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Interviewees: Clara Lee Irobunda, Vincent Harding, and Carmen Givan

Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison and Brian Purnell

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): Before we begin the formal interview, I want to introduce Clara Lee Irobunda, who is the principal of Morris High School, and is overseeing the transition to Morris High School campus with small schools. So, Clara Lee, if you could tell us a little bit about how this process is taking place and what your goals are.

Clara Lee Irobunda (CI): OK, I used to be a business teacher at [Inaudible] high school, which is a couple blocks up the road. After that, I became assistant for guidance, and then I became the principal of Morris High School. I came to Morris High School in 2001.

MD: Did you grow up in the Bronx?

CI: No, I did not. I'm from Jamaica and I've been living in New York City for 35 years... So I've been here for a long time. [Laughs] My interests have always been to make a difference. Always been. And my goals, my objectives, have always been to improve the quality of education for all students. I am here to serve them. And everything I do is for them - to improve the quality for the students. I was brought the previous design of Morris High School by the former superintendent and the principal of Morris at the time, [Inaudible]. One of the main problems with the Morris High School students was that many of them were falling through the cracks, and it's not because of the teachers' fault, it was the structure of the large comprehensive high school. They were no longer serving the needs of students.

Vincent Harding (VH): How large did the school get?

CI: It got to be 1,600... over 1,600. However, because of social changes including the kids and parents having to work, and some of them were no longer able to provide the support students need, people started to rely more on schools, and the schools did not - - the structure of the schools, could not support them. Kids starting falling through the cracks. I realized [Inaudible...] the stories of Morris High School [Inaudible] started falling through the cracks and that's what led to redesign. How can we make this school better? Serve all the needs of all the students? And that's why we redesigned that. And what we did was we created a kind of - - Where you have small little learning communities and we had quite a small little learning community here in September. And this is the small learning community; each one has a principal, so they have got to be five small schools within an area. They're referred to as [Inaudible] ... marble because they share certain things and they play a role. And the main objectives of the schools are to provide bigger construction and to provide an individualized instruction for each kid. [Inaudible] OK, so on the fifth floor we have the school for violin and dance. So they have vocal and violin and dance up here. And the fourth floor is the school for excellence.

Unknown Voice: We were the first school, one the first two small schools in the building, we've been here now for four years. We probably have about ten or twenty students and we're ready to have our first graduating class this June.

CI: And on the third, we'll have Bronx International. In order for you to qualify for Bronx International, you have to be in the country for four years or less and speak no English. And these students are required to graduate in the same four years that other students are required. They're in their fourth year this year and we will have a graduating

class. And many of them perform at high levels on regents exams... they learn to speak English and they perform very well.

VH: Do you have anything on paper for this - - [Inaudible] - - I'd like to carry something with me if I can.

[Crosstalk]

CI: And we're on the web... all the schools are on the web. So if you want information -
- On the second floor we have Bronx Leadership School, to which Dr. Naison referred to. He had the students [Inaudible...]. Even though it says "leadership," their theme is taking science, and just teaching everything... [Inaudible] On the first floor is the old Morris High School. When we started to redesign, we started it over 1600 on register, [Inaudible] in Morris High School. The whole school we have 172 students. Many of those students have graduated or played [Inaudible]. In recent years we find that... last year we graduated 255 students from Morris High School. When we redesigned it in 2001 we were graduating 60 students and we find that each year after we redesign we're graduating more and more students in the old Morris High School. So it looks at the more individualized instruction and that as the school had gotten smaller, they're getting more individualized attention.

Question: [Inaudible]

CI: The basement and part of the second floor. We have Morris Academy for Collaborative Study, that's the newest school. And the theme of that school is going to be technology and the arts. When Morris goes out, the school will really be known as Morris High School Campus in September, comprising of five schools.

[Cross talk/Questions/Inaudible]

CI: We have very effective smaller learning communities that students learn better and actually help [Inaudible]

MN: OK, now what I'd like to do is start the formal interview - - this is going to be a collaborative effort, so am going to introduce Dr. Harding, Carmen Givan, and Jean Reyes.

CI: I would like to introduce one Morris High School student here, Nicole Smith.

MN: Now everybody else here is welcome to ask questions, but when you're asking questions, for identification purposes, state your name. In other words, the interview is going to be opened ended, and we often to the Bronx African American History Project, it's not just one interviewer and the interviewee. We have students, colleagues, people from the community, come in to start a discussion. And today's discussion is going to be basically focused on the experience of growing up on Dawson Street and this community and Morris High School, and then we will segue into the legacy of that experience on the future activities of our three distinguished guests. But everybody is welcome to participate in this discussion, so I'm just going to have a few introductory remarks, and hopefully I won't mistake anybody's name or background in the process.

MN: Hello, this is the 108th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. It is taking place at Morris High School on March 28th, 2005. And we have three distinguished guests that we are here interviewing. The first of our guests is Professor Vincent Harding, a 1948 graduate of Morris High School and valedictorian of the graduating class. Dr. Harding is known to most people as a civil rights activist, a theologian, and one of America's most distinguished historians. He was a friend and confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the senior advisor the film project *Eyes on*

the Prize, the founder of the institute of the Black World, and the author of numerous [Inaudible] books. Dr. Harding grew up in Harlem but moved to Dawson Street in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx and attended Morris High School. His neighbor on Dawson Street is Carmen Givan, who was the graduate of Cathedral HS and at a very important organization which we need to investigate further, called the Lincoln School for Nurses, which trained African American nurses for many, many years, was located on 141st St and Bruckner Blvd. And our final interviewee is Jean Reyes, who grew up at 167th St and Boston Rd, and graduated from Morris High School in 1952, and attended Montefiore School of Nursing, so we have two nurses and a historian who are going to be the subjects of our interview today. So, I'd like to start with Dr. Harding and Carmen Givan: What was it like living on Dawson St. in the 1940's?

Carmen Givan (CG): It was wonderful because people knew each other. Not every single person on the block, but you knew almost everyone in each of the buildings. I'm telling Vincent again to about Charlie [Inaudible]... he became the neighborhood [Inaudible]. We lived in 856, across the hall diagonal... you know there were four apartments on each floor, across the hall but diagonal from each other, and Vincent and my brother used to make model airplanes and all that. [Laughs] It's just so wonderful, happy time.

MN: Is your family from the Caribbean?

CG: From the Caribbean. My mother was born in Barbados, my dad in Trinidad. She was raised in Panama, considered herself Panamian. And most of our neighbors were from the Caribbean Islands when I think about it.

MN: Vincent, where was your family from?

VH: Both of my mother and father were born in Barbados.

MN: And when did they move to the United States?

VH: Both came shortly after World War I.

MN: And did they initially move to Harlem?

VH: No. I'm not sure of my father's past, I know my mother's somewhat. She came and originally started out in Boston where a brother of hers had immigrated so I guess he came maybe just before World War I. She went to Boston then, for reasons I'm not quite sure of, she came to New York - that was her second stop.

MN: And Carmen did your family live in Harlem before they came to the Bronx?

CG: Before we moved here, the Heights rather, we lived on 122nd street. I was raised between 131st and 132nd on Madison, around the corner from the Handmaids of Mary Convent. They later moved across the street from Morris High.

MN: So you were raised as Catholic?

CG: I was initially - we became Catholic. My mother was having problems with my brother, he was two years older but he was still in the second grade or third grade. Anyway, mom asked the nuns if they would help her with the child, because she had to work laundry on 138th St and 3rd Avenue, over the 138th St bridge. And so we started with the nuns around the corner. They're the only black nuns in New York - you know in the northeastern area.

MN: Right, the Handmaids of Mary.

CG: Francis Handmaids of Mary. Mrs. Joseph has just celebrated her 105th birthday on January 21st and she's still alert.

MN: When you moved to Dawson St, did your family enter a catholic church at that time?

CG: I had become catholic while we were going to school in those from St Mary's to [Inaudible] I was in the first graduating class at St. Athanasius - that was in '43.... What was the question now?

MN: When you moved to Dawson St...

CG: That was in April '43, because we just had three months before graduation. I traveled back and forth with my brothers and I traveled back and forth from school. Her and Jean when to St. Athanasius - that was my church.

MN: Vincent, was your family a member of a church at Harlem?

VH: Very much so.

MN: Which church was that?

VH: It's called Victory Tabernacle 7th Day Christian Church on west 138th St, just over near 8th Avenue.

MN: Is that different than 7th Day Adventists?

VH: It's a little different but it's an interesting difference because it was one of the main groups of black 7th Day Adventists who in the Garvey and post Garvey period began to be very uncomfortable with the white 7th Day Adventist leadership and began to organize in some very powerful ways in the Harlem area as well as other places. And they started independent 7th Day Adventist churches and could not then use the same name so they had a variety of names; ours was the 7th Day Christian Church.

MN: And when your family moved to the Bronx, did you remain active in that church or did your family find a new church in the Bronx?

VH: It's interesting that you should ask the question Mark, because my family consisted of my mother and me. She was a single parent after my father and she separated, maybe when I was about three or four years old. But we never even considered the possibility that moving the Bronx might mean no longer being a part of the church. The church was so central to our life, that it was natural that we would figure out that we would just be getting on the train on Intervale Avenue or Prospect or wherever and go back out to Harlem to go to church every Saturday morning and Wednesday's, Friday nights and Sundays and all kinds of other times...

MN: So this was an all-encompassing experience?

VH: The church was a combination of my extended family and my father, especially in the light of the fact that we were only two. But that church came with the larger context and I always felt that that was really my family. There was a very deep sense of closeness about it and we had not discovered a world of many churches at that point. There were no more than about 115 members of the church, but they were powerful in that way. It was for me, a deeply grounding experience where people believed in me absolutely and expected very great things from me and made it very clear to me that they did expect this.

MN: As a young person, how did the church provide an outlet for a talented... somebody who is sort of marked for things? Was there a way of having you participate in some leadership or public role in the church?

VH: That too is a set of good questions. From the very outset, the church provided a platform, literally and figuratively. I remember my first public performance was playing a piano solo... or was it? No. It was singing a song, yes. It's coming back to me and my

children will kid me about it very often. The first song I sang at the church and that church, every did something, everybody performed, everybody sang, everybody played the piano... A dozen or so piano teachers in the congregation and so you couldn't get away from it. My song that I sang was Jesus Loves Me... I think I was about four or five. But what I remember is that during this, was that I messed up on the words and ended up singing "We are strong but he is weak!"

[Laughter]

VH: You were in what we called "Sabbath School." You were in Sabbath school not as a simple sponge listening to people put forth things to you, but you served as secretary of the class. You served as assistant Sabbath school teacher. You served as assistant Sabbath school superintendent. You had all kinds of roles and it's clear to me now that the church was very, very conscious of the need to develop leadership capacities in the young people. And if you had only about 130 or so people, you had lots of hands to be put on you and kept on you in a variety of ways.

MN: Sounds like the theory of Morris High School.

[Laughter]

VH: Yes exactly.

MN: Were most of the people in your church community of Caribbean ancestry?

VH: Most were. And I think of it often, how they must of felt when some of our friends who were from the south, how they integrated in a sense, a very tight West Indian community. It worked out rather well as far as I can recall right now. Let me say another word about the matter of roles, which is much a longer story than I would rather go into, but one of the expectations for me was that I was eventually going to end up as the pastor

of that church and there was a lot of both beauty and sadness in that with my own sense of purpose in the light of the churches sense of what I should be. But they were organized for opportunity and then to preach as a young person. I think I preached my first sermon when I was about 15-16 years old.

MN: And this was when you were at Morris High School?

VH: I was at Morris at the time, yes. And I'm sure that I still remember the text of that sermon, which was "I am the door." I think I got in over a track of a sermon they had given me from some place... but that was my first sermon and from that point on I did a lot of that kind of thing. After that church, interestingly enough too, there was a tremendous emphasis on culture and we had on - - when we went to church on Sundays, we had Sunday afternoon programs that were called "Lyceum" programs and lots of blacks churches in Harlem and the Bronx had those kinds of programs where you had poetry readings, singing, quartets, piano presentations, speeches.... And I got involved with something called "Dramatic reading" where you memorized poetry, you memorized speeches, and you delivered them. And this was one of my specialties, dramatic reading.

MN: How old were you when you began doing your dramatic readings?

VH: I would say about early teens. But we also had a boys quartet that I remember as well. I was talking to one of my friends eight months ago who all of the members of that group became [Inaudible].

Brian Purnell (BP): I'm curious; did the church combine theology and politics in any particular way? Was there any discussion of politics national or international or local combined with the theology of the community cultural work?

VH: That too is a very helpful kind of question. What's clear to me is that our late 20th century understanding of that combination which comes out of the southern freedom movements period and then beyond that, was not very much alive at that point. The church officially would see politics the way many of the more conservative church organizations used to see politics up until the ten years actually, and that is something separate from the religious task, but what I again have still embedded in my brain is a kind of strand that often came to the surface in the preaching of this marvelous self-educated minister P.J. Bailey was his name, who was one of the most astute and educated men that I have known, I know that he had come out of Jamaica, he had not gone probably past what would be an eighth level in this country, but he was tremendously well involved. And one of the things that he brought constantly into his preaching was what was going on in the anti-colonial struggles of the world. That consciousness very often came forth in something like, again, the statement that stays with me: he talked about how that little brown man in India was twisting the tail of the British line. And for 60 years that has resounded in my mind. And so politics, as we usually define it, was not necessarily put forward in that kind of obvious way, but some politics was very powerfully there or I would not remember some things that went through as a teenager.

MN: How did your mothers support the two of you when you were together?

VH: With a great deal of love and struggle. She worked for most of the time of my childhood as a domestic - working for families in both downtown New York and in the Bronx. What always became very clear to me was that she had every intention that I should go as far as I could possibly go, as far as education's concerned. And that she would do whatever was necessary to make that possible.

What sticks in my consciousness is what happened when I went to college. I was at City College. And in my last year at City College I was in the one dormitory that City had... at the time I was at Dormitory Council or whatever. And so we would stay especially on weekends on Dormitory [Inaudible]. The first time I saw this it was powerful for me really, because when I came home, I found that in addition to her work as domestic, my mother was bringing home laundry to iron stuff and this was her way of contributing to whatever I needed. And I have lived in deep gratitude to this woman.

MN: Did she have long standing relationships with families or did she have to go through the process of possibly finding new employers?

VH: Well she had some long standing relationships, some of which would come over to me because sometimes she would take me over to these homes. I remember for some reason one name particularly, the name of a Mrs. Sladin, who lived someplace at that time just north of Central Park. I think it was a street in the 90's, maybe 99th St and she must have worked for Mrs. Sladin for I would guess at least seven or eight years. And Sladin was clearly interested in me and the fact that I was trying to get an education and I felt that. My mother was - - by the time I finished college she was working as a house keeper at Hotel Pierre and one of the great times in my life was when I got my first advance for my first book and I always said that I was going to take my mother and make a reservation at the Hotel Pierre.

CG: Oh! Vincent I love that!

VH: And when we went there, some of her friends were still working there and they were so excited that Mabel was here at the hotel [Laughter]. They were just ...

MN: Carmen, what sort of work did your family do?

CG: My dad was a carpenter and a plasterer. And my mom she did domestic work sometimes too, and I fell in with her also, at times.

MN: So Carmen you occasionally would go with her and help her.

CG: Yes, special times - - there were times I washed the dishes or something [Crosstalk]
And my dad, you know most of the time he was working, but the pay periods - - it must have been during the depression.

MN: Was he in the union?

CCG: They didn't have that... and it was years before he got into that.

MN: How many years of work did he have out of the union before they finally took him in?

CG: Before he came to this country he had friends in New York Journeymen that whole thing. And for Jacobson and Co. he worked for 50 years, he retired when he was 75, but by then he had been able to join the union, the carpenters union.

MN: Where did Jacobson and Co. do its work? Were they - -

CG: They worked at Lincoln Center - - he was so good at his work!

VH: This was Jacobson Construction?

CG: Yes, Jacobson Construction Company. He worked at Lincoln Center, the Flat Iron Building, almost any building.

MN: Did they have two different wage sales for black carpenters and white carpenters?

CG: I know they did - - I can't remember where I saw it, but there was a difference in the pay, white and black.

MN: Well one was the union and one wasn't.

CG: But even so I think... [Inaudible]

BP: Did your father share any experiences with racial discrimination through his employment?

CG: You know what? My dad did not. All he had - - I think he buried it. And he joined this thing called the Jazz because he had a beautiful voice - he always had it. And whistled gorgeously - - loved it. So he was so loved by everybody; his coworkers, the Italian guys - - They were very warm and loving to him and my mother, you know the families. So he had good relationships with people and he kept things inside. He looked on life, generally, as life's just a bowl of cherries. He was easy going, at least appeared to be. He was such neat worker, any time we did this plastering or made beautiful things in peoples homes - archways, and such - - I can still smell the plaster. He just enjoyed his work. Clean work, unlike so many other people. Cleaned up after himself.

MN: Jean, what kind of work did the people in your family do?

Jean Reyes (GR): Well, my father was a cabin maker up in the garment center and my mother was a waitress at some of the best restaurants in Manhattan.

MN: And where does your family come from?

CG: My father's from Puerto Rico and my mother's from Bermuda. I was taken to the Bronx when I was eight years old. At 162nd St right off Boston Road - - fun times when we were growing up. We had a lot of things we used to play as children - tag, rollevio or popsy as they used to called, double dutch- oh gosh... all those. Fun games that the kids would get together.

MN: I guess there was gender divisions, what did boys play in the street?

CG: Marbles, skate ball, marbles.

[Crosstalk]

CG: Skully, yes skully.

[Crosstalk]

CG: The boys used to With the pigeons on the roof. We enjoyed the roof. We had picnics on the roof!

[Laughter]

MN: Do you have any pictures of roof...

CG: I do. And we can show pictures that were taken on our stoop.

MN: Because we would love to have copies for our archives, because the building that you lived in is no longer there.

CG: I know! James, our super - god bless her. She went to every funeral in the world.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Was she also from the islands?

CG: Ms. Margaret James, Ms. James.

MN: From what - -

CG: I don't really know which island she was from, because she didn't sound like she was from Barbados or Jamaica... so she might have been from - -

MN: I'm listening to you, and you're all from working class families - carpenters, domestic workers, laborers - - and yet you all ended up here getting higher educations. Was this something that was a communal effort that people - - or was it more families?

CG: I think it was a combination. You just - - you wanted to make it. Plus, you were interested. You were interested in doing more. I loved reading and learning... I was always in and out and my mother could always find me at the library.

MN: Now where was the nearest library to Dawson St?

CG: It was on Southern Blvd.

[Crosstalk]

CG: It was down not far from St. Athanasius.

MN: How many days a week was the library open?

VH: Every day, it was open seven days a week.

[Crosstalk]

CG: It was open on Sundays? I'm not sure about that.

MN: How many hours a day were the libraries open?

[Crosstalk]

CG: A full day. You know, 9-5 or to 6 or 7! I think it was open late - -

[Crosstalk]

GR: Is the library still on Franklin avenue?

MN: Oh yes it is. We even had a painting of it that we auctioned off at our benefit dance. I'll go by the library on the way out; I'll go back through on my way to the car.

VH: The library was a very clear alternative space that was part of the growing up process. We just knew that that was someplace else where we could be, where we should be, where we wanted to be. And I just - - for some reason the major library impression on my mind is that I took out every one of the color books of fairy tale. The red book of fairy tales, the yellow book of fairy tales - - Fairy tales were very important to me, especially at that pre-teen period - - it just became a major part of my life.

MN: The library was encouraging to the other people who went there.

CG: The first library was on 124th St and I was about 8 or 9 years old. When ever I move, that's the first place I go. And Sister Walberg took us there, a group of the

children there from the convent. And my grandchildren, I got them enrolled - - And I go to the library still, I'm going tomorrow for tae-chi. [Laughter] This is the second class I'm in with the tae-chi. It offers so much and [Inaudible] - - and Queens when I lived in Queens - - because I raised my family in Queens palace - - and learn how to make earrings - - all so many cultural things they had at this library. My children went to day camp in Blockners - - The New York Library, god bless them. Before they built Chambourge, I used to go to the Country Colored Library around the corner, to the Negro section there, even though we belonged, they still had a Negro section and I loved it. [Laughs] I did recitations like Vincent said - - those days - - on Sundays, almost every chance you get you know, recitations. You see grownups doing the recitations. And my grandmother was in the lodge; my mother was in the lodge. Grandma was getting into the West Indian - -

MN: What was the name of the lodge - -

CG: Lily of the Valley Lodge.

MN: And this was mostly women from the Caribbean?

CG: Yes.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Was your father also in the - -

CG: He didn't belong to it.

MN: - -So your mother - -

CG: And her mother. And some of our relatives

[END TAPE 1; SIDE 1, BEGIN TAPE 1; SIDE 2]

CG: - - I did poetry, like Louisa - - you know Louisa, from Jamaica she did some - - but I would mix it with a West Indian accent, I mean with a Cajun accent because they had a Jamaican accent [Laughter]. When I went to the West Indies/Barbados for the first time, I felt so at home because that's where - - my grandmother's always telling us stories about it.

BP: What parish was your family from in Barbados?

CG: My mother was born in Christ Church.

VH: And my mother was from St. Folks. I think my father was St. James, but I'm not so sure.

MN: You've mentioned - - talked about all these cultural influences: the church, the library - -

CG: I used to go back - - like Vincent said - - I used to go back St. Athanasius all the time - -

MN: So you went back to Harlem also. Now were there any community organizations in the Bronx where you also had exposure to cultural opportunities? Did you ever go to Forest Neighborhood House, or any of the local - -

CG: I didn't myself.

[Crosstalk]

CG: I didn't. I think because I was so involved in Harlem.

MN: What about you, Jean?

GR: When I was in Harlem, I did live in Harlem on 136th St, we had Harlem Hospital. And they had the Harlem Boys Club. It was donated by the Kennedys. And I used to have a lot of activities. That's where I learned to swim, to draw, and every afternoon it

was like a day care center or something. We had lots of fun. In the summertime we went to camp and it was all funded - - my mother paid like \$7 for one week to go to camp and that was it. If you didn't have the \$7, you didn't pay. You went, but you didn't pay.

MN: Now, what were your public school experiences like? Carmen, you went to catholic school.

CG: Right, but I started out with PS 124 on 128th St.

MN: Now were you encouraged and nurtured the way you were in church and library in the schools, were the teachers also disciplined in the public schools?

CG: I only went to the first grade in public school because we all went to the catholic school after, but my cousin, he was involved in something. You know the teachers - - I remember my first grade teacher's name even still, Ms. Luther - - still do!

MN: Vincent, what was your experience like in the public schools? Did you get the same kind of support and encouragement that you got in your church in schools?

VH: That seemed very clear to me. I early on found myself really loving to go to school and I'm sure that a part of that had to do with the encouragement that I received. That has been part of my life constantly - - people really encouraging me to discover. And if she knew [Inaudible] - - And that's really been part of my own life, trying to do that with as many generations as I can.

MN: Did you ever experience from other children resentment of your academic achievements and intellectual curiosity?

VH: You know I think it was part of our culture at the time. That there was a lot competitiveness, a lot of wanting to be the best. And certainly not putting somebody

down because they were doing very well or resenting the person because they were doing
-- [Crosstalk] That wasn't part of the culture at all. [Crosstalk]

CG: -- the few who may have been smoking pot or something like that, they regarded --
they didn't ignore the smart people. They would consider Vincent smart -- he was like a
little professor!

[Laughter]

MN: What do you mean by a little professor?

CG: When I say that I can still see him walking down the street with his briefcase.

MN: You mean when he was around 13 or 14?

CG: Yes!

VH: I don't think it was a briefcase.... [Laughter]

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now that's something interesting. What sort of things did you build? I'm a little
generation later; we had Rector sets and things like that.

CG: We had those then too. Rector sets, my mother bought --

MN: \$.50?

CG: \$.50 and we got six. But my brothers did have those Rector sets. Going back to the
roof, my father used to build gorgeous kites.

MN: Oh you had kites on the roof?

GR: We didn't have mountains or hills!

CG: Oh yes! And you know, dad would build them -- you know, get the lumber, the
wood, and crepe paper, and get on the roof and -- I can smell it still -- the paste! He was
very creative. These gorgeous kites: he would fly them and my brothers...

MN: So this is from the roof on Dawson St?

CG: No, not on Dawson. Harlem... and on Dawson I think. But mostly Harlem. But we moved from Harlem in '43 to the Bronx, I was 13.

MN: Now were the pigeons on Dawson St, on the roofs?

CG: Yes there were pigeons. Mike [Inaudible] he told me he had his pigeon coops, and they were very important to those kids. That was their life.

MN: So holding pigeons was a very serious activity?

CG: Yes. A lot of kids. Yes Jean, you didn't know that?

MN: So the people would fly kites on the roof, they had racing pigeons - - did you have picnics on the roofs?

CG: Picnics and you'd take up your blankets and your water cooler and your Kool-Aid jugs and you'd make it like your beach.

MN: Oh so it was like your little beach?

GR: Yes! You'd put it on the roof and the tar was hot [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk]

CG: And when [Inaudible] would fight, we'd get out on the fire escapes - -

MN: Oh the building had fire escapes?

CG: Oh yes.

MN: And what was the social setting on the fire escapes? Because this generation does have problems.

CG: Oh man - - you'd carry with it [Inaudible] and we would sing on the step and the radio, and talking about - -

[Crosstalk]

GR: In the summer time you'd have to sit on the fire escape to even breathe; you know it was very hot.

CG: Right. I loved it in the summer time because nobody bothered you. Absolutely no one bothered you.

MN: So you felt completely safe everywhere?

CG: Yes.

MN: Would you walk home from Harlem - -

CG: At 2:00 in the morning - - 3 - - subways, walking the streets. Even though you knew some of the fellas who were junkies, they never bothered you. Nobody bothered you.

MN: Did you go dancing - -

CG: Loved it.

MN: Where were the places you'd go dancing?

CG: Hunts Point Palace, the Remy, on 110th St and 5th Avenue - -

MN: Park House.

CG: Park House. And the one 156th St and 8th Avenue - - and of course - -

MN: Rockland Palace.

CG: Right. And then especially the Autobon - - they had the - - you know Jean! It cost more - -

GR: The lodges.

CG: The lodges! They cost more if you got a seat in the lodges.

MN: Now did you get into Latin music at all?

CG: Yes we used to down to the Palladium with Frankie when we lived on Kelly St.

Frankie and I met at St. Athanasius because he was catholic. And that's how we became friendly with some of the guys.

MN: Vincent, did you get into music when you were an adolescent?

VH: Yes I had a very different experience partly because my church was closer to a kind of fundamentalist church and so going to dance places and things that were not encouraged. And sometimes disco. We did our dancing at house parties. We did our dancing when we had birthday parties or some other kind of party in people's living rooms. That's where most of our dancing got done.

GR: There used to be a bar called Blue Morocco on Boston Rd. Great jazz place there.

Arthur Frysock - - Rick James used to - -

MN: Rick James used to play the Blue Morocco?

GR: Yes. And there was a group - -

MN: Mickey and Sylvia?

GR: Yes. They owned - -

MN: The Blue Morocco.

GR: And my brother worked in there as a bouncer or a manager or whatever. You never had to be afraid of being in a bar - - I mean I haven't been in a bar in 40 years. And there you could sit and drink and enjoy the good music, and just have a great time.

MN: What about Club 845?

GR: I went there - -

CG: My aunt Alba took me there when I was 16; she lived next door to Vincent. And her friend was living near Club 845 - -

[Crosstalk]

CG: She took me to see Little Ms. Cornchucks. Great music! And so that was my first exposure and my first and last time I've ever been to the 845, I was 16 years old - - first time I went to a nightclub. And Oh! I'll never forget, the next day I think I went and I bought that record. She's belting out the blues!

MN: Could you sing it for us?

CG: I wish I could - - [Laughter] [Crosstalk] [Phone rings] I can't remember exactly but I have it on record. It broke, and that hurt me. I think I have something on it though. Anyhow - - we'll find it somehow. Little Ms. Cornshucks. She was adorable, with a big straw hat, barefooted, green and white farm dress or something - -

MN: Oh really? And singing - -

CG: Singing the blues! And my daughter in law is related to her. When I went to her shower.

MN: Did your church discourage attending live music performances or was that also part of that experience?

VH: It depends upon the kind of music.

MN: Could you go to the Blue Morocco the year of Etta James?

VH: That was not encouraged. You were encouraged to go to Town Hall.

MN: So there was a high culture preference and sense that the blues were somehow - -

VH: Not a part of high culture.

MN: Right. And what about calypso? Was that also considered not some sort of - - or was calypso a different matter than the blues?

VH: There were probably more mixed feelings about that because that came out of the culture of most of the people, so they weren't quite sure sometimes what to do.

MN: Was calypso part of your experience?

CG: Most surely. Because my grandmother took me to the sons and daughters of the Barbados - -

MN: Where were those - -

CG: At the Remy, Rockland House - - Just before Lent started you had all of these West Indian festivals to go to. And she danced, and my mother danced and I danced.

[Crosstalk]

CG: We had such beautiful memories.

MN: Did you ever hear Caribbean music in the Bronx? Were there ever calypso shows at the Hunts Point Palace?

CG: Yes.

G: They had about two different bands, remember - - Ron Anderson

CG: Ron Anderson - -

MN: Ron Anderson is a calypso - -

CG: He did everything. But you mean like Macbeth? Because Macbeth is one of the West Indian bands of that time.

MN: The Mighty Sparrow?

CG: Yes Mighty Sparrow too.

MN: Was he down at Hunts Point Palace?

CG: I don't remember. He's a little later. He probably did before they tore it down, I'm not sure.

G: And we went down to the Apollo Theater and saw lots and lots of famous singers and [Inaudible] and Billie Holiday - - I remember - -

CG: I never did get to the Apollo until I was - -

MN: This is sort of interesting. Did you think of the neighborhood you lived in as an extension of Harlem? Or did you think of it as something distinct?

CG: I thought of it as something distinct myself. I mean I liked it but I loved Harlem silly.

MN: What's your thought about that Vincent?

VH: I was just reflecting on the question. I hadn't really thought of that kind of separation, but it was clear that when we moved to the Bronx we were moving away from Harlem. In my particular case we moved away shortly after somebody had burglarized our apartment in Harlem and it was very clear to me at that time and still in my memory that that was my mother's major impulses for leaving Harlem and coming to the Bronx, which was considered the place where it was less likely for something like that to happen.

MN: I think that's very significant because so many people we interviewed said people moved to the Bronx to - -

VH: To get away - -

MN: Well Harlem - - bigger apartments. And some people said the schools were better. So you have essentially this idea that this is a community of upwardly mobile people from Harlem because what you're describing is almost this idealistic childhood. In retrospect, are there things which were less idealistic there that - - in other words, would somebody else living on your block think of that experience somewhat differently or do you think most people felt that it was a pretty safe, positive - -

CG: Yes. I think most everybody felt safe. And it was - - people knew each other, or at least spoke to each other. It was a warm place. And you didn't mind the area. I liked the area, but my heart and soul were in Harlem but I did a lot of things in the Bronx - - clubs, you know when I say clubs it means social clubs - -

MN: Tell us a little bit about your social clubs.

CG: I was in the Adahi's - - first [Inaudible] were the boys that I was associated with when I was in club Piccadilly.

MN: Club Piccadilly?

CG: Yes, Piccadilly is what we used to say. But anyway, the main club I was in was the Adahi's and it was again rooted in Harlem because most of the girls in the club were from Camp Minisink.

MN: Oh so you were also from Camp Minisink? I didn't go there as a child, but as a young adult, they had alumni weekends and I went there. And most of the girls in the club had gone there yearly. We used to have our meetings on Friday nights in Harlem some of us were, and in the Bronx and after the meeting on Fridays we would come you know, from one house to the other, the meetings would be. We would be singing the Orioles song from the Three Blazers.

MN: What is the Orioles Song?

CG: [Sings] To be, me to you - - have you heard of it? [Group sings] and Lonely Christmas is Gone - -

MN: The Orioles played the Hunts Point Palace in 1953 on New Years Eve with The Lorious Monk - -

CG: Oh stop it - -

MN: Yes, 1953.

GR: Jackie Wilson - -

CG: No I didn't know that.

VH: Can I go back to that Harlem/Bronx dichotomy? One defines it, as I remember, as Carmen was talking about neighbors knowing each other and therefore changing the character of the living situation, I became a member of - - my only opportunity and occasion - - became a member of a local gang while I was in junior high school, at Knowlton junior high school. The gang was called the Comanches Chiefs.

[Laughter]

VH: And all sorts of things come to my mind there, but let me try to focus on what is really the most important for me. One is that the young man who became the leader of the gang, or what we called the captain or something like that, his name was Stokes. And what I remember about him is that he never did very well in school, in academics. But he was very clear about what it meant to be a gang leader. That's what he could do; that's what he knew how to do and what he enjoyed doing. Almost as soon as I got into the gang and started moving around with them, I don't think we had got our jackets yet... we had all kinds of plans of what we were going to get - - he came on my street, on my block, the one before all the women who were always looking out from their window or on the porch, saw me with this gang and the word very quickly go to my mother that I was hanging out with this gang. And my mother would not have any of it. [Laughter] So the point came, I don't remember how long it was into my gang life, but the point came when I had to tell the gang that I could not be a member anymore.

CG: Get out in those days.

VH: In those days yes, you could get out. But that was part of the interplay of the life that gang life brings, coming up against one another, and the community won in the situation.

MN: That's when you were at Junior HS 52?

VH: That's 52. [Crosstalk]

MN: So the block was being watched daily by many people.

VH: That was what it mean to be a citizen and part of the community.

MN: Did they mostly watch from the stoops or the windows? Did anybody have folding chairs, or that was not part of the culture?

CG: No, no folding - -

G: They sat on the stoop or they looked the window. They saw everything.

MN: Were there any particularly memorable people, particularly memorable women whose voices could be heard very far for telling you what to do, or it wasn't that kind of thing?

G: It was, but we didn't do anything to make them yell. Usually they would tell your mother they saw you do something but - -

CG: I don't remember people yelling. You know, some people yelled to call their children from their windows and stuff like that when they were down the block.

VH: Another memory from the question again is that we did a lot of playing in the streets and one of the kinds of playing was marbles on the manhole covers - - wonderful patterns there were great for shooting marbles and I seemed to enjoy that a lot. And one day, if I remember correctly, I was down there playing and somebody came up behind me

and put their hand over my eyes. And I said “oh shit” - - and it was my mother!

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk]

VH: But somehow, that image came to my mind as we were talking about people on the streets.

MN: What I'd like to do if it's OK, is turn to the high school experience. When we were talking before we went on tape, you said there were a number of memorable teachers that you had at Morris. Could you talk to us a little bit about your Morris experience and start off what had you heard about the school when you first enrolled there.

VH: That's a very important matter. When I first had an intention about high school, since I had been so involved in the model building activity that Carmen was referring to, rather than total ignorance as to where that might lead, I had started out thinking that I was going to apply to the school of Aviation Technology, but someone wise said to me that's probably not something that you want to do, that's more technical school than anything else. And then my next goal was Stuyvesant because I knew that that was the academic school. I had a tremendous amount invested in that idea of going to Stuyvesant, partly because of the reputation of Stuyvesant and partly because I was supposed to be a pretty bright person. And it was a marvelous experience for me also to be rejected as I took that exam and it was clear that one of my real weaknesses was that even though I did well in math, I was not as good in math as I was in some of the other subjects and so Stuyvesant dropped down. The next place that I felt I should try was Clinton, but Morris was never even on that list and it was only after Clinton said “No, you're not in our area,” that I then - - Morris was kind of a last choice. And I was soon

disappointed that I was being sent to Morris because I had heard that Morris was not nearly good as these other places and it was a disappointment for a while. But one of the things that I was trying to say to you earlier Mark, was that for me, Morris was absolutely crucial part of my own shaping of my identity and my sense of purpose in this world. The first thing that I wanted to do when I came in here, was to keep in mind was to see the name of my principal, and I was very glad to see the name of Jacob Bernstein as being my principal because I remember him saying often, after I got into Morris - - that what he wanted to do was make Morris a real United Nations. He used that phrase more than once. That whole idea of seeing diversity not as something that you're forced into or something that you're trying to avoid, but something that you welcome and try to shape into its best possibilities, was a very important matter for me. So Bernstein - - I didn't know him that well, but I got to know him because I did some kind of hall monitor and those kind of student responsibilities, I was in the student government so I got to know him and appreciate him - - But it was that vision of the possibilities of diversity which was crucial to me. And I just wanted to reflect out loud on the general question before getting specifically to these teachers. As I have thought back on, Morris was a kind of counter point for me to Victory Tabernacle Church, which I see as one of the most important ways that a truly diverse democratic society can be built. Because what I had at Victory and my little family, was a solid African American base from which I moved. I didn't stay there. It was a base of which to move. And I moved into this kind of diverse world; what was seen as valuable thing and that was a negative thing, that was as a thing to be avoided. So, at that whole idea, of moving from a particular cultural base into a larger society, into which you can bring something powerful out of that base, it

seems to me to be something that we still have to learn - - how to do and how to work with in this American society so that you lose neither the base, nor the larger multi-cultural part of society. For me, the most important teacher that I had here at Morris was a woman who I must find out about what happened to her. Her name - - she was a biology teacher. I never had her in her course but she was my advisor, thank god. Her name was Eileen Bursler. I don't know how long she had been a biology teacher, but as my advisor, she again marveled something of tremendous importance and that is that Ms. Bursler really loved me. It was more than just the number on a chart of your advisee. She really came to the point where I could know that she cared about me. And she got to know my mother, and my mother appreciated her and she helped to find me part time jobs because she knew that if I really wanted to go to college I was going to have to get into that full mode, and she finally got me some summer jobs; all that was part of her role as a teacher. And I don't mean as a teacher officially, but I mean as an advisor to me and for all of those kind of reasons, in my mind I keep coming back to the image of her address all in the upper hand corner of the letters that she constantly sent to me even while I was in college. 975 Knowlton Avenue is what I would read. I would visit her house at times, her husband and she invited me into the synagogue on a couple of occasions. She was really for me the model teacher and she then would be the one of those who I considered really marked me and marked me by her deep concern for me and love for me. The second person who comes to mind is another woman who taught French. Her name was Helen Prevost. And she had an impact that - - it's sort of strange. When I came here, I had this sort of side vision of myself as maybe being an athlete of some kind because in Jr. HS I had been on the softball team, I think I was shortstop. I

always enjoyed sports very, very much. But when I came to Morris, I also received a background of interest in journalism and I then - - one of the editors of the Carles Milton something - - whatever they called the magazine that we published - - and I thought that when I came to Morris I thought that I would like to maybe try out, because you had to try out in those days, for membership on the staff of the Morris Piper, that's the name of it. And it turned out that in this particular point, the beginning of my first year at Morris, that the try outs for the Piper and the tryouts for the basketball team were on the same afternoon. And for reasons that I don't fully understand, maybe I knew what she would say, I went to Mrs. Prevost, with whom I had been friendly and she friendly to me, and I enjoyed the friendship, and I told her; Mrs. Prevost, could you help me decide what I should do about this, that both of these try outs are on the same afternoon. [Inaudible] Basketball you can enjoy but for a very short time. [Laughter] Writing, journalism; you can do that all your life. So I ended up going to the Piper - - and being 5'7'' or 8'' or something like that wasn't really for basketball - - but Mrs. Prevost was very, very important to me because that was path that really did open up. Going into journalism for me, was a very important direction for a big part of my life. The third teacher and the last one that I'll mention is a teacher, and I don't know if I wrote her name down, she was a biology teacher. She was the epitome of the strict, disciplinarian who expected constantly that you would do your best work and I think it was into my junior or senior year and I had her biology course and at that point, towards the end of that year, I think I had something like an 89 as a grade for her course and I was involved in this competition for someone for the best grade point average for the semester and it was clear that if I had something like a 91 or a 92 I would beat out the other person and I made the mistake of

going to Mrs. whatever-her-name-was and telling her that story, that I really wanted to beat - - could she just give me a 90? [Laughter] She said “Vincent I am not going to do that. You know why? Because you’re lazy.” She said “You could do better than that. If I encourage you, I will be very, very sorry, so I’m not going to change your grade. You have to pay the consequences for not doing your best anyway, and thank you.” That was a wonderful woman.

CG: God bless them.

VH: God bless them all, that’s right.

MN: Vincent, this is sort of emotional for me, because I did a little background research on your involvement in the civil rights movement. Do you think that your experience at Morris was something that helped you become somebody who could invoke a vision of a beloved community that united people of different racial and religious backgrounds?

Was your experience at this school something you took with you when you went and created that first interracial Mennonite House in Atlanta? Was Morris part of the shaping of you as somebody who imagined a different kind of America in terms of race?

VH: I have a strong suspicion that that was part of the story. I’ve always thought back to Mr. Bernstein’s vision as a vision that helped to shape me. That, that whole idea and terminology that was used, that Martin King often used, that the beloved community is something that was very clear for me here at Morris. That when I was here, I could just go through the list of Italian, Armenian, Puerto Rican, African American, Jewish - - I am sure that there were at least a dozen ethnicities wrapped up here in this one place and the principal idea was that this is a place that ought to be celebrated then, and I’m expecting here to work - - not just to get along with each other but to work with each other to make

this a beautiful place. And I'm sure that that was part of my own education and part of my own inspiration. I was thinking about that movie when I saw - - what was the principle's name?

MN: Clara Lee Irobunda.

VH: Ms. Irobunda - - what she reminded me now was the fact that a few weeks ago I was involved in a pilgrimage that my friend Congressman John Lewis organizes regularly to go down to Alabama and to take people of Congress down there along with others, to see some of those specific places that were involved in the transformation of this country and among the places that we went was Birmingham, where I had spent a good deal of time with my wife in the midst of that Birmingham movement of '63 and when we got to Birmingham, we began to be introduced to the Birmingham of 2005, one of the most overwhelming experiences was to be introduced to the chief of police who was the chief of police under Bull Conner in 1963. The chief of police in 2005 is a black woman. It just blew me away. So for me, this is very profoundly commended. And I see that experience here as being extended there without a question. Am I'm left wondering why I've spent such a tremendous amount of time working with people just like your little sister here, that I feel that the cause I was so inspired, at the level of a high schooler by this kind of a vision - -

[END TAPE 1, SIDE 2; BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

VH: - - passed that vision on in every way that I possibly can.

MN: Jean, you were also here. Did you feel that community?

GR: I did. Everyone got along together. We had no problem. No such thing as - - I mean every once in a while there might have been a fight. There was no animosity

between the kids - - this race and that race - - because it was a mixture, a melting pot when I was here in '52 and we just had a great time. There were no problems that I could remember. We just had a really good time.

VH: I was looking at the Morris HS song here, Dear Morris High - - or however it starts - - and I sang in the choir. The woman who conducted the choir, Mrs. Steiner – if I remember her name – was just wonderful. The choir was again, a multiracial choir and we did some wonderful things. I remember that tremendously, that was one of our jobs to sing the Morris HS song.

MN: So you think there were people, that it wasn't just the principal's vision, but that there were a lot of teachers and people at the school who believed in celebrating the schools diversity.

VH: Very much so.

MN: Because I have so say, when I was here for the 100th celebration, I had never seen a more integrated school reunion in my life. I've never seen anything like this.

CG: How interesting!

VH: We didn't know where we were really.

GR: I don't remember African American teachers really.

VH: Yes that's one of the things that was very important coming to my mind during the last few days as I was thinking about this interview experience, and that was the thing that I missed as I remembered the experience that I did not remember having an African American teacher on the faculty here at Morris HS and one can only say that some things were very good – could have been excellent – but missed it.

MN: I want to now talk about this Lincoln School for Nurses because this is also part of something that is very important to capturing the Bronx. Can you talk a little bit about how you found out about the school and a little bit of your school's background? This was a Bronx based school for training African American nurses that Carmen attended.

CG: Right. Well we celebrated our 100th anniversary of the alumni last year.

MN: When was the school founded?

CG: The school was founded in 18 - - oh dear - - no Jean - - [crosstalk] - - I think it was 1898. And it was a private school connected to Lincoln Hospital because you see, by a board paid salary - - it only became attached to Lincoln Hospital in the sense in 1926, because they stopped giving stipends to the students at Lincoln. And when I entered the school in 1954, I had first been a stenographer. I had worked for the state but then I needed something more for my labor. I started out with nursing at Montefiore, with Jean - - that's how we met. We went to St. Anne's on 138th St. and that's how we became friends. So anyway, I went there and then decided yes, I did like nursing but you see because secretary work didn't fulfill me enough. So, I applied to Harlem Nursing School and to Lincoln Nursin, because I did want to go to a black school because I already - - I liked being among my people more than anything. Anyway, I started there in '54, finished there in '57. It was a wonderful experience. The school was marvelous - we had some of the best teachers. We tried to integrate the school - - and we did, with Esther Ephlemen. She was a Mennonite and she came from Pennsylvania, but they didn't have any - - we had Spanish girls - - but our school, we couldn't keep it open, we tried to keep it open but they said they didn't need Lincoln anymore because those were the only two black schools. They weren't taken into Bellevue or Fordham so easily. Anyway, I

enjoyed the experience, I was voted to the secretary of the students Nurses Association of New York state in '55 so I represented our school at that time, or during those couple of years. I enjoyed it, and I loved nursing. I retired a few years ago.

GR: They trained a lot of African Americans doctors at Lincoln. They did have a good amount of residents - -

[Crosstalk]

CG: Definitely. We had nursing - - our nurses were bright, popular all over.

VH: That's a very interesting question that Carmen is reflecting on here and again the larger issue that we still have start with here is in a multiracial society, what is the place for single race institutions? And if so, what is it? And it seems to me in a clearly integrated society, that kind of question ought not to be avoided in anyway.

MN: I have to share with you an interesting - - I spoke at the University of Maryland at Eastern Shore at a black history month forum, and they had a jazz performance there and they have this jazz teacher named Lantcin and it's an incredible student ensemble and there was this one young white student who was part of it, who purposely came to this school because it had the best jazz education program in the state of Maryland. So you have this traditionally black institution which was open to everybody but still had this tradition. And I think that speaks to it because it sounds like Lincoln was opening - - and should you phase out something like that or keep your tradition alive with a certain kind openness.

CG: We tried to do it but they said it wasn't necessary because they said they were accepting black girls into all the city schools. So they closed our school - that was such a sad thing.

MN: And what year did it close?

CG: 1961 – I was in the class of 1957.

MN: OK this is already at a length where it leaves a certain amount of exhaustion, although while I could go on for many days. [Laughter] I wanted to give each of you a chance to say anything in reflection that you didn't have a chance to say or would like to emphasize. So we'll start with you Jean. Any reflections, anything that you didn't get a chance to talk about, memories, or thoughts - -

GR: I just think that growing up here in the Bronx and going to Morris HS was one of the best experiences that I truly had. The fun times that I had living here in the Bronx, with no fear - - nothing to really be afraid about, not like we live in these times.

MN: Let me ask you: what do you feel about the stories that they're telling relative to how you've grown up?

Nicole Smith (NS): Really different. When they were talking about [Inaudible] - - just how their society and environment was different, that they could you know, lean out windows and sit on their fire escapes [Inaudible] and their school - - I mean when I first came to Morris it was terrible and I think that worries have really increased in their behavior and their self respect [Inaudible] I think that you really have to encourage and increase our emotions on succeeding in life and wanting to be somewhat successful. I think that what they've had compared to our future is going to collide together.

[Inaudible] Now we come in more calm.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Carmen?

CG: While I was ungrateful that my parents did move from Harlem to the Bronx, it broadened my outlook and it's been a wonderful experience and I'm glad to have been part of it - - and contributed in some way. It's been great. We just have to enjoy and bring everything together.

[Crosstalk]

GR: Like I was saying, we never had to worry about metal protectors and police officers in schools - - it's just amazing to walk in here and see that, we just never had anything like that.

MN: And Vincent, any final comments for today?

VH: One very specific, one general. I forgot to mention when we were talking about my mother and her work as a domestic and what that meant to me, I forgot to mention that my name comes out of that experience that she had. While she was pregnant, maybe it was a little before that, she was working for an Italian family and they had a son named Vincent. And she was very impressed with Vincent; she thought he was one of the nicest boys she had ever met, so she determined that she was going to try out the name on her son.

[Laughter] I got to be Vincent as the result of some very nice, young Italian man and I think that that is sending a powerful message. The second thing is that I am absolutely taken by the education that Morris is trying to develop now, because I think that the presence of Nicole and what she had to say is probably related to that struggle to recreate itself and for many, one of the messages there is that this country probably cannot be what it's meant to be if it only thinks about defending itself rather than recreating itself, each generation developing a new understanding of what it means to be America, just as

a new generation asks to understand what it means to be Morris. And I think that we've got a lot of work to do along this line of constantly redefining the American experience and what it means. And I take from Morris that with wonderful encouragement, we can do things that people thought were impossible and I'm so glad I had somebody like Nicole Smith.

[Clapping]

MN: I guess Brian, Maxine, John - do you have any final questions before - -

BP: Well I have tons... [Laughs] I wanted to ask Jean please and then I have a question for Professor Harding, but Jean, you spoke about - - your father was from Puerto Rico, correct? What was the Puerto Rican community like in the Bronx when you were growing up?

GR: He was the only Puerto Rican up in this area because I originally came from what was called Spanish Harlem - -

BP: Where in Spanish Harlem?

GR: 123rd St near Park Avenue, 115th St - - I was born on 123rd St in a house in Harlem near Park Avenue where there was a large percentage of Puerto Ricans in that area, the east side between the teens the 120's and we moved up to the Bronx and as I said, he was a patten maker which was unusual for - - he became a patten maker back in the mid 40's. and then he quit that job and he had a restaurant right up there on 168th St there on Boston Rd, it was a bar and grill. He had a candy store two doors away - -

MN: Wow

GR: And then he owned one over here on 166th St and Boston Rd, so he was doing quite well.

BP: Do you have any memories of your growing up experience being both Caribbean - - your mother was from Bermuda - - what was the multiculturalism like in your household?

GR: I spoke Spanish up until a certain time. When we started going to school we no longer spoke it because I had two brothers and we all spoke Spanish up until the time we went to school and then we started speaking English. That's the most exposure because we didn't have Puerto Rican families around us.

BP: So did you find that you developed more of an African American or black identity in years growing up?

G: Yes.

BP: That's interesting. And for Professor Harding, I'm just curious - - I had two questions if that's ok - - One comes from in your book *There is a River*, you use the image of a river as a why to describe the continuing and ongoing struggle of the black freedom movement throughout time, so how would you describe the contemporary river of the African American struggle in the United States?

VH: Brian, that's very hard to know and to describe it - - my own hope for it is that it would identify itself as not simply a struggle for African Americans, but that there will be a struggle that is shaped by the African American experience, that is inhabited by the African American spirit of struggle, and that becomes a gift for the larger American struggle to redefine itself ; which means that we cannot be culturally, ideologically or virtually lazy and especially if we think all we're going to do is more of what we have done but I think we're being challenged as much as a larger American nation is being challenged to reinvent ourselves just like this school is being challenged and I think at a point I feel that there are people groping to figure out what time is it. Hoping to

[Inaudible] beautiful self of who, like a number of people I know, are really wrestling with this matter of what should we do with the education of our children? That I think is something I think again, has become one of the critical points of leverage and movement. How we're going to work through, what are we going to look for; I don't know. I just have a sense that that is going to be a part because that many of the wires of people in the world have taught us that if you start moving, the bottom levels of society, you can help but move everything else and that we are going to probably be in danger of that.

BP: My last question, which I think you might have answered, it had to do also with you wrote an essay about sign posts of history, so I was wondering if you could relate it to the first question where you thought we might try to look for these sign posts in our contemporary period as indicators for people to follow.

VH: I was involved in a process now trying to mark some of these sign posts, the whole Veterans Project is trying to take these lives of people who have been working for decades for compassionate social change, gather their stories and then through the technology of those times, pass those stories on to the Nicoles and to the Ryans of this generation and the generation to come. And so that the Davids know that there is something they can gain from the past that has not been the greatest celebrity activity and has much to do with who has been working for the creation of a more human society and what can they teach us now? And I think that's where the sign posts have got to come from. We have to look every place we can and assigning ourselves in no way to any particular location or grouping saying that whenever we see people who have been working for a more human existence, we've got to name them as our sign posts and share them .

BP: Thank you.

Maxine Gordon (MG): It's very hard to follow Brian's questions - - Brian and I are in graduate school together, we're in the history program at NYU and African [Inaudible] [Crosstalk] I want to really know what kinds of records you listen to but we won't get into that now [Laughter] but I'm really interested in where it says war is terror [Inaudible] because often we talk about the 60's and we like the 60's and when people mention a name, they're like oh my god, Dr. King - - we know of his work - - could you say something about that?

VH: Thank you very much for that question. Tell me again your name?

MG: Maxine Gordon

VH: Oh Gordon, that's my middle name. What this represents is not so much a continuation of the anti-war movement, it's more an entering into - - and encouragement to those who are trying to figure out how be pro-human and to remind my fellow citizens that this is the kind of education to my fellow citizens to lets talk about what we're doing. Let's not back off from each other, let's not run away from the conversation that we need to carry on when we use these terrible terms like "terrorists" and just remember for instance, that Nelson Mandela at the African National Congress was labeled as terrorist just 20 years ago and I think that's what this is doing. I really do feel a deep sense of democratic responsibility that as a citizen, I must insist on conversation about what's going on in our country and I refuse to be talking about anything else except what we are doing as a nation and therefore we are doing as citizens in this democratic society, what are responsibility is. So this was just kind of a way of sort of saying this is an invitation for us to talk about this.

MN: After listening to the principal of Morris and having this interview, I can't tell you how glad I am that we - - and also listening to Nicole speak - - how important it is and was to have this interview in this school. And I think we have to do more of our interviews in schools and community organizations. Isolating and acknowledging universities is one of things that has got us into the mess we're in and that this project has the potential to take the acquisition of knowledge out the hands of professional scholars who use it to their own advancement and turn it into an instrument of community empowerment and self discovery. The connection between your church experience and what is happening at this school right now is something I won't soon forget. I'm so happy we all did it this way, I hope we all stay in touch with one another, and Carmen, you can be sure that we will have many more conversations about Lincoln School of Nursing which is another forgotten institution that needs to be reclaimed, just like Club 845 needs to be reclaimed, so does the Lincoln School for Nurses. So Vincent, thank you not only for being here, but for bringing Carmen and Jean.

[Clapping]

[END INTERVIEW]