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Interviewees: Pete Jones (PJ) and Kurtis Blow (CB)

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison (MN)

Transcribed by: Israel Munoz

MN: Uh this is the 74th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're here with PT J Jones and Kurtis Blow – two of the legendary figures in the history of American popular music, particularly hip hop and, uh, we'll start off with Pete. Uh, when did you first move to the Bronx?

PJ: I moved to the Bronx in 1970, July of 1970 and I spent (unintelligible) in the same apartment.

MN: Uh-huh, and that's Anderson Avenue between where and where?

PJ: It's 164th street right up the hill from Yankee Stadium-

MN: Okay. Now, had you been to the Bronx at all before that time?

PJ: I'd been there many times, yeah.

MN: Now, um, how did you find – you grew up in North Carolina, how did you find yourself coming to New York?

PJ: Well, I grew up in North Carolina, (unintelligible) North Carolina on a dairy farm, and I, I was um, (unintelligible) to play basketball and my coach suggested that I come to New York because of the better competition (unintelligible) practice. So I came to New York and I lived with my brother for (unintelligible) drive.

MN: Now, how did he come to New York City?

PJ: Well he came out to stay with my older brother – the older brother.

MN: So there was a North Carolina to New York connection?

PJ: In those days, the New York, uh, in North Carolina, uh, North Carolinians migrated to New York because share-sharecropping had gotten scarce and hard to maintain jobs. We could make more money, bottom line, we could make more money – have better jobs, have better unions. So almost everybody in my town migrated to New York. Now they've moved back.

MN: So now they've moved back? Ok, now um, had you done anything with music when you were in North Carolina?

PJ: Well one thing I did with music was to fool around with my grandmother's gramophone which was a big, wind-up machine (unintelligible). And I played around with music like Bruce

Jordan (?) (unintelligible) stuff like that. And I played at different parties where people (unintelligible) the music department.

MN: Now, the concept of the DJ, like you know, you study music history in the early '50s, the DJ was the guy on the radio who talked in rhymes. When did the DJ at the party become a figure who was important?

PJ: Well, I don't know but I think it first came to New York big time. A guy names M. Martin Hall (lists several other unintelligible names) – they were promoters. They, during the time when they had the beef crisis, I know you remember around early '70s they had (unintelligible) downtown, so they would go down and speak to restaurant owners about giving the disco (unintelligible) about 10 o'clock. They couldn't believe it. They said, "you wanna try to have people come in to see people come to spin records?" and they said "yeah." So they tried to (unintelligible) found a building (unintelligible) they started moving up, making groove, Jenny, Puff Theatrical (unintelligible).

MN: Kurtis, what year was it when you first went down to, you know, one to Pete's parties? Was this in the '70s? Or the late '60s?

KB: Yes, this was in the early '70s. I remember it, clear as day. It was 1972, and I was 13 years old. Um, a friend of mine was co-promoting a club night, where the #1 DJ in New York was playing. His name was Pete DJ Jones. And I said, "oh my god, can I get in? Can you get me in? Please?" I always liked to tag around with, you know, tag along with my older brothers and the older cats around my neighborhood. So one night, the guy who actually had all the juice, the power to get us in, said "sure I'll take you (unintelligible) guy. Come on in." And I couldn't believe it. It was my first time ever being in a close situation. I mean, I'd seen it on TV in the '60s, in the late '60s.

MN: What did it look like? Describe walking in the door.

KB: Well, first you gotta understand in the '60s, the late '60s, the go-go was the most important thing –

MN: Oh that was the dancing girls.

KB: –psychedelic, the dancing girls, and you had a DJ there but he was playing with one turntable. He'd play a song, then make an announcement, then play another song. What amazed me that night in 1972 was that when I walked into this, uh, club called Macoy – it was on 43rd street and right around the corner from (unintelligible). 43rd Street and Park Avenue? Lexington! Lexington Avenue! And so I walked in. Immediately I saw the club was completely black but there was a huge disco ball at the top of the club. And they had like a white light shining on this ball, so when the ball spun the mirrors reflected the light around the room (cell phone begins ringing--cut). Mirrors reflecting the light around the room and it seemed that there were little

spots of light, just spinning all around the whole entire place. It made it seem like you were in outer space with nothing but stars.

MN: Right. So it created a kind of psychedelic atmosphere?

KB: It was the most incredible thing I'd ever seen. As a child, you know I'm talking about a teenager. I was traumatized. Seeing this and all these people – 1000 people, 1200 people in a club and they're all dancing and they're all looking really nice with suits and ties and dresses. Oh man, it was just an incredible aura to witness. And then as I approached closer to where the music was coming from, I saw the set up. It was a big tall 6 foot 7 guy standing there spinning the records but he had two turntables. He had headphones on. And he was big. I started to look at him and actually stare at him. At that time, I admitted my point to become a DJ and break into the music industry and do films myself and (unintelligible) and all that stuff when I was 13. So in analyzing this number one DJ, I saw that he had two turntables and it was continuous music. It didn't stop. He had two of the same records, and what he was doing was he was extending the break of the record to make just the break, which was the most important part if you go into a club, you see the DJ throws on the hottest song of the night. Everyone goes crazy when it drops down to the break, or at the beginning of the song everybody throws their hand in the air. I'm checking all of this out and he's bringing the break back and forth and he has this-this timing, this precision timing to keep the beat going exactly in tempo, so that the crowd of people could actually do the hustle on time, continuously nonstop, dancing to the break of one song for about 5 minutes.

MN: Now to me the question is, how did you get from being a basketball player with professional aspirations, coming to New York playing with guys like Dukes and Lingo, to becoming the number 1 DJ in New York? Let's try to take it step by step.

PJ: Well (laughter) when I first came to New York around the early '60s, mid-60s, I used to uh I used to have a turntable integrated with an amplifier and somehow I'd (unintelligible) and I used to go home and play DJ and rap (cross-talk). And I started playing for parties and stuff like that. And um, so how I really got into it, in 1970 I had the first (unintelligible) Morgan in Yankee stadium –

MN: Oh yeah, I remember that.

PJ: – and everybody was giving a party that night. So I had just moved to the Bronx in this place called the (unintelligible) you had this nice back room.

MN: Now what street was that on?

PJ: That was 164th and (unintelligible).

MN: Now that's also in your neighborhood? (cross-talk)

PJ: So everybody was doing a party and I decided I wanted to get into, I wanted to make some money (unintelligible) I made the mistake of renting a place first. So I got the place and then I got the DJ. All the DJs were booked that night. So (unintelligible, for about 15 seconds). So I went out and bought top-twenty records which was (unintelligible). They were about a minute and a half, two minutes at the most and so I played myself that night. Went out past (unintelligible) on Yankee stadium and the place was jam-packed (unintelligible). But the next morning, it was so successful that the guy gave me the place every Friday and Saturday night and he rented and sold me the place. I bought the place (unintelligible), called Pete's Lounge and later changed the name to Club DJ. And uuh, so I was playing then and one night a guy named Bob Kagel from Grand Theatrical, Grand Master Flower from the DJ. Grand Master Flower had shown up late so he called me in by 12 o'clock, I'm watching TV watching the late show. He said I'll come pick you up so (unintelligible). I threw my stuff in his Volvo and we went down, got there around 1 o'clock (unintelligible).

MN: Now what street was this on?

PJ: (unintelligible)

MN: 57th? Now were you using one turntable then or two?

PJ: No I was using 2. I had learned how to hook up two turntables by using like a pre-amp. It's like a short (unintelligible) with two inputs. No. One input, two outputs. Now I learned how to do that. They probably had (unintelligible) in those days, but we couldn't afford them. We couldn't afford radio stations or stuff like that. But anyway. Took this with my pre-amp, run the turntables with the input, and on one side we had a Sony MX-12 mic (unintelligible) and it was battery operated, I mean battery powered. So we would run one output to the mixer input, and run the other output to the (unintelligible) throwing one switch to the other like a train. And I could turn this turntable and listen to it without going through the mixer. Then I could switch it back, and that's how I started mixing. Other DJs used the same thing too but (unintelligible). And in my opinion, I think they, uh, hip hop came from the fact that there was like an evolution in R&B music. R&B music had taken a lot of turns and flipsides over the blues, getting into jumping jazz, and then rock and roll, the whole (unintelligible) side. And in the '70s, you took another turn. You had the hustle type music which the blacks, the black people didn't even like that well. So the hustle people kept going with Puerto Ricans and White folks, and all the black people we had to go and dig back down in the archives and find some old music to bump. So we released all that James Brown, People's Choice, and stuff like that. And we partied to that, but still we didn't have enough (unintelligible) all night in a disco. So, let me back up a little bit. Before I got the (unintelligible) I used to be into really (unintelligible) reggae. (Unintelligible) standing on the groove and you see (unintelligible) and you know something is going on. So we used to, I used to play that groove (unintelligible) so without a kicking system, you had to kick back on the beat. So in my opinion, that's probably where scratching came from. Out of necessity, but then they did it because it sounded good. We used to have the (unintelligible). And

so we played the jump part over and over again, eventually (unintelligible) records came out. And the (unintelligible) they were right on top of everything. They gave us the break parts, they even gave us (unintelligible) in the beginning and the middle. Then came the instrumental. The first part that I remember was the James Brown part two, part two and part one. And, uh, that's how we got started.

MN: Now Kurtis, were a lot of the people who were in hip hop skilled in electronics? The (unintelligible) doesn't sound that easy to, you know, a person that didn't like have some experience.

KB: Yeah there were scientists. There were engineers. There were very, very creative writers. A lot of this energy in hip hop spirit is-is basic energy that has been filtered throughout the Bronx and Harlem. And a lot of these kids had been hit by this hip hop love at an early age, and we still arguments and fights and debates about who did what and, you know, I call it the "I I I syndrome" – I did this, I did that. Um, I would like to think of it as like a hip hop spirit that's touched all of us. Because I remember back in '72 when I was 13 or 14, you know, when I first saw Pete I couldn't believe that he had continuous music. And I saw him. And then I went back to my home after seeing him and actually trying to look at the grooves and bring that back (crosstalk) so that the record could repeat, sorta like what he was doing with one turntable. And they call that "drop the needle" or "pick up the needle." It's like a spirit that touched everybody. It's just natural evolution.

MN: Now did you – was your first impulse to want to be a DJ? When you saw this, uh, when did you, you know, have the (unintelligible) of becoming an MC? Or was that something later?

KB: I always wanted to be a DJ ever since I could imagine, that I could read, because my mom was such a lover of music in general growing up in the '60s, and she used to go out to the Cotton Club and Apollo Renaissance and the you know all those clubs (unintelligible). She told me the stories of how she was the best dancer than they was. There was this place where they used to call her Skinny Minny. She did the jitterbug really well (unintelligible) she's throwing up and all that good stuff. And so um dancing was a real good-good thing in my home. Just a lover a music. I remember being 4 or 5 years old going to the corner record shop on 145th street where they had, you know, the speaker outside of the record store and you could hear the songs. And I used to just stand right there and just hug the speaker right there as a kid. My mom was going in buying the latest records. And then, even before I could read I remember the first things that I would read were the charts that each record store would have at the time – the top 10 records of that time. And I just loved music growing up with the Motown Sound, James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Sam Cooke, (unintelligible). All that stuff was deep deep deep! I remember it knowing what songs were, you know, changeable in the top 10. You know what I mean? So, with that love of music even when my mom bought our first component set, a TV, and a radio (crosstalk). When my mom first bought that, I was the designated scientist for that system. So I used to take the requests for all the house parties that we had. I was a DJ at 7 years old for the family, you know.

MN: So you were entertaining everybody from that system?

KB: Yeah! Yeah, definitely! And that's when I really became the-the engineer for the family and just loving to open up radios and see what made them tick. All the appliances and they started calling me the little scientist around the house. I would always bring things down but never bring them back together.

MN: Now, Pete did you grow up playing any musical instruments?

PJ: I played trumpet in the high school band.

MN: In a marching band?

PJ: In a marching band. The coached talked about me so bad (unintelligible) I had to drop out and play basketball.

MN: What about you Kurtis? Did you play any musical instruments?

KB: I went to the High School of Music and Art, so I can play a little bit of everything. But my love has always been art. I mean, I excel in art – cartooning, graphics, and you know all the oil colors and pastels and watercolors. I'm a master artist.

MN: Now, one of the things that's interesting to me, when I was growing up in Brooklyn, I mean, a lot of people heard of King Kurtis and wanted to be a saxophone player, you know, or they wanted to sing doo-wop. Did you have, ever have dreams of being an instrumental musician like being, you know-

PJ: No, when I dropped out of band I never looked back. I don't even know where my trumpet is. I guess it's someplace in the closet.

MN: So it's interesting to me you know. This is I guess in '63, '64 when you're being a DJ in your own house by yourself. When were the first white discos opened in like New York? You know, because—

PJ: Where they had 99 cent record hops they had the parties that they might charge a dollar. They called it rent parties. They had all kinds of parties. And it was really like disco but just in brick rooms—

MN: Did they give a name to it, you know.

PJ: No, just a house party. (Unintelligible). “Pete's giving a house party tonight. Parties over here tonight.” You had groups that would call each other to know where the party's at. There was some people who you could tell about the parties and would never pay. There were promoters I guess.

MN: It strikes me, I guess, that what you're doing was and still is an incredible skill. The timing—on one hand you have the technical expertise, you know. But then the timing, so that everything moves that way. What prepared you to have that exclusive-ability to just come in with that?

PJ: With the records you mean?

MN: Yeah, (crosstalk).

PJ: Well, practice. You hit and miss. You didn't care. If you missed it, it was the same thing. It was still a party. You put on a sound, put it on the groove, pick it out and put it on real fast. I guess I could do it real fast. When you're starting a record, you don't play (unintelligible) and you back it up – that's where you get that "bloop bloop bloop." But apart from being a technician, the competition (unintelligible) and everything else because we were having battles in those days. And everybody was trying to out-do each other. They were scratching on the labels on the records. They were tape over the amplifier, turning (unintelligible) equipment. There was a violent style. So I would go down to (unintelligible) to ask some guys at AST down on Canal Street. They had speakers and amplifiers, and I said I had to have – to Henry, the guy working was henry – I had to have some bass, I got to have some bass. The guy was blowing me away. He ordered, he gave me a big black box. No speaker (unintelligible) you see the cone in the speaker. Big black box with a port to it. No nothing. I said is that a speaker? He said yeah that's a speaker. Said (unintelligible) "point it to the back so the sound will come out the port. I'll order you this from California it costs \$300." I said "I'll get it right now." And in about two weeks, I got my B36-ers beta came. The B36, I had that good quality sound (unintelligible).

MN: Now I've been playing and everybody else around here has been playing those CDs I got from you, it says "this is dynamite pete from across the street with that funky beat." When did you start calling yourself Dynamite Pete from across the street?

PJ: Well a guy named Sandy, he was a promoter, and when I played on night at the "heavy club" at the grand memorial game, he comes in and says Pete the DJ Jones. Every time he would see me he would say Pete DJ Jones. And I started to call myself Pete DJ Jones.

MN: Now was it common—

PJ: No, Kurtis gave me the name Dynamite Pete from across the street.

MN: Oh really?

PJ: Dynamite Pete from across the street...

MN: ...with a funky beat (crosstalk). Now a lot of the books say that the rapping part of it was something that came well after the DJing, you know maybe by '75 or so. Is that what you guys recollect or were people always doing some of this at the parties?

PJ: What is the question again?

MN: Like some of the books about hip hop say rapping really started in '75 or so where the rapper became as important as the DJ.

PJ: Well yes that's when they became important, but they were rapping when we started playing the break parts on records, they were usually instrumental right. Yeah, instrumentals a lot of drums, chords, and beats so when we were playing that part it left a little void. They had no vocals in it. That's what allowed my guys to rap. Stasio (?) will tell you, I'll cut you off in a minute if you rap over vocals. No rapping. I did not allow rapping over a vocal.

MN: Now, so you had a team of people with you?

PJ: Yeah.

MN: When did you start – did Kurtis start with you, or you went out on your own, Kurtis?

PJ: Well Kurtis was sneaking into my parties.

KB: Yeah, I came later. Much much later on. When I was watching him (unintelligible) I used to call myself a Pete DJ Jones clone. I used to just follow him. I was one of the patrons to his party everywhere he was. But you know, he's right. When it first started, when the DJ actually was a vocal point of the party, the MC – we used to call ourselves MCs, master of ceremony or mic controllers, we were more like a dime-a-dozen (crosstalk and laughter).

PJ: I used to always keep an open mic. If a guy wanted to come and rap I'd let him rap, and if he couldn't rap I'd cut him off (laughter).

KB: Yup, yup. So it was more like, you know, Pete had 3 or 4 MCs, we used to carry the equipment for the DJ.

PJ: I had a crew. I think that's probably where the crew started. Everybody had their crews some other guys they had their crew.

MN: So you needed a crew to carry your equipment.

PJ: Yeah, (unintelligible) by 5 guys, about 3 or 4 young ladies. And they would come to get the party started, and the ladies and the guys they all carried the equipment.

MN: And when did you start – when did this, you know, get... How long did it take since that time at the first party with the gambling game till you had a whole operation like that.

PJ: About 4 or 5 months, that's when they (unintelligible).

MN: So it happened that fast?

PJ: That fast. Turning out that night, when you got the top 20. Turned it out, there's a party till 6 o'clock.

MN: Now, did you have another job when you were doing this?

PJ: I was working for the department of social services when I started – casework.

MN: Oh God, that's a terrible job.

PJ: Later on, I transferred to motivating teens. I talked for 13 years.

MN: Oh so you're a—

PJ: Yeah I was working.

MN: You were a high school teacher?

PJ: Junior high.

MN: Junior high teacher?

PJ: Junior high school 22.

MN: In what borough?

PJ: Bronx, 167th and Martyrs Avenue.

MN: Oh, boy.

PJ: Worst school in the Bronx.

MN: 167th and Martyrs Avenue. Is that near Taft?

PJ: Yeah, 5 or 6 blocks from Taft.

MN: Wow. So you know, some of those times in the '70s there were rough things going on.

PJ: Oh, I was (unintelligible) so many times. I was supposed to have been dead 50 times already. (Unintelligible) one year. I'll see you after school.

MN: You mean, the kids would threaten you?

PJ: Yeah, they would threaten. They'd make this motion like this: "you dead, you dead."

MN: Really? Wow.

PJ: Yeah! I mean, we couldn't run through anybody. They weren't as strict then as they are today. Kids will threaten you (unintelligible) "ahh he's just a kid." (Crosstalk).

MN: So the discipline has broken down?

PJ: Yeah.

MN: Now, Kurtis, did you go to public high school or did you go to Catholic or private school?

KB: I went to the High School of Music—

MN: Before that. Or you, uh—in the neighborhood that you were in wasn't like what Pete was describing?

KB: Uh, no no no no. I had – my school career actually was very very celebrated. I was in IGC classes in elementary school, for Intellectually Gifted Children. Then AP classes in Junior High. Then I went to Music and Arts, and then to college. I remember having a 12th grade reading level in 4th grade, so I always excelled in school (unintelligible).

PJ: The reason the kids were acting up was the physical school. I mean, Rikers Island had better conditions than we had at junior high school. We had blackboards, you'd write on the blackboard and you had to write around a hole in the wall where they threw a chair (laughter). You had to write around the board. We didn't have books. We had to walk around carrying books on a cart from class to class. The kids had no books to go home and study with.

MN: This is in the '70s and '80s?

PJ: In the '70s and '80s. They had plate metal where windows are supposed to be, plate metal with a peephole.

MN: Damn.

PJ: (Unintelligible) knocked out. Now that's the kind of environment the kids had to deal with.

MN: Wow. And also—

PJ: --holes in there sometimes, rats running all over the place.

MN: I remember some of the buildings around there had burned, you know.

PJ: Oh yeah, they were burning buildings in those days. Yup. They were burning. Burn baby burn.

MN: So, were any of your students—was hip hop a way for you, as a teacher, to get the attention of some of the kids?

PJ: Exactly. That's how I controlled the bad kids. Most the bad kids' teachers would send the kids to me. I'd come into my classroom – and I had about 20 students – I looked around and then I had about 30 or 40. And I said, “why are you in here?” [They said] “‘cause my teacher told me to come over here.” Because I could control them. Because I could play music for the school, and they wanted to be in my crew. I'd threaten you want to be in my crew? You be a nice guy, don't get in trouble, and you'll be in my crew. I'd get control of them. (Unintelligible).

MN: Now, Kurtis, when you were going to some of these clubs, did you ever feel like physically concerned—like that stuff was gonna beak out? And you had to be careful? Or were the clubs like a safe zone?

KB: I was too busy having fun. Downtown they were pretty safe. They used police—off-duty police officers as security and stuff like that. (Unintelligible). There's a whole difference of the coin, you know, we're not talking about. The guys who couldn't get into these parties we're talking about were (unintelligible), partied in the neighborhood, partied in the parks, partied in the gyms in the community, and on the blocks with the block parties and house parties. And they didn't have a dress code. They didn't wear suits and ties.

MN: So to go into one of the clubs that Pete was working at downtown, you had to wear a suit and tie?

KB: There was a dress code.

MN: It was a dress code?

KB: No doubt, (crosstalk) pay money. And on the other side of the coin, you didn't have a dress code. So there were shoe people and there were sneaker people. You know, people who could get into the club and people who couldn't get into the club. The people who couldn't get into the club are what is known as hip hop today. It was the ghetto disco, or the guys who partied in the parks and the community centers and the gyms. So it's a whole different crowd. A whole different audience. And they are the ones who get most of the credit for pioneering hip hop.

PJ: Like he said, you had two types of parties in those days. You had DJs that played downtown. You had DJs that hooked up in the park (unintelligible). Everybody couldn't get the job, except two DJs got the job downtown. So they was rough. They hooked up in the park, and that's when kids had enough security (unintelligible) that's when fights would break out, no what I mean?

KB: That's when it got really dangerous, 'cause you had guys who were gang members going out to these clubs and actually beating the security or some of those hot DJs in the park, and they would just rob all the people. And that's how hip hop got a bad name later on in like '78 '79.

PJ: That's why a lot of these days, they got their names in the park. Because they were playing for kids 4 years, 3 years old, up to adults 60 years old. When the DJs were playing in the club, having like 20, 18 20 years old.

MN: Now when you were owning your club, did you have to worry about people coming in, you know, trying to steal or disrupt. Was security an issue?

PJ: No because my bar, I tried to make it an adult bar (laughter) no damned kids. That was more like a (unintelligible) but my club PnP (?) on Jerome Avenue we had a very strict dress code. There was no sneakers, no (unintelligible) caps, no boots (unintelligible).

MN: Now where was that located? Jerome and where?

PJ: Jerome between Marcy Place... it was near 170.

MN: Okay, and what year did you open that club?

PJ: I opened it around '87 I think (unintelligible, crosstalk).

MN: What was going on there?

KB: You see, Pete had several clubs. He's not telling you the whole truth. He had several—I mean he had 3 or 4 clubs at one time. And this one club I'm thinking about, again I was very young so (crosstalk) yeah I used to get these phony IDs. I'd go down to 42nd street you know, like 15 years old I got an ID that said I'm 19 years old. So I was getting into all the discos, all the clubs, you know, at an early early age. But he had this one club called Peace Clowns (?) (laughter). It was the first strip joint I had ever been to it was a real live (unintelligible).

MN: Now, this is in the Bronx? Or in Manhattan?

KB: And the things they used to do at this club traumatized me again. I'm talking about when I was like 13 (crosstalk) '72 so then again in '75 and '76. He really traumatized me (laughter) at this Pete's Lounge joint that was the most incredible (crosstalk).

MN: This was on Jerome Avenue?

PJ: That was on (unintelligible).

MN: Oh so that's where the old club was?

KB: They had a guy in there named Jaws (laughter) that was when the movie was really really hot, so this guy (crosstalk) he was famous throughout New York City.

PJ: Yeah, I had about 25 dancers in there.

MN: How big a place was it?

KB: Wooooo!

PJ: It could fit about 300 people

MN: And you had about 25 (crosstalk)...

PJ: most of my clients there were police (laughter, crosstalk).

MN: Now did you have male dancers as well as female?

PJ: Only female.

MN: Where there a lot of places like that in those days?

KB: No, never! Never.

(Crosstalk)

KB: I'd never seen anything like that before in my life, ever. I was 15 and (crosstalk)—

PJ: They had to, because that's the only way to get clientele down there. I mean, the people with the money that spent money.

MN: So how long did the lounge stay in existence?

KB: Couple of years.

PJ: Until about '84. That's about—

KB: That's 9 years you're talking about.

PJ: I opened it in '77. I tried to do the right thing. I went and got my liquor license. I paid the money. They investigated me like I was running for the White House. They gave me all my stipulations. I'm trying to run a decent (unintelligible) and I look around, and all my clientele is burnt out. Where are they going? Oh, they're going next door to the after-hours joint. I called the state liquor store (?) and they told me there's nothing we can do. It's a police problem. I called the police, and they said that's a liquor store problem. I said okay, next year I'll be a after-hours spot. (Crosstalk) These guys might last 5 years but you might get busted the first night. Well I'd take that chance. That's when they (unintelligible).

MN: So there were a lot of after hours—

PJ: —around that area over there. Everybody was at the after hours (crosstalk).

KB: They never gambled in your place.

PJ: No, they never...

KB: That's the big thing about after hours spots. Yeah, people get a drink (crosstalk, unintelligible)...you could go and gamble, actually illegally gamble in the back room. They had a pool table set up and shoot craps on the floor.

PJ: It was really like bars, but you had better protection on yourself, because they was sticking up bars. I got stuck up twice.

MN: So you got stuck up at Pete's lounge?

KB: Yeah (unintelligible) because a bar's a public place, by law. You couldn't have a doorman checking and screening people. Everybody had the right to come in if they were of age. So at after-hours spots, you had a door man that pressed everybody down.

MN: Now, were the police like on the take in those days, or it would vary?

PJ: Yeah, they were on the take in those days. They didn't bother me because they knew me (unintelligible)... They'd look out for me though. And I had good security, and I was on top of my place.

MN: Now, you said that when you went down to see Pete in Manhattan there was, the clientele was almost all black at the club. In the Bronx, was it more mixed black and Spanish or it varied from club to club?

PJ: Well, it depends on the area you were in. If you were in a black area, it had all black. But if you were in a borderland area you get sort of—

MN: Now do you remember—

KB: I don't remember any mixed clubs like that until like the mid-70s. (Crosstalk). If it was, it would be downtown like a funhouse, and the roxy.

MN: Right, right like a place—

KB: —177th

MN: Like, in High Bridge there weren't too many Puerto Ricans?

KB: Oh yeah, there were a lot of Puerto Ricans. (Crosstalk).

PJ: In my club there were very few Puerto Ricans. But now it's predominantly Puerto Rican.

KB: But you know what? On those, with those B-Boy parties I used to go to, like say you know the gym and the community centers, it was like (unintelligible) during that time in the mid-70s, there was gang problems, lot of gang problems that sprung up in the Bronx and, you had gangs like the Black Spades

MN: Right, and the Savage Skulls.

KB: And the Savage—the Savage Skulls were Puerto Rican.

MN: Right.

KB: The Savage Nomads were also Puerto Rican, but they were also like what you would call cousins to the Black Spades, and they were sorta like family. (Unintelligible). You know, in those times the parties were integrated on that level. I'm talking about the sneaker parties.

MN: The sneaker parties, as opposed to the shoe parties.

KB: Yeah, because you had different gangs, uh, parties—two different gang parties coming to a club, and then, you know, at the highlight of the night the two best dancers come out and do a battle. And I remember being a B-Boy at those parties going into different parties with the Puerto Ricans and that's how we got our (crosstalk).

MN: Now, this is dance, so you were also—you danced?

KB: Yes. I was also a—

MN: Damn, so you were a DJ, a breakdancer, a graphic artist and an MC?

KB: I was a B-boy I think before I was a DJ. I used to just go up and dance in the parties. That was (unintelligible) and dancing.

MN: Now, at a party like the one you saw Pete in in Manhattan – and this is interesting because, did men and women always dance in couples (crosstalk). So that was couple dancing, but you didn't have—when did B-boying, did B-boying ever affect the clubs?

KB: It came out of the (unintelligible).

MN: And then came back into the clubs?

PJ: (Unintelligible).

KB: You had a few cats who would represent—who were B-boying and represent at a club. I was one of them.

MN: So you'd go out and do stuff on the floor with people getting around you in a circle?

PJ: Yeah, in my club, I'd be on the floor and they'd pick me up and throw me out. (unintelligible) there are too many B-boys around there, because they'd get frightened when the break dancer starts breaking, everybody runs like it's a fight. And they gather around and another would jump down there. But talking about the clubs being integrated, you had the Latin-Puerto Rican and Blacks and Jamaicans, everybody at a large club (unintelligible). At a small, or community club, you'd have, if they had reggae you'd get Caribbean; if they had latin you'd get (unintelligible); you'd get a few (unintelligible) integrated (unintelligible).

MN: Now—

KB: How do you know to ask all these questions?

(Laughter)

MN: That's a long story, I'll show you this book I wrote called *White Boy: A Memoir* how I ended up into all this stuff, but to actually say, for many years I coached basketball and baseball in Brooklyn and I drove the teams around, and this was the music they listened to. And I listened to it and began to get interested in it, and then I began to read about it, and then when I began to do this project you know I picked up a lot of information about a lot of neighborhoods and the sequence of stuff so..

PJ: I should have brought you some hip hop.

MN: No that's okay, I have an office full of hip hop, cause my students burnt—but this is the stuff that I would dance to. Like when you do the party at our benefit concert, you'll see me dancing. For sure. Like that one—what was it?—don't do any better? What's that one that (unintelligible) start off with a number 3, the Pete DJ Dungs Number 3?

PJ: You hear volume 3?

MN: Yeah, and the one in which “I ruled the world” was on.

PJ: Oh okay.

MN: We were playing that down to Marsany (?) yesterday. I love that.

PJ: (unintelligible) start busting loose. Busting loose feels like busting loose.

MN: Get the seat (crosstalk) I Ruled the World, that's so hot. (Crosstalk). That is just ridiculously hot.

PJ: (Unintelligible) Grand Master Flash, didn't he?

MN: What year was that, that he did that?

CB: Oh, 85? It must have been.

MN: That was just – (stuttering) we were going down Crotona approaching Tremont when that came on in our van, cause we were headed down to Crotona Park to do some interviews. Some of the people grew up in (unintelligible) just exploded over that, but yeah. It's this one. This is just incredible, these clubs. So there is an explosion of after-hours joints and clubs in the 70s.

PJ: All over the Bronx.

MN: All over the Bronx.

PJ: The Black Door was (unintelligible).

MN: Now, where was the Black Door? That was in (Morisania?) wasn't it?

PJ: Yeah, the Black Door. You had Uncle Jim's on (Seventh?) Boulevard. Rodney (unintelligible) on 170th Street.

KB: You ever go to the Burger King Disco?

MN: Oh now (crosstalk). Okay, Burger King Disco is fascinating because that's 845 Prospect Avenue. Was that the one? The Prospect and Westchester Avenue?

PJ: I never went over there.

MN: Now they said DJ Starsky used to perform over there.

PJ: Yeah, Starsky. Right.

MN: So you went to that place, the Burger King Disco?

KB: (Unintelligible). I was out in Queens.

MN: But you know what's interesting about that location, because before it was a Burger King it was a major Jazz club called Club 845.

PJ: Oh! Club 845! (crosstalk)

MN: They had strippers too. (Crosstalk).

KB: I used to go in there, watch them girls.

MN: Oh, so that was in the early 60s – you'd go see the go go girls at Club 845?

KB: Club 845! That's where I used to hang.

MN: Now, was that mostly jazz at that time?

KB: Well they had jazz in there on certain nights. You know on the weekend when I went in there they had the dancers and R&B music.

MN: So, this was in the mid-60s?

KB: Yeah.

MN: So you used to go up to Boston Road like—

PJ: I had a BMW on (Tenton?) Avenue for a while with my brother, sitting right near Prospect.

MN: Okay, now when you were growing up were any of those old clubs like The Blue Morocco and Freddy's and Goodson's, were those still open on Boston Road or was that stuff shut down?

PJ: Anymore? Boston Road Ballroom?

MN: Yeah. So when you were coming (crosstalk). Now, I don't know if I should ask this question but where did all the money come from for all those after-hours clubs and, you know, spots? (Crosstalk). Or were there always after hours spots even in the 60s?

PJ: Well some of them were after hours spots (unintelligible) 2 of them in the same block, on Arthur Avenue. So I had no choice (unintelligible). I had to pay tax. I had to buy liquor – you need to buy liquor for a liquor store. You had to buy liquor through the State Liquor Authority. They'd charge you more money for it. So they were killing me. (Unintelligible) and get a case of beer, go to the ABC store and get a bargain on some liquor.

MN: Now, now, now – the two clubs that I come across a lot are Teek and Action (?)

PJ: (unintelligible)

MN: White Plains Road and uh Disco Fever.

KB: Disco Fever..

MN: Where was it?

KB: 167th and Jerome.

MN: So Jerome Avenue?

KB: Upstairs. It was a (unintelligible) downstairs.

MN: So you had a Spanish club downstairs?

KB: It was sort of like a bar—like a watering hole. They would hang out in there (unintelligible).

PJ: But uh Disco Fever was (unintelligible). They had Latin and Blacks.

MN: Now at what point did people begin to see the outside world, discovering what was going on in the Bronx? Uh, you know in terms of...

PJ: Well, (unintelligible) Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash, Sugarhill Gang, and (unintelligible).

MN: So this was in the 80s?

PJ: That's when all the rap records started coming out.

MN: When did your first rap record come out, Kurtis? What year?

KB: Um, 1979.

MN: '79?

PJ: I thought it was earlier than that.

MN: So how old were you when that-

KB: 20.

MN: Uhuh. And who produced the record?

KB: Jimmy (unintelligible) and Robert (unintelligible).

MN: Were they Manhattan people? Bronx people?

KB: Manhattan and Queens.

MN: So your family moved to Queens or you had moved to Queens? (inaudible crosstalk) Your still in the Bronx? Now did you ever have any interest in moving into the rapping part when you saw it was like taking off?

PJ: (unintelligible) why don't you go and make rap..

KB: Because I used to do my own rap.

--tape is cut off--

PJ: Because I used to play radio when I first started DJing. I never got into that rhythm rapping.

MN: Right.

--tape is cut off—

MN: People were saying, why don't you do some rapping?

PJ: (unintelligible) really took me downtown first to (unintelligible) and places like that. And he said, "why don't you pull out a rap?" And I said, "you're crazy. Rap? How will people dance off a rap record?" (Laughter). (Unintelligible) about to do it, and so he turns (unintelligible).

MN: Right. Now did you ever try to like go on the Frankie Crocker Show and do what he was doing?

PJ: No I never tried to do that on the radio. I just did it when (unintelligible) introduced to records. Not only Frankie Crocker, but the Jive. All those DJs were old school. They would come on and have a little skit before the show started. Like Jock-O—

MN: Right! I remember Jock-O (unintelligible) too. (crosstalk). So, um, you stayed in the Bronx all these years but you also lived in North Carolina and Florida?

KB: Yeah I have a house in North Carolina and a condo in South Beach.

MN: Uh huh. So when did you leave the New York School system?

PJ: Well I retired in '95. I put my social work time together and my teaching time together and (unintelligible, laughter).

MN: Right. Now when you were dealing with the kids, you know, did you feel that like the families had fallen apart? Was that some of the problem? Or was it more the whole neighborhood, the school, the whole atmosphere?

PJ: Well it was, because, when I (unintelligible) all schools had forced integration. But over there at 22 and a lot of other schools in the Bronx you would never see over 2 white kids. So therefore you had the kids from the community, and at Clemente you had mostly single parent families. The mother either had to get out to the street to hustle for a living, or she had to work. Either way, the kid had from 3 o'clock in the afternoon to 6 o'clock unsupervised. (Unintelligible) that's the way the kids got hooked up with all these gangs and all the activity on the street. Their best role models were the hustlers out there on the street, and uh that was the problem.

MN: So was it very different than how you were growing up?

PJ: Oh yeah (stutters). When I grew up we looked at teachers the same as a man, the Presidents, and the police. The teachers were on a very high pedestal. But these kids had no respect for teachers.

MN: I mean it's amazing because here you are – you're a major figure in music. You're 6 feet 8, and they're still going like this to you?

PJ: Yeah. Yeah. You'd probably feel it up here. I mean you're teaching them (crosstalk and laughter).

MN: That's why I'm teaching college, not high school. (Crosstalk). And, um, was there a lot of heroin in the Bronx in the '70s? Was that the big drug at that time?

PJ: The big drug was heroin from the '60s up to I'd say about the mid-70s. Crack-cocaine came out and heroin took the back seat. Oh, wait a minute. You had heroin. You had angel dust. Then crack. Then heroin took the back seat, and everybody was so afraid (unintelligible) it was crazy! When crack came out they pushed all that aside.

MN: Now, do you think crack did more damage than heroin?

PJ: It did more damage than heroin. It did more than all of it. Crack – they (stutters) get one high and they're hooked. I've seen doctors, lawyers, politicians, judges – I mean there's no, there was no cross section there. Crack was devastating the whole population. They called it the “smoking cocaine.” When they told me, somebody said “you're smoking cocaine,” I said, “you're crazy.” I'm not smoking cocaine. (Unintelligible) they're burning it in a pipe. And that's what they're doing: burning it in a pipe.

MN: Okay well this was a great interview. Is there, you know and uh a lot of this stuff is absolutely just priceless. Some stuff we've never heard before, and maybe never said anywhere before. But is there anything that you want to say looking back on all of this that you – you know in terms of things we overlooked or just things you want to say to people?

PJ: The only thing I wanna say, and I always say this, hip hop was not discovered or invented or founded. Hip hop emerged from R&B music. Any DJ that comes to tell you that I started hip hop, or that I'm responsible – he's lying. Hip hop from one DJ was (unintelligible) was most DJs the whole state of the planet, because that's the music all DJs started playing. If any person would have to take credit for hip hop it would have to be Curtis Blow and the Sugarhill Gang because they were the first ones to take it to the world. Hip hop was nothing but recorded music which was being sampled for rappers. Rappers do any of the music until the late 70s.

MN: Okay.

PJ: That's the bottom line.

MN: Okay thank you very much—

-- tape cuts off --

MN: Guys you know because like Grand—these other guys you mentioned Grandmaster Flowers and Maboya (?), they were the DJs who were also using two turntables.

PJ: Yeah. Back in the day, yeah.

MN: So this was before like Cool DJ—

PJ: But you can't find it. Yeah, that was before Cool DJ (unintelligible) and all those other guy out here. First, um, well Flowers passed away. (Unintelligible) disappeared, and Maboya (?) he was a Panamanian so he went back to Panama. So I, if it falls on me, I have to carry the (unintelligible). I mean these guys, they mean, they're saying what they know. At least they came down to 166th and 167th – they don't know anything before that because they were in the mix.

MN: Now what about this guy like Starsky? He was part – how did you meet him?

PJ: I met Starsky.. when did I meet Starsky? Oh there was Starsky – they called themselves Starsky and Hutch, two guys. So they met me one day, and Starsky was a little aggressive. He didn't know if he can come hang out with us. I said, "yeah come on, man." (Unintelligible) He started helping me carry speakers for a while, and then I saw that he was ambitious. He liked to hook things up. He was the only guy that would hook up my amplifiers and my speakers during those days. Everybody else carried the equipment but that's it. (Unintelligible). But Starsky, he wanted to learn. He watched me hook my stuff up and asked me to go sit down and he'd hook up

everything. And he wanted to play one night, I let him play. He's got talent. He can sing, and he's got a good ear for music so he's very talented. That's why he's making it so big today.

MN: Now does he – he ended up being an MC or mainly a DJ?

PJ: Well, he used to MC a little bit, and then I let him DJ but he was aggressive so he wanted to play. Whenever he got the chance, he was on the turntables. So he MCs for himself and he (unintelligible). Okay. (Unintelligible) for the records also.

MN: Okay, this is great.

[Tape ends]