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Dacosta, Linval

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Interviewee: Linval Da Costa
Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Natasha Lightfoot

Transcriber: Mary Maxwell
Date: October 4, 2007

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): And we're at Fordham University, we are interviewing Linval Da Costa, who in addition to being a supervisor in the New York City Housing Authority is deeply involved with Cricket in the Bronx and bringing a Caribbean immigrant tradition into the Bronx community. So Mr. Da Costa tell us a little bit about your childhood. Where did you grow up?

Linval Da Costa (LD): I was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1938. I came to the United States on December 10, 1950. My parents were immigrants here and they sent for myself, my brother, and my sister. I attended junior high school from the eighth grade to the ninth grade, Cooker Junior High School, 124th Street in Harlem. And I graduated. I went there from 1950 to 1952, I went to Stuyvesant High School from 1952 to 1955. And I went to City College, Baruch section from 1955 to 1959.

MN: How would you compare the educational system in Jamaica, when you were growing up, to the educational system in the United States?

LD: Well when I was growing there was more discipline in Jamaica. It was also disciplined here but I didn't have a problem. The class I was in, there wasn't any disciplinary problem. And I was a very conservative young person and in Jamaica when you were going to school and if a teacher asked you a question and you didn't have the right answer they would give you a whack. On your hand. So I was always a little scare of teachers. Because you know I always tried to get the right answer but I hate to be hit in any way. I was scared of that.

MN: Now what level of education did your parents have?

LD: My parents, elementary school education. My father he became a seaman and my mother she was basically a seamstress when she came here.

MN: So did your father continue to work as a merchant seaman after you came to the United States?

LD: Yes, he did. And he worked until he retired. And also after he retired he worked as a bank guard in Manhattan.

MN: Do you know if he was a member of a national maritime union?

LD: Yes he was. He was.

MN: Was your home a home where there was a lot of political discussion and discussion of current affairs?

LD: Well, not primarily with my parents but I know with myself and my friends we were always discussing political issues from very, very young. Because I was always interested in politics, even from Jamaica I used to read about different parties and up here I always used to read the New York Times. And that's one of my basic hobbies if you want to call it. Discuss political issues, foreign affairs, things like that.

MN: Now when you were in Jamaica what sports did you play growing up?

LD: I used to play cricket and soccer. Football as we'd call it in Jamaica. And I wasn't old enough to play at the field, but we used to play in what we call a backyard. And I was pretty good at it because I was very hard to get out, I was a batsman.

MN: Now did you, what sort of equipment did you have when you were playing in the backyard? Did you make your own?

LD: Well we have, if I remember, we had like a cork ball, a rubber ball at some times and we had, it wasn't a cricket bat but something similar. We made our own bats, because a cricket bat at that time was too big for us. And we had, I think I made a bat from, a coconut tree or something like that.

MN: Now did they have--? Did the school have teams?

LD: Yes, the school had a team. But I never played for the school team. We used to play when we had recess or lunchtime, we used to play on the side of the field, on the grounds. And I recall one time we were playing and we hear the bell ring and we were late and we got beaten for it, from school principal.

MN: And was soccer as popular as cricket in Jamaica?

LD: Yes, it was seasonal sport at that time. I think in the summertime I think was cricket and in the winter was soccer. So we looked forward to both.

MN: And what was it like coming Harlem? Did people play cricket?

LD: No.

MN: When you came to the United States?

LD: When I came to the United States I didn't know that cricket was being played or even soccer. We were here about two years, in fact, when I came here, among the neighborhood they used to play stickball. And I used to play a little bit of it. And eventually there was a gentleman

who was very close to my family. He was a older person and he played cricket in Jamaica and he also played cricket in New York. And he told us about it and he took us to Central Park, where they used to practice, me and my brother, and we played, practiced and they saw we had a talent, and then he took us up to VanCortland Park to see if they had a cricket team, that would let us play for them, with them. This was near the end of the season, I think it was 1952 or '53 and the team stated that they couldn't use both brothers on the team but they could use one of us.

MN: And this was when you were like 14 years old?

LD: 14, 15 something like that. And I played for a team at that point because Jamaica Athletic Club, I remember my first match I made 14 not outs and then of course the winter came in and the next season he took us up to the park again. There were about 10 different teams up there at the time and he said that he wanted both of us to play on the same team.

MN: Explain what a knock out is because--?

LD: What?

MN: A knockout because most of the people, you said you made 14 knockouts?

LD: Not Outs.

MN: Not Outs. Explain what that means to the--?

LD: Undefeated.

MN: So they couldn't get you out?

LD: And I was a little boy at the time, a teenager. So he took us up to the park the following year and he tried to get both of us on the same team. However, the team that he approached, probably

another Jamaican team. They are pretty good people and they said they couldn't use both of us and they might use one of us so he took us over to a team that was much weaker, that team was the St. Lucia Cricket Club. It consisted of Jamaicans all of the islanders. St. Lucia, other nationalities, Barbados, etcetera. And we played for them, and we won the cup that year and we played for them for two years and then a group of young Jamaicans in their 20's decided to form another Jamaican team up there. So they approached us and we said we would play with them and that was when Wembley Club was formed.

MN: And how old were you at the time?

LD: I was about 17, yes 1955.

MN: Now were most of the people who founded this from the Bronx? Or they were from all over the city?

LD: Manhattan and the Bronx. Most people used to live in Manhattan I think.

MN: Now did your family socialize mostly with other Jamaicans and West Indians mainly or when you were living in Harlem?

LD: Yes. That was our socialization basically. But mostly family and friends, people they knew from Jamaica. At that time, the Jamaican community was not as large as it is today. I thought it was pretty large but even then, when I started playing cricket, I started to meet other young Jamaicans, other West Indians and some other friends, Jamaicans, who wasn't the neighborhood. We got acquainted and they used to meet at my house because we had a very large apartment, six-room apartment.

MN: And where was that located?

LD: That's 113th Street and 7th Avenue, 112th Street and 7th Avenue. 1845 7th Avenue. And we used to accumulate, we used to you know meet in the front or upstairs or whatever and socialize. And eventually we started going to parties, things like that. In those days we didn't have a car so we had to take the train or the bus. Go to Brooklyn, Queens, wherever, wherever we knew the party.

MN: And these parties were mostly in Caribbean--?

LD: Yes, mostly Jamaican.

MN: Now when you went to Stuyvesant High School, did you get there through competitive examinations?

LD: Yes, I did. We had to take an exam. And I was fortunate to pass it

MN: Did any other young people from your junior high go to Stuyvesant?

LD: Yes, a few. About 3 or 4. I don't know how many graduated.

MN: Now, when did you meet your wife?

LD: I met your wife in about 1960 or '61. It's a funny story to tell because, what happened I was in the house and my mother used to tell us, you know to help clean up the house until 4. So I would get the broom, sweeping the stairs and she came with a friend to visit my uncle.

MN: Now at this time where were you living?

LD: I was living in the Bronx. My parents bought a house on 176th Street in the Bronx.

MN: What year did they buy the house?

LD: 1960.

MN: In 1960, and where exactly was this house located?

LD: It's E 176th Street. Between Topping Avenue and Clay Avenue.

MN: Right so you were--?

LD: About 21, 22.

MN: Was that close to the Grand Concourse?

LD: Yes, very close, very close.

MN: Were there many other Jamaican families or African-American families on the block at the time?

LD: No at that time, it was primarily white.

MN: Was it mostly Jewish or--?

LD: I think it was Jewish. Mostly Jewish.

MN: So they bought a house there in 1960 and was it a big house?

LD: Yes. It's a very large house, it's a one family house, it had three stories, three stories.

MN: And did it have a porch in the front?

LD: Yes. And we had it until recently when my mother died. I wasn't living there anymore but she was living there until she died.

MN: So go back you were sweeping the house--?

LD: Yes, and my wife came with a friend of hers to look for my uncle. Because she was looking for his daughter, who also went to high school with her. And then I saw her and then I asked her

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if I could take her out or something like that. And she gave me her telephone number and we became acquainted. And she was at the time a student at the Brooklyn Community College. She came up on a student visa too.

MN: Now was she also from Jamaica?

LD: Yes. And she's what we call in Jamaica half Chinese. My background is Jewish, African, and European, so forth.

MN: Right, so is the American approach to race and ethnicity different than the Jamaican?

LD: Course.

MN: Can you explain that again to some of our listeners?

LD: Yes. Well in Jamaica, people never utilize, or use the term race per say. People knew that there were black, brown, Indian, Chinese and various mixtures. So when most Jamaicans come here and to be classified, you know like, in those days they didn't know how to classify like, use the term Negro. But nobody wants to be termed Negro. You're either brown, black, or whatever. It went by complexion basically. Never race; race was a new terminology for me. And you know some people resented it, but then some people get acclimated to it. But in this society you have to conform right?

MN: Yes. So people of Jamaican ancestry were aware of all the different traditions, you know that, from their different families?

LD: Oh, yes. You see the Indians, the Chinese, well the Indians were brought as indentured servants in the 1830s I believe. The Chinese came, also I think they came there to do the railroad,

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basically, but they came as merchants after that. But they opened, what they call it, we used to call it China Shop. Chinese grocery stores and almost every corner you have a Chinese grocery store. The Syrians came, I think I heard that, they came as peddlers, they used to sell dry goods store, and they had stores. The Jews have been there from a long time ago, the 1600s and they're also merchants and whatnot. And you know in Jamaica you had, they intermingle per say. I don't know that racial thing per say. For some people, some people are very strict they don't want to intermarry with people from other groups.

MN: Now in your family, your family had all elementary school education. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

LD: I have 4 brothers, well 3 and myself. And 2 sisters.

MN: And this is by the way Dr. Natasha Lightfoot. And did everyone go to college?

LD: Yes, most of us. I went, I have twin brothers, they went. My other sister she went. My other sister she went to community college. Another sister, she's a half sister she became an x-ray technician and everybody--. And my brother, the second one that followed me, he's very smart. In fact he went to Brooklyn Tech High School, but unfortunately he was a [inaudible] man he got involved with a girl at 16 years old. Yes, instead of coming to the parents and you know letting them settle it out, the girl lingered on and she went to her parents and then they, her father, her mother had died. Her father went to the police and they brought statutory rape against him. At 16 years old and that really basically ruined his life. And he was very smart and after that, he finally got his high school diploma and then he went into the army and came out and he started writing,

he was good at drafting and things like that. But eventually, he got some good jobs but basically he messed up his life later on.

MN: Mr. Da Costa went to Stuyvesant.

Dr. Natasha Lightfoot (NL): Okay.

LD: [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

NL: You grew up in Brooklyn?

LD: No I grew up in Manhattan and the Bronx

[Crosstalk]

NL: I just heard Brooklyn Tech High School, so I thought--.

LD: No, my brother went to Brooklyn Tech High School.

NL: But your brother went there, okay.

MN: But what year? Their family bought a house on 176th Street not far from the Grand Concourse in 1960, which was much earlier than almost anyone we've interviewed in that particular area.

LD: We came in the country from '50 and they were here from 1945.

NL: Did you have family here already when you all came?

LD: When I came just my parents.

NL: Just your parents and your parents had no other relatives, here then?

Unidentified Person (UP): He said that you need to fill out this form and he has to, you can take them out of the frames--.

[Crosstalk]

NL: So you were saying that you know your family first bought a house on the Grand Concourse, well on 176th.

MN: Near the--.

NL: Near the Grand Concourse in 1960. Do you know what the process was by which your parents came by the house?

LD: They decided they wanted to buy a house.

NL: Did they run into any problems with you know, local realtors in the area?

LD: No, the neighborhood was changing I guess.

NL: The neighborhood was changing already.

LD: Primarily a white neighborhood.

NL: Right, right.

LD: I don't recall them, having any difficulty.

MN: Now is it possible that because your parents were light skinned, that somebody you know thought they were Jewish?

LD: No, I don't think they thought they were Jewish, but they were light skinned.

MN: Do you think that-?

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LD: Because, when we moved there the neighbor was I think Jewish, but they weren't that friendly, you know what I'm saying. But we didn't socialize very much.

MN: Why? Because it was very difficult for African-American families to get into that area at one point.

NL: I also wonder if maybe they weren't taken for Jewish but maybe for Latino, because of the last name Da Costa.

LD: I don't know.

NL: That might've also been a possibility. Were there a lot of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood yet?

LD: No.

NL: Not even. Okay.

LD: No because I noticed when I first came here in 1950, that's when the influx of Puerto Ricans started moving. Primarily settling in East Harlem.

NL: Right, they hadn't reached the Bronx at, even by 1960.

LD: No, not by then. They were in the South Bronx, they were further south.

NL: Right, Mott Haven area.

MN: Now when your parents bought the house were you still in City College, or had you graduated?

LD: I think I graduated. They bought it in 1960, I graduated in '59.

MN: And what did you study at City College?

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LD: I studied Public Administration. My first love was political science, and foreign affairs but--. That was the one time I was trying to take the test for the State Department, but I didn't like to travel that much I was scared of flying.

NL: Did your family do any socializing with other West Indians in the city, or Jamaicans specifically?

LD: Yes, primarily Jamaicans. Other relatives, in fact my parents, or my mother she was instrumental in getting most of my relatives families over, to migrate to the United States.

NL: Okay, so she was the primary person they claimed passage through.

MN: Did they belong to any social or fraternal organizations?

LD: No. They just go to church.

MN: What church did they go to?

LD: We were Roman Catholic. And my father, he was not really a Roman Catholic; I don't know what church he belonged.

NL: He wasn't a churchgoer?

LD: No.

NL: It was mostly your mom?

LD: He would go if we had to go to church, he was not a member of any church.

MN: And when you moved to the Bronx, what did you begin attending, a church locally?

LD: Yes, we went to Saint Margaret's, Tremont Avenue, East Tremont Avenue. And when I married my wife, she's Episcopalian or Anglican, and I'm Roman Catholic. If we want to marry

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in the church, we had go with each other as Catholics. And my children were all grown up as Catholic, went to Catholic school all the way up to high school. And some of them now have branched off. Some of them have become Baptists.

NL: And I guess, I wonder were there other, were the families in the church mostly white as well, that you attended?

LD: Yes, at that time it was primarily Irish.

NL: Primarily Irish. And did you feel any kinds of tension in the neighborhood as you were growing up, well you were already almost grown by the time your family moved there, but even as you know a young adult did you feel like--?

LD: The thing about it is, if there were, I didn't notice it, because I was among mostly friends or relatives. My socialization was among primarily, in fact mostly young Jamaicans, West Indians. Some of them have become very successful now, if you want me to describe any of them or--?

MN: Sure.

LD: I have a very good friend, his name is Hughes [inaudible]. He was always referred to by his family as Bay Boy, he went, he graduated from NYU, Masters at Columbia, he went into the Peace Corps and then worked for the Agency for International Development, he was stationed in Africa, the Cape Verde Islands, he was in the Peace Corps in Columbia, Panama, and so forth. He became very successful. He is now retired and he's been consulting in Washington D.C.

NL: And he was someone you knew in the Bronx as a kid?

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LD: We grew up together from 1954. Another friend, Dennis Derrick, he's from Trinidad, he has his PhD in Mathematics. He is now a professor about to retire from the New School and he also did consulting work and traveled to Africa and so forth.

NL: So it seems like this group of young men, young West Indian men growing up in the Bronx, in the mid-50s seem to not feel any pressures to go any other way but the school route, the professional route.

LD: Yes.

NL: Did you have any influences to the contrary?

LD: Well, growing up we were always interested. We knew that to succeed you had to have a good education. And although most of us, in fact all of us I think, were the first ones to go to college. But you know when you migrate, at least that's the impression, most people want to get, do better for themselves.

NL: Of course.

LD: And your parents stress that you should be educated. It's up to you really, you know.

NL: And were your parents business people in the Bronx? Or what kind of profession?

LD: My parents have tried a few things. They'd opened a cleaning store, must've been Columbus Avenue when I first came here, in fact we had to, in fact they had a store, and they opened another one--.

MN: Was your father doing that while he was also a merchant seaman, or--.

LD: Well, my father was a merchant seaman and my mother she was here, so she's the one--.

MN: She's the one--. The go-getter.

LD: She was the go-getter. And she, they had this store a cleaning store on Columbus Avenue around 90th Street at that time. They were doing well, pretty well as far as I knew and it was the, you know, when you have a store, especially among West Indian and Jamaicans, then you have friends and acquaintances come out and hang out and so forth.

NL: Right. So it just became an informal--. Right an informal meeting place.

LD: Eventually she opened another store in Brooklyn because we had to go over there to help on the weekends. It was so far I thought it was country at the time. From what I remember it's not too far from the Atlantic Avenue, at that time I wasn't familiar with the neighborhood. And that store was in primarily a white neighborhood. And it wasn't successful. The other store was doing okay, but I think they used to clean with Benji and somebody, I guess was smoking cigarettes or something and it went in flames.

MN: Right.

LD: So after that she started working.

NL: Where did she work after that?

LD: She worked in a nursing home, she was working at Calgary. When she first came here in 1944, I think she was doing in Defense Department work, in Brooklyn or something.

MN: Right, a lot of defense industries. Now your mother had Chinese ancestry--?

LD: No, not my mother.

MN: It was your wife.

LD: My mother and my father had Jewish ancestry background.

NL: Right, right, there's a large community of Jews in Jamaica.

LD: We didn't grow up Jewish but my father's father was Jewish.

MN: Were they descendents of the Spanish Jews or Portuguese?

NL: I was gonna ask you that, that last name is Portuguese.

LD: My mother's last name is De Sousa.

NL: There's a family of Portuguese people, Portuguese descended people in Antigua where my family's from and they're also called De Sousa as well. So I was going to ask you, so there's obviously Portuguese and Jewish, is there any other kind of, you know, racial mixture in your family as well?

LD: Yes there are European, European. West African.

NL: Are there any Indian or Chinese or anything?

LD: Well no my wife is half Chinese. Her father is Chinese and her mother is you know a mixture of European--.

NL: And your wife is also Jamaican?

LD: Yes.

NL: Where did you meet your wife?

LD: I was telling Mark, I met her in my house.

NL: She was a family friend?

LD: No, she was just visiting with a friend and at that time I was attracted to half Chinese girls.

[Laughter]

LD: Long hair and so forth. I you know asked her out and we went to movies and so forth.

MN: Now when you got married did you end up living in the same house?

LD: Yes. When I got married, I just thought I was going to work in a year and half, and then accumulate any funds. The selective service people were after me, to draft me into the army and I was called down and I was supposed to get my you know token, and just before actually, I am gonna get married [inaudible]. And she was going to school but I was going into the army and didn't know where you might end up, because I'd never see her again, so we got married.

NL: What year was that?

LD: 1961. My mother she planned the wedding, we had it in the same house, the big house that we had. And we lived there until I got an apartment.

MN: Now was the apartment nearby? Or was it--?

LD: Not far away, it was off East Tremont, no Crotona rather. We did stay around because my mother bought another house next to the house where we were.

MN: So you had two houses on 176th Street?

LD: Eventually, she had more than two.

MN: So the whole street was--?

NL: Was she pursuing a kind of a landlord situation?

LD: No, no she just bought it, basically she rented, most of the family we lived there.

MN: What was the maximum number of family members on your block at the high point?

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LD: Literally my mother had four houses. The first one was at 236 East 176th Street, the second one was 234 East 176th Street and eventually she bought another house next-door 238 East 176th Street with a cousin of hers. And eventually she bought another house 239 East 176th Street with another cousin.

NL: And what size of houses were these? How many people?

LD: These were one family houses but they were like three stories.

NL: Three story houses wow. And were they row houses or detached?

LD: They were attached.

NL: They were attached and they had porches?

LD: Yes.

NL: And so I guess with that many rooms and how many family members are we talking here?

LD: Like 236, we had a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen on the first floor. Excuse me, on the second floor there are three bedrooms, and on the third floor three bedrooms.

MN: Have you ever been to Jesse Davidson's house?

NL: No.

MN: Because he was very near there, those are big houses.

NL: I've been to houses over there though. I had a friend from high school who had a house right by East Tremont and the Concourse, very big, very big.

MN: Those are big houses. And did you have a basement also?

LD: Yes.

MN: And you have a backyard right?

LD: Yes, a little backyard. We didn't utilize the backyard, not that much. But we used to have a lot of parties in the basement.

NL: So pretty much your mother was single handedly responsible for turning the block from white to Jamaican?

LD: Well the whites started moving out, you know--.

NL: And I guess, did you feel that growing up you kind of that example to you know work from. Your mother's example. Is what made you maybe want to pursue--?

LD: For most of us, --. I'd say we're business oriented but not that much; we didn't have that push that [inaudible]. We had a steady job but not that push to you know--.

NL: Be an entrepreneur.

LD: Me personally I'm more secure because I used to worry about working, earning a living and take care my family. I ended up with 6 children so--.

NL: I was going to ask how many children you had with your wife?

LD: Six.

NL: You know, I guess where did they end up? Where did you end up growing up with them? And having, where did they end up growing up and going to school?

LD: Well, as I said all of my children went to parochial school from the start. From kindergarten right up.

NL: What schools did they go to?

LD: They went to Cardinal Spellmans, three girls.

NL: I went to Spellman.

LD: And the boy went to Cardinal--.

NL: Hayes, yes.

LD: And the other boy he's the last one, he has a learning disability, plus juvenile diabetic, so he finished high school, very learned in a certain way but as far as writing properly--.

MN: Now when did you buy your house in the Northeast Bronx?

LD: I bought my house in 1974.

NL: And where was that located?

LD: Bruner Avenue.

MN: Are you still there?

LD: Yes. That neighborhood was the primarily white at the time.

NL: I was going to ask you that. That neighborhood was white, and when did you see the changes happening in that neighborhood? Were you one of the first families?

LD: No we weren't the first, but maybe 5th or 6th or something.

NL: And by what time did you feel that the neighborhood had become primarily changed?

LD: It started changing honestly when we got there. Over a period of time it changed. Right now it's primarily West Indian, and you know blacks, Indians.

NL: Were West Indians the ones coming up there when you were buying houses or African-Americans?

LD: No West Indians. In fact, there were two families of Jamaicans in front of us. The other family next door was a white family, they were Italian or whatever. And you know it changed over the period of time. But you know it doesn't bother me either way.

MN: Now you were playing cricket this entire time?

LD: Yes.

MN: And when did you move the headquarters of the Wembley Athletic Club into your home?

LD: Okay, I'll tell you about the history of Wembley briefly. One as I said before, primarily young Jamaicans, we were one of the so called Jamaican teams. Some of them knew each other from Kingston. We were primarily from Kingston. And as I said I was a youngster, myself and my brother. We were both 15, 16, 17 years old. And these are the fellows, you see there in that picture.

NL: In this picture here?

LD: Yes, no not that one.

NL: The one the other bigger picture.

LD: They were all working.

NL: This is when you're 15 and 16, you first decided to start this club?

LD: I didn't really start it, I was a participant. This is about 1955, '54 something like that.

NL: And where did you first start playing? You and your friends in this club?

LD: In this club?

NL: Yes.

LD: I started playing about 1953, but in this club 1955.

NL: And what park is this?

LD: VanCortland Park.

NL: So you've always been playing in VanCortland Park?

LD: VanCortland Park is the place where they've had like 10, 12, 15, teams playing at one park.

I don't know if you've been there but--.

NL: Yes, I have, and I wanted to know where most of the other cricketers on the other teams, they were West Indians too?

LD: Yes, they were all from various islands. A lot of teams, Trinidad, St. Lucians--.

NL: So each island had their own specific team?

LD: But it wasn't restricted to the native per say. If there was another player from another island who would want to play with them, they did.

NL: That's fine but for the most part it was a kind of island specific team? And I guess, were they all from the Bronx or were they all from other parts of the city?

LD: Primarily, most of them around that time used to live in Manhattan.

NL: And would travel up to VanCortland Park?

LD: By train or those who had a car would park.

NL: I see. And I guess how, what was the actual history of the, what was the name of the club?

LD: When it was formed?

NL: When it was formed.

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LD: The name was Wembley Athletic Club.

NL: And why Wembley.

LD: One of the fellas there, I can show you a picture, this fella here, he played cricket for a team in Kingston named Wembley Cricket Club and at the time, since everybody basically came from Kingston they were thinking of naming it Kingston Cricket Club. The Kingston Cricket Club in Jamaica at that time was an elitist club, primarily white Jamaicans, and they were prejudiced, so most of them didn't want to take that name. So they named it Wembley after the club. And that's how we became. I'm still a member of the organization up til now. I was president a few times. A few years a long time ago. I was vice-president. Right now I'm the recording secretary.

NL: And are all of the members? Are there any other kind of original members as well still alive that are in the club?

LD: Not many more, a lot of them are deceased. Ebo is the first president I believe. This is Roy Francis, he died. He moved to Florida and he died. He's still active, he's one of the founding members and that's Alvin Lawrence. He's still alive he's still active in the club, not many of them, there's only about three of us there in this picture are still alive.

NL: And was this cricket club the, you know, just a local phenomenon or did you all go back to Jamaica and do anything as well?

LD: Well, they used to take tours, cricket tours to Jamaica, play in Jamaica, I went to them about three or four times.

NL: And did you go back for you know cricket matches to watch the West Indies team?

LD: Yes, I've been there but in fact, about 2, 3 years ago. In fact at the present time, almost every year there's a group of guys who go back and they have test matches down there. And go supposedly to watch the games, but most of the time they don't.

NL: I've been to cricket matches in Antigua, it's very much a party in the stands.

LD: But most of them right now, we stay at a hotel. And they have friends down there, so they socialize and some go to the games and some don't you know.

NL: So was your family the kind of family though that went back and forth often, or kept in touch with Jamaica often? As you were growing up?

LD: No, they didn't go that often. My mother she was always bringing up family. Cousins, sisters, brothers.

NL: From there but--.

LD: So there was a lot of interaction, but not traveling back and forth. Because you know flying--.

MN: Did most of the people who came up end up staying in the United States?

LD: Yes. In fact I have very few relatives in Jamaica now. Most of them are living in Florida, quite a lot in Florida and New York.

NL: And I guess I'm wondering how, whether or not it's been this, the phenomenon of this cricket club, is something that you passed on to other generations of your children or if it's something you all, the first generation, engaged in?

LD: Well, I say unfortunately, but most of the children of all generations, they didn't take up cricket or anything like that.

MN: They play baseball, basketball?

LD: Baseball, basketball, they're more interested in those things.

NL: In American sports, yes.

LD: American sports. I notice now in this current era, especially among Indo-Caribbeans, especially. They're involved in cricket, and I think they're training their children to play. But there are other groups from other islands, they're not. If the kids liked it they would try it. But very few of them do. It's too slow for them.

MN: Now how long does, did you play on Saturday afternoons?

LD: Saturday and Sundays.

MN: Now how long would the matches last?

LD: We used to start about 1 o'clock and over 7 o'clock. If I explain cricket to you, I don't know if you want me to?

MN: Yes explain a little bit.

LD: Cricket is an English game basically. Came from England. And you have two sides, or two teams. Eleven men on each side. The object of the game is to bowl, or out ten men on one side. First of all, you have one side that has to bat first and if you get ten men out, and they score x number of runs, then that's the side. The other side has to go to bat and pass those runs.

MN: Now how do you get someone out?

LD: Well you can get somebody out, you bowl over the arm, now when bowling you can bowl a half-break, which the ball comes like that, leg break comes like that or a straight ball. And you can get, a person can get a leg before a wicket. You also have three pins. Now when they bowl the ball if my pads are in front of the wicket and I miss the ball I can be out, leg before a wicket. If the ball beats my bat and hits the wicket I'm out. If I hit the ball in the air and somebody catches it, I'm out. If I'm going to make a shot, they have lines here and if I go forward and the wicket keeper, if I miss the ball he catches the ball, I stomp the wicket down.

MN: You mean he kicks it?

LD: No, no with his glove, he has to have the ball in his hand.

MN: I see.

LD: It would have to be out of the crease as we call it.

MN: So the idea is if you, if it's impossible to throw the ball by you, it's hard to get you out unless you hit the ball so somebody catches it?

LD: Right, you can get L.B.W., leg before wicket, or I miss the ball, or try to make a shot, miss the ball and it hits the wicket, or if I hit the ball in the air and somebody catches it. And also get run out, if I hit the ball and I'm running to the other wicket, the other batsman runs up there also, and if they throw the ball to this wicket, or the other wicket, if they hit the wicket before I reached there I'm out, or somebody throws it.

MN: Now what was your skill in hitting? Where would you hit the ball to make sure you weren't out?

LD: Well you hit it on the ground. And you can hit a 4 or a 6. If you hit it in the air over the boundary, it's 6 runs, if you hit it on the ground then it goes over the boundary it's 4 runs.

MN: Now the boundary is how far?

LD: In feet it's a large area.

MN: So is it like a circle?

LD: A circle? A large area.

MN: And you can hit it sideways, backwards, forward?

LD: Anyway, as long as you hit it over the boundary it's 6 or 4.

MN: Right. And that's how you add the runs?

LD: Yes.

MN: And what was your specialty? Did you have a specialty?

LD: Batsman. I made a lot of 4s, 2s, 1s. Single. I wasn't an aggressive batsman. I think cricket reflects your personality. If you're an aggressive person, you will want to go and hit 6 every time. If you're more defensive like I am, cautious, then you stay and you--. They tell me I was a very hard person to get out. Which I would stay there and make 50s or 40s. And I never made a century because VanCortland Park the boundary, we set up the boundary. We set it up on 7 sometimes larger [inaudible]. And I couldn't hit a 6, I hit 4. I made a lot of 50s and 60s and 40s and 30s and plenty. In fact I win the batting average, many, many times.

NL: Of the club?

LD: For the club, even for the league.

MN: For the league?

LD: Yes.

NL: And explain to me what, what was the extent of the league?

LD: The cricket league consisted of all the teams up in the park at the time. 12, 13 teams. And at one time I was president of the cricket league also. I was president of Wembley.

MN: Do you have any of your trophies?

LD: Yes, I have trophies at home I didn't bring them. If I come for another interview I'll bring them.

MN: If you're the batting champion for the league they give you a big trophy?

LD: Yes. I have one or two trophies when I won the first year for Wembley, the club.

[End of Side A]

[Begin Side B]

MN: So we have a whole Housing Authority. So new groups of immigrants joined the club? Is that how you?

LD: The thing about it now especially with my club per say. Most of us are becoming senior citizens now, so it's more a social club than a cricket club. We still have a cricket team, but we try to just recruit some younger fellas or whatever, they said we would like to play cricket so we say well you play for the club, but you're not actual members of the club.

NL: And are they Jamaicans as well?

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LD: All nationalities basically. Right now, they cricket in Jamaica, I don't know where they are, Brooklyn, Queens, or wherever; most of them are not in the Bronx area.

MN: So you have more south Asian cricket players or--?

LD: Well, in the park there is another league. The league we belong to, New York Cricket League, that is primarily of other nationalities. But the other league has a lot of Indo-Caribbeans. Primarily Guyanese.

MN: Wow, when you're saying do you hold like dinner dances? The Wembley Athletic Club?

LD: Well what happened, fortunately for us we have our own clubroom.

NL: And where is that located?

LD: Near Bronx Boulevard, 239th Street and Bronx Boulevard. 330 East 239th Street. It has two floors and we have a liquor license for it.

NL: So it's a social club?

LD: It's a social club and we rent out, upstairs, downstairs we rent it for parties, weddings, things like that. And the members meet every week, we have a bar, we socialize, but unfortunately the expenses are so high the real estate taxes, you have to have insurance for the liquor license, insurance for the patrons if they get drunk and have an accident, you know that type of thing. So the liabilities are so high, so we are just barely meeting our expenses.

NL: And have you had any other partnerships with other cricket leagues in the area then? Or no? You know, sort of similar, kind of--.

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Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Natasha Lightfoot

LD: Well, the New York Cricket League is affiliated with the United States Cricket Association, the United States Cricket Association. And the other leagues are all affiliated. In fact, the influx of Indians, Pakistanis, and other nationalities, cricket is more or less taking off because some have acquired wealth and they're putting investments in it.

MN: Have any New York City high schools like started cricket clubs, or cricket teams?

LD: I don't know of anybody. I heard that in Mount Vernon a group is trying to, they have some people courting youngsters up there. I don't know, how that's progressed.

NL: I went to school in New Haven for college and I knew for sure there was a cricket league there where all the West Indian folks were getting some of the younger college students who were Indians, to teach their children how to play. Because they were getting advanced in age.

MN: The Yale students.

NL: The Yale students who, yes I heard about that.

LD: Yes, in fact all these colleges, Columbia University, Howard, they have cricket teams because when I was young, younger, when I was going to school and so forth, I used to go and play against teams like that.

NL: School based teams. I didn't even realize.

MN: I didn't realize this, that Howard and Columbia had cricket.

NL: And were there any other schools that you can think of in the area, in the East Coast that had--?

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Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Natasha Lightfoot

LD: Yes, I guess most of the schools, as long as you had West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis, wherever they played cricket. They would get together and form a team. And they would play. Some of them belonged to leagues, some friendly matches you know. I know we used to travel to Baltimore to--.

MN: Now did you, you're clearly preserving a West Indian, athletic tradition. Were other West Indian traditions being preserved? Let's say music, did your family listen more to Caribbean music or did you also get immersed in American music.

LD: Well, I know when we were growing up, we used to go to a lot of dances. And West Indian, Caribbean music, Calypso, stuff like that. The Audubon Ballroom and different ballrooms around. And then, my parents weren't much into music. But I listened to everything basically, I listened to rhythm and blues, rock and roll, calypso, and Jamaican music, reggae came along, I listened to that. I even listened to hip-hop.

MN: Now did you ever get, sing in like street corner groups, or did you go into--?

LD: No we were not singers no.

[Laughter]

LD: We used to sit down and talk about politics.

MN: Now you mentioned your interest in politics on many occasions. Were you involved in any political groups in college?

LD: I belonged to the NAACP, yes basically that was it. When I was going to school, my mother said I had to get a part-time job, so I had to work.

NL: Couldn't be as active as you would wanted?

LD: Yes. From high school, I went to a part-time job, because we [inaudible]. And then when I went to college, I got a job. In fact I was working in the post office part-time until I graduated, and I stopped working.

NL: And did any of the, well did any of the politics of the time touch you in any way, you know civil rights and you know kind of--?

LD: I was following it, I wasn't actively involved in it. You know you had your ideas. I know in the, when I finished school. At that time it wasn't easy to get a job like say down on Wall Street and things like that, that's why most people went into the civil service.

NL: You knew that there was a certain boundary, that blacks couldn't cross professionally.

LD: Well, we had it not that you wouldn't try but you know, there was an obstacle there, you knew it.

NL: You knew why, yes.

LD: And personally, with me basically I wanted to feel secure, I was more, retire with pensions things like that.

NL: Right, right.

LD: I wasn't the adventurous type, so to speak.

NL: And I wanted to ask did you have any instances of color consciousness in your family also, alongside the issue of race but kind of like color consciousness within, black communities given your family's a certain complexion.

LD: I never observed it from my family. I know when we were growing up, you know, we are a mixed family in Jamaica, up here my parent didn't make any distinction basically. You were like brown or dark or everything like that, there wasn't any color problem per say. If any individual, had a preference for marrying or anything like that--.

NL: And was your family particularly race conscious in any way, that you can think of?

LD: No, not too particular, they didn't care really if someone wanted to marry a white person or a black person, really not--. But you know, I don't know if you know, well in Jamaica sometimes, my sister is much darker, we have different, and growing up and my sister used to cause a lot of problems, my mother might curse her. You know in that sense. But it wasn't in any derogatory sense.

NL: So I guess I'm interested in the Housing Authority experiences that you had too.

MN: We'll do a little of that. I mean, you said your first job was in the Department of Social Services.

LD: Yes, I was what you call it a social investigator, where we used to visit homes.

NL: So like a social worker?

LD: Well we were an investigator.

MN: See in those days if you were getting public assistance, people would come to the house to check if you were fitting the guidelines. And so what was that like? That was a tough job.

LD: Yes, initially it wasn't too bad. But we had one or two run-ins with certain individuals, because when you said you had to look in the closet to see the clothing. This is the man of the house. If there is a man in the house. Look under the bed things like that.

NL: How long did you do that?

LD: I did for a year and a half. And then I took the test for the Housing Authority and I went in.

MN: What borough did you do the welfare investigations?

LD: That was in Manhattan. The office was at 125th Street.

MN: So you're doing this in Harlem.

LD: Most of my territory was on the West Side.

MN: In the West Side.

LD: At that time the area of 96th Street around there [inaudible] houses at that time.

MN: So what were you exactly looking for when you went into the houses?

LD: You went to discuss the family make sure that the children are there and the mother, they're not brutalizing the children or anything like that. That the man wasn't around if they said--.

NL: If they were single parents yes.

LD: Or another husband. Usually in those days you had to get public assistance you didn't have a boyfriend, you didn't have a husband, anything like that. So just the mother and the children.

MN: Now were they allowed to have television sets?

LD: No, not in those days.

NL: You couldn't display any luxury, no signs of luxury?

MN: So you couldn't have a television, you could have a radio, but you couldn't have a car or a television?

LD: When I started working very few people had televisions I guess.

NL: That was what year, about 1950--?

LD: 1959, 1960.

NL: 1959, 1960, interesting. And were you mostly investigating black families or was it a range?

LD: Range, mostly Spanish and black.

MN: And when you took the test for the Housing Authority, what was your first position?

LD: My first position was a housing assistant. It was a different type of job because you were in an office. And you stayed in the office. You used to do inspections, you go to the apartments and you had to visit so many apartments.

MN: And where was your first job?

LD: My first job was in McKinley Houses at 161st Street in the Bronx.

MN: And at that time, was that a well-kept development?

LD: Yes, in fact the one I went in was a new development at the time. It was well kept, they're new.

NL: Were there kind of regular police patrolling the area or--?

LD: I think when I started, what do you call it, housing guard, and they upgraded them to housing police and became a separate department, housing police.

NL: And there was a sense of security in the neighborhood?

LD: Yes.

MN: Was there a sense that this was a good place to live?

LD: Yes, for those who couldn't afford to live outside public housing was step forward for many people. And they were decent families, I had one or two bad ones, had destructive elements and whatnot, but--.

NL: But in the 60s it was a--.

LD: Even in the later days, you know never put down any families unsafe. You know, people depending on your circumstances, I see working families. I see some of the children used to go, a lot of them used to go to college, things like that.

MN: So your sense of like, of public housing was that, you know there were all these stereotypes about public housing that are very negative.

LD: Yes, it's very negative but, you know among the negativity you have decent families, you have upwardly mobile families. People are trying to get ahead and personally I don't see anything wrong any public housing or public assistance housing. I personally don't have any disagreement with that.

MN: Well New York City is, you know, reputed to have the best public housing in the country. Was there a sense of pride with being associated, did most of the people who worked for the Housing Authority take pride in what they did?

LD: Oh, yes. We had various organizations in housing, and they used to have meetings and dances and things like that. And in fact there is a group I had belonged to when I was still working, called Association of Black Housing Officials. And they're retirees and they meet once a year, primarily in Brooklyn, they call Chat and Chew, they meet and have lunch, in fact I'm supposed to go to one this month.

NL: And were there many black housing officials when you started?

LD: There were a few, not many, you know it was, there were not that many in public housing. But they had a few managers and so forth, not many, not many.

NL: Was this a union job?

LD: At the assistant level, and the assistant manager you were in the union. When you became a manager, in fact even up to the managerial level, the first step in management you were still part of the union, but then if you become on the higher level, then you're no longer part of it.

MN: Now did promotions within the Housing Authority come from seniority or from taking tests?

LD: Taking the tests.

MN: So at every level it was taking a test?

LD: Yes, well the thing about it is that, tests were scheduled every 4 or 6 years or something like that. In the meantime they needed people, they would appoint a provisional, like a provisional assistant manager, provisional manger, and then if you were successful on the test, depending on

how you score you would stay in place, if not you might get bounced and then when they reach your number then you would be upgraded.

NL: And over the course of the time you worked in the Housing Authority, what were the different positions that you occupied?

LD: Well first it was a housing assistant and then I became an assistant manager.

NL: And what were your capacities as an assistant manager?

LD: Assistant manager you supervise the staff, the managerial staff, you work only with manager. The manager, assistant manager, and housing assistant.

NL: And this was all in McKinley?

LD: No, no, no I became an assistant manager at Adams Houses.

NL: And where is Adams?

LD: Adams is like you know Saint Mary's?

MN: It's right across from Saint Mary's?

LD: Yes.

MN: Now Saint Mary's is middle income and Adams is low income.

LD: Yes. Well in the Housing Authority of the federally fully subsidized, state subsidized, city subsidized. Saint Mary's was primarily city subsidized housing, but Adams was a federally subsidized. And after I was promoted from the assistant manager at Adams I became a manager at-- No, no I became a manager at Adams Houses, I was assistant manager of Moore Houses and I became manager at Adams which is also in the Bronx.

MN: Now Moore Houses is right near Saint Mary's right?

LD: Yes, that's the one, that's Moore. And Adams Houses is on 150 something street.

MN: Did you see big differences between different developments, like or were they pretty much similar in their--?

LD: Some developments, some had a worse reputation than others.

NL: Which ones?

LD: Well Patterson Houses was one that they said was very, so-called bad housing.

MN: In what years?

LD: Over the years, over the years. Some housing seemed like they have a problem with [inaudible]. You might go up there and it might get a little better but sometimes, I don't know if it because the population of it was rented and so forth, you had more vandalism. You know we had the clubs there, in every building you have like what we call caretakers, people clean, and you have your maintenance men who go out and repair. Of course you have good caretakers and you have bad caretakers. A caretaker might keep the building clean and you the next day and you come back, urine all over the stairs, things like that in the elevators. Sometimes it's people from the outside group and sometimes people from the inside group. You have destructive elements.

NL: And you're responsible for inspecting, these places for that? For those types of--.

LD: Management, managing and making sure all repairs are being done etcetera, etcetera.

NL: Was there a point which you noticed the change in kind of you know or deterioration in the way the public housing was being maintained?

Interviewee: Linval Da Costa
Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Natasha Lightfoot

LD: Yes, the developments where I managed like McKinley and Adams were in pretty good shape. After I left Adams I was sent Douglass Houses, I don't know if you know that one. West Side Manhattan 103rd Street. I was the manager there for about 4 or 5 years, that's when I, after you know I passed the exam, I got promoted to the district manager and I got assigned to Brooklyn. Near Lafayette Avenue around there, to district manager, and the district manager, the district director would send you out, you would supervise certain developments, you would go and inspect them and write a report on them and make sure you know, the manager and superintendent were doing their job and so forth. We would do what we called project surveys and we would follow the guidelines and make sure they complied with all these different things.

MN: Where, which developments gave you the most trouble when you were in the managerial capacity?

LD: Well, one that gave me the most trouble was Douglass Houses, when I went there it was in very, very bad condition. In fact, I remember the first week I was there, they, people used to leave garbage in the stairwells and they had fires and things like that and as soon as I got there they had a tenants association, a meeting and Carly Maloney was their representative for that area. She had a big meeting and you know really turned on the fire, so that was a very hard development. But I think when I left there it was pretty good, decent at the time.

NL: What year was that?

LD: What year was that now? In the 70s, probably the 80s.

NL: And were you working in the Bronx around the time of the fires or you know kind of that period?

LD: Yes.

NL: And what were your thoughts on what was happening at the time?

LD: The South Bronx was burning. Well it didn't effect us directly, I noticed that it was a multifaceted thing, tenants and landlords it was all part of it I guess. I don't know if it was a conspiracy, whatever, to burn all the houses. Insurance purposes or whatever. I remember, but it didn't effect me we weren't living in that particular area. And I didn't have any relatives or family who were directly involved in the burning process.

NL: They were all kind of north of the burnings at that point.

LD: So basically the South Bronx. I mean I used to work in the area but--.

NL: That's what I was wondering, you know--?

LD: I worked in the area, but no it didn't effect nothing. It didn't effect me personally.

NL: And what about the drug trade and you know how that infiltrated public housing?

LD: Well the drugs is one of the things that causes a lot of problems and the crack epidemic and so forth started. That I think effected because you know you had more vandalism things like that. They would break the doors, locks things like that.

NL: Hold that thought because we have lunch.

[Break in Discussion]

MN: The migration to the Bronx was a movement of people to find better living conditions and so you were saying both the Wembley and Primrose Cricket Clubs began in Harlem?

LD: In Harlem.

NL: And then at some point once more West Indians were moving to the Bronx, they moved as well these clubs?

LD: Like for instance, Wembley, we were formed on Amsterdam Avenue, no Saint Nicholas Avenue at the first because someone's basement, basement. And we have had many ups and downs, sometimes we're up, sometimes we're down. We've always tried to have a clubroom. And about 1970 we were in desperate straits, because you know the management was poor and we didn't have any financials, we turned over to some people to manage the club, it didn't work out. About 1970 it was reorganized and a group of us reorganized it and I became the president. And from 1970 to 1977 we organized parties and so forth and our finances.

NL: The parties made you guys money?

LD: Yes. You paid dues also. And my mother's basement we used to meet and we didn't have to pay rent, we met every third Friday of the month. And we accumulated assets and then we decided, at least some of the guys decided they wanted a bigger place and [inaudible]. And they rented this place on White Plains Road between 228th and 229th Street. And we had it there for years.

NL: And by that point was White Plains Road a business district for West Indians?

LD: Well it was mixed in.

NL: It was still mixed okay. Because it seems totally West Indian now.

LD: So we went up there and we had an open place. Members would meet there to play dominoes, drinks and so forth. Your bar is open, that's the fundraiser.

NL: Would you bring your kids around was it a family thing or was it just men mostly?

LD: Well, during the week and so forth, were men. Ladies come there on the weekends.

NL: Would they cook the food?

LD: We didn't have much food there.

NL: You didn't have food it was mostly, mostly drinks?

LD: If we have a party then you know they provide, a curry goat.

NL: They bring a curry goat?

LD: A curry goat, that type of thing when you had parties you had food.

MN: During the years when you know you were meeting in the basement, if you had a dance would you rent a social hall or have it at someone's house?

LD: There are some people who had a basement that they would rent out to have parties. As well as if you wanted to pick up days you go to a hall. And that's how we accumulated assets.

NL: And would you have live music or would you have DJs?

LD: No, DJs.

NL: Okay and these were mostly Caribbean people attending Caribbean music things.

LD: Reggae, calypso, things like that.

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NL: Did you go to any live music shows as you were growing up or even as an adult in the Bronx?

LD: No, not live music. I didn't go to too much live music. You'd go to dances where they have music, live music. Band playing that type of thing. So as I was saying about the club in the formation and so forth and after [inaudible] when we acquired the place at White Plains Road it was there and we are making money and accumulated a lot of funds and they wanted, they aspired to own their own place at some point, because there was rented. Although we had an opportunity to buy it one time, but at that time they said they didn't think they could handle it. And eventually under our new president we decided to look for a place and we found a space on Bullard Avenue, that's near off of Bronx Boulevard. 550 East 239th Street. That's where we are now. It's a big building, two floors. We had to renovate it.

MN: Does the building have a sign on it, in front? It says--.

LD: Wembley Athletic Club if you drive by you can see. It's there and now we have a liquor license, we have a bar.

MN: So you can rent it out to other organizations?

LD: Yes, it's supposed to be a membership club so people just can't walk. You have to be, you know, know somebody. But to raise revenue you have to rent it.

MN: Now are all the members of the club people who at one time or another played cricket?

LD: Some did and some didn't.

MN: So some people just joined for the social, fraternal?

LD: At this point in our lives, persons interested become a member. And you have to go to a membership committee meeting and things like that. And if they approve you, you become a member.

NL: And you said there are 80 something members right now?

LD: Yes. We have about 3 or 4 female members.

MN: Are there mostly retirees? Or--?

LD: At this stage now, basically, probably about 50% are retirees.

MN: Now are most of the people who are in this club, civil servants would you say? In New York City?

LD: Some were civil servants, I would say most, some are civil servants, they did various jobs. Some did various jobs. Some were civil servants some weren't.

NL: And was this mostly a middle class kind of grouping of people, homeowners?

LD: Basically 99% of them are homeowners. 99% or 100%. Some live in Mount Vernon now, some live up above.

MN: So these are like the solid citizens of a community.

LD: Yes. I'd say in the organization most of them are well educated you know. Some are educated some are not you know. We really don't discriminate in that sense.

NL: But most acquired property and have steady jobs.

LD: Most of them are better off than I am.

[Laughter]

LD: Some of them have 2 or 3 homes, so yes.

NL: That is a great story.

MN: It is a great story.

NL: I'm interested to find out more about this community that's been formed, seems to have been in existence for you know 5 decades or so, that's something.

MN: Now do like the local elected officials come to talk to you know--?

LD: At one point we Larry Seabrook he was in that area. We used to invite him to our functions, things like that. And [inaudible] comes a General from Jamaica, he comes up.

NL: So there's still some political activism, sort of connecting back to Jamaica.

LD: Right. In fact, I think it's October the 11th, there's a visual group from Jamaica that is coming to the club to interview or take videotape of people giving Christmas presents for people in Jamaica that's October the 11th.

NL: So are there people who are, you know, active in the club in Wembley that are active in politics in Jamaica, or you know are interested in that sense?

LD: No, no they're not active, but they know people.

NL: Yes, so they kind of keep aware of current events there?

LD: One of our member, he's on the executive board too, he's an attorney, I don't know if you've ever heard of him, Jeff Bonds, he's on the radio.

NL: Yes, saw him on as a kid he was on WLIB.

LD: Yes.

NL: Yes, I remember him definitely; his voice was always on, on Saturday mornings. Okay.

MN: Were you ever involved in like a Democratic club in the Bronx?

LD: Yes, I've been a member of the same club that Larry Seabrook goes.

MN: And what about the NAACP, have you been active in that at all?

LD: No, I send dues, I send money to the Democratic club too.

MN: So the Democratic club and Wembley are your two major--?

NL: Affiliations.

MN: And then the organization in the Housing Authority?

LD: Yes. I didn't run for political office or anything like that.

NL: You weren't interested?

MN: Were you tempted, did anybody try to persuade you?

LD: No, well you see I'm, I was kind of shy in a sense.

MN: You were the best hitter in the league and everybody knew you.

LD: When I was playing people knew me yes. I wasn't the best, I wouldn't say I was the best I was a good player. I wasn't the best player I was a good player. But they know me; in the old days in the park I'm not really that active up there. I go up there occasionally because I belong to a fraternal organization.

NL: Which one do you belong to?

LD: I belong to the Mechanics Order, you know, I don't know if you've heard of it. Something similar to the--.

NL: Masons yes.

MN: Now does this also go back to Jamaica?

LD: They have it in Jamaica but I joined it up here.

MN: Now did you join it through the Housing Authority? Or through--?

LD: Through friends. Members of Wembley and others.

MN: And is this club centered in your neighborhood?

LD: No it's not a club it's a fraternal organization, it's not in my neighborhood though. The club is in Brooklyn and we meet, in fact the name of my fraternal organization, is Mount Sinai Lodge #7 and we meet up in New Rochelle. And I was treasurer for years, I'm on the district Grand Lodge.

NL: And this is a national order?

LD: Yes.

MN: Or is it international as well?

LD: It's international. It's not as large as the Masons but they're gonna have a convention in Aruba at the end of this month.

MN: Does it get involved in charitable work?

LD: Yes. They look out for their members, you know basically.

NL: And there are a lot of West Indians who are involved in this?

LD: This organization is primarily West Indians but it's open to anyone.

MN: Is this true, is it primarily West Indian all over the country or--?

LD: Yes, from what I've observed. But they have branches in Panama, Costa Rica, Cuba, Netherlands, England.

NL: So basically anywhere that West Indians went?

LD: Yes.

NL: I see.

MN: How old were you when you first got involved?

LD: In this organization? I was in my 40s. 1982.

MN: Now what attracted you to it?

LD: Well you know growing up, I used to hear about Masons and it seemed to be that most people were in the lodge, to me, it seemed like they were fairly successful and I was curious.

NL: The lodges had a reputation in Antigua too of being upstanding members of the community.

LD: I was curious, as I said, curious. And I had two friends, they were members of the club and they joined and you know--. If somebody had approached me from the Masons who I was friendly with maybe I would've gone that way but people were close to me and I went to there.

And I'm still here. But I don't know if you're aware that in fraternal organizations today they're becoming older and dying out basically, the same thing. You're not attracting younger people and the one I belong to right now, we're few in numbers because if we initiate one member, somebody dies or moves away to Florida or something like that so--.

NL: Right, so one in, one out.

LD: We're in a predicament. Yes, we're in a predicament as far as membership. Same thing with the club like I said we can't attract the young--.

MN: So this is almost like a whole generation of upwardly mobile West Indian immigrant men, use these organizations as a vehicle to connect, to network--.

NL: Kind of build a professional base.

LD: There are of course they aspire to [inaudible].

NL: And most of them are probably succeeded in that.

LD: In fact we had an anniversary service last Sunday at Saint Luke's Church.

NL: Okay, Father Reeve.

MN: We have to interview him.

NL: Yes, we've been trying to. He married me and I've been trying to get him in here for so long I can't tell you.

LD: Well I know the minister at my wife's church, Father MacIntyre.

NL: What church is that?

LD: Church of the Good Shepard.

NL: Yes, I know Good Shepard, yes.

LD: Yes, he's a very charismatic.

MN: Should we interview?

LD: Yes, if you can get him.

[Laughter]

Interviewee: Linval Da Costa
Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Natasha Lightfoot

LD: For instance he's very comedic, he's a good comedian like he emcees a lot of like the Jamaican concert, General Dinner Dance.

MN: Like your aunt? Her aunt performed at her wedding, she was the best emcee at the wedding, she had everybody just cracking up. I wanted to bring her up from Antigua for one of our events here she was so good.

LD: Yes, so he's familiar with all the Jamaica cultural events in New York. So he's another reference if you want.

MN: The Church of the Good Shepard what street is that on?

NL: That's on Henry.

LD: Yes, Henry. The church looks like a house. My wife is very active in that church.

NL: Well your wife sounds like she might be a great interview as well. So please talk to her about coming.

LD: Sure.

MN: This what you're describing is quite remarkable in terms of this transition from Harlem, to the Bronx, and then from the South Bronx to the North Bronx and you know all these different organization which sort of reinforced one another. And this remarkably successful community. It's a great story. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]