

11-30-2005

## Orange, Taur

Orange, Taur. Interview: Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://fordham.bepress.com/baahp\\_oralhist](https://fordham.bepress.com/baahp_oralhist)

Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Orange, Taur. November 30, 2005. Interview with the Bronx African American History Project. BAAHP Digital Archive at Fordham.

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Bronx African American History Project at DigitalResearch@Fordham. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of DigitalResearch@Fordham. For more information, please contact [considine@fordham.edu](mailto:considine@fordham.edu).

Transcriber: Angela Dugan

Mark Naison (MN): 35<sup>th</sup> Interview with the Bronx African-American History Project. It's November 30, 2005. We're at Fordham University with Taur Orange who is the Director of Opportunity Programs at Fashion Institute of Technology –

Taur Orange: That's correct –

MN: Also very, very active in the Wesleyan University recruitment process. So we'd like to start this talking a little about your experiences growing up in the Bronxdale houses and what it was like growing up in public housing in the - - I guess you call it the Soundview section?

TO: Its funny you should say that because it's always been a matter of debate as to whether were hip enough and hard enough to be part of Soundview

MN: Oooh.

TO: Let me tell you just a little bit about my family actually. I'm the youngest of three, I have two older brothers. My father had been in the military he was part of special services during World War II and served as a boxer. And one of the perks of having served during WWII is that when he was discharged, they created this certain type of housing called the Quonset huts. Now this actually predates my birth but I used to hear at - - ad infinitum from my parents living in what's now called the Classon Point section of the Bronx, which was then the Quonset huts. It's where people from the military came and lived. And that's where my two older brothers were born. Bronxdale was one of the early housing developments to open during the late 50's, actually during the early 50's. And so they moved my family, my mom, dad, my two brothers moved to Bronxdale houses. They represented the first families to move in, in 1953.

MN: Right. Now I want to talk a little bit about your family. What part of - - was both sides of your family southern in origin or -

TO: Actually New Yorkers, but yes, both sets of grandparents were from the South. On my father's side my grandmother was from Georgia and his paternal side of the family was from South Carolina.

MN: And what about your mother's side?

TO: Virginia.

MN: Now where did your mother and father meet?

TO: Oh gosh, wow. They met as kids believe it or not. They first met when my mom was 11 and my father was 13 in Harlem. And the running joke in the family, that my mother used to love to tell, was that she showed my father how to take a shower because he was from what was called the Valley in Harlem, and she was from Sugar Hill.

MN: Oh boy. [Laughter]

TO: So the class issues were, were very pronounced even then - -

MN: Really wow - -

TO: She was an only child, he was the eldest of nine. And so she loved to tease him about how the folks from the valley didn't quite have it going on, but the people up on Sugar Hill were, were a bit more civilized.

MN: Right, right.

TO: [Laughter]

MN: Now had your father boxed professionally before he entered the military?

TO: That's a good question. I'm not sure -

MN: Okay -

TO: I'm not sure.

MN: Were most of the people who had moved into Bronxdale houses also military families wh-

TO: In the early days absolutely - -

MN: Okay - -

TO: Absolutely.

MN: And were, were these mostly two parent families?

TO: You must've anticipated my next response. Absolutely. The one thing I remember as being a constant norm - -

MN: Yes - -

TO: Was that we all came from two parent homes - -

MN: Yes - -

TO: That was absolutely the norm. It didn't matter whether the father was - - or mother was dysfunctional or not - -

MN: Yes - -

TO: The homes had two parents in them.

MN: Right. Now what - - describe the physical setting of the Bronxdale houses. Where it was, how big the buildings were and the like.

TO: Okay. Bronxdale is bounded by, let's see, Watson Avenue on the eastern border - - sorry on the western border, and it's bounded by Bruckner Boulevard on the eastern border - -

MN: Right.

TO: Between Soundview Avenue and, oh gosh can't remember the name of it - - there were three sections to Bronxdale houses and I can't quite think of what the northern boundary street is now. But divided into three sections roughly about, seven to ten buildings per section.

MN: So this was a very large development.

TO: In those days it was considered large.

MN: Okay. Now how high were the highest buildings?

TO: Six floors.

MN: Oh so none of them were [crosstalk] more than six stories.

TO: Six stories.

MN: So it wasn't like Patterson or Forest - -

TO: No.

MN: With these tall buildings.

TO: No. And again these - - Bronxdale houses represent some of the early - -

MN: Right.

TO: Housing developments when it was still fairly compact and fairly short - -

MN: Right. Now what do you remember about the grounds and the atmosphere in the grounds in the Bronxdale houses.

TO: To this day, and I kid you not, to this day I cannot and will not live anywhere that does not have trees and grass, because that's what I saw everyday looking out the window. And even when my family moved from one building to the next, when I was 9, my parents decided to move from 1670 Watson Avenue and they moved to 1725 Bruckner Boulevard. Did so because they needed extra rooms - -

MN: Right

TO: And so forth. But in each location there were always these absolutely magnificent trees outside the windows and there was always grass.

MN: And the grass was well kept?

TO: Absolutely. And I'm sure you've heard by now - -one of the refrains was that, you were not only fined if you stepped on the grass, but the person who was assigned to maintaining the grounds, would make house visits and come looking for you if he had overheard from someone else that someone had stepped on the grass. They would actually come to your apartment and speak to your parents and extract that fine. So all of the grassy areas were contained by these little small link chains - -

MN: Right.

TO: And not surprisingly all of the guys wanted to play stickball, punch ball, you name it. And if the ball went over onto the grassy area, [Laughs] it was quite a scene to watch the guys negotiate to see who was brave enough to go step on the grass to retrieve the wall.

MN: Wow.

TO: Because no one dared step on the grass.

MN: Were schools within walking distance, the local elementary school?

TO: Some were, some were not. I was bussed, maybe the distance of about 13 blocks. First to P.S. 47, and then eventually up to Castle Hill area P.S. 36.

MN: Now what sort of work did your father do when you were growing up?

TO: My dad worked three jobs, until I was 5. My, my father not unlike most of the men in their home at that time, were very traditional in the sense that they expected the women to stay home and raise the children because that was a real job. And so, my dad actually held down three jobs until I was 5 and of school age when my mother was allowed, not allowed but encouraged, strike that. [Laughter] She's deceased but I know she'll be buzzing in my ear when she tells people, allowed. She was in, she was, well allowed [laughs], to seek employment when I turned 5 and entered kindergarten. But my father worked for the police athletic league, he worked for private

construction firm, and eventually worked for the New York Cit Transit Authority and retired after 43 years. The New York City Transit Authority.

MN: Okay. What was the ethnic mix of the Bronxdale houses when you were young?

TO: Everything and then some which, which continues for me to be one of the most, enriched memories and recollections I have of growing up in Bronxdale. That it was incredibly multiracial, multiethnic, a significant number of Italians, Jewish, African-American, Latino, at that time the predominant Latino population was Puerto-Rican. There were occasional people from India. You name it, it was there. It was there, Filipinos, [crosstalk] Filipinos who lived there. And so, when I think about the community of mothers who lived in Bronxdale, the community represented just about everyone you can think of. When holidays like the Fourth of July would roll around or even during a typical summer day or summer night, you'd see all the mothers lined up at evening watching their kids play, and it looked like something from the UN.

MN: Wow.

TO: Something from the UN.

MN: What were - - you know where did you go for amusements within the walking distance? Were there movie theaters, the White Castle? What were the places you as a child went to, that you could kind of go by yourself or go with an older sibling? Close, relatively close by?

TO: I would say probably until the age of about 12, we were very self-contained. We actually played amongst ourselves right there on the grounds, and didn't dare think of venturing beyond that. All bets were off when we turned 12 or 13, especially as girls, we started venturing [Laughter] to Bronx River, to Monroe Houses, to Soundview, because we thought that's where the finest boys were.

MN: Okay, right.

TO: And we always made sure we were back home before our parents realized we had ventured.

MN: Right, right. Were there recreation centers in Bronxdale with supervised activities for young people, or did you mostly organize your own games?

TO: It was a lot of both, to be honest. The third section had Bronx - - housed Bronxdale's community center. Most of the activities, though, were designed for boys. So you had the cadets, you had different organized kinds of sports for the young men. But for the girls for the most part, we organized our own activities.

MN: So you were saying there wasn't much in the way you've organized recreation for girls.

TO: Not really. So we tended to organize our own activities.

MN: Now did boys and girls play different games in Bronxdale houses? Like - -

TO: Oh definitely. [Laughter]

MN: Okay what - -

TO: And in some, the same. [Laughs]

MN: Yes, right. Now what were the girls doing when the boys were playing stickball?

TO: We did a lot of stoop games. There were a lot of games that we created based on how the stoops were configured. And I think now even, most housing developments have a uniform kind of stoop. On the rear of every building, the stoop was divided into eight kind of quadrants, the cement apparently had been laid in eight different quadrants. And so we came up with all kinds of creative ball games, games where we would have to roll the ball. And, and use that stoop, that very limited space for our playground. We also played what we call popsies, off the sides of the building. In term of how the brick is constructed, there's always a little area that's jets out - -

MN: Right, yea - -



TO: And so, the idea was to toss the ball in the right angle of that space, and make it pop at a certain angle - -

MN: Yes - -

TO: And the person who was able to do the most number of pops was the popsie - -

MN: Right - -

TO: King or queen.

MN: Yes. Did your family attend a church regularly when you were at - - growing up?

TO: Mine did not, but we were encouraged to attend with my cousins who lived in a housing development right across Bruckner Boulevard, Monroe Houses.

MN: Right.

TO: One of the interesting things I have to add is that as the eldest of nine, most of my father's siblings always resided in close proximity to him. And wherever he or we moved, they followed.

MN: Wow. So you had people in Monroe, you had people in - -

TO: Rosedale - -

MN: [crosstalk] In Rose - -Soundview.

TO: You better believe it - -

MN: So - -

TO: They did not go far - -

MN: This was a very close family.

TO: Absolutely. There was only one sibling who lived outside of walking distance and she was based in Harlem and she was in a housing development there, in King Houses.

MN: Right. So this was an entire family who moved into - - benefited from New York City Public Housing?

TO: Oh absolutely.

MN: And pretty much the experience and the other developments were just as positive?

TO: Oh absolutely.

MN: Right. Because today, in hip hop terminology, the projects, the PJ's, or the term for fear and crime - -

TO: Probably as it should be, but we're talking about the late 50's up through, I would say the mid- 70's. An environment that was almost entirely drug free. That was the norm. It was the norm to be in an environment that was drug-free.

MN: Right.

TO: It's very different now where the norm is to be in an environment that's drug active.

MN: Now what sort of - - was music an important part of your childhood. Your uncle said you were a musician?

TO: We all were. We come from a family where music is like sort of in the DNA. So my father was a drummer, my oldest brother was a drummer, my second brother went to Music and Art. He was a horn player. I played oboe and flute. All of my extended family as well as my nuclear family were - - either took music lessons or voice lessons.

MN: Now did you know your Uncle Joe was a professional musician? Was that in those days - - was that something that was - - everybody was very aware of?

TO: Definitely, definitely. And because my middle brother was a jazz - - an aspiring jazz musician himself, he was always able to inform us as to who my uncle was playing with.

MN: Right.

TO: My oldest brother was very heavily into poetry, and at one point was actually a member of The Last Poets.

MN: Your - -

TO: My oldest brother - -

MN: You're kidding. Wow.

TO: Oh yes, oh yes. Definitely.

MN: What was the name he was under through The Last Poets?

TO: Richard Orange.

MN: Richard Orange?

TO: Richard Orange - -

MN: Okay.

TO: Yes. But my middle brother was sort of the real, legitimate musician of the family. And so whenever my Uncle Joe was traveling or playing with Shep or Herbie Mann Weather, Tony was the one that would say, "You won't believe this, I just heard from Joe and he's on the road with-" But music was a huge part of our family.

MN: Now I guess Joe said JC Higgenbotham who was a famous musician, was a relative of - -

TO: Oh yes.

MN: So this was something - - was music being played in your house all the time? You know --

TO: [Laughs] I'm laughing because I recently shared with my staff - - right now we're doing Secret Santa for the upcoming holidays. And we decided to do a Secret Santa around a music theme.

MN: Okay.

TO: So we are going to purchase secretly, a CD that we think another person absolutely must have in their collection. Absolutely.

MN: Okay.

TO: Absolutely. And so that then led to a discussion of what we grew up listening to. And I told them that, they probably would have lost their minds in my house, because my mother was a big show tune person.

MN: Okay.

TO: So my brothers and I would like, head for the hills when she would put on South Pacific - -

MN: Oh I love that stuff - -

TO: And Oklahoma

MN: [sings] Oklahoma [crosstalk]

TO: Now of course I appreciate that. I love it.

MN: Yes, yes.

TO: But we grew up listening to everything from South Pacific to Cold Train. And everything in between, Motown, Hendrix - - my middle brother was a huge Charlie Lloyd and Jimmy Hendrix fan.

MN: Wow.

TO: My older brother was more of a traditional jazz buff. So - - and my father, of course, steeped in jazz because his uncle had been J.C. Higgenbotham and he had a very close relationship with him. So we listened to everything from swing to be-bop, to Jimi Hendrix to Motown. I was very big into folk, so I was listening to Joni Mitchell and my mother was listening to show tunes and Mary Ann McKay.

MN: [Laughter] Now did you and your siblings go away to summer camp at all?

TO: That's a painful subject, yes. [Laughs] Because I was not a good camper.

MN: Oh. Did you all go to the same camp?

TO: Yes. My brothers actually had a much better and beneficial experience with sleep-away camp. So much so, that they were asked to return and become counselors and then they became directors at the camp. It was Star Lake - - all I remember was that it was sponsored by the Salvation Army. Star Lake Camp.

MN: Right.

TO: But during those days the Salvation Army was very supportive of families that had economic need, and my family was one of those.

MN: Right.

TO: And so I remember when - - I couldn't have been more than 3 or 4 - - accompanying my mother as my mother would put my brothers on the bus every summer to go away to Star Lake Camp -

MN: Right - -

TO: From 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

MN: So this is a subject we can pass over. [Laughter]

TO: [Laughs] I only did two years.

MN: Right.

TO: I did a two year stint and that was it.

MN: Now what about day camps. Were there day camps in the Bronx that you ever went to in the summer?

TO: No, because for the most part mothers - -

MN: Mothers were able - -

TO: Mothers raised their kids - -

MN: Were raising their kids.

TO: Yes they were not working at the level that mothers work now.

MN: Now do you recall any race issues in your childhood that disturbed the seeming harmony of groups in this development?

TO: Yes, yes.

MN: And how did those manifest themselves?

TO: Even in the face of the multicuturalism -

MN: Okay -

TO: That was very pronounced, there were pockets of - - there were pockets of bigotry that got manifested and surfaced between kids. Whenever the boys in particular would fight, the first things that would come out of their mouths were racial epithets, on both sides.

MN: Okay.

TO: And so it was not uncommon for African-American kids to be called nigger, and it was not uncommon for white kids to be called honkies.

MN: Okay.

TO: Yes.

MN: So its inter - - so it was honky not like guinea, kike, nick, it was like the white kids were seen as white. Not as Italian, Irish - -

TO: Here's the strange thing, somehow the Italian - - the Italian kids escaped a lot of the - - of the racial confrontations because they were seen as being of color.

MN: Fascinating.

TO: Italians were seen as being of color, but they were seen as a population who didn't want to own up to it. And I even heard that in my own home.

MN: Right.

TO: That Italians had an African ancestry that they denied.

MN: Yes.

TO: So they were diluting themselves to think that they were white.

MN: Okay, very interesting. There is an actual book that I have called "Are Italians White."

It's a collection of essays by Italian-American scholars on this very subject. Which - - was there a lot of political discussion in your household?

TO: Nothing but, nothing but - -

MN: Interesting - -

TO: Nothing but - -

MN: And this was something from an early age?

TO: Absolutely.

MN: What was the manner - - was this something at the dinner table and what were some of the subjects that you recall being discussed at let's 5, or 6, or 7?

TO: It was discussed - - politics was not discussed or framed in terms of it being politics, it was framed in terms of life skills. And so there were issues that now we would refer to as sort of political issues that were simply both imparted, and discussed as a mechanism for being safer out in the world.

MN: Really.

TO: My - - and much of it came from my mother.

MN: Really.

TO: The White Castle at that time - - and this is early on in the late 50's and early 60's, would not serve people of color - -

MN: Right yes - -and Brian by the way has written --gave a talk about - - so this was something everybody was very aware of.

TO: Right and my mother gave participated in a lot of the picketing of White Castle - -

MN: Of White Castle.

TO: Definitely.

MN: Both they - - at the one near Bronxdale, did she also go up to Allerton?

TO: No. For the most part it was the one right there near Bronxdale, bordering Bronxdale right there.

MN: Right. So she was involved in that campaign.

TO: Absolutely. So there was a lot of discussion around ways in which to address bigotry, if we were the recipient of it - -what we were to do if someone called us a name.

MN: Okay - -

TO: What we were to do if we thought or sensed that someone was withholding something from us because we were African-American. There was a lot of discussion about what was going on during that period of the 60's - -

MN: Right - -

TO: In terms of the Black Power Movement, and it got reflected to a large degree in the kind of music that we listened to in the home although it was a wide - -

MN: Right - -

TO: Range of tastes, it found its way in the home as well.



MN: Okay. Did your mother or your parents have issues with the schools and how they dealt with you and your siblings?

TO: I'll never forget this and I've repeated this story a thousand times. My middle brother, when he was in fifth grade, was selected by the teacher to be part of a class - - a play that the class was putting on.

MN: Okay.

TO: Huckleberry Finn.

MN: Right.

TO: And I don't need to tell you who he was asked to play.

MN: Okay.

TO: And Alice Orange just about lost her mind [Laughs] because her son was asked to play Jim the Slave. And I remember - - there were 5 years between me and my brother Tony, so if he was 10-ish maybe 11, I would've been about 6.

MN: So this would have been late 50's, '59 or so.

TO: Well this would have been - - yes, yes or maybe '60.

MN: Right.

TO: And it still stays with me. It was the subject for several days - - the only subject that was discussed in my home.

MN: Okay.

TO: And I remember my father wanting to take a slightly less aggressive stance - -

MN: Okay.

TO: And suggesting maybe a letter and my mother saying hell no. It wasn't a matter of if she was going up, but when she was going up, and how long she was going to stay in having a discussion with the teacher who asked that my brother play the slave.

MN: Right. Okay.

TO: Yes.

MN: Now what are -- were there any other examples from let's say your experience of teachers who were subtly or directly -- putting you or other African-American youngsters in humiliating or difficult positions?

TO: I can't say that I really recall it being pervasive. There were incidents, no question. I was, as I am now, a compulsive gum-chewer [laughs] and I remember when I was in, I believe it was the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, there was a -- I had a teacher Mrs. Cerebello, who would insist that I swallow the gum. That used to be the practice back in those days. If you were caught chewing gum in class, you had to swallow the gum. It wasn't about spitting it out. The punishment was, and they'd get right up on you -- swallow it.

MN: Okay.

TO: And so I was aware though, that she never asked any of the white young women to swallow the gum. She would chastise them, but she would have them spit it out. And she might threaten to contact their parents, but never to swallow. With me, it was always, swallow it. And so my mother experienced that as, a double standard.

MN: Right.

TO: And I think now it was.

MN: Okay.

TO: Yes.

MN: Now what was the atmosphere regard - -in your family regarding education and what was -  
- what were you expected to do and how did the family contribute to your educational  
achievements?

TO: I don't think they were unlike the majority of parents and majority of homes that had an  
expectation that if the father and/or mother was out busting their butts to put food on the table,  
then we were expected to hold down our job, and our job was to put one hundred and twenty  
percent into every single day. Not some days, everyday. It was the norm for parents to - - at  
least the mothers, to check homework every single night, to monitor progress. And not because  
the schools requested or required it, but because they had an investment in monitor -

MN: And this was going on not just in your house - -

TO: No, no

MN: In other - - in your friends - -

TO: Sure, sure.

MN: Right. Okay.

TO: Half of us went to public schools, and the other half went to the local Catholic school

MN: Right -

TO: Catholic school. And it was consistent. In fact, it was sort of a - - an unspoken time when  
we knew not to be on the telephone with one another because that was the time when our parents  
were checking homework.

MN: Yes. Now did your friendships cross racial lines at that time in terms of whose house you  
would be sleeping over or visiting and things of that sort?

TO: Probably more for my brothers and less for the girls, which is interesting because the interracial friendships for the girls primarily took place in the schools. But once we came home, we tended to be in same, ethnic kinds of groups.

MN: Really.

TO: The boys however, always crossed racial and ethnic lines.

MN: Right.

TO: I think in part because of a common interest in sports.

MN: What about dating, when that started, did those same lines tend to be preserved when girls started dating?

TO: Absolutely.

MN: And that was pretty - -

TO: Yes, yes absolutely now we're talking, at least for me, late 60's, early 70's.

MN: Right, okay.

TO: Definitely. African-American girls stayed with African-American boys. Occasionally maybe dated a Latino boy. The Filipinos kind of went both ways. They dated Latinos, dated African-Americans, occasionally dated whites.

MN: Right, okay. In terms of your musical training, did it take place in schools or were you sent to private lessons?

TO: Both, both. There used to be a music school on Westchester Avenue near Elder, near Elder Avenue.

MN: Right.

TO: And that's where my brothers and I all took our music lessons. And when we then attended high school, it was a choice between typing lessons or music lessons - -

MN: Right -

TO: And my mother insisted upon the music lessons, so to this day I still type with three fingers.

MN: Now, did your mother take you to museums when you were younger? Was that part of the exposure to the broader culture in your family?

TO: The short answer is yes. The longer answer is that - - and I - - maybe I do say it because I'm her daughter, but I think not. My mother was a genius. She was an absolute genius. My mother had a practice every holiday of conducting what she would call a trip to nowhere. And what she would do is allow me and my brothers - - and we would rotate this, so Easter it might be my choice, Thanksgiving it might be my other brother's choice - you know that Thanksgiving weekend. We would get to select a train line - -

MN: Wow.

TO: And she would then pack a lunch for us, and we would ride to the end of that train line just to see what was there. And we would go upstairs, hang out, sort of explore the community, have lunch, and then take the ride back home. So one, it allowed us to develop a comfort with traveling anywhere in the city, it familiarized us with all of the train lines, but it also opened our eyes to the greater communities beyond where we lived -

MN: Yes -

TO: And for us it was as if you had taken us to the Caribbean. I mean it was like, better than you can imagine. The excitement and the anticipation of figuring out what was at the end of that train ride.

MN: Wow. That's quite a story.

TO: So that supplemented the museum visits, just going down to different communities and hanging out, that were more accessible.

MN: Right.

TO: But the idea of exploring the unknown was fabulous.

MN: Yes.

TO: And affordable because they didn't have a lot of money.

MN: Did you attend many live music events when you were a child? Concerts?

TO: Anywhere and everywhere that was affordable.

MN: So give some examples of [crosstalk] - -

TO: When the Jackson 5 was at the Apollo, it was much more affordable then. We would go see James Brown at the Apollo, the Jackson 5 at the Apollo, the Temptations - -

MN: Now this was you and your friends or - -

TO: No no no - -

MN: This is the family.

TO: Family.

MN: You went with your family to see James Brown?

TO: Absolutely, you better believe it.

MN: [Laughter] You went with your family to see James Brown?

TO: James was hot in the Orange household. That's what I'm saying everything from - -

MN: And this is in like the middle 50's before he- -

TO: No no this would be later. This would have been in the 60's.

MN: In the 60's - - I mean the mid-60's.

TO: Yes mid to late 60's.

MN: Okay. And you saw the Temptations?

TO: Temptations, oh gosh Gloria Lynn. My father was a huge Gloria Lynn fan. We did Gloria Lynn - - I'm trying to think some of the others. Definitely the Temptations - -

MN: Did you ever go to the Hunts Point Palace or any venues in the Bronx, or it was mostly Harlem?

TO: It was mostly Harlem. I think I was too young for that. That would've been my Uncle Joe's generation.

MN: Right, right. But that was - - any outdoor park's performances that you remember it was - -

TO: Mostly the Shakespeare series - -

MN: Okay -

TO: In Central Park - -

MN: And you went to Shakespeare in the Park.

TO: Yes, until my brothers rebelled and shut that down. [Laughter] But I got dragged along. [Laughter]

MN: Right. Now this may seem like a strange question. What sort of educational toys were in the house? Were there chemistry sets, erector - were there things like that that?

TO: Yes that's a fascinating question. We had very few toys, when I think about it. We had very few toys. We had a lot of board games.

MN: Board games okay. So what board games were played in the house?

TO: I think it was called - -I'm tempted to say Sorry? I think it was Sorry? This is fascinating. I think it's a board game called Sorry, we definitely had Monopoly - -

MN: Monopoly. Did you have Scrabble?

TO: We had Scrabble. That was big. Because my little brother was always trying to cheat. That was a biggie.

MN: Big in Scrabble?

TO: Scrabble a lot of card games.

MN: Right. What card games were played?

TO: We played a version of what is now - - now it's called Spit. I just remember it being a very fast game like Spit.

MN: Yes, okay.

TO: We played Blackjack.

MN: Right, okay.

TO: When I got older, we played - - my mother and I played Bid Whist. Big on Bid Whist.

MN: Right.

TO: She tried to teach me Peanuckle. That was a - - that didn't work. [Laughs] But it was mostly those games.

MN: Okay.

TO: But we didn't have - - we didn't have many toys. We had one toy that I remember that was in the shape of a turtle.

MN: Okay.

TO: And I think it was called Tony the Turtle or some - - [Laughter] some old crazy thing. But we held onto that long after my brothers and I left home. I'm not sure why but my mother kept that in the apartment. Years after we had gone on to college.

MN: Right.

TO: Yes [crosstalk]

MN: What - - was there - - did your family's cuisine reflect ethnic influences or it was pretty much standard Americana. What sort of stuff was being cooked and eaten?



TO: It was standard. My mother evolved into an excellent cook.

MN: Okay.

TO: My father was horrid, we would just beg her not to leave us in his care.

MN: Right.

TO: However, he hooked us up on sundaes. My dad made a mean waffle.

MN: Okay.

TO: And he had a dish - - I'm not sure where he learned this. He used to take canned salmon and sauté some green peppers and onions and scramble it in with the salmon. And then hook up the grits and pour this mixture over the grits and the eggs - -

MN: Okay so you did have grits though?

TO: Oh yes. That's funny you should say that because the cook at FIT, just brought grits on about a month ago, and we have been his biggest and best [crosstalk]

MN: Now what about - - [crosstalk] did anybody make collard greens in your house?

TO: No my mother never cooked collard greens. But she cooked all of these wonderful green vegetables that I think she learned from her mother who had a heart condition - -

MN: Okay - -

TO: So we had Swiss chard and broccoli rod and asparagus and broccoli and string beans and kale. She was big on kale.

MN: Right, okay. Okay before we move into sort of junior high school years and adolescence, I was intrigued by your mention of Chinese food at the local Spanish restaurants in Westchester Avenue.

TO: Absolutely -

MN: If you could talk a little bit about that.

TO: I'm thinking that the earliest one might've come into being sometime maybe around the late 60's.

MN: Okay.

TO: And they seemed to be traditional Latino restaurants with Latin fare that had some very traditional Chinese dishes.

MN: Okay.

TO: So beef and broccoli, pepper steak, egg foo young, shrimp fried rice, were offered on the same menus as traditional Latino fare.

MN: Now where did your - - did your family go out to eat much or was this something - - and where were the places they went out to eat?

TO: We didn't do a lot of eating out. It wasn't affordable, but we did it I would say maybe once every couple of months.

MN: Okay.

TO: Or we would do take-out maybe once every couple of months.

MN: Right. Now going back to the White Castle demonstrations, did you actually see your mother picket, or was this something she actually talked about.

TO: No, it was something she talked about and my father talked about. Probably had a lot of concern about her being involved. But my brothers and I actually weren't allowed to see her.

MN: Right.

TO: We were kind of kept away from that.

MN: Was there fear of violence taking place?

TO: Definitely - -

MN: That was the issue that - -

TO: The issue was fear of - -probably more so than a fear of violence, it was a fear of some kind of repercussion down the road with authorities as a result of participation.

MN: Okay now this is very interesting because I had the same thing in my family. Don't join the picket line, don't sign anything

TO: Definitely, yes yes.

MN: Was there - - and people associated with the McCarthy era and what happened to people who were on The Left. Did your - -were there people in your family who had been involved in The Left or the Communist party who had felt those repercussions?

TO: [Laughs]

MN: [Laughs] It's not a - -this is - - I don't see this as - -remember I wrote a book called Communists in Harlem during The Depression, so this is my area.

TO: That's touchy, yes that's touchy.

MN: Okay, you don't - - okay you'd rather avoid that.

TO: Yes.

MN: Okay. Okay moving, moving - - [Laughter]. But back to -

TO: I didn't see that one coming, but that's touchy.

MN: Yes. Did - -was anybody talking about the riot that happened at the Allerton Avenue White Castle? Were you aware that there were like - -there was like, hundreds if not thousands of white teenagers throwing rocks at demonstrators at the White Castle on Allerton Avenue during the core protests.

TO: I have not heard of that [crosstalk]

MN: Okay so that was not something you -

TO: No, no.

MN: Where it was more like just the picketing of the Bruckner –

TO: Right.

MN: Yes, and how old were you when that picketing was going on?

TO: Oh gosh I must've been 7 or 6? Seven or six years old.

MN: Yes okay.

TO: And I remember the intensity with which my father tried to convince my mother that -- you know there could be repercussions for standing up.

MN: Right, okay I'm going to turn - -

**BREAK IN TAPE**

MN: In terms of political consciousness, was Paul Roberson an important figure in your household?

TO: Oh he was central. His -- he served as a model of someone who stood for his own dignity - - the dignity of the human community, not just African-American, but the human community. And who was willing to pay the price for standing up. And so he was very central in my home.

MN: Did -- were his records part of what you grew up listening to?

TO: Absolutely.

MN: Okay.

TO: Absolutely.

MN: Okay.

TO: Yes.

MN: So that music was -- was -- is that something that helped to shape your involvement in folk music?

TO: I would have to say definitely [crosstalk] because rarely did we listen to music that did not have a social consciousness to it. A social focus to it.

MN: Right. With Josh White and Pe- - and Odetta -

TO: Absolutely.

MN: Those were all –

TO: Those were the big ones.

MN: Those were the big ones.

TO: Those were the big ones.

MN: And these are records that your parents had?

TO: Yes.

MN: And so you listened to them before you developed your independent appreciation?

TO: Oh yes. In fact I still have many of those LPs. [crosstalk] - - my mother's been gone for fifteen years now I still have much of her collection.

MN: Right. Do you - - did you get the first Joan Baez albums when they came out?

TO: My mother did.

MN: Okay. What about Harry Belafonte?

TO: Big.

MN: Okay.

TO: Big, big. Oscar Brown Jr.

MN: Right.

TO: Name some others - - for me the –

MN: Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee –

TO: Yes, yes.

MN: Yes. The Weavers.

TO: No.

MN: No not The Weavers.

TO: No not The Weavers.

MN: Pete Seger.

TO: Pete Seger, definitely Pete Seger. Who I still maintain as probably the original saint.

[Laughs]

MN: Okay.

TO: So music with a social consciousness and social awareness was huge.

MN: Yes –

TO: Huge.

MN: Yes, now --and your brother -- let's take your brothers as well as --

TO: I would say -- yes no question about it. But at the same time I would say that jazz informed them -- classical jazz and bop -- informed them hugely, in ways that it did not inform me.

MN: Right.

TO: I was a bit younger. Five years between one brother, six years between myself and another brother.

MN: Right, okay.

TO: But r&b and folk really took a hold of my life. So much so that there was a radio station, I can't remember what the heck it was called, that every Friday evening would play without commercial interruption some of the more progressive folk music.

MN: Okay.

TO: And my mother and I would always listen to that station.

MN: Now was this when you were in junior high or in high school?

TO: This would have been starting in elementary school.

MN: In elementary school –

TO: Absolutely –

MN: So what you were like 10 or 11 –

TO: Absolutely.

MN: You were starting to develop this –

TO: Yes.

MN: Now did you - -did you ever want to play the guitar as a result of listening to folk music?

TO: We had one that was not a success [Laughter]. My mother tried to learn, I tried to learn, no.  
[crosstalk]

MN: But yes I try to play the saxophone because of King Curtis, [Laughter] with no success.

TO: No success. I always wanted to play cello and was discouraged because I was very, very thin when I was younger. Very, very thin. And my mother said there's no way in the world you're going to be able to lug this cello around, it weighs more than you do, so forget it. So it was flute and oboe.

MN: Okay. Now did your - - your mother went back to work when you were 5?

TO: When I was 5, she began to work part-time. When I turned 6 and went into the 1<sup>st</sup> grade she began to work full-time.

MN: Right, right. And what was her work trajectory? What did she start out as, and what did she eventually end up doing?

TO: She served as a para. What they --in those days, a lot of mothers who were entering the work force were encouraged to be part of the educational system. One, because they could be close to their children.

MN: Yes.

TO: Bust also because the feeling was that mothers had a lot to offer in terms of child-rearing and child education. So many mothers were encouraged to become paraprofessionals.

MN: Okay.

TO: That's what they called them. Essentially they would assist a teacher in the classroom.

MN: Okay.

TO: And so my mother was a para for many, many years before her lead teacher actually urged her to return to college and complete it. Because my mother had started and dropped out when it was time to raise children.

MN: And then did go on to become a classroom teacher?

TO: She did.

MN: Okay, in what grade level.

TO: High school, English.

MN: So you went to First Borne elementary school you were bussed to?

TO: P.S. 47.

MN: Now was -- were your parents very conscious of which the best schools were and that was guiding that decision?

TO: I don't think so. I think --and again I was so young I'm not sure what they were hearing. But my sense now looking back at it, was that most of the schools in the area were decent



schools, and so it was a matter of simply whether or not you wanted your son or daughter to go to one that was father away or closer.

MN: Right, okay. And what about junior high? What was -

TO: I walked, that was within - -that was two blocks away. Junior high school 125.

MN: Were the schools tracked when you were attending them?

TO: Yes. I think I began to see a pattern of encouragement for some kids and not such support for other kids.

MN: Okay.

TO: I know for my mother the big issue –and my father--the big issue was whether or not there was going to be a certain kind of social experience that paralleled the educational experience.

And by that I mean, for the kids who were in the SP, in the SPE - -which, I forgot even what it stands for –

MN: Special Progress yes.

TO: The fear was that, even though it was an accelerated educational experience, they did not want me and my brothers to not have a parallel social experience.

MN: Right. So you got into SP, but chose not to enter it.

TO: Well I got into SP, but my mother made a choice to keep me in the 3 year SP, as opposed to moving me in -

TO & MN: The two year SP -

TO: Where you would skip a year.

MN: Yes. My parents made me do that and plus skip third grade, so I can tell you that your mother's instinct was pretty sound. Going to college at 15 is a very interesting experience.

TO: Yes, yes.

MN: But - - you went to a junior high right around the neighborhood –

TO: I did.

MN: And did you find that teachers were enthusiastic and encouraging to you as a student or it varied?

TO: I think they were very involved with us. Very, very involved to the point of knowing probably more about our family lives than I think teachers now do, except for the exceptional teachers.

MN: Right.

TO: But they seemed –

**END OF SIDE A**

TO: As a sign of their failure as a teacher if students didn't do well.

MN: Was there cooperation between parents and teachers of –

TO: All the time. So much so that - -as kids we tried to strategize on how to get around that.

Teachers thought nothing of calling homes. Parents thought nothing of calling teachers, or even dropping in during the day. [Laughs] There were a lot of prophecies that involved parents to sign off on things so that the schools were clear that parents were aware of what was going on.

MN: Okay.

TO: And of course parents, as I mentioned earlier, always were required and expected to sign off on homework.

MN: Okay.

TO: It was unacceptable, even if a student was doing well - - it was unacceptable for a student to bring that homework in the next day without a parent signature.

MN: Now in junior high school, the Civil Rights Movement nationally is starting to really take off. Is that something that people talked about in school or did - - was this something that was not much part of that experience?

TO: Much of what I heard about the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Movement, and by then I was 8, 9, 10 and older, was discussed in the home and almost never discussed in the schools. I don't remember having Martin Luther King discussed in the schools until I was in junior high school.

MN: Right.

To: Even high school.

MN: What about - - was African-American history or African-American culture part of what was going on in school at all?

TO: Not at all. Not to my recollection.

MN: Okay.

TO: Not at all.

MN: So your consciousness and awareness of that -

TO: Came from the home -

MN: Came from the home.

TO: Clearly came from the home.

MN: Was there a point at which you started to think of yourself as a political person? Or as - - or did you? Did you that said- -was there some point at which you looked at television and saw the things going on and said they're speaking for me and I'm part of that?

TO: I don't ever remember a time not feeling that -

MN: Oh -

TO: What you just described. And primarily because it was a home where you were not just an individual, you were an individual who represented a race. And that was articulated really early on.

MN: So - - really, that what you do is - - represents the Negro, what would've been called the Negro people - -

TO: Absolutely right [crosstalk] –

MN: In those days.

TO: Absolutely.

MN: And so you are –

TO: For good or for bad.

MN: Yes, so you're on display and therefore conduct yourself accordingly.

TO: And it also meant to anticipate certain – a certain backlash. That's why early on my mother and father were imparting certain social skills that they felt would help us navigate some of the backlash that they thought we would get for being intelligent and for being outspoken and for being assertive.

MN: Okay. Now did they see that coming almost all from the white side or also from the black side?

TO: It was articulated as coming mostly from the white side.

MN: Did you every feel growing up any stigma attached by other kids to your being an academic achiever?

TO: That's interesting. I wouldn't - -no I wouldn't say a stigma. Again my mother was very, very shrewd. She always - -she always impressed upon us - -there was always this duality that was present in my home. My father who is like the eternal humanitarian - -my father loves the

world - -and so he was always saying to us explicitly and implicitly, you're not better than anybody, so get it right. You're not better than anybody. But my mother had this perspective that said, but you're as good as everyone. And so there was always this very delicate dance that played out in everything that they imparted to us. Don't let anybody even suggest that you're less than, but a balancing side that said, but you're not better than anyone. So in growing up, my mother was very aware that some kids did not have the same kinds of educational opportunities that my brothers and I had, and she was always reinforcing how to navigate it all. So we never got half the static that some others did get, for thinking that they were better than.

MN: Because [crosstalk] you were told to carry yourself in a way that wouldn't create that kind of -

TO: Absolutely. That we speak to everybody. These are folks who you've known since you were 2, 3, and 4. Life sometimes is hard and throws people curveballs that you should be happy weren't thrown your way, you know, your father and I have done all kinds of things to make these things happen for you but that's not how it plays out for everyone else -

MN: Right.

TO: So don't think you're better than anybody. And that's how we grew up. So to this day there are people who still live in Bronxdale houses who when I see on the street still feel like family to me -

MN: Wow.

TO: They still feel like family to me even though they may not have had the same kinds of opportunities.

MN: Wow.

TO: Yes.

MN: Now did you start going -- did you -- when was your first demonstration? Or was that more --

TO: One --

MN: Or did you -- was that some -- you were more somebody who didn't express it on picket lines?

TO: I mutated in strange ways. Bu the time I was like 13, I was running with -- my girlfriends and I were running after recording artists, unbeknownst to our parents.

MN: Recording artists?

TO: Yes.

MN: [Laughs] Okay.

TO: So we would find out what hotels they were hanging out and stuff.

MN: [crosstalk] And these are not like recording artists from Soundview, these are recording artists, like Sam Cooke types?

TO: Yes.

MN: Oooh.

TO: [laughs] So the political awareness was there but we got real swept up in --

MN: Who were some of the recording artists that you followed around? This is, this is --

TO: [laughs] Some of them were in the rock range. I remember going to The Homesly (?) with some of my girlfriends, he wasn't my favorite, but for my girlfriend Leslie, he was hot. And that was Jim Morisson of The Doors.\* [laughs] It was [crosstalk].

MN: Okay, I mean you know hey. A lot of people thought he was hot.

TO: I was real into the Jackson Five and I had a big thing for Jackie who the eldest Jackson. I was trying hard to figure out whenever they came to town where they were staying. Never was successful, but I couldn't swear that it wouldn't have been if I didn't know.

MN: And so this would be a group, three, four, or five of you?

TO: Yes.

MN: That - -this is interesting. Is - -was this something that - -as a guy you're not too - -you're hoping that they follow you not them but -

TO: See there were the local guys who some of us had crushes on, and then as I got a little older - -that was like 10, 11, 12 - -and then as we got a little older, my social circle expanded a little bit. And our - -the interest of those other groups were different from the ones - -

MN: Right - -

TO: That I grew up with.

MN: Yes.

TO: And so - -I just - -as I said I mutated a little differently. [laughs]

MN: Right, well. This is really - - now these were your junior high and high school friends that - -the girls?

TO: I had very different circles in junior high, high, and elementary, and then I had my girlfriends who I grew up with - many of us are still friends in fact.

MN: Right, but the people who did the Manhattan-like hotel thing, were they like from -

TO: Pre-high school.

MN: Pre-high - - these are from - -

TO: These were actually the cousins of a childhood friend of mine, but I started hanging around with them in junior high school.

MN: Right, now when - - what about parties? Did you go to a lot of parties around the Bronx or was that not part of the scene?

TO: It was very much a part of the scene.

MN: House parties or community center parties?

TO: Both, both. There were house parties. My family, very smartly, encouraged us to give a lot of house parties. It was a way that I realize now of keeping us closer to home -

MN: Right -

TO: And bringing our friends in -

MN: Okay. [crosstalk] And there was always an adult there?

TO: Oh yes. We gave fabulous parties. [Laughs] [crosstalk]

MN: Okay. And - -so there was a lot of that - -lot of house parties?

TO: Lot of house parties. As we got into high school, a lot of community center parties.

MN: Okay.

TO: But, yes, parties were huge. And being seen at the parties of the different housing developments was huge. I did not personally do a lot of it just because my parents didn't allow it. Most of our parties took place in our home.

MN: Right. But were there a lot of rivalries between the different housing projects at the time?

TO: I wouldn't say rivalries but there was a perception that some housing developments were harder than others and some were lamer than others. Bronxdale was considered the lamest.

MN: The lamest? [Laughter]

TO: Soundview was the hardest, followed by probably Bronx River then Castle Hill.

MN: Right. But you didn't go down to Patterson or - -

TO: No, no.



MN: No --that was --

TO: No forget that --

MN: You were not going into Forest Houses --

TO: Hardly --

MN: Mitchell. Okay so those were places you didn't --now this is very interesting because your family came from a neighborhood which went through a terrible abandonment and disinvestment and even arson cycle. Was this something that was talked about in your family? What happened to the old neighborhood?

TO: We were geographically a bit removed because we're north of the area --

MN: Right --

TO: That really saw the fires during the 70's. I used to experience it on a daily basis --the fires the burning down of the South Bronx because it was my train route and my bus routes to and from high school.

MN: Right.

TO: Ran straight through the South Bronx.

MN: Right.

TO: And so it was amazing, almost on a monthly basis, there was another fire.

MN: What buses and trains did you take --because I -- what was your train?

TO: I lived on the number 6 train, the Pelham Line --

MN: Right.

TO: Which ironically was the train line that my father worked for as well. So that was interesting because sometimes I'd see my father on my way to school or where I wasn't supposed to be on my way to. [Laughs] Here he'd come through with the train. [Laughter]

MN: Right.

TO: For school, I took two buses and sometimes a bus and a train to get over to 205<sup>th</sup> Street –

MN: Which is where Bronx Science was.

TO: Which is right where Bronx Science is.

MN: Right.

TO: And so the bus routes were the 5 and the 36.

MN: And they would go through –

TO: The number 5 bus ran along Story Avenue and then into Hunts Point.

MN: Okay.

TO: The 36 ran from in front of - -it was right - -174<sup>th</sup>Street, near Bronx River –

MN: Right.

TO: Behind East Tremont.

MN: Okay, yes. So all those areas really took - - what about - -I know Joe talked to me about the building his mother was living on burning in early - -in 1970. Was that - -so was that something that you remember that --

TO: Oh sure.

MN: Your gran - -I guess it was your grandmother's apartment building burning?

TO: Sure –

MN: On the corner of 168<sup>th</sup> and Prospect.

TO: It was huge for us because my father and some of the elder siblings were born in Manhattan on 126<sup>th</sup> Street, right behind the Apollo.

MN: Yes.

TO: And the younger ones were born and raised in the Bronx.

MN: Right.

TO: My Uncle Joe.

MN: Okay.

TO: And that's where a significant part of their lives were spent - -were on Prospect Avenue.

MN: Right.

TO: So when my grandmother's building burned, that - -it raised a lot of issues for the family.

MN: Yes.

TO: And so my family, my father in particular, arranged to have my grandmother moved to Soundview Projects.

MN: Oh so that's where she went, from there to Soundview.

TO: Like I said, very few of them went very far away from my father.

MN: Okay. Now when - - so you - -what was Bronx Science like in those days for you? Did many people from - -

TO: Tough -

MN: Your junior high go there?

TO: Heck no, and I begged, I literally begged my mother not to send me because I felt it would mark me.

MN: Okay.

TO: I felt it would, it would estrange me from my social group in Bronxdale in ways that I thought I wouldn't be able to bridge.

MN: Okay.

TO: And that was the first year that Adlai Stevenson High School opened.

MN: Right.

TO: And so a lot of the kids from my neighborhood were going there, if they weren't going to the Catholic School.

MN: Yes.

TO: And my mother said, get it out your head you're not going. Even though she was working at Stevenson by that time. She said forget it, so off I went.

MN: Okay.

TO: I was hoping I'd go to Performing Arts High School, but they didn't want me.

MN: Okay.

TO: I was devastated.

MN: You auditioned?

TO: And I was waitlisted.

MN: In what instrument?

TO: Flute.

MN: Okay.

TO: Because my brother had gone to Music and Art, and that to me seemed just so hip and sexy and [crosstalk] - -

MN: Yes, right. And so you went to Bronx Science.

TO: Which was an egghead school.

MN: Yes I'd—

TO: Right, and I said now how are you going to do this, but you love me, to my mother how could she [crosstalk] - -

MN: But your self image was not as an egghead?

TO: No it wasn't and I was afraid that it would become that.

MN: Okay.

TO: I was devastated, I really was. I was devastated that I got in, and that she even thought to send me there.

MJN: Okay.

TO: But that's where I went.

MN: Okay. And - -

TO: Fell in with a whole other crew and we had a blast.

MN: And were these - - so who's your crew at Bronx Science?

TO: Kids just like me from Forest Houses, and forgive me because I don't remember some of the names, but there was a - - *is* a huge housing development over in East Harlem, between 102<sup>nd</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> between FDR and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.

MN: Right, yes.

TO: So we all fell in together because we were like kindred spirits.

MN: So these were mostly Black and Latino kids?

TO: All.

MN: All.

TO: Entirely.

MN: Okay.

TO: Kids who had been raised just like me, in housing developments, whose parents wanted something more and better for them, and we found each other.

MN: Okay and what - - did you form an organized group at Science?

TO: There was an organization that was - - that preceded us. A black student organization called BOSS –The Black Organization for Student Strength. Yes BOSS, that's what it was.

MN: Now was - -did the Latino students have their own organization, or did they join - -

TO: They were with us.

MN: They were with you.

TO: And eventually they went on years later to develop a separate organization but the lines between African-Americans and Latinos was a very, very, very thin line. Socially, culturally, we were very aligned together.

MN: Right, and this was true when you were growing up as well?

TO: Sure.

MN: Did you grow up with Latin music as part of your - - dancing to it, listening to it?

TO: Mostly for my brothers who were a little older.

MN: Okay.

TO: Salsa was huge --they called it Latin then.

MN: Okay, right.

TO: They didn't call it salsa, it was called Latin. And so, for them to be hip, they had to know how to Latin.

MN: Okay.

TO: And so that was always played in the house as well.

MN: Right, okay. So what about the classroom work at Science, was that more challenging than the junior high at Compton from (?) or was it just an extension of --

TO: No it was clearly a rigorous academic environment that I was not - -that I wasn't emotionally or psychologically ready for. It's one thing to be a big fish in a little sea, and to now be a smaller fish in a larger sea. And I was not ready for it to be honest, emotionally was not ready for it.

MN: Did you get involved in any student - -any activities at Science, any clubs or –

TO: At that time, and this is I would say probably during my high school years that I really, really come into my own politically. The consciousness was always present, and the awareness was always present, but the involvement --the activity came into being really during my high school years. There was a city-wide organization that was spearheaded by Kwame Ture' who was then known as Stokely Carmichael, and he had been a student at Science –

MN: Yes at Science.

TO: And as quiet as it was kept, he was an egghead too. But he was years ahead of me.

MN: Yes.

TO: But he always came back to Science to recruit.

MN: Okay.

TO: And so I fell in with a group of students from various high schools from throughout the city, and really began to find who my political awareness and political activity.

MN: Okay. Now was being part of this meant dressing a certain way, or did you have an afro in those days, did you - -

TO: I think that was - - yes I did, but I also think it was as much a part of the youth culture, as it was a part of the black power culture.

MN: Right.

TO: Everybody wore headbands and bell bottoms and had an afro pick. And had an afro, and I was right along with them.

MN: Now being part of this organization, what were the major issues that the organization was dealing with at that time? Were they more international, were they more local, or were they more national?

TO: It was more national with an international focus. Brother Kwame even then had a vision of a Pan-African forum for students –

MN: Okay.

TO: For students at the high school level. And so we were all encouraged to connect with other students from throughout the city, the state, and the country, and even the Carribean.

MN: And do you recall meeting students from a lot of different campuses around the country –

TO: Absolutely, absolutely.

MN: What are some of the highlights about that experience that you remember most - - were there particular events that would sort of leap out at you as - -you know and that experience?

TO: I'm hoping you'll leave a space for this for the next interview because I can't remember in this moment and there are a thousand of them I'm sure.

MN: Okay-

TO: That was a big, big part of my life.

MN: Yes, why don't we then - -this would be a good point to stop.