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Brifu, Karen

Brifu, Karen. Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison and Dr. Jane Edward

Interviewee: Karen Brifu

Date: January 31, 2009

Mark Naison (MN): Hello. Today is January 31, 2009, and we are here today doing an interview for the African immigration component of the Bronx African American History Project. We are here interviewing Karen Brifu, a graduate of Fordham University, who grew up in the Bronx and now works for the Federal Reserve Bank. Conducting the interview today will be Dr. Jane Kani Edward, the director of African immigration research, Dr. Bernard Hayford, a research consultant with our project, and Dawn Russell, our videographer and documentary filmmaker. And I am Dr. Mark Naison.

Karen, could you spell your name and give us your date of birth?

Karen Brifu (KB): Ok. My name is Karen Brifu, K-A-R-E-N, last name, B-R-I-F-U, and my date of birth is January 12, 1986.

MN: Ok Karen, could you tell us a little bit about your family and how they came to the Bronx?

KB: So, basically, my father came first. We're from Ghana. He's from Accra. And he grew up very, smart intelligent boy, and he always had aspirations of doing more for himself and his family. So his big thing was he wanted to come to school in America. And he tried his hardest. He actually was accepted to Yale, but unfortunately his uncle really wanted him to stay home and work for the family because the family had a huge business. So he ended up staying home.

MN: And what was that business?

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KB: We owned a really big cigarette company called 555. I don't know if—yes. So he actually worked on the business side of that. And he eventually found a way here, which was—his motivation was my mom. He met my mom, married her, and she really wanted to come over. So he came over first and then she followed soon, so.

Jane Kani Edward (JKE): So when was that?

KB: Honestly, I can't remember. [Laughs.] A long time ago.

MN: Before you were born, though?

KB: Way before I was born. [Laughs.]

MN: Now how many siblings do you have?

KB: I have one. An older brother.

MN: An older brother. And how much older is he?

KB: He's four years older than me.

MN: He's four years older. Was—now you were born in New York City?

KB: Yes.

MN: And was he born in New York City as well?

KB: No, he was actually born in New Jersey.

MN: Oh, OK. Now what sort of work did your father get when he came here?

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KB: First when he came here—from the stories that's he's told me brother and I—first he actually had a job as a janitor at a hospital, I think. So that's what he did for a really long time. From what I can remember when I was a young child, he actually did that, and he also worked as a—it's called a coding—in a company where he's the person between the insurance company and the hospital. So he did that for a while.

MN: So he was working two full-time jobs.

KB: He was working two full-time jobs and he would—I think I saw him maybe for an hour every day. So he would leave home at like 4'o clock in the morning, he would get home at 3, which would be time that my brother and I would be home from school, stay home for an hour, because at 4 he had to leave for a second job. And he would be home by 11. And that time my brother and I would be sleeping. So I never really had a chance to spend a lot of time with my father when I was very young.

MN: Now did your father have relatives or friends here who helped him find a job and an apartment?

KB: Yes. He—fortunately for him, I think he has five older brothers—or five brothers, I should say, not older. I think two of them were already here and settled. So when he first first came here, he lived with one of his brothers, an older brother. And when I was born, I was actually living with them.

MN: Now where was their apartment located?

KB: In Riverdale, Manhattan.

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MN: In Riverdale, OK. Now is—did your mother have friends in the United States or she just wanted to go because, you know, of what it represented?

KB: Basically of what it represented. She knew that she would have an opportunity to, you know, provide for her family back home if she came here. Get a job and support a family back home—that's basically the theme of, you know—

MN: Right. So when people in your family or cohort moved to the United States, the expectation is that they will send money back.

KB: Exactly, yes.

MN: Now what religion did your family practice?

KB: My father is very Roman Catholic. Very strict Roman Catholic. My mom is actually Methodist, so.

MN: And were you brought up in one particular religion?

KB: I was not. I guess it was never decided what would be, you know, the religion for the family, so I've been to both churches. Never very strict in, you know, keeping my religious ties to any one religion.

MN: Now before, you know, the formal interview, you mentioned that your first time going back to Ghana was when you were one years old?

KB: Yes.

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MN: So your—did your family think it was important that you and your brother maintain the connection with the family in Ghana?

KB: Definitely. Even before then I knew of my family in Ghana. Like I had pictures, I knew people by name. It was very important for them to make sure that we knew that we had family back home. And I think that also goes in with theme of sort of supporting your family back home—realizing that you are here, you may not see, you know, your family, but you do have a family that you should always go back to and support back home.

MN: What languages were spoken in your household?

KB: English and Twi, which is one of the languages of Ghana.

MN: And in what context—I'm not going to pronounce it—would you speak Twi? Like you're sitting at the dinner table, would you be speaking English or Twi?

KB: When we were younger, it was Twi. Like full-blown, no one ever spoke English in our house. But now that I'm older, it's a mix of both.

MN: Now was this a matter of choice or were they more comfortable in that language than in English?

KB: It was choice. My parents actually were very fluent in English. My mom worked—when she was in Ghana, she worked in a museum, one of the National museums. So she was always in contact with tourists, so she new a lot of English. And my Dad went to like all these like boarding schools where they, you know, English was very—

MN: So this was a cultural choice—

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KB: It was a cultural choice.

MN: —to make sure you had that Ghanaian tradition.

KB: Right, right.

MN: Now where you were living, what was the neighborhood you grew up in?

KB: I grew up in a neighborhood around here, actually. A couple of minutes around here.

So—

MN: What street was this?

KB: Grand Concourse.

MN: Grand Concourse and—?

KB: Grand Concourse and 167 Street.

MN: OK, right near the Bronx museum.

KB: Yes.

MN: And were there other Ghanaian families in the neighborhood when you were living there?

KB: Oh yes. [Laughter] A lot. [Laughs.]

MN: Really? So this is even when you were like 5, 10 years old—

KB: Yes.

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MN: —There was a large Ghanaian population in that area.

KB: And they're—it's growing.

MN: Yes, we—

KB: Everyday. [Laughs]

MN: Right. Now describe the building your family lived in.

KB: Ok, so it's a very old building. It was actually a Jewish building. So it's six floors, it's like—you know, plain vanilla white building, but the apartments are very, very big.

MN: Ah, those Grand Concourse with the sunken living rooms—

KB: The sunken living rooms, yes. Yes.

MN: So how big was the apartment that you grew up in?

KB: Actually the apartment—when we moved out from my uncle's house, we actually lived in a studio for a while because that was the only available apartment. So my father finally found an apartment on the first floor—which was an office—and they turned it into an apartment because I guess the demand of people coming in—and we took it. So I've been there ever since.

MN: So it's the same apartment?

KB: The same apartment.

MN: And how many rooms?

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KB: It's one room, but it's big enough that we made it into two rooms.

MN: Ok, so you and your brother had your own—

KB: We shared a room.

MN: —a bedroom. And your parents had—

KB: Had their own.

MN: Had their own bedroom, and the kitchen, and the living room—

KB: Right. Kitchen, living room.

MN: Now, when you were growing up, did your parents encourage you to mostly socialize with other Ghanaians, or was, you know, did they encourage to be part of a whole neighborhood culture?

KB: The whole neighborhood. It was, I think it was hard for us to just socialize with Ghanaians just because even though we were surrounded by them, our neighborhood was very diverse. I—we had, you know, Caucasian, Asian, Spanish—like we have so many other people and we lived around—like our building itself is very diverse. So we just—we went with everyone. The thing is, the only time we really hung out with Ghanaians were during functions. So we'd go to Outdoorings—which are like back to the Christening—and we'd go to all these Ghanaian parties. So that's where we actually had a chance to meet—

MN: Right. Now where were the outdoor events held? Which parks?

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KB: They're—they're actually all over. Mostly in the Bronx and Manhattan, but they were anything—like—any function that basically—it was a Ghanaian community throwing a function, we'd go.

And just to describe a little bit, what we have here, I guess—I don't know if the other cultures have it but I know definitely for Ghanaians, we have certain things which are like cultural groupings. So we'll have like a king here, and he's a part of—like a grouping where you can go and you can join. And once you join and there are certain events, he sort of sponsors those events. And he has his name on those events. So once they have—they give out announcements in African markets or places where, you know, there's African businesses, and you can go because you're a part of this community group, so you can—you're free to go to—

MN: Now what would be the term for these associations academically? Would they be called sodalities, or I don't know—

Dr. Bernard Hayford (BH): No, they would be called traditional organizations.

KB: Right.

MN: Just “traditional organizations”?

[Crosstalk]

JKE: Sometimes ethnic or community organizations.

MN: Now what sort of food did you eat in your household growing up?

KB: All Ghanaian food. That's what we ate.

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MN: You ate Ghanaian food.

KB: Yes. My mom cooked everyday.

MN: You didn't eat bacon and eggs?

KB: I—no. [MN Laughs]. When I was growing up, it wasn't something that—

MN: No oatmeal?

KB: We have Farina—Cream of Wheat—that's big in Ghana, so my mom always made that. But it was basic Ghanaian food.

MN: Now what was your experience like going to school? Did you go to a public elementary school?

KB: I went to a public elementary school. I actually went to a private school for Pre-K, when I was in Pre-K, I went to a private school that was very small. And my parents decided that eh—you know, that's good, but we want you to sort of go to a public school, get the diverse, you know—

MN: Right. Now what elementary school did you attend?

KB: C.S. 90, which is now Public School 90.

MN: Now what street is that on?

KB: That's on Sheridan and McClellan Avenue. So it's right around the corner—

MN: I know exactly where it is. Big school, big, red, school—

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KB: Yes.

MN: Now what was—did you enjoy school?

KB: I did because I like to read. So in school, I could read, and I could—you know—that's what I love to do. So in that sense, yeah. I did enjoy school.

MN: And was your neighborhood—like as a child—did you experience it as a safe place to grow up in?

KB: Yes. All the other families were very protective of all the children, so like—

MN: In your building or everywhere?

KB: No, on that block. So from between 167 street and McClellan Avenue on the Grand Concourse. Everyone knew everyone. So let's say, for example, if you're playing outside and someone else's mother or father sees you do something wrong, you're in trouble.

Like you already know you're in trouble by them, then you're in trouble at home. [BH Laughs]. And it was very like a safe—

MN: And this was cross ethnic lines?

KB: Yes, across ethnic lines.

MN: Everyone whether you're Latino, black, African—

KB: Yes—

MN: —Caucasian, Asian—everybody looked out for everybody else.

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KB: Yes, yes.

MN: Were teachers good in your elementary school? Were they motivated and interested?

KB: Yes. When I was younger I can remember that all of the teachers would try their hardest to know all of the parents. And I think that was the best thing ever because if there was a language barrier, they would try their hardest to get, you know, a counselor or someone so that they could understand, you know, sort of the environment at home to understand the child. And that was very important to all of my teachers growing up.

JKE: I just want to go back in relation to your education, because here in the U.S. they emphasize the parental involvement—

KB: Yes.

JKE: —so you told us that your father worked two full jobs, so who was helping you with the—

KB: My mom.

JKE: OK.

KB: My mom. She was—she went to all the parent meetings; she was someone that picked us up, she—because she had one job. So that required her to just come home early—

MN: And where did she work?

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KB: She's actually worked there—and she till worked there—at the American Museum of Natural History.

MN: Really? [Oohs and Ahhs from JKE and BH].

KB: So she actually worked at a museum in Ghana and then came here and worked in a museum here.

BH: [Inaudible] that's why I picked the brochure for this job [Laughter] [crosstalk, more laughter].

MN: So she was a museum educator?

KB: In Ghana, she was. And then she came here. She works in the security department, so it was a little different for her, but the same environment.

MN: And was education emphasized in your home a great deal?

KB: Yes. My dad was very strict with education. [Laughs.] He's a great like math/science person. So he actually emphasized that, you know, "Whatever you do, you need education!" So it was very strict on us. Like even doing work on the weekend. Like we could play, but we had to read, and we had to stuff. So.

MN: What was the kind of music that you grew up with in your home?

KB: So—as we were young children, my dad would always play his Ghanaian music on the weekend when he was home. It was always his Ghanaian music. He wouldn't listen to anything else. [Laughter.]

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MN: Now who were some of the Ghanaian artists, just to give—for someone who doesn't know this.

KB: Pat Thomas, A.B. Crenstil It's hard for me to remember now, but—

BH: Thomas, Crenstil and the other one—

KB: Um. [Laughs] Those are like the prime ones that I remember—

BH: The major ones.

KB: Yes. But very traditional music.

MN: Now what sort of music did you hear in the streets of the Bronx?

KB: Hip-hop, you know—a lot of Salsa.

MN: So did you—did that music intrigue you as you heard it?

KB: Yes, like even now—I listen to all those. All across—I listen to everything, so.

MN: Now what sort of—did your parents let you play in the street?

KB: Yes, when I got old enough. My brother's four years older than me, so it was easier for him, you know. All his friends—so I was actually a tomboy for most of my life [laughter] because I wanted to do what they would do because that's the only time I can go outside. If my brother wasn't outside, I couldn't go outside, so.

MN: So what were some of the street games you played?

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KB: I don't know if they were games, but—[Laughs]—we'd climb fences [Laughter]—we would like run wild. Play football, play video games—

MN: Now, you know, by the time—I guess—you're ten years old, you're going back to Ghana in the summers?

KB: Yes.

MN: Now what was it like going from the Bronx to Ghana? And what were the differences and what were the similarities?

KB: So—I—one thing that, I don't know, something about smells. I'm, you know, a person that loves smells. And like I remember distinctively the smell when you get off the plane—it's just like—this fresh air—like it was just free—like when I went every summer, that's how I felt. Like free—I didn't have to hear the city noises, I was just away, you know. I could just do anything and just come back and then, you know, back to normal routine. But it was like breaking away. When I went to Ghana, the people there are lovely. Like I can't emphasize how much I love the people. They are very giving, you know, they want to know where you're from, because they're excited you're from the United States, and they talk to you—and good thing for me is I understand the language, so I didn't have that barrier. It was just very free. In terms of differences, you know.

The—communities are very different in Ghana. You have the very residential communities where there's are all these houses with gates around them. You don't see anyone, you don't hear anything. It's very, you know, solitude. And then when you go into the cities, where you know, they have houses—they actually have houses next to one

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another that I experienced. I never really experienced in the United States how we have buildings that people live in apartments. It's just everyone lives in a house but they're next to one another. And everyone comes out, and everyone socializes. And that's more in Kumasi, I go there. And it's—it's different in the sense of the way people live, but it's the same in that everyone lives in a community. Everyone understands everyone, you know, everyone comes out and sort of appreciates—this is my next door neighbor, you know.

BH: No barriers.

KB: There is no barriers, right. Other than that—

BH: Where you in Kumasi or Accra?

KB: Both.

BH: Both, you were in both.

KB: I basically spent as much time—

BH: Oh, that's great.

KB: —in both because all my Dad's family is from Accra. So, you know, their thing was, "Oh you have your kids here, we want to see them!" And then my mom's family is like, "That's not fair, we want to see them!" [Laughter.] So we actually went to both places. Like we'll spend a month here, we'll spend a month here, and everyone will be fine. So actually, what my parents decided to do and ultimately they're leaving for good from the United States. They built two houses, one in Kumasi and one in Accra.

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MN: So they're going to go back to live.

KB: By next—this time next year.

MN: Really?

KB: It's going to be sad. [Laughter.] So they—you know, they send money back to build these houses because my dad actually loves architecture. So he—he drew out, you know, his housing plans and—so—

MN: He designed the houses himself?

KB: He designed the houses himself. And when we were younger, we had the house in Accra, so we always went to Accra. And that was what was hard, that we couldn't go to Kumasi and just be, you know, in our house. We had to go stay with my mom's family. And my father didn't like that [MN Laughs], he thought, you know, let's have a house there too, so that—

MN: So you have a house in each—

KB: In each place.

[Talking in the background as Dawn changes tape]

KB: I'll make sure I check [inaudible].

MN: So these are different ethnic groups?

BH: Yes, different ethnic groups.

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MN: Ok, so maybe we should explain that, that your mother and father are from different ethnic groups?

BH: From two strong—two strong ethnic groups, major ethnic groups.

MN: OK, which if you weren't—didn't study this, you wouldn't know. So it's—I mean, I would think it was one location. So you're in a mixed marriage.

BH: Yes.

KB: Yes, a mixed marriage.

MN: OK, so let's explain that. Tell me when you're ready Dawn.

Dawn Russell (DR): OK.

MN: Now Dr. Hayford pointed out that, you know, Kumasi and Accra represent two different ethnic groups.

BH: And the two largest cities in the country.

MN: Can you talk a little bit about the different ethnic groups your parents come from?

KB: To be honest, I'm not very sure, only because they don't really talk about it too much. I mean if you want to explain—

BH: I will do that. [KB laughs]. Accra is our capital region. Accra is a very big region itself. The city's Accra—it has been the capital city since 1876. And ministries, all the departments, government associations are all there. If you want to get a passport, you come to Accra. You want a really good doctor, Accra. Education, Accra, of course.

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College, Accra. The Universities are all in Accra. So it's our capital region. Now the ethnic group there are Gas. G-A. The word is Ga. The language is Ga also, G-A. Ga.

MN: Yes, OK.

BH: Very strong people, wonderful history. Proud language. Beautiful language. Beautiful songs, too. Ashanti which is pronounced Asante—it's the center—it's in the middle of the area. It's the center of Ashanti region. People are called Asante. They speak Twi, a major language, Twi. T-W-I. Now they're a proud people, long history, very important king. The whole country knows all about the king—who represents the whole country, as a matter of fact. And the variety of language—of other small languages, very close to Twi itself. F[inaudible] types, farmers basically. But now many of them are urbanites because they live in a big city—Kumasi is a big city. And then they come back to Accra, and most of them come to Kumasi now because it's another very important hub in the country. So these two people are very proud people and technically the cross over is not very common.

MN: Ok, so your parents marrying—Asante and a Ga—is not that common.

KB: Well, my—

BH: Now, it's common though.

MN: Now it is?

KB: My mom's not Ga.

BH: Your mother is not Ga?

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KB: No.

BH: No your mother—your father is Ga.

KB: No. They're both Asante.

BH: Really?

KB: Yes.

MN: Oh they're both Asante.

BH: Oh, they're both Asante? But he lived in Accra?

KB: My dad lived in Accra, yes. But he also—as young child he went back and forth between Kumasi and Accra. But my—I think my mother's father—my grandfather—was from the Asante—so he—I think he—

BH: What about your mother's mother, your grandmother?

KB: I'm not sure.

MN: Now do your parents speak Ga as well?

KB: No.

BH: Oh, OK, then that's cool.

MN: They're both Asante.

JKE: And I think it back to why they are competing. I think they come from very proud families, so every family always want to have the kids. And especially their father's side,

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they want the children to be with their parents—with their family—because they feel that—I don't know if the Asante is matrilineal—

BH: Matrilineal. Asante is Matrilineal. So the mother—

[Crosstalk]

BH: They both are matrilineal, but they would say, “What, why are you in Accra?” Come to us. Come Home.

KB: Home, yes.

BH: Kumasi is the home, not Accra. [Laughter.] That's like saying, I'm from Waterbury. New York, temporary.

MN: Now do you get the apartment when your parents leave?

KB: Yes. [Laughter.] I do.

MN: It's sad but also happy.

BH: You can go back and forth though, right?

KB: Yes.

BH: And your brother, is he going to go back and forth too?

KB: Well, My brother actually lives in Buffalo.

BH: Oh, he works there?

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KB: He works there, lives there. He went to college in Canisuis, so we both did the Jesuit College thing. And he decided to stay there. So he's been there ever since.

BH: What does he do?

KB: Right now he works—he's like a computer tech, but he does digital media. So he's very—he's into all—

MN: Now one thing that strikes me is—your upbringing the Bronx seems almost idyllic in terms of your neighborhood and, you know—I've heard a lot of stories like that of people who grew up in the Bronx fifty or sixty years ago, and yours is the first one of somebody in the twenties which is actually quite wonderful to hear. So it sounds like you had two wonderful experiences, the Bronx experience and the Ghanaian experience. Was there ever any, you know, because people from the outside see the Bronx as a fearful place. Did you ever experience it that way?

KB: No. And I actually get upset when people talk about it being so fearful.

BH: I'm very uncomfortable walking the concourse.

KB: Really?

BH: Yes, even as an adult. The museum is the only safe haven for me.

KB: Really?

BH: Beyond that, look at all the huge [inaudible]. I'm very uncomfortable.

KB: Oh, no.

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BH: So I really respect you [KB Laughs] for being able to have the nerve to walk on the concourse [Laughs].

KB: You know what? And I see it the opposite way. I see the concourse as it being open, you know. So it's an open community. You don't feel like I can't cross the street [Crosstalk with BH] and be here and you know—that's how I feel.

MN: Now growing up, what were your favorite places in the Bronx?

KB: I definitely love the park Mullaly's Park on Jerome Avenue. Always used to go there. We also played a lot in Yankee—by—right by the old Yankee Stadium there was a basketball court, and we used to always be over there. I think I was there like most of my life in the summer. [Laughs.]

MN: Now did you play basketball growing up?

KB: I did—when I was in junior high school I played a lot.

MN: Did you play on the team?

KB: I didn't play on the team because there was only two girls in the whole school who wanted to be on a team. [Laughter.] There was a boys team—

MN: But no girls team—

KB: —so sometimes we'd play with them, but we—right. We couldn't play on a team.

JKE: Could you tell us about your experience in the boarding school?

KB: Oh yes, definitely. So after junior high school—

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MN: And where'd you go to junior high? Which school?

KB: I actually went to 145, Arturo Toscanini.

MN: And where is that located?

KB: And that's on Teller Avenue, between, I think, McClellan and, I think, 164. It's really big.

MN: That's further down the hill from the Concourse—

KB: Right—

MN: —in other words—

KB: Past College—

MN: Yes. It's about—probably about 7 or 8 blocks from your house.

KB: Right, right. So it's all relatively around the community. I walked to school. And while I was in junior high school, I excelled in, you know, all of my subjects. So it was—I actually graduated valedictorian.

MN: Wow! You were the valedictorian of your junior high.

KB: And because the teacher saw that and the principal, who was Robert Hannibal, I love that man. He's like my second father.

MN: Spell his name.

KB: R-O-B-E-R-T, last name H-A-N-N-I-B-A-L, Hannibal.

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MN: Robert Hannibal.

KB: Yes. He saw that, you know, I loved, you know, learning all of these and I was very strong at it, so I was in touch with another teacher there, and she ran a program where—I think she headed it in the school—

BH: The ABC Program?

KB: Yes, A Better Chance Program, Prep for Prep. I know she's going to hate me forever. I can remember her first name is Jacqueline, but I can't remember her last name. But she actually introduced all the students who had, I think, a 90 and above GPA to the program. And we all applied and whoever could get in she would try her hardest to get us into the school we wanted. So my parents—well my father—chose Emma Willard. He wanted me to go to a boarding school because he went to a boarding school and he thought it was the best thing in the world, the best experience. And at that time, when I was finishing up junior high school, and my brother was finishing up high school, he actually went to an all boys catholic school—All Hallows.

MN: All Hallows, right down, you know, the concourse.

KB: Right. So he was like, all girls, it's the experience and he wouldn't have it any other way. So I—fortunately for me, I had a full scholarship from Jane Fonda, who actually gave me a full scholarship to go.

MN: So you had a personal sponsor—Jane Fonda?

KB: Well she sponsors one child every year, and I got to be—

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BH: [Overlapping with JKE] Wow, goodness! That's unbelievable!

JKE: Wow!

MN: Did you get to meet her?

KB: I never got to meet her. I got to write letters to her but I never—

MN: Do you have copies of the letters?

KB: I don't. The school does.

MN: The school does. It would be—Now, you know, it sounds like you were an outstanding student from the beginning. Did you ever experience negative peer pressure from other students because you did well in school?

KB: The funny thing is a lot of the students who were—we had top classes in junior high school, and there was three. So in every grade, there was three top classes. And we would all like hang out with each other, but a lot of the other kids wouldn't hang out with us.

[MN Laughs.] But what it was as we got older—I guess there was a group of us. I think it was like seven girls, and we were always together. And we started to breaking out of our shell. And we would go out and talk to people, so—it was—at first, yes. You could see. like it was a barrier. People wouldn't talk to people. You're in the top class; I don't want to talk to you. But then as they got to knew that we were people—like we were human beings just like them—as we got older, it was—it wasn't fine, [inaudible].

MN: Now was this group of seven girls multi-ethnic, from different backgrounds?

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KB: Yes. Me from Ghana, another girl from Antigua, another girl—she was Jamaican. I think there was one who was, you know, African American—it was just all over.

MN: So that sounds like you had a really good educational experience, I mean—in both, you know, schools. Now what was it like going to Emma Willard? Was it shock?

KB: It was very different. [Laughter]

KB: The thing was, I never visited the school before I went. So my first day was the first time I went up there. Three and half hours away, went up there with my parents. And I go up and it's this grand school. And, you know, they say, "Oh ye gray walls protecting," that's what they call it. That was in our Alma Matter. But it's just grey. It's like grey stone building and with these gargoyles and very different from what I'm used to. I'm used to the city with the noise, you know, everyone outside. And it was in Troy—it was a very small town. So I get up there and you know, there's trees everywhere, there's no one around, and then I'm like, "Ok, am I going to see anyone who looks like me? Of course not." [Laughter]. So, you know, it was I think like 90% Caucasian and, you know, it was shocking to me. I'd never been around just, you know, so many people of one ethnicity. So I think my big thing was sort of breaking out that shell—that I wasn't in the city anymore, a). That was my big thing. I wasn't in the city. Two, I wasn't around, you know, a diverse group like I was before I didn't have that luxury anymore. So now I need to understand sort of how to adapt to this new environment. And then, slowly but surely, as time went along, we—you know, you break out your shell. You start to understand people, people start to understand you. But that first year was very, very hard for me. In

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just my grade, there were two other girls who were, you know, black. There was one who was Ghanaian too—

JKE: Oh!

KB: —so that was nice. But her and I were very different. She grew up where she only went to school with Caucasians. So she understood—and it was ok for her and she went in—me, I didn't. The other girl, actually which was funny—she lived two blocks away from me. [Laughter.] Never knew each other—

MN: In the Bronx?

KB: —In the Bronx. So, you know, her and I got really, really close. She's just—she's half African American, half Puerto Rican. And we got really close because we're like, "Oh we live, you know, near each other!" We knew some of the same people, and that was more comforting. But then I realized that it just couldn't be two of us all the time. Like I would still have to break out of my shell, and that was the hard part.

MN: Now did you in junior high, did you belong to any clubs? Like in the school, did you get involved in theater or music or anything like that?

KB: I was actually in a band.

MN: You were in a band?

KB: Yes.

MN: What instrument did you play?

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KB: I played the clarinet.

MN: Really?

KB: Yes. Mr. Schiller, that was our band teacher. And I love him to death because he would spend hours teaching us all this material and we did like all these concerts and—

MN: Now did you learn to play the clarinet in junior high or did you play it before that?

KB: I played the flute before that in elementary school. They—I learned how to play the flute.

MN: So you had a—there was a music program?

KB: There wasn't a music program. It was a teacher who loved music and she decided that she wanted us to learn how to play instruments and then what she would do was carry it on from—because we had top classes in elementary school, too—and I was in the top classes all throughout. So she—every time—she would have it carry on by the next teacher and so I—

MN: So you played the flute in elementary school, then the clarinet. And did that give you an entree into things at Emma Willard? Did you continue playing music?

KB: I didn't. Because at Emma Willard, studying was very—that was your critical point. You spend most of your time studying. I don't think I remember a time when I wasn't studying or didn't feel like I had to.

MN: Did you feel a lot of academic pressure there—

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KB: Yes.

MN: —of a kind that was much greater than in junior high?

KB: Oh yes, definitely. Much greater than college.

BH: Really?

KB: Yes. Academics there was very difficult. And when I came to college, college was like the easiest thing in my life after— [laughs] after high school.

MN: No, I've heard that about certain prep schools like Exeter and Andover—

KB: Yes.

MN: —where when my friend—I went to Columbia—were from there, they said, “This is easy compared to what we had.”

KB: Yes.

MN: And were most of the girls at Emma Willard very academically motivated?

KB: Oh yes.

MN: So everybody had that in common? Everybody wanted to do well?

KB: Very competitive.

MN: And competitive?

KB: That's what in junior high school my principal saw that I was a very competitive person. I actually did the Bronx—the specialized high school exams and was accepted

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into Bronx Science. And that's where I really wanted to go because, you know, I knew that was a competitive high school. My dad was like, "No. Boarding school." [Laughter] But what it was that I wanted that competitive—I actually asked for it, you know. I was like, "I want to be in a competitive school." I didn't want anything else.

MN: So there were other boarding schools you could've gone to which wouldn't've been as academically competitive?

KB: Well I wouldn't know because my dad just decided that he wanted to fall in love with this one school and I was going to that school.

MN: Right, he probably did some research. [Laughter.]

KB: [Laughs] Yes, he didn't want me to go anywhere else, so. The only other school we actually considered was the Ashville School in North Carolina, but it was so far away that—but.

BH: I taught junior high years ago—

KB: OK.

BH: —in Connecticut.

KB: OK.

BH: And I still work with teachers in junior high. They had troublesome kids. Can you say that none of these troubles ever came your way at all? You've experienced any challenges with the kids, the trouble, the smoking, [inaudible], there's all those negative [inaudible] in junior high school?

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KB: Yes. I mean, I knew people who were like that who were actually my friends, you know. People sold drugs. I remember there was an experience I had in 7th grade where we had a student actually bring a gun into school and he had it in his desk, like he—and he—you know, things like that. You definitely experience those things, but girls that I would hang out with, you'd call us bougie. [MN Laughs] We didn't—

BH: What does bougie mean?

MN: Bourgeois, you know—

BH: Oh, OK—[crosstalk.]

KB: —we were above all that stuff. We never, like, got involved, like. We knew our parents would kill us. Like, we were the type of girls that we would always be together because if you went somewhere else. Someone was telling on you, you would get in trouble, and it was just us. So that's basically what it was.

BH: I get a sense that at home, your parents were saying, "Look at these other kids. I want you to do well in school." Was it like a pressure to do well all the time?

KB: Yes. It was. It wasn't as—like if I came home with like an eighty something, that was bad.

MN: Eighty?

KB: Eighty. It was—you need to have nineties and above. Like I could never have anything lower than that.

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BH: Would you say that other parents in the area, in the neighborhood, were doing the same thing with their kids?

KB: We—I know in the Ghanaian community it was that pressure across the board—

BH: Generally.

KB: —generally, because our parents came from here, they didn't want us to work as hard as they did. They wanted us to, you know, work hard in school so we could have an easier life as we get older. So there was mad pressure across all of us, we used to talk about it all the time. But for everyone else, no. I didn't see that pressure. I didn't see, you know, all my other friends saying, "Oh, I have to be home to do homework." It was like, they came home, they were outside playing. It was never, you know, pressure for them. I'm not saying that there wasn't, but I didn't see it as much.

JKE: Well what about the experience in college?

KB: Well in college it was different. I think it's because when I went to boarding school, my academic experience changed a lot. Coming from junior high school where, you know, I was valedictorian, you know, I worked hard—I didn't have to work as hard to get the grades because it came to me naturally. But when I went to boarding school I had to work ten times harder than everyone else because I realized from my teachers that my junior high school background was not strong. And that was my issue. Like my—I thought my writing was so much better than, you know, anything. Then I went to high school and my first teacher, my writing teacher, was like, "This is horrible. Your writing

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is really bad.” And I had to learn from scratch. So a lot of the things I had to learn from scratch. I didn’t learn it before, so.

MN: I had that experience for the first time when I was in college because I went to a New York City public high school and many of my fellow students went to boarding school and had that kind of writing training. So I had to rebuild everything. I got my first C. C? What is that?

KB: Yes!

MN: I never got a C in my life! [KB laughs]. And then, OK, I’ve got to figure out how to do this. And it was—but I had that experience in college, you had it in high school. Now was there much of a social life at Emma Willard?

KB: Very little. [Laughs.] But we had one. Again, the academic side was very demanding and then besides academics you had to be apart of some sports or like Physical Ed. So my thing to—and you know, it will come to haunt me later—but my thing to get out of Physical Ed—because I hate, you know, doing aerobics and stuff like that. I became team manager to a lot of the teams [MN Laughs]. So, yes—all I had to was for games and stuff, just sit down and take statistics. And [MN laughs] that’s what I would do. And for practices, I had to be—the thing was, the difference between, you know, taking a physical—just a regular Physical Ed class was that it was only three teams a week. You can go, come back. But for the teams, you had to be there for all of their practices. So even if they practice on the weekend, you had to be there. But I could just do my

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homework while they practiced. So I took advantage of that. Because I knew that it took me a lot longer to do my homework than a lot of other people. So—

MN: Did a lot of the other kids come from two professional families, you know—

KB: Yes.

MN: —their father was an executive and their mother was—

KB: Yes. Doctor or like—yes. Because—and that also came because tuition there was like 36 a year.

BH: 36 a year?

KB: So, you know, you had to be able to pay that and we had—it was boarding and day school. So we had day students as well. And, you know, I had an opportunity to go to some of their houses and they live in like lavish lives and I, you know, didn't experience. But you had to have money to go to that school. So that was the big thing.

MN: So how did you end up choosing Fordham?

KB: Actually what happened was, I—because of having that Emma Willard experience, I started to appreciate, you know, in an all-girls environment. And when I applied to Fordham I applied to Marymount because it had the all women's college. I—the places I applied to were Marymount and Barnard. Barnard being my first choice. Of course, I didn't get in. I was a Columbia reject, yes. [Laughs.] So I, you know, I got into Marymount, and, you know, I was like, "OK, I want the all-women's experience." And

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then because Marymount closed, I came to Rose Hill. So that's what made me choose Fordham.

BH: Marymount is closed now, right?

MN: Yes. Fordham bought it and then closed it—

KB: Fordham bought it and then closed it. Yes. Pretty much. [Laughs]

MN: Now, but now—when I met Karen, you know, she was a major leader on the campus. And you had been—so how many years did you spend at Rose Hill?

KB: Two. Just my last two.

MN: So how did you become a leader so quickly?

KB: So, I'm a very ambitious person [MN Laughs] and I love to go out and do things. Like I hate being idle. I can't just be doing nothing. So it started in high school where, you know, I was part of these teams, and then afterwards like I would have to—my friend and I, like would—we would, you know, watch movies and things like that. But then we would start creating things. Like I like to draw. So I would start drawing things and we would start making up dances. I was a part of—I was like president of one of the really big clubs there, it was called Black and Hispanic Awareness. And it was just—I loved being, you know, a part of these organizations where you could do things. You could help out. We did community service, like—I was always doing something. So when I came to college, I realized that the academic pressure wasn't there as much.

BH: That's what you felt your first year?

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KB: Oh yes. My first year in college was breeze. Like I—my first semester was so easy for me. I didn't feel like I had to work as hard, and I didn't, you know. I got a 3.5 doing the bare minimum. And then I realized, "OK. I need to step it up because, you know, I want to do better." But it wasn't there anymore. So I had the time to be a part of all these things, so my first semester I was a representative for the freshman class in student government. I was co-head of our community—it's called Community Association—where we did all the activities—student activities—on campus. And I, you know, went along with that, I started tutoring math. I just got really involved, and then when I realized I had to come to Rose Hill because a lot of the classes that I wanted to take wasn't offered at Marymount once Fordham decided that it was going to, you know, going to phasing it out. I came here, and I was like, "I have to do the same thing. Like, I can't—you know, I can't be idle. I can't be here and not—" And luckily for me, doing all those things, I knew people on this campus.

MN: Oh, you already knew people.

KB: I knew like Mike Partis—like I knew people who were also, you know, motivated in that way and doing student activities. So as soon as I came here, I was in student activities. I was like best friends with all the administrators, like—I wanted to be involved. And I had the opportunity to. So whatever opportunity I had, I took it. So my senior year, I was overload. Like I was running around this campus, but I loved it. Like I loved every bit of it, so.

BH: That's interesting.

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MN: Now when I met you, you were the major organizer for the fashion show.

KB: Yes.

MN: Now did you every do fashion designing?

KB: No, I never did. [Laughter] Marymount actually is very big on fashion. Their huge program was fashion merchandising.

MN: Really?

KB: Yes, they were very big on that. I think like maybe 70% of the women who were there took courses in fashion.

BH: Really?

MN: I never knew that.

KB: So a lot of my friends who were part of this program, and I would see what they would do, and I started watching the fashion shows. And I actually got involved sort of by mistake [MN Laughs] because my friends were a part of—it's called Fashion for Philanthropy, the club—and the first year of it, two of the women that I knew at Marymount were a part of the board. And they needed models. And at that time, no one knew of the club, it was the first year, so they were basically asking people to be a part of it. And I was like, "Oh, I'll do it!" because they're my friends, and what I do when they're not around me? [BH Laughs] So I, you know, became a part—I was a model the first year, and then after that, I started being very vocal in the club, and after that, I became president, and it was just a wonderful experience.

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MN: Now what was your major at Fordham?

KB: I was an Econ and Math major.

MN: Econ and Math major and—which is a—that’s a tough major for most people.

KB: Yes, it is. [Laughs]

MN: Now how did you get your position at the Federal Reserve Bank? Was it an internship or—?

KB: Yes. So when I was actually in high school, A Better Chance not only helps you get into schools, they also help you with internships. I didn’t know that until I think very late in the game and I think I was a junior when they just called me out of nowhere, like, “Do you want an internship?” And I was like, “Sure.” So my first, first internship—

BH: Junior in—

KB: —junior in high school.

BH: In high school, OK.

KB: My first internship was with UBS, so I was in investment banking as a junior in high school. And from then on, I decided, “Hmm. I might want to do business.” So I came here, and with my economics background, I actually had a professor at Marymount who was very vocal about, you know, about the financial system and, you know, she was very head on about being a part of things like this so you can make really good decisions in life and—so, I was a part of INROADS which is another organization that helps minority youth in getting internships with all these affluent companies, and I, you know, went

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through the process, I passed, and then I had an interview with the Federal Reserve, so I took an opportunity, you know, with that—went to the interview; they called me back for a second interview and I was accepted to the internship. So my sophomore year—the summer between sophomore year into my junior year was my first summer with them and ever since then, I have been working there. So the summer after that, I worked there. All my senior year, I worked there part time, and then as soon as I graduated I worked there full time.

BH: And you're full time now, aren't you?

KB: Yes.

MN: Well, that's great.

JKE: That's good.

KB: So I knew I had a job all through senior year because they offered me the job the summer before I started my senior year, so I—

MN: Now to switch gears, you know, to family issues—Does your family expect you to marry somebody Ghanaian or does it matter?

KB: OK, so that's the issue that I have. [Laughter] It's like halfway, because they want me to continue in the traditions. They feel like if I do marry someone outside, I may lose it a little bit, my children will lose it, and they don't want that. And they also want my children to sort of be a part of the, you know—our family, like—I like love to go back. And, you know, I—I'm just connected to my family there, and they want the same for,

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you know, their grandchildren, and I understand that. And in the same respects, they also want just someone, you know, to love their children, they don't really care who it is. So it's like halfway. It's a battle. They, you know, they—they don't want to put the pressure on us that we have to marry someone that's Ghanaian, but at the same time, you know, they're like, "We would like if you did—" [Laughter]

MN: What is Barack Obama mean to you and to your family?

KB: I think Barack Obama—and even in Ghana—is just an outstanding man. Not in the sense of his race, because yes—his race does play an issue, he's the first black president—but just that he can be an individual amongst that. Like it doesn't have to be a race issue with him, you know. He is who he is because of his background, because of, you know, the things that he does, you know, because he's a powerful man in himself. And I think seeing that then, of course, stuff aside—seeing that he is a black man doing this is very important in to what we want, I guess, what my parents would want from my brother and I, what I would want for my children in the sense that you can tell them, "You can actually be whoever you want to be." You don't have to, you know, be at a certain level just because of your skin color, because of where you come from, you can do whatever you want in your life, and I think that's what's more important than anything else.

JKE: Let's go back to the social events that you participated in. I just want to know what kind of event you would go to with your family and other Ghanaian community members, and what kind of dress people would wear.

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KB: So, alright. Now, I don't go to as much just because [MN laughs] I'm older, and [Laughter] I work, and—But before, I would go to a lot of christenings—we call them Outdoorings. So a lot of christenings. I would go to a lot of, you know, marriage receptions after—I would go to a lot of—we have funerals, but our funeral parties are different.

BH: Different. [Laughter]

KB: They're different. And I always have to explain this to my friends because they're like, "What you're having a party? Someone died?" [Laughter] And I'm like, "Well, that's not what it is—" It's not party, you know, it's—it's sort of, just—it's a celebration of someone's life. That's what I say to them. It's a celebration of their life when they were here, you know, who they were to us. So after, you know, you go to the funeral, you bury them, you have this—it's a celebration. You have celebration. But you know, people still cry. You have traditional dance, you have traditional wear, to answer your question what we wear. So we wear—a lot of people wear—depending on what the event is, we wear traditional African garb. Which would be the headdress, you know, the dress if you're a woman, the—if you're a man, the—

BH: The entema [?]

KB: I don't know how to describe it in English, but—

BH: Yes, it's like a wrap around, wrap around—

KB: Yes. I wear this sometimes too when I go out. But it's a very different thing. And that also comes with my fashion, like—I love my mom—goes out, she gets these—it's

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different designs within every—off a pattern, it means certain things [BH Laughs]—it goes, and she gets them in all these styles, and it's—it's beautiful.

BH: What would you like to share with your—with Ghanaian kids in the neighborhood—in like the Bronx neighborhood—about your own experiences and about how you got to where you are and what they have to do to succeed in life? Because I think that you are a success right there for me—you are really a wonderful success to any girl under thirty years, I can't see how you can do so well really.

KB: Thank you. My advice to them and mostly to the children or the people who come from Ghana here—so they were born in Ghana and come here. I would think the most important thing I could tell them is to yes, embrace, you know, the American culture, understand it, try to see where you can fit in, but don't assimilate in the sense that you lose yourself—you assimilate so much that you lose yourself. And I see a lot of the youth even that were born here, they, you know, they see what's popular, not necessarily what's meaningful. so you know—they want to be all, you know, in the hip-hop. And even in Ghana, you know—

BH: Oh, in Ghana it's worse!

KB: I went to Ghana and I saw someone in a North Face. [Laughter] And it's so hot there! Just because he saw it in a music video, he's wearing his coat with the hood up, and it's like, do you understand? Like—try to understand [MN Laughs] where this comes from, not that this is, you know, we're watching all this stuff on TV and this is what we want to be—

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BH: It's there, so I want to be like that person.

KB: Right. But really try to understand where you fit in. Like where's your role. How you can use who you are to become the person, you know, that understands this American culture. You know, for me it was hard in the sense that my parents weren't from here. So the first generation where my brother and I are American—we, you know, we're going to school, we're learning things. Yes our parents were very strong people, but at the same time, they're also learning as well—from us, you know, from their experiences, so, you know, some things you have to learn on your own, you know. You can't go back and say, "Mommy and Daddy, when you were younger—" how it was, because it's not the same for them. And I feel like a lot of the youth forget that. Like yes, it's not the same for them, you sort of have to pave your own way, but you can still go to them, you know, for the, you know—just a build up in who you are. Like build up in, you know—never forget where you come from, you know. Just to understand that it's important to be proud of who you are and use that in your upbringing. And also, another thing—just to be successful is not just about, you know, doing—doing the bare minimum or being, you know, just academically being successful. Like Professor Naison said, I was a part of a lot of you know, groups and organizations and you know, you have to take charge, you can't always sit back and wait for other people to invite you to—into being into these organizations. And for me, it built me up to who I am today. I can make decisions and say, "I know I'm making the right decision." And not feel like I'm holding myself back from anything. And I think that it's important to also embrace different cultures. I think it's very important to understand where everyone comes from. Like my

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best friend is Puerto Rican, you know, I have one who is black and Dominican, and I have people from the Islands, and then I appreciate every single person because we all bring something to the table. Don't be too proud to the point that you don't understand where other people come from. And I think that's very important, so.

BH: Well, I said, I am really very impressed with your achievement to date and I'm happy that that school—Emma Willard—

KB: Emma Willard—

BH: —did so much for you. I certainly will recommend the school the other Ghanaians—

KB: Oh yes.

BH: —who [inaudible]—

KB: Yes, it's a great school.

BH: —and to see a high school which prepared you so much for college that the first year like was a breeze in college [inaudible]. There was a Ghanaian that we interviewed about two months ago, a Mr. Otibu. He will set up a small youth group in the Bronx here. And he wants to invite in leaders to talk to this group. These are new kids who just come in, poor parents, not too much money trying to go to school, get a part time job. It's this initiative he want to get them together and just talk to them, share his experience with them. I would love to invite you to meet a group—if it's possible and if you don't mind—to meet these—young women especially. The women are very vulnerable to many things.

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You know, the dress is number one. When you come here, “Oh, you want some nice clothes,” you know—

KB: Yes.

BH: —that should be second [inaudible].

KB: That is, yes.

BH: Working on this is number one. [Inaudible] is very important too. There are many bright, Ghanaian women who—[inaudible name] is a Ghanaian writer—a woman writer, now, you know that—

KB: Yes.

BH: There are many top Ghanaian women, too. But the job at the Federal Reserve in Ghana is empty. At the moment, it’s empty. And we’re thinking about you [laughter]. I’m not kidding. We just lost our guy. He’s going on leave now. So you should get ready for that. [Laughter]

MN: I want to ask you just something about music. Is there Ghanaian music that you listen to now?

KB: It’s not—there isn’t one kind of music. I do listen to some. The thing now is, I used to get a lot of my music from one of my cousins in Jersey, but him and I have lost touch a little bit. So he loves Pat Thomas—loves him. And I used to get a lot of music from him. But now it’s more like hip hop-y.

BH: It’s hip—you’re right. It’s changing so bad.

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MN: There's something they call Hiplife?

BH: Yes, Hiplife--

KB: Hiplife, yes, that's what I was just about to say. [BH Laughs] It's Hiplife. And I like it, but I don't like it.

MN: Love it.

KB: Yes, I don't love it.

MN: Now do you like Triphop?

KB: Triphop?

MN: You haven't heard that MIA and Santigold and—

KB: No.

BH: Triplife?

MN: Triphop—

BH and KB: Triphop.

MN: —it's a new sort of—it's a mingling of like reggae and South Asian and hip-hop and—so it's something to look into.

KB: No, I haven't heard of that.

MN: Remember Nakawesi—

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KB: Yes.

MN: —Yes. Well she told me—she’s really into Triphop, so she’s gotten me to start—
but what’s your favorite music now?

KB: I listen to a lot of salsa. I listen to, you know, a lot of R&B, I do listen some of the
Hiplife. I’m not a fan—I actually listen to the oldies—the highlife. I like highlife a lot
more than anything else.

BH: She’s a true Ghanaian right there. [Laughter]

MN: Now is Pat Thomas a highlife person?

KB: Yes—

BH: He’s a highlife person, yes.

KB: —Highlife person.

JKE: What about movies? Because there are so many movies, African movies.

KB: Oh, I don’t like them. [Laughter] Every—every Sunday my parents like watch it
throughout [BH laughs] the day—watch all these Afr—but there are a lot of Nigerian—

BH: [Crosstalk] Nigerian [inaudible] all these African things—

KB: Right. I don’t like them. There’s always some drama and—I’m not into that.

[Laughter]

BH: I don’t like that myself.

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DR: Do you listen to reggae or world music?

KB: Oh yes. Oh yes. I'm very—I listen to a lot of reggae [laughs]. I listen to—I love, you know, like things that have a lot of rhythm. So I, you know, like the salsa, the, you know, the reggae—just like—some hip-hop. I like a lot of, you know, that rhythm—it just gets you back into like the old style. I listen to a lot of old school. A lot of old school.

MN: Now when you were at Emma Willard, was there a difference in musical tastes between the other girls and you coming from the Bronx?

KB: Oh definitely. Definitely. I didn't listen to rock at all [BH Laughs] pretty much before I came, and now I'm into rock now. All the pop stuff I didn't like and, you know, so—

MN: Did you convert some of them to your Bronx music?

KB: I did. I did. I did. [Laughter] It was funny. like my freshman year, my neighbors across from me, I would get all these CDs from my uncle, and they were like, "Oh, let's listen to them!" And they started—they had it on repeat over and over and—so, yes, definitely.

MN: Dawn, do you have any questions?

DR: No, just a comment. When you were talking about the funerals, I was kind of chuckling to myself because in '05, I had gone to my aunt's funeral in Jamaica and when people saw the video—white Americans mostly—they said, everybody said, "Is that a funeral? People carry on like that at a funeral?" [Laughter]

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MN: Well I still remember one of the interviews we were doing where they were talking about, you know, “I don’t want to die in the United States because when you die in Ghana, they know you’re dead.” And then they talked about being carried through the streets in a big fish—

BH: A casket—

MN: Well, a casket that looked—that was shaped like a fish.

BH: Or a Mercedes-Benz—

MN: Or a Mercedes. But I would like to be carried in a fish down the Grand Concourse.

[Laughter] That would be—so get me one of the Ghanaian coffins—[Laughter]—that would be—

JKE: And one last thing from me. You said your parents are planning to go Ghana.

KB: Yes.

JKE: Are you planning to do the same?

KB: Am I planning to do the same?

JKE: Like in the future, not now.

KB: It’s hard for me. My dad tried to make me go. [Laughter] My Dad’s a very convincing man, and after a while I try not to listen to him because everything he’s told me to do, I’ve pretty much done. Even though I like rebelled and I’m like, “I’m not doing it!” I do it eventually. [Laughter] So, I’m trying not to listen to that part only because I

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still want the dual experience. And I know with my Dad, wherever he is, or wherever my family is, I'm just going to be there. That's how it's always been, you know. And my brother's still here, you know, so—and my brother and I are very close—so—it's just hard. Like, it'll be hard when they leave, but I definitely feel like I—I want the opportunity to go. Like, that's more of an excuse to go back.

MN: Now did your father eventually move from doing two full time jobs to one job?

KB: To one, yes.

MN: And what was—what did—what profession did he ultimately pursue?

KB: The coding profession.

MN: So that became his full time job.

KB: That's his full time job.

KB: And—

BH: [inaudible]

KB: He's still doing it. But he has one job; he's actually been promoted. He's like a manager now, so he's, you know, for him it's—it's very different in the sense that he knows he's worked so hard to get to up to where he is now. And then like I'm coming in with my new job like, "This is how much I make." [Laughter] And I make like a lot more than—

BH: Far more than that—

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KB: He's like, "Oh, you know—"

DR: What's your job at the Federal Reserve?

KB: Sort of—in a nutshell, I do research. I do financial research for, you know, many institutions. Just to sort of—on the policy side, I work more on the policy side. So to influence certain policies that, you know, the Board of Governors eventually, you know, gives the Senate and so forth and so on, so.

BH: I have suggested to a couple of Ghanaians who are in the same spot where your father—your parents are right now. "Why don't you go—go, go, go accountant, go, you know, to pharmacy school—" Say, look. Let them stay here and do what they want to do, OK, but if you ever have a chance to spend six months in a Ghanaian organization—like in the Bank of Ghana, or one of the major banks we have in Ghana—you can offer them so much. I mean, you can just open a whole new light to them from the American experience. It applies to teaching, educational, the investment level, anywhere—almost any sector, you can—

MN: Well, Dr. Edward did that in the Sudan. She went back to help organize, like women's education in—so, I mean, you have many opportunities.

BH: Definitely—

KB: Oh, definitely.

BH: —to spend at least—teaching you can go for a semester—in your case, maybe your vacation time. Get a job there and open a whole new [inaudible] for the bank. You'd be

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amazed how much you can—I mean, [inaudible] like a regular summer, one-month staff—consultancy—but you can even go back and forth. Because I know the experience here is very, very productive and very, you know, broad and enriching for us, you know. So think about that. If there's a chance for you to go for any—couple of weeks—three weeks, four weeks—grab it. And you will come fulfilled. I mean, they would appreciate you and there will be many, as you know, many husbands saying, “Oh, I just want to [inaudible].” [Laughter] [Inaudible] My son just finished London investing—

KB: I know. [Laughter]

BH: And—I know—she knows too—I have man for you, don't worry [laughter, crosstalk] I have a man for you, don't worry.

MN: Ok, well listen. Thank you so much for this really extraordinary interview. I hope you enjoyed it much as we did.

KB: I did, I did.

BH: I've learned one thing, though. Whenever it happens to the kids going to school here, you should look for a good high school first.

KB: Yes.

BH: You think so?

KB: Yes, I agree.

BH: A good Catholic high school, boarding, you know, day, whatever, but it should be a very serious high school—

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KB: But it doesn't necessarily have to be Catholic.

BH: Public too? Right, Bronx—

KB: Public too, yes. Because some—a lot of the Catholic schools you don't get as much opportunity, you know what I mean?

BH: But it should be a boarding school though, right?

KB: No, it shouldn't. It could be a day school.

BH: Ah, day, but you come home and you do all of the regular stuff.

KB: Yes, but you know what? I just feel like people need direction, you know? If, you know, you go to a day school, afterwards getting them involved in something else, or, you know, whatever they're interested in—there are so many programs and organizations—like right now, I—I like to help women. Like, I like that field. I've always been a part of the women's experience and there is an organization called GEMS. Have you heard of it? GEMS. Girls Educational Mentoring Services. And I actually am trying my hardest to be a part of that and get—oh, [inaudible]—

DR: Oh, yes, I forgot.

KB: —and get some people from my job involved. And these are women who have actually been a part of the child trafficking. Yes. So, yes, you know, I—it's something if you are interested in it, it's easier to be a part of it. They have, you know, like I said, educational mentoring services. That's what I like to do. I used to go when I was first in

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boarding school, every time I had a vacation, I would go back to my junior high school and speak to certain classes.

MN: Really?

KB: Yes, because of that principal, like, I still had the connection. So I'd be like, "Ok, are you there? Do you want me to come?" And he would be like, "Yes." And I would come to talk to this class, this class, this class to motivate people who, you know, want to go to—

MN: I had a sense that this is one video that I'd like us to edit because I think it is important to show in the schools—

BH: Definitely.

MN: —there are so many, you know, young people—

DR: So you want me to hold on to this one and to edit it?

JKE: I think so, yes.

MN: Yes, yes. To edit it by themes. So that we can use something in the schools.

BH: For the schools.

MN: Because I think that there are a lot of, you know, some of the—especially the newer African immigrants, their parents are not able to direct them—[crosstalk]—they're not that kind of parent. A lot of the parents, you know, don't speak English, they're—some of them are uneducated—

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BH: Uneducated, you know, so they say, let's go for the money, get me a job—two, three, you know. Your father got into Yale before he even came here.

MN: Yes, I mean [crosstalk] but look at this story. Here's somebody who gets into Yale, ends up being a janitor, and then—

BH: A second job, with computers—

MN: —a second job, and but look at what his children accomplish. [Talk in background] This is so much the story of this group of people. How many of the people we've interviewed worked—or their parents—worked two jobs, three jobs—I mean that's what—you know, this group has contributed so much in terms of—and everybody sends back remittances. People build in the—you know—

BH: Two houses! I mean, Accra, Kumasi—very expensive—the land is very expensive to begin with—

KB: Very expensive, yes.

BH: I mean the building of several huge mansion—

MN: Yes. But it sounds like there was no conspicuous consumption in your family. You know, no bling. [Laughter]

KB: No, no.

MN: But that's another lesson—

JKE: I have to stop this—

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MN: OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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