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Coolie, Derrick

Bronx African American History Project
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(Please Note: Tape One, Side One begins on Page 8, Line 13)

Mark Naison (MN): The Bronx African-American History Project, the person we are interviewing is Derrick Coolie and we are going to be talking to him about his days growing up in the Bronx in the Butler Houses and his experience with Hip-Hop and the crack epidemic. Our interviewer today is Rachel Sharfman who is a doctoral student at New York University, so Rachel, take it away.

Rachel Sharfman (RS): Derrick I just want to hit the basics first and then we can move in and you can totally steer the along with the questions. First series is how old are you and where you born in the Bronx, and did you live first in the Butler Houses.

Derrick Coolie (DC): Okay, I am now 27 years old. I was born actually in the Fordham Hospital, which used to occupy the parking area in the back of the school here, Fordham University. I first moved to Belmont Ave., from Belmont Ave. from '76 till '79 I stayed there, and I moved for a short stay to Myrtle Ave. in Brooklyn, Dr. Naison will be happy about that.

RS: That is where I live.

DC: Beautiful. Stayed there for three months with my great-grandmother, who has since passed on. And from Myrtle Ave. and Flatbush Brooklyn, I moved straight without any stops in between to the Butler Houses right here El70th and Webster, South Bronx. And I am happy to say that.

MN: What year was that?

DC: That was, we moved there 1980.

RS: So how many people in your family moved at that time?

DC: The core of us that moved there was myself, my twin brother, a younger sister Tamika, an older sister Regina, my middle aged sister middle in age I mean of the five of

us she moved with her father's family to like the Jersey first and another section of the Bronx Morrisian section and from there they went to Jersey. But the four of us stayed along with my mother in the South Bronx, El 70th and Webster.

RS: OK.

DC: 1428 Webster Ave.

RS: Ok, 1428 Webster. So had your father been out of the picture for a while--Your biological father?

DC: My biological father-- I don't have much of a contact with him. I don't really know him, I can't really say that I do. So no.

RS: So it was the five of you that was up here.

DC: Yes just us my mother and the four children.

RS: Right Ok, so your mom was not born in the Bronx.

DC: My mother was actually was too born in the Bronx.

RS: She was?

DC: Yes.

RS: Ok. What High School did you go to?

DC: I went to-- well this is where the family story gets a little foggy. I went to high school in Nyack NY, but that is after I moved from the Bronx in 19--late Dec. 1987. And I moved to Nyack, NY and from there I went to the latter part of 4th grade and the 5th grade, and through High School but all the while had of course travelings and interplay with some of my old friends, and just connections that I still had at the Bulter Houses.

RS: Alright so we've got a lot of back story to fill in but--

MN: Just one question, because we didn't know that you, do you know what neighborhood your mother was born in the Bronx?

DC: She is from the Belmont area as well. That is where a large part of my family now

here in the Bronx, that is where they centered at like Arthur Ave. Belmont. I had some family in the University Ave section of the Bronx, by Bronx Community College that is where my grandmother would stay. I had an uncle there and one aunt there, and then I had one other aunt, I had a pretty big family, I had one other aunt that lived here in the Bronx, while we lived at the Butler houses she lived in the Tebout Ave section of the Bronx, that small area. Five blocks actually, well two blocks from where I work now.

RS: Was there a lot of visiting back and forth just among--

DC: Constant.

RS: Constant?

DC: Yes, Yes.

RS: They came here, you guys were going there.

DC: In the earlier tenure of my stay here in the Bronx, even though I am back but that is just a shining part for me that is a more shining part of my stay here. There is a lot of visiting and getting together we were a lot closer then, we have issues now. But we were a lot closer then, there was a lot of meeting and greeting introducing to other friends. I grew up, I grew up around a large amount of people, it was like people everywhere sort of all the time.

RS: In other words, immediate family, extended family, and then the additional circle which sounds like it was a little like a family.

DC: Yes, Yes.

RS: Can you talk more about this kind of shining period of growing up in the Butler Houses, what that meant for you in terms of community, experience in the projects?

DC: Well,

RS: What shone?

DC: What shone to me was just then, as big as it was and as many people that lived there

and still live there it could be like a, it could be small. Like we had those three sky-scrapping sorts of buildings that all three of them in that little sort of sack you could call it, are 21 stories each. And I knew people from each building. From my own building which happened to be the middle building, so we were sort of the center. And then I had kids, friends from the side, the other two buildings. What shone for me was just the togetherness, just the interplay between the kids. We had problems but you know people, everyone mostly got along and it was just nice. I didn't know I was poor, so that was, that helped a lot. Because if you don't know you're poor it doesn't really affect you. You know. We had a welfare situation, we had at that time they had I guess a more vibrant school lunch for the kids and things like that. So, we did that, and everybody did it, so it wasn't like you would get singled out for that. You would get singled out for other reasons. Kids are kids, they are not exactly the nicest people of the world.

MN: So was your mom on public assistance?

DC: For a large part of my stay there as I could remember, and sort of look back to the tall telling signs that I didn't really know at the time but it was very evident yes, yes.

RS: When did you look back and realize, when did you look back at your past and say damn we were poor? And did it change any of your recollections?

DC: Well actually my economic status, and my own actually realizing of my race as well, came to me when I moved to Nyack, NY. Because when I moved up there it was a predominantly white area, and people have money, and that is really when I found out. I mean I knew things weren't so great especially given the circumstances why I went to live there but. it was just wow we didn't have anything. I mean, I look back on shoes that I had, I had this pair of Olympians that the rubber soul came out, and we always glued it and I was like, that's cool. But, we did not have a lot but like I said when you are a kid that age, between like five and twelve or you know the latter stages of eleven years in your life

that is not something you worry about. You want to get with your friends, you want to have fun.

MN: Was your family multi-ethnic were there Latinos and whites in your family as well as blacks.

DC: The core of my family here in the Bronx and the ones that I would go on to meet for the most part were black here in the city. I am told we have a-- some white family members that live further down south because my family itself originates from Fayetteville, South Carolina. So I am told there are quite a few white people that look exactly like me that live in the southern portion of this country.

[Laughter]

DC: So I would like to meet them, but you know that just hasn't happened yet.

RS: Haven't gotten them up to the Bronx yet?

DC: Not yet.

RS: You mentioned a race, when you got to Nyack, actually it brings up an important issues. Just the basics of what was the racial breakdown of the Butler Houses, when you were coming up there?

DC: When I was living there it was mostly black and Latinos, period. I mean we had, we had some I guess you could say sprinklings, I don't even want to say that about like white families here and there. But they really fit in.

RS: They did fit in?

DC: Yes, yes. It was just like, it wasn't the issue. I mean you knew things from TV. You know, you just saw the new things just from TV. That was a large part of our outlet to the world, was TV. Because no one, we didn't get visited by people you know what I am saying. You know people didn't come to our neighborhood to do editorials, at least then. Now we're being on the list, where they want to come visit somewhere, and hence why I am doing this

interview. And I appreciate that but at that time we weren't visited, we weren't seen so the outside world came to me through my eyes which was through television. And I wasn't a big reader then so--

RS: Who's a big reader at that age? But so regarding the impact of popular culture, through television at that time if you weren't exposed to racism until you left how did that -- I guess my question is what did you learn, was it just not on your radar? Was racism not on your radar growing up in the Butler Houses and in the larger community of the Bronx?

DC: It wasn't I mean the white people that I did know, and they were very nice to me, some of them after I moved away I actually got more close to them you know to those persons in particular. But, there were police officers that I knew that were white and my teachers.

RS: And they were fine relationships.

DC: They were, they were you know it was fine. Maybe if I looked back on certain situations I'd probably find something there but I don't really that just takes a lot of energy that I don't have.

RS: Was there, did the groups of -- the African-American and Latino groups in the Butler Houses get along with seamlessly, or was there tension.

DC: I think that there was underlying riffs but there was nothing that overt, like you wouldn't find these people or a group of people in front of the building arguing because this group was happened to be a large section of black people or this group was a large section of Latino people. It wasn't like that no, no. It was-- to me everybody was black so it wasn't-- everybody was black, even the white people that lived there you know that is why I said they fit in there because to me they were black, everybody was black you know. The only, as I said, the only time I encountered a white person and I guess you know I could relate them to what I saw on television cause I said a lot of what I connected

the outside world in these people were from an outside world because I didn't see them every day. They were white and the people I lived around were black that is it.

MN: Did everybody dress the same? All of the kids?

DC: Mostly yes, yes. It was like.

MN: What was the uniform, in those days?

DC: The uniform for those times were Lee jeans, Shell Top Adidas, or some Nikes of varying colors in different styles and it was a very well actually the people who had money even where I lived were did show that they had at least some money. I didn't live around rich people I mean it's a tenement housing and project dwelling so no one has lots of money to speak of you know. Some people that you could see were well off for their own reasons, which I will talk about later, had nice clothes and we looked forward to Easter you know that was a good time for everyone there because you get nice clothes and you get to wear it and you have fun. Like I said it was an innocent time you know you didn't know that you were poor, these things you just didn't worry about it. Your life was just waking up having fun, having fun in school, if that you know could be had if you liked school not everybody liked school I happened to like school. And that was it really.

RS: I have some questions about the houses themselves. You mentioned that there were three, you know skyscrapers. I am curious were they like those same personalities like you're in that building?

DC: Yes we used to designate by, the reason that I said the number of my building is because that is how we designated some people. It was like you lived in 1430, 1432 in the center and I hate to sound like we were the best but that is what I thought. I lived in 1428 Webster Ave. and we were right in the middle. And from my section you could see everything from either side, they were kind of at a disadvantage or at least we thought. So yes, there was difference. Or at least we projected it on to each other.

RS: Alright what in Butler Houses themselves were there any community centers, or kid centers? And what did they do? And did you guys go to them or were they like the not cool spots?

DC: We had a daycare I believe it was in 1432 here, in the sort of the not the basement, but the ground floor level of the building. They had a daycare center it still operates it is under a different name, I think it is the South Bronx Daycare Center. Before it was just mainly they just called it a daycare center it hardly had a sign then. They had like a makeshift sign, yes they did daycare for people that had children that were working. Like I said these were things that weren't really on my radar. I just saw kids go in there and you know I knew it was a daycare from when my mother would say-- we never went there because my mother was you know stay at home. We didn't have a lot of money, she didn't work too often. But that was mainly it.

(Beginning of Tape One, Side One.)

RS: Alright so we were talking about community centers, and aside from daycare centers for younger kids were there after school programs for kids your age?

DC: For my age around that time, not really. They had stuff sort of for the younger kids and then for like older kids who were interested in athletics and different things like that. We had a basketball troop if you will, we called it-- they were called The Trotters. And then around that time was when the Gauchos came in to vogue, I don't want to say vogue but I guess popularity. They had always had players over the years because different people from, different NBA players from the Bronx that have played there also went there before when I was younger. Like Rod Strickland and Malik Sealy.

RS: I knew that.

DC: You did?

RS: Yes.

DC: Everyone knew Rod in the Bronx, a lot of people.

MN: Now, the people in the Patterson Houses that I spoke to said they had afternoon center and night center at the public schools. Was that there or had that been eliminated by the time you were coming up?

DC: No it hadn't been eliminated but the thing with the time that we are speaking of there was a lot of issues with, I guess children acting out or different things like that. So it was still going on but some of it was being phased out, some of it was being looked at as to finding better times to do it. Was it better to do it on the weekend? Was it better not to do it at all? I am sure that they had funding issues, as I said I was quite young then so only now do I actually know what a funding issue really relates to. So we had the programs but some of the timing and the availability was sort of lapsed at certain points. And toward the end of my stay in the actual tenement where I grew up we saw started really having nothing really. Because of the violence and some of the stuff that was going on, different things like that. I mean it was still there, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. It was still there but it was like the people who were running it, if they get a chance to see this I am sure it was harder for them to run it around that time just because of all the outside forces and all the different things that were going on.

RS: With the discipline issues that you mentioned coming up—whom, if anyone, was disciplining kids when these programs folded or failed? What--

DC: Well in my experience, in the small area where I grew up and where I spent most of my time- the parents like a lot of the parents still took on the job of making sure you that their friends child didn't get out of line. Or my mother on occasion had people, other children with me, and you've got to stay with him now because if I see you doing this you're going to get in trouble. So it was still a lot of that, it was still very communal. And only in my visits and my going back I guess in to the 90's, sort of early 90's, did I see like

a lot of that wasn't still being held up you know.

RS: That kind of community monitoring. So there are other adults who could like watch out for you.

DC: People were watching me like a hawk.

RS: Ok, Alright that's—

DC: Man it was nuts.

MN: Now was this mostly women or there were men there who were you know forces in kids lives?

DC: Ok. I guess I could simply say, in reference to that that the women here in my life and in the community as far as I could see they had a much larger hand in that than the men did. The men they were sort of called upon when something was really at a height where it was sort of uncontrollable. Not to say that the women like the matriarchs of the community didn't have it under control, sometimes you just sort of need help.

And where the men were I guess especially strong and helpful was when things really, I mean a lot of really big problems.

MN: Sister Soldier in her book refers to the men in the projects as rentals.

DC: Say it again.

MN: As she describes the men in the projects she grew up in as rentals. They moved in and out of people's lives you know, do you think that description works for you. Or where there stable you know male figures.

DC: I mean personally because of how I grew up without my father so I won't make credit to what she said, because I disagree with her. But there was a strong father presence for friends that I had. People that I was close with. So to that point I would say no, but as it pertains to my life there is some reality there but that is only because of one person. So--

RS: Can I, I want to ask you about a-- on that note, Mark forwarded something that you

wrote regarding Stanley Crouch black on black crime and civil rights leaders, how Crouch thought they were failing.

DC: How many people read that?

RS: Something you had said-- yes I know I wondered if you had objections but you wrote something very poignant and I want to read it to you see if you-- for the thought. You said: "I know firsthand that the lack of supervision, male role models for the males involved and the overall disdain that they build for a society seemingly unaware of their existence." I was really struck by the last part, the overall disdain they feel for a society seemingly unaware of their existence. Where, was this a feeling you saw a lot of young black men or Latino men experiencing within the Butler Houses?

DC: Well it was just something that I was able to come to of course later in my life, because I was really young living there. But a lot of the actions and the things I saw done like first hand, it was clear to me that it was because of -- in some cases it was because of a lack of supervision or someone not being there to sort of pull in the reins on a young person. And where you don't have that you have some of the things that are very evident through you know through news media that you hear about today. And some of it even in my case I went through some of it too, because I had people checking me but then again even with me I would stand on record saying that I was quite sly. So there is no way that I could be checked if I didn't allow it. Because I had a lot of personal control coming up, there is a lot of things I could have done that I chose not to do. And if I didn't have that personal--to put those personal checks on myself as well as those people who thought that it was important enough for them to check up on me, then I wouldn't even be here sitting, talking, saying anything you know for the purposes of this interview.

RS: Do you think the personal checks that a lot of people, you are saying, weren't able to get would that have been different if there had been a lot of older men, older male role

models around? Is that kind of what--You know cause if you are saying that moms had a lot of control but yet there are a lot of kids that couldn't get checked, what do you think was the major gap there? Was it--

DC: Yes I mean, it could from what is being said it could definitely, one plus one would equal two there so--because they don't have those checks, and it is only the mother in some cases that is struggling and they don't have that father and that is part of the extra upbringing that all children need. Because they didn't have that of course in some cases led them down a negative path. But, I mean for me it is hard to say because I saw people and you know I am still aware of people, without those I guess you would say strong holds, able to hold themselves up. And you know operate in a law abiding way so.

RS: Let's get in to if you don't mind, the people who weren't able to pull themselves up. And talk about when you saw real big problems start to arise in Butler, be it drugs or other types of problems within the community when crime escalated or just tensions escalated. And how old you were, and--

DC: Well my first recollections of anything short of, I guess you would say shady, going on in the community actually was from day one. Because within the first week that I was there, as young I was I knew what a number whole was. And a number whole is where people do gambling, they sell drugs out of the number whole. And for what I was told later, which probably is not so much true, there was a young man pimping young ladies from within the number whole as well. So--

RS: Was the number whole in your building?

DC: No the number whole actually was stationed across the street along a strip of stores. So one of the stores was bought out by one of the community entrepreneurs, I'll say that. And he had the number whole there and you know it doubled as a bar or a saloon, for like a better term. And just business was conducted out of there and as I said within the first

week of my living there I was able to pinpoint where that was.

RS: How? Did someone tell you? You felt it out?

DC: You don't need to be told. When you live in a place like that, or you grew up around certain, it just pops up.

RS: Was it a spot of curiosity for young guys?

DC: Of course.

RS: You guys flock over there?

DC: No we didn't flock so much over there because I had my mother, I lived on the third floor, so my mother could see a lot of what was going on and what I was up to. So and she would let me know that she was watching me quite often, by yelling at me out the window.

But yes it was a point of curiosity for a lot of the young people living there. Especially for the males because there were male figures in there and they were making some money.

MN: So they were better dressed and had better cars.

DC: Some of them, some of them. At the front some people dressed down to dress up.

RS: Did any-- Were any of them from Butler Houses, are the women who--

DC: Well we had people-- we had people from outside the neighborhood who used to sort of be in there. That is where some of our visits from outside the neighborhood came from. They would go there they would go other places. But we had people from my building that sort of ran it and the people from the other buildings that sort of, you know, it was communal in that sense too. They sort of did this together as well.

RS: So if everyone knew who these people who were running it, and you knew full well where it is. Was there-- How did other people in other houses react to those people? Was there respect? Were people angry at them for doing this? Or was it like you've got to do what you've got to do to make a living?

DC: I think it was more of what you said last. It was more of you know just sort of allowing

people to be people. Some people you know, are sanitation workers, you know, and one of the most outstanding persons that I came in to contact with while I was living there was a sanitation worker. And he had a regular job and you know he paid for everything in the house. And then you had these other people who sort of you know ran around I guess the law you would say, and they would they felt they needed to do to get money, and earn money excuse me. Because I was told later that a lot of them believed that they were earning money. So--

RS: Did rackets like that increase in number, or did you become more aware of different types of businesses in that order? Or did crime escalate or you just saw it more?

DC: Well that was my only, that was my first example that I could see from my own experiences and what I was able to notice. There were an array of things already going on, and of course as you get older you just sort of you pick up on things and then you find out that this one has been doing this for years, and this one has been doing that for years. The only way I guess it would really change, and it did change, is that younger people were starting to get involved. And--

MN: Right, so the people who were, when you first moved in 1980 this was being run by adult men?

DC: Yes when I first moved there for the most part it was very adult, very adult. Forties sometimes and up that were running these sort of establishments.

MN: Right.

RS: And so regarding the younger men who got involved, like how young are you talking?

DC: The youngest person boy, the youngest person that I could remember that was involved in anything there was nine.

RS: Wow.

MN: Now see this is one of the things with crack, that crack completely undermined the age

part and power hierarchy in neighborhoods.

RS: Right, how did that happened? Were kids recruited? Why did it happen in your looking back on it?

DC: Well—

RS: Who would ask? Was it the tougher kids? Was it--

DC: No as far as who was asked to do it, cause I'll go straight to that point cause I just love that point, because everyone who lived there was tough. I will tell you that, so that really didn't play in to who was chosen or who was not chosen. Not that it was great to be chosen, which I found out later. But the persons who would do the work so to speak would be persons who would want to do it. You weren't really, when I was living there, I didn't see anybody being forced to do anything. It was all a lot of what I saw was by choice. You were asked you were approached, you said yes or you said no. There was enough people to where they didn't have to really go about it in that way. You know there was people, who were on drugs who had debts and different things like that. But they were sort of given jobs that even within such a society it is hard-- I am looking for the word. Like they were given stuff to do that you wouldn't ask somebody to do that you were just bringing in to an establishment. If you were like, just to say how it was taught to me when I was coming, growing up- if you were being put on by somebody which means that they were going to put you in line to do business with them, if you were being put on they wouldn't put you on to do something that they absolutely knew that you wouldn't want to do. They want you to work, so wouldn't-- that is not how they would do you. They would give you something to where they want you to be a soldier so if you do this work you could be elevated. And if you elevate far enough somewhere down the line elevation leads to conflict, so they'll elevate you to the point where you're not a threat to them. That is basically it.

RS: So what I am hearing you say it, and we have not even talked about the monetary

incentive that would lead you in to, what I am hearing you say is that it sounds like there was a big sense of community going on in this. And I don't want to put words in your mouth, but was it like a brotherhood? You get in there and--

DC: Unspoken, unspoken because for the neighborhood itself as many people we were visited by like for that business portion of it, like neighborhood to neighborhood you didn't do a lot of that because that would cause conflict. Like people would see you coming in to the neighborhood, like even now like some of the drug wars you hear about like people going in to another neighborhood trying to sell drugs. That is just like, as far as selling drugs go you don't do that, like you don't go in to the next neighborhood the next block even in some cases and try to you know push drugs that don't really live there because a person there already has clientele so you're messing that up.

RS: So people in Butler were selling to people in Butler?

DC: No they-- that is where some of the visits as I said came in to play. People would come from out of town. Because like the junkies, for lack of a better term, they sort of went throughout the Bronx from what I saw. Like I saw certain people that I knew were on drugs when I would travel to go visit like cousins or an uncle somewhere, I would see the same person that is on drugs.

MN: Now Derrick, you said you arrived at Butler you were about five?

DC: Yes five or six give or take.

MN: Five or six, so that is 1980. What year do you, and this was a time when it is really the older people that were running it. When did you start to see you know the younger people drawn in? How old were you when that whole phenomenon took place?

DC: I was about seven.

MN: So that would be about 1982.

DC: '83.

MN: '83.

DC: '83 I was seven so '83 yes.

RS: What did you notice first? What--

DC: What I noticed first was that you know, that one of my friends had money. I mean there is not much else to notice, especially with kids. When kids have something they'll show you, it is like they'll show it to you every day. You get a good group of three kids all you are going to hear about is what this person showed this person yesterday and tomorrow I am going to bring this but you can't tell. So, he showed us money and I was just like wow.

RS: So then did he invite you in? Did other people go in?

DC: No kids didn't invite other kids in, no that was done from older people.

RS: Did you get that from older people?

DC: Was I asked to do things? Yes I was asked to do some things.

RS: A tough situation among other peers.

DC: No not for me, I was young I was seven I wanted what he had. So you know I did some things that I am not proud of right now. But no when you -- I don't mean to laugh about it, I don't know it is weird because I had mentioned before you don't know that you don't have anything. But then again when you see this it sort of--it starts to hint towards the fact that you are less well off. It is not so much that you know you are poor you know, to use the word I used before. But you just sort of know that this person is obviously, he was nine so he was further up in the community already at nine than I was, and plus I was already two years younger. So--

MN: Now did you see this as very exciting? Having--

DC: It was damn exciting. Let me tell you.

MN: So you know, so this started out as being very exciting, making money.

DC: Yes.

MN: And when did you start to realize there was a down side to it?

RS: And when did, along with that, you sense danger?

DC: Who. Well I think that the danger was always there because I had always heard about people getting stabbed and different things like that. There was the occasional story about guns and back then it was the long snout Smith and Wessons that we heard about. People put them in their mailboxes and stuff and when a problem happened you see somebody gravitating toward the lobby of the building, and of course that always meant that they were going for their piece, just to say that. But the dangers sort of came in when there were visible fights all the time. Like people fighting and then the fight wouldn't be over, like you would see the same two people or the same group of people fighting again. And then it would be a night and the kids would be sort of over here and they would be off, and the next thing you know the ambulance was coming they said somebody got stabbed for like ten dollars like real mundane things at least, from my perspective they were mundane. But like stuff that is when you sort of knew and the kids there we all knew. I mean you grow up fast there so you know exactly what is going on.

RS: Aside from knowing the way that I am hearing it is kind of just like abstract kind of the stuff is around. But did it ever really get up in your face, in danger? Or when was the first time? And also along with that where there different groups within Butler? Were buildings people working together? You know by building?

DC: Well, that was another part of the distinction between the buildings like people who lived in a certain building, I guess just by closeness of proximity they were closer with people who lived in that building. And you had some cross-sectioning. Like people who are you know that had a family member that lived there or they were--it just happened to be that they were just closer with that person within our little circle of friends, because we all played together as

I said, before but the people who lived in those building like together, like if you lived in 1430 it just sort of made sense that you would be closer with somebody from 1430. So it wasn't like outright animosity, even though there was as I said there was some of that anyhow. So yes. It was just, it wasn't like a rivalry but it was, there were underpinnings of a lot of things like that.

MN: Now again, what strikes me is the sense that here you have this community where most people are a certain level, other than a few of these older men. Then all of a sudden there is money trickling down to like nine year olds. Which you know, and you said everybody is very excited about it. And yet it ends badly, how long before from the excitement you go to danger and then to disaster?

DC: How long?

MN: You know did it take before this really became very scary?

RS: Or is it not that clear?

MN: Or is it not that clear, right.

DC: I don't think it is that clear, because there was like--it was like those little three buildings right there for me went through a metamorphoses that is really like hard for me to describe.

Like we went from like, we had a number whole and you know they had booze in there and then people gathered in there and there was music played. It was almost a point where it was like a little club. And it went from that to where they took out the music playing apparatus people weren't really congregating there like that anymore. People were going in and out really fast to where you knew there was drugs being sold in there. People were coming out looking high what else-- I guess it was closed after time, but then when it was open, you knew why it was open. And then it went from there to the cops were there fairly regularly. Because in the beginning the cops didn't--you know the cops either didn't care or didn't go there, there was really no in between. They may like, it was like periodic visits, almost like

something else was going on there. But, I will go to that later. So it just went through that, it was just it went through that. It was progression but it was just slow, and it was like an escalation towards something definitely that was not good. So--

RS: Was that the only spot where dealing was going on? Where there other concentrations?

DC: No, it was right on the street.

RS: It was right on the street?

DC: That was just my main focal point because it was as I said, it started off as you know a would be establishment, or was a front for an establishment.

RS: How about among the residents. What was the change in just the community vibe of Butler as drugs started infiltrating more?

DC: What it changed there was basically kids were out around all the time, to where kids weren't because it wasn't safe. That was just it, it went from that to that.

RS: But if you were a kid and you were involved, where you guys not out and about? Where you out and about in a very different way?

DC: Involved in what?

RS: I don't know what you were involved in.

[Laughter]

DC: No I went from playing to you know, I was asked to do certain things. I didn't do anything crazy. I mean maybe I walked something from here to the end of the block and they gave me money for it. Then again I was eight so as much risk that they could take with a child they didn't go overboard. Because still my mother knew these people, my mother knew these people. So it was like and a lot of people knew what they were up to. So it was like even in the using of the youth, that is basically what they did just use the kids in some cases. It wasn't like every kid was carrying a bag of crack up the block that is not, I don't want you to

get that impression that is not really what is going on. It was like they felt like they knew who they could approach, and it was done that way.

RS: So it sounds like you're talking that there was some sort of internal regulation of--

DC: A lot of regulations.

RS: Of the dealing, how kids were being used.

DC: Kids were sheltered, some of the kids even with some of the stuff that was going on kids were sheltered from a lot of stuff that was going on. Because you had your crack selling, you had your bad heroin and then even though crack was way beyond heroin by that point. But and then you had reefer which seems to be ever present. And you know there was something going on, but you know kids would overhear off the kids that were involved. They were like they saw, if they weren't initially they sort of became the harder edged kids. Or, you know they weren't for the most part they weren't even kids anymore. Cause as I told you it just ages you, it just even dealing with that ages you a lot. I mean, a lot of it is hard to describe it is just a way of life that is accepted and you sort of intertwine with it or you keep, you are at a distance from it.

RS: And it was, so it was kind of managed the way what kids were going to be exposed to and what they were going to be used for. And so that kind of really speaks against the kind of dominant idea of like a drug economy, like kids are thrown in the line of fire. It doesn't sound like what you are--

DC: Na I never experienced anything crazy like that. Like there was shoot outs--the craziest, the most challenging experience I ever had as far as guns and anything of that nature was the time when I was out in the playground with a younger sister of mine and my twin brother and we were sort of just on the slides, and you know we had monkey bars or whatever. And it was sort of like overcast started to come out, so it was early evening I would say like seven, seven fifteen, it was like the end of a summer, around this time actually, something like that. So,

then you just hear people arguing and it sort of, right on the street there at like E 170th and Webster, like right there on the corner. And sort of, we had the playground in the middle. So we are playing and they had the sprinkler on, earlier in the day so people were over there cause there is still some puddles over there so kids are still playing over there. And then the argument escalates as I eluded to with the guys that are arguing, and it just escalates. And then over a couple minutes as you see its getting a little darker, so it is like maybe five minutes six minutes later. And you hear this pop, and then you see one guy run. And then still like, it still a little small circle. Then you hear three four more and then everybody is running by that point because we get the picture. And I later found that my sister somehow who by herself walk outside of the small park there that we were in and she is now in between the people that are arguing. And they are screaming across a small area of I guess park area at either end screaming at each other, and she is in the middle. And so I am like screaming at her to come run, one of the best things my sister could do was run. So she ran from where she was and just ran straight up I guess the center area leading to the building. And by the time, I am sort of in the middle and she is like at the end standing and I am waiting for her to come. And then they moved closer to each other the two people, like the two groups that are arguing. And so they are coming closer to each other and there are still shots being fired and it is like that is the craziest thing I ever really went through. I mean I've seen a person shot but I never it was never anything to where somebody I knew or like somebody that I loved like my sister was in the middle. So that was the only time really. But I saw somebody get shot, a couple people actually but-- I don't know you sort of you get callused to it. Because it sort of it becomes sort of an everyday, like the arguments escalate, then somebody gets stabbed, or there is a gun involved. It is either over or there is going to be shots fired.

MN: Now how did all of this affect kid's feelings about school?

DC: Well a lot of the older kids that I knew of, and the reason that I knew of them was

because they liked to pick on me, it was really funny. But they were like in ninth or tenth grade; they were dropping out some of them. Some of them were dropping out already to you know do drug selling or in some cases where females were involved if there was pregnancy they were dropping out.

MN: Could it be that having this opportunity to make money on the street this way definitely encouraged people to drop out of school earlier than they might have?

DC: Yes, some people definitely.

MN: Now, where there legal jobs that a teenager could get? Or where those pretty scarce?

DC: Toward the end of the time to, before I moved to Nyack, NY a lot of the summer programs, a lot of these summer programs where starting to experience problems. So that was around the time where they started to, if not do away with them totally, they started to cut the funding to where they would only be able to pay a certain amount of children. That is why there wasn't a lot of them--

MN: And so the neighborhood—that is the government jobs, right—

DC: Yes.

MN: Now what about could people get jobs in stores or factories, or was there not much of those around?

DC: Well to get those sorts of jobs they would have to travel outside of my immediate area, because we didn't have, and still don't, have a shopping section like that. They don't have that.

MN: So in other words if kids didn't get these government summer jobs there is basically no source of money for them?

DC: Not right there in the community.

MN: They would have to be very assertive.

DC: You'd have to be very assertive in one of the stores that were already, if they didn't have somebody already. Or you would like I said you would have to travel to the Fordham Rd.

section or even in some cases even further. Or actually not to cut you off, you could go to the Hub, 138, that section right there. And that is still like a little ways from where I lived, being that I was on E 170st.

RS: I have one quick question, not about our theme, but I am curious were little girls getting involved in deliveries and

DC: No. not that--if they were I didn't know about it.

RS: So that means girls had even less opportunity of--

DC: No they had opportunities.

RS: Different--

DC: Everybody had opportunities

RS: Everybody had opportunities.

MN: So what was the girls' opportunities?

RS: What do you mean illegally as far as--

MN: Anyway, making money.

DC: Making money. Well the girls were sort of straight edge, that is not really something that--where it relates to me it doesn't cross gender lines. I mean I saw things later as I got older, but earlier on it was male.

MN: Were girls under pressure to use sex for money?

DC: Not in my cohort. No, no. That came later, if it did at all it came later.

MN: It came after you had left?

DC: Yes.

MN: Ok.

RS: Alright I want to ask some questions and you've got to direct me cause I don't know exactly how your story developed more in Nyack, when you moved to Nyack. But I want to kind of start with the soundtrack to all you've described in the Butler Houses. When you

think back on those times, what is the soundtrack? What was the music you came up with?

DC: Wow, Grandmaster and the Furious Five. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.

RS: Any particular--

DC: The Message, that is how it was it went from being ok and working class sort of fine to just a mad crazy world right there within three buildings.

RS: And that speaks to you most?

DC: If anyone's song could, that would, as far as my living there yes.

RS: Who else were there other hip-hop artists that you guys really feel at that time?

DC: Well we used to even with all the stuff that was going on and how the crack epidemic developed even within my own neighborhood we used to have jams in the park. Which is like where different dj's would come to toast or play records, I didn't mean to say toast that is the age in myself. Different djs would come to spin records and just play music for the larger community or anybody even people from outlying communities that would come. And you know just be around the music. We had break-dancers so there was sort of--

MN: Which schoolyards was this where--

DC: This was PS 55, they did it. We did some of our jams at PS 9, they did some of the jams in PS 4, CS 110.

MN: Now how far were these from where you, your building?

DC: Walking distance, everything.

MN: All these schools were within walking distance.

DC: Yes, yes. Some of them were a little farther away but you could get there within ten minutes walking. So, it wasn't like they were far away.

RS: Do me a favor, paint a picture of this. Like how-- like walking there who was there, who was spinning, who was front, who was hanging back, who'd bust out in dance?

DC: Well me and my brother used to break-dance for money. So—

RS: You got to tell us how that started. [laughs]

DC: I realized I could dance that is how it started. Well actually my mother told me I could dance.

MN: So your mother told you, said you used to dance in the apartment? DC:

We used. I used to dance at every family function and party.

MN: Now what sort of music did your mother like?

DC: My mother was a R&B, she was a big fan of R&B music. Like Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson, Smokey's group I forget the name right now.

MN: The Miracles.

DC: The Miracles, thank you. Smokey Robinson and the Miracles-- She, my mother was the biggest Elvis fan that I have ever met in my life, and she knew like all these songs. And it was just it was just crazy because like all the artists that I did know that she liked were black, and then there was this one white dude. And it was Elvis Presley, and I was just like OK that's cool. It had to be, I just knew he had to be good because my mother loved him. So--

RS: So she would start dancing in the house, and she--

DC: It was first actually that genre of music before it was hip-hop because I know as Dr. MN could attest to I know a lot of those songs and the artist and the music, more so than I know hip-hop. Just because I was--

MN: So you grew up listening to that music and dancing to it, and dancing at family parties.

DC: Yes definitely. Some people would say I was groomed properly, because I had the R&B first.

RS: So how about, how did you start from the family party to doing that in public and making money with it.

DC: Confidence that's how it starts.

RS: Confidence?

DC: Yes, and plus a lot of other people were break-dancing, and they sort of set up you know their little make shift areas with the cardboard. And me and my brother, my brother was far better, was a better dancer than I was at the time. So, he was sort of out there and like we should do this we should do this, and I just sort of latched on. I was fine with doing it for family and you know intimate settings. But he was like you need to take it to the corner of the street, and we need our cup, and they need to put quarters in there.

MN: So if you did this out on 170th and Webster would people give you money?

DC: We used to-- I mean we weren't allowed because my mother, she was kind of strict. But when we were sneaking through things that was one of the things we did. Like we would set up a little area out of the way of the window where she used to yell to us from. And we used to break-dance.

MN: And people from the neighborhood were dropping nickels and quarters and--

DC: Yes, I mean people knew us, so I guess they just sort of thought they were helping out these little skinny kids.

MN: Now, did you ever go out of the neighborhood to do this?

DC: Not so much, but I do recall one instance in particular that me, my brother, my little sister, and my mother, and my grandmother as well we went to Robert Clemente Park, which is right off of University Ave., in that section of the Bronx. And WBLS was there, and of course they had a big large following at that time, a little larger than they have now. And they were doing sort of a show case, and they called people from the crowd, kids in particular, to come down and you know just do anything. Well with the kids at that time of course you were going to get break-dancing. So, I am shaking now, because I am remember it was like, I am going down now. But I didn't go down, my brother was the braver of the two. And he went down there and he got money, and he was, it was very nice. But then after I seen then I realized, maybe I might want to be some kind of performer. So you know we

break-danced occasionally like I said in parties and different things. When we went to the jams we definitely did.

MN: Now when you saw all these things happening in your neighborhood did you have any idea that hip-hop, that this would turn in to something that would be on television, that would be worldwide, that this would make people billions of dollars?

DC: No, no way. Like what I am seeing now in comparison to what I saw before, like we used to be at a jam and we used to listen to Public Enemy "Rebel without a pause." Like that is like my, if not my favorite rap song ever just because of the jam, just how it just electrified everybody who was there, half of these people not being able to dance. Like, surprisingly to some people even within a black community, having people there would not dance. To me it just felt like they didn't have the confidence, you know that is another issue. But that song it just like, and other songs like it like Audio Two's Top Billing, like songs like that it just--it just lit, it was like fire, it was unbelievable, unreal. But to think that it would get to the point that it is now, never, never. I knew I would always love it. just because of just the time I had with the jams and just the different community parties and things like. I knew I always would because I felt like if I couldn't get it later I had to rack up on it now and just have the music and be able to you know share it with somebody else. And I just I love hip-hop it's not even, it's crazy.

RS: For how long did you and your brother dance?

DC: Well when we moved away, we still danced.

RS: In Nyack?

DC: But it was just different, yes. It just changed. Because then they had house music when we got older. Then like Madonna's craze of like voguing, she was just like she was just wild.

MN: Do you have any tapes?

DC: I don't have tapes of that sir. Even when people were voguing they were not happy to be

voguing. Madonna was the happiest voguer that I have ever seen. Anyway, what else?

MN: Let's say you are nine years old, what did you think that you were going to be when you grew up?

DC: At nine?

MN: At nine I had ideas I did. At nine I thought I was going to be a doctor, but a year later when I actually went headlong into reading anything I could get my hands on. By ten I knew I was going to be a neurosurgeon. I just, I just something told me and I was still living in the Butler Houses. But I was just entrenched in like reading and different things like that. Even before that time but at ten that is just my first memory of when I actually said to myself I have a job for myself and this is what I am going to chase.

MN: Now did kids ever make fun of you for reading? Or for doing well in school? You know was there--

DC: Well early on I didn't do particularly well in school. But you know you got the jokes, different jokes, like you know egg, egg-head, or you know stuff like that. You know that wasn't the only in your time. We didn't say egg we just egghead or nerd and dweeb and what was the other one, smarty pants, different things like that. Those jokes always probably always be around, because to me that has a lot to do with like jealousy or different things like that. But I never really paid attention to those things, people picked on me I was not very big in stature then as I am now. But you know just part of the things that you dealt with. It didn't really particularly affect me in that way, even though when I did get picked on I was a kid who held a lot of things inside. So then unfortunately for the next person to come, it was a wrap. Or like that person probably didn't never experience before because I would wait till the next person. Like it was like a build up for me, it just wasn't good.

Smith: When I-- I grew up pretty much in like the same kind of settings just maybe ten years later. I mean I grew up in Bridgeport, Ct. you know very urban city and you know we

had our time where we lived in a pretty bad part of Bridgeport. My brother and I we did well because my parents you know made sure that education was serious. But in doing that we got a lot of responses from kids. Maybe even a little bit more because I was so big and people were afraid of getting the slam down. But I mean we got a lot of people saying, calling us white boy something like that. Did you ever get that same kind of?

DC: I didn't, as I eluded earlier race wasn't that big of, it wasn't paramount in our community. By the ten years later even in, where I grew up it was much more. So I didn't get racial anything's really.

MN: So nobody called you whitey for reading?

DC: Not really. I didn't get that later, you know later in life from, until I got like in college. And stuff like that from friends and family, but that is another probably interview.

MN: Now, it sounds like in some ways you know the first part of your childhood was pretty good.

DC: I thought it was, I had a good time.

MN: A lot of things going on.

DC: It was sort of bliss, it was like ignorant bliss that is what I call the early part of my childhood, it was ignorant bliss.

RS: When does that ignorance turn in to a non-blissful knowledge?

DC: 1984.

(End of Tape One, Side One. Beginning of Tape Two, Side Two.)

RS: What happened in '84?

DC: Drugs got really close to my life, because I had an uncle that I never seen basically for the most part of my life. Until, even up until I was about 24 I still hadn't seen him, he was in and out of jail. And I realized some of the reasons that he was really in jail for that many years of my life. And just because of friends or family who were either just entrenched in

drug selling or on drugs. So that is how I came to, it came to me in vivid pictures. It wasn't none of, from 1984 on all my experiences with drugs or people on drugs, or anything like that is first hand, everything is first hand.

MN: And did that lead to you end up going to Nyack?

DC: In '87 yes.

RS: That is three years.

DC: Three short years.

RS: It sounds like it was three long years.

DC: Well it was but then again it flew, because--The only reason I could point to '84, I could easily point to '83 because that is when, it was a buildup. You know what I am saying, so it wasn't like in '84 you know these same people just started using drags. These are already older people they were advanced in age, way beyond my years, they were in their 20's some in their 30's, you know. These people for some of them, they started at the age I was at the time, using drags. So it wasn't as if it was something new, it was just something that came new in to my perspective on life and my consciousness, and what I was able to grasp and see.

RS: Can you, not every about your own family, but more broadly about people living in the Butler Houses or elsewhere, the slide in to using drags. Where there immediate factors that would lead to drags or is it a combination of things? It was just around so it was easy to pick up on? You want to just let off steam? Like what was it that just allowed, caused people that you might not have thought, would be using to head in to this?

DC: From what I could see there was like two sides of people, of those persons who use drags. There was the operating person, who was fully on drags but really managing their life way beyond whether-- I've yet to see as far as any drug users. And those were those people who were using drags and slowly breaking down their entire lives as well as the lives of family members and everyone around them. So, it was just those two sides, you were either fully on

drugs but somehow able to keep up with your bills, keep the kids clothed, keep food in the house, just keep on top of things for lack of a better term. Or you were fully using drags every day, had people in your house using drags, and people visiting your house to get drags, going to other peoples house to get drags out in the street, or out at night trying to get drags. Leaving the kids at home, not preparing any food for the kids, the clothing of the kids was either tattered, very tattered and worn and basically you didn't care. So that's it.

RS: Well if this was large scale, what did this do, you described a pretty beautiful community within the Butler Houses when you were younger-What did this do to the shape of adults watching after kids? Or kids being able, you had already mentioned that because of circumstances there wasn't a lot of community action. But what did it look like now in the courtyard or in the hallways? What did it feel like?

DC: It was like a cloud sort of descended over the area. Because I remember the day time you don't even remember, you just sort of remember night time or evening cause it always seemed dark. I mean I don't know if that was just my mood because I dealt with everything, but it just always seemed dark. Through the later portion of my time there, I don't remember I hardly remember day time. I remember a lot of night time because at that time I didn't have a lot of checks on me so I was out at night.

MN: Did your teachers know what was going on?

DC: Yes.

MN: So they could tell?

DC: They could tell which kids were having the most problems yes. It was evident, and some kids tell.

MN: And this was happening to a number of families at the same time.

DC: Yes, yes.

MN: One of the things you know that people said, that when heroine hit the Bronx it mostly

hit the men. It sounds like crack hit women. You're saying that heroine hit women too?

DC: Heroine hit women, I work with them now. Heroine hit everybody, just the fact that it wasn't gender specific. It likes everyone, drugs like everyone. That is what I've come to find out.

MN: Now when your immediate family fell apart who stepped in to make sure you and your brother were taken care of?

DC: I have, one of my aunt who still lives The bout, the one I alluded to earlier, she sort of stepped in. And then by the grace of God New York stepped in, I say that very facetiously. And those two, I had my aunt which is my family portion, and then I had New York State who felt like they needed to do something. But I feel they could have left me alone.

MN: So New York State assigned you to a family in--

DC: Na, it wasn't, I wasn't that in that in the Foster homes.

MN: So you were living with relatives?

DC: No I lived in a group home setting.

MN: You lived in a group home-- They sent you to a group home?

DC: Yes they did.

RS: Was that in Nyack?

DC: Yup.

RS: And was that with your brothers and sisters as well?

DC: No only with my brother, my two sisters then moved to some--well initially I can't say where they moved because I don't know. Because I didn't see them when I first moved Nyack, I didn't see anyone in my family for two years after that.

RS: So, just your brother, or--

DC: No, no one, I didn't see any one but my brother cause he was with me.

RS: Right, right.

DC: But anyone else I didn't see.

MN: So you were sent by New York State to a group home in Nyack.

RS: When you were twelve?

DC: No, I was eleven. Yes. December 5th 1987.

RS: And you were there two years with your brother?

DC: I was supposed to be there two weeks, I left in--when did I leave? June 19th 1996.

RS: So you were there until you graduated from high school?

DC: I was there until one day before I came to stay here with the HEOP program.

MN: Wow. Was-- how many people from that group home ended up going to a college the quality of Fordham?

DC: When I left? Me and my brother.

MN: So you and your brother were like the--most people ended up going to college or?

DC: Group homes are a short stay before a jail.

MN: So what, I mean you were sent in a situation which for most people was a prescription for failure.

DC: Yes.

MN: And it wasn't for you and your brother.

DC: I didn't think it was for me. I stayed, but I didn't think it was for me. No kid there thinks its for them, so that's not--

MN: How did you hold it together to achieve what you achieve?

DC: I had a lot of help. I had you know, people who that I met along the way that cared about me. I had some good wits about myself, I could get myself that much credit at least to a point.

What else? I just wanted to, I didn't want to go to jail. I am not a fan of jail.

MN: Of your cohort from the Butler Houses, you know the kids you grew up with. Did any others end up going to college, that you know of ?

DC: Yes a handful of us.

MN: So some of the people who stayed also ended up also going to college.

DC: Yes, some people who actually stayed there which I, and looking back on it I didn't think if I stayed there I could have went to college. But some people I'm happy to say, that I grew up there with went to college.

MN: And are you still in touch with those people?

DC: For the most part no.

RS: Have you spent a lot of time back in the Butler Houses?

DC: No not really.

RS: But you have visited?

DC: I've visited but sort of once my family left, and given the circumstances under which I myself left I am not you know, I love the Bronx, but right there it sort of-- It is a sweet but sour at the same time feeling. Even when I drive past, I don't shake but it's like I know where I am every time, and any proximity of it. And given the fact that I work five blocks from where I grew up I always know when I am there, I always know.

RS: How--you work five blocks from where you came up and went through all of that. How does that shape what you do now, and shape how you look at other people going through experiences? You learned a lot really young.

DC: Yes, but I've been grateful, I'm very grateful. I'd rather have learned it, and I honestly say I'd rather have learned it on the circumstances that I did rather than having not learned it at all. Because it has given me tough skin, and you need that you really do. I feel sorry for kids that you know don't really have anything to go through. You need something you need something to test you I feel. And it definitely tested me.

RS: Since you are looking at a lot of peoples experiences right now who are facing serious challenges, and you went through facing a lot of serious challenges also. I

know you said in the email you said that you're not in to urban planning trying to creating economic fixes for this. But when you look back on it if you think there was one thing that might have made the biggest difference what do you think it could have been? What could have maybe not turned the tide entirely, but what would have made a huge difference in the downward slide?

DC: Maybe if some of the safeguards, such as I guess you would say the greater police force, some of the safeguards with schooling for some of the kids because I was lucky in that that sense. Some people even after school, where I was even before I even left to move to Nyack you know they showed a little interest in what was going on with me. But if that was a little stronger for some of the other people that I knew growing up I guess as far as school involvement and just checks on what was going on in the kids' life and you know community based things if they had more of those things maybe. And as I said initially if the police force was maybe, I guess more attentive then a lot of things could have been different. And the reason I said police first because unfortunately for them, and I really respect their job, but they the first line--they meet these things head on before people know about them. They have to write the reports that eventually make it to the mayors desk and after they get to the mayors desk they make it to media.

MN: So your sense is that the police led a lot of stuff slide--

DC: I saw a lot of things slide, saw lots of things slide. That's why we have Larry Davis.

MN: Is there anything else that you want to say, I mean as you were talking I think of that hip-hop song "If I ruled the world."

DC: That's another one, Kurtis Blow.

MN: Yes because I mean I went through the sixties, and all the drugs. And I knew a lot of people who were able to you know do drugs and then cope.

DC: Yes those are the people--

MN: But it seems like there are a lot of very fragile people, and you know-- So to me the question is what made people so vulnerable? What--

DC: Their circumstances were horrible. If you don't have much you don't have that far to drop. If you stand more to lose you'll take less risk, I'll say that. That's why in white communities they have what they call sheik drugs. And in communities of color they have drugs which are all intensive purposes wreck your entire life. I've never seen in a black community, in the ones that I've come in to contact with, where you know they do what may be called a sheik drug and it sort of ends there. When you have also addictive personalities, which is my job to be servicing right now, you have people that are more apt, if not more apt more vulnerable, to the availability of drugs. It is really hard in the sense that crack itself was very addictive, so once you get crack in to your system, there is a craving for crack that is unlike any other drag. You need it for however long it is going to take you to completely get yourself off it, and enter a lifelong stage of recovery. So until you get to there, you are basically within the jaws of a killer whale.

RS: So you are saying that drugs weren't the primary cause, that there were bigger forces--

DC: People's families there is you know, there is-- I came in to contact with a family that the mother she gave birth to a child that had some learning disabilities and you know was mildly retarded, she started to use drugs. I guess for her, at least for what I could see looking back on it, probably the pressures of taking care of this child along with two other small children. And in that case there was no father. So maybe in that case it became a little too much for her. And she didn't have a lot of support that I could remember, she didn't have a lot of support from her own family.

MN: With all you've been through and all you've accomplished do you feel optimistic about the future. About you know that kids will grow up with better

opportunities than you did? Or--

DC: They already have better opportunities than me. They have computers, they have-- to me like that is the biggest one. Stuff that computers bring in to somebody's world that doesn't have a computer its like night and day. Once you get one on the regular basis, like everyday I've learned-as far as computers-I've learned on this campus. When I was in high school as good a high school as it was, we didn't have a lot of computer access. I mean we used computers a lot, in some cases when I was at CS 1101 used computers more than I did when I was in high school. A lot of what I did in high school, because I couldn't have a PC in the house, because there was twelve other people there and for other reasons, I mean I did stuff by hand. As to whether the kids have more, and will they be better off I hope they will. Because if they are able to realize and sort of sit back, take in their own surrounding they'll see that they have more. Or if they in turn take the time to listen to someone like myself, who has sort of already lived in their shoes not exactly because as was already said I don't have some of things that they have. If they just take the time to listen and sort of take away and sort of learn some things, they would know what they have, and be maybe be more appreciative of it and thereby act appropriately.

Smith: Do you think the way that hip-hop has taken a turn since when you were growing up, in a more materialistic way, with how rappers are putting out videos about what they are wearing--Like in my experiences has made my friends, people I know back home, want to get in to the business of just selling drugs and making money, fast quick money without earning it and working hard from going to school you know even more appealing. Have you seen a change from when you were growing up, to how it is now because of how the hip-hop industry is making this turn to more materialistic--

DC: Well just through, I guess I would like to just talk about what your friends believe that they are seeing first. I would like to talk about that because that is a

wonderland that they've created in their own mind. These people work, hip-hop artists have to work. And as far as the cars and different things of that nature that they are able to accrue along the time that they are in the business that is a perk of the business. Your friends obviously don't seem to know what they are looking at. They are looking at entertainment, so in some cases they are not their material that they are seeing in these videos these are not you know the spinners that they see on their cars for some of the people. It is a fantasy; people don't live like that not anybody we know. No one in this room knows somebody that lives like Jay-Z, and if you do more power to you maybe they should share with you that is all I would say. But, I would say they would have to get past the fantasy, as far as the braggadocious speaking and boasting in hip-hop, that has always been there that is always going to be there. This guy thinks he is better than the next guy, Little Kim thinks she is better than Foxy Brown, Foxy Brown thinks she is better than Little Kim. That is always going to be there because it is competitive; it is a sport it really is. If you can you know create a rise better than the next person, why shouldn't you say you're better, it's a sport. For me I look at it as a sport, it's just back and forth- the dozens on record, that is all it is really.

Smith: What I am saying is that a high school student you really can't differentiate between what you see in a video, is that really his clothes is that really his car? Because you are older now you are post college, when you are a freshman in high school and you have opportunities to make money selling at your high school aren't you going to that because that is what you see people are doing?

DC: You would tend to do it--

Smith: With all the jerseys and the \$150 Jordans, how are you going to get that on a \$6 salary you know working in the mall?

DC: Ok, well if it was really that important to you would save first of all. Second of all for those younger persons who are coming in to the business, because we have quite a few young

people in the business, and other businesses for that matter who come in to a level of wealth.

You have to have people who are in your corner that are willing to work with you and help you to do the homework, or you have to do the homework yourself to see that there's a life after this first video that I'm doing. There is probably a bill that I am going to have to pay on my townhouse.

MN: See but there is one thing that struck me is that people in the Butler Houses sold drugs without ever having videos. In other words they did it because they saw a way to make money. They didn't need--you know this is well before there were bling-bling videos. So I know, there is this whole question whether it is hip-hop making people sell what they are selling because it is there and it is the easiest way to get money.

DC: Well when I grew up around it was a way to make money. I don't think so much that it is different. If you are going to go in to drug selling, you are not going in to drug selling because you want to someday be able to show up at the Cheetah Club and pull out a knot of money and hopefully catch the eye of the nearest model, cause that is not really going to happen. Because people see through those things if not initially then they see through them eventually so-- What I grew up around was people trying to elevate their economic status, and a large part of what I grew up around also and what is prevalent in any person I believe that will go in to selling drugs for any amount of money that they may need is greed, its greed. It is just you have a drive you have greed you have wants and it just goes from there. And people stay in it, stay in the game as they say for greed. No one stays in drug selling because they need to support their family. What you do in drug is way beyond supporting a family, especially if you're successful. It is not about supporting a family, its beyond that.

RS: What is it exactly?

DC: I don't know it's like street, it is neighborhood fame, it is street credibility, it is the

showing that in some cases that you could break a grown man down, especially where he may owe you money. You break a grown man down, and show everybody else around him that you have the upper hand on him because of your status in the community. And you may not even be as physically imposing as the person that you need to collect from. If I was drug selling, and entrenched in it, he could walk somewhere near me. If he owes me ten dollars, as big as he is, there won't be too many words exchanged, and I am going to have the upper hand that is just how it goes.

RS: So what-- cause a quick shift from hip-hop but what I am hearing in that is that there is serious ways of defining manhood in these relationships.

DC: Yup, it is toughness it's money as it progresses. It is willingness to perform or act out a violent act.

RS: Street credit.

DC: Street credit, it's really I can't really describe it any more deeply. Also, where it applies willingness to perform or act out a violent act. That is usually the end point because no drug dealer that I have ever come in to contact with just really wants to kill somebody, they want the business to go right. So the business going right is basically the person whoever owes money, just giving them money. And if you don't then of course you are either made to do something you don't want, you're humiliated in some way. Someone close to you or someone that you love either have to pay your debt, or in a drastic situation as well a tragic situation you could get killed. That is really it.

RS: Now another drastic turn, which is back to the hip-hop question. You mentioned before that, you know when I asked you the soundtrack to you growing up it was the message the first song that came to your mind. And I kind of want to go from the issue of the increased if you want to call the commercialization of hip-hop or the videos and what you see when you know twenties and whatever. Do you see any artist or any songs that

speak to you as profoundly today as "The Message?" Do you see any as smart as political hip-hop messages coming out of the mainstream hip-hop, or just lesser known artist?

DC: Mainstream, excuse me. Mainstream hip-hop doesn't speak to that right now. Because it is, as you said commercialized and with sensationalism you can't--we are not able to mix politics now. So, the days of a grand group like Public Enemy the early 90's late 80's or X-Clan, like groups like that. They really, there is really no spotlight in the main stream for them right now. But with that said, you still have groups and artists like we're generally speaking you know pass on political messages, like Dead Prez, Jurassic 5, Talib Kweli even though I feel like he needs to get back to--

RS: You're not feeling Kwelity?

DC: No I like that album, but he is sort of he is moving away. I feel a steady movement towards something that I think he shouldn't be doing personally. But then again he comes back around. It is like they go through these chameleon stages which is another portion of hip-hop that is always going to be there. As long as artists are allowed to develop and move forward then you are going to have these stages where they feel like they want to, you know they want to curse a lot or they want to talk about politics. But the politics is mainly focused only through lesser known groups.

RS: You said something really interesting just before you said--there is no space for politics in it right now. Why do you think that is? I think a lot of people agree with you, I mean why?

DC: That is because you can't put a video girl in a video with a man who depicts a

RS: So it is about audience.

DC: It is about audience and about what is going to sell. And if you ever saw Public Enemy's video, I forgot the name of this video, "Can't trust it." They had a video where they depicted a raping of a black woman. It was insinuated but it was raping of a black woman by slave

masters and it had this in the video. You can't stick a video girl in a video like that. She can't, there is no way for her to dance and there is no way for you to see the size of her breasts, or how big her hind area is. Or you can't sit her on a car in the middle of a landscape that is depicting black people on horses picking cotton. And two shots later you have a young black woman running out of a would-be stable of some sort and half naked white men behind her. You can't there is no room for that, the two you can't have it. You are speaking to two totally different audiences as you said. And the Public Enemy, the video, I used to wait and when I say wait if they threw them on now I would still be waiting for videos like that. Because that is a history lesson in the South. Even NWA had a video like that.

RS: You would be waiting, but apparently the rest of MTV's audience would not.

DC: Maybe not, I figure--the thing is that, what I have found with the MTV audience as you say, which I very much used to be a part of but now I am not because I took MTV off of my cable system. If you entrench and I guess force feed, you can get these young people to pretty much like what you want. And that is what the record companies know, so this is what they are doing even now with the varying video girls and the nice cars and different things of that nature.

MN: Ok. Thank you very much.

(End of Session.)