



11-21-2004

Brown, June

Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewee: June DeVonish Brown
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison
November 21, 2004

Mark D. Naison (MN): This is the 88th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. Today is Monday, November 21st and I'm here in the Co-Op City apartment of June DeVonish Brown who will be in reviewing about her experiences growing up in the Morrisania section of the Bronx. First, if you could tell us a little bit about your family, what part of the world were your mother and father from?

June DeVonish Brown (JB): My mother from Freetown Village in Antigua and my father from Black Rock Barbados and they came here in 1900, 1901 around that area they came to this country. My mother's family were very nice people, very tall. Well, the grandmother spoke mostly all African words too when I went to see her. And my father's side, they were all right, they were nice people too. It was a nice country, beautiful country Antigua and Barbados are very beautiful.

MN: Now you were born in Harlem?

JB: Yes Harlem, right in Harlem Hospital.

MN: And what year were you born?

JB: 1921.

MN: Right, now where in Harlem were your parents living when you were born?

JB: I think we were living in the 30's. I can't remember it all very well, but I think in the 30's we were living. I can't remember that far, because I know I went to school at 116th - school is still there - - I went to school on 116th St.

MN: That's the elementary school.

JB: Yes.

MN: What sort of work did your father do?

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JB: My father was a jeweler - - I don't know if he learned it in this country or if he learned it in his home, but he came in and worked as a jeweler in Maiden Lane.

MN: Maiden Lane in - - where is Maiden Lane?

JB: In Manhattan, that's all the jewelry section downtown.

MN: When did your family move to the Bronx?

JB: We moved to the Bronx I guess when I was about six years old. I moved to - - I believe it was 163rd St we moved there to a house - - but I can't remember the name of the house or the number of the house.

MN: What elementary school did you go to?

JB: I went to PS 53, PS 63.

MN: First you went to PS 53?

JB: PS 53 on Boston and [Inaudible] Avenue.

MN: Now what grade were you in when your family moved to the Bronx?

JB: Oh I must have been in 4th grade.

MN: So this was in the Depression era?

JB: Oh yes, yes. That's true because we moved in 1929 - - oh yes that was the time of the Great Depression.

MN: That seemed to make a big impression on you. What were some of the things going on?

JB: The snow. The snow piled up on either side of the street, that was something in those years. My father worked hard, he went out to work for us every day; he was a good father. Mama took care of the children and he went off to work.

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MN: How many children were there?

JB: There was six of us. 1929 - - the boy was born in 1929, my brother. But five of us, then six.

MN: So there were six children and how big of an apartment did you get when you were in the Bronx?

JB: In those days - - on Boston Rd the apartment was three rooms - - I guess the bedroom - - all of us were put in there. But you know, bedroom mom and daddy - - there was another room - -

MN: So the six of you slept in one room?

JB: Mama put the three of us in one room and the others in the other room.

MN: Now you had mentioned that your father had been in the Garvey movement?

JB: Oh yes, my dad was a Garveyite.

MN: What was some of the ways that you were aware of that, was it - -

JB: Because he told us. And then when I was about ten or eleven I guess, I went downtown to I think it was the last parade that Garvey had, and I saw that.

MN: Now did your father march in the parade?

JB: Yes, yes. Daddy had on his uniform.

MN: Do you have any pictures of him in his uniform?

JB: Oh yes.

MN: Because some of what we're trying to do is to collect pictures. Do you remember -
- did he have a title?

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JB: Well he was just one of the soldiers of Garvey, that's all. I believe what Garvey had advocated that they should go back to Africa and build their own country - - have their own country.

MN: Was there a lot of political discussion in your house at the dinner table?

JB: Oh yes, daddy told us everything. Daddy told us that we - - he came to this country to better himself, [Inaudible] family sent for him, but he came here to better himself.

And he also came here to work and get a good job and so forth and so on, course he came here quite young. But he told us that we must be educated and we have to be educated to talk to the king of England and the president of the United States - - we must be educated to know what we're talking about. And he insisted on us going to school. He wrote well and gave us history, and mom did too. Mama showed us how to write and read and how to tell the time - - everything. Mama told us about the West Indies, what they ate, what they wore.

MN: So you were brought up with a sense of history.

JB: That's right. English history and West Indian history. And African history, my father made us read the African history book.

MN: So as a child you were reading about African history.

JB: That's right, African history books.

MN: Now when you went to school, were any of the things you were learning at home taught at schools in the United States?

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JB: What I learned was the history of the United States and English history my mother told me was different. And she did math her way, and I learned math the American way, 'cause there's two different ways of doing this math.

MN: Right. Now when you moved to the Bronx was the neighborhood you lived in - -

JB: It was all Jewish.

MN: How did your parents get an apartment in Jewish neighborhoods, did they know people?

JB: No. Daddy worked hard. Daddy went out to work and then he did super jobs too.

MN: Oh so he got a job as a superintendent?

JB: That's right and then he went on and did his - - whatever little job he could get outside, he did those.

MN: Because there are a number of families I've interviewed who moved into neighborhoods becoming the superintendent of the building.

JB: That's right.

MN: So he was a superintendent?

JB: On 163rd St.

MN: And that was near Boston Rd?

JB: You know, I can see where the building is in my mind - -

MN: Is it still there?

JB: Oh yes, still there.

MN: How long did you stay in that particular building?

JB: I don't think we stayed there too long.

MN: You moved to another building?

JB: We moved to 1057 Boston Rd - - that's where my brother was born.

MN: 1057. Now was your father a superintendent in that building as well or you were just renting?

JB: Yes I think he was there too.

MN: What was the cross street?

JB: Boston Rd runs into 3rd Avenue.

MN: So it was down the hill.

JB: Yes.

MN: So you were in a predominately Jewish area, and was the school you went to predominately Jewish?

JB: Yes it was.

MN: What was your experience, were the other kids friendly?

JB: No. I came home every day crying and asked daddy why they didn't want to hold my hand or play games with me and daddy told me not to cry. He said "It's alright. You're going to school to learn, you're not going to school to make friends. It's OK, don't worry about it." When I played basketball I'd win for the school and I got only got a bronze medal. I'd know I'd win I high jumping - -

MN: So at this point you felt there was a lot of resentment and prejudice.

JB: Yes. Because there was I think only two or three black children in the school.

MN: This was in the early 30's.

JB: That's right.

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MN: What about the teachers, were they more receptive?

JB: They were vicious too, 'cause they didn't look at you. You raised your hand and they didn't ask you questions or anything. I remember one, she never - - every time I raised my hand to answer questions she never did answer my question or anything. But daddy said "Don't worry about it. She can't just teach the whole class and not teach you. You listen to what she says."

MN: Do you remember the name of this teacher?

JB: No.

MN: What was this, fourth grade?

JB: Fourth, fifth grade I guess. And she used to tell people bring the Times to school what weekend - - and then she would say "What you say good goes around the world and comes back to you in a minute. What you say bad comes around the world and comes back in a minute too." Then she was the one who said "Read the Times. And when you read the Times, you'll see about the stock market." So she said "In the stock market, you don't get rich by working from nine to five. You have to invest in the stock, you cannot get rich by working from nine to five." And as soon as I started working two jobs - - I was in my thirties - - I started working two jobs, I remember what she said. So I invested in the Bank of America and I bought shares in that.

MN: What grade did PS 63 go to?

JB: Sixth grade.

MN: So at that point there were junior highs?

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JB: Then we went to PS - - I graduated out of PS 53 - - anyway I went there - - maybe it went to - -

MN: Some schools went to sixth grade, some to eighth grade.

JB: PS - - went to eighth grade. So sixth grade, that's right yes.

MN: OK so you went directly from PS 63 to Morris?

JB: Well after I graduated from 53 I went to Morris.

MN: So you went to from 63 to 53 - -

JB: Then Morris Annex and then I went to Morris High School.

MN: So 53 was a junior high school. And that was all girls?

JB: No that was girls and boys.

MN: Where did you have more of a hostile experience: in the elementary school or the junior high?

JB: In elementary school because I used to tell my cousin to meet me at 12:00 because they said they were going to beat me up and my cousin would meet me.

MN: This is at PS 63 in Boston Rd.

JB: That's right.

MN: Now 53 was on 163rd St?

JB: Yes up the hill - - Teller and Clay Avenue up the hill. You had to walk up the steps.

MN: Teller and Clay - - that's up the other side of 3rd Avenue.

JB: That's right.

MN: And that was almost all Jewish also?

JB: That's right.

MN: Were there any teachers who took a personal interest in you?

JB: No. We went to school - - and I learned from my father that you went to school to learn.

MN: But there were no teachers who - -

JB: No. Not with me. So I didn't bother with them.

MN: Did you make any friends at school?

JB: Oh yes, there was black friends.

MN: So you made friends with a few black kids?

JB: Oh and one girl - - they were sweet. They had platinum blonde hair and her brother had platinum blonde hair too. She was very pretty. But that's about all.

MN: And she was at 63 or 53?

JB: That would be 53.

MN: At the junior high?

JB: Yes.

MN: Now what about in your neighborhood, did you play in the street with other kids?

JB: We played with one another because there was six of us and daddy showed us how to play together and live together and with our sisters and brothers - - you know, they don't like you, so why should you go with them?

MN: So basically you had an experience, and this again in the 30's, where the people in your neighborhood and the people in school had no interest in being friends with you and sometimes were hostile?

JB: Yes. Especially in school.

MN: It was worse in school then it was in the street.

JB: Yes.

MN: What about the store owners in the neighborhood, were they friendly?

JB: When you paid your bills and you'd buy whatever you want, they were OK. They were alright, had no trouble with them.

MN: Was there ever a point - - what about Morris High School, did things get - -

JB: Oh Morris High School I met my friend - - I'll show you my book - - Morris High School there was more black females. There was a few black boys, there was Savage, Washington, and another fellow - - there wasn't so many, more girls.

MN: What year did you graduate from Morris?

JB: I think 1941 or '42.

MN: So you basically were there before there was a large migration of African Americans.

JB: That's right.

MN: You were sort of there before everybody else came.

JB: Yes. And most of the girls - - most of the boys and girls there, most of their parents were West Indians.

MN: Did your family participate in West Indian clubs and associations?

JB: My father because he was a Garveyite.

MN: What about Antiguan or Barbadians societies - -

JB: Well they had them, but my mother had to take care of us.

MN: Right. So did you and your brothers and sisters play the street games that they played?

JB: Sometimes when you see the [Inaudible] marks in the street you know - -then you'd jump - - daddy said we could play any of those games that we wanted to play but we don't mark the sidewalk because the sidewalk is not our property. And we couldn't make any noise and carry on bad. As I got older we were allowed to go to the school yard too - - stay away from here, the neighborhood because there's always somebody - - If you make noise then you would interfere with people who were sleeping, sick - -

MN: The school yard of what school did you play in?

JB: PS 55.

MN: That was right near your house?

JB: Yes. Over that way.

MN: Now at Morris High School when you were there, how many black students were there at the school all together?

JB: I'll see - - I'll be right back.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MN: When you went to Morris High School did you participate in any extra curricular activities or student clubs?

JB: Track and basketball.

MN: So they had a women's basketball team?

JB: I guess that's what you'd call it.

MN: Did they play other schools or did they - -

JB: I played inside the school.

MN: Now what about the track team?

JB: I played on the track team too.

MN: Did you run against other schools?

JB: Yes. And this teacher she went and had her nose fixed that summer before I graduated, and she was talking down to us again. And I talked back to her and I was running for my major "M" and because I talked back to her, she didn't like it and she gave me a 98 instead of 100, so I couldn't get my major M.

MN: So that was for track?

JB: Yes. Track and high jumping.

MN: So you had a pretty negative experience in school would you say?

JB: Yes well - - the good thing about it was my mother and father were in school, that's what it is.

MN: Did you get pretty good grades?

JB: I had good grades - - and if you don't raise your hand you don't get no grades. The teachers said to me - - Mr. Green something - - the year we were going to graduate, this was April - - he wrote a book about it, about that thick, and he said "June," I raised my hand and I discussed the civic history of the Bronx and because I didn't say it in his words, he said "June, you won't graduate in June because you won't say what I wrote in my book." I looked out the window and I didn't pay no mind after that. And of the three children that passed in class was June.

MN: So only three kids in the whole class passed?

JB: And June was one of the three, 88 or something like that because he wanted us to say it exactly like how - - but when I took the regents, the regents didn't require me reading his book.

MN: Were you planning to go to college after high school?

JB: No. I wanted to be a lawyer but I knew I couldn't go to college. My mother had children.

MN: When you were in high school were you working on the side?

JB: No. I worked after I came out of school. I worked down at German Town, I worked in the city helping them to - - they weren't citizens then, but the people who came here from the different islands and they had to be vaccinated and I helped them do that down town. Then I worked for Maquisins and Robins on 142nd and 5th Avenue, I worked for -- I worked for some company - - remember the telephones that you - -

MN: The telephone operator. Andrea told me you eventually became a nurse?

JB: Yes I was 30 years old - - what year was that?

MN: 1951. Did you get married during those years/

JB: Oh yes, yes, yes. I got married that November.

MN: Where did you meet your husband?

JB: In the Bronx - - we'd all hang out in the Bronx.

MN: Now she told me you know a lot about the clubs and the night clubs.

JB: Oh the night clubs [Laughs].

MN: Tell me a little bit about the night life in the Bronx.

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JB: There wasn't so much of a night life in the Bronx. [Inaudible] club called the [Inaudible] so we used to go downtown to the Rendezvous, the Renaissance, and to that club downtown - -

MN: How do you spell the name of the group you were in?

JB: My group was the Copper Hearts. There were twelve of us and this club you had to be - - you had to know music and play the piano or something. Eleven of us played the piano and had to know music.

MN: Were you all from the same neighborhood in the Bronx?

JB: No not from the same neighborhood. I met most of them downtown because the head of the club was my Michael and he lived down on 139th St.

MN: Oh so this is people from Harlem, people from the Bronx - -

JB: Yes, yes, yes our friends. And the club used to meet on Saturdays.

MN: Right. Were you a good dancer?

JB: Oh yes, yes, yes.

MN: Did you used to dance the Lindy Hop?

JB: Yes.

MN: Where are some of the places you used to dance the Lindy

JB: I danced in the Renaissance, and I danced at the - -

MN: Savoy?

JB: No, I went to the Savoy once. I danced at - -

MN: Not Rockland Palace?

JB: No, we didn't go way downtown. The Renaissance and another place.

MN: Were there any places to go in the Bronx, did you ever go to Club 845?

JB: Yes I went there.

MN: What was some of the musicians you saw at Club 845?

JB: Oh well I can't remember them but we used to go to [Inaudible] in that club and then we used to go to Boston Rd up on 169th St there was another club there.

MN: Was that Goodson's?

JB: Yes it was Goodson's. And then we went to the Sterlin - - those were the nice, better clubs.

MN: Now did you ever go to the Hunts Point Palace?

JB: Yes we went there. And the first time we went there - - I'll show you the picture of my sisters - -we all went to the dance there. We all went together.

MN: Did you ever learn how to Latin dance?

JB: Oh of course it was natural, that was a natural thing.

MN: So Tito Puente and all them?

JB: Oh natural. Natural for us, we were all Caribbeans. Music is all the same in all the islands. Same thing, same thing.

MN: What kind of music did you hear in your house, did you parents play?

JB: Oh my daddy, he gave us - - we had to listen to the better music and Morman Tabernacle - - good music. Daddy would have music play for us and you needed to listen to the music and you'd sit and listen. Mama would play the piano, daddy would sing.

MN: Did you have a piano in the house?

JB: Yes. We got rid of the piano when we moved to 925 Union Avenue. But daddy - - better of things that he could afford and good music was one of the things that you had to - -

MN: You had the record player and the piano.

JB: Yes and we had to learn how to read, take time out for reading. We couldn't run in the streets like kids run in the streets now a days. At 3:00 you weren't out there running around like you were insane, you was upstairs resting and reading.

MN: Did all of your brothers and sisters go on to become nurses and teachers?

JB: My sister next to me, Emmid, she worked in social services. My sister next to her, she worked in Psych, Psych in that big hospital downtown.

MN: Bellevue?

JB: Is it? Yes. And they built a new one - -?

MN: New York Hospital maybe?

JB: That's right. And my other sister she went out and became administrator. My other sister worked in the bank. And my brother worked for 20 something years in Department of Sanitation administrating.

MN: So everybody took education - -

JB: My other sister, Orea, the baby sister - - she graduated from Hunter College and she went on to - - she worked for the government, federal government. She worked out of welfare too. And then last job was out there in Staten Island, she worked for the federal government.

MN: So everybody at least graduated from high school.

JB: Oh everybody had to graduate from high school and yes we did. Several of us had some college credits to our resume.

MN: As more African Americans and Afro-Caribbean's moved into the neighborhood did it become a friendlier place?

JB: Oh yes of course we didn't know them and then you realize you grow up and become friends. You deal with the same people - - they spoke the same language, acted the same, and they cooked the same.

MN: What sort of food did you grow up with in your house? What kind of food did your mother cook?

JB: Mom made cereal, oatmeal cereal, and she cooked rice and peas and she cooked lamb, fish - - all the things that they cooked in their home, most of the time we had Caribbean food.

MN: When you and your husband met and got married did you stay in the Bronx?

JB: Oh yes. Just moved over to the building that's torn down - - but I lived in the Bronx.

MN: Your family, I saw your address at Morris was Union Avenue. This was Union Avenue between where and where? 986.

JB: Yes 986 between 163rd and 165th, this side of the street.

MN: Were there a lot of people from the Caribbean in that block?

JB: Oh yes. Especially this side of the street - - Beldfonte lived and Mr. Kitt's family - -

MN: Now you said Harry Beldfonte lived on that block?

JB: Yes on the other side.

MN: How long did he live on the block?

JB: Not too long.

MN: Somebody said he lived with a family named Sousa?

JB: I know he lived across the street.

MN: Did you notice him?

JB: No, he was just one of the children in the neighborhood.

MN: How old was he at that time?

JB: Oh if I'm 83 - -

MN: In other words - -

JB: Teenager.

MN: Oh this was as a teenager. Did you notice he was particularly handsome?

JB: No we were just friends in the neighborhood. [Laughter]

MN: So he wasn't the handsomest guy in the neighborhood?

JB: No. [Laughs]

MN: Did you guys go to the movies a lot in the Bronx?

JB: Yes once at Loews - - RKO - - the other one down the block there at 845.

MN: Was it the Olympia or something?

JB: I can't remember the name of that show. I can see it in my mind but - -

MN: Now what about churches?

JB: Oh my daddy said we have to go to church. He didn't know so much about the lord and god and so forth and so on, but we had to go to church. And you'd go to church on Sundays.

MN: What churches would your father have to go to?

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JB: He wanted them to go to the Catholic church so they went to the Catholic church, but I went with my friends. Anybody told me - - if you're Catholic or Jewish or - - I used to go with my friends, wherever they were that's where I went. Catholic was predominately - - my father them baptized.

MN: Was that St. Anthony of Padua?

JB: On 166th and Prospect.

MN: Did you ever go to St. Augustine's, the one on 165th and Prospect?

JB: Yes I used to go there too. I went you know, wherever my friends went, I went.

MN: But you weren't particularly religious?

JB: No, I just knew you had to go, so you went.

MN: Did you have a sense that your father was typical or that he was unusual in that neighborhood?

JB: My father was good father, he worked hard.

MN: He sounds like an amazing person.

JB: He worked hard for us. He worked hard for my mother and Friday nights when he'd come home he'd bring my mother stockings or candy. So he always brought us something on Friday. And then he says "Well, since you had the children all week, I'll take care of them." He was a good cook and he'd cook for us and take care of us and we had to take - - since my sisters bubbles, her name's Pearl she was the fourth sister, they claimed she had rickets so mama took us to the doctor and they said they had to break her legs to straighten her legs out. Then mama came home and told daddy and daddy said "You don't have to break her legs to straighten her legs out, I'm going to take her out

again.” And so he took her to a doctor, a German doctor, and the doctor and the doctors said that you had to give her codliver oil, rub the legs, and put her in the sun and fruit juice or fruit every morning. So daddy said that if it was good for her then it was good - -

MN: For all of you. [Laughter] So you all had to have fruit juice and codliver oil.

JB: And then he bought a house out in Queens.

MN: So you all moved to Queens eventually?

JB: Yes. My mother had four kids then.

MN: What year did the family move to Queens?

JB: If I was born ‘21 - - I guess 1924/25.

MN: And then they moved back to the Bronx.

JB: Yes because it was lonely out there because daddy worked in Manhattan.

MN: When you were married how old were you?

JB: I was 30 I think.

MN: And you had started working as a nurse then?

JB: Yes.

MN: Did you go to nursing school?

JB: I went to Harms Nursing School. And then I went on the island also to train.

MN: How many years did you work as a nurse?

JB: 32. I retired after I was sixty something.

MN: Where are some of the places you worked?

JB: Morris - - oh the hospital? Fordham Hospital and North Central over here. Fordham Hospital was a good place to learn. I saw every disease in the books at Fordham hospital.

MN: Did you enjoy working as a nurse?

JB: Oh yes. It was very good, learned a lot, you meet a lot of different people.

MN: How many children did you have?

JB: I got hurt in this job so I had spontaneous abortion.

MN: Oh boy so you never had children.

JB: No.

MN: And you got hurt in the job while nursing?

JB: Yes while nursing. But I didn't know I was supposed to report it and it was too late after - - but it's OK, everything happens for the best, my mother said.

MN: Where you and your husband lived, were the neighborhoods always good neighborhoods?

JB: Not bad, the Bronx was pretty good. There wasn't no shooting or carrying on like that.

MN: So you remember growing up in a time when it was very safe.

JB: Yes. And mamma said - - we had to be home after school, promptly at 3:00 because Mr. Shultz used to come through Boston Rd. And coming from Boston Rd up north, and mamma said we had to be in the house and come home from our schooling at 3:00 'cause they came through the neighborhood in their cars.

MN: And they were worried - -

JB: My brothers - - the first time that I saw the red and green lights because they used to have these globes up there on the street.

MN: So they didn't have traffic lights?

JB: No. Schultz would come around through - - people going underneath the L and keep on going to Manhattan.

MN: So he was the local gangster.

JB: Wherever he came from he was the local gangster. [Laughs]

MN: And they were worried he was going to shoot people or run them over?

JB: No but just that - - mamma said we had to be home at 3:00 on time. Get to school on time and you come home on time.

MN: And when you'd come home you'd stay in the house?

JB: Stayed in the house or you'd play in the yard out there.

MN: What sort of yard was there?

JB: There was a nice yard and then we had a open lot, that was on Boston Rd. Nice open lots up there.

MN: All the brothers and sisters played together?

JB: Oh yes. We played together.

MN: Did you ever roast marshmallows or things like that?

JB: No we'd roast potatoes. [Laughs] Up in the lot, the white potatoes you know. Oh it was something else.

MN: Did you ever call it "Mickey's?"

JB: That's what they called them but we called them potatoes. [Laughter]

MN: Were there other things that I haven't asked that you remember that are important to talk about?

JB: No. I had a good father and mother and I thank my mother for what she did us.

Because I thought if it wasn't for her, I'd never be living in this house.

MN: Now the things she did for you, you mean by education?

JB: That's right. How to sew, how to crochet, play the piano - -

MN: So you had all of this upbringing, all of these skills that an educated person would have. And you learned them all at home. So you learned more at home than in school.

JB: I don't know, I guess one way or the other. I remember when Morris High School - - I had a burn on my hand from the stove, and the teacher said "What's that on your hand?" and I said "It's a burn." And she stayed away from me and she wouldn't look at my sewing because I had a burn on my hand. These crazy people. Crazy. And one year - - we made cocoa, you make cocoa, put a little bit of cinnamon and sugar, pinch of salt and the cocoa, and it was just delicious. Because I didn't make it according to the book, I said "You make cocoa from a book? I didn't know you made cocoa from a book - I didn't know you cooked from a book." I just cooked. And she was upset. She didn't give me credit for it, she gave it to the teachers to drink at lunch time.

MN: Was there any teacher who was different?

JB: Ms. Duncan. I was learning algebra in ENX and Ms. Duncan was dean of the girls and she [Inaudible] so Ms. Duncan would do the algebra and I'd come home and do the algebra and it'd come out right. When I'd go to school she'd want me do it her way. For one solid year she taught me algebra her way and mamma taught me her way but she said she'd give me credit for it and I graduated Morris High School and she said well you

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tried. But I did everything the English way. I used to do all of my math in English way too. Daddy wrote very well, the old script, fancy writing.

MN: Did your family every go back to Antigua or Barbados and vacation?

JB: Oh we went two years ago on a boat, a cruise.

MN: But not when you were growing up?

JB: No, we couldn't afford it then.

MN: Did you have other relatives who lived in New York City?

JB: Yes. I had my grandfather who lived here in Manhattan, my mother's grandfather, my daddy's momma lived in Manhattan.

MN: Is it your father's mother who still spoke African words?

JB: My mother's mother. And her son spoke the African words. [Laughs] That was a long time ago.

MN: OK so nothing else you can remember?

JB: No. I met nice people. I met bad people too, but I met nice people. Nurses, some of them are still alive and around which was very nice. I met nice people.

MN: OK thank you very much

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MN: Now you're telling me a very interesting story about interpreting history. You were in high school I guess you wrote on a paper because you had learned it in the English history that your mother had taught you that George Washington was a traitor.

JB: [Laughs]

MN: And you wrote that in your examination and tell me what the teacher said.

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JB: He said "June," and I was certain about my graduation, he said "June, you won't graduate or pass the regents because you're writing this. You must write it the other way, maybe he was but I want you to write it the American way about George Washington because it has to do with the Tories and the Whigs because George Washington's father told George to get the colonies to become English. This wasn't supposed to be the United States, this was supposed to be the English colony. Well she was so funny, she said you must write it the other way. To me that was so funny. [Laughs]

MN: So in the West Indies they taught that George Washington was a traitor?

JB: Yes because in English history - - they were under the English government; Antigua and Barbados and a couple of the islands along there never got five different nations - - conquered them, just the English conquered them. So some of the islands were Spanish or what have you, but this was only English and she said you must turn it around the other way I'll pass you. [Laughs]

MN: OK thank you.