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Martin, Nicholas

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Transcriber: Angela Y. Dugan

Mark Naison (MN): Interview of the Bronx African-American History Project. We are here in the Bronx with Mr. Douglas Martin?

Nicholas Martin (NM): Nicholas Martin.

MN: Nicholas Martin.

NM: Yes.

MN: Who is the principal of P.S. 6 and grew up in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx. Joining us are at least 25 people who are teachers, and principals, and parent coordinators, and people from the district. So Mr. Martin, how did your family come to live in the Bronx?

NM: I was raised in Manhattan. Born rather -- I was born in Manhattan. My parents moved to the Bronx when I was approximately 5 years old. Moved to 659 Fox Street here in the South Bronx. Truthfully, I don't know exactly how they were able to secure the apartment. I remember the first apartment in Manhattan was a railroad flat. We moved to this apartment. They had three bedrooms, a living room, small kitchen. We lived in [unclear] on the 5th floor.

MN: Now where in Manhattan was your family living?

NM: They were on 98th street.

MN: [crosstalk]

NM: Pardon? I don't recall.

MN: So it was on the east side?

NM: Right it was on the east side.

MN: Right. Did your family have any other relatives living in the Bronx at the time?

NM: At that time they were all living on 98th street.

MN: Right, so your family was the first to move to the Bronx?

NM: Yes.

MN: What sort of work did your father do?

NM: My father worked on the docks. Basically he was a laborer, basically he was also a [unclear].

MN: Right was he in the union?

NM: At that given time, I truly, I don't know. I know that as a young boy I still remember when we finally had a phone. We had to man the phone because it was as though when he was called he was on court. So it was a matter of never knowing how much money you would earn, how many hours you'd have to put in, and things of that nature.

MN: What was Fox Street like when you first moved there? What are your earliest memories?

NM: I remember again, very tall buildings. I lived across the street from 62. There were lace curtains in the hallways, the entrances. They were extremely clean. The level of the type of people that lived in the building. We had people of all many, many ethnic backgrounds. Jewish, Polish, German, Irish, Italian. At that given time that I can recall, very few Hispanics per se. We had a Yeshiva on the corner. There was a synagogue on one side of the street. There was a laundromat on the corner that everybody- -because you weren't allowed to have a washing machine or a dryer, so everyone did that. There was a deli on one side. There was a bodega. There was a Chinese laundry, I'm trying to think, other than that to my recollection.

MN: Was there a lot of street life on your block?

NM: Most definitely. I would say that all of us as children first of all would gather and play stick ball, marbles, activities like that. We were very fortunate because not many people can

afford to have cars, so you had two and three cars, you'd speak to the neighbor, they'd move the car, you'd play stick ball. You had a level of camaraderie, in terms of all the boys and girls got along with each other, and it was extremely diverse. I still remember on Friday I used to go down and the rabbi used to give me 5 cents for me to turn on the lights.

MN: Now did you feel when you were playing in the street that people were watching over you?

NM: Yes. It was no doubt about it, regardless of who you were. And again all different backgrounds. They could tell you, I know your mother, where you're going, it could be three blocks away. Everybody in the community knew everyone, from that point of view.

MN: Were there any movie theaters near - -

NM: Yes on Southern Boulevard there used to be a - -used to be called the Ace Theater. I think I remember you used to go and you could pay 25 cents, you'd see three movies, 25 cartoons, and you'd get a slice of pizza and a soda for 25 cents.

MN: And how old were you when you were first allowed to go to the movies?

NM: Well at first my mother and father would escort me in, because sometimes I was [unclear] so they wouldn't let me go in as a junior. I would say maybe ten years old - -eleven years old.

MN: What language was spoken in your home?

NM: Okay in my home we spoke Spanish as well as English. My dad, I think, spoke limited English. My mother was bilingual in the sense that she could correct my college papers. Needless to say, she had a very clear accent, but again, the discussion at home was in Spanish. And then sometimes we'd code switch.

MN: Now were your parents born in Puerto Rico.

NM: My mother was born in Puerto Rico [unclear]. My father was born in Tampa, Florida.

MN: Wow.

NM: My father was born in Tampa, Florida, raised in Cuba, but he traveled back and forth because my grandfather was a [unclear]. Her used to do - -in Tampa you had all the cigar - -

MN: Oh right, of course.

NM: So my grandfather would travel back and forth, and he would - -there was a level of education.

MN: So this was a mixed marriage, Cuban Puerto-Rican?

NM: Yes, yes.

MN: Okay. Did your family have ties in both countries that were preserved?

NM: I would say so. I think I was able to be exposed to understanding the different nuances, be it culturally through different nationalities. The nuances culturally language wise, understanding colloquialism, idiomatic expressions from all respective languages.

MN: Was music a big part of your household?

NM: Most definitely. I remember at that time, there was the transistor radio as well.

MN: Right.

NM: During that time, and the music was phenomenal.

MN: Now what music did your parents listen to?

NM: I think my parents listened again, to a great deal of Spanish music, the classics. My dad, I remember, brought in these albums which was the [Spanish phrase] which referred to in terms of Afro-Cuban.

MN: Right.

NM: These were two orchestras.

MN: Yes.

NM: And that was really when you referred to Afro-Cuban music. That's the foundation of Latin music for New York City.

MN: Now did your parents ever take you to live music performances?

NM: My mother and father, I think as a family, we were raised - -we were very, I think we were very close as a family. In other words, I know I didn't have that latitude to go. I didn't have a big family. It was basically my sister and I. But I remember as a young kid, I was 15 years old, and I started shaving very early, and my friends were much older. And they were going to go to the Palladium. And the Palladium is Uptown, oh my gosh it's dangerous, this and that, and I remember my father sitting down with me, and I got the courage to ask if I could go. My mother was going to have a conniption, and my father told me - -I remember he gave me 10 dollars, he said look, you put on a suit, if you have to buy somebody a drink, you buy somebody a drink. I just want you to go to see for yourself. And I went there and I liked to dance and listen to the music. Later on when I got older I went, but yes, I went to some of those clubs.

MN: What was your school experience like?

NM: I attended 62, which is an elementary school.

MN: What street was that on?

NM: That's right on Fox Street. It's right across the street from 659 Fox Street. My building's right across the street from the school. Then from there you made a tremendous leap. You went to 52. 52 when I think back now as a grown man, God forgive me for saying it, but to a degree sometimes, it was a bucket of blood. It was the type of school where a parent would take you in,

you say a little prayer, you had to make your way through. It was an all boy school, and it was a tough school.

MN: Yes. Is your building that you lived in still standing?

NM: I believe so.

MN: Did it have fire escapes?

NM: Yes it did, and oh that's another thing. In the apartments in the back [unclear] industries, there were all the metal gates that you'd have to put in the back.

MN: Right. Did any people do things on the roof in your neighborhood?

NM: Needless to say, some of us weren't allowed to go on the roof. You'd fly kites. You don't stop to be careful because there was a time later on where there was a scourged use of narcotics, so you had to be very careful on the roof.

MN: Your area was hit by - when do you first recall the narcotics coming into your neighborhood?

NM: I think back now as a young boy, I would say about, I was about 12 years old. I remember vividly in the summer you would see the guys walking up and down the block, and the way you could determine that the scourge was taking place, was everybody walked with their sleeves rolled halfway. It was a sad commentary, but as time went on you'd see brothers, sisters, and they got strung out. That started in Longwood. It drove down from Longwood all the way down into the area of the South Bronx, and families were devastated, the [unclear] went on, and a lot of other things started to take place.

MN: So when you first moved to the neighborhood you felt completely safe and protected.

NM: We were definitely safe and protected, and we were also - -even during that period of time, we were safe, but you also knew that you'd have to put the radio on because people would break into your apartment because again, people that became drug addicts, unfortunately, were doing other things.

MN: Now in your school experience - -I mean today - -did you have language issues at all that were in the school?

NM: I think the one thing that we can say about that, at least for me, I really feel that the one thing that our communities had, maybe now I'm talking as an adult reflecting back, there was a level of poverty economically, but I will tell you across the board, ethnically for all people, there was one thing that was important. That was the family. There was a line of family, and that transcends all ethnic backgrounds that's present, that I know I experienced. It was a family piece.

MN: How did that contribute to the atmosphere in the school? I mean today -

NM: In the schools - -the one things that did take place in the schools. Let me say people - - when I say a bucket of blood, there was a lot of fighting outside of the school okay, but there was a common level of respect within the school, there wasn't a level of vandalism, there wasn't a level of defacing buildings or anything of that nature. There was a level of prospective respect within school.

MN: What were the relationships like between parents and teachers?

NM: I think that was predicated on again individual families. A significant number of parents worked in factories or worked in different fields so they I think, relinquished, and rightfully so - - relinquished and had trust in the people who were educating the children. But I think by and

large, I don't think there was a family, regardless of ethnic background, that would not think twice and not reprimand a child if they received [unclear].

Question from Audience (QA): [unclear]

NM: You had to - -there was a time within that specific area of the South Bronx where the level of narcotics addiction was such that it permeated - -just devastated that area. We're talking about minorities, it hit all parts. It hit the Jewish [unclear], the Irish [unclear], the Italian [unclear]. But I can relate back again to the area where I was raised. I think it decimated, it devastated those populations, so when I say safety, the issue was when you went downstairs, okay you sat downstairs. It wouldn't be uncommon for you to see in the street, two guys walking down the street with a couch that they've taken from some apartment, or a TV set. So that - -you have to be mindful of those type of things. Or you were leaving your school and you'd walk down - -you're on your way home, and you'd see some guy that just died of an overdose, or somebody gone nodding on the corner.

QA: Okay [unclear] people look at the Bronx and say that, has neighborhoods changed, has difference in the way -[unclear] that they came to the Bronx, that they came for the work and in fact [unclear].

NM: I think another critical issue was - -and again I have a very focused opinion on my behalf. I think that when I reflect back as a young man, and then again becoming an adult, that I think it was the application of the law and resources within respective communities that were not applied immediately. Okay let me give you a case and point. If you study historically, in the Bronx or in urban settings, and again I'm not defending the use of drugs, it says that, in my time if you were indiscreet and you happened to be standing on the stoop and there was somebody that you didn't

even deal with, but possibly maybe had a past [unclear] or pot or something of that nature, and you weren't engaged in them, and you just happened to - -and the police would come by, they would grab 3 or 4 people immediately, and make a collar and arrest everybody for intent to use drugs, and everyone was fingerprinted. So what I say to you is [unclear] the law wasn't at times prudent, and again it's a sad commentary. If that didn't take place [unclear] and these are just realities. So again I just feel, as an adult reflecting back, I look at that. It's just like when you go to New York City, you see the application of the law, you see the way services are administered, all these things had an impact - -I believe had an impact.

QA: [unclear] What did you have to overcome?

NM: Okay there was an interesting thing. Again I would say many of us - -I'm talking about my contemporary - -we were rich in the sense that we had family. If it could be a single parent, it was a family, it was a nucleus. There was a level of character, there was a level of responsibility, and that was constantly there regardless of them. When I was in junior high school, very interesting, you could only go to a high school that was delineated for your geographic area. And we were only allowed to go to Morris High School. And what you say about Morris High School was great, but there was a great difference between the composition of students and environment in Morris High School as opposed to other high schools in the Bronx, regardless of what anyone says. You couldn't go to, say Clinton, and Clinton was very, very different - -Clinton was going to like a Harvard. Harvard in the sense of the environment, in the lack of violence. So I had this one teacher, very, very interesting guy. His name was Shelvin Marcus, and he was a social studies teacher. What he did was, he got in touch with our parents and he was pushing for us to go to Clinton High School, however, for a few of us - -I guess he

was going to talk to somebody, and 3 or 4 of my colleagues or my friends, went to Clinton. I did not go. I went to Central Commercial High School because again, you were raised - -depends - - you were raised that you wanted to go to college, but you had to get a trade. You had to make sure if something happened to your mother, something happened to your father, you could make a couple of dollars. So Dr. Marcus took the group of us, it was very interesting, and he took us to Yeshiva University - -he was doing his doctorate work, I didn't know that at the time, and I remember the first time I went to the university I saw a bunch of people of the Jewish faith engaged in a [unclear] - -so anyway, he supported us in a nice way. From there, he became a full professor at Fordham University, as a matter of fact I believe - -I may be wrong - -he was the first Jewish professor [unclear], and even some of his work was possibly used for Pulitzer. So what I say to you is that I made those choices, but I find because of my family, the guidance person, we moved out of the Bronx. You have to go to other places for exposure. So I went on to Central Commercial where they had a special program there with an academic curriculum, and we did that.

QA: [unclear]

NM: Yes in the junior high schools, I remember that was the first time that we had phenomenal music teachers. His name was Mr. Wright, was an African-American phenomenal. The guy was - -I mean he was class, aside from not only being a role model, he dressed impeccably, his diction was there. I learned how to use the word ambition. I learned how to play the trombone. There were many of us, so I learned how to appreciate the reading of music. We were also able to rent the instruments, you're right, 5 cents a day. That's what it was. You were able to rent the instruments five cents a day. And as time went on, later on when I went to high school, the

schools experienced some difficulties, because you had to be careful having a kid walk down from a school with a trumpet or a trombone, or somebody's going to do a number on him and hurt him. And that no one talks about, but that had an impact. Just like I have a reservation on lap tops, you have to be careful.

QA: What was some of the jobs that you had straight out of high school [unclear].

NM: Let's start back with this one. When you're a kid and they say you can't make money, that's not true because if you were willing to turn around and deliver laundry to five flights up and have a lady give you 5 cents and 15 bottles you were rich, so people could do that. Young boys and girls could do that, so that came with a work ethic. You could go to a supermarket and carry groceries. You could go to a Jewish deli and make a delivery. You could do that at a bodega. Later on when I went into high school, since it was Central Commercial High School on 42nd street, I was able to get a job at an office working part-time at the school, and in college the same thing. But that's because, remember, the schools were located in places with industry. You're talking about learning the nomenclature, how people support themselves, how they dress, these are all things that work out. So those are all jobs that I did.

QA: What about [unclear]

NM: This is painful for me. We have two sons and my sons are young men, almost 30 years old and other boy is 27. And sometimes he'll ask me, and he'll say, dad how come you don't have any friends from when you were old. And I think that's the part that I find painful, and I would say the vast majority fell into drugs, got involved in prison, it's a sad commentary. I don't think in my heart, I think I've got maybe two guys that I know that are my contemporaries from the South Bronx, and that's a very painful issue because you look at it. But I also think that you

have to make choices. You have to learn to want, and you have to learn to roll with that punch, but you also and I think this is where our kids are very fortunate, and I don't think they realize it yet. They have the ability to be resilient, to be street smart. It's let's do it in a socially acceptable fashion. But I feel - -it's awful for me to say that, it's just a reality. I guess other people could say differently. For me I experienced that.

QA: Also brought up, one of the things that [unclear] after-school programs [unclear]

NM: Okay I went to a night center, and also I was in the police department for almost 14 years, and I worked in East Harlem, and when we talk about night centers, and you've got to be very real about this, night centers were only good if the people that were administering it made sure that there was a level of equality for all kids, because if you were playing pool, then not just a big dude could control the pool table. So that all depends on who is running the center and making sure that there's a level of safety where all those kids can get a turn. Because I will tell you Paul, there were night centers that were just controlled by a bunch of thugs and then you had others- - it's like a classroom. When you're in high school, it's how you run a class. If you're studying the parameter, you're the adult. So I agree with that when they say it, but I also have to tell you I think there's a problem with that - -like for me.

QA: [unclear] You had people that were very concerned [unclear] but for the most part they were doing it because they had a love for children -

NM: 3 to 5 [unclear] they used to have it in the elementary school, yes.

QA: That's really saying an awful lot about politicians [unclear] -

NM: Yes but parents knew where you were.

QA: Another thing, you lived very close to what we now consider the hub of the [unclear]. The 149th street area and Third Avenue, what was your experience [crosstalk]

NM: I didn't remember [crosstalk]. I lived on Fox, so we'd walk down Southern Boulevard all the way up. Your mother would give you the money, you'd pocket it so you'd walk right, and then you go to Herr's or Alexander's. You'd get a slice of pie, they used to sell pie for [unclear] cents. You'd kick in, or else you'd go swimming at St. Mary's Park.

MN: What kind of pie?

NM: Apple pie, you name them. And when the people in our neighborhoods, we'd realized - - Sue again, my sister [unclear] you realize we didn't have money. You'd go and you'd buy and, when we realized relatively speaking [laughter] but the truth is that we go back to the fact that we have family. We had family and people cared, and nobody went hungry. But you respected things. You respected property and you respected people. But we used to go St. Mary's Park, we'd go swimming. The membership was one dollar, and then you'd go in and they'd charge you 15 cents or something like that. You'd go swimming there at St. Mary's Park.

QA: I have a previous memory of the Bronx [unclear]

NM: I think back on that block, it's hard for me - -I know the area because I used to walk through the areas, but that was after I was even older in college, and I mean that. I'd say this, I remember - -I realized the word is [unclear] but the - -there was a serious change in the moral and responsible crime of populations that started to go in. And I think what happened there was people relinquished their responsibilities to governmental agencies. If you think back about it sociologically, people say the advent of welfare. Many years ago at that time, if you had a - -I remember I had friends, all of a sudden the mother or father had a difficult situation, whatever it

was and the dad left. When the father left, the parent - -and this is as evolution took place, the parent was given some type of support. Now what would happen was, at that time if I remember correctly, case workers could come into your apartment 24 hours a day, you couldn't have a phone, you couldn't have a TV. So now, if you have a male that's working in a factory, and again I'm not [unclear], and working and making 30 dollars a week, whatever it is and breaking his chops doing that and trying to support a family, and he disappears for that second - -for whatever it was, and it wasn't breaking the family, but now the mother is receiving that help. When she's receiving that help, like anyone else, you try to bring the family back together. The man comes back into the house, but when he comes back into the house though, the deal is that now if she continues receiving that money couple with your money, maybe you can do something. But what happened was, the case worker would come, and all of a sudden they'd give that parent or whoever it was would say the case worker's coming - -so the man would leave the house, but in leaving the house, sometimes their wife, right or wrong, I don't know if it's temptation or moral point of view - -what happened was that impacted on the fiber of the actual matrimony. And no one talks about that, and that transcends many ethnic groups. But that also gave rise to some of those situations. Again, that's my opinion, so logically.

QA: I have one more question, when you were growing up, in your mind you knew you were going to be a [unclear] you were going to be a principal?

NM: No, when I was growing up first of all, like all of us here, we used to watch [unclear] Omaha, we used to watch National Geographic. Our education - -Our TV Programs were very different. The level of literacy, no matter who you were, no matter what language you were, the level of English was far superior from what you see today. So from that point of view, your

levels of aspirations were different. I can honestly say I think the level of nuance on behalf of instructors on behalf of the children, what they see on TV, is not the same. In no way is it the same. So another thing, you talked about religion - -in our areas you had a lot of Pentecostal and Catholic Churches. No matter what you say, everybody's talking about [unclear]. That's what kids have. When your grandmother took you to church, you're with your mother and you're listening to the sermon, those were [unclear] if you're Pentecostal. They were hearing voice, they were hearing verbs, adjectives. That's nonexistent today. Today I have a grandmother come in, she comes in, she's ready to go an after hours call. They don't come in [unclear] So these are all critical issues that have impacted on the parenting, on instruction and everything else. So was I going to be a teacher? I loved teaching, I taught - -and I'll tell you what, I taught for a year at Central Commercial High School because I wanted to go back, and then like everything else, I talked about the contract. You only have two nickels to rub the first year, and I had a friend and I was very [unclear] and I always wanted to go into the police department, it turns up - -it's awkward, but writing wrong, looking at things. And what happened was, I was accepted into the police department on June 30th, and it was right after I finished my school year. So I went into the police academy, and then from there my hopes were to go and become - -get assigned to get a patch, and instead they send me to the 23rd precinct. The 23rd precinct is basically a very interesting mosaic. The 23rd precinct is in Manhattan. The parameters there were from 86th Street to 110th street, so think about it. Geographically, there were people in that precinct that run this [unclear]. You're talking about the wealthiest people in the world, lived in those areas.

BREAK IN TAPE

NM: You had the Spanish Harlem and part of Central Harlem, so it was very interesting I was assigned there. When I was assigned there as a rookie cop, I would teach during the day, and work as a cop at night. And what happened, you're talking about gangs, that's when the real serious gangs were taking place - -I'm talking within the 70's, and what happened was, as a rookie cop you work four to twelve, and your lucky if you can get a locker, and I go to the precinct, and the [unclear] Irish sergeant behind the desk goes Mud, I say yes - -you have to see the inspector - -now you have to understand it's not like the Board of Ed of police department [unclear]. So you never saw the inspector or captain. That did not exist. Their people didn't speak to you. So with that, I go get dressed, I go downstairs, and they tell me you're driving the inspector - -I've never drove a police car in my life, and they throw this key at me, and now the inspector was in charge of - -he was the highest ranking officer working from 59th street all the way to the top of Manhattan, from river to river. So he would go to the precinct [unclear] and he'd sign. So he was a very progressive guy. And I say progressive very interesting, he passed away, his name was Solomon Groves. Very intelligent guy, happened to be Jewish in a very, very dominant Irish Catholic organization. He was just very, very open. So what he does as I'm driving him, and then he tells me Nick I want to ask you a question. Why did you never come to me with your background? And what happened was I came in, I was a college graduate before, and I'm going to use that carefully, before affirmative action, so I guess I was atypical in a way, and I was an idealist. So I said to him, what do you mean by that, because you do it the right way. And I didn't have a hook. My family weren't Irish cops, or Italian cops. I didn't have a hook, I didn't know somebody. [laughter] So then what happened was he took me and pulled me out of uniform because, when the stabbings and shootings took place, there were a bunch of

people running into the precinct at that time, and so I said why isn't this the Martin [unclear], because when I was a teacher at Central Commercial, I started the first [unclear]. And that was in the 60's when everything was going on. So then I was taken out of uniform, and that's history. So from there I did that. I worked in different aspects of the police department. The [unclear] division. Narcotics undercover, organized crime, and committee relations, but it was in committee relations, [unclear], it was something where you had to understand politics and dynamics. So in that capacity I would represent the inspector at committee training board, so as I shared with you before, I worked at a place where people that were head of the planning board were people that had a lot of Jews. I'm talking about political Jews. Racy Mancher was there, Kauffers Parkland. So here you are with one group of people, you're learning about politics in a classroom with people who have Gucci shoes, and they're politically [unclear]. Then the other day I would be in Central Harlem going through a community planning board meeting where the people would be predominantly African-American, Hispanic, so you learn those aspects. And again I left the police department, I continued teaching. What I did was, I started teaching full-time in Spanish Harlem where I stayed, and then I took the test and then I moved on. But I think the truth is, when I think back about it, I went full circle, because I'm still in our community.

QA: How did your experience as a policeperson impact what you do now as an educator?

NM: I think that it's not all that I worked as a police officer. I think it's exposure to understanding social dynamic, political dynamic, understanding the plight of many of the kids in our communities, whatever ethnic background. So I do have a different person from that point of view. I think it's critical, and I just look at it. You can be an emasculated system, going back to that aspect about narcotics. Why I said this, and this is very important. During the late 60's, if I

remember correctly, the late 60's, decriminalization of pot took place, and the reason decriminalization of pot took place, you say it was right, it was wrong, people shouldn't get locked up, but the bottom line was [unclear] kids that were going to Harvard, Brown - -and they were going to get locked up. They were going to get finger-printed, and their asses were going to go to jail [laughter], so what happened was the laws changed because it's there. Because I tell you the contemporaries of mine, and they were not drug addicts, because they happened to be in the neighborhood, be in the place, they were fingerprinted, so when they went to apply for jobs, they had to fill out that they were arrested. It doesn't say whether you were convicted or not. So I go back to that piece so those were aspects that I've seen. I will say this though, despite anything that I feel as a principal in my heart, I think that the bottom line is that we as a people, no matter what our ethnic backgrounds are have to strive for literacy and compete. And I have to tell you something [unclear] you have to hustle, you have to work hard, you have to want. Just like you want to buy a pair of sneakers, you have to do that, you want [unclear], it's your problem. The reality is it's a global society and our kids have to be able to compete and get a piece of pie. If they don't, our kids have a lot of opportunities today. We have to fight, we have to compete. Today all you have to do is breathe and they pick you up like this, and they give you the scholarships and they do things like that. So it's had an impact on me. An impact that, honestly [unclear], but I will not deny injustices because that part is learned. I learned that. Going back to a very important piece. I remembered many years ago, I was in a police precinct, it was 12 o'clock at night, and all of a sudden this man comes in, very well-dressed man. Turns out he's a judge and that they want some kid who happened to be of another background, got locked up for pot - -I never saw it in my life - a judge comes out and does the preliminary so the

guy could walk out, he's a young kid. How many of our kids went to jail. Again, that doesn't make it right. I'm just saying it's the application of law, but I think that we as teachers and principals have to be mindful of that, because I don't think the law is forgiving.

MN: Now I have a question for you. Did you become street smart on Fox Street? Is that something you learned, to negotiate what was really dangerous, and what you could handle, how you could protect yourself and still be part of the crowd, because that's a difficult thing for all –

NM: I think all young men and women negotiate out a lesson in various ways. So you have to learn to say hey what's up, how are you doing, and move forward. You have to learn how to do that. I think that given those scenarios, but I think the bottom line is it's something that you have to want and that should also be engendered by parents, by people around you as well.

MN: When did your family finally leave Fox Street, what year?

NM: It's about maybe 1963. '63, my sister, we moved to Jackson Heights, Queens.

MN: Right, so you left before the fires.

NM: Huh?

MN: You left the neighborhood before the fires?

NM: No there were parts - -I worked the riots as a police officer in East Harlem, and I was deployed here in the Bronx looking at my neighborhood burned down on 49th street.

MN: Now would you a police officer during the blackout - -now this is an important thing because this is an important subject I think, maybe to look at. There weren't major riots in the Bronx in the 60's, or were there?

NM: The Bronx during that riot situation, 149th street, they devastated that area. It was the 70's.

MN: It was the blackout. Because in the 60's, you had riots in Bed-Stuy and Harlem, but I don't think there were any major burning of Bronx districts in the 60's. Now the '77 blackout, were you on the police force during then?

NM: The 70's, yes I was.

MN: Okay what was your recollection of the night of the blackout in the Bronx?

NM: It was very frightening. I think that I remember going to Manhattan and getting deployed up to the Bronx, and it's a sad commentary, because I remember in uniform just standing there, and the people were devastated. There were police officers, I think they were definitely afraid also, rightfully so. And there were a lot of innocent people that were just burned. Their environments, their stores, it was a sad commentary. But it was bizarre, it really was bizarre.

MN: I actually remember, I was at 168th and Broadway, and there was gunfire on 168th and Broadway that night, though that wasn't - -but apparently you were in the hub when this was going on because [unclear] sections of that.

NM: They sent a significant contingent of law enforcement people into the Bronx, that's what it was.

MN: Now when you saw all that happening, and you saw what happened to your neighborhood, did you ever think the Bronx would be rebuilt the way it has been now?

NM: Yes, I think that after awhile you'd see there was a change, there was a level of sophistication. We also had a different caliber of teacher, curriculums were different, I think people were not as orthodox in teaching and talking about specific issues. There's no doubt about that. You can see now, even gentrification as its taking place right now. You recognize that there is a change.

MN: That raises an interesting question about education because -- in what ways do you think the schools now, are better than the schools when you were growing up?

NM: I will say this to you, I think that -- I don't think they're necessarily better. I don't think they're necessarily better. I think that people that are studying policy are in denial of a very serious component, and the component is citizenship, is character, is morality. I had a person interview me one day and talk about this issue, what's the key for education, you know more money. That's a standard statement, more money. But the issue is, do you really need that much more money? Why do I have to spend two-hundred twenty-five dollars to lock down a computer? Why do I have to spend seven thousand dollars per set of books? Are children, as well as community have also value -- you have to value things that are taking place. So when I say the schools not necessarily better, I think what's lacking is a moral and spiritual fiber, and I'm pushing an envelope, but I think that's a critical issue.

MN: Is that something that schools produce?

NM: I can't -- I'd be inappropriate in saying that, but I'm saying that all we can do here as adults as responsible people models, share with them the enthusiasm, create the synergy, the levels of aspiration, also share valuable information with parents in terms of guidance. That's a critical issue too. But what I'm saying is I think children have more choices, but I don't feel in my heart that they're availing themselves of those choices. I say that to you [unclear] university today, you go to [unclear] Indiana you can't get into university because you have to have a car. Here you have public transportation, you have a lot of things available to you, and our children have to rec -- that's why so many of the young men and women coming from some of the other nations, where unfortunately they didn't have the resources, some of them are realizing that you

avail yourselves of those opportunities. And I think our kids have to - -we have to constantly talk about that with them because the opportunities are there. You just have to pick up and look, but you have to take the test. Nobody's going to take the test for you. Again that's my opinion.

MN: Now if you look back on your experience growing up in the Bronx, what are the things you look back on the most fondly in your upbringing - -and that gave you resources and social capital for the rest of your life?

NM: I think the most important thing to me is the value of having a family nucleus, having people within my family, as well as around the community that model responsibility and don't look for excuses. I think that's very important. In our communities, people across the street would grab you and say, come over here, what are you doing. Today, that's not the case, so I think it's more a fiber, and I think and I also feel very strongly –

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Tape 1, Side B

NM: And I hope it's not taken out of context. As a person of my ethnic background, I think something that's critical is that the men have to take responsibility for relationships, for children as well as women. So therefore, we're not giving words to widgets, we have children and when you have a child you have a responsibility, and I think that's critical.

MN: Well this is an issue that a lot of people are talking about. What is different do you think in the environment that men who are brought up in the 40's and 50's, and the young men today. How much of it is economics, and how much of it is moral and cultural issues?

NM: Again, I would have [unclear] I'm very biased from my own point, but I think it comes down to family, it comes back to modeling, it comes back to not tolerating, accepting that - -talk

about hip hop music, I mean you want to talk about the most repulsive terminology that's used and used to describe women. I mean that's reinforced and I don't think that's cute, that's beyond comprehension. You don't have to be reminded of things like that. The fact is we have to move forward and I think it comes down to moral fiber, in terms of a religion, I don't say it's organized religion, but I think you need a level of spirituality and I think you have to have ethics. And I also feel that within our schools, people that are here as teachers have a responsibility to model that type of decorum, coupled with the fact that parents can no longer relinquish their responsibilities. When we talk about education, the onus is always on the educator. It's a semi-biotic relationship. In other words, parents, adults, all have a responsibility to do that up to a point here --when I bring in a kid [unclear] but yet I can't have a parent give a kid a dollar to buy a sandwich in the bodega. Something is wrong. Let's go back to buying spicy ham and making a sandwich, because they're not doing it. I don't think our society is that forgiving, and if you look at the United States and different areas, you'll understand that that transcends all ethnic backgrounds. It's a matter of family and values.

MN: Okay thank you very much Mr. Martin.

END OF INTERVIEW