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Chappell, AJ and Robert Minor.

Chappel, AJ and Robert Minor Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewee: Andrew 'AJ' Chappell, Robert Minos and Margarite Chappell

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Transcriber: Ariana Allensworth

Mark Naison (MN): Today is June 6, 2007 and we're at Fordham University, this is an interview for the Bronx African American history Project with Andrew A.J. Chappell and Robert Minos, both of whom in played for the famous Hilton White basketball program and both whom grew up in the Forest Houses. Helping us will be Margarite Chappell, will be sitting in as a helper in this interview. So to start with the beginning, tell us a little bit how your families came to the Bronx and to the Forest houses, we'll start with you Robert.

Robert Minos (RM): As far as from what I know my father's family was from the Bahamas –

MN: So your family's from the Caribbean.

RM: Yes, well part of the family. My mother's family was from the south. They sent us to Catholic school. My older brother Harold, his name is Harold Johnson, he was the first black person to get a scholarship to the White high school, in the 50s. In those times we watched guys like Floyd Raines or anyone in the particular neighborhood around 166th street and Prospect Avenue. My sister, her name was Shantell I had an older brother named Leroy Minos, to which I mostly copied his moves, and got the credit for it.

MN: No did you go to Saint Anthony of Padua?

RM: Yes, I did. I went from 1 to 8th grade. I mean I hung out with various guys. But, I mean, we have a lot of people from that particular school that became something. There was Anita Greene, today she's a top judge now. Numerous others I just can't remember that became something. It was a upward experience.

MN: What year were you born?

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RM: 1948.

MN: 1948, and what year did your family move to the Forest Houses?

RM: Actually, we lived on 166th street but my particular grandmother lived in the Forest Houses.

MN: So you lived in an adjoining block?

RM: Yes, 166th street.

MN: What building was it?

RM: 815, it was the corner building. Right there on the corner.

MN: Is it still there?

RM: No sir. No it's not.

MN: Now what sort of work did your father do?

RM: My pops worked with the post office. The United States Post Office. And my moms was a nurse of Lincoln Hospital.

MN: Okay, and Andrew, why did your family come to the Bronx in the Forest Houses?

Andrew Chappell (AC): Well, my mother and father were from the South. They moved up, we initially lived on, I'll never forget, 444 171st Street in the Bronx. I remember that at the time everyone was pretty much just living in tenements, and then the projects were just being built. Basically back then, which I know a lot of people don't know now, is that the projects were really just for low-income working people. So it was like a move up when we got put in the projects. In 1956, or whatever, we moved into 695 163rd, which is around the corner of Trinity Avenue. From then, I moved there when I was like 5 years old, 6 years old. So I grew up right there.

MN: Did you go to PS 140?

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AC: Yes I did. In fact, I went to PS 55 at first until they closed it down. Then I got transferred over to 140. Then from 140 I went to the famous 120, which was pretty big in basketball back then.

MN: This was a junior high?

AC: Junior high school right there.

MN: And where was that located?

AC: It's right on Caldwell Avenue, between 163rd and 164th.

MN: And that was known as a basketball Mecca?

AC: Yes, everybody passed through there, including –

MN: Mention some names.

AC: Willy Warsley went there.

RM: Tony Fields

AC: Myself. Tony Fields, Robby Behagan, played in the pros. In fact a lot of the older grads went there. Buney, he died in Vietnam, he was also going to play in what Trinity – There's a lot of people. Robert Swinton.

MN: What was the neighborhood like when you were growing up?

AC: Let me see, it was interesting because initially, when I was growing up, we were all into baseball, that was the big thing initially. It wasn't until I got about 11 years old that I started getting into basketball.

MN: Where would you play baseball?

AC: We had 128th school yard when it was right there.

MN: You played in the asphalt?

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AC: Exactly. But also I played in the stadium league next to Yankee stadium. So our main thing right at that time was baseball. And Robby Behagan's father, Mr. Behagan, he kind of took us under his wing or whatever, because he was into baseball at the time, so we played kind of for him.

MN: Yes, they named that park after him, you know Behegan—

RM: Yes, he lived in our building so he was —

MN: Did you know Arthur Cryor?

RM: Yes, I knew Arthur Cryor. I used to actually hang out with his son, Jimmy Campbell. You know Arthur Cryor, he was alongside Burt Backrat, I know he just passed away about a year or two ago. Arthur, you know, he was a *genius*. He was over on 10th Ave and 166th, over there. Actually, one time, he took Jimmy and I. My sister's name was Shantell, he probably figured I was singer [laughter]. He took us downtown, and I'll always remember the song too, we recorded a song, that's the last time any of us [laughter] were caught singing. So, yes, I knew Arthur Cryor.

MN: Now, was the neighborhood a safe place when you were growing up?

RM: Yes. It was a different crowd, a very crowd. As A.J. said that as people were moving into the projects, you understand, that was like the next to a home. Everyone worked, from what I knew. I know my father worked, my grandfather worked, it was a very nice neighborhood.

AC: It was very, like I said, cohesive. I mean, for those few that I grew up that didn't have fathers, the other father's would bring them along. Mr. Behagan was especially known for that, I mean, I always remembered he was the one who interested me to frog

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legs. Because he took us out to Coney Island or whatever. My father used to always
prett much –

MN: So there was a lot of mentoring going on?

AC: Yes exactly.

RM: A whole lot, that's where Hilton came in. That's where he came in. I came from
166th Street, A.J. came from 163rd Street and our particular team was like an all star team
in the Bronx because we came from various neighborhoods at Hilton. Some of us
beforehand went down to Mr. Alley, Mr. Alley coached the team for all the boys at –

AC: Well we played – that's where it started out for me. I had tried out for the Falcons
or whatever, but he didn't know I was 11 years old at the time.

MN: Now what year were you born?

AC: I was born in 1950.

MN: Okay, so you're two years older.

AC: Yes, so when I tried out for the Falcons or whatever, I had actually made it, but then
when he found out that I was only going on 12, he sent me down to Mr. Alley, which was
his mentor [referring to RM] Hilton White.

MN: Okay, tell us a little bit about Mr. Alley. How do you spell his name?

AC: That's a good question, we only knew him as Mr. Alley.

MN: Where was his gym?

AC: Well we played, for instance, when I played with him were Adam Clayton Powell
Joe Wells Bitties, was the name of our team. So were sponsored by Wells' Restaurant
and also Adam Clayton Powell. We used to practice at the Renaissance.

MN: So you went down to Harlem? Mr. Alley was in Harlem, and he mentored –

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AC: Hilton White.

RM: Yes. It was like something was in conjunction with Hilton's coaching. What people would do is if you were young they sent you down to Mr. Alley, and Mr. Alley gave you that basics and what have you, you understand. And then, as you got a little older, you came back to –

MN: Now run through a Mr. Alley practice for me.

AC: Well, Mr. Alley was tough. I mean, it was no nonsense, you know, once again, you know, father type figure. The thing I liked about his program, one of the things he would do, because like just prior before me that's when Robby Sweeton and The Singhole twins, they had been played the year before, so they left there I came in with myself, Tony Fields, Walter Grandwall –

RM: Weaver.

AC: Yes, George Weaver, Upshure. So about five of us went down to play with Alley. One of the things he used to do, he had one of the things he called Bird League. What was interesting about this, when you played with his Bitties team, at the end of the year, when he had the Bird League, each of us would get to have our own team. So we learned about coaching when we were about 12 years old. And then we would all have our or Bird League team, and we would coach. So I had on my tem, I had Ricky Polite, Reagan. They were on my team coaching, so I got introduced to coaching at an early age which I thought was beneficial – I thought was beneficial because of the fact that it gave you a broader idea about the game, it made you think about the game in a different way, so at an extremely early age –

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RM: Different perspective, you know. I just found out, I didn't even know, that's where Hilton got that idea from. Because Hilton used to get a bunch of us, and take us into a classroom at 120 and what he would do was make them, some of the guys who were better than, make them the captain of the team. I didn't even know he got that from Mr. Alley. What happened, is really I got good from being around Gary –

MN: Now, you start playing basketball – who would identify you as talented, and how would they direct you

RM: Alright, what happened with me I had ball players who played with them. My brother, and other guys. Those guys, you understand, recommended me to play with Hilton. So that's how I got recommended. The name of our team was the Falcons.

MN: Now how old were you when you picked up a ball for the first time?

RM: I was young, I was, have to say at least five or six years. You have to understand, the thing with my family we're ball players. My sister's Renee, Shantelle, she played with Saint Anthony's basketball team. The funny thing about that situation, her girls team won the whole Catholic school championship. And also, they beat the fellas. They beat the fellas.

MN: So playing ball was in your family?

RM: Yes. Or you could say in the genes.

MN: In the genes. What about in your case?

AC: Well as I told you, I started off playing baseball, and then we just all sort of started getting interested in basketball I'd say pretty much when I was about 11 years old we are started playing basketball. In terms of being introduced to it, or the Falcons or Hilton, of course with us, our crew, after finishing with Mr. Alley, we came as a group back up to

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try out for the Falcons. One of the things I'll always remember growing up is trying out for the Falcons, because it's an experience when you come and try out. Because people come from all over the place, because the team is already known to be big time as far as playing, so people would come from everywhere. I mean, Melrose, Patterson, Bronx River, you name it, they would be everywhere.

MN: Now, was this an indoor or outdoor?

AC: Outdoor.

MN: Caldwell and 166—

AC: At Hilton's park because he used to work for the park. So we would have the try outs there.

MN: So he worked for the parks department? And he was a recreation supervisor?

AC: Right.

MN: Because during the fiscal crisis, they eliminated those positions.

AC: Yes, I know.

RM: See at that particular time, Hilton was lucky enough to get that coaching job, because he could coach various people –

MN: So his official title was as a park recreation supervisor?

AC: Right.

MN: And was the team funded by sponsors?

AC: No.

RM: No, that's one thing I always will remember. What happened, he'd speak to us, you understand, about getting uniforms, and we'd have to go to our parents, and our parents

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would provide the money for our uniforms. One thing he did do as far as tournaments, he'd put his own money in.

MN: So he didn't have sponsors, he did that out of –

RM: He did that out of – I mean this guy, he was a loving genius as far as kids and basketball was concerned.

MN: You know, what I want to go over with you is, the opportunities you had for mentoring, so you had it from father's, you also mentioned the night centers and the afternoon center, what were those places like?

AC: Well they were interesting. I mean you had a lot of activities going on, I mean they had dance going on in one place, arts and crafts going on some where else, basketball or whatever, you know, chess – I mean you had a lot of things going on and you had people, you had a lot of people that volunteered to be there.

MN: Which afternoon centers did you go to?

AC: I went to 120.

RM: I went to 120 and also the Forest House. A lot of the Forest House had workers that were counselors, one particular person was Mr. Modus, Mr. Modus started PS 5 over there. He was the big guy at PS 5, Mr. Modus was a big time ref.

MN: So there were a lot of places for kids to go with activity?

AC: Yes, I mean you had the church; a lot of youth would go to the church. In the summertime we used to go to the church. Then –

MN: Now you were a member of Victory Baptist, was that a big congregation?

AC: Yes.

MN: Who was the minister?

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AC: What was his name? [Sighs]

Margarite Chappell (MC): I went for the barbeques, I don't know.

RM: I don't remember, that was a long time ago.

MN: And you remember Saint Anthony's?

RM: Saint Anthony of Padua, I had a distinguished grandmother, you know, she was really involved in the church.

MN: What was your grandmother's name?

RM: Her name was Rosetta Myan.

MN: Rosetta Myan.

RM: She was the president of the rosary society, the president of the credit union, grandma of the year. She had a heck of an influence on me. She was always doing something, always going places.

MN: Was your grandmother from the islands?

RM: She was from the islands, my grandmother was from the islands?

MN: From Barbados?

RM: No she was from Nassau.

MN: From Nassau?

RM: Yes, that's where she was from. She came here, her name was Roberts before it was Myans. They migrated here, and then my father he was born in America my other uncles were born in America. I had a cousin, what happened, her family in Nassau, her brother sent his kids all the way here to America to go to college, and all of them became something, a doctor, a pharmacist, I had one cousin named Joe Roberts, and he helped

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build the World Trade and State building. So you see a lot of West Indians and a lot of blacks into construction building, he was among the ones in the 60s who made it possible.

MN: So he helped, those jobs were tough to get, and he helped open doors? So it sounds like you were surrounded by people who wanted you to be successful?

AC: What my case was, the influential person in my life was my mother. Because my mother first of all, she was a rebel, activist, I mean all that stuff. She worked in 120 when I was there. So, I mean she constantly pushed me. I'll never forget one time when, I forget what it was, for some reason we got caught because they claimed I didn't stand to pledge to the flag or something, and they called my mother in and said he didn't pledge to the flag, and she says well you don't have to pledge to the flag if you don't want to. So, you know, she was always that type, she was active, she was treasurer of the PTA, she was in the Democratic Club.

MN: Was she in the Jackson Democratic Club?

AC: Yes, she was in that when it pretty much first started. I mean like I said, you name it, she was activist in that. A lot of the kids that came after me know her because she worked at 120.

MN: So people like your mother and Behegan and your grandmother –

RM: And uncles, I had uncles too, all my uncles went to World War II, a lot of them came back alive. If there was people out there that wasn't doing right, I'd still look up to them, you understand, they were the guys I looked up to.

MN: Now, were there gangs when you were growing up?

RM: There were gangs, there were gangs. The funny about it is, we never were in no gangs. I remember one time we played in the Forest House, and we played against

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Ronald Sniff, and them. Remember we had that fight? Many times we had to stick together as a team, and these guys was in a gang. We held out own, but we wasn't in no gangs.

MN: But it was possible for somebody to keep out of that without getting into too much trouble?

RM: We was fortunate, because like I said, he had his moms, Mr. Behegan, you understand, I had my grandmother, my uncles, my older brothers. If they were in gangs, per se, those guys were smart enough, the older guys to look out little guys.

MN: Now what about, how you related to elders, were you always supposed to be hello Mrs., hello Mr.?

AC: You had to be respectful, I mean it was unheard of, well first of all, in our day, you didn't even curse in front of your parents, you didn't say any slang. That's one of the other things that interesting to me about kids now growing up, we had our own way we'd talk amongst each other, but you didn't dare bring that in front of your parents. And that's what's interesting, because now you got parents that let their kids speak any kind of way or whatever, that was just unheard of.

RM: I can remember, one time, I was at the table, and I had belched and I didn't say excuse me. I can still feel my mother's hand going [laughter] Or even when you came into the house, you spoke to everyone. I can remember my father telling me, 'take your hands out your pocket. Don't be walking with your hands in your pocket.' As I got older I understood, it could cost your life.

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MN: One interesting thing you were talking about during lunch was that, teachers would come to your house, Mr. White would come to your house, that doesn't seem to happen much.

RM: I think today, because the parents now a days, they consider the school and everybody else the enemy to a certain extent. So, when a teacher tries to, the first thing a parent is going to do is take up for their child, when we grew up, it was the opposite.

Where they believed you messed up if the teacher – but now a day, they would challenge a teacher and say, 'well how you know my son did that.' Even though they know, their son or their child did something wrong.

MN: So the presumption then was that the teacher is right, now the resumption is the kid is right.

RM: How that came about, these kids now are so young, they haven't even had an adult life, so what do they know? So that's what's going on, babies having babies, and things of that nature, so kids got younger, kids wasn't as intelligent as we are today, and also what's going on now too, it's just people don't have no trust in the system. That has a lot to do with it. That's ignorance. The younger type of kids, I can say this much, in the 60's you had a drug crisis, this tarnished the black neighborhoods. It didn't tarnish America, I'll put it like this, if I was on drugs and I had children, my parents took care of the children, would take care of my kids. Uncles took care of the kids, and what I mean to say is, when my uncle died, my grandmother's died young, these kids are out there. So that's why things are really crazy now, where the kids aren't listening to *nobody*. That's 60s, that's 60s.

MN: So you see in the mid-60s as a time when things started to collapse?

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RM: It's because, what I'll always say when I talk to people in the job, and when I talk to the young folks, I said, not you, but my age group, got the ball. Everybody else in front of us they alright, but if you think after us, you understand, everything went down.

MN: Now I want to go back to Mr. Alley, and Hilton White, and all these folks came out of this little black college in South Carolina, Benedict College, tell us a little bit about that whole background and experience.

AC: Well, for – as I was saying before, I mean I just knew Mr. White, I started with Mr. Alley or whatever, and everything about him was disciplined, in education, you know respect, I know he was known for if you didn't do something, or wasn't paying attention, you'd see that ball come flying across your head. [Laughs] It was always about respect. The other thing about them, when I left and moved on to play with the Flacons or whatever, even when I was in college, Mr. Alley always called me followed me whatever we'd do, come to my games when I was at NYU. Which was in and of itself, I'll always remember this, the reason why I ended up at NYU because, this somewhat a connection with the southern schools, it was so much talk about how all the good ball players out of New York would always leave New York. Everybody used to go, you know, they had the North Carolina connection, all these different connections. They all put so much emphasis on it, that we all decided we were going to stay. So then in my time, I stayed, I went to NYU, Charlie Owens, went to Fordham.

MN: Now wait a minute, Charlie was from the Falcons?

RM: Charlie was downtown, but we knew Charlie.

AC: Dee Millager, but he went away. Then we had Cee Wright, he went to Manhattan.

Jim McMillan was at Colombia. So we all used to visit each other, and we'd play against

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each other. Of course later on when I got a chance to go out to California to play, I wish I'd gone out there [Laughs] but we all stayed. So that made it where Mr. Alley would always keep in touch with us, Mr. Alley used to be at my games sometimes at NYU.

RM: One of the myths, one thing I can say, see at those particular times, anyone who wanted to stay in the city to play, their mobs had to be together. See a lot of guys did go down south, where the standards were lower – Only guys whose mobs was together could stay together would stay here in the city to play.

MN: Now, all of these mentors, they looked at your grades, they looked at your personal character, and they saw this all as a part of –

AC: It was part of the enrollment. And they'd see it as opportunities, you know, we're coming up in areas where it's not too many things for you, or opportunities for you, and one of the things is, they just wanted to help. As we speak about Mr. Alley, Mr. Alley mentored. Mr. Reed was telling me this story where when he came out of the service he was unemployed. And Mr. Ali said to him one day, I'm going to send you to college.

MN: Now he's one of the owners of the Lenox Lounge, right? With Skinny Reed?

RM: Skinny Reed just passed.

MN: Yes, that's right, because I met him at the Lenox Lounge through Dukes just three years ago.

AC: Yes, I think his brother owned it, and he was an accountant or whatever. What I did pick up as a young fellow is Mr. Alley was a mentor for all those guys. He gave all those guys a chance to go to school.

MN: Okay, so was Hilton White originally from New York? Or these were all people who were from the South who moved to New York?

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RM: From what I think, Hilton's family probably migrated from the South. Now Hilton, did live in Manhattan, that's how he got that recreational job in the Bronx, and brought his family up there to the Bronx.

MN: Did he live in the Bronx, Hilton White?

RM: Yes he did, in the middle of the neighborhood.

MN: So, he lived in the neighborhood, and could walk to his job?

RM: Because Hilton, by being around my older brothers, that Glory Road crew dies, they all used to be going to Hilton's house all the time.

MN: On Clinton Avenue and where?

RM: Between 145th and 46th. He was right across the street from the Forest Houses.

MN: So, you knew his family?

RM: We'd all been to his house, because we lived right across. His wife used to always be in the Forest Houses, teaching dance or whatever.

MN: You took dance with his wife? What was that like?

Margarite Chappell (MC): Tap Dance, she used to treat us strict just like her husband.

[Laughter]

MN: What was her background? Was she also from Benedict College?

RM: I don't know if she was. But I know she was an educated woman, beautiful woman too.

MC: That she was. Her presence you would know.

MN: So she carried herself?

RM: Yes, a very good couple, a professional couple, successful.

MN: Now what did Hilton White look like, was he a tall gentleman or?

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RM: He was tall, he was big, he played on DeWitt Clinton football team. With the DeWitt Clinton coach, Mr. Butler.

MN: So he went to DeWitt Clinton? Then he went to Benedict College, then he came back?

RM: I have all praise for him, because I was lucky enough. A.J. and then they moved on, when to college, teaching, doing this and that, I was fortunate to coach. Very successful citywide, as far as All Star coaches, this and that. But I got over, because I had all of Hilton's ideas.

MN: Now did you coach like high school, college?

RM: I coached every discipline. From the Bitties teams all the way up to college. What I'm doing now, a friend of mine named Mike Dowes, that I grew up with, he's coaching

MN: Did he used to be an assistant coach at Fordham?

RM: No. But you might know his name. But anyway, right now, he's coaching at Trinity, it's a school over on 3rd street.

MN: Yes, I know, sure.

RM: We coach the JV team over at Trinity right now. But what I mean to say is, all that stuff I learned from Hilton. That's what I'm teaching these young fellows.

MC: Trinity, the private school?

RM: Yes. It's a private school, we were so fascinated by that school.

MC: Prep school.

MN: John McEnroe went to that school, the tennis player.

RM: Jackie Onasys, she's keeping the score.

MC: I went to school with Jackie's daughter.

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RM: We come, you understand politics of coaching the girls game. So, distinguished people at that school. I didn't realize that this school starts at grade one and goes all to high school. Which is cool.

MC: It's expensive.

AC: The thing when I think back to the Falcons, it wasn't like just a team. It was almost like a system that Hilton had created. I mean, he had the different levels, you had to Tops—

MN: So what age did he start with?

RM: I started at 13 with the Tops. It was a situation if you couldn't make the team, because I remember being on the Tops, and I couldn't make intermediates, so we made up a team called the Cubs. So that's how I kept my little career going.

AC: What it is, that each of these – like I said, it's almost like a organization basically, because each of these, it's basically age groups within each of these. And then as you go on, you go into the next. I remember it was like that, any other team, I didn't see any other place that had –

MN: This level of organization? A system.

AC: Because Ali, only from the Bitties, to the next level, and then that was it.

RM: And then Hilton came in. And as Hilton migrated and went to colleges, that's when Mr. Reed came in. Mr. Reed, he made it so where he started me off at the Forest House, he got me a job at the Forest Houses at the gym. So he started me off as an individual.

MC: It was great being sisters of –

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MN: So these guys, people knew – if you were in the Falcons, people knew who you were.

MC: You knew the coaches, you knew the gym, you knew the family –

RM: I really I started building reputations from when I was thirteen up until today.

MC: It was great being sisters, because you had all the guys being like oh yes yes yes, I know your brother.

AC: As Robbie mentioned before, when we went to high school, Hilton would come to your games. I remember, I'll tell you, one of the funniest things I remember. We went to watch Tafts was playing against Martyrs, and this was when Devin Down, was on Tafts. Devin was having a hard time, and so, instead of them going over to the coach, they go over to Hilton, Hilton's telling them what to do. As he's saying it.

RM: I forgot the coaches name at Morris High school, but that same thing happened.

MN: So he was like in the whole neighborhood, everybody knew him? It was like 'Hello Mr. White?'

MC: He was like the Pat Riley of the whole neighborhood.

RM: He was like the main person. And if you played with him. It's like A.J.'s sister said, you was something, you was a rock star.

AC: I'll give you another example, of it was like great, or you would get in trouble. I don't think you remember this, you remember – one of the tournaments we used to win all the time was the P.A.L. And at the end when you win the P.A.L. you'd get the green jacket. I still got one of them. So, any event, something happened and Sharpton got into trouble and Hilton got wind of it. Hilton told him – mind you we had already won these jackets, Hilton told him to take his jacket off, and leave it over here on the fence. He had

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to take his jacket, and leave it there, and he didn't get it back until he straighten up, or whatever. [Laughs]

RM: I remember messing up and I didn't play. If I got in trouble, I didn't play. He'd get you.

AC: A thing I'd always get respect for him was – I was always like an honor student in school, so when Hilton went to American International –

MN: What year did he leave?

AC: It had to be before I was coming out of high school.

RM: Hilton was coaching up until he died.

AC: I'm trying to remember, it had to be –

MN: Did he leave in the 60's or the 70's?

AC: It had to be – [Crosstalk] like '66. Because, I hadn't come out of high school yet. Because Curtis was already there, and then he was talking to me and then he says how would you like to come up to Massachusetts? Because I went up there to visit. But he said oh I know got too good grades, you can go anywhere you want to go.

MN: So his whole family relocated to Massachusetts?

AC: He didn't even try to convince me and say, come with me or whatever. He just said, you have the grades and can go wherever you want to go.

MN: Now what was – neither of you ended up going to Morris, which is your neighborhood school? What was the reputation?

RM: Morris? Morris was known beforehand, even in the Powell days, Morris was a dynasty. What I did, I did that same thing everybody else did in my day I was coaching

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kids in the Forest House the good kids, I sent them all the Morris, and they wound up in the championships. But that's the type of guy.

MN: Now why did the two of you not go to Morris?

AC: Well, I'll tell you for me, actually I wanted to go to Taft, because Task had Mr. Adams, was out of the same school as Hilton and them.

MN: He was also? Because— that's interesting because what's his name? Allan Jones said Mr. Adams, cut him from the Taft team, when he started getting into the drugs heavy.

RM : I know Allan Jones, who you're talking about now.

MN: He's about 6'7".

AC: That's where I wanted to go, but I couldn't because I was out of the zone, or whatever the case was, and so they said at the time, Roosevelt. When I went to Roosevelt, they didn't even know I was there. And when they had tryouts I just showed up, because I guess the coach didn't know of me. I just came and he just looked, and said what are you doing here? I said, well I go to school here. He said *you* go to school here? He said well you don't need to try out, you're on the team. [Laughter] I really wanted to go to Task because I wanted to be on Adams' team, because the Adams was known for being no nonsense.

RM: Well, my particular case, coming form Catholic school, and not going to a Catholic high school, due to the fact that it was all boys, so as I got there, the guys knew who I was, the next thing I know, the coach wanted to speak to me.

MN: Is it your sense that in the 60's the Bronx was the place in New York.

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AC: Well yes for ball playing, we played. I was shocked when people were coming telling me Joe Hammond was averaging all these pros, I said we used to kill him.

MN: He was from Harlem?

AC: Yes, and we used to kill him in –

RM: What he's saying is correct. Because now, my younger brother he's younger than Joe Hammond, he was living uptown because my family lived up in the Gunn Hill section, so my brother said to him do you know Robbie Minos. He said, no. But what he's trying to say is, these guys they got so good all of a sudden, but we looked at them like, who are these guys, we'd never heard of these guys.

MN: No I remember Joe Hammond from the Rutgers Tournament.

AC: The only guys that killed us was when we played against Walter Robinson.

RM: And Tiny.

AC: Yes, and Tiny.

RM: Because I knew I was good. You couldn't tell me nothing. But when I got to play against him.

MN: Now who was Tiny playing for at that time?

AC: Chick Jewelers?

MN: Chick Jewelers, now Allan said he played for that guy.

RM: Over in Parkchester.

MN: Now was that Bronx team Chick Jewelers?

RM: Yes, that's one of the rivals.

AC: He'd get most of the players that didn't make Alley's team. [Laughter]

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MN: Now he had a particular connection with Floyd Lane and PS 18? Now was their any tension between Floyd Lane and Hilton?

AC: No the tension was between Chick and Hilton. That's why we had to win when we used to play Chick. Because Chick was known for snatching up any ball players known to man.

RM: One thing I can say, as Hilton left, we got like black balled. When I say black balled that means, a lot of the coaches, you understand, they'd look out for us. When he left, a lot of people abandoned us. You could understand that, because they're trying to deal with their program, one thing I could say to Hilton, he was the first person – remember when you used to do this A.J.? When I coached the Rutgers citywide all star game, I was coaching citywide. We would get up, or when the game was real tight what we would do was, say for example, A.J. would get fouled, instead of putting out our bounds on the foul line, to get the rebound, or whatever, we would take it off the line, and A.J. would shoot. Now he did that for *years* with us, never seen it on T.V. Now one thing about that game, when I would coach citywide and I did that, the people in the stands said, what is he doing? They'd never seen it before, so

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

RM: Now you started seeing the coaches doing it the colleges.

AC: He was a genius when it came to coaching.

MN: No what were some of the things you learned from him as a coach in terms of, first of all, drills, and then organizing practices, and then getting strategy. So just run through first the drills.

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RM: The drills, I learned from him especially about the big man. That's why I was such a good big man coach. He taught us something with the big man, like see how Mike can get that ball, and he can get that dunk in? He always did that too. You know, look at the pivot foot. And then, shooting foul shots, because I couldn't shoot. And this play that he taught us, the one A.J. was talking about on the foul line, I'd pass the ball to the side – I do that play until today. That play still works.

AC: We really knew about defense. We used to press the daylight out of people.

MN: Now would you do zone press, or man to man?

AC: We did everything known to man. Man to man, zone, we all knew it. We knew two-one-two, two-three, one-three-one, all of them.

RM: It would be like this. We would look at Hilton, he would be like, 'no not yet not yet.' [Laughter] He used to do some extraordinary things too. He used to do stuff like this, every time a team scores, press, when they don't score, back on defense. Now he had our minds so adapted, I mean he really got us together with out brains.

AC: I'll never forget, one time, one of the times, when he split the team, when we'd play one against the other. I remember one time we were talking, it was me and this other guy says, 'well I know Hilton I don't want you to think we can't win without you, because we took team whatever over at such and such and we won the game without you.' He just said whose sets do you use? Whose plays do you use? So you don't ever play without me. [Laughs]

MN: So he trained your minds?

RM: He disciplined us, he really did. I'm going to tell you something, the truth. We loved playing with each other. To this day, what I mean to say is, played with A.J. a

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smile will come across my face, Curtis, I'll see him maybe once a year, deep down inside I say to myself that's one of the best big men I ever played. I always get attitude when I think, how he got shafted going to NYU and they closed the program over there, and that really messed him up, because he thought he was going to the pros. He had everything going for him. And today when you see these big guys, he could have played them, this guy was something, I knew he was something. You know what he never did to me, he never talked back to me. If I got in trouble on that court, he would check me. Curtis Mitchell, this guy was so good, he was before his time. What I mean to say is, he got skipped, he went to Hunter, or whatever. When he was in high school ball the year before he was great.

MN: Would you say hundreds of people were influenced by Hilton White? Or more on hundred?

RM: More than hundred. He probably had hundreds that probably played. But then the influence.

MN: So hundreds played for him, but then there's into everybody that you coached.

AC: Yes, because I've coached – when I was working over at. I mean, outside of basketball, just principles. I'll tell you. I'll never forget we played against, Milton in Harlem.

RM: He came from Harlem off the hill up there around where Frankie Lymon and them.

AC: I'll never forget this game, I had a dunk and I missed, so we lost. [Crosstalk and Laughter]

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RM: I mean A.J. I don't have a bad thing to say about this young man, I mean what he is, he's a mentor for young kids. Guys like this here show how we should be working within the community.

MN: Now you both work with kids a lot after you?

AC: Yes. Yes.

MN: So where are you working?

AC: Well I work in Yonkers at one of their programs that prepare youth – I mean I've worked with kids my entire career.

RM: Also. I've worked in mental health, I've worked with kids. I'm presently now, and have for the last 27 years [Crosstalk]

MN: So this is somebody who influenced a tremendous number of people?

RM: Yes, what they did in that particular picture [referencing film Glory Road] you spoke about – I'd like to cry just to hear his name.

MN: DO you think somebody could put together a Hilton White exhibit in like some site in Morrisania. D something, you know, where you collect like you know memories, pictures, wouldn't that make sense? You could do something like this at PS.

AC: Well one of the things that unfortunately – because we were talking about Skinny Reed - one of the things he had took that last time I saw him at the older timers thing, he was trying to talk to me into coming – you know they have this older timers team.

RM: Yes, me too, me too.

AC: But, you know, we're old guys, we're tired, I'm retired. But he told me, A.J. I need you there because all the guys are getting around and talking about the old days I need

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you there because you're going to come and make them organized. But I'm just not freed up or whatever. But that's one of the things they need –

MN: But, you know, you could do something like this at PS 140, or else there's –

MC: Or 120.

MN: -- or 120. Do we know the principle of 120?

MC: I just know the one at 140.

MN: Because somebody, this is something. You know, if you're honoring Morrisania, and it's history, people are doing this with the musicians. You know, we've collected all this information, you know, The Chantells, Arthur Pryor, Grandmaster Flash, The Clubs, you know, it sounds like this particular basketball program, you know, was a community resource that should be given some sort of recognition.

MC: But it's not just basketball, it's just –

MN: But it's part of this whole mentoring, thing that was part of what made Morrisania a special neighborhood.

RM: That's a great idea. Because basically, when I think about the ones that played with us, people have done, we've all gone on to do pretty well for themselves.

MN: Well I know Bubba Dukes would definitely want to work on something like that.

AC: Not we know Bubba Dukes, we'd all love take part.

MC: Me too. [Laughs]

MN: Well I know Bubba Dukes, because he and I talk minimum once a week. We play tennis and golf together.

RM: Actually he was giving a tournament last week, my brother's a coach, and my son plays. Bubba Dukes he's an inspiration to a lot of people.

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MN: But he was one of the really key people in the project taking off. Because it was like, this started off – he got like 15 interviews for us with people from the Patterson Houses. And then what happened was, this friend of mine who was a reporter in the times heard about what I was doing, because Dukes is as crazy as I am. You know, we'd go with a basketball over to the Patterson Houses and then we'd go to Frank's Sandwich Shop and eat, you know, and we'd play music, and we'd joke around with everybody. So this reporter went along, and she wrote a article in the Times, and then all these people from Morrisania started calling, what are you doing on the Patterson Houses, Morrisania is the spot.

RM: One thing I can say, you know, The Patterson, The Forest, all of those, it was just a family, it was all of us, the stars, knew each other.

MN: Well I mean, the first thing I'm doing is, when you guys leave is I'm email Allen Jones, and calling Bubba Dukes. I mean I may know where the Benedict College yearbook. But I mean his friends from Patterson, who were not ball players swear by him.

RM: He can run faster with the basketball, than most guys can run without it.

AC: In fact, a lot of the times, when they be talking about those great guards that came out here, they totally forget about him because he was on the bench.

RM: He was so far on the bench [Laughs] they thought we was just spectators.

AC: Yes, I mean Tony ended up leaving.

MN: You know what's also – when I think back, you guys grew up in a great time.

AC: Yes we did.

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MN: And then something really happened. But today at the school it was like it's coming back. I felt that it was like, you saw these kids.

RM: She knows she knows, she seen it all. The one thing we got going for us, our kids benefit from it, our kids are actually doing well for each other. [Cross Talk]

MN: You guys got to head out right?