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## Ray, Pastor

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

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[Interview opens with Pastor Ray and a woman conversing in an African language that the transcriber is not fluent in].

Pastor Ray [PR]: The Queen Mother is fair. She listens to you, she's prepared, and she wants to support you one hundred percent. Before she became the [unclear], there were orders I heard of her. So she's going to cancel all the [unclear] women. See, if she has to make a phone call to Ghana and also contact other women of high status. She'll be advised, she be someone with the advice that she gets to the king, even though he is a male, but he ought to know what the problem might be. And then you give you all the support. There are certain occasions where arts also play a major role in society. Every year, there is something called the Kente dance. The Kente Dance is simply an exhibition of every Kente cloth you see here. And it's just the tip of the iceberg. You may see 500 people wear Kente cloth, and every design will be different.

Mark Naison [MN]: It's different

PR: Every cut will be different and yet they are called Kente, the traditional weaving. So those classes can possibly be organized at Fordham University. And there are other functions that she as the Queen Mother can bring for the women, and she can bring those [unclear] to you. So don't hesitate to please send your questions back to her, write to her, call her, and one of us is just supposed to be, to work. She is well-prepared to support you.

Jane Edward [JE]: He is going to ask a question. Just your traditional name and then your nationality.

Penne Benti (PB): Okay. My name is Penne Benti {?} and I am Gambian and I am a graduate of New York University's Global Program. This is not a cultural question, but, you know, I think it's a question where culture and politics intertwine. When Colonel Qaddafi was chairman of the African Union, he invited over 200 traditional leaders from across the continent. The reason he did that, is he believed traditional leaders, they are at a crossroads. He could use them to achieve what he was advocating for, that is, for a single army, a single currency, and a single passport for the African continent. So I just want to know if the king was in attendance, if he was part of that, and if he was in attendance, what is his views,

Ray Pastor [RP]: OK this was last year. Otumfuo [?] [unclear] with the king who rules the gold. That is one of the nicknames of the [unclear] which means that he's the occupant of the golden stool. And you know, there's this adoration you use to describe him. Like forgive me to use Jesus Christ, whom you call Lord of Lords, King of Kings, in the class. No, he was not in attendance, so he could not really give any comment. But he can give the veto. The view is this: that yes, kings and queens should not be underestimating the power of the political kingdom. Politics have their rules. But kings came before parties and so most African nations got the kingdom of kings and queens and stay away from the political use. Kick the parties

over there, and let my kingdom rule us over here. Don't come and engage me with the parties. Finally, when everything goes down, the president of that nation has no right to command me. I must follow his commands. Take the British kingdom. You know, the Queen Mother. It's not just. Parties have nothing to control them. They decide what they want to do in Britain. They decide where they want to go in Britain. If you are President Tacha, Tacha is far back, before the parties. And so is Ghana. The King rules his people. No parties. The political kingdom has no statement that will go against the king.

I think this came from the perspective that, when Qaddafi came in. He said. before the Europeans came to Africa, Africa had kings and kingdoms.

PR: Kings and kingdoms, yes.

PB: So he is going to use kings and kingdoms.

Male Interviewer: When I was speaking earlier on, you made mention of a very important fact, and I want to go back to that. He talked about a education fund, started by the Ashanti here in New York. And you explained that this was about 30 students, around which 5 of them are currently medical students back in Ghana.

Male Interviewer: Now, I would like to find out if any of the funds go to Bronx residents, like Ashantis or Ghanaians who are currently living in the Bronx, like everything goes back to Ghana.

PB: [Unclear, but sounds like he is speaking in African language with some English words interspersed].

Male Interviewer: Okay. So the question is how do we ready to submit the functions of the fund, the special fund.

PB: We did not specifically did [*sic*] it in the Bronx. We wanted to, but when we saw it and we visualized everything that is going on in the US, you have a child that is preparing to go to college. There are [unclear], all those classes are there for you to apply for. There are the federal grants, there are state grants, and all that. You are a U.S. citizen and you qualify for those grants. Yet, we are talking \$500 dollars apiece that our fund allocates. \$500 couldn't even buy three books at Fordham University bookstore [laughter]. Three political books. That \$500 alone could take care of two or three students in Ghana. So we decided, "Okay. We are initially Ashantis. We are generating a collect fund. It should not be for Ashantis alone. It should be for the entire nation. So, even though the name of the fund is, "Ashantiman [?]" the recipients of the fund are not only Ashantis. It's for every individual who qualifies for the fund. How do we you make the choice? If you are a member of the [unclear], they ask you to make a choice. Pick someone from any family you want. They help people pay school and randomly distribute our choices. That's how we give

[unclear]. When we did that, and something that I forgot to mention earlier is that to bring it in, is that the country, not just Ashantis, needs computers. We are in the computer age. So all that is leadership. We send the first [unclear] computers along with the printers and the ink and all that. When I say computer, we mean the whole nine yards of a computer and we did not just tie to the Ashanti region. We chose schools [unclear] and we give them away. Then everybody started writing to us. Every school said, "We need computers," and how are you going to supply computers to the whole nation? We're not the [unclear] of Ghana. So we went around to schools and colleges and asked for the computers that they were going to throw away. They were all repurposed and sent to Ghana, leaving it to the Ashantis [Unclear]. So this is an organization that is focusing on building education for the nation. But you can see the names of the Ashantis, but we don't just stand for the Ashantis; we stand for the country. That is something for which we can stand up.

PR: The recess project is a community-based one. [Unclear]. I know how passionate he is about the concept of minority, the disadvantaged. Since he has been collected in Columbia, he has been fighting for the small guy. So although this kind of ethnic something, you can see it's passionate. Like, currently, there's a row about basketball, a school wanted to spend a lot of money. And he is looking to some of the money as to how it can benefit more people. So that's his side. That's who he is. And we've been asking [unclear] to have a woman and everything. Also, let me tell you in case a family needs support in terms of grant writing, looking at terms of proposals, to do this or that or to do some more, I am able to speak on behalf of Dr. Naison that he is able to support this [Applause]

MN: We will continue to work together, because you are bringing something very precious to this university. I think I feel privileged to be in this room with you, but there are many, many other students who would appreciate the opportunity to learn about this tradition, this culture. You mention Jamaica. I teach a course on Jamaican music. It's central to the development of Jamaican music, Jamaican spirituality. You can't understand the culture of the Americas without understanding American traditions, just like you can't understand Cuban culture without understanding Yoruba culture, the same way you can't understand Jamaica without understanding Akan culture. So you're bringing a very precious gift that I don't think people at this university know what the gift is. But when they see it, they will welcome it. So this is the beginning of something that I think is going to grow, and I love the idea of Twi replacing Spanish in the Bronx [laughter] becoming the third language. Spanish, English, and Twi. So we start with the twenty phrases and then move on. But this is very exciting. Dr. Edwards, you had a question [crosstalk].

Second Male Interviewer: So clearly, Ashanti culture is very strong in Ghana and in the Bronx. I spoke to one of my friends in Ghana yesterday, and I asked him how is the relationship between Ashantis and non-Ashantis, and he said the relationships are good. He said that the only area where it's not is with the Ewe people, who trace their descendants to the Ashanti people. When we met with the Muslim community there, the Zangha community, I noticed some sort of divide. I was just curious to

hear what your opinion is on the relationship between Ashantis and non-Ashantis, the Ewe Muslims.

[Unintelligible, possible chatter In African Language with English words interspered]

PB: We are one people as a nation and living together nicely. You spoke about Rara. Rara has a lineage to the Ashanti kingdom, as you mentioned earlier. And things have been like that for all these years. We are friendly, we live as human beings, and we are cultured. The only culture that typically resembles the Ashanti is the Adangbes. However, if you see any trouble between the kingdoms and the Adangbes, it's not the kingdoms that are fighting. I would call it an [unclear] political episode generated by political agenda. The country is made, as we said, of 10 regions. If a non-Ashanti becomes the President, it's like a minority becoming the head of state. If an Ashanti becomes the president, it is the majority at the helm of the state. Everybody goes, "It's good, it's good." If you take the narration of that, everywhere you go you are going to see minorities and majority. So these political tensions set up the conditions to bring this enmity between people. But the counts is done, it's normal. Everyone lives together as, you know, equals. But we don't have that enmity between people.

[Chatter]

PR: If you want to hear facts and figures, go to the communities. Speak to Ashanti [?] Because if you go to Kumasi, the capital of the central region, they have all sorts of people living there. But if you go other regions, you don't see that. [Names African places, then proceeds into something unclear] But if you come to Kumasi [unclear]. I know some place called Kpeve. It's part of the Volta region, but if you go there, there's a big dam around it. This big thing [unclear]. They even have another [unclear]. If you go to part of Volta region, you can hear music like Branji [continues in something unclear].

Male Interviewer: [Unclear]

PR: Yeah, chiefs. So if Ashantis have someone [unclear]. So if you want facts and figures, if you want to get a run-through, look at the community leaders. They will do the rising [?] There's no enmity between the division between the Ashanti kingdom. So it's a program, a big program, not a part of Ghana. It's the King of Ashanti who is [unclear]. Why? Because he's neutral, because of his wisdom. I'm not saying that the Fanti King or the Molo King or the [unclear], but they all believe in unity. In every community, when you have a problem, how to solve it is the important thing. So there is no problem with Ashantis and [unclear].

JE: I just want to ask one question. I just want to ask about the king. I can see that he's dressed differently from everyone else. So I just want to know how his outfit and all the bracelets and the rings represent in the kingdom.

PB: Yes, you're right. In the olden days, you'd be, you feel so proud to get so close to sit [laughter]. Yes, it's like the King, when he sits, everyone sits a little bit behind so that he's the front showcase so that you can see him. The King of the Ashantis, as he is named, sits on a golden stool, so everything that he commands is called "Nothing but gold." When he is coming out, when he is going to go to the public site, the Ushipene [?] And this is not a tightened [unclear]. This is not at all. This is only for this interview. There will be other tons of people, sitting behind, all because of the king. The Ushipene, with an advisor and two other men, would make sure that no one, and we mean no one, even if you have the same patterned clothing, is equally as good as he has done. If he gives us permission, we will trinket ourselves. But this interview, he is supposed to identify immediately who is the senior man here, who is the king. Every trinket that he has on him says something, so they know. For example, this is not just fashion. This is his protector, I would say. And I can hold it, I can take it with me, but I wouldn't even know what to call it. He's the only one who knows what it is, how to use it, when to use it, and how to apply it. But tradition tells us that you will not talk to him when he is holding this. Either he is communicating or he is getting powers, or he is enchanting. I cannot explain. But when he's down like this, and he's not holding any part of it, we are free to talk to him. That's one point. Let me use this as an example. I shouldn't take that away. It means I am undressing him and I shouldn't be that way.

JE: Don't take it out. Just have it.

PB: It's all happening. And you can see this. What kind of animal figure do you see here?

MN: Starfish?

PR: No.

MN: A turtle?

PR: It's a turtle. What can you tell me about a turtle?

Male Interviewer: It's slow.

PR: Slow, quiet, don't speak, naturally slowly. But if you, the moment you touch it, he puts off his fangs in and he says, "You can take me." But take that shell out, and you can see the real turtle. So that's a symbol. The king sits calm, simple, collected, but do not try to estimate the people behind him. What do you see here? Is that a symbol? Does that say anything to you?

Male Interviewer: Like a [unclear].

PR: It is, kind of. When walk in here, the emblem is open, now he sits down. Kings do not step out without their emblem of barrier. So don't underestimate my powers. So every one of them has something to tell you, and if you want to really go to on and go on. But before I go on with that, take another thing. Take a good look at it, this way and then that way. You might not know it. It looks like a comb. Back in the days, when the kingdom was in its heyday, they used to store gold in comb. So how can you call him "the king who sits on the golden stool, the occupant of the golden stool," when he doesn't show you that he has power to control gold. This is his comb. That's is him saying, "Yes, I have gold, and they are hidden in combs." So is the Queen Mother and everybody that, you know. You're going to see on a couple of them, with maybe two lines of trinkets. It tells everyone that they are junior kings or junior staff. And you're going to see me with just a watch. I'm just in the—

JE: So everything has a meaning?

PR: Yes, everything has a meaning. Sometimes it comes and I'm going to hear the drums for 30 minutes, and they're going to tell you the king's here and we're expecting silence. However, every single beat of the drum says something, means something to the public. So we will, when the possibility comes, we will go through all this.

MN: I want to have one more question and we'll end because we have a—

Male Interviewer: This is just a comment complementing what you said about Ashanti's relations with other people. History has taught us, I studied West African history and know about the Ashanti golden age too, the greatness, the influence it has—

PR: Yes.

Male Interviewer: It has influence on all the other ethnicities. So, historically, we learn that the Ashantis are a very humble people. They're a very, very nice people, very good people, very they're helpful. And politics has, not just in the case of the Ashanti, but the most influential tribes or ethnicities, when they're in power, once they get out of that position of power, that started in Ghana when the military government came. You understand, the Ashantis, they are one of, some of the most humble people, very influential, very helpful, from a historical perspective. They've gotten along with everybody. It's only politics that started...that was the problem.

Unclear Speaker: Thank you so much.

MN: Well, I want again on behalf of our entire research team, but also on behalf of our entire university community, want to thank you for exposing us to something that is truly extraordinary and will begin a process of...and now we can eat some Ghanaian food.

PR: And on behalf of the [unclear] and the Queen Mother, and everybody that came today, we also would like to say thank you so much. We look forward for the big day to come and we are really prepared to come support joining you. We should not let communication break down from here. We're going to exchange cards, email addresses, and phone numbers. And before we leave, there's something I have for you here. You may have enough, but this is for you and Fordham University. It's a calendar that was issued for 2010 by the Ashantiman Association on behalf of the King of the Ashantis.

Woman Interviewer: Wow.

MN: OH, I have to send out your—

PR: Use your right hand!

MN: Oh, OK. Right hand.

PR: When you have a shot—

MN: A shot, OK. Right hand [laughter] Right hand—

PR: Very good. And you see the power, and you see the powerful power, and you have [unclear] It is over our king, the king of the Ashantis.

JE: And may we take a picture with the King?

PR: Yes you can—

MN: And are we allowed to stand behind him

[Crosstalk preparing to take photo].