



5-1-2007

Mulraine, Edward

Bronx African American History Project
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Brian Purnell (BP): This is an introduction. Okay, alright today is May first, two thousand seven. We are at the Bronx NAACP Branch Office in Williamsbridge. Conducting an interview with Reverend Ed Mulraine. So Reverend - and also Natasha Lightfoot is here for the interview Reverend Mulraine if you could please start by saying and spelling your first and last name. Edward Mulraine (EM): Edward Mulraine. E-D-W-A-R-D M-D-L-R-A-I-N-E.

BP: And your date of birth?

EM: Two, nine, sixty nine.

BP: For the first part of the interview, if we could speak a bit about your biography. Maybe even just starting with your parents, what were their names and where were they from?

EM: My mother she grew up in the, she came, I should say she came, initially she is from Panama and the Caribbean.

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): Okay, where in the Caribbean was it?

EM: St. Thomas and [Trails Off] St. Thomas. But initially, from Panama, and she came to the Bronx. I guess she was about twelve

BP: Do you know any of your father's history?

EM: No.

BP: What neighborhood in the Bronx did your mother first settle in?

EM: My father's history, he grew up in the Bronx around. He was in the Bronx. That's about it.

BP: What neighborhood did your mother initially settle in?

EM: South Bronx and I would say around the Morrisania Section. BP: Do you have any other siblings?

EM: Six of us all together.

BP: That's a good family. What neighborhood did you spend most of your childhood in?

EM: Boston Road. Right there in Boston Road in Northeast Bronx.

BP: Okay, so your mother moved, to the Northeast Bronx after-

EM: We were all over to tell you the truth, South Bronx, Northeast Bronx, I mean, we moved a lot. We went to a lot of different schools. So I can say I was on 188 th Street and Fordham Road

and off of Fordham Road, Shakespeare Avenue, South Bronx and then we moved to 212 th Street and Boston Road, and 156th Street in the Bronx. I mean, this is really I was born in that area, 156th Street in the Bronx, and then on my own moved out to the outside of Park City Area, and also on 241st Street and White Plains Road. So we've been all over the Bronx. [Laughter] The Bronx has been the place for now.

BP: And now currently you live in - Mount Vernon. EM: Mount Vernon, right.

BP: When your mother moved to this mixed section of the Bronx, what was the rest of the area like? Was it predominately African American, West Indian-

EM: In the Northeast Section of the Bronx there was a good mix up there. That was back in I guess nineteen eighty - I would say in nineteen eighty, eighty, nineteen eighty, eighty one. So it was a mix of blacks and whites on Boston Road. The majority blacks there, but it was, you saw some whites. Now you don't see any.

NL: When did you start noticing that transition?

EM: I didn't because this faded away after a while. So, to say it became noticeable is not to distinction. Only way you know it was noticeable was when you went to school. I went to 135 in the Bronx. Now, thatNL: Where is 135?

EM: 135 is on Allerton Avenue. And that's where a lot of racial tension was. So we had to be bussed to school from Boston Road to Allerton Avenue.

NL: In what year was that?

EM: This was, I was in Junior High School, so we're talking nineteen eighty, eighty one. So, you know, Allerton Avenue was still a civil amount of whites. Where they were from, I can't really recall, but then in the Northeast Bronx we had to be bussed from Boston Road to Allerton Avenue to go to school for Junior High School. High School, Junior High School wasn't private at that time, so there was a lot of racial tension there, and there was a lot of fights and stuff going on because of race. Then you just, you know, when I graduated, now you can see it's mostly black. It's wholly black and latino. So, but in terms of when it started, I can't really say because I had graduated.

BP: I wonder if we could speak about this a little bit because it's an important topic that not many people talk about. When you say that these fights surrounded race, what do you mean by that?

EM: Well, I remember we used to have to, we were bussed first of all, from Boston Road all the way down to Allerton Avenue in that 135 area, in that area. And I remember we used to have to run on the bus and get on the bus quickly because the whites would come, they were from around that area, but they didn't necessarily go to the school. I mean, it wasn't, 135 was still a mixed school, it was interracial, it was mixed. So we would have to, everyday after school, there would be like a gang of whites that would beat up the black kids at the school, and we would have to run home. Some got hurt really bad. And it was existing at that time. You wouldn't think

that this was the case. And in the eighties, like this was the case in the eighties. I mean, there was a lot of racial tension fighting and the blacks wouldn't necessarily fight back but we would all have to walk in packs in order to get home and take the bus, and if we missed that bus then we were required to take the busses back home that would really begin some trouble, and start some trouble.

NL: So you never took public transportation home if you could, if you could, you know -

EM: Right, if we could prevent, if we could prevent taking public transportation although they gave us bus cards. We would - now that's, that's one instance, I didn't even go back because I used to live on Reservoir Avenue in the Bronx as well. Right by the park, now that's where we grew up, that's, I think its Reservoir Place or Reservoir Avenue, we grew up there, and there was a lot of racial tension at that time. This was like, this was, this was like the seventies, seventies, eighties, or like seventy eight, seventy nine, and a lot of racial tension there. I know I was in the second grade, second or third grade, fourth grade, and we couldn't go to the park because there were a lot of, you know just the whites in there had that park and we were right across the street from the park and so we, we, we were warned not to go in there by the whites as well as by our parents.

BP: So this was something too that your mother would instill in you?

EM: Absolutely, not to go into that park.

NL: That was just common knowledge in the neighborhood?

EM: That was common knowledge in the neighborhood, and they, you know what it seems like we were going to the park at first, but then they just sprung up out of no where. And they just put, just began putting KKK all over the place. And we were, we were, it was whites and blacks in the neighborhood, but then it seemed like some hate began to pop up or I don't know if I became conscious or aware of it, but beginning the hate was corrupting, but then you began to see after some time, maybe two or three years living in the neighborhood, you saw a Klu Klux Klan, KKK, all over the place, writing all over the place, and even white kid's parents telling them not to talk to or hang with black kids. So this is where you begin to, or where I came into consciousness with the racial polarization that was against us at the time.

BP: Did you ever, I'm just curious, going back to when you were growing, attending 135, did you ever miss the bus?

EM: Yeah, I did. I ran home too. [Laughter] Yeah but I walked with a group of kids. There was a group of us and they would, they would come after us, but we wasn't playing that. [Laughter] I mean we had a group where we were determined, some, some groups fought back, I wasn't in the group that fought back.

NL: I had a question, was this something that was gendered, was it mostly boys fighting boys, or you know, from what you know of?

EM: From what I know, they would mostly pick on the boys. I mean they wouldn't necessarily, I didn't see any instance of –

NL: Okay, of like white girl fighting black girls.

EM: I didn't see that. I mean, maybe there were, but I didn't see it.

BP: This is something that is very important and fascinating, when we do interviews with people who lived in the Bronx, in the thirties and forties, they have a very different story that they tell. They talk about growing up with German and Irish, Jews [Cross talk] racial harmonies, you know, everybody's in the Bronx, and it's like its all love, but is there ever a moment in time when you, but this sounds like you were from a very young age, you know first, second grade you were you know aware and dealing with these, was there ever a time when you would you know you would play with or had white friends?

EM: Yeah, yeah, we had white friends in the Bronx, like I said, I would say second, third grade. I mean, it was harmonic to the extent that the children played together but I don't think the parents, I mean after school, that was it. The parents never associated too much. And, I never knew my mother to have white friends. In terms of, you know, together

BP: If we could speak about your mother just a little bit, what kind of work did she do while you were growing up?

EM: She was mostly at school at that time. She was at school and then she was a receptionist.

NL: What was she in school for?

EM: She was in school for, to become a teacher. She hated it, but she was in school, studying.

BP: Did your family attend church while you were growing up?

EM: Oh yeah, absolutely.

BP: Which churches did you go to?

EM: A lot, mostly in Harlem though. There was one in the Bronx, we went to Fountain Spring Baptist Church on Grand Concourse and 172nd Street. BP: Fountain Spring Baptist Church.

EM: Fountain Spring Baptist Church, Reverend Dukes was there at the time and his son, heads it now.

NL: But, mostly all the other churches you attended were in Harlem?

EM: Yeah, in Harlem.

NL: And were you raised traditionally in a Baptist faith?

EM: No, non denominational. And then we went to church up here, right up the block, right here.

NL: And what was that church?

EM: And that was Miracle Provider Church, but now they've moved three locations, they're on two 222nd Street and White Plains Road now.

BP: Miracle Provider.

EM: Miracle Provider, that's where we mostly grew up in church.

NL: And were you active?

EM: Oh, yeah.

NL: What kind of activities were you involved in as a youth?

EM: Like choir, different things, choir, usher.

NL: Okay, and was your church politically active at all or was it -- ?

EM: Not really, not at that time. I mean, there was a more spiritual focus, some community events, but more community associated with the church, you know what I mean, back then, get involved in the community politics.

BP: Where did you attend high school? EM: Theodore Roosevelt.

BP: And this was in, the late eighties or the mid eighties?

EM: That's right, about eighty-four I graduated. No, eighty-four I attended, eighty-four to eighty-eight. Eighty-eight I went to college. So, eighty-four to eighty-eight, yeah, that was a wild time when I was in high school. There was gun shooting, drug smuggling; that was probably, Theodore Roosevelt was the worse school in the city at that time. I think it was pronounced as one of those, really on top of the list, one of the worst schools. So --

NL: What was that like for you? Were you kind of more observant? Or were you, you know kind of did you have, you know?

EM: I mean, I was a combination of observant and interactive, but not any serious interaction in terms of serious crime. I always had my friends but you know they were into the extreme of drugs and crime. You know, I knew how keep my boundaries.

NL: Right, when did you notice drugs starting to infiltrate you know the neighborhoods around where you lived or where you went to school?

EM: Well, at that time we were living in the South Bronx and you know eighty-five was the height of crack. So when you talk about crack being recognizable, that was the time, eighty-four and eighty-five, that was the time we really began to see the impact of drugs. I think when you're a child, to us it was more visible because you began to see how people were acting to the drugs and then connected with the drugs that they were taking. There was weed and stuff you don't necessarily see the affects as visibly as you do with crack and for us growing up it was just like those who grew up with heroin in their days, you begin to see that affect of them, then crack. That's when it became visible, about eighty-five and I was in high school by that time so it really became visible.

BP: So when you were attending Roosevelt High School you lived, you didn't live up here?

EM: No, I lived on 188th Street, about three blocks away from Roosevelt High School.

BP: Oh yeah, that's when you lived off of Fordham.

EM: Right, that's when I lived off of Fordham, right.

NL: Were there racial tensions in that area too?

EM: Yeah, only racial tension was in Fordham it was Little Italy. We couldn't walk in Little Italy, but I mean, everybody knew, not many people lived in that direction. So unless you walked over there, then you heard about incidents; Italians beating up the Hispanics and the Blacks. But now that's a different story. But, it was no real racial tension; it was more violence with each other. Black on black, Hispanics and black, I mean serious violence.

BP: At Roosevelt and in the neighborhood?

EM: At Roosevelt, in the vicinity. 183rd and Webster were the Projects.

NL: Right, were there gangs?

EM: Yeah. A lot of gangs --

NL: Did you know -

EM: It was gangs more in junior high school than, when I got to high school it was more just "cools" rather than official gangs. But I do remember gangs like the "Ball Busters" and stuff like that while we were in high school

NL: The "Ball Busters"?

EM: Yeah, I mean, and at that time it was more, I mean unless you want to call the Zulu Nation a gang, the Five Percenters a gang, that sort of went attached to the - but I mean the police described it as a gang, but it was more of an association of family, of brothers and sisters coming together for understanding and knowledge.

BP: This is when you were in high school?

EM: Junior High School.

BP: Junior High School and High School.

NL: Were you ever attracted to you know the Five Percenters or the Zulu Nation or any of those?

EM: Yeah, of course, the Five Percenters were, attracted in terms of understanding the knowledge and not necessarily joining, but in terms of the knowledge that they spread, and communicated, delivered to each other cycles and circumferences and coming together. That's where they achieved power because you had to learn what it meant to be a Five Percenter.

BP: And this was in High School, young?

EM: Right, this was in, this was mostly, I would say most of the Five Percenters and the Zulu Nation was in Junior High School. High School was in the beginning, but not necessarily in the end because the focus on was trying to graduate at that time.

BP: Could you speak a little bit about your memories of coming in contact with that type of knowledge and what the Five Percenters, even at that young age, what they were doing with -

NL: Young black men?

EM: Yeah, I think it was more of, like I said, a lot of my friends were attracted to it, and all of us had different ways to associate with our connection with what it meant to be a Five Percenter. So we would come together and they would drop knowledge and understanding based upon the alphabets as well as based upon the understanding of what it meant to be a Five Percenter. Of course a lot of them came out of jail, and dropped knowledge, there were certain places that Five Percenters would meet in order to come together and build that knowledge and tell that -

NL: And what were those places, was it mostly in the street, or was it -- ?

EM: In a building, because most of our meeting places were in a building at that time, or on the street corner. So you would drop knowledge on, during, at those different locations, and it was impressive because it wasn't young black men getting together and rolling dice and stealing or just watching girls, it was more of drops of knowledge and understanding, and it was impressive also because it was competitive. You had to know what you were talking about. And I was always impressed with that. Yeah, you had to know the math, you had to know your science, you had to know what it meant to communicate and articulate. That's where my first interaction with really seeing brothers articulate a certain knowledge that they had based upon memory, and based upon analysis. So it was cool to see that, and I was always impressed with that. Anytime, and even when rap came out, that was the height of rap. I grew up with rap all over the neighborhood. And when you came up to the Northeast Bronx it was more evident that, "even just dropping brothers not rapping," that was the rap. That's when you used to have the parks,

spit so quick the remarks, where you used to have, you could go to a jam in the park, of course at times it ended in some violence, but you could go to a park like Eighty or up on Birdside Avenue, where you could go and hear before the guys made a record, we saw them in the park. These days, they come out of no where. Back then, I would sit there and write my rhymes, and go to the park, and everybody would start rhyming.

NL: So you were an aspiring rapper, sort of?

EM: Yeah, sort of. I mean aspiring to the - I mean my cousin, he was a DJ, so we would get together at times -

NL: Was he well known in the neighborhood?

EM: He was well known in the neighborhood, he would DJ for other people, but he was always trying to connect me with it but I was just playing.

NL: What was his stage name?

EM: What, mine? Oh, his name was DJ Little Man, and I was MC Jamel. Justice, Allah, Master, Equality, Love.

BP: Say that again.

EM: It's based on the Alphabets. Justice, Allah, Master, Equality, Love. So, you had to break it down like that.

BP: And that came from your knowledge of-

EM: That came from knowledge of the Five Percenters. BP: Justice, Allah, Master, Equality, Love.

EM: Right, that's Jamel. So, but, he was Little Man, he wasn't into it, he was more into his DJing stuff. So we would get together, and like I said, on the mic you could break down the same knowledge that you had for the Five Percenters. That's why at the time you had so many brothers coming out with articulation and knowledge that they were spouring at the time based upon their connections with like the Five Percenters. It was more a sense than articulated from the microphone when you had it being done in a car or just off the top of your head and you would hook up the DJ equipment to the light post outside. [Laughter] Those were the days when you had real interaction and outside. I would say it was the time of the origin of hip hop and the origination of it, but at the same time we, how can I put it, unfabricated [Laughs] --

NL: You think hip hop now is a fabrication?

EM: Yeah, yeah. Unfabricated, it was genuine. You know, from its humble beginnings. So you had people who, you know, they wouldn't even write the rhyme. They would just say it. They would know it off the top of their head.

NL: What kind of groups did you see in the park that might have been well known?

EM: Well, Nicole Crush, Crash Crew, Afrika Bambaataa, he had his, Afrika Bambaataa had his crew, Mr. Biggs, we had, Funky Four plus one more, Opia, you had before Bizzy Bee and them, before they even came to the streets, we had a host of them, a host of them that used to come out and then all of a sudden you hear them on a record Grand Master Flash, Furious Five, Grand Master Nelly Nell, which was my favorite. [Laughs] You had a whole of them coming out in back of Burger King, at the Beaver, and or they were down at Burger King on 100 and, this was in the Prospect Avenue area.

NL: Oh, that's where Club 845 used to be. [Crosstalk] BP: Right near Westchester Avenue?

EM: Yeah, even if I was young I would just sneak in because I had my cousin. NL: I was going to ask if you snuck in, my cousin talks about that too.

EM: Yeah, yeah, I used to sneak in because I couldn't get in on my own. [Crosstalk] Either the Beaver, or they had Harlem World at the time. Beaver was off of Jerome.

NL: Oh ok, this is before it moved to 29 Webster.

EM: Right, right. So it was over there, and my cousin used to play at that time.

BP: Could you talk a little bit about the Prospect Avenue Burger King and The Fever? What were those?

EM: Well, The Fever was a place where people used to come and party, and have a good time. That was three, there was Skate Key, Skate Key [Crosstalk] on Allerton Avenue. That's what I [Crosstalk] Allerton and White Plains Road, right down the block. Now you could go there at night because it was packed with blacks, this was even during the time of the Great Detention, but they were on the other side. But at night they had, not skating but they had the party, where you would come together and dance and I mean of course there were acts of violence and fights and stuff like that but inside it was more of a cordial dancing atmosphere with the latest dancers, break dancing, electric boogie, I mean that was the rock. All of that was part of that, [Laughter] just going to Skate Key and hanging out and you know just doing your thing and you know you always came to who because you know something went down in every crew.

NL: Did people wear jackets and all of that?

EM: Yeah, you wore your jackets, and at that time it was the, you had, what you had going on at that time? You always had your Lee's and your Adidas. [Laughs] That was the time for Lee Jeans and Adidas, and your boots. [Laughs] If you had some money you could have different flavors of Adidas. But that was the number one place where I used to go. The Skate Key because it was right down the block from where I lived in the Northeast. When you're going down to the South Bronx however you got a little bit more, you know, that's when I used to live on 188th so that was my Burnside place. I used to hang out at Burnside and 183rd, so I had to walk through

so I didn't have any problems [Laughs] so, the Eagle was the place where you would go, mostly to dance but a little bit rougher crew I would say. South Bronx has always been a little rougher. In Northeast Bronx you can find a little bit more semblance and less violence with each other. Although you found it, but in the South Bronx it seemed like it was more, South Bronx seemed like it was more guns in the South Bronx and more stabbings. You know if you got into a fight, you wouldn't get into a fight. Northeast Bronx, you get into a fight, boom, you fight. But in the South Bronx seemed like you know more shootings,-

NL: Weapons were brought out.

EM: Weapons and things. So you have to be, you had to be careful when you went to the Eagle and see stuff like that. And then just the outside jams like in the school yards that was one and then behind Burger King or McDonalds we had the chance on the outside, and everyone would just have a good time. I think what brought more problems with that was the police because the police would be, the police were more opposed to it because they thought that it incited violence; so whenever the police came around even if you had, and at that time you didn't get a permit, you just plugged up [Laughs] plugged up the machines and you had noise, so if somebody complained or something then it would be problems, but yeah, the school yards were the places to be. It was good; you had a packed jam it was like always a weekend. We see it at home all the time like I said, but now you have to get permits, you have to set a span and set a time, but that day you just plugged up and you was off.

BP: Living in the Bronx, you lived by I 88th and Fordham, and then moving to the Northeast Bronx, what are your memories of what was happening in South Bronx then in terms of the fires? Did people talk about that back then?

EM: Well, it was happening, I mean, we had I began an early plan to layout of the plan for ten years in East New York workman's relative to South Bronx; so, but when we were growing up we used to always, this is when I lived on I 56th Street, I could remember clearly my grandmother, mother, who I grew up with they would rush out the house almost every other night because of a fire. We would have to go on; we were always on the fire escape. Always you know, running out the building.

NL: Standing on the street.

EM: Going up to the roof; standing on the street. It would be the whole neighborhood, you know running out just because you know, friends got killed, this one got burnt up, that one died in a fire. So it was crazy at the time, but thank God you know also, the grace of God protected our family, where it never happened to us specifically, but you still have to mourn those who it did happen to that you didn't know. That was mostly like I said growing up, you always heard that and you always had to show us out the house.

NL: I'm sorry just to interrupt you, but did you move because of fire at all?

EM: I don't know. I mean my mother determined why we moved -

NL: Because it seems to be the story of a lot of people in your age group of moving around because of fire.

EM: Yeah, I think growing up we moved 15 different times. I mean between public school and high school I moved like 15 times, all in the Bronx. From South Bronx and Northeast Bronx; we went to like 20 different schools in the Bronx. So we were always moving. I mean we always moved together, that's what kept the stability, but the instability was moving around a lot. But not that, I don't know if it's all because you know, you know families, we have our problems, [Laughs] we have landlord problems, we have family issues, you know, but we always had somewhere to go, and always had, we'd go together.

BP: What happened after you graduated from Theodore Roosevelt? You said you went on to college?

EM: Yeah, I went on to college after that.

BP: Did you stay in New York?

EM: No, I mean, in New York State, in Purchase, New York at Manhattanville College. NL: Okay, and what was that transition like for you?

EM: It was a mind blowing transition. To go from the black Bronx, all black and Hispanic, to all white. I mean, they had that it was a pretty big Kennedy school you know, really big, at that time anyway, now they're putting in more blacks and Hispanics but Manhattanville was a community; and then I lived on campus, so it was a community of about, I think we had at that time about under four thousand.

BP: You said it was a bit of a shock when you arrived -

EM: Oh yeah, total transformation of community and connection and people when you went to college because like I said the whole college was an Ivy League setting and they were like I said the majority white on campus and we went into our class of about twenty blacks and about a thousand whites. So it was a total transformation; when before we were facing the majority when I came from high school and seeing the community and neighborhood; and then to go to up, to an affluent neighborhood to you know poverty is a total transition.

BP: Before we hear a little bit more about that but, just curious, who were some of your mentors or counselors, or people who guided you along the way?

NL: To get the college?

EM: I would say, Mr. Brown, in high school, because I was involved in a Shakespeare Club, I mean when I got back to school, you know, I did my little thing. Then about by tenth grade, I would say Mr. Brown, and it was another lady, but I can't remember her name. Mr. Brown was a Shakespeare teacher, and he was more drama, and I was into drama so I began to get into Shakespeare and travel around and do Shakespeare and at that time I thought I would become an

actor so I started, and now it really was law, I was gearing up for law, but acting was a core part of that; so Mr. Brown, and I can't remember this other lady's name, but she was good also as this assistant, at helping out.

NL: Was there lots of encouragement from other teachers in Roosevelt at all?

EM: Not to go to college. I mean to go more to like community college and stuff, but I don't know how; I think I just copied off of other people's application of where they were applying, the smart kids. Because I went from like a truant class to an honors class when I got in high school, you know, I started going to school every day, and you know and getting into it. So, I didn't know anything about college, my mother she was in college, but when I got to college I began to hang out with you know, I mean in high school, I began to hang out with the honors class. It was different kids, so I applied to the top colleges in the nation, but they would encourage you in high school to go more to community college.

NL: To a state school or something?

EM: Yeah, like you know stuff like that, but I did apply to Fordham also; I got into Fordham. [Laughs] I got into Fordham, but I went to Manhattanville because it was, you know I didn't know anything about the school, but I did go on an interview and I liked the setting and the atmosphere, but there was no real encouragement in high school. Like I said, they encouraged you, like Mr. Brown and them in the area that you were in; I was in literature, and I was in drama, so they would encourage you in that; but in terms of going to college, I don't think anybody encouraged me anyway; probably others, but not me. We had, in my class, I think we had, even though it was the height of violence in the school, I think that class actually went to some of the best colleges in the nation, Tufts, Harvard, I mean, they were a lot of kids that went to some of those schools. [Crosstalk] Yeah, that was the exception, highly the exception. But I applied based upon what I knew other people were applying to.

BP: So, how would you describe your adjustment to life in Manhattanville and in that college?

EM: You always have a group of students that you can relate to. I think somebody wrote the book not too long ago, *Why Do All the Black Kids Sit in the Lunch Room Together?* I mean you always have your group that you can relate to; so the adjustment becomes easier because of that group that you can relate to. The trying to connect with others, it took some time because I had roommates that were white and you know, that had their classes and interacted with their friends, it was adjustable.

BP: Did you come back to the Bronx often or for summers or -- ?

EM: Only during vacations and stuff like that, but not too often during my first year.

NL: Were you in touch with a lot of the kids you came up with in Junior High School and High School?

EM: Not really, no. only those who had gone to college, then I lost touch with them. That's the thing about the Bronx, if I had grown up somewhere like Mount Vernon, it's a small community, I probably would be able to keep in touch with different people because everybody you know is in the same community. Bronx is a million people so even if you know people, you know them during that time in school, but it's not like you grew up together, you know continuously. I think its only one friend that I had that I know from high school, that we keep in touch anyway; everybody else I keep in touch with is during college. But there's only one or two that I really know from high school.

BP: Maybe we could speak about, I'm curious about two things, how you came to become involved with the NAACP, but also, I assume that occurs earlier, how you answered the calling to the ministry? Was that something that began in college or was that after?

EM: Yeah, that happened actually during college. Like I said, we grew up in church. My mother was always in church. My mother was a minister, is a minister. So I was always, I was there always in the church for some capacity or another.

NL: Even when you were doing the hip hop stuff, you were still going to church?

EM: Yeah, yeah even doing the hip hop stuff. [Laughs] But, yeah, in that time because of the, my mother was at the church, she was always taking us to church. Like when I went to college for the first year, then I came back and actually this was in a non denominational church, the pastor proposed it to me because I was you know I was involved at the Sunday school and stuff like that. So I took that opportunity and did that. Then I went on to join other churches, see where my association, my affiliation was more in connection with, not only a spiritual, but a political and social. I thought that there were other churches, mostly Baptist churches that connected the social political with the church, and whereas certain churches just focused on the spiritual in the church. So, that calling came later, that became my Baptist church of Mount Vernon.

BP: Which is, is that where you're a pastor now?

EM: No, I'm pastor of the block of the Baptist church that was Grace Baptist Church of Mount Vernon. Frank Richardson was there at the time and still, then I went on to, I got a calling to go to another church two blocks up and be pastor of that church -

BP: Is that also a Baptist church?

EM: Yeah, it's the Unity Baptist Church.

BP: What is the African American or the black you know West Indian community of Mount Vernon, how would you describe it? Is it large, is it people who come from the Bronx and moved up there?

EM: It's focused mostly on blacks in Mount Vernon. I don't, I mean, there are a lot of Caribbean in Mount Vernon; I just see we're all together, there's no division, in my church we have a lot of

Caribbean, we have a lot of black, south and Caribbean - because I am both, my father is from South Carolina, my mother is Caribbean South, but I gravitate toward you know Caribbean South. Yeah, there's really a big distinction in terms of a big population and in terms of connections.

BP: And, do you know anything about the history of the NAACP in the Bronx, or even just starting with your own involvement or how did you come to -- ?

EM: I came, at the NAACP I started really dealing with them in college. I used to have to go, because I was head of the Black Student Union in college. So I connected with somebody from the NAACP. I always knew of the NAACP, but I wasn't involved in the NAACP until I got to college, and I was head of the Black Student Union, and the person from the NAACP would come to me in college and she asked me to speak in different times at her youth group. So that was the extent of that.

NL: And who was that person that used to come and speak to you?

EM: In White Plains, that was Yvonne Jones. Yvonne Jones was the head of it at that time.

BP: That was the NAACP branch in White Plains?

EM: In White Plains, right, because I was in Purchase so the nearest branch to school was in the city of White Plains.

BP: I guess maybe too, before we start talking about the NAACP, if we could just, your own, I don't want to say political awakening because clearly what we talked about earlier you were politically minded, so racially conscious since you were a young, almost a teenager, but what was going on amongst black students in the late eighties in college?

EM: In college?

BP: Yeah, what was the political atmosphere in -- ?

EM: I think the political atmosphere, I mean I was always conscious and connected with politics. It was my calling, I don't know how, in terms of, I don't even know how it came, I guess my mother

NL: I was going to ask, was there political conversation in the home or something that -

EM: Vote. Just vote. Always vote. She used to walk all of us down to Roosevelt, every time there was an election we would be walking all together. You know a family thing. I take my kids now. So it was always voting, but in terms of interaction, I think my mother did have some correlation with certain groups that she thought fought for racial justice. When I became conscious, more when it probably was in high school, I was vice president of the high school. I was more, you know, trying to do stuff for the blacks. I started a newsletter, stuff like that to talk about the politics of the school, and fights in school. Then when I got to college, that's when it

really came into clarity. Sophie Carmichael's book became my manual for black power. [Laughs] So, it became, when I first got to college I saw the heading of the Black Student Union. Because I was started in it in my freshman year, with activities to get more blacks involved in school because we were lacking certainly in certain representation and it was because of, and I mean it somehow started prior to me coming to the school, and showed me some things, and then I took up a day or two. We didn't even have a black history month, a Black History Department. Now there's a Black History Department, before I left we had all of that put in place. The Black History Department, hired, there was not one black teacher at Manhattenville. So we got black teachers at Manhattanville now, there's retain their teachers. So all of that came into the fire fighting for justice fighting for rights, and I became the persuader of the Black Student Union who was more in a lot of conversations around racial integration, that was the biggest discussion. Racial integration because our school was lacking considerably, and you know just coming to a place at the right time to deal with those issues.

NL: Was the campus receptive?

EM: They were hostile because I think we were hostile. [Laughter] At that time Al Sharpton and Seabird and Mason and Maddox were at the height so we would bring them up to campus and they weren't holding back on what they had to say, and we brought forums together. I think because of their verbiage at the time, the white kids got upset and they were throw tables and chairs and say, "We don't want to hear this." But you know we had to pursue, and persist. So, that's when we had the departments came into existence because of the fight that was happening at the time. Every time we had a program at Manhattanville College, especially for Black History Month, there were bomb threats. We would invite the biggest people up to Manhattanville, this is a good discussion that we did, we were trying to put together stuff at Manhattanville College that would turn around our leadership there and making a transition, and I'm teaching a course there now on Martin Luther King and social justice, and we try to talk about these things, but every time we had a program we brought KRS-One, we brought, and this was I think the biggest commencement, it was 150th anniversary, or something like that. We brought some of the big names in media up to Manhattenville, but there was always cancelled –

BP: Chuck D.?

EM: Yeah, but I'm talking about in Doctor, it was a lot of different people who were big at the time we're talking about.

BP: Leonard Jeffries-

EM: Leonard Jeffries, but even people from Yale and Harvard who were radical Professors at the time. There were always cancelled or we had to move it to different places because any time we had it it was a problem. Any time we had something it was bombed up. [Crosstalk] I remember one time we had this African, he came from Africa, he was in town but he was a diplomat, I think it was Tanzania, but he came up to our school because we invited him because it was something really thought out at the time, or one or somebody else invited him, but we accepted his coming under the Black Student Union, and he came and was ready to speak, packed place. All of a sudden, "We have to evacuate the place! We have to evacuate because -- " and he got so

scared because he was used to it in his country, but he didn't expect it in America. So he got so scared that he just started running out the castle by himself, and his people were like, "Oh we have to go and get him," and he came with a bunch of armed men. He got so afraid, but he figured this was all about him, and him being bombed. We always had you know a lot of racial tension at Manhattanville. So my whole life has been lived with racial tension and a fight for integration, and not knowing how the NAACP would play into this when I got home from college, I just continued on the path of and then entered into the doors of the NAACP.

BP: What did you study in college?

EM: Political Science and religion. Political Science was my major. Then I went off to NYU.

[Laughs]

NL: And then what did you do -

EM: That was Urban Planning. I went to the Indianapolis Seminary [Crosstalk] for monastic divinity.

NL: You mention being an urban planner, I know that takes us a little bit off, but I just wanted to know when you were doing that and what kinds of work did you do in the South Bronx when you were an urban planner?

EM: Right, well I started urban planning, HPD, House Probation Development, and I was there seven years, mostly working down at 100 Gold Street in Manhattan, where the office was, and I did that right after college, I got hired, but I went to NYU and then I got hired because it was a good resource I was unemployed, totally, ran to NYU and then they hooked me up with a job and upon introduce I got the job at HPD, a year and a half after I graduated.

NL: So what year are we talking?

EM: Well I graduated in what, ninety-two? So we're talking about ninety-three, about ninety three, ninety-four. So I went and I started working for HPD, but we were mostly concentrated on building housing and renovating a whole neighborhood of East New York, and these are going to be buyer houses for people like down in New York. I was head of that for HPD in that neighborhood, working and coordinating things, and this was crazy because I was coming out of college and I mean they're taking over neighborhoods. So the people, it was a sensitive issue because the people had, even if their houses were run down they were connected to it, and they didn't want to see them go; so some would come in and they were you know sort of communicate to you and cordial about it; others would come in with guns like, "You ain't taking my property." And these were at community board meetings, and I was wondering why they always sent me, the only black guy to these things because it was East New York. So we had to deal with that, and try to connect and you know just let them know that we know it's a traumatic experience for you to endure this, but and the church is where is responsible for it, we the black churches are responsible for it, for the change in the neighborhood, but they had to do it. Now you go to East New York and it's a totally different neighborhood. I mean its, up and it's running.

BP: So you worked directly with Reverend Youngblood?

EM: No, I was more with the director with HPD because our role in it was to acquire the property. We were responsible for the acquisition, for the demolition, and for the communication with the community in terms of having them understand what was going on. Johnny Grey Youngblood was responsible for building the houses, but we had to do all the heavy work, all the hard work. NL: To create a foundation before you can actually put houses on it.

EM: Exactly. We had to do the planning and make sure that what neighborhoods, we would take what houses, we did all of that. We were in people's homes and everything. We took them to court. Yeah, that was the hard part.

NL: so were the community members the people who ended up in the new mine houses?

EM: They had the opportunity to buy first and foremost. How many of them purchased, I can't say. Even, I mean, they got money for the homes and they could use that towards the purchase of the property -

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

BP: How did you get involved in the Bronx NAACP?

EM: The Bronx NAACP is like I said, when I came out of college, I became head of, I was living in a building on 241 st Street in the Bronx, 241 st and White Plains Road. And it became a bar tennis association, and from there all the community groups used to meet in different places and it was right here in the NAACP. So I came to a meeting here one day and I told them I was going to, I think I came here because, oh I was the tennis association president and then I said I came here because I was going to run for the school board at that time.

BP: Is this in the early nineties?

EM: Yeah, this is ninety-three, ninety-four.

NL: Around the same time you started working for HPD you were doing this?

EM: Yeah, right, I was doing this and I was involved in tennis, but I wasn't involved in the NAACP. I was involved in the NAACP, I became involved in the NAACP about ninety-four. So then I got involved doing things, and I was running for their school board, but I didn't pursue it. But I just got involved in fighting for different rights in the community that the NAACP was involved in.

NL: And what kind of stuff were they, what kind of campaigns were they launching?

EM: At that time it was mostly voting, I was mostly involved political, head of the national, I became ultimately head of the national private plan for the national NAACP for voting, and you

know my whole thing has always been turn to policies and getting out the vote, so I became head of the political action chair at the NAACP about six months after I joined. [Laughs] And then after that, my whole thing was always just, how can we get more people out to vote? A couple of years later, that's when I ran for that school board, and I won. So I was the youngest person elected in the Bronx to a school board.

NL: What district was that?

EM: Here. That's what it was in districts, District 11. That's what it was in districts. I won by one vote. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit combined. [Laughter] And we took it from there.

NL: And what schools did this district cover, was it like going down toward Gunhill?

EM: It was 32 schools, Gunhill, White Plains, all of White Plains, across the bridge, I mean this was the most integrated community in terms of blacks and whites; it was still a considerable amount of whites down there, and they had mostly that Pelham Parkway that section over there, so you know, nobody from us was there.

BP: This is very, again also important, and something we haven't heard much about, at the time you were on the school boards in the mid and late nineties, the school board still had a considerable amount of power. What kind of things and decisions did you make?

EM: A lot of them had to do with, I think at that time, mostly dealing with Superintendent Powers. See, the superintendent was big; he was a person but he would still have to go through the school board in order to get their approval. So many of the things we were dealing with was approving his decisions for like principals in certain areas, and working with him on those things. And I think the biggest problem was, that we had to deal with was over crowding in schools and weather or not we should put those fake schools, those little trailers, on the side of the schools because of the over crowding situation. And then I raised the issue when I was head of the hiring area, and weather or not enough blacks were being hired in the district. Yeah, I had a big community forum on that.

NL: Did it lead to more black principals?

EM: It did. It led to more black, even teachers. I think that we didn't have a sufficient amount of teachers, all being hired that should have been hired. It led to more black principals, more black teachers being hired in the district.

BP: You were recently the president of the Williams Bridge NAACP.

EM: Yeah, I became president, I was about 20; I was on the school board, then I stopped the school board. I was 26 on the school board, so three years, and then I stopped, and then I became; so lets see, it was, ninety - wait is this 2006?

NL: 2007.

EM: Yeah, 2007, so I was president, I just ended being president this year, in 2006. So, I was there for eight years, so what is that, 1998? So ninety-eight I became president, and I was there for eight years.

NL: So now, were the activities of kind of school board activist integrated into what the NAACP was doing?

EM: We made it that way. I mean we started, like I started the Educator's Award for Ethic Virtue which we have on May 17th. Then we made BP: The Educator's Award?

EM: Right, because that was a thing that I started where I connected with NAACP and NCNW, Willie Bowman I think was the president at that time.

BP: What is NCNW?

EM: National Council of Negro Women. They are just as active and social in involvement, and whenever we have something we connect with them in order to assist us. They're more social, we're more political. We've connected with them and have founded the Educator's Award breakfast, and it has been, this is actually prior to me becoming president of the NAACP, but I was a school board member. And so, I thought that the African American teachers were not being recognized in the district, so we started that. The first year we started it we honored like 30 teachers, and about six to seven hundred people came out. It's been going on ever since. We have it like I said coming up in May.

BP: On May 17th?

EM: May 17th, whatever Thursday of March is. BP: That's the Brown - [Crosstalk]

EM: Yeah, whatever that Saturday is closest to May 17th. So every, this is the tenth year I think it is -

BP: And where is it held?

EM: This year it is going to be held at Maestro's. Usually we hold it at the Benna Carone, but they have - [Crosstalk] Maestro's is holding it this year. But yeah, so we integrated to the school board and the NAACP and there was always more political make sure more African Americans were hired because like I said, even though we're in the Northeast Bronx, we still have that considerable lack when it came to representation of teachers and principals and superintendents for that matter. So I found it more political you know to establish a presence in Northeast Bronx, and I did that for eight years.

NL: And were you involved in getting a lot of black representatives in counsel people in that area?

EM: Well, at that time because Seabrook had already began - yeah, Seabrook was already the first black assembly man and counsel man, Larry Warden was here at that time. State senator, which I knew from the South Bronx, up here, I can't remember his name, but he had died and Seabrook took over the senate seat. So we always had pretty much locally, black elected officials. When I came up anyway, it was pretty much represented. The only area that we felt should have been more represented was in Congress, but that carried a large weight to it, and we fought, when I was president we fought to have the congressional seat more representative of the district, and it was at first, it was more representative of the population in the district, but then it was changed in 2000, to less represent the people in this district. - [Crosstalk]

NL: You mean, the lines were redistricted or something?

EM: The population of blacks - the redistricting caused less blacks to be in the congressional district.

BP: I saw a testimony with you online, I was doing some internet research, and I came up with, it gave me a testimony about this issue, so was this, this was a major issue?

EM: Yeah, absolutely, it was major because of two areas, assembly district we thought at the time, the assemblies, we wanted to create another assembly district that would be more representative because the population had more blacks in here so we wanted Co-op City in connection with I think Pelham Parkway to become another assembly district so that we could have more representation because of the population, and then we would have one on the Northeast side. South Bronx has currently two black representatives but because of the high percentage of the Hispanic, one of them is going to ultimately be eliminated and therefore we would only have three left, or we would only have two if we didn't create this new one based on the population. So we tried to get a new assembly district created in the Northeast Bronx, which didn't go through, but we fought to have it done. The congressional district came in order to not have them move it or depopulate it based upon the population of African Americans that were in the district. They changed it, and it went from 70% to now its like less than 50% African Americans. So we could have had - both combined, Hispanics and African Americans is less than 50% now. It went up to nine-

NL: Of both, African American and-

EM: Yeah, they changed it, and we sued, that was testimony. They went up to Nyack; they took the district out of Co-op City, which represented a lot of African Americans and they took it up to Nyack, out of the district. I mean, it's all political. In order for a black not to have the district, or to decrease the population of the African Americans and Hispanics and not give the African Americans - Which is really illegal according to law because this was a protected district by the Civil Rights Authority, but they didn't see it; they said as long as you still have 50%, it's still good. So they do suggest enough so that you can have the black population there, but not electable. So you have the population, but they're not elected; they might be too young or too, you know. So the fight as it comes in future years is to look at that district again and hopefully make sure that we can reroute it.

BP: Who were some of the, I guess leaders, in the NAACP branch when you first came into it?

EM: Al Tuitt, he was a great man. Al Tuitt was my mentor.

NL: Could you spell his name?

EM: Yeah, A-L-, Albert, A-L-B-E-R-T, T-U-I-T-T. BP: Has he passed away?

EM: Yeah, Albert Tuitt passed away 2 years ago, June 2005. He was my mentor; he actually brought me into the NAACP. He was my campaign manager for the school board, I mean, he was my campaign manager statewide when I ran for state vice president of the NAACP, which I won. And nationally he was my mentor because he was that influence in terms of making sure, that I got you know got up over myself.

BP: Who was he?

EM: He was president for 10 years of the NAACP. He was like, brought, put NAACP on the map. In the Northeast Bronx, this branch; he was president for like ten years, and he was a community parent association president, he was, he ran for city counsel, he, you know Al Tuitt was everything when it came to it. He was the first black to run for the city counsel. He was everything in the Northeast Bronx, and everybody knew him, you asked Willie, you asked anybody, I mean everybody knew him. So when I came in, he saw a young man, and so he took me under his wing and began, but he died about 2 years ago.

NL: Are his family members still in the area?

EM: Yeah, his daughter's a judge, Judge Allison Tuitt. She's on the bench in the Bronx.

BP: Allison?

EM: Yeah, Allison.

NL: And she's with the courthouse?

EM: Right, on 163rd, but I mean she moves around at times, and his wife, she's active in the National Counsel of Negro Women, Northeast Bronx section, under-

NL: What's her name?

EM: Alice Tuitt.

BP: So, his daughter is Allison, and his wife is Alice?

EM: Right. His son is Al. [Laughs]

NL: Oh wow, I love it. Alice and Albert and Al and Allison. That's wonderful

EM: He's a good man, and especially right now we're trying to get a school named after him, and we've testified and everything and now, I understand that they're not going to do it, and we have testified, we had got the whole community together just last year in order for this to be done. So that might be the next rally we have to deal with, and we'll see what happens.

BP: So, Albert Tuitt was the president before you?

EM: Albert Tuitt and then Shirley Ferron. Shirley Ferron is the current president, and she was president before I was president. So she ran again.

BP: So where does the NAACP Williamsbridge branch hold its meetings now, here?

EM: We used to have offices back there, but we hold it here.

BP: And are there other NAACP branches in the Bronx? I know you said there were three others?

EM: Yeah, there's South Bronx, Parkchester, Lou Brown used to be president, I don't think he's president anymore, there's another girl who's president now, and Co-op City, Elaine Cole, in Co-op City.

NL: And, are all of your activities with the different branches kind of coordinated?

EM: We used to be. I formed the coalition of Bronx NAACP branches when I was president and we used to do especially get out the go campaigns together because a lot, I mean, we used to every year we had the "Get out the Vote" campaign, and we coordinated throughout different parts of the Bronx. It was really good, but now, you know with so much, it's a bit of a hard time.

BP: Another thing we do besides collecting the oral histories, is we also try to locate historical records of documents pertaining to important churches, organizations, individuals; do you know if the Bronx, if the Williamsbridge NAACP branch, since you said you used to have offices-

EM: We have stuff in the back, we have papers. We have a lot of papers back there. We made sure we moved them, put the names at the bottom, you have to look back there, but we have an office right back here, that we store things in in case we can't go in there.

BP: Right, but nobody's going to throw it out. Please don't throw it out. NL: Please don't, we'd love to - [Crosstalk]

EM: We have to move them upstairs, and we'll do that, but I think we still have access to that.

NL: And I had a question about collaboration between you know black politics and Latino politics in the borough. What has that been like, you know, with the years that you've been involved with the NAACP?

EM: I don't think we've had problems up here in the Northeast Bronx because the population of the, the black population is still pretty strong, so I don't think there's been any strong consideration from Latinos to run and see where we would face a challenge or some opposition or some difficulty in our working relationship, so that hasn't been in the Northeast Bronx. I mean, possibly if you enter running for office now you may find that, but I have, during that time - now when it came to the South Bronx however, and like I said, we were involved in all posit walks, then you do have some opposition and a lot of you know possibly hostility towards the black and Latino community, but you can always have also people willing to work together in order to get that resolve.

NL: I was wondering, what are the kinds of projects that the Williamsbridge branch is involved in right now?

EM: Right now I think we're working on more programs and actual projects of racial disparities. A lot of programs in terms of fund raising, like I said the Educator's Award Breakfast, mothers recognizing mothers, women, like women's history month, black history month programs, it's more programs to get the community involved and assemble rather than challenges. You know, that's now, I mean, when I was - different administrations have different purposes.

NL: Right, and I guess you know maybe the neighborhoods are a little bit different now than when you first got involved.

EM: Right, that's true; I guess the biggest time will come during the elections. You have to get the people out to vote, I mean, that's always a high time for the NAACP, especially when it's a presidential election year. Right now its more, you know, its more, like I said if we get into an issue right now it would be the school board, the fight against them not putting Al Tuitt's name on the school, so that would be up to the president.

NL: Is the make up of the NAACP mostly older folks, or are there younger people from the area getting attracted to it? Is there a kind of outreach going on?

BP: Yeah, I have to admit, I thought you'd be an older generation - [Laughter] EM: I thought I'd be older too [Laughter] I probably am.

BP: No, just because you know you hear Reverend and you hear NAACP I thought-

EM: People must get involved early, I got involved early. I'm 38 now, but when I was involved I was like 24, 25.

NL: Is that typical though?

EM: The church takes up a lot of time now, but it's typical nationally. Not typical, I would say it's you could see it nationally, especially more in the South. I would say more into the South, and I traveled down south, I get more youth college, when we travel like to NAACP functions, you'll see a younger crowd. But in the Northeast Bronx, up here, its older, I mean, I was only the youngest one, you don't have too many, I mean, you have a young sister right now who is

involved with our youth, we have another young brother who works with the youth. So we get it, we had thought about it in the administration, but I think it depends on the programs, the focus, who you bring in, so the program and the focus was mostly on stuff like voting, so it attracted the older crowd, but it also helped get some of the younger out only because we had to do the running around, standing in the street, register people, but like I said the program now, we have, like Shirley is good at the youth, in terms of bringing the children in to different tutoring programs and stuff like that, so it depends on the program, but you don't have too many executive board members or officials that are under 30.

NL: Do you find it difficult to get young folks out to vote, you know the 18-25 crowd, when you are involved in the voter registration draws?

EM: Yeah, it's real difficult, I don't think they understand the points, I don't think they have been taught. I think when you explain it to them then it becomes a different understanding. But I don't think anybody has influenced them to really comprehend the significance of what it means to vote, historically as well as presently. I mean it's only, and if you always go back in history, that doesn't necessarily excite a young person.

BP: I was going to ask, so how do you explain it?

EM: I deal with current day issues. Look at Sean Bell, I mean I deal with anything we have current that caused a major catastrophe and attention to you, so you have to relate it to them, to where they are because I think many of our older, we try to talk about what Martin Luther King fought for, that doesn't mean much to them, unless they came from that in the homes. We have to be able to communicate to them, where they are, the school that you attend, that's political, I mean, it has to be some more learning from us, or teaching from us in order to have them understand why it's so important to get out there and vote.

NL: Just another question, I'm wondering if also, are there a lot of people around here who are you know because I'm thinking from the perspective of West Indians, are there a lot of people around here who are you know eligible to vote, if that might be an issue too? Some people being here but not actually eligible to participate.

EM: Yeah, I used to work with Q, from the Caribbean Cultural Center right there on 222nd in the Bronx because, we had a lot of problems with eligibility, when it came to mostly immigrants voting. So we had a difficult time and they would always tell us, especially this area, that they were not residents or coming in [Crosstalk] so they were trying to get their papers done. So we would work at the Caribbean Association in order to make sure that could happen, Hugh Beckford.

BP: Oh, we should talk to him too. Hugh Beckford?

EM: Hugh Beckford, right. He's right up here, if you go to

NL: Is that where St. Luke's is?

EM: St. Luke's, right. If you go to St. Luke's his organization is there. He's really good.

NL: It's inside of the St. Luke's Parrish.

EM: You'll see a sign when you pass by. He's really good.

NL: Yeah, the minister at St. Luke's married me, I know him pretty well. Father Reed. I was wondering about that whole issue of you know people not actually, people living in a community, but not having a stake in it because their immigrants and how that plays out in local.

EM: Right, we try to work in order to make sure because you know all of us are in the community together, and like I said, you try to, you want to, I think we need to make sure that the communication is there where both groups understand that we're all fighting for the same cause and that immigration legislation on the national level affects everyone. So when the NAACP came out and supported the immigration bill, a lot of blacks may have gotten upset over all the immigration legislation. Blacks got upset because they felt that division would take away jobs for blacks but I think that we don't really see the connection of oppression that comes with the lack of people who are not represented from different cultures or communities and we have to do all that we can in order to make sure we have that tie to walk together.

BP: Is there anything about your personal history that you would like to add or any other thing that you would like to add as an end to you know, this document that we've just created, this oral history document?

EM: I think you should talk more about the church when you get into these things. The church plays a significant role in making sure that, number one you have a place to meet in if you're going to do any civil rights or political stand. A lot of our functions were held in the church.

BP: What were some of the important churches in this neighborhood that-

EM: I think Trinity Baptist where Reverend Lloyd used to be. His daughter is a pastor there now. Trinity Baptist is very important for the life of the community. Father Reed at St. Luke's, that's a very important establishment; and then you want to have, they helped us, whenever we had Al Sharpton or we had a rally that we needed we could go to those churches and the church becomes very significant.

BP: Historically.

EM: It's been important in terms of gathering, planning, coalescing, Martin Luther King and all of them understood this, and I think that as we move forward, church, even in the Bronx I think the Bronx lacks considerably when it comes to churches involved in activism. Harlem yes, Brooklyn absolutely, Queens yes, but you have few churches in the Bronx where you can really say that it's a place where it gets attention for its political activity, weather it be the church or the minister. And I think that we, as the NAACP, on the NAACP side of course stepped, but I think it wasn't something that we necessarily initiated, the leadership of churches.

NL: Right, its something you're not receptive to-

EM: And they're receptive to it if you initiate it. And they open their doors if you want it. But they don't necessarily spearhead the movement. Whereas Mount Vernon, any issue that come up the churches are the lead. Queens, Brooklyn, you could say churches are the lead, so I think that the Bronx-

NL: Right you have like Daughtry and those types of guys

EM: Right, and the Bronx, we don't, we have probably at local levels in South Bronx I know some preachers but not too many in Northeast Bronx. Not too many

NL: Wow, thank you for a great story. You know, we definitely appreciate it.