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Coleman, Dennis and Harriet McFeaters Interview 2

Coleman, Dennis and Harriet McFeaters. Bronx African American History Project
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Transcriber: Connor Murphy

Mark Naison (MN): Today is the second interview with Mr. Dennis Coleman, longtime Bronx activist, educator, and political leader. This interview is taking place on February 10th at Fordham University. And in the beginning of the interview Mr. Coleman wanted to correct something he said in the first interview.

Dennis Coleman: This is Dennis Coleman. I'm not sure if I stated that Yaphet Kotto, the movie star, had been originally from the Bronx NAACP. I want to correct that, he was originally from Bronx CORE, and I was reminded that he was the vice-president of Bronx CORE. And he was liaison with Bronx NAACP when we were joining together in different civil rights activities in the Bronx.

MN: Let me also say that sitting in on today's interview is Harriet McFeeters, longtime Bronx educator, Natasha Lightfoot, our senior interviewer, and Patricia Wright, graduate assistant on the project. In our last interview, we discussed much of your civil rights activism, and today we'd like to segue into education. When did you first become aware that education was an important issue in the African-American community and in the Bronx generally?

DC: In moving from civil rights, I served in the New York State Senate, and during my tenure at the New York State Senate - -

Unknown: Sorry to interrupt, which was exactly when were the years you served in the senate?

DC: 1955-56. I was on the joint legislative committee for education reform, and our joint legislative committee traveled around the state looking at different education programs,

and reviewing them and seeing the progress that other youngsters from the inner cities around the state were making. We were not being successful in the Bronx at all, and for awhile I was called upon by the - - that was my first introduction to working with the state education department, to come up with innovative programs to be helpful to the inner-city youth. The State Education Department hired me and kept me on as a consultant working with them. When I came back to the Bronx, I was appointed under the old board of education in 1966 to serve on the local board. I served on the local board - -

MN: What neighborhood was covered by this particular local board?

DC: It was formally District 17, District 18.

Harriet McFeeters (HM): Yes, the Morrisania area - - [Crosstalk]

DC: - - Morrisania area, later became District 8. So it covered Morrisania, Hunt's Point, South Bronx, Soundview, Castle Hill, Throgs Neck, Bronx River; that entire Bronxdale area going all along Westchester Avenue, from the lower end going all the way up to the Throgs Neck area.

HM: Was that contiguous with your senatorial district? I mean, pretty much the same area?

DC: Yes, it was - - quite a bit of it was in the senatorial district.

MN: How many people served on this board with you?

DC: I think it was seven.

HM: Who appointed the people to the local school board?

DC: Really came out of the, technically, the bar president's office, [Crosstalk] but Mira Lutwin, I remember, another lady that was labor union. I don't remember all the names

now. However, our names are in the - - I can find out the names because at I.S. 174 I saw my name on a plack as one of the people who built the school.

MN: What street was that?

DC: That's over on White Plains Road in Castle Hill section, Castle Hill – Soundview section, and my name is as you enter the school on the right hand side, myself and the other board members' names are on there. Matter of fact, we built a number of schools. Built the 116, which is over in District 12, and I.S. 74 in Hunt's Point. [Crosstalk]

DM: 131 was - -

DC: 131 was built before I came on the board.

MN: I'm very interested in what areas of education you felt the Bronx was falling behind other portions of the state you visited. What were the Bronx schools not doing? How were they failing?

DC: My biggest problem with public school education was that parents were being made to feel that their youngsters were doing gifted and talented work, so called IGC classes, such as Henry Hudson Junior High School, where youngsters were skipped a grade in the school. And when these youngsters got to high school level, they found out they could not compete with the other high schools in the northern part of the Bronx or places like that. So that the youngsters and their parents had great expectations for these youngsters, only to go in at the freshman level at high school and find themselves to be failing students. I wanted a more realistic level of understanding to the parents, and a more realistic outlook in terms of what the parents should expect. But basically, parents were being given a publicity that was unrealistic of how great the youngster was doing, and in

effect they were not doing well as the other youngsters, when compared to other youngsters.

MN: Do you think this was teachers not pushing young people not hard enough?

DC: Oh this was a viewpoint that you motivate, and you told others that they were gifted, and they would tend to go out and achieve more and more, and graduate with honors and other things like that. And then when they left the school as role models, they would get to high school and find out that they were failing students. So there needed to be a more balancing of the scales, in terms of the achievement level of the students. I went on the school board in those days, pressing as much as we could to find out, and when the Ford McBundy proposals came through, I served then and we began to first, hire the new superintendent. This became very difficult because the unions were opposed, and the seniority rule for those who felt that they should have somewhat seniority and automatically be promoted to some of these positions.

MN: Let me just go back and explain - - was this the transition from the local board to the community school board that you're talking about?

DC: No, this is an in-between.

MN: This is an in-between thing.

DC: This is an in-between before we became to community school boards. This is an in-between phase, and after that - - this is after Reverend Milton Galamison and [Crosstalk] Al Van and others had the big issue, and the I.S. 201 issue in Harlem with the union and everything. It was determined it was best to have school boards that were elected. I, of course, haven't been vocal in the community about the quality of education on the basis of what I had seen as a state senator, serving on the joint legislative committee, remained

a very vocal critic of the current, the then board of education, and what they were really achieving. So I was the only person who was elected to the newly elected school boards and that came about - - I forget what year it was - - but it was a few years later.

MN: '69 or - -

DC: I think it was '69.

MN: So you were the only person from that appointed local board - -

DC: 1966 to '69.

MN: - - to be elected when the new community school board structure was created.

DC: That's correct.

HM: That's statewide, right?

DC: Oh no, there were others in other districts I later found out about, four or five others.

MN: What were your recollections - - and then Harriet you can also chime in here - - of the teachers', 1968 teachers' strike in the Bronx, and how that affected the atmosphere in the schools?

DC: That was one of our most difficult times.

HM: I remember that Morris High School, a group of teachers at Morris High School, opened the school. They had to cut the padlocks, the place was chained, and my brother was one of those who went in and conducted school with great deal of opposition from the administration of the Board of Ed., and other teachers as well [Crosstalk]. And also, in District 8, I know there was a very active group of parents from 232 and 93 [Crosstalk], from that 93 area, who were very vocal and they insisted upon having the schools open.

DC: We had a very good group of parents. Some who slept in the building at PS 138 to make sure the building stayed open, slept overnight in the building. And our board issued a policy to the superintendent that as long as there were teachers who were certified, those teachers could go in and open the school, with or without certified principals or assistant principals. It became - - and in some cases, for instance, at I.S. 52, which is now I.S. 302, some teachers who were quite dedicated did not want to have the schools lose out, the students lose out. So they went into the neighboring church, which was St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, and they opened up and they ran the school, and continued running the school in the parish hall for all of the students who wanted to come, and particularly for youngsters who were in the gifted and talented programs, because then at I.S. 52 they were able to get youngsters into Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant High School, and of course that's the same school that had the long reputation where Colin Powell had graduated from. They wanted to keep that going. We had similar situations where in neighboring churches, some of the teachers would go in and teach classes at the neighboring church's parish hall, including St. Andrew's Episcopal Church [Clears Throat]. I don't remember the other neighborhood organizations that opened up, where teachers who didn't want to cross the picket line and go into school, but still conducted classes - -

MN: Right, outside.

DC: - - without pay, without pay, on their own time. And when the strike was over, there was quite a bit of confrontational activity in relation to those teachers who went in and cross the lines and did things like that.

MN: Was there a lot of rancor on the picket lines between the picketing teachers and parents and teachers crossing, and did that rancor - - what was the form that rancor took?

DC: At first, it began [Clears Throat] quite difficult, and then as the community poured out in support of parents wanting their youngsters to go to school, less and less people showed up at the school to picket. I don't know whether they were fearful of confrontation with the parents, but less and less parents. The big demonstrations were usually down at City Hall, and that's where the teachers and supervisors would go down and march and demonstrate. But in the local community, basically after about the first week, they stayed away, and did not in any way come to the community or in any way involve themselves in a picketing activity outside the school.

MN: So there wasn't that much picketing outside the Bronx schools?

HM: Well the strike lasted for a few months you know. And I think it ended, I think around the end of October, because I recall that was the first year that my daughter was going to a public high school; she went to Music and Art that year. And I was still working. At that time I was working down at the Board of Ed., at the center of Board of Ed.

MN: So you weren't actually teaching or doing administration work in the Bronx?

HM: No, well I was a member of the Office of Intergroup Education, and so I happened to be one of the parents who went to see the superintendent of district, I think it was District 6. It was a black woman; I can't recall her name now. And we were among the parents who wanted the school open, and we did our thing in terms of harassing the teachers who were on the picket line.

MN: Were there racial epithets ever used back and forth in some of these confrontations, or did people keep it pretty civil?

HM: I recall that there were community organizations like the United Bronx Parents and comparable organizations in Brooklyn that put out excellent material [Crosstalk].

DC: All of the city-wide NAACP chapters participated, including even the ones in Williamsbridge, which was then District 11, participated in supporting the parents to go in and open the schools.

MN: Did you remember - - were there any acts of violence or vandalism in the Bronx that you can recall?

DC: Yes. Yes. The - - I remember individuals with Evelyn Antoinette's organization who were arrested when they opened up P.S. 130 on Prospect Avenue.

MN: That's Prospect and what street?

DC: Prospect and 156th Street. And they were arrested. As a school board member, I went to court, and I went to the district attorney to indicate that the school boards which had negotiated with the central board, that there would be no retaliation against teachers or parents, that we wanted to see those individuals not be prosecuted because of the agreement that had been made in the strike. But the then district attorney, Roberts - -

MN: Burton Roberts.

DC: - - Burton Roberts was adamant, and he went ahead despite the agreement, to bring charges against the parents who broke the locks and went into school.

MN: Wow. Do each - - [Crosstalk]

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): I have a question. I was wondering if most of the parents who were active in trying to keep the schools open: what was - - what were - - how did these

parents break down by race? Were they mostly African-American, were they Latino, were they - - and exactly who were they facing on the other side as well?

DC: They were parents of color.

NL: Ok, mostly parents of color.

HM: But there were other parents too. The United Bronx Parents - - [Crosstalk]

DC: Yes, but there were parent organizations. United Bronx Parents was created as a result of that.

HM: Yes, but I mean the UPA, like the one that Jean DePisa worked for, was a part of, and some of the PAs too - -

DC: Yes, that's quite true.

HM: - - and local parents, they wanted their kids to go to school. And one of the issues in the strike had to do with - - was about community control as they interpreted it.

DC: As they interpreted it. But it was parent involvement programs was what it really was. [Crosstalk]

HM: And one of the interesting things about it was that the parents wanted, was the right to sit in the classroom and watch what was happening, you know, watch the teachers teach and of course the teachers didn't want that to happen.

NL: And were these mostly white teachers at the time?

HM: There were mostly white teachers in the system, there were very few minorities, and that was another issue. And I have to say in Mr. Coleman's behalf that he was really a pioneer in that struggle, in the sense of he went out of his way to recruit and push and pull minorities, especially African-Americans, who were certified to become administrators and to teach in the schools, and in particular in the area where he was a

school board member. He was responsible, I would say, largely, for the identification and appointment of many of the minority principals that ended up there. When you talk about P.S. 130, which was the school on Prospect Avenue and 156th Street, that confrontation - - I was standing across the street watching it - - was about Howard Thomas, who was a black principal, becoming the principal - - he was appointed - - becoming the principal of that school, and there were people around who didn't want him in the building. And I can recall, there was a group of black men from the neighborhood, they were civil servants mostly, who used to come out to the school board meetings, and they didn't say too much but they were a presence that was very, very powerful, even in their quiet - -

MN: Who was trying to keep Mr. Thomas out of the building? Was this teachers or - -

HM: Well the union wasn't happy.

DC: Basically it was the union. That was the historic meeting at P.S. 130, in which my pants was ripped and my underwear was showing, and I was photographed in the New York Times exactly with that - - [Crosstalk]

MN: Who ripped your pants?

DC: Persons who were sent there by the union to go in and try to disrupt and stop the meeting.

MN: So they were sent to try to break up the meeting?

DC: To break up the meeting.

NL: And they physically assaulted - -

DC: Oh yes, but what they wanted more than anything else, was, and the photograph showed, that despite everything, we stood firm, and I was there raising my hands, voting in favor of Mr. Thomas to come.

MN: Who was chairing the meeting at that time?

HM: Was that Mr. Phelan?

DC: Yes, James Phelan.

MN: And he was - - what was his - -

DC: He was white, from Throgs Neck. These were mostly whites - -

HM: He got his clothes ripped too, I remember.

DC: But they went after me, in frank, to - - as if I was the person who was bringing in Thomas. I did not know Thomas before at all. [Crosstalk] Only through the interviews.

NL: So they just made assumptions that because you're black and he was black that you were trying to push him through.

DC: Yes. This made the New York Times, of the fact that we had to stand up to these goons. And let me tell you - -

NL: - - and do you know what month this happened?

DC: I can't remember.

MN: [Crosstalk] It's in the New York Times, it would be 1968.

HM: Right, or 9.

DC: No, it might be 1970.

HM: or '70, right.

DC: Yes, or '70. [Crosstalk]

HM: After the implementation of the - -

MN: So this was after the strike - -

DC: Oh yes.

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MN: - - and this was with the implementation of the community school boards and new procedures for appointing principals. So we should look in the New York Times 1970.

DC: '70, '71 yes.

HM: I'd like to find out - - I was going through my papers and I found a file that I have that describes some of the activities that happened in that period.

MN: Oh really? This is very - -

HM: Should I throw them away or - -

MN: No! No, please donate them immediately. I'll come get them. Ok, as an aside, all of your papers from this period are absolutely essential historical documents which we should place in the Bronx Historical Society and the Fordham Library. And we will have a press conference when you donate these documents because they are that important.

HM: [Crosstalk] They need to be cataloged though.

MN: I have - - I'll send somebody to catalog.

DC: Yes, ok.

MN: [Laughs] Hi Patricia. [Crosstalk] Seriously, this is very important - -

DC: Let me say to you that this was a very, very frightening experience. Particularly - - two things came to mind at that meeting. Number one, we had a white female who just came and stood up in the aisle or one or two white females just standing in the aisle, and like dared anyone of color to touch her or to try to remove her, and she's standing in the aisle, just standing up refusing to sit down. And then you had some other individuals who came with knives in their hands, but you couldn't really see the knives because they held the handle of the knife in their hand and the blade of the knife was underneath their jacket. So all you saw was the knife, and that it had a blade, and the blade was under the

jacket. And they came right in front of you, in a taunting manner, just walking right in front, trying to disrupt the meetings with that. And we continued going, guarding the tape recording of the machine that we were voting and that we were recording it on vote, despite these goons that were there to try to stop us.

MN: So this was an attempt to physically intimidate - -

DC: Oh without a doubt.

MN: - - the entire process. And this was a principal selection.

DC: Selection of a principal.

NL: And you have an idea of who sent these people?

DC: No, we couldn't prove it.

UK: Ok. What were your suspicions?

DC: Please, at one point in our meetings, I remember South Bronx Organization wanted to take over vacant land that we had set aside for the replacement of a school, P.S. 39.

The local community managed to have gotten a man by the name of Mr. Roney who was head of the PAL at 156th Street to bus a group of kids to come up to our school board meeting to disrupt the meeting because they wanted the site to be turned back to the community for them to build a new PAL.

MN: Rather than a school?

DC: Rather than the replacement of P.S. 39. [Mechanical Tape Noise] And they were successful eventually with the help of Father Gigante and some other community organizations under Father Gigante. They were successful, and the new PAL center is built exactly on that site that we had to turn back to Robert Wagner Jr., president of the Board of Education then. And he turned it over to them.

MN: So basically you are saying that physically intimidating school board officials became a common practice.

DC: Common.

MN: So if you were on the local school board in some communities, this was not a matter of holding a meeting and having a civil discussion. It was a threat of violence and intimidation in the air from many directions.

HM: But would you say that during that period - - what I thought was - - my impression was that it was the first time that the Hispanic community, at that time Puerto Rican, and the black community leaders kind of coalesced. I had the impression that Dr. Antoinette and - - well they had - - she was really a very vibrant force [Crosstalk].

DC: She came out of the Cleveland Robinson's District 65 movement. She was a part of that.

MN: So she was out of district - - and also the American Labor Party? Was she out of that also?

DC: I don't know, but I remember that she was tied in with Cleveland Robinson's union organizing efforts with District 65.

HM: [Crosstalk] And she was very effective.

DC: And he was organizing all of those factories and other places that were in the Morrisania - -

MN: So Cleveland Robinson was organizing factories in Morrisania for District 65?

DC: Yes, that whole south Bronx area.

HM: And she was supportive of the school board.

DC: And she was part of it.

MN: That's very important.

DC: And she was supportive of the education because she had young children there.

Matter of fact, she got an apartment in Adam's Houses. 1966, it's a letter I wrote as a state senator for her to get the apartment in Adam's Houses.

HM: Because she was - - her children went to P.S. 5, and that's when I became involved with her.

DC: We became - -

HM: She was supportive of you I recall - -

DC: Oh yes.

MN: Was Jilberto Hereno Valentine involved in any of the school issues?

DC: Yes.

MN: I think he must have been close to Evalena.

DC: Yes, oh yes.

HM: They all wanted to be close to Evalena.

DC: They all were tied in. Judge Philippe Torres, his sons, his family. As a matter of fact, his daughter-in-law is currently - - no, Judge Philippe - - Judge Philippe Torres Jr., not Senior. Junior, not the great-grandfather. His daughter, granddaughter-in-law is currently as I.S. 74.

HM: As a teacher or a child, student?

DC: She's a parent coordinator.

MN: Did you ever feel the need to have a body guard or did you always go to these meetings alone and depend on your own dignity and self-confidence?

DC: Let me assure you that even some of our business meetings had required the police to be - - when we were on Turnbull Avenue, had the police in the neighboring room while we conducted the business inside because on occasional, folks would storm those business meetings, such as the PAL who brought the busload of kids and others. So from there, it became obvious that we had to have police, sometimes detectives, in plain clothes, sitting in the neighboring room just in case we needed them.

NL: And this was all racially motivated, you feel?

HM: No, not generally.

DC: It wasn't particularly racially motivated. No, It was - -

HM: Community control.

DC: - - community control.

MN: For one particular group wanting to get some - -

HM: No but basically it was the hostility of the United Federation of Teachers against this concept of community involvement in school affairs. That was the issue, and of course community control meant that parents of all ethnic groups, in particular Latino and African-American, would have a loud voice in what was happening. And their children were not being as successful as everyone felt they should be, so this was in opposition to what the union was feeling they should have had control, and at the same, that was when the power professionals became an important part of the school programs, and most of them were African-American and Latino people. And I must say again, Mr. Coleman, I feel - - well I know he was instrumental in my becoming a part of District 8, I mean we were neighbors, you could say. But I was working at the central Board of Education for awhile after I left 146. And he encouraged me to come to - - I had accepted a job with

Edith Gaines and she wanted me to come and be an assistant principal in her district, but you spoke to me and asked me to come and work in District 8.

MN: Did you know each other from church or - -

HM: Well, from the neighborhood.

DC: Her mother and father was some of my organization's strongest supporters in the community back in the civil rights days. They had a block association covering home owners and others in that block, and it was a very, very powerful organization. So I knew her then. Her sister and I were friends while her sister attended Hunter.

HM: But it was more about the issues of the community - -

DC: Basically.

HM: - - at that time. But like I said, but what Mr. Coleman did during that very turbulent time was when the city-wide issue of decentralization of the school system, and coming up with a plan to integrate the school system. And before they used to talk about the kids and their problems and whatever. But around this time, when there was this issue of community involvement, people began to talk about, well maybe the teachers aren't doing what they ought to be doing. And programs looking at teacher accountability evolved, and that was very sensitive with the United Federation of Teachers, which was a very powerful group. And that's why when the school boards were elected and became into office and saw themselves as powerful individuals who would have a say over who became an administrator and what the programs were and how the money was spent, this is what Mr. Coleman was involved in. And the hostility of the union against people like him was very, very virulent, and I don't know how you related to the people at central - -

MN: Did you ever get hate calls or death threats or any forms of intimidation directed at you personally?

DC: Going outside of the meeting and having flat tires, four flat tires on my car, yes.

MN: Because those are the kinds of things we need to put on record. So that happened to you - -

DC: Sure, sure.

MN: Did any people ever call your home?

DC: Yes, because I kept my - - from that day on till now I have the same phone number that's listed in the public telephone. So I had my telephone as an open access to anyone who wanted to reach me and talk to me. I kept an answering service on it that they could leave a message. At that point I was working for New York Telephone so it didn't really matter to me. I could always find ways of getting the telephone to be working no matter what they tried to do. This was one way that I kept an open access policy to anyone who wanted to reach me.

MN: What were some of the things that people said to you in these phone calls?

DC: Oh, there were - - from the very beginning it was always threatening about appointment of so-and-so. That what you're doing, is you're trying to make it - - the kids suffer more by bringing in - - whether you support a person of color to be principal or assistant principal, it was always that I was doing harm to the kids. And I did not believe in integration by supporting someone of color. It proves that I did not believe in integration. This went on all the way until we had a superintendent who very cleverly was able to get the Board of Education to have the superintendent do a pre-screening of candidates, and only give, I think it was five candidates to the school board, or three

candidates. And by then, on one occasion, I found that after forty interviews, not a single African-American had come before the school board for interviews.

NL: And what period was this now, is this still in the early 70s?

DC: Yes. This was under Max Messer, the superintendent. I'll try to find the letter. I wrote a strong criticism of the procedure to - -

HM: That must have been in the 80s.

DC: - - Gwendolyn Baker, then president of the Board of Education, who later became head of UNESCO?

MN: Yes.

DC: And she looked in and wanted to know why is it that after forty interviews, not a single African-American had come before the school board. And Mr. Messer pleaded that don't single out District 8 alone, look at other districts in the city. It was a stalling tactic. But out of that, for the first time in the history of New York City Board of Education, they were forced to come up and put together an affirmative action program for hiring.

MN: In the district?

HM: In the city.

DC: In the city of New York, because the Board of Education had never had an affirmative action program despite all the turmoil that they had gone through until Gwen Baker demanded that they come up with one and write one. And that came - -

MN: Do you have these documents?

DC: I have that letter, oh yes.

HM: And they had, at some point they had to have monitors to look in on the [Crosstalk]

DC: Sure. From the Office of Civil Rights, the Federal Office of Civil Rights had to monitor and continue to monitor the hiring in District 8 and elsewhere. They kept that policy of having four African-American principals all the way until maybe twelve, fifteen years ago, never having more than four African-American principals. It's as if it was - - [Crosstalk] - - in the District 8, District 8, in the schools.

MN: Out of how many?

HM: Twenty - -

DC: Twenty - -

HM: Twenty-five or something like that.

DC: More than twenty - -

MN: So there have never been more than four African-American - -

DC: No, at one point, under that superintendent. And the succeeding superintendent, Cadish, acting superintendent, attempted to carry out the very same policy.

HM: But before that you had been successful - - [Crosstalk]

DC: In getting a number of principals. But as soon as they left, the screening committee came up with candidates that were not African-American. No African-American. So African-Americans knew all around the city that District 8, you're not going to get to the first screening phase with the superintendent if you were African-American. All over they kept telling me this, and kept saying, so I just gave them enough rope until I could make a city-wide issue of it. And at that point, is when Gwendolyn Baker and the Board of Education felt they had to have affirmative action program, city-wide Board of Education.

HM: But what was interesting about that, though, was, and I tried to encourage many of my colleagues as teachers to go into administration and to apply, and the pull that the UFT had on teachers was tremendous. At that time, teachers were paid for after school work, so they could stay where they were and just work a couple of hours and make sixty dollars a day extra. And many of them were very short sighted and they didn't want to be principals. They wanted - - they saw the money as an issue. And they saw what the turmoil was in becoming a principal and so forth. And they were short sighted. And then, even though they had certification, and I think of Barbara Noel as one because I begged her.

DC: Who?

HM: Barbara Noel at 146.

DC: Oh yes.

HM: And there were others too that were qualified to be principals; they took the courses and everything. But then they thought about what trouble it was going to be, and how you could not have to work in the summers and all the issues and so they didn't really want the job, so they didn't apply. And it wasn't just in District 8, it was all over the city.

MN: Mr. Coleman - -

DC: I'll give you an example. We had a young lady whom I found out had the certification to be supervisor of early childhood, and I had wanted her to be appointed to an assistant principal's position, and later to - - and they insisted that she couldn't have an early childhood position as supervisor because they had already had, by seniority, and assistant principal picked out. I managed to convince the school board that this is who we wanted and this is whom we are going to go with. Lacia Keeby became the early

childhood coordinator of the center on course one P.S. 130. And later, when she had served and became tenured, she was nominated to be principal of P.S. 140. The union went all out in the community, giving out leaflets that they're trying to bring someone in as principal of P.S. 140, the eagle school, which had not taught or supervised above the second grade. Well that was her license and her specialty, so therefore they were saying that she didn't have experience with third and fourth grade since she had been a specialist for early childhood. They were in effect trying to block her from being principal. Of course - -

HM: They were using that as an excuse.

DC: - - The excuse did not work. We made her principal, and she stayed there on until she retired at P.S. 140.

MN: One of the things that's really remarkable is your courage and persisting in the face of things that would have made most people turn away. How - - What kind of work did you do at the telephone company and how did the security at that job affect your ability to stand firm on these issues.

DC: I worked in personnel at the telephone company. And the telephone company - - I was even more frustrated with the telephone company in working at personnel in seeing graduates of high schools in New York City who came in and could not pass the entry level job for the lower positions at the telephone company because graduates from high schools in Nassau and Suffolk and over in Jersey, they were able to graduate from high school and pass those entry-level tests. And those youngsters were white youngsters. So I became more frustrated about the entire Board of Education in New York City in turning out high school graduates who couldn't pass the entry level exam. It was even at that

point, that then Sandra Feldman, president United Federation of Teachers challenged the telephone company to lower their standards. They could not lower the standards of New York Telephone because they were then part of the AT&T structure, where if you work in New York Telephone, you could transfer to Pacific Telephone or to any other telephone around the country doing the same type of job no matter where you are. And you needed to have the same measurable skills in any - -

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DC: - - something has to be done to turn out a better quality of students so that they could pass these entry level tests because I agreed with the telephone company that you ought not to lower your standards in order to hire someone, particularly where that person wanted to move or if there was a strike in a telephone company in Georgia, telephone company workers from New York who wanted to go to work in Georgia could go down there to work, but they had to have the same skills. If they wanted to get married and move and live elsewhere, they could go and move and transfer and live elsewhere. I felt that was very important to these workers. Also, you needed to pass exams even for the civil service structure. Con Edison was facing the same thing. We met as personnel officers of neighboring personnel corporate structures. We all wanted to have a higher quality of graduates in New York City. And then Fred Cilerno, who was an officer at New York Telephone, had been able to work with the governor in reviewing education, and he had me testify before the panel as to what I've experienced on both sides of the fence in order for governor Cuomo, Mario Cuomo, to bring about changes in the education division. The entire experience of trying to get people of color to work in the Board of Education, particularly in districts where they were fearful that if they went into the

system, that they would be penalized by the then superintendent led to a fear of people wanting to come in because if they felt that their future was in jeopardy. Certainly, particularly at the times when there were a quota of four African-American principals, everyone knew that don't even try - - and just by luck, I recall, a young lady from District 7 who was an assistant principal at P.S. 156 had applied, and while she applied for the job, a principal at 123, who was African-American, resigned to accept a position in Teaneck, New Jersey as principal, which left three African-American principals in the district. Right away, the person who had been earmarked for that school was skipped over and the young lady interviewing for the principal's job was immediately appointed, and she is, Mrs. Dawkins is still there as principal, but she became principal simply to meet that quota of four that then - -

HM: That was at 138 right?

DC: That was - - yes. What's his name after Max - - Cadish. Michael Cadish was being interviewed and wanted to be superintendent, and the last thing he wanted was to get below the quota of four, and that's how Maxine Dawkins became principal.

MN: Let me ask a broad question to both of you, because for all of us, a lot of this, the intimidation, the tension, the - -

HM: It was very exciting to be alive at that time. [Laughs]

MN: But, you know, there were other things going on in the community, factories closing, people moving up and out, the fires - -

DC: Housing burning.

MN: - - How did you keep your vision and optimism, both of you, with all these things going on? What kept you going, day after day, staying in this community and trying to

accomplish something? Because that's something I think we need to help young people understand.

DC: It was very, very difficult on my part for those who were physically and mentally intimidated. I don't know if Harriet McFeeters will admit it. We had an entire, massive turnout, parents, community, Albert Goodman, president of South Bronx NAACP, and other came out to meeting, where we were - -

UK: When was this meeting?

DC: - - at Junior High School 120.

HM: Around 1970 something.

MN: Now 120 is what street?

DC: It's in Morrisania, on Caldwell Avenue and 163rd Street.

MN: [Crosstalk] It's down the street from Johnson's Barbeque, that's my reference point for everything.

DC: Yes.

UK: This is like late 70s or early 70s?

HM: It was in the early 70s.

DC: Early 70s.

MN: Now where was the Morrisania headquarters of the NAACP at that time.

DC: At that time - - well the South Bronx NAACP was at 163rd Street and 3rd Avenue, just below 163rd Street on the right hand side. A fellow by the name of Al Goodman was president.

MN: He was the president. Is he still alive, by any chance?

DC: Oh no he's not, but you have the Albert Goodman Houses, which is right on the corner of 163rd Street and 3rd Avenue that's named after him, that he built himself. But let me tell you about this meeting, because it may be a bit embarrassing - -

HM: No I remember that meeting very well [Crosstalk].

DC: - - to Harriet. We had - - there was a massive turnout and - -

HM: Standing room.

DC: - - and we were bringing pressure to have Harriet McFeeters to be appointed superintendent of District 8.

HM: Wasn't that - - that was when Malesca was still superintendent right.

MN: [Crosstalk] So you were campaigning to have Harriet become district superintendent.

HM: But that was when Jean Malesca was the superintendent, and he - - at that time, there was a vacancy for the deputy.

DC: Oh for the deputy. There were two things, yes.

HM: Yes. And the community support was for me to become deputy, and later he chose Dr. Dawny.

DC: No, he choose - -

HM: Joe Dawny.

DC: No, he choose Mrs. Bacon.

HM: Oh yes, Margarite Bacon.

DC: Margarite Bacon.

HM: That's right, he pitted two black - -

DC: He placed another black female who had not been tenured as a principal. So during the time that she was chosen, she could not be paid on the deputy superintendent's line in order to gain tenure as principal because she remained on the principal's line at P.S. 62.

And even though we voted for Dr. Albert Oliver to replace her as principal, he was in the school as principal with an interim acting title for a year and a half because she was officially on that line in order to gain the required period of time to become tenure.

HM: In other words, they at that time accepted the fact that they needed to have black people in higher administrative - -

DC: But they didn't give it to her.

HM: They didn't give it to me. I had, I guess, too much community support and I also - -

[Crosstalk]

MN: - - And qualifications.

DC: Oh definitely, she was already tenured as a principal.

HM: But also, I had been active on the community corporation. I was a member of that Morrisania community corporation over there on 3rd Avenue and 163rd Street. So I - - I lived - - I mean, I could walk to those schools. In fact, I used to walk to 146 and 23 and formally P.S. 10.

MN: So there was a lot - - this was an organized, active community.

HM: But I really wasn't interested in it. I was sort of like the person that they were pushing to test the, I guess the accountability of the superintendent. Personally, I really never wanted to be that, in that role. I always liked to be the one, the power behind that thrown. I knew that there was the difficult task to get the work done, and the superintendent established goals and so forth. But I was always the person who liked to

get it done, and I always counted as my personal strength getting other people to work on the team to get it done. And I had a great deal of respect for people in the community. I was community, and I felt that the people who lived there needed the same kind of respect that I did. And there were very few people on the staff or otherwise, who felt that those people were their equals. So, I never was one that wanted to get rich off of my job. I felt the richness came from my involvement in the job, and only once did I apply to be the superintendent, and that was when Max was interviewed as superintendent. And I had an agenda; I could see all the things that were wrong with the district. So I asked for an interview so I could propose my suggestions, and then during the interview I told him it was just an exercise for me but I wanted him to hear my ideas.

DC: She had the votes lined up then.

MN: What did you think is - -

DC: She had the votes to become superintendent because Max Messer had never had qualifications to match Harriet. Max Messer served - -

HM: He was a gym teacher.

DC: - - for six months as an assistant principal and ended up becoming superintendent.

MN: So who appointed him as the superintendent?

DC: After Harriet withdrew, he had been in the district office and he was given a one year interim acting superintendent - -

MN: Right, but if you hadn't withdrawn - - if Harriet hadn't withdrawn, she would have been the district superintendent.

DC: It was such a situation where we were smart enough to know that his qualifications did not match Harriet. No one else's qualifications matched Harriet's. No one knew the

district better than Harriet and had a longer tenure of service in education than Harriet. So that this form of gym teacher, who was moved up to be an assistant principal, and then got himself running the summer program in the district office as the summer program, and stayed on in the district office as a gofer for the den superintendent.

HM: He was in charge of the zoning, remember?

DC: I don't ever remember what title we had. But he stayed on after being summer coordinator, the coordinator of summer programs for the district, and stayed on in the district office. Certainly, he might have had the license, but I don't even know how he had the license because he had never been tenured as a principal at any time in his life until the day he retired.

HM: But he had the support of many of the school board members.

DC: After, after he served as interim acting, got an extension, and began to wheel and deal and do favors for some of the school board members. I even remember one school board member who was on public assistance, and as long as your children were in school you were required to go out and get a job while on public assistance. Well, he took her youngster and put her in school prior to her being eligible to go to school and did this favor for this parent school board member so that that school board member was voting to support him in anything he wanted because she didn't have to go out and work.

NL: I had a question kind of along the lines of your example just now - - your general thoughts on the corruption in local politics within these community boards, within the school system in general, because this is something even you brought up to me in prior conversations. You talked about a transition that you saw in city-wide politics in general

from kind of a racism to a corruption, and I was wondering if you could comment on how you saw it play out on the local level and then on the city-wide level.

DC: One of the things with me, which started out in early education. There wasn't a single year that I ever ran for the school board, not one single campaign was I ever endorsed or supported by the United Federation of Teachers [Crosstalk]. They opposed me every single election, the teachers union, till the very end. And I proved to them that I didn't even need their support, and even when they challenged me in court, to go after petitions to remove me from the ballot, I still had parents and community voters write my name on the ballot to bring me out to the number one position. So I learned from a very early age that the corruption that came about from being obligated and beholden to those who gave money or those who printed campaign literature, that you remained tied and politically tied to what their agenda was and not the agenda of school kids. So from that point on, I recognized the difference from politicians who did their favors and did the work of outside individuals whose best interest might not have been for the children, even in the cases of which books should come into the schools. For the longest time, we couldn't get publication of Our World - - what was that World Publishing? The fellow whose just been the doctorate serving on the central board that had the publishing house, and he published - -

HM: Is he there now? Or somebody who's there now or became the deputy - -

DC: Not too long ago, left just - - not too long - - as a matter of fact he's in Miami helping Rudy Crew now.

MN: Oh is it the - - no I don't know.

DC: Served as a school board member for the Bar, representing the Bar of Manhattan, the last school board - - but had had a doctorate, and he had a publishing house, and he would meet with school board members of color. Globe, was it Globe?

HM: I forget the name - -

DC: - - The name of the publishing house. So we were able to get those who were African-American contributors to be able to go in with illustrations and books to the different schools, and even there we were being pulled aside and said we shouldn't do it, and there's no sense in spending money on those books. But we wanted the youngsters to know something about [Crosstalk] the history and the great individuals who helped to build this country during the times, whether it's during slavery or anything else, but they needed to know something about the history and culture that was important.

HM: I wanted to comment about the corruption angle of it too. What I saw in my own district and other places, because I worked down at Central for ten years, and the office of Intergroup Education and was a part of the committee that developed the plan to integrate the school system. That had to do with developing curriculum materials, rezoning the schools, the ethnic census, and all of that. And then when I came - - I felt - - my interest was in seeing the community involved in the schools, so how could I stay in the bureaucracy at the highest level when I lived in the Bronx and where there was a need. But when I saw what was happening in my own district, politically, and how much influence certain schools in the district had in politically, in the north end of our district, I won't say any more than that. There were - - state and local representatives had a lot to say about the curriculum, about the appointment of personnel, and all the other issues. I thought that I really could not function as a superintendent, nor did I want to deal with

that, because it was strictly, from what I could see, a political position that in some ways -

- I guess the other people that had the job were willing to do what had to be done to keep the job. I had tenure. I was a secure person, and I liked being involved in the schools with the people, the teachers, the children, and I didn't want to deal with, as you say, sort of like corruption. I could see where moneys were given to certain schools over others.

When computers came around, certain schools had everything and the ones in my neighborhood didn't have it. And I could use influence and educate parents [Crosstalk] but I couldn't - - I could do certain things that I felt I was strong enough to do. The fact that I was the only, the only female, the only black in the cabinet - -

MN: Of the district?

HM: Yes, there was like a ghetto, you know four of us over there, three men and me. And I had a lot to - - I had a lot of power, in a sense, because people respected me, they couldn't catch me on anything, in terms of unethical. I was nice and respected by everyone, and I mean my superintendent, he never challenged me except when it was time to retire. When they gave the incentive, he came over to me and said I don't have your papers. They gave an incentive to, you know, if you wanted to retire they'd give you extra money. And I was thinking about retiring, but the fact that he came into my office that day and asked me where were my papers because he was going to sign them. I said, you know, I'm going to be here when you're gone, and I was. [Laughter]

DC: I managed to tell you - - I managed to survive not just that superintendent, but also the UFT chapter chairperson, who was one of our biggest antagonists for the district.

MN: This was District 8?

DC: District 8. He was head of the UFT for the district - -

HM: For years.

DC: - - and became a prominent individual in the UFT structure. Every year, during that the school board had elections, somehow or other I found out that I couldn't believe what was going on, that more voters were coming out from just one community electing 5 school board members. I had finally gotten the facts that they were stuffing the paper ballot box, and they created a situation where they stuffed the paper ballot box so much that one individual who was elected, he was elected where one of the precincts had more ballots than voters, total voters. [Crosstalk] [MN Laughs] At the time of this issue, there were irregularities in the board of election under which the individuals who were placed on the ballot on election day had been officially removed by the board of elections and secretly put back on the ballot by the politicians at the board of elections. And Robert Morgenthau, District Attorney of New York, began an investigation against the board of elections holding secret meetings to put these two individuals - -

MN: Is this the board of elections in the Bronx?

DC: Board of elections meeting in Manhattan.

MN: In Manhattan this was happening?

DC: That's where the board of elections met.

MN: Right, sorry.

DC: So that gave Robert Morgenthau the jurisdiction. We did not, and still to this day, do not have faith in the Bronx District Attorney to go against Bronx politicians. We, at that time - - and Morgenthau took the case. Immediately upon taking the case, one of the issues and the things being talked about was this school board member who had gotten more votes than any other individual in the entire city of New York in the school board

running in the number one position. And of course this was the issue of stuffing the ballot box. And immediately, six months is all the school board members wants, Morgenthau investigation came, resigned right away. And he was the president of the school board, resigned right away, fearing where the investigation was going to lead to. Later, the next election, the politicians up there decided that on the paper ballot, they felt that they could only elect four persons and they decided to have a write-in candidate. So those who were working on the polls at those, in that area of Throgs Neck.

MN: So this is Throgs Neck?

DC: This is Throgs Neck. They wrote the woman's name on the ballot and gave it out to the voters. And somehow or other, even if the voters went in in the place and wrote number one next to a candidate, that candidate ended up with number eleven on the paper ballots when the ballots came. And I sent a telegram - -

NL: Now, around what time is this that you're talking about.

HM: This was in the eighties.

DC: This was Carol, Carol Trotter lawsuit. I don't know, but the moment I heard about the issuing of ballots with her name being already written in, I sent a telegram to United States Attorney in relation to the Voting Rights Act. I sent a telegram to the District Attorney of New York and to the Bronx District Attorney, alerting them the fraudulent practices of voting and that we were under the Voting Rights Act, as a school board, publicly elected. And this brought in not just the local investigators, but it brought in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. So the FBI went around and began interviewing and so on and it became known as the Carol Trotter scandal where - -

MN: Could you write that down? Would this be in the New York Times you think?

HM: I'm sure that it is - -

DC: Oh sure, it's all over the newspapers.

MN: Did you - - do you have documents of this?

DC: I might.

HM: The Bronx Press Review would be a good, and the Bronx Times Reporter.

[Crosstalk]

DC: The Bronx Press Review is the best. But the Bronx section of the Daily News ran the articles. And the - - Raphael Sugerman was the reporter. And they showed samples of the ballots with the exact same handwriting at the same polling place where the name had been written in with the same handwriting, and so it couldn't be different voters with the same handwriting. And they threw out her election. However the lawyer, who was representing the parents who made the complaint, made a settlement with the board of education to have a public election where we would not have proportional representation. He settled the case before Judge Sweet, and we who, myself and other parents who ran in the election that were directly, we felt directly effected, refused to sign off on the agreement of the case. Immediately thereafter, that lawyer who we had paid thousands of dollars to represent us, was hired by the Board of Education as a lawyer to serve on their staff. So - -

HM: I was kind of oblivious about that. I mean, I knew about the confusion and the politics, but what is really ironic about that whole situation is that now, very powerful legislators who were involved in backing these candidates and all, so many of them have lost their jobs or have gone to jail. I mean - - [Crosstalk]

DC: One is still in jail. One is still in jail now.

MN: Is it Peter Volant? Not Volant.

DC: [Crosstalk] That's right. Oh yes, at one point everyone - -

HM: Not Volant, what about - -

MN: What's the guy - - no, the one from - -

DC: Guy Valela.

MN: Guy Valela I mean.

HM: And Congressman - - he's from up there, that retired under Cloud.

DC: Oh please, you don't mean - - I know who you mean.

MN: Not Garcia.

HM: No, no. This is from the Throgs Neck area. Anyway - -

DC: Former policeman.

HM: - - they were very - - yes, important policeman. They were very, very influential in getting things done. They had a home owners association which was pervasive in terms of electing their public officials. Now Jenis was one of the minority in more ways than one on the school board. I mean, he was there all the time. And there was always a cleavage between what he was trying to do and what the others would - - I mean, they didn't care what was happening to certain schools, but they wanted to make sure that their schools got everything.

MN: Now this was basically a Throgs Neck group?

HM: Yes.

DC: Yes.

HM: And they were the majority members of the board.

DC: Mario Biaggi.

HM: Yes.

MN: Oh, Biaggi.

HM: And I mean - -

DC: And let me just go another step further. At one point, before you could work on the election polls, you had to fill out an absentee ballot, and you have to fill out an absentee ballot checking off number one candidate, number two candidate, to whoever the party leaders were hiring to work on the polls. So, some individuals knew, before election, that they had enough absentee ballots from those who were working on the polls to be able to elect them.

MN: Now what's interesting is Valela is a Republican and Biaggi was a Democrat.

DC: Oh this was just a community thing.

NL: It's not about party lines.

DC: It wasn't party lines at all. [Crosstalk]

HM: It was also a racist - - [Crosstalk]

DC: It was racist because those were white members of the school board that they wanted to elect to control eighty percent of the school district.

HM: But it was beyond racism, because at that time there was just one junior high school in that area in Throgs Neck, 101. And then they built a second junior high school, 192 - -

DC: 192.

HM: - - they named it after those two policemen. One was shot - - [Crosstalk]

DC: - - Jones

HM: And then they had to decide which children would go to which school. And I recall I was working at the district office as a community relations person then, and there were a

number of - - the minority kids all lived in the projects, the Throgs Neck projects. And they used to have let those kids out early, the minorities, so they could have a head start against the other population so they could run to get home ahead of time. And the precinct, you know, had a lot of problems with the minority kids and the other kids seemed to not have too many problems, or they got off or whatever. And when the kids were suspended, I was the person who had to interview the parents and make arrangements with them to go to another school, and at that time, of course, those people up there did not want their children outside of their neighborhood. So a number of times we tried to zone them into 125 because that was the next nearest school but it was too far south, and that's when we came up with the idea of the academy of uninterrupted education, which was another whole thing. But the point I want to make is that Mr. Coleman was very - - I mean he fought an uphill fight, but he always won. I mean, he was influential in getting minority rights for the children, in terms of the zoning. They ultimately had to make sure that the schools up there were somewhat integrated, and I won't go into how they did it and it was never a good plan, but it did become - - they had to accept some of the kids from the other parts of the district because the Civil Rights Bureau looked in on it.

DC: I can tell you, they closed Junior High School 101 because they did not have enough kids to go to 101 and 192.

HM: Right.

DC: And the reason that 192 was built was because 700 youngsters were being bussed from the south Bronx to go to 101 at that time, which - -

HM: - - for integration purposes.

DC: Thompson and Michaels and Marco used those figures without telling the city council that kids were being bussed into 101 and it was his district, he was chairman of education, and he wanted a new school in his district and he got it, but once he got it, the schools in the lower end, then, were losing a population from houses being burnt down and etc. and whatnot. So they had to go back to the other schools down there because the schools weren't being destroyed. I'll finish. Now, when 192 was built, 101 remained empty, and as a matter of fact, the same problem at 192 exist up until the year 2004, last year. Same problem, and all of the newspaper articles and everything had to do with problems, racial problems, at 192.

MN: So there's still racial problems in Throgs Neck?

DC: Still, without a doubt.

HM: But, what is very interesting, and I got the job of doing zoning for the schools, which was a real headache. They actually had to send investigators out to check on who lived in each apartment in the housing projects because there were some white families there. But the thing I want to say about that is, that now, at this time, they do have some light skinned Latinos that have been able to buy property into the condos and into the new housing up there. But they still have very few, if any, brown skinned people I'll say, of any kind, that live up there and why I know that is because I got to the doctor up there on East Tremont Avenue so I visit often, and of course I have colleagues that live up there too. So I've been able to watch the change, and it is really fascinating. I can recall - - remember when Sandra Taylor ran for president of P.S. 72, which was the only integrated, sort of integrated school because all the kids - -

DC: She lived, she lived in the Throgs Neck projects.

HM: - - She was - - that was the only school that had minority kids in it. The other three schools were all white schools, and so we became under civil rights mandate to find a way to integrate P.S. 14 and P.S. 71, because they had no minorities and that school had all of them. And so something had to be done about that. But I remember the night that she had the election. She ran for president of the PA.

DC: Yes.

HM: And, you know, racism has a smell. I remember that I - - we had to go to this meeting where the election took place and she ran against another slate for offices. And as a member of the district staff I went to observe the elections; I had been asked to help with it. Well, I walked into that auditorium, which was jam packed, and there was such tremendous hostility and anger that I did something that I guess I'll never do again, but I stood next to - -

NL: Anger against Sandra Taylor?

HM: - - They were angry, they were hostile, they wanted to see her loose the election. And I stood next to Mr. Phelan, who was never a friend of mine but at least I knew him, and it was like - - it was a horrible sense. I felt - - I was in fear.

MN: Wow, and this - -

HM: And just because I had a different color face.

NL: And this was in the eighties?

HM: This was in the eighties.

NL: Ok, now as you both have been talking, the one issue that's been at the forefront of my mind that I think is kind of directly tied to the issue of schools in the Bronx and the school system is the question of housing, and particularly public housing, because I know

you, Mr. Coleman, have worked on the board of the Castle Hill Projects before, and I wanted you to talk a little bit about your experience. First of all, when you moved from the Morrisania section to the Castle Hill section of the Bronx and your experiences

DC: Even before that --

NL: - - in trying to integrate public housing in the Bronx.

DC: Yes. Before that I served as the first person of color at the New York City Housing Authority as a director for all of the public housing in the city of New York. And my responsibilities then, was that under John Lindsey, who brought in Walter Washington from head of the Washington D.C. public housing to come to New York City to head up the Housing Authority. And John Lindsey had me to go over to help Walter Washington. This was in 1967. And I served and worked as a director of tenant programs for all of the tenants in the city wide public housing.

HM: This is 1967?

DC: 1967. So from then, I was involved in housing developments and public housing. Even to the point where, in Morrisania, prior to that, the Housing Authority had built a public housing that came in after the Costinicks, which is something I'll go. Well, during the days of public housing, building housing - -

MN: Now let me just ask one question: do we want to have a whole third interview focusing on the housing issue? Is there enough material - -

DC: Oh there is.

MN: Because we may want to segue, set the stage for this, and do a third interview on housing. [Crosstalk]

DC: Sure, but let me just get back then to the corruption, because in the corruption area -
- this became one of the eye openers that I had experienced in talking about corrupt politics. When you can imagine that the FBI is brought in and goes around interviewing people and individuals whose names were forged when they came up and testified gave testament to the FBI that they couldn't have voted because they were on a cruise at the time, and proved that they were on a cruise, and other individuals that did not vote at all, and their names were on the books, which had been forged. So it showed that, not only did they have ballots put in but they forged signatures, and they - - the FBI and others only went to the Throgs Neck community where they were trying to get five whites from Throgs Neck elected to control the school board. So, that became good. Then later, when the Latino community began to go into power, and pressed more and more into power, they found out that they were able to exchange - - like, I won't vote for someone here because it may be a conflict of interest, but I'll have them become a candidate in your neighboring district, and you send your candidate over to my district, and our team will work together so that we can always promote Latinos. By then, we had the lawsuit, was it the espirilos? - - whatever it was, a lawsuit in which we had to have bilingual courses. And a number of youngsters and teachers and others, who were Latinos, felt that their way moving up the career ladder was simply to have more and more bilingual classes in the school, so that that would require them to have a bilingual supervisor, bilingual principal of schools that became all bilingual schools. This became so bad that the Bronx District Attorney even went in and taped and finally indicted school board members who were involved in trying to politically use the school boards to upgrade individuals.

MN: Right, I'm going to stop now - - ok, Mr. Coleman.

DC: I just wanted to indicate that in Throgs Neck, one of the things that eventually solved was when we were instrumental in getting Dr. Betty Rosa as a superintendent. This was a Puerto Rican female, doctorate from Harvard University in education, graduate of City College of New York, who came in and found a unique way - - because at that point, they did not want Junior High School 101 to have any students in it, then the home owners and others in the community decided they would allow special education who were physically challenged, to be brought in by wheelchair to go to school there. And then, there was so much space still available that Dr. Better Rosa felt that the thing to do was to have - - utilize that space for education. So she came up with a concept of having an un-zone school for youngsters of only about 100 youngsters coming in at the first grade to be in a laboratory at 101. And the laboratory that she developed was 101, which became the maritime school. Each year, another 100 or 125 students were added which came from all over the district; their names were picked out of a hat. The elementary school downstairs remained an un-zoned elementary school from pre-K to fourth grade, or fifth grade.

HM: That was after I left.

DC: And it remained in that same building, and both schools are still there today. But what I wanted to say was that that maritime school that she created became a flagship school for public education, scoring number one in Bronx County, number sixth in math in the entire city, number two in reading, and even, currently, coming ahead of some of the private schools that are being written up on television as being the school of the - -
[END OF TAPE]