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Interviewer: Mark Naison and Oneka LaBennett

Interviewee: Joan Morgan

Transcriber: Danielle Rowe

Mark Naison: Hello. Today is June 26th and we're honored to have with the Bronx African History project, author, activist, and now doctoral student Joan Morgan. We're going to talk about her years growing up in the Bronx and her exposure to Hip Hop. The lead interviewer today is going to be Dr. Oneka LaBennett and our videographer is Owen Russell and I'm Mark Naison. So, Joan tell us about how your family came to the Bronx.

Joan Morgan: I actually don't remember. I have no memories of myself because I was a little bit older than two. My mom came first. My dad was one of the founding members of the Jamaica labor party.

MN: Wow

JM: Yes! So the Bustamante's were like my defacto Godparents. My dad was working at (inaudible) so because he was working at (inaudible), we lived at (inaudible) my mother was trained as a teacher but she got to come through those connections as one of those domestic workers program in 1968. So she came and worked as a domestic for about a year. She left me with my dad and my older sister. Then she sent for us as soon as she could.

MN: Now where was she living? What street was she living on when she first came here?

JM: When she first came here she was in Scarsdale.

MN: Oh, she was with her family?

JM: yeah. So you came and you'd live with family. I think our first address was Givan Avenue in the Bronx.

MN: Okay how do you spell that?

JM: G-I-V-A-N

MN: And what was the nearest cross street?

JM: I don't remember. I think it's near Bay Chester.

MN: Okay so you were near the north east Bronx when you first came.

JM: We were staying with a family friend and I think it might have even been their basement but we didn't have our own apartment.

MN: so this was in one of those 2-3 family houses?

JM: yes

MN: okay. Where did they move next?

JM: then we moved to Fulton Avenue.

MN: what are the near streets?

JM: 169th street and I think 3rd avenue.

MN: Okay so you're right near McKinley Square.

JM: yes

MN: Okay and not too far from Crotona Park.

JM: yes.

MN: so what are your earliest memories of the Bronx?

JM: My earliest memories of the Bronx are at that building, 1231 Fulton Avenue.

MN: Okay, so describe it for us?

JM: It was a five story tenement.

MN: Were there fire escapes?

JM: with fire escapes. I lived on the first floor. That's where I met my very best and first friend Mark Anthony Neil. Dr. Mark Anthony Neil lived on the third floor.

MN: In the same building?

JM: Yes! He was my first friend and we went to preschool together.

MN: What was the name of the preschool?

JM: It was head start and it was in a church- St. Johns and Episcopal Church.

MN: Did your family belong to a church when you were in the Bronx?

JM: My dad's side of the family was Seventh Day Adventist. But my father had absolutely no use for any religion whatsoever. My mother basically did send us to church for a long time. We went to Episcopalian churches. As long as I was going to church it was fine. So then I got to go to different friends churches and go to what I liked.

MN: now, Fulton Avenue was one of the blocks which survived pretty well during the fires. What was it like on that block? Was it a block where you could play in the street? Or were people more protective?

JM: We did play in the streets a lot. Well, Mark and I both had extremely protective parents. We laugh and say that we'd like to think that we chose each other, but really our parents ALLOWED us to play with each other. There were other kids and we were allowed to play with them outside but we weren't allowed to be in their apartment. I remember very much, until I went to elementary school, that block was my world in terms of the Bronx.

MN: Right. Did you go to Crotona Park at all?

JM: I went to Crotona Park all the time because I used to belong to a community center on 168th and Washington Avenue. Clermont Center.

MN: So the Clermont Center in the Cleremont houses?

JM: yes and they had day camp and we went to Crotona park all the time.

MN: okay so this is very interesting because this is what? 1968/69/70?

JM: yeah

MN: Okay because right now, Clermont housing has the reputation as the most dangerous single housing project in the Bronx.

JM: they were pretty dangerous back then.

MN: so did your parents walk you there? How did you get to the community center?

JM: you know it's really funny because I'm a mom now and I don't let my son walk anywhere. When he was 13 I was so nervous about him getting on the train and going anywhere. And then I remembered that I walked this entire borough as a kid. As long as we were in groups of kids, we were allowed to walk. I mean, we didn't have money for bus fare. I remember walking from our second house on 170th near grand concourse and I would walk to Fordham road all the time. We were just allowed to walk until we got tired. We walked all over the city.

MN: this is interesting because I know all these blocks and when things happened. What year did your family move to Teller? I want to say 1980/1981.

MN: so you lived on Fulton Avenue during all the fires that beset the area. Did you have a sense of safety during these times? What was it like? You're on the middle of Morrisania, that's the neighborhood, which loses 60% percent of its population between 1970 and 1980. Were you aware that bad things were happening around you? Or were you relatively insulated by living on that block and with that family?

JM: I actually think we were pretty insulated. I definitely knew of some gang activity. Basically, you weren't supposed to wander off the block- danger meant wondering off the block. Everyone knew everyone, there was always someone looking out the window. So someone knew where you were in terms of the block. I don't remember growing up in the Bronx as like a safe space. But once my world got a little bigger, and I have a lot of friends in Clermont. One of my closest friends was on 1372 Washington Avenue. I remember wanting to go on her floor, she lived on the 17th floor, and if the elevators were out, walking up those 17 flights of stairs was really treacherous.

MN: were there any burned or abandoned houses on Fulton Avenue?

JM: I think we had a pretty decent block because the hospital was there and then we had a park on the next block, a school and a church. So I don't remember any burnt out lots on Fulton Avenue.

MN: right, the reason I mention this is because (inaudible) Fox, she was teaching college in California. She came back to Limon place, which is maybe 7/8 blocks away, and everything around her was burning. She decided to stay and save her block because the surrounding blocks lost like 3/4 of the buildings. You were in a section where that was not happening right in front of you. You didn't hear sirens and see buildings across the street burning.

JM: No, and as a matter of fact, Mark and I were laughing about it. We were remembering Fulton Terrace. Do you remember Fulton terrace?

MN: yeah

KM: Like I our heads, that's where the rich people live

MN: That's a Mitchell Llama subsidized middle income building.

JM: Okay

MN: That's like the same thing that (inaudible) lived in actually. Then there's McKinley terrace down on 163rd street, those were the two Mitchell llama buildings in Morrisania.

JM: Okay.

Oneka LaBennett: Just for the historical record, in terms of your life story what year was it when you moved to the Bronx?

JM: 1968

OL: is your brother younger or older?

JM: I have a few brothers. The brother s where we have the same mom, the eldest came when he was 13 and then my other brother is the only American of the bunch. He was born at Bronx Lebanon hospital.

OL: Okay so, what did you know of that process of your mother sending for you?

JM: I don't remember it. Other people will tell me about that time period. My dad and I were very close; he was my parent at a very formative period. But I don't think I started thinking about it until I had my own son. I tried to imagine... I couldn't understand how she was brave enough to do it. She came with \$50 US dollars which took her forever to save, and she left her baby.

OL: yeah, so many West Indian women do that.

MN: What sort of work did your father do when he was here?

JM: all of my family worked at Montefiore hospital. My dad came first. He applied as a janitorial position and they told him he had too much education for that. So they put him on security and then he moved up through the ranks. But for many years, my father was the first person you saw at Montefiore hospital. They'd call him the squirrel man, because he would feed them. They would come and see him and sit on his shoulder

MN: (laughs) you're kidding!

JM: yeah, that was my dad. My mom after my dad retired went to work there as a nurse until she retired. So I pretty much grew up at the hospital.

OL: I wanted to hear a little bit about your early upbringing with your mom and your brother in the house. What kind of parent was our mom? What was that early home life like?

JM: we were really recent immigrants. They didn't trust very many people; they didn't know very many people. We lived in that building but all our relationships took place with other Caribbean people. We traveled to queens a lot. We traveled to other places in the Bronx a lot. I don't remember spending a lot of time in Brooklyn. But those were places where my father had friends and other political colleagues. We were like a one bedroom apartment with two kids and then three when my brother came.

MN: Did your parents belong to an ethnic association of any kind?

JM: my mother had no use for those things. But my father was the president of a group called the Jamaican freedom league.

MN: would that come up on google as an organization?

JM: I don't know, it might. My father was a political activist. So during all of that political turmoil during the 80s, we used to go back to Jamaica like every year. My parents really wanted to raise Jamaican children. When things got really tense politically, we couldn't go back. The kids couldn't go back. I had a lot of anger about that, I really missed it. But my father would continue to go back. He was working on bringing down food, and organizing and all of this other kind of stuff. So we also had a lot of politicians in our house.

MN: so would they stay with you? Or would they come to eat?

JM: some people would come to eat, some people would come to our house and I knew them by one name but was told to call them another name. I realize now that a lot of people were fleeing. There was a whole network of where to get a passport. Who could put you up. And my father, because he was so politically connected was the in between person here.

MN: So did the Jamaican freedom league have a hall that I met it? Or was it something that was peopled apartment?

JM: it did meet in a hall. I want to say that it was somewhere off of White Plains road, 216th street. I remember that the meetings would be there. My father is dead, so I can say it. But I actually grew up to be quite a Michael Manly fan. (Laughs) I had a lot of respect for his political leanings. He came to lecture at (inaudible) and I went up to speak with him afterwards and told him who my father was. And he said "does your father know you are here?" I said no, I can never really tell him. But I grew up in a household where my father's absolute first love was his country.

MN: was he a cricket player by any chance?

JM: my dad played cricket.

MN: where did he play?

JM: I don't remember where he played in Jamaica, but when he came here he became a huge Yankee fan.

MN: so he didn't play cricket in Van Cortland Park?

JM: I don't think so

MN: did this Jamaican consciousness affect how you looked at other children In the Bronx? Was this something that gave you distance or was it not that intense?

JM: it was pretty intense. My mother said that one of the biggest temper tantrums I had ever thrown was because someone had called me American. I actually still don't consider myself America. I can say that I am black Caribbean America. Because rationally, I know what line I go to for immigration when it's time to come back into the country. But I learned the Jamaican

national anthem as soon as I learned the American national anthem. And when I'd go visit my god parents I would be sitting at Lady Bustamante's house with Sir Alex. So with that history, I consider myself black and bi cultural. But I was very culturally Jamaican for a long time. We were very insulated. My parents didn't know, many African Americans, outside of mark. They didn't make friends with a lot of people who weren't from the Caribbean. And that was part of it. Their sort of consciousness in raising their children. In 2012, to talk around the Bronx or to be anywhere in the country, you would think there was such anti-immigrant sentiment. But there was back then. It was really high anti-immigrant sentiment particularly against West Indians. I got teased because, I didn't speak with a Jamaican accent, but we spoke kings English because my mother was a school teach back in Jamaica. So that set us apart. We got accused of talking white a lot. There was a lot of go back on your banana boats, particularly when people heard my parents accents. And I didn't realize it. But in my own self selection process, the kids I associate with were all from the Caribbean. They could've been from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, but they were all pretty much immigrants.

MN: What elementary school did you go to?

JM: I went to CES 2 which was PS 2

What street was that on?

JM: that was on Fulton Avenue too

MN: That was the one closest to the park?

JM: Yeah

MN: Okay because there's P.S. 63

JM: nope, I know 63

MN: oh, that had a different reputation?

JM: Yes (laughs)

MN: Okay, tell me about the different reputations with CS 2 and PS 63

JM: you know, I don't even know if it was true, but we were just raised with the mentality that if it was on the block it was safe. So 63, was like ohhh, you know what I mean? That's were all the bad kids are. That's where you get jumped. There was this idea that if you are on your block that's where you're safe and danger is where people don't know you.

MN: right.

OL: so the elementary school years, were you a good student?

JM: I was an excellent student. But I also loved school so that wasn't hard. I got in trouble for my mouther. I always talked too much. If I got an unsatisfactory it was because I needed to show self-control.

MN: what about respecting the rights of others?

JM: I respected the rights... I also learned how to fight in public school. My father hated the idea of me fighting at all. But my mother was very much "if somebody put their hand on you, you go down there and do what you have to do." She was very much against other people putting their hands on us. I remember parents would come in and beat them in front of the class. I had a teacher grab my shirt once and that was a problem. I remember just... now looking back, what that was like for them to confront authority like that. Part of it was a sense of bravery and family because they didn't really understand the way the system worked here. But they also didn't see any reason for them to not confront authority. When I look at who they were, they had to learn white racism. They had no understanding that they were supposed to believe themselves to be inferior in any way. So I tell people that we were living in a working class neighborhood with working class poor, but in the walls of their house, they raised middle class minded children.

MN: right, what was the racial composition of CS 2?

JM: Pretty much all black and Latino.

MN: what portion was larger? The Latino portion of the black portion?

JM: I would say the black portion was larger definitely. But I don't remember looking at race like that. People were either Caribbean or not.

MN: Now were the classes tracked when you were going to school?

JM: they were always tracked people knew they were ranked by number.

MN: we've had this issue because most of the people we've interviewed were in the one or two classes. Fortunately we got a few people who were in the 12 and 13 classes to get a sense of what that was like. So this was in the 70's that they were still tracked?

JM: I left public school in 1979 so they were definitely tracked. I knew I was in gifted classes.

OL: so we want to hear about how you ended up going to Fieldston, but did you go to a junior high after that?

JM: yeah, I went to 148th.

MN: Where was that? What street?

JM: That was on Washington Avenue, right across the street from Clermont projects.

MN: Now were there a lot of tough kids in that school?

JM: yeah, that was a tough place. People fought a lot but I never had one fight in junior high school. That's where you really learn that you have to have your crew. You find out who your crew is and that's who you rolled with. But I don't know, bullies always liked me. Maybe that's because I would let them copy my homework, I don't know. But I didn't have a lot of problems in that way.

MN: you learned how to maneuver this would fairly affectively without encountering too much trauma?

JM: yeah but I also think it's because of the way my mother integrated herself into the community center. My brother and I went to an after school program there but that's also where my mother got her GED. Then she turned around and taught dance classes. I took dance classes there. My mother was very involved in that community center. So kids knew and really liked her.

MN: now, we interviewed a man named Frank (inaudible)

JM: Oh my goodness I really love Mr. (inaudible) (shrieks)

MN: You're kidding! Oh I have to tell him.

JM: Oh my goodness, tell him the Morgan's say hello.

MN: Okay because we're having a book of all histories. And his interview is in it. He talks about the dance classes at Clermont center.

JM: that's the very first place I took dance classes.

MN: yeah and he's an amazing guy. He was one of the kids in the 13 and 12 classes, not because he wasn't smart, but because he talked back. And he would go on to run track at Morgan state and he is now the president at the pioneer club which is this very famous track program that started in the 30s. So your whole family knew him?

JM: yeah, I started running track at Clermont center. Mr. Belton is very important to us.

MN: it's so interesting because today what has happened to Clermont is heartbreaking. He said that they had a great program at that center.

JM: I remember one year after my first day of day camp, all the kids sang "let's just kiss and say goodbye." And my mother was like "you guys act like you will never see each other again" The counselors were crying, we were crying, Mr. Belton was probably crying. The center was an extremely safe place for me. So while we were in the projects, when we were in that center, we were safe.

MN: I think, given all those things that were going on in schools, after school and community centers are unbelievably important and underestimated. Describe all the different activities that you experienced at the Clermont center.

JM: I took African dance classes at the clement center.

MN: what was that program like? Because Frank said it was terrific.

JM: it was upstairs and I remember that at Clermont, the thing that was great about it was that you were always encouraged to try. I was always a slow starter. For example, I ran track for Clermont and when I first started, ire ally couldn't run at all. And I really did learn how to run track while I was at Clermont. And I really did improve dramatically. And then there was also the day camp which was really wonderful. That was I the summer. And then there were boys that used to just play basketball. So we would hang around the center and watch the boys play basketball a lot. There were just different types of girl programs. There were just a lot of things there. I learned about menstrual cycles at Clermont, all of that sort of information I learned in safe kind of ways.

MN: wow, so when did you go there?

JM: I would go there after school. And I my mother was also there. She taught a sewing class. You went there after school starting in elementary school or junior high?

JM: starting in elementary school.

MN: wow. So this was your space.

JM: yes, that was my space. And then I started to sneak out to go to hip hop jams but that's another story. (Laughs)

MN: yes we'll get to that. What were the adult and senior programs like?

JM: there was a GED class that my mom took. There was a sewing class. Those are the two I remember. There may have been dance. I'm sure there were more; I just didn't pay attention to them.

MN: so this was about five blocks from your house?

JM: yes, we would walk there.

OL: okay, so before we start talking about music, how did you end up going to Fieldston for high school?

JM: Well from the time my mother came here, because my dad was working at Montefiore, my father was very charming and people liked him. So a lot of the doctors would hire my mother to do domestic work and I would go with her. That was how I went to New Rochelle for the first

time. My mom used to clean for them. It's funny because the friends who we go to Martha's Vineyard with every year, they all live in that area. They're experience with New Rochelle is so different than mine. So basically, my mother's employers told her that they needed to get me into private school because there were scholarships available. When I got to Fieldston, there really wasn't a way to get me there. And I wasn't old enough to travel by myself. When I was at 148th there was a program called the Fieldston enrichment program that had three junior high schools that fit it. I was one of the students selected for the program. It starts the summer of 6th grade and you go to school every summer and every Saturday.

MN: this is like a pre cursor for prep?

JM: yes. But we loved it. It was one Fieldstone's campus. So I fell in love with the campus. It was a refuge. everything was really crazy but the Saturdays and summers were safe. You got to walk around without any of the pressure. Safe as I got older became very gendered. Girls had to be protected in a different way than boys did. None of that existed there so I was thrilled when I got in.

OL: did you have a sense of being different when you went to Fieldston?

JM: that was my hardest adjustment because the immigrant thing—I felt like with distance from my parents, unless I started to speak patois no one knew that I was Jamaican. But navigating Fieldston in the 80's, as much as I loved the school, it was very different. I watched gossip girl religiously because that was my life. I understood that. Fieldston wasn't an Upper East Side school. For many of my classmates, as much as I loved them, life ended at 96th street for them. And 96th was pushing it.

OL: let's talk a little about music. What were your early musical influences? What kind of music did your mom play at home? When did you start listening to hip hop?

JM: My mom played no music. We did have this thing where we would say we didn't want to go to church and she would say fine. So she would play religious music all day long on Sunday.

MN: so were you exposed to music through your neighborhood?

JM: I was exposed to music through my dad. My dad had an incredible record collection. So I grew up listening to a lot of Ska and a lot of calypso. I got introduced to Marley through my dad. When he would take those trips to Jamaica, he would bring back albums for me. So I was singing Marley way before the rest of my peers.

MN: no of the calypso artists, who are the ones you remember?

JM: I remember Sparrow

OL: The Mighty Sparrow

MN: does the artist name (inaudible) ring a bell?

JM: I mean, I'd have to hear it.

MN: yeah, she was a hard core feminist. One of the people we interviewed said she performed in the Bronx a few times. Did you ever go to hear Jamaican music in the Bronx live?

JM: no, I didn't. My mother is the one who organized most of our activities. And she wasn't into music like that. My mother still isn't into music like that. She doesn't dance, she has two left feet. All of that musical sort of oratory performance sort of thing, I really got from my father.

OL: so when did you start listening to hip hop?

JM: I didn't consciously start listening to hip hop. It was just around and there was no way to reproduce it and bring it back into your house because it's not like people were making records. But I do remember, and I don't remember what happened to this cassette, but I do remember going to a flash jam in the school yard at 63.

MN: At 63!

JM: yeah, that was where I was not supposed to be! (Laughs) But I brought my tape recorder because he used to rhyme. Not well.

MN: now you're talking about Flash?

JM: yeah, Flash. I had that for a long time.

MN: how old were you the first time you headed over to 63 park?

JM: I was probably 11, 12, or 13. We would sneak.

MN: could you hear it from your block?

JM: No, because when there was a jam, that was like the Underground Railroad. People would just find out and you'd just go.

OL: Right and word of mouth. Now you said people weren't supposed to be sneaking out and doing those things. What happened when your mom found out?

JM: she didn't, she'll know now! (Laughs)

MN: did mark go to you to those jams?

JM: no, Mark was a really good guy friend. He was a good boy. At least with me he was a really good boy.

OL: so it was like in your pre adolescence and adolescence that you were listening to hip hop and going to the jams in the school yards that you weren't supposed to be going to?

JM: yeah. Roberta Clemente state park was another place where I heard they played a lot of hip hop.

MN: so how did you get to Roberta Park?

JM: we would walk, I walked this entire borough.

MN: that's interesting because people would talk about walking in the 40's 50's and 60's when there was a sense that the whole city was safe. But you were walking during some of the most dangerous times.

JM: yeah. We dint walk alone.

MN: how many people would go to Clemente together?

JM: I feel like it was at least a group of three or four.

MN: was this all girls or were there some boys?

JM: mostly girls. I always had a crew of girls. And even in Fieldston there was a group of us that was from other parts of the Bronx. So that and roller skating was a way for us to combat some of that cultural schizophrenia that we were going through at the time. But I realize now that walking had very much to do with the fact that this is a city where you take the bus. So if you knew the bus route, you knew how to walk. It was probably the long way but we didn't care.

MN: now did you have a B girl aura that you tried to create when you went to these events? Did you try to dress in certain ways?

JM: I think a lot of that was how people were dressing. So I just dressed like all the other kids on the block. Which would then become what we know now as the B girl B boy aesthetic. But I showed up to Fieldston like that.

MN: So this is a time before crack?

JM: yeah, my classmates at Fieldston still laugh about it. It comes up at every reunion.

OL: So I want to get a sense of what the gender politics were. A group of three girls going to parties and school yards and how you negotiated that. Especially with your mom raising you and telling you how to be a woman. Because in when Chicken Heads come home to roost you talk a lot about your mom's rules and how that influenced you in becoming a woman. What was she teaching you in adolescence and pre adolescence and were you using that in those spaces?

JM: yes, but probably not in the way you are thinking of. I got two very strong things from my mother and my father. They were very big on “brought up-cy”. So how you spoke, how you sat was important. Knowing how to use a knife and fork. They are very British. So I did get that sort of stuff from them and I knew there was a time for that particular kind of performance. But my dad was the politician he grew up in a cosmopolitan, my mother was a country girl. She grew up knowing how to fight, knowing how to climb trees. I think he could still climb a tree. She was not all into very prissy lady like girls. She was more concerned that if you are going to roll with your girlfriends, there needs to be a group of you and you need to watch out for each other. From a really young age, I tend to really privilege those relationships over others. It’s like, who are my girls? Where are we going? What are we going to do? And that’s very consistent with my family. It’s not that men were important, but they were always on the outskirts. We may have been going to the jams to find boys, but there was a headcount. Is everybody here? Like we came together so we all have to leave together. If you want to get his number and see him another time that’s fine. Also, someone was going to ask you where so and so was, and you didn’t want to say that you didn’t know. You’d all get in trouble.

OL: so when you were going to those jams, did you get a sense of women being active in that space? A lot of the early history of hip hop tends to erase women’s participation. Did you see women dancing, performing, and helping to organize parties? Did you see any kind of female input?

JM: No, not in that sort of organizing kind of way. I wouldn’t have paid attention to it. You know, I was very young, like 11/12. So were there women there? Yes? Did I have any sense of being a woman in a male space? Not at all. It really wasn’t until hip hop became a more commercial entity. Commercial in the sense that you can purchase music, there were clubs now that were for hip hop, that I got a strong sense of being a girl in a male space.

MN: now what about graffiti? Did you ever get drawn into that world?

JM: not really. But as I got older I became more aware.

MN: did you do any breaking or popping and locking?

JM: absolutely not. I don’t know what would have happened to me if my mother had gotten word that I was spinning on my head and dancing in public in that sort of way. That probably would not have been a good thing. So I was always navigating two lines. There was trying to be equipped to be raised in those streets because I did live in that community. But I was also the only girl in my household. My two brothers, and then my cousin came to live with us. I was the only girl. So there was a lot of expectation in terms of how you behave as a young lady. And they were all very protective. There was a bigger problem if I wanted a guy to talk to me. They would just come out of nowhere.

OL: were you allowed to date?

JM: no but I did. (Laughs) in a big rebellious way too. My first boyfriend was 28 and I was 17. I didn't realize that my mother understood that he was my boyfriend until I was dating someone else and she asked "well what happened to Mike?" And I was drinking something and I just spit it out all across the room. And I was like "you knew?" I just couldn't believe that she didn't say anything. But she just always knew her daughter. I knew that if I said nothing, you would've come to college and be fine. I knew that if I said something you would have convinced yourself that you tow needed to live together.

OL: so you were obviously a good student at Fieldston because you ended up at Wesley.

JM: yeah I was a good student. I had a hard time there. The things I excelled in, I excelled in. so I excelled in English. In junior high, people would say you were a good writer. At Fieldston, everyone was a good writer. You wouldn't be there if you weren't. So good writing was expected in every class. So I never really thought much about these things. I never thought of myself as an exceptional student in those classes because I was with exceptional students. That was the standard. But I struggled with math. I almost didn't graduate with math. And I had enough credits to graduate early and I had already gotten into Wesley because of early decision. So when they called me in because there was a problem. I was like what's the problem? They said that if I failed math I couldn't go to college. It didn't make sense with the rest of my academic performance. I was a year behind in math because public schools are a year behind private schools. So I came and I was in classes with kids that were younger than me. And I was never comfortable asking questions in class. But I would go home and work on math for hours and I would get by. But I could not do algebra and trig to save my life. And so finally the school tested me and diagnosed me with math anxiety. So this is the genius of being at Fieldston. Seniors get out in three weeks or a month earlier than everyone else. So I came in a learned math in those weeks. I ended up getting an A- on the final.

OL: what were the other teachers at Fieldston like?

JM: I really loved my teachers. When I look back at Fieldston, the class difference was hard to navigate. But there were things that the parents did to help us navigate. My best friend's mom started to do mother daughter theatre parties because the other kids were skiing or going to the vacation homes in the Caribbean. So she would organize those. And that's how I learned about ALE. WE would go to Broadway a couple times a year. Our mothers became friends because of that. So they were very clear of the class racial divide. So they were keen on instilling culture as a way to combat that. For me it was different because I came in in ninth grade. Most of my friends had been there since kindergarten. So I really was navigating class more than race because even some of my black friends were middle to upper middle class or they had been in the school long enough where they didn't know any better.

OL: when was it that your mom was starting to put herself through college?

JM: she started college while I was in ninth grade. It was the best because I would be like “mom, I have a paper and am totally stressed” and she would say the same and write me an excuse. We would take the whole day off and have study dates together and take breaks and watch all my Children or One Life to Live. (Laughs) we became extremely close during those time periods.

OL: I’m just curious how your mother did that? How did she financially, mentally?

JM: well she came here to go to college, and she would have done that a lot sooner if my dad had been more supportive. But we were young and he wasn’t the type of guy to stay home and take care of small children. So when she decided that she was going to go, she put the family on notice. She lined us up and gave us the days when we were going to cook. She was going to cook Friday Saturday and there would be enough for Monday. And the day you test her, there just wouldn’t be food. So when someone tested her, she would get Chinese food and we’d all have to go fend for ourselves. And my father made turkey wings every Thursday night while my mother was in school for like five years. And even afterwards that was his dish, but for Caribbean women that was unheard of. They were leaving an initial household where they had a helper. They were used to someone else cooking for them. But a large reason why she was able to do that was because of Clermont center. So she had dreams and aspirations and there were actual structural things there that told her how she could turn those into realities.

MN: did your family buy a house on Teller Avenue?

JM: no we rented a house. Houses are a big contention in my family because my dad never intended to stay here. So we owned property in Jamaica and a home that he built. So when we went to Jamaica we did go home. We weren’t staying with friends or relatives. But as we got older, my mother wasn’t willing to live in Jamaica and neither was me or my siblings, but my father was not willing to live here. So in some ways, it divided our family.

MN: this is when you were in junior high and high school?

JM: no, when my father left I was already in Wesley. I was 21.

MN: Now Teller Avenue, you rented a place. Was that in a two family house?

JM: yes, I look back now and that was a great apartment. It was beautiful. We had French doors. Now it was the only place I had ever gotten robbed in, but we had French windows and it was pretty big.

MN: Now Teller is right up the street from Webster?

JM: Right, we lived right across from Clermont Park.

MN: Okay and you were in one of those two family houses? Those were nice. Did you ever go to church there?

[END OF TAPE 1]

JM: No, at that point, I was at Fieldston. So my life really took place in Riverdale and the upper west side because that's where all the kids lived, and I had such an intensive academic thing going on. Which my mother had already been prepared for that since seventh grade because I was going to school six times a week. So at that point, she didn't have to do anything in terms of studies. I was already like "oh my God, I have this, this and this to do. How many hours are we going to do that?" And then navigating my friends socially. They were either in Riverdale or Manhattan so at that point my Bronx life shifted drastically from where I live to Riverdale and the upper west side.

MN: Now, when did you decide you wanted to be a writer?

JM: I still am conflicted about being a writer. I didn't really decide that I wanted to be. I was published for two years before I decided to be a writer.

OL: What made you decide to apply to Wesley University early decision?

JM: I loved Wesley. We went to visit, and again my father had another friend who worked at Montefiore. His daughter went to Fieldston. My first cousin was the first person in my family who went to Fieldston under drastically different circumstances. She wasn't a scholar student; she was a concert pianist and violinist. It was my father's sister. So Fieldston was also on our radar as a school that my parents were familiar with because it was the Fieldston enrichment program they generally took 2 or 3 kids from the program. I forgot your question.

MN: about becoming a writer

JM: right, so I just left college and I knew I wanted to become an actress and I didn't really know how I was going to tell my Caribbean parents that.

OL: were you thinking about law school?

JM: I kept telling them that I was taking a year off to go to law school. So I was doing small acting things and then my mom and I got into the fight of all fights. She would always say she didn't throw me out, but this is her lie! (Laughs) and I was running the streets. You know, I was really on one of these "so where are you going? I don't know" because the city would unfold itself in these kinds of ways. And "when are you coming back? I don't know" and this was also kind of true. And then this is prior cell phone so she didn't really have a way [to contact me]. So it was sort of nerve wracking for her. She was just like "look, I'm not kicking you out but this house is not big enough for one and a half women. And if you and I are going to remain friends, I think you need to find someplace else to live." It was very clear from her tone who the half woman was. So I got my first apartment over on [inaudible] avenue.

MN: it sounds like you had a lot of confidence to take that kind of path and not know where it was leading.

JM: I was teaching at Fieldston. I went back there to teach. I was teaching African American literature and English, and drama. So I taught there for four or five years. Then I started to feel like I can't walk up that hill one more time ever. I loved that school but it was time to do something different. Then that's when the central park jogger rape case happened, and at the time my boyfriend was this black writer cultural icon, village voice person. They were working on a special issue—because that case polarized the city racially. They were working on a special issue “black writers and women: The Voices not heard” so he was working on this piece, that's how I know Vernon and all those other guys.

OL: Can you tell us who he was?

JM: Greg Tate

OL: Oh!

JM: Greg was doing this piece on the media coverage and the racism within that. I was (inaudible) well you're not talking about gender. Although I don't even know if I had language for it at that time, because I was just not a big fan of Wesley's women's studies department. I tried. But feminism for me doesn't exist in theory. It's a lived experience. So I felt like I took two courses in the women's studies department and then that was it.

OL: You majored in African American Studies and psychology?

JM: Psych-Soc,

OL: Who did you take in African American studies? Do you remember?

JM: I had Bob Mealy and Alex Dupree and Hazel (inaudible)

OL: oh okay!

JM: I took it completely for granted at that time, I was like “oh everyone has those experiences” and then when I got to grad school and people were like “who were your professors?” and I was like okay.

OL: So you were talking about the Central Park case

JM: Right, so Greg was writing his piece and here's the thing, if I was a black investment banker jogging through the park nobody looks at me like... black and Latino guys don't look at me and go “Oh that's a sister, I'm not gunna touch her.” She got raped because she was a woman. Whoever did it did it because she was a woman. It wasn't because of the color of her skin. So Greg and I argued about it till maybe 5 in the morning and he called his editor and said “I think I

need to change the angle of the story” and she said “it’s a great story, it’s a great angle. But it’s not your angle. And if this woman can write, then she can write it all. Give it to me in 36 hours and I’ll run it” So I didn’t even have a computer. All the real writers had to leave (The Voice?) and (The Voice?) at the time was where the movie theater is now on union square. There were mice running over the computer keys and I had to wait until all the real writers left, but I just wrote it. And I handed it in. I was fine with that experience, but then it took the front page! It was like Joan Morgan, black feminist writer and I was like “oh shit!” [Laughs] It was like, the writer thing was weird enough but then they had the feminist thing! And now people were asking about that. So I was published for like 2 years, but I had to make sure that I had things to say and that it wasn’t a fluke because of that specific situation.

OL: And then your next big thing, you wrote about the mike Tyson case?

JM: I wrote a lot of stories for The Voice in that time. So I would say, what happened after I wrote that big gender piece was that I started to do a lot of music review pieces. The first one I did was a review of Queen Latifah’s first album. When the editor brought it to me I was like “give it to nelson or one of them” I didn’t really understand music reviews. I didn’t understand half of what they wrote. I didn’t understand what a booming rift was, like what does that mean for real people who are listening to music? So I knew that if I wrote about the music, I wouldn’t be able to do that. So my editor came and gave me her cassette at that point because there certainly weren’t CD’s. And I was like give it to one of the music guys. But The Voice is great in taking you out of your comfort zone. My editor said, there’s no one else here from the south Bronx and who is a women. It’s your story—write it. So I just wrote it. So I started doing a lot of music pieces for them. So the Tyson piece was another one. I was like “you’ve got a sports writer” and my editor was like “it’d be cool and quirky to send Joan to music writer down to cover the mike Tyson trial” so yeah, that was a ting. I had no trial experience.

MN: so this was like the late 80’s?

JM: late 80’s early 90’s.

OL: How did “when Chicken Heads come home to roost” come into being? How did that book happened?

JM: In two ways. There was a publisher at the time, who was very interested in something on hip hop and how feminism fit into that. She had been talking to my agent. I hadn’t really completely theorized how the two went together yet. I’m really in grad school because I say things now like “theorize” [laughs] I hadn’t really thought about it yet. But we were sort of thinking about it. And then the Whitney’s did the Black Male Show and Andrew Ross asked me if I would come and be on a panel. He was familiar with my work at the Village Voice.

OL: and another Wesley graduate Glen Lyon participated in that show.

JM: Right. And so I wrote what became the chapter “From Fly Girls, to Feminists” ... no “Fly Girls, Bitches and Hoes” that’s the chapter right? It’s my own book, I should know this.

[Laughs] I wrote basically what ended up being that chapter to present there at that conference and then it ended up being published text. My agent bought.. I don’t want to say publishing house.. She bought the editor with her. She said she wanted it and would buy it. But they only wanted to do it in soft cover. And then my agent said “well you can’t have it” which is how it ended up at Simon and Schuster.

MN: did you have another job while doing this? Or were you supporting yourself through writing?

JM: No, I just made my living from writing. Is topped teaching once I decided I wanted to write full time.

OL: but before you wrote that book, no one really talked about or thought about the idea of a hip hop feminist. I mean, that was sort of a new idea, and you said you were sort of thinking through how to put those two things together.

JM: yeah, I wasn’t really thinking about how to put those two things together. I was just tired of answering the question “can you be a feminists and like hip hop” I knew it was possible because I did it. I just thought “I’m gunna write this book and explain it so that I don’t have to talk about it anymore—which was so wrong. [Laughs] I’m still talking about it all the time.

MN: now around that time, I remember reading a piece by Dream Hampton about one of these conventions of the industry where she describes being outrageously treated by men in the industry. Was that your experience? Or did you not put yourself in the venues to have those experiences?

JM: I absolutely saw what she was writing about. But I’ve always had a crew. So whereas Greg wonderfully brought me into the fold of The Voice... and I think part of the tragedy of losing that paper is that it really was a breeding ground for writers. I got everything I know about writing at the hands of those editors. And they were not easy editors. It was just frustrating. Like really, it’s my fourth time writing a 400 word music review? But they were impeccable at not just wanting good writing, but pushing your thinking. And right now, I just find so many editors that are just glorified copywriters. So shout out to the village voice. But I think that what The Voice also gave me was that my cohort became [inaudible] and Nelson George. And then to be there when [Delaney?] Davis was working there and Lisa George and Lisa Jones. And then outside of The Voice, June is a little younger but shed started writing at around a similar period in time. Again, I had a crew. Those were the people I rolled with. So I always felt like I had my people with me, and people knew I had my people with me.

MN: it’s interesting because you seem to have walked through a lot of situations that many people would see as rather complicated. You walked through relatively unscathed.

JM: yeah, I don't know about unscathed. But I definitely know that I wasn't afraid to navigate them which I think a lot of people would have been. But I was always the outsider. Like I came to this country as an outsider. So having to step back and read an environment very quickly and figure out how to move through there and be seen but also unseen when that wasn't convenient, was something I've been doing since I was two years old.

MN: right, but it's interesting because I have a former tennis partner named Teray who you may know.

JM: I know Teray.

MN: when he began this, he had all these experiences. Like him trying to interview Mary J Blige and her totally ignoring him. And Suge Knight threatening to hang him by his ankles off the terrace. Did you have those kinds of experiences? Or did you figure out how not to get into them?

JM: I didn't have them. Teray is a brilliant writer, he's also wonderfully ambitious. But I say wonderfully because he's fearless about certain things. I wasn't fearless in that way. I've interviewed Mary four times. She's probably one of the more difficult interviews I've ever had because there is frigidity and volatility to her. It's a minefield, you can't miss step. It did help to grow up in the south Bronx in the 70s and have those experiences of being at Clermont projects and on Webster because I knew a million Mary's. I had to go to school Mary's. Understanding how to deal with a Mary was the difference between fighting at school and not fighting at school.

MN: and Teray went to private school from the beginning, it was a different experience.

JM: right

MN: see that's interesting, you had these social skills in dealing with people who are under pressure and angry.

JM: when we talk about safe, it's really funny. I knew in ways that that Bronx was not safe. I think I wrote about it in Chicken Heads. Coming out of Clermont Center and seeing the iron screen down on the candy store and seeing blood splatter. But I also grew up being aware that being a kid in the south Bronx was emotionally unsafe. The places where the scars don't really show as much are really more emotional scars. But I witnessed a lot of cruelty. I witnessed a lot of people under pressure, try to parent with too little resources, many of them being too young. Addiction. So I'm very aware when people are like minefields walking around with a lot of shit.

OL: that brings me to a questions I've wanted to ask you about Chicken Heads, it's more of an observation. One of the things that strike me with that book is that you write with such tenderness about everybody. You're being a critic, but there's tenderness about black men, there's a tenderness about black women tricking and trying to work the system. That same type of tenderness, that's the lens you use for everybody you talk about in that book. As I was reading

it I thought “well this comes from her mom. This is her mother’s influence” but is it from that sort of emotional turmoil you saw in the Bronx? And you sort of being sympathetic to it?

JM: I do think that my parents were in many ways very compassionate people. My mother had a lot of compassion for individuals and underdogs. So it’s not surprising for me at all that she’d get what she got from the center and then turn around immediately and want to teach. That whole idea of giving back was very much a Morgan value that she instilled.

MN: her first name was...?

JM: Maud

MN: okay

JM: but my dad had great compassion for my country. So very young I sat and listened to compassionate people. Jamaica was a new country. The bicentennial here I actually missed because my parents went to Jamaica. There was no comparison. I had no idea—to celebrate this country’s 200th birthday, like you weren’t alive for independence. For my father that’s a very real thing. So incredible compassion for people and where they came from. So we were never raised or trained to leave a certain set of social circumstances and completely leave the people behind. So if that tenderness is there, it’s because I still identify very strongly as a Bronx girl. That’s where I am.

MN: it’s pretty extraordinary that you were able to be part of this world and still maintain your path in a way that was going to take you out of it.

JM: Yes, but I was very determined to leave it. I think I have a lot of love and compassion for the Bronx and I don’t think I ever left. But I became very aware at like 13 that I couldn’t live there.

MN: right, I grew up in a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn and went to Columbia. And I knew I was going to leave but I was shaped by the streets in ways that influenced me permanently. It’s a similar kind of thing but the worlds you entered took a lot of people down. Both the Bronx and those neighborhoods and the hip hop. And you were doing that gracefully which is interesting because some people do it [makes strange noise, JM voices affirmation] but you had these social skills that you used to do it with some grace which is kind of cool.

JM: yeah

OL: it’s pretty amazing

MN: yeah because even my friend Elizabeth Mendez Berry a hip hop writer, when she did that story she got physically threatened.

JM: I mean, Elizabeth is one of my closest friends. There’s a text right there on the phone from here. But again, there’s a way. I don’t actually know a more compassionate person like

Elizabeth. She makes me feel sometimes like I'm insensitive. But again, there's a way as like a Latina who is pretty much phenotypically white and blue eyed and from Toronto—there's just not a space. I have a way about me that makes people feel at home... because I am home. I wasn't going to get trained for that in journalism school. That was just something I was able to bring.

MN: so you could put people at ease who were very volatile.

JM: yeah, but I could also put you in check. Because in some ways, the performance part of it—like I can tell when that's a performance.

MN: I'm sure there are all sorts of artists who try to pull stuff?

JM: yes. Okay so the difference between Dreams kind of fencelessness which I don't have, which for example, now that we're talking and I'm looking back, that was so Bronx of me. Spin wanted me to cover the NWA right after they'd beaten D Barnes. And I was like “who are you flying to L.A with me” you can have, I forgot the editor in chiefs name, you can have him as a bodyguard. And I was like “you don't understand, I don't know anyone in LA” my people are not in LA. You need to fly them here, and I'm good. But I'm not flying to LA to interview NWA. But that was a way I knew that whatever I walked with, as a woman my compassion blah blah blah, that wasn't going to make a difference because at that time, we had just discovered that Compton even existed.

OL: That was very smart of you

JM [chuckles] yeah, like they just beat the hell out of D, I'm not going. At the same token, ice cube is an artist that is extremely significant in my career because I wrote some pretty seminal pieces about him. I also wrote a bio piece about him. He was something I knew I could just sit and talk to. I had no fear, being in his hotel room for hours. But it's also just about reading things.

OL: do you mind if I ask you some questions about women in hip hop and kind of just reflect on some of the stuff you said about power and gender in Chicken Heads?

JM: sure

OL: okay so I was looking at some passages in Chicken Heads and thinking about how relevant they are for some of the conversations we're still having about women in hip hop. Do you want me to read it or do you want to read it?

JM: no, you can read it.

OL: so you wrote: “unfortunately, power is still divided by gender. The phenomenal success of rappers Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim—the official chicken head patron saints—are one example. Unlike MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Salt N Pepa, or Yo Yo, Kim and Foxy are hardly examples of

Afro femme regality, refined sensuality, or womanist strength. These baby girls—with their history making platinum debuts—have the lyrical personas of hyper sexed, couture clad hoochie mamas. Once again hip hop holds up its unwanted mirror and drives him a little discussed truth. In these days of Cristal, Versace and Benjamin filled illusions, the punanny-for-sale materialism which dominants Kim's and Foxy's albums runs rampant in the black community” and then a little later you say “its intractability, however, speaks to something far more complex than mere female strategy, greed, or sexual manipulation. Chicken prevalence across class lines demonstrates just how deeply embedded money sex and power are to our notions of male and female identity.” First of all, I love that you were looking across class lines, looking across gender lines. But then saying something about women in power and reflecting beyond hip hop music. And as I was reading that passage again I thought about Nicki Minaj and I was wondering what you think about her. Where you place her within those dynamics.

JM: it's really funny because I find Nicki very fascinating but this is part of being a 47 year old writer. I encourage younger writers to talk about her all the time. So when younger writers or cultural critics call me and ask what do you think of Nicki I'm like “no what do YOU think of Nicki” [laughs]. Because in some ways, I just don't want to spend the time to really immerse myself in her music because she's complicated. But I will say this. For me, in terms of the work I'm doing now on a second generation of black Caribbean identity and what does that mean, when we can [inaudible] the terms black and African America. Like, who gets [inaudible] the historical and racial narrative of the country? I do think that the lens people want to apply to Nicki is too narrow. So I think that if you don't look at her as Caribbean America, you've already lost her. Because there are ways that if you look at her painted body and her performances sexuality, and you put that in the context of this continuation of ill Kim or Foxy or whatever it's like the world has come apart. You put it on the parkway and it makes complete sense.

OL: absolutely, I'm so glad you said that. That's amazing. I was also looking at what you called your mom's “third rule of dating” and she said “never ever leave home without your feisty money” and it's a Jamaican spun idea of how a young woman should behave, and how your mom always told you that you should never let your date pay and how all of those things—you kind of talked about how she influenced you early on but how you changed it to suit your own needs. Do you think about that kind of stuff now that you're parenting?

JM: I have a son who is just hard core romantic. Like an incurable romantic. A sweet sweet boy. I'm really glad that he has his father in his life. Like I'm sure all the girls in his life will meet his father before they meet me. They way that it challenges me as a feminist because I'm mother bear when it comes to my child. But I do look at him and there are ways where I say “oh this is great, I'm walking the walk here as well as talking it” I look at the girls he's starting to be interested in and they're all fiercely independent. His last little girlfriend played the saxophone.

OL: How old is your son?

JM: He'll be 13 on the fourth of July. He likes girls that read, he likes girls that are really smart. His range of what he considers attractive is really broad. But I would also say that what's really nice about my son is that he just doesn't like mean girls. And there's so much right now that I think young girls have to deal with now that I didn't have to deal with. Like the mean girl is the one that wins right? So that's why you have Love and Hip Hop and Basketball Wives, and you just see pretty girls being mean to each other. And my son has absolutely no use for a girl who is pretty but no smart, but then pretty not smart and mean? He just can't even see you. And he's very articulate about what that means. I think that I try to talk to him about girls as if they are fully realized human beings. He did say something really funny to me the other day. He was talking to me and his god mother; he's going to kill me because I'm forever doing this. He was talking about girls, and there's this girl at school who he doesn't really like this way, but he hadn't really said he didn't like her and so she had a crush. And she just didn't back up, so he stopped communicating. He didn't call. You know typical 12 year old thing. But then in his language about her he kept calling her crazy. But I said "okay maybe she is crazy. But you should know that as your mother if you ever call us crazy again, I'm going to tell you that the two things us crazy girls have in common is you. So what is it about you that is attracting crazy?" So we just had to talk about, "how does it make you feel, if someone just disappears?" without any language or explanation? How does that make you feel? It makes you a little crazy right? If one of your guy friends stopped speaking to you, stopped communicating, that would make you a little bit crazy. So I do try to talk to him in that way where girls are not this foreign thing because girls do this and boys so that. But how do we like to treat each other as people? I'm really trying hard not to pass one some of these very convenient but essentially biologically essential zed definitions of male and female lines. But still trying to hold on to--- some people love it in Chicken Heads, some people hate it. But I really do love being a woman, I love men. I mean, I grew up in a house full of boys, the stuff about them I like, I really like, but the stuff I hate drives me crazy. But I really do appreciate masculine and feminine energies while realizing that there can be a lot of flux and shifts between those two. I don't see anything wrong with trying to identify certain things as masculine or feminine.

OL: right, I realize we didn't talk about your time at Howard. Do you want to say anything?

JM: Oh my goodness! Nothing more than it saved me. I just got to a point, and I think you know this—it my junior year at Wesley and I just didn't want to be there anymore because it was so similar to Fieldston. So I just hit a serious slump. And I just came home and showed up at my mother's house and she was like "okay this is a problem" and so I was like "I just want to withdraw for a semester" so I took a semester at Howard, under the specific instruction that I finish at Wesley.

MN: so you took a semester at Howard and finished at Wesley?

JM: yeah. I highly recommend that people do that. But I also just wanted to be in a school where everyone around me was black. I hadn't had that in a long time. I wanted to be at a school

frankly where there weren't 8 black guys to 22 black girls. That also informed my understanding of how to deal with black men and read them. Because they were also from all over the country and I had never dealt or met men from the south before. My who experience of black and brown men were really about New York, east coast, and Caribbean. It was a really great time. And I was in DC and sort of just figuring things out and I just felt like I could just be myself. But again, a really good girlfriend that went to Fieldston, her brother, Sherman [inaudible] graduated from Arizona State. And again I had no idea. I walked on Howards campus, and there would be guys who introduced themselves like "you're Sherman's little sister" so again, I had these people who were looking out for me. So of course I wanted to go to Howard, it made sense.

OL: is there anything we haven't asked you that you want to talk about?

JM: I will close with saying this. I was doing a radio show. I did it this morning as a matter of fact. Her all women panel. And one of the questions was on gentrification. There was an article about the gentrification of the south Bronx, SoBro. We didn't have a lot of time to talk about it. But my other two panel mates were incensed about it, and I was not. I wanted to move back. I was so excited about finding a place on the concourse. I could have drinks at Giovanni. I have always been excited to move back. I think hat people don't really understand that if you're raised during the 70's and that time period your narrative about the Bronx is escape. You have to escape if you're going to do anything with life. For other boroughs that's not the case of the narrative. So I was saying to them for you, it probably foes feel this way. Like "who are all these foreign people" but for me it would never feel like that. So I look at what's happening on the Concourse and I get really excited. I think the only thing that could keep me in New York post grad school, is that I could go pioneer the Bronx.

MN: I'm doing a radio show at a new place called "the clock: wine and martini bar" tomorrow night which just opened in that clock tower building where Charlie used to live. There are a whole bunch of little spots. That area is a small zone but there is a lot of interesting stuff.

JM: I also think that we need to think about the language of gentrification a little more. We always think "okay now all the rich white people are moving in" and it really lets the city off the hook in terms of how it handles housing. I live on the upper west side now but the new York times article talked about a woman who pretty much lived on the upper west side her entire life. She lived on the upper west side before it was the upper west side. Before Columbus Avenue Is what it is now. And she was facing retirement not being able to afford her neighborhood. So to look at her as just a gentrifier as opposed to someone who is being pushed out of her community that she's lived in, that she's contributed to, that she's attached to, that makes her [inaudible] I don't buy into that. But there are a lot of gentrifies in Bed Stuy by virtue of class, which is what makes you a gentrified, are not white. There are many of my middle and upper class black friends that are gentrifying Bed Stuy right now and we don't think about it.

MN: right. Last night I ate in peaches which was 90% black. All of my friends who went to Wesleyan now live in Brooklyn.

MN: absolutely interesting issue. So you could move back to the Bronx. A friend of mine, who is now a professor at Columbia, has a lovely apartment on Gerard Avenue and 158th that you could never afford that in Manhattan.

JM: Do you know what the apartments are like on the Grand Concourse? [Laughs]

MN: now they have that new upscale soul food on 161st and the Concourse.

JM: You're kidding.

MN: Nope, I mean I know a lot of these spots to eat [laughs]

JM: so you're going to have to give me a Bronx tour, Mark.

MN: You want one? You've got the grand tour with music and food.

JM: that's exactly what I want. [Laughs]

MN: you let me know

OL: I'll be there for that

MN: And Dawn will come along. Maybe we can bring Valerie capers, this brilliant jazz pianist in the Bronx. She opened the women in jazz festival at [inaudible]

JM: Oh nice.

OL: was she the first African American at Julliard? I think she may have been.

MN: I'm not sure, actually she was. She was blind at age 6 and was classically trained and taught herself. She's now one of the premier jazz specialists in the world.

JM: WE have to get Mark to come too

MN: right, you send him a Facebook message and we'll get him to come this summer too. I do a tour for the both of you. I got a present from my son, a four hour eating tour of the Bronx with famous fat Dave. We went to seven places in 4 hours and I can redo this once my diet is over. But anyways Jane, this was a wonderful pleasure to have you, and think of us as part of your family.

OL: yes, thank you