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Kogolo, Raymond, Jr.

Kogolo, Raymond, Jr. Bronx African American History Project
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Transcriber: Akeim Samuels

Ogonetojoh Okoh (OO): Okay, my name is Ogonetojoh Okoh; I am interviewing Raymond Kogolo Jr. for the Bronx African-American History Project, November 7, 2005 at Fordham University. Hi, Raymond?

Raymond Kogolo Jr. (RK): How are you doing?

OO: Good, so do I need to ask him to spell his name?

Brian Purnell (BP): Yes.

OO: Can you spell your name?

RK: Last name? R-A-Y-M-O-N-D K-O-G-O-L-O Jr.

OO: Okay Raymond, where were you born?

RK: Where was I born? Lagos, Nigeria.

OO: What date?

RK: October 16, 1980.

OO: Okay, when did you move to the U.S.?

RK: Um, U.S.! My mom, she was working in the airline business, she was with the Nigeria Airways for a couple of years, long time, 20 years I think, so she was on and off constantly, and when she was coming here she basically stayed in New Jersey first, then she started falling in love with the Bronx when she came and was in a hotel in New York downtown, and came to the Bronx one time and saw that there was a lot of places close by where you don't have to walk a long distance to get where you want to be. So that's why she was like, "Alright, next time I'm going to come here, I am going to stay in the Bronx", and I think the next time she did was in 1988 when she was pregnant with my younger brother. So then I came in a year after 1981, but I did not stay, we did not stay that long because I was like on and off; then if you talk about me coming in finally and residing was in 2000.

OO: In 2000?

RK: Yes, that was when I came and resided, that's when I got finished high school in 1997, I was working within that period from 1997 to 2000 so I wanted to come over and stay permanently because I was going to go to college in Fordham University.

OO: So you spent your high school in Nigeria.

RK: Yes, I did 6 years of high school in Nigeria.

OO: And when you moved to the U.S., where in the Bronx did you live?

RK: Valentine Avenue, it's not far from here the Grand Concourse.

OO: Okay, what neighborhood is that?

RK: Valentine, 182, 183 right on top.

OO: Alright, how many siblings do you have?

RK: I have three siblings.

OO: And you live with your mother?

RK: Yes, I stay with my mom.

OO: And do you still live with her?

RK: Yes, I stay with her.

OO: And you are a senior at Fordham University, studying?

RK: Political science major, then I got a double in African and African-American studies and Sociology.

OO: Okay. What was it like growing up in your neighborhood, what were some of your memorable childhood experiences growing up in the Bronx?

RK: In the Bronx.

OO: Actually you were in high school back in Nigeria.

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RK: Yes, but I was here, before I went to high school that was a couple of years ago, I had pretty much my childhood here in the Bronx. I had friends at that time mostly Spanish or Black friends, there weren't any whites.

OO: There weren't any whites in your neighborhoods?

RK: I did not see any whites.

OO: Okay, so most of the kids you hung out with were African-American and Latino kids.

RK: There weren't any whites, and so pretty much most of the guys I grew up with because when you are in the Bronx, close vicinity, you have to be friends, you know, especially when you see someone walk by saying, "Hey, what's up; how are you doing?" that's how you start talking, so that's pretty much the guys I grew up, you know, we talk. I had like two close African-American friends, who we still see eye-to-eye today, and I had I think one Puerto-Rican friend, who goes to SUNY college.

OO: Okay. Did you meet most of them in the neighborhood or through school?

RK: Neighborhood; right up one Valentine, right there.

OO: So was it an apartment complex?

RK: Yeah, it was an apartment complex.

OO: Okay. So what was it like growing up in your house with your mom being Nigerian, and you being Nigerian, what were some of the differences or maybe even similarities that you saw you had with your friends; you know, interacting with them?

RK: Differences would be, most of the time African-American friends mistake me to be Spanish because of my complexion.

OO: Oh, interesting.

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RK: And I'm like, "No I'm not", you know, and the only they could tell is when I talk, but just by my complexion, a lot of people besides them, even my mom's friends thought I was too, because my skin color is fair complexion, I am not dark. Because when you say African, they expect you to be really - -

OO: Jet black.

RK: Exactly.

OO: Okay.

RK: And I am not because my mom is not because she has the same exact skin tone as mine.

OO: So your accent marked you out more than - -

RK: Helped me out, yes, more than my appearance.

OO: Okay.

RK: Then the similarities, pretty much we had everything in common, we had fun, you know, we all like sports. My African-American friends and I liked football. My Puerto-Rican friend liked baseball. Puerto-Ricans tend to go to that side.

OO: Did you guys ever come together in soccer, or is that not part of the mix?

RK: Nah! I liked soccer, but they didn't because my African-American friends were like, "How the hell do you", excuse my, they were like, "How do you play with your foot?"

OO: Yeah, they did not understand.

RK: They did not understand that.

OO: But you grew up in Nigeria playing soccer a lot, right?

RK: That was when I got into high school.

OO: Okay.

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RK: That's basically is either you are in the soccer team, or you play soccer, or you are on the track, if you are not on those two, probably you will be doing volleyball or tennis.

OO: I didn't know volleyball was popular in Nigeria.

RK: Yes it is, especially in high school because, you know, we played mixed with boys and girls, and we had fun. It was more mixed than just a single gender sport because you know that's just the way it was. But if you weren't on track or the field team or whatever, you playing soccer, but most of the time it was soccer because after classes everybody was running back to the dorms to get take off their clothes, and wear shorts to go out and go play soccer.

OO: So what kind of community organizations were you involved in while you were living in the Bronx growing up?

RK: In the Bronx growing up, church (Saint Simon Stock) it is like two or three blocks from my house, that's where we went to church. The priests/fathers have been good to my mom. I went there for a year, and came out. My younger siblings went through Saint Simon Stock Elementary School. So it was good because that's what my mom always wanted. She wanted every one of her children to experience religious private school.

OO: Was it Catholic?

RK: Yes, it was.

OO: But is your mom Catholic?

RK: My mom is Anglican.

OO: Okay, what were some of the similarities?

RK: But she became Catholic because she got married to my father. My father is Catholic, and you know the way tradition is where a woman leaves everything of hers and follows her man. So that's what she did although we went to her church when we got to the village back in Nigeria.

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OO: And this was in Imo State?

RK: Yes, but she brought us up in a Catholic way.

OO: Um, were there any cultural institutions you were involved in while you were in New York, any cultural associations, often there are ethnic associations or Nigerian unions that perhaps existed in different neighborhoods. Were you guys involved in any of that?

RK: I think my mom was involved in that, she was in Imolite Sisters. They had a branch here, and had a bigger branch in Nigeria.

OO: So they have branches in New York.

RK: Yeah, but it is not as popular as back there where she had meetings like every week when we went back there. They were all dressed in the native attire, and I usually said she looked nice, and she takes the car and drives off.

OO: But you guys did not really participate in all that.

RK: Nope, I did not have time for that.

OO: You were busy doing sports.

RK: Exactly, because you know a young man growing up, you did not have time for that.

OO: Yeah. So were there any other organizations you were involved in growing up?

RK: I went for a leadership course, I can't remember the name right now, but it was a leadership stuff I went to and did it, and it helped me out a little bit because we built us to be leaders in the future, be a better person, how to overgrow up, and overgrow all that childish attitudes especially when people put you in a situation where they expect you to perform and lead for other people to follow; so I went for that.

OO: How many years were you involved in this?

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RK: For a year and a half. Then I got out and they gave us, at the end, a certificate or something like that.

OO: Was this in high school, or junior high?

RK: This was during high school.

OO: Okay, wonderful. So what was it like going back between Nigeria and here; what were your impressions of having to deal with that going back and forth?

RK: Well, I think the only time I was probably pissed off is when we had to go back, and I was like, "Oh no, I got to go be in a situation where they got to go take off the light because the light wasn't constant, and you had to put on the generator". I think that was pretty much it because besides that, I mean, every time I went back I was always happy to go back because I had family there. So when I go back I see all my family and cousins, I had a lot of cousins.

OO: Most of your extended family is in Nigeria.

RK: Exactly, we are a very large family so I was happy to go back, as long as you don't take the light too much. You know that was just the only thing, besides that everything was good.

OO: Did you spend most of your time in Lagos or did you go back to the Imo?

RK: Usually we go, the village was just - - That's where my grandmother stayed, and the only time we all came together, everybody, was during Christmas. Everybody comes together in Christmas, and stays together until like a week after New Year. So it's like you can say the family sees everybody once a year, and my grandmother said, "You all can do whatever you want to do, but just make sure you get yourselves back to the village before December 25th."

OO: Were you guys able to do that every year? Oh yeah, we were able to do that pretty much every year, you know, because it was something mandatory. If you don't, my grandmother is going to come visit you, and that's not a pretty sight.

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OO: So the main differences you saw here were just the resources, electricity, running water, those kinds of things.

RK: Pretty much, and television.

OO: Television, okay.

RK: Television wasn't 24 hours, it was 12 hours.

OO: And your schooling, did you go for the school year, and came back in the summer?

RK: Summer - - summer - - when we had vacations I usually came back here.

OO: Okay, and do you have uncles and aunts in New York?

RK: Yeah, I have an uncle in Brooklyn, he is an accountant. He has been here for a while.

OO: Um, so what did you think of getting half of your education in Nigeria, how do you think that's influenced your ability to be here in the Bronx, and your education, how has that influenced your education as well?

RK: It helped me a lot, it helped me a lot; I have no regrets.

OO: In what ways?

RK: I have no regrets. It made me grow - - it's like I grew faster in terms of wisdom, in terms of being more mature. Going to school here, the difference here and there is that the school here, how would I put it, the life experience in terms of going to high school is not as intense or tenuous as the one back in Nigeria, especially I went to a boarding school and that built me up a whole lot because I was in a situation where I was by myself, there was no one around me. I had to take care of myself. When I got into school, I was in school probably by myself for like 6 months, situations came where I had no money.

OO: What did you do when you didn't have any money?

RK: Oh, there were a lot of ways.

OO: Did you work?

RK: My freshman year - - you see, that's the difference back there; high school there, you cannot work, it's not like here where you have the opportunity to work because it's flexible a little bit here, but back there you don't work, especially if you are in a boarding school, how am I going to work, you know - - nothing. So what I did every time the school year starts, if I am going to school with a thousand Naira; that's the currency back there; I get to school and start giving out money away to people who need the money, who want to borrow the money, then I will be like, "Pay me back whenever you feel like". And usually I am lucky because when it gets - - we have a period where if you're like two, four months into the school year, everybody starts getting broke, so usually when that comes, you better start paying me my money, start paying me my money with interest.

OO: Oh, so you were an entrepreneur.

RK: Exactly. You know you have to think smart. My freshman year - - that's the first day of - - it wasn't easy at all. But my second year, I wizened up; I wizened up a whole lot, so that's what I did, so every time it got to the broke period, I always had money on me, and people were like, "We all broke and hoping for our parents to come visit us and give us some money, but still living comfortable". I am like, "Well, you have to be smart, I could say that's when I started becoming independent, where I didn't need no help; my father was there, but he was pretty much negligent, so I was like okay, I am on my own, started taking care of myself.

OO: You said, "The first year you had trouble acclimatizing", what kinds of things did you find difficult that first year?

RK: Seniors. They were brutal, they would beat you up, and they would beat you up without any remorse, none whatsoever. They would expect you to do things that you, as a young boy at 11

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would be like, “Wow”! When you get back, you have to deal with the responsibilities of going to classes, when you get done with classes coming back to you dorm, you expect to probably go to sleep or get some rest before you do whatever chores you have to do. On the way back, seniors are calling you to their dorms to come and wash their clothes or do whatever or go get their meals, and you will be like perplexed, and if you don't do that, you will get a beating, that's just the way it is. Nobody sues anybody; it's just the way - - it's like a tradition in boarding school, that's the way it is. The seniors were brutal, the water wasn't that constant, I mean there were times that people stayed without showering; I can't do that. So what I did, I take a bucket, I go into the forest because we were close to the forest, there was a well that wasn't clean at all, so I what I did I get the water, I go back to my dorm, I get another bucket, and put a cloth over that bucket, and try to filter the water as much as I can, and get rid of whatever nonsense is there. Then use the water to finally take a shower, and most times the water is not going to be pure, it is not going to be clean, but what can you do.

OO: Do you think you were prepared to deal with that first year?

RK: My first year I was not, pretty much it wasn't just me, there were a lot of people who were not. The people that were probably okay, were the people where their parents came in more often to visit them.

OO: Okay.

RK: My father did not come in more often to visit, once I got in, I was on my own for like the rest of the - - you know. The only time I was probably lucky was when my mom would come back from the U.S. to come to Nigeria and come, you know, to stay awhile because I told you she's in the airline business, so she was on and off. But she was not so much in Nigeria because she was traveling all over the world; so the only time I was lucky was when she comes back, and

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when she comes back she comes to visit me, and she's like - - a couple of times she came back she wasn't happy with the way I was. She wasn't happy at all..

OO: The way you were, or - -

RK: The way I looked.

OO: The way you looked?

RK: Yeah, because I looked terrible.

OO: You looked hungry and fed up?

RK: Terrible, terrible. She would give me some money, and a couple of times that was what brought the dispute between her and my father. My mom would be like, you are here, and see what your child is going through, you're not even concerned because she would give me money, you know what I'm saying? She would buy me whatever, you know, was available. But the funny thing about it is, by the time you have all that, and you've taken all that back to your dorm, seniors are out there waiting for you.

OO: Waiting for you, exactly.

RK: And most of the - - if you are lucky, you might, the stuff your parents gave, you might be able to take it back to your dorm, but if you are not, you are going back empty handed. The only thing if you are lucky, is the cash.

OO: Yeah

RK: Because they don't know if you have cash or not, and usually when they give me cash I put it in my shoe, I don't put it in my pockets, I put it in my shoes because the seniors are going to check my pockets.

OO: So do you think that "savvy" that you picked up in Nigeria helped you in the Bronx in sort of moving around, and negotiating, getting through your daily experiences here?

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RK: Yes it did, because like I said, it gave me – it's like I grew, I grew faster mentally, intellectually, physically, however you put, I grew faster, I got wiser; when you talk about business, you could use the word “hustler”, I can hustle. You know, when its time to hustle, when it's time – that knowledge of what I got from high school is what I use 'till now, and that's what is helping me, that's pretty much it, and it built me a lot; that's why I said, I have no regrets, it was a tough life, but it helped a lot right now.

OO: How does that influence your relationships with your friends here and sort of the community that you live in?

RK: There is a big difference because when I look at my friends now, I am like “you don't know what life's about”. They still have everything handed to them, apparently handed to them pretty much; you know they don't have anything to worry about. I am like, “When you get to the real world where you have to be by yourself, you have to take care of yourself, and know that the world is not like that; especially when I see them with the other sex, females, the way they treat girls and everything, I am like that's not the way it is supposed to be. You know, you're not supposed to treat them the way you treat them or call them the names you call them, and that's part of being mature too, because if you are not mature, you would not be able to say all that.

OO: Right.

RK: You know.

OO: Do you think that that was based on your skills you learnt here with your mother, also in the community, in your leadership skills that you built up, and then also in Nigeria, you know, how those kinds of things conform your - -

RK: My mom helped me out, I was - - I would say my mom contributed a little, you know what I'm saying, not a little but a lot.

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OO: A lot.

RK: You know, got to give kudos when kudos is due when I was growing up as a child. But pretty much when I was a teenager, I brought myself up. I took care of myself ever since then, but when I was a child, yeah. And I don't blame her too much because she was not around, she was traveling, she was getting good pay, and took care of some other things. My father was supposed to be helping out, but he was not helping her, so you know.

OO: Was he in Nigeria the whole time?

RK: When I was in high school, he was in Nigeria the whole time.

OO: But before that, was he in Nigeria, or was he in the U.S.?

RK: He was still in Nigeria; he was coming in and out, in and out, in and out.

OO: Okay, what profession does he have?

RK: To tell you the truth, I don't know and I don't care.

OO: Okay, I have another question. So, I mean, do you consider the Bronx your home, I mean, how do you define home based on your going back and forth between Nigeria and here?

RK: The Bronx is a nice place.

OO: Is a nice place?

RK: Is a nice place. If you compare the Bronx with other neighborhoods like Brooklyn and Harlem, you would see the difference.

OO: And what's that difference?

RK: The difference is the environment is not that hostile. I mean it is a little bit hostile, but it is not as hostile as Brooklyn, Harlem, you know, those kinds of places.

OO: When you say hostile, what do you mean?

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RK: That means, you can walk – there are some places in the Bronx where you can walk with your mind at rest, you don't have to look back all the time, and get worried, because in Brooklyn, I have been in situations where I have had to turn around and look at who is behind me, or what is coming behind me, just in case. The Bronx here, probably because of the history or whatever, the climate and environment right here is a little bit peaceful. At times it could be rowdy, it could be noisy, but you know, it's not as hostile as the other places where you have killings, murders, and all that stuff you hear in the news. So the Bronx is a nice place, besides you don't have to walk a long distance to go get something because you know, we have shops all over the whole place. The people are also not that bad. That's pretty much it.

OO: So do you feel attached to your neighborhood here in the Bronx? Would you stay if you had the chance? I know you have larger goals.

RK: Would I stay? If I am going to stay in the Bronx, it is the kind of place where I would like to have my own house; it's got to be very big place – yeah, I wouldn't mind. But you know like you said, I have bigger plans.

OO: Yeah, so the Bronx is home in some sense, and how does that compare to how you feel about Nigeria?

RK: Nigeria is my home too.

OO: So you have two homes?

RK: I have two homes, exactly. I know when I go back I have a home back there, and when I come here I have a home back here.

OO: So what are your larger goals in life?

RK: My larger goal is after graduation, I would like to go play professional. I always wanted to play professional sports. I have always been into sports growing up as a child; you know my

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mom says I'm a very physical person, and I am like, "okay". Ever since I was a teenager, it's just been about sports, and being a professional athlete, and I want to play football, but at the same time, I am getting an education here too, which I don't joke with.

OO: How do you think that education is going to help you?

RK: Because if you are educated, and you are a professional athlete, you have a better standing in life than someone that is just a professional athlete, and has no educational background, or someone who is a professional athlete that went to college, and probably did nothing, you know, didn't do anything serious, he just wanted to get that degree in whatever he could. Then what happens by the time you get to that age where you can no longer be as effective as you were before, and you are retired? What are you going to fall back on? So education to me is always going to be my plan B. As a back plan in case plan A, after a while doesn't work, I have something to fall back on. That's why education is so important to me, and that's why, you know, it's serious. I am not just getting the degree for nothing, you know, it's always going to be my plan B, my back up plan for whatever happens to me in life. I always know I have something to fall back on.

OO: So aside from education, what are some other things you are really passionate about, that you really care about?

RK: I care about the people around me.

OO: Your friends, your family?

RK: Friends, I don't have too many friends because people know you can't trust people too much.

OO: Okay, is it because you feel betrayed?

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RK: You can't trust people that much, but there are some people I know I can look at and I could say I trust them; they don't have to be family. I have someone outside family, Doctor Purnell is a good friend, you know, I got to say that up front because you know, when times are rough, friends are there to help you out, they are there to advise you, you know what I'm saying; those are friends. Not friends when times are getting rough, then they turn their backs on you, but when times were good, they were right there, that's no friend, you know? Those are friends right there, and most of those friends become family afterwards.

OO: Right.

RK: So friends and family, you know, - - I don't play with them. I care about them a lot, and that's me. I am ready to inconvenience myself just to make sure those people are happy. Passion, when you talk about passion besides family and friends, sports.

OO: That's it?

RK: Sports, besides sports, education. There are some courses that I am very passionate about.

OO: Which ones?

RK: Courses I have taken with Doctor Purnell; African-American History, Racial and Ethnic Conflict, I am very passionate about those and some other courses I think Doctor Chapman's class - - Black Athlete. You know, there are some courses you take in school that especially when you have that interest in it, you know. I mean if I did not have the passion in Political Science, I would not be taking it.

OO: What motivated you to Political Science?

RK: Because I like politics. I like the power tussle in it.

OO: Yeah.

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RK: And I am the kind of person, I like power, the idea of having that power is just, it's motivation, you know? And in politics, you have to be a good talker, you have to be sociable, you have to be able to plan strategies, you have to be a hustler.

OO: And this is the skill you feel is special about it?

RK: Exactly, so that's what pushed me to that line, politics right there. So that is why I got into political science.

OO: Well, do you have any questions for me or anything else you would like to share?

RK: Trying to get my thoughts... You were born here?

OO: I was born here, yes.

RK: So you didn't go to school in Nigeria?

OO: I was born here, I moved, my parents left several months after I was born, so I spent my first nine years, actually in Nigeria.

RK: So you went to school there. What school did you go to?

OO: I went to school, my primary school up until primary 3, 3rd grade I think.

RK: Yes, what school was that?

OO: The American-based school in Benin City by the University of Benin campus.

RK: Okay, so you resided in Benin City?

OO: Yes, my family is mostly between Benin City and Warri; however I have some in Lagos as well.

RK: And then after that you came back?

OO: Yes, I came back when I was 9 years old, in 1986, and we moved straight to Minnesota where my mom is from. So I did most of my education, the rest of my education, here.

RK: Oh, so your mom was from Minnesota, she is not Nigerian?

OO: Yes, she's not Nigerian.

RK: Oh, is she African-American?

OO: No, she's white.

RK: Okay, I could tell from the complexion right there, and your dad is African?

OO: Yes, my dad's Nigerian from the Delta.

RK: That's good. What college did you go to?

OO: Right now?

RK: Not now.

OO: I went to the University of Minnesota, and then I did my Masters at Wisconsin, and then I came to New York to finish my graduate work.

RK: What made you interested in the Bronx project?

OO: Well I actually, I very much invested in people telling their own histories, and I can feel that a lot of African-Americans and Africans particularly don't often have an opportunity to tell their stories, and to have their history recorded. So it's very important to get that history, and I think also particularly with dealing with African immigrants it's very hard to infuse all the statistics that we hear in the news and, you know, the policies with actual lived experiences. It is important to capture that, and have Africans talking about what it means to be an African immigrant in the U.S., what it means to live here as an African, and also, as time goes on, what it means to make a life here. And sometimes, you know, making a life requires that you make it in both the U.S. and Africa, so that's what motivates me, and why it is important to get these interviews and participate in this project, because the African-American race is being expanded daily, not just from migrations within the U.S., but from African immigrations from various parts of Africa.

RK: That's good.

OO: Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself, or will you conclude the interview?

RK: That I'm about to graduate from Fordham.

OO: Congratulations.

BP: What is your mother's name?

RK: Her name is Edna.

BP: Edna?

RK: Yes.

BP: Edna Kogolo?!

RK: Edna Kogolo, yes she decided to stick with my father's name because you know it is a whole lot of process if she changes everything because she divorced him and everything, but she was like that for the children's sake, she does not want to go through all that, she is just going to stick with it.

BP: What was her maiden name?

RK: Obioma, O-B-I-O-M-A

BP: And does that have an English meaning?

RK: Yes, I think it has something to do with "tailor", "tailoring", "how is your life sewn", or something like that. My grandfather [Inaudible] I didn't get it from my grandfather that well, but you know.

BP: And the name Kogolo, what does that mean?

RK: From what I heard from my grandfather on my father's side, it means "protector".

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BP: I had a few questions too about - - so, you were 11 years old when you went to go live in Nigeria?

RK: When I went back, yes that's when I went to high school.

BP: So you stayed in the Bronx up until 11?

RK: Yes, up until 11.

BP: What were some of the similarities between the friends you had here, the games you played, how you played with other children from between the Bronx and Nigeria?

RK: Well, the kids in Nigeria are a lot more physical.

BP: What do you mean by "physical"?

RK: That means, when we tried to play soccer, we are not playing soccer just to enjoy: we are playing to get somebody hurt. That's how we play soccer, you know, it's like playing a real game, meanwhile it's supposed to be a game amongst friends. Everybody is so competitive, you know, unlike here, where you know - -

BP: You have rules.

OO: You have rules and all that stuff, but back there every- and anything goes when you're doing a sport. The only thing is there are certain rules when it gets to a point - - we have to make sure it does not lead to a fight, period. So that's what I mean by physical, it's more - - there's a lot of competition back there, you know?

BP: Earlier in the interview, you said that here in the Bronx you grew up, and African-Americans mistook you for a Puerto Rican. When you lived in Nigeria, what was it like being an American now in Nigeria? Did that distinguish you from being a Nigerian?

RK: No, because back there that's another difference too, and it's a good thing you brought it up. If an African-American is going back there, everybody looks at you - the only thing they will

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say is like “Oh, so you spent time over there?” But they don’t make a fuss about it so much now when somebody is coming from there over to here because to them, it’s like, as long as you are not white because if you are white and you are going back there, you are different. I mean, they have light-skinned Africans over there too, so we see that they have a good point. They even have albinos back there, you know, who are really white-skinned, but they know a white person, when a white person comes over how much – you are not familiar with the environment. When you talk, you know, they will think it’s a big deal, but if you are black and my accent changed, then after a while it starts clicking and my other accent starts clicking in.

OO: Was it easy to go back and forth with the accent?

RK: No, it was okay, I did not see it as much of a problem, but it was a little – I have to be there a while for it to start changing, and again when I come back here it starts changing back, you know.

OO: Yes, I’m the same way.

RK: So, because I have to blend in, you know, I’m trying – my accent has to blend in, I mean, because back there we have what they call “Waffi” talk, it’s like “Pigeon”.

BP: “Waffi” talk?

RK: That’s what they call it, my cousin calls it Waffi talk because he is from Warri, and he stays in Warri.

OO: That’s a particular kind of Pigeon from the Delta

RK: Exactly, Pigeon English.

OO: Yes, Delta is the sort of - -

RK: The only way for you to pick it up or go with the flow is if you stop, or go with him.

OO: Because there are new words every time you go back?

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RK: Exactly, and I am like, it's not the way, because I am down, or I know my roots, I will be like, what are you saying, you know?

BP: Can you give me an example, what is an example Waffi talk compared to English?

RK: Um, "how you dey"?

BP: Oh right.

OO: "How go dey go now, you go, you go, you go dey, speak you know small, small, small", and you know - -

RK: It's English, but it is twisted, seriously twisted.

OO: [Laughs]

BP: So what does "how go dey" mean?

RK: "How go dey" means, "How are you doing, how is it ..." you know, "how has it been for you". That's it means, you know, but in a twisted way.

OO: Do you see a similarity between Pigeon English and African-American slang, or what they call Ebonics?

RK: In some cases, I think like one or two words connect, you know, it's not like when you keep talking because I haven't spoken to my cousins in a while so I can't really have anyone in my mind, you know, but when you keep talking and talking you tend to listen to what they're saying, and tend to find that there's some - a little bit of similarities from it.

OO: Do people in Nigeria pick up on the fact that you have been in the U.S.?

RK: My friends back there, it's like they put me on a higher pedestal because when I go back, it's like my whole life is different, you know, I have my own car, and everything, so it's like they look up at me higher because they know I'm not in the same class as them, but that's what they think. But I don't try to be that, I always try to be humble in a way I can, you know, but when I

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get back, they're like - - Ray's coming back, he just came back from the U.S. so everybody, by the time I get back, probably by the next day, everybody is at my house already. My friends are in my house already - - I don't know how they get the news, but they know I'm around, and when they come it's like, we all have to go out, so we usually go out to the Country Club and all that kind of stuff, and go chill. It's like - when I got to buy something - -

OO: They are all there.

RK: Exactly, you know, I am taking care of myself and I got to take care of them too. I am like, "Hey! Ray is going to help you for a while, but don't push it too much".

OO: So the expectations on you are a lot higher?

RK: Because they feel I am coming from a place that's higher than Nigeria, the U.S., and you know the dollar is a lot of money back there.

OO: Do you have a hard time explaining to them what life is like here, and the fact that you have to work going to high school?

RK: I try, they feel...their mentality back there is that once you are here, you have no problem, but that's why they're wrong, and that's what I keep telling them, I am like, here is a whole lot more complicated than back there. Look at - - just to get a license, a driver's license here is terrible, and they still have the worst accidents in history. Back there, to get a driver's license is not that hard; they don't have traffic lights.

OO: But even if they work, they don't pay attention, right?

RK: But the accidents there are not as rampant as it is right here, so why is that? That's what I try to let my friends know, and I try to let the friends I have here know, you know, so that's a big difference. I am like, "They don't have traffic lights back there, bro". But everything still flows, you know?

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BP: Two more types of questions, I'm just personally curious; when you were a senior - - how old were you when you came back from boarding school?

RK: When I graduated?

BP: Yes.

RK: 17.

BP: And then you came - -

RK: I came back for like – that was during the summer when I graduated, I visited here, and went back because I wanted to go back and go experience – I did not want to go into college straight up. I was still trying to decide about going to college back there, and going here.

BP: So you went to - -

RK: So I went to Nigeria – I was like, let me just go back and go work, let me see what I get, you know, let me - - at that point in time, my life was different, I was rebellious, I was something else, I was involved in some things I wasn't supposed to be in, you know, and for me to get out of there or for me to have a better life afterwards, I was like, let me stay out and see how life is, work a little bit, so that way I could reflect on myself growing up.

BP: What kind of work did you do?

RK: Like I said, I was a hustler.

OO: Yes, I was about to ask. There isn't a lot of employment in Nigeria.

RK: There's not, but what me and my friend did – he was my neighbor too – we didn't stay that far from each other, so usually we got up at – our work starts at like 8; there was a woman, she had a lot of contacts because she was in this catering business for senators and all that stuff. So our job was to take her anywhere she wants and this was from like 7 to 12 midnight when we'd probably be getting back, you know, so that's what we did. That's our job, and we got paid

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because we automatically were her drivers, her bodyguards, her helpers, you know, we were doing so many things for this woman. She had other people who could do it, but she trusted us, she gave us a job because she trusted us; I know there were times when we had to carry bags of money, large sums of money to the bank for her, so that's what we were doing and most of the time we start from like 8 o' clock we don't know when we're going to get back, you know?

That's why I said, we were just hustling, me and my friend, and that's what made us become so tight. At times, we worked like five days – Monday, Tuesday we used his car, Thursday, Friday we use my car, Wednesday will be neutral grounds, whoever feels like driving will drive, you know, that kind of stuff. Then we go around, we pick her up, we usually park our car at her place, use her car, take her all around – you know, more like all over the whole place because she was working, dealing with senators, commissioners, and all that stuff; she had a big outlet of work, I call it hustling because we were still free-lanced.

BP: I am curious, what was it like when you were a senior at the boarding school?

RK: Oh, it was good.

OO: Did you take advantage of those - -

RK: No, you see – that was the - when I was still in lesser classes, I thought that by the time I became a senior in high school I was going to do all that; I wanted to do that all that.

OO: [Laughs]

RK: I wanted it so much, but when I became a senior, I was like – it wasn't in me. I mean, all that they did to me, I did not do it to them. And that's why a lot of people were so drawn to me, were so close to me, a lot of younger people came to me. If they were in trouble, if they were about to get beat up by one of my mates, they would come to me, and I would go and like plead to my mate, I am like, "let him go please". I think every time they were in trouble - I was so

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disciplined to the point that, you know, they felt, a lot of them felt so comfortable coming to me for help; even the times they were broke, they came to me and I gave them – it's either I have provisions to give them, or I give them cash. So that's how my reputation in my senior year was built up so high: because I was different.

BP: What was the name of the school?

RK: Federal Government College Ijanikin. I was a federal government school. If you went to federal government school back there - -

OO: That's big.

RK: You know, not many people get to go there so I went to a federal government school.

BP: My last question has to deal with music and culture. So when you were growing up in the Bronx, when you were a young boy and you first moved to Nigeria at age 11, did you notice that they did not have the same music, or did you miss some of the music, and some of the – what was the music and culture like here in the Bronx right before you moved to Nigeria?

RK: When I was here in the Bronx, I listened to Hip-Hop, 80s music.

BP: Yes.

RK: You know, pretty much the same Michael Jackson and all that stuff, so it was not different because when we went back we stayed on all that music. The only difference was when we go to the village, then that's when I start listening to native music. There was still a rhythm to it with the beats, but the culture when you are in the village, the music is different. You know, it's not Hip-Hop, but you could tell that a little bit of the rhythmic beat or whatever is in tune with that because, you know, in the village music they use drums, they use all that, so everything is still in tune. But the music here, when I listened to it, was beautiful, that just balanced everything between, you know, it was good knowing two sides.

OO: Did you listen to Hip-Hop in Nigeria?

RK: Yes we did; we had a whole room with just records.

OO: Was there a lag between when things would come out and when you would actually listen to it in Nigeria?

RK: You mean when music comes out here?

OO: Yes.

RK: When music comes out here, it takes a while for it to get there, you know.

OO: But did you take the opportunity when you came in the summer to stockpile on music, and take it back?

RK: Yes I did that, and that's why I was able to balance both sides. It was good.

OO: Do you feel like people have different perceptions about African-American culture in Nigeria, I mean, what's your perception of what people, how people think of African-Americans in African-American culture in Nigeria?

RK: You are talking about how people back there perceive African-Americans here?

OO: Yes.

RK: I think they don't know, but if they come over here and see how African-Americans act, they are going to say they are immature, and they are going to – a couple of times they are going to tell them like, "You African-Americans here who have the opportunity to go to school don't want to go to school. If you bring an African from there to here and give him the opportunity, he is going to take it like that; he is not going to hesitate. You have a situation where you can go to school and the government can pay it for you, you don't have it back there. There are so many young kids back there who wander the streets, and don't have the opportunity of going because their parents are poor or something like that. If they come here and have that opportunity, they

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would not hesitate, and that's one thing African-Americans here; the decent ones who know about their culture, and that's [Inaudible] – all of them are ignorant like I even told Doctor Purnell, African-Americans on this campus don't even know where the African-American department is.

[TRANSCRIPT ENDS ABRUPTLY]