to things called Hooky Parties, you'd go to somebody's house whose parents were at work and you'd hang out there, or hang out at the corner and hopefully your teacher doesn't see you or, you know, got to Hunt's Point or something and hang around, maybe go to one of the catholic schools and hang out.

NL: And wait for the girls?

WW: And wait for the girls. [Laughter]

NL: I see. So at this point, you felt as though you were having some difficulties fitting in, but not too many?

WW: Not too many. I think I definitely assimilated faster than, if I could use my sister as an example, she was older. I felt she had a tougher time here because she wasn't exposed to the things I was exposed to. My sister had already completed high school, so when she came here she tried to get into college immediately, she didn't go back to high school.

NL: Ok, take care Dr. Naison. So carry on. [MN EXITS INTERVIEW]

WW: Definitely I felt it was easier for me just because of the environment I was in, I was kind of thrown into an environment where you had to assimilate fast or you would kind of stand out. It wasn't too difficult for me to assimilate.

NL: And what kinds of activities or organizations were you a part of in the Bronx that helped you to retain a sense of identity from a [Inaudible] identity or some sort of Caribbean identity because I'm sure there are definitely certain things you might have done that would have made you assimilate. What made you feel like you were holding on to your values?

WW: Well, I think primarily it would be the church I attended. The church that I attended, ST. Andrew's Episcopal in Castle Hill in the Bronx, that was the church that my aunt and my uncle

and my younger cousins were members of and naturally we went to that church. I would say maybe 90%, above 90% of people of Caribbean descent and that definitely helped me retain a sense of Caribbean identity, being around people from the Caribbean, naturally the home environment - - my folks, I mean my aunt and uncle also being from St. Kitts that definitely helped maintain a sense of Caribbean identity and in Stevenson High School, you know, playing soccer, the majority of the people on the soccer team were of Caribbean descent and so naturally you rotate towards each other, being on the same team, and that also helped me retain that identity.

NL: Talk a little bit more about your involvement in St. Andrew's; why did you, what kinds of groups did you involve yourself with and how did that shape your experience while getting settled in the Bronx?

WW: At St. Andrew's I became involved in the youth group and the people who were part of the youth group at that time, I always say to Ms. Grant, who was the youth group advisor, I always said to her we had the best youth group for the reason that when I became a part of the youth group, everybody was very accepted, and there were people in the group whose parents were from Antigua, there were people in the group who were Caribbean themselves, so I felt perfectly natural. I didn't feel like I had to make an effort to be in this group. I felt like a part of this group. And we did a lot of really fun things which exposed me to things outside of New York City early on, and that was also, it made being a part of the group easier because it was fun. We'd go to the movies, we'd hang out, we'd travel to different states every summer - - so that made the group that much more interesting and fun for me that we were doing these types of things and there were people in the group that I could really identify with. So I would definitely say the youth group was "the group".

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NL: Do you feel as though your experience with St. Andrew's or the youth group, kind of made your story a little bit different from most people, like, the average people your age who went to Stevenson with you, how did you see yourself as different from them, maybe because of your affiliation?

WW: I think there is a difference; I'm not quite sure how to articulate it. For me, it was I grew up in the church and this was a church-based group, so it was natural to be a part of it. At the time, with the exception of maybe one or two people I went to high school with that happened to come to the same church, that the majority of people I was hanging out with from high school, wasn't necessarily church-going. So as opposed to being part of a church-based group, they were maybe doing other things; hanging out on the street, being parts of other groups that weren't necessarily focused and having the same type of safe fun and monitored fun, and those types of things that don't necessarily endanger you. So I felt like that was definitely the key difference that I saw.

NL: In the end, where did you end up going to college?

WW: From Stevenson, I went to New York University.

NL: And what was your experience like at NYU?

WW: NYU was a very interesting experience. At the time I went to NYU - - well, it's located at Greenwich Village, and at that time I went to NYU which was 1991-1995, Greenwich Village was, I guess, sort of the "Mecca", at least for the east coast, of homosexuals, and there were a lot of things going on at Greenwich Village at that time. There were skin head groups that were kind of roaming around, there was, I guess, this phenomenon called Gay Bashing, which was really prevalent in Greenwich Village at the time. I think people who were homosexual in part of that community were retaliating at that time and then there was this movement of Straight Bashing,

so there were a number of experiences. I always say that I had an education inside the classroom and outside the classroom when I went to NYU - - it was a very, very interesting experience.

NL: How did the people at NYU receive you as a commuter student, someone from the Bronx, and also somebody from St. Kitts too?

WW: For the most part, very well; I felt welcomed. Of course, there were exceptions, there were instances where you ran into a particular person there's certain prejudices or preconceived notions of not only being a commuter student, but being a black male, and - -

NL: What were those preconceived notions?

WW: Well, I mean I would get comments like you're here on scholarship; your family can't necessarily afford to send you to this school, or there was one particular incidence that I remember where I was being paired off with students and this particular student told the professor that he couldn't work with people of my kind and that was sort of a shock to me for the reason that I came from a community where racism didn't really exist.

NL: What community are you talking about?

WW: In St. Kitts. And even here in the Bronx, I was here - - I did two years in high school and then I went to college, and for that two years, I wasn't really exposed to racism; I was exposed to other things, but not necessarily someone judging you based on the color of your skin. And that happened at NYU in a number of instances, but I have a strong enough family background where I can talk to my family and I was made to understand that those are just particular people, you just deal with those particular people as you will. Also, I was relatively young when I went to NYU, I was 17 and again, having only been in the country permanently for 2 years, that was also a - - it was a very big difference from Stevenson. I had to do a lot of maturing, I had to understand that I'm not in a high school environment which is a fashion show and even though I

got my work done, it came relatively easy for me, I was not really - - at college, NYU where it was tough, it was rigorous, and I was amongst people who some of them graduated top in their respective schools, so it was definitely a transition.

NL: While you were living in the Bronx, what was your understanding of the people who are around you, the different types of people; how did you categorize them, how did you understand them?

WW: Well, just looking at where I lived, we had, I guess, black Americans, we had Spanish people, we had people of Caribbean descent, and I remember in St. Andrew's church we had this one elderly white couple and I think either their daughter or their granddaughter who was also white, came to church and for me, it was just people. Even in the community, I remember hanging out, there's a guy who still lives on the block Caesar Place named Ralphie-he's Spanish, I remember hanging out with Ralphie. Running around with him, playing basketball, football, whatever with these three brothers Manny, Jay, and I forgot the third brother's name, but they were Spanish too. I mean, we would all just kind of hang together, everybody just clicked. I don't know if it was the time, or we all were young so if we were all just hanging out, but there were definitely different groups of people around me but I didn't necessarily classify them as different groups at the time.

NL: Right, so you didn't feel as if though there was any kind of difference between you and say somebody who was African-American or somebody who was Puerto Rican, or - -

WW: None, none.

NL: Ok, ok. So I guess now I have a question about your career choices - -

WW: Sure.

NL: - - because after NYU you decided to pursue law school and become an attorney. What prompted that decision for you?

WW: Actually, that decision was made way before NYU. I think from as far back as I can remember having conscious thought, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer or a pirate. [Laughter] And I guess it may sound silly, but there was a point in my life, it was between the age of 10 and 15, I don't remember at what particular age, when I saw the reason just for myself, that I'd better go the lawyer route, because I figured lawyers don't crash - - that was my rationalization.

[Laughter] So I said well, that's probably the safer career choice and I remember growing up and looking at Perry Mason and my parents were big Perry Mason fans, and I remember he just looked so debonair, and questioning people in the court room, and I grew up looking at Matlock and those types of shows, and they were doing something that I wanted to do. And if you speak to my parents, they'll tell you I've always, I guess, had the gift of gab as my mom would put it, and I've always questioned things and why does it have to be this way, or why can't we do it this way, and it just, it felt like for me, something that I always wanted to do and I knew I was going to do it, I knew I was going to go to law school as soon as I graduated from college.

NL: And where did you attend law school?

WW: I went to New York Law School.

NL: And how was that experience for you?

WW: Law school was a lot of fun. Law school is a very, very, competitive environment; it's a very tough three years of four years, however long you take to go to law school. But - -

NL: What makes you think it's fun? [Laughs]

WW: I had a lot of fun for the reason that the work itself was tough, but I knew it was going to be tough and I knew that this is what I wanted to do, so I had to get through this work. I had to

get through these three years in order to be an attorney, so I was going to do it no matter what obstacle was put in my way or came in my way, but the reason I said it was fun was because at least from my experience, I made sure that I took the time to get the work done, but also meet interesting people, meet different people, cultivate what has become life-long friendships, and just really have a good experience in law school. And the reason why I consciously did that is because I didn't really do that in college. At NYU I sort of went to class and came home, I was a commuter student, for my last two years I was working in a law firm, so I didn't really take the time to really do a lot of things socially with other NYU students. When I got to law school, it may seem strange, it seems that you should really do that in college, but I really consciously made the decision that I'm going to not only enjoy the school academically, but make some friends and do some social things as well.

NL: Ok, that sounds like fun. So now, tell me a little bit about your practice; exactly what do you specialize in as an attorney now? And what made this decision happen?

WW: Well, I 'm part of a two-man firm, and - -

NL: Where is the firm located?

WW: The firm is located here in the Bronx. We have one office on the Grand Concourse directly across from Supreme Court, and last January, we opened up a second office on East Tremont Avenue.

NL: And what's the name of your firm?

WW: It's the Law Offices of Daniel Chavez. And primarily, we are a civil litigation firm, then my specialty really is litigation. We trial council to about five firms, we try a lot of their cases, and I do a lot of personal injury, I do a lot of medical malpractice, lead paint, slips and falls; basically, if you get hurt for any reason, we can help you. Most recently since we opened the

second office, we sort of expanded our practice and are now doing uncontested divorces, bankruptcies, name changes, and the reasons for that is we're the only law office I think in that community, so whatever the community needs, we try to service that need.

NL: And tell me about that community, what exactly is in that community, what type of people do you interact with?

WW: Well it's primarily, I think, Latino community and we get, we have what's called a storefront office, you can just walk right in. And we get a lot of walk-in traffic, and primarily, they're Spanish. And actually, our legal assistant secretary speaks Spanish because neither Danny nor I converse very well in Spanish and we got a lot of Spanish walk-in clients. But the community itself, I guess, is the West Farms community - - it's on East Tremont Avenue, maybe four blocks west of West Farms, right off Crotona, and it's right in front of a bus stop. So we get a lot of people getting off the bus who see the sign, they come in and ask a number of question, but primarily, the walk-in traffic are Spanish.

NL: Exactly what do you see as the needs of that community, given that you've been functioning in this capacity for a while, how do you feel that community could use improving or what kind of services could yours or other types of institutions bring?

WW: Well, I think having a law office in the community helps for the reason that we really get a lot of people coming in and asking questions just seeking information the landlord/tenant issues, or somebody may have gotten hurt and they're not sure what to do; so I think just in terms of being a source of information for the people in the community, we get people coming in asking us about other things that have nothing to do with the law, and maybe sometimes I can get on the internet or make a phone call to maybe direct them to the Bronx Borough President's Office if they need help with something having to do with the community, so we also service sort of a

[Inaudible] I guess or a source of information for the people in the community when they need other things besides legal help. I think I would like to see maybe more educational-type based services in the community, maybe a library - -

NL: There's no library at all?

WW: I haven't seen one. I'm sure maybe - - I know Dodge High School is not too far, Department of Motor Vehicles is not too far, there's I think it's IS4 or JS4 is down the block from East Tremont, but I haven't seen a public library anywhere close. There's a Chase Manhattan Bank, and a post office right before the [Inaudible] but I actually haven't seen a library, so I would like to see there be a library somewhere in that community. Maybe the type of business, not necessarily a Starbuck's, but the type of business where you can go and sort of relax and read and you know, maybe have a cup of coffee, you don't necessarily have to be on the street, you can go and sit down and read your newspaper and have a cup of coffee and maybe talk with your neighbors, that type of thing.

NL: Do you feel as though this neighborhood that you work in, or even the neighborhood that you live in, in the Bronx now, do you feel as though there's a lot of community sentiment where people talk with their neighbors, where people get to know each other?

WW: I don't really know if I really have the pulse of the community that I work in, I mean just from observation, because pretty much I come and go, but just from observation, it seems like people are neighborly, it seems like they talk, but again, that's just from observation. The community that I live in, I think that has deteriorated. I think it was more neighborly before.

NL: Right, when you first got here.

WW: When I first - - I would say within the last six, seven, or eight years it has really changed.

NL: Why would you say - - what would think would be the reasons for that?

WW: Well, I think a lot of people have moved, I think at least a lot of the original people who lived on the block when I came onto the block, they've sold their homes, they've moved on to other states.

NL: Where have they moved to?

WW: Some people have moved to Atlanta, some people have moved to Florida - - actually, quite a number of people have moved to Florida - - and I sort of attribute that to, not necessarily things that are going on in the community, but things that are going on maybe more in the borough or even in the state, with the rising costs of owning a home, buying a home, I mean New York is a very expensive place to live and I think people are opting - - I've owned my home for ten, fifteen years, I can opt to go to another environment that's less stressful and less fast. So I wouldn't necessarily think that's a community thing, I think that's beyond the community itself.

NL: Do you see any other changes in your community since you moved here?

WW: There's been a lot of development in the community, a lot of stores have gone up, a lot of commercial places have been built.

NL: So Castlehill is becoming a lot more savvy, you feel like?

WW: Not necessarily Castle - - more like Whiteplains. There's Whiteplains Road - - a lot of businesses have gone up. But even on Castlehill and some of the neighboring communities, like if you go down Story Avenue, if you go down Castle, they've put up a lot of homes, so we've had a huge influx of people into the community. And I don't know how this has really affected the stores, it hasn't really affected my block too much, I don't really see that much more traffic - - except for parking on the block is horrible now. Before you could give away parking spaces, now parking on the block is really horrible but I don't know if that's because more people are on the block or on the surrounding areas.

NL: Do you feel like the people coming into the community - - who are those people? Do you feel like you're even connecting with them?

WW: Well, quite honestly I haven't really made an effort. Part of it is just because the things I'm involved in - - I'm home sort of to lay my head and then I'm gone again. I haven't really gotten involved in the community board, I haven't done a lot of community-based things that I could get involved in, but just listening to statistics and hearing the statistics and census reports and things like that, the majority of people coming to the community are Latino. So we've definitely had a huge influx. It's interesting, I'm on the vestry of my church and we just had a conversation yesterday about needing to reach out to these new communities so to speak, within our community, and really getting somebody in our church who can minister to those communities. And we were talking about needing a Spanish speaker to really reach out to this influx of residents in the community and sort of try to bring them into the church and to our community activities.

NL: What are your thoughts about the kind of - - over the course of your life here, what mistaken assumptions people who are here have made about Caribbean people?

WW: I think one of the biggest mistaken assumptions at least that I've heard and I've been subject to is that Caribbean people are moving here to take over from African Americans that are here. And that definitely is not true, it's completely inaccurate. I think that the majority of Caribbean people who come here are really seeking opportunity for themselves and for their children and I think that for the most part, they work very hard to establish themselves and make it a little easier for their children and their children's' children. And I haven't seen or I haven't heard of anybody of Caribbean descent coming here replacing anybody - - any African

Americans that are here. So I think that's the one big mistaken assumption that's often times made.

NL: What kind of assumptions did you have about African Americans in the Bronx when you came here and how have you cleared those up, if you have?

WW: Well, I think given the age that I was when I came, I think one of the things that I really assumed and I've seen that is not necessarily true is I've always thought that African Americans would be more affluent or at least have more upward mobility. Because I saw New York as this great place of opportunity and a great place to do something and I've tried to take advantage of the opportunities, and I always thought that everybody would have that mindset; there's so much that you can accomplish and just so much that you can get, that everybody would have that mindset about them. And I haven't necessarily seen that to be true. And I think there's also an assumption, not necessarily on my part, but I've heard it and I think it's more from all the people of Caribbean descent, that African Americans are lazy, and they don't come to work on time, and that may be based on experiences, it hasn't been my experience.

NL: The other thing I wanted to ask you too was about any interactions with other people who are not from the Bronx, the kind of assumptions that they make about the Bronx that you feel in your - - that you've worked on in clearing up?

WW: Well, I think people are naturally going to think that the borough that they reside in is the best borough. I mean I'm around people now who have been life-long Brooklyn residents, or life-long Queens residents, and the assumptions about the Bronx are not necessarily malicious; it's difficult to navigate, Bronx people don't know the city, they don't leave the Bronx, it's not as much fun, they're not as much social, there's not as much history in the Bronx as in other boroughs, but I think the assumptions are not malicious, they're just sort of in just or to chide

each other. But for the most part, I think maybe one big assumption, I find more with Brooklyn residents is that the Bronx is soft [Laughter] - - you know Brooklyn is kind of a tougher borough. I don't know if that's true or not [Laughter].

NL: I wanted to talk a little bit about the other ways you might have accessed the Caribbean community that live here. Besides the Andrews, are there any other ways in which you managed to access people from St. Kitts, people from just any other island?

WW: Yes. When I was at NYU when I did have time, I was part of the Caribbean Students Association and that introduced me to a lot of people from Caribbean descent. Naturally, going to law school, there aren't too many African-Americans; there aren't too many black people in law school when I went. And I think naturally, you sort of rotate and gravitate towards each other and then in addition, if you find somebody who is not only black but from the Caribbean, you have a natural bond, that pre-existent bond. Just going to school I found being part of certain clubs in addition, I'm part of a fraternal organization and there are people of Caribbean descent in the fraternity and we sort of gravitate together and talk to other people from different states, or even here in New York from different chapters who are of Caribbean descent.

NL: What fraternity are you a part of?

WW: Omega Si Phi Fraternity Cooperated.

NL: I wanted to ask you a little bit about what you see as your future plans for yourself; where you would like to be in 10, 20 years?

WW: Well, in ten years I guess I would like to be retired from the practice of law and I would like to be married with a family.

NL: Where would you like to be living? Would you still want to be in the Bronx?

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WW: I'm not sure. I think part of that decision is where my significant other would want to live and I know in conversations with her that is not necessarily the Bronx. I think - - I was blessed enough to have a home in the Bronx now and I think I will always keep that home.

NL: Why is that?

WW: Well, because I love the Bronx and I feel a certain allegiance to the Bronx. This is the first and only community that I ever lived in since I permanently moved to New York, so for all intents and purpose, I consider myself from the Bronx, I've been here in the Bronx as long as I've been home in St. Kitts. So, for all intents and purposes, I'm from the Bronx; I rep the Bronx, I say I'm from the Boogie or whatever it is. So I think I will always see the Bronx as my home even if I live somewhere else in Westchester or New Jersey or what have you, I will always see the Bronx as my home.

NL: Sounds cool. Just a last point, just a last question - - it's kind of off the track - - but I wanted to go back to the question of music. Because Dr. Naison brought it up earlier and hip-hop music is something that was pretty integral to all of us when we were growing up, and I was just wondering what were the artists that were really major to you when you first became exposed to hip-hop in the late 80's and early 90's; who were your favorites?

WW: [Laughs] Wow. I remember listening to NWA, I remember listening to Rae Kwon, I remember listening to KRS-1 who's from the Bronx, and he was really big for me because he was from the Bronx. He was talking about the Bronx. I remember listening to L.L. Cool J, not too tough because he was from Queens and I was from the Bronx so - - [Laughter] I didn't really pay much attention to him, but I remember hearing him on the radio. I remember listening to - - I remember listening to - who else was around? Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth I remember listening to them. It was pretty much whatever my friends were listening to, I was listening to. They knew

who was hot and who was good and who wasn't, and I would pretty much listen to them. Plus, I was looking at Video Music Box and Ralph McDaniel, so if it was on Video Music Box then I was paying attention to it.

NL: Did you go to a lot of parties that played a lot of hip-hop music? Where did you go?

WW: I went to a few - - I wouldn't say I went to a lot, but I would pretend - - I would tell my parents I was at my friend Keenan's house and we would sneak off to a club in Hunt's Point.

NL: What was the name of the club?

WW: I don't remember the name - - it was like a hole in the wall, it wasn't too safe [Laughter].

But I do remember one time, we went to the California Club in Manhattan, it was in 50 - something Street and Red Alert was DJing and Vogue was hot back then and Vogue was playing - - that was a very big experience for me. I think that was my first club here in New York, the California Club and Red Alert was DJing - - so that always stands out as a really fun experience.

NL: Besides that hole in the wall in Hunt's Point, what other clubs did you go to in the Bronx?

WW: Well, there was a club in East Tremont whose name I don't remember right now.

NL: Was it The Fever?

WW: It might have been The Fever. I went there with my best friend Greg, I went there with him one night, and Susana and a bunch of other friends we have; I went there with them and that was a lot of fun. And then you know, just house parties. My friend Keenan who I hung out with in high school a lot, he knew - - he was pretty popular so he knew about a lot of house parties, so I hit up a couple of house parties with him. And also my sister got into Bronx Community College so I went to a lot of parties at her school, and those were fun - - a lot of Caribbean parties to go to, a lot of other parties to go to, a lot of fun too.

NL: And what DJs were popular at the time?

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WW: Oh man. Kid Kapri, he was “the man” at the time - - I still have some Kid Kapri tapes

[Laughs] I’m not letting go of those. One of my younger cousins tried to take them out of my car a couple of months ago and I almost had to give him the business. [Laughter] But Kid Kapri was definitely the hot man at the time. Red Alert of course was hot, nobody else really mattered.

There was a local DJ by the name of Triple C who did some of the parties at Stevenson High School. He was up and coming, I don’t what happened to him, I think he kind of peded out. But Kid Kapri and Red-Alert; those were the two DJs to listen to.

NL: So I guess for now, I don’t know if there’s any other points in life that you feel like you might have wanted to talk about - - other points of your life in the Bronx that might have wanted to come out that haven’t in the course of the interview.

WW: Not necessarily, I think we covered - -

NL: So for now you feel like you wouldn’t want to live anywhere else?

WW: Well, I’m pretty happy now.

NL: You wouldn’t have wanted to have done it differently?

WW: No, definitely. I mean I don’t know - - maybe it’s because this was just my experience I don’t know if I’d have had a different if maybe my aunt lived in Brooklyn or Queens, or somewhere else. But in retrospect, I’m pretty happy we moved to the Bronx and I met the people I met and I’ve developed friendships that have lasted for 15 years. My best friend who you happen to know - -

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

NL: I have another question about your visit, if you’ve ever visited Stevenson High School since you graduated, and what exactly has taken place?

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WW: Yeah, I—the first Monday of every May is Law day, and as part of the—I'm part of the Bronx Bar Association. And what the association does is the lawyers that are part of the association, the judges that are part of the association, we visit different schools; different high schools, different junior high schools. You know, talk to the kids that attend the school and sort of encourage them to just finish school period and go on to college, and maybe there may be some people in the crowd who want to go on to law school so we try to talk to them. But I had an opportunity last year, last May, to go back to Stevenson High School where I graduated from in '91. And at the time I was going to Stevenson they had a law program which was pretty much just a class, and you were part of the class for I think a year as opposed to one semester. And when I went back to visit last year they had expanded that one class to an entire academy, and I thought it was really fascinating because you actually had to apply to this academy and once you got into the academy the curriculum was very heavily based in law things, in law studies, and law classes, and I thought it was really a great way to prepare kids who are truly interested in maybe going on developing a career either in justice or law, or those types of career. It was really a nice program for them. The gentleman who was running the program at the time we went back to visit was Mr. Castro. He was my history teacher when I was in Stevenson, and he was now in charge of the program, and you know he saw me; I spoke, I gave a little speech about the types of things I do and having graduated from Stevenson and going to bachelor's and all that good stuff. And you know he asked me to come back and help with the moot court program because I'm a trial lawyer. He asked me to come back and help with, helping the kids out in preparing for the moot court competition and things like that. I went back for maybe about 4 months and then just schedule, my scheduling couldn't permit me to get there. I was going to every Thursday at about 4 o'clock or so, and stay for a couple of hours and just with trials and things of that nature

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I couldn't keep it up every Thursday. So that sort of, died a natural death, but I'm very excited about the things that are happening at Stevenson in terms of the law academy.

NL: And you feel like there are some improvement than in the quality of education at Stevenson since you've left?

WW: Oh definitely, definitely, at least when it comes to that program. I've also heard that they're now, somebody I guess got smart in administration and stopped sending kids from so many different areas to this one school. So I think just in terms of –

NL: In the neighborhood rival to—

WW: Exactly, I think just in terms of the environment itself the school has gotten better and I think—it seems like the curriculum itself has gotten better for the students. You know, I'm really excited about that.

NL: Well, Thank you so much for volunteering all your, you know, information, it's really been a fascinating story, and you know, we'll definitely be in touch about other ways you can help out with the project.

WW: My pleasure

NL: Alright, take care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]