



2-18-2016

Turner, Joel

Bronx African American History Project
Fordham University

Follow this and additional works at: https://research.library.fordham.edu/baahp_oralhist



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Turner, Joel. Interview with the Bronx African American History Project. BAAHP Digital Archive at Fordham University.

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Bronx African American History Project at Fordham Research Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Fordham Research Commons. For more information, please contact considine@fordham.edu, bkilee@fordham.edu.

Interview of Joel Turner

Naison: Today we are interviewing Joel Turner a former executive with IBM who grew up in the Patterson Houses and lived there from its opening in 1950 until 1972. Urn, we spoke before the interview you mentioned that your family moved in to the Patterson Houses in 1950. Where did they live before they moved there?

Turner: Um, they lived in New York, in the Bronx.

Naison: They lived in the Bronx?

Turner: In various places in the Bronx.

Naison: Do you remember what neighborhoods or what streets?

Turner: Ya, like Tinton Ave I think that area, Prospect Ave. that area of the Bronx. My dad lived in Harlem for a while, 116th St. And, he was born in Pennsylvania, while my mom was born in NY.

Naison: Right so both of your families were actually born in the North.

Turner: Yes.

Naison: Now, did they have family ties to the South at all?

Turner: Urn, my dad had some ties to the South, I can't remember where. Well Ohio is not South but there was an Ohio connection I know that. Urn, a lot of Pennsylvania connection and um I am not sure what other parts of the South. But, I really didn't ... growing up I never really had connections.

Naison: Ya so you didn't go down to the South to visit.

Turner: No, and not till an adult.

Naison: What year were you born?

Turner: I was born in '49.

Naison: uh-huh. And did you have siblings?

Turner: Ya, two younger brothers. Urn, one was born-the closest one born to me is my brother Michael who was born in '50, my brother Jonathan was born in '59.

Naison: And what was the number of the building that you lived in?

Turner: Um, I lived in 2615 3rd Ave. Urn which was the southern side of the complex.

Naison: Right and how big was the apartment that your family moved in to?

Turner: Um, we lived in a four room apartment, or two bedroom apartment. Right, and later years, in '64 I believe it was, we moved in to a three-bedroom in the same building.

Naison: What sort of work did your father do?

Turner: Urn, my father was a postal employee. And he was already- you know eventually retired from the Postal Office.

Naison: And did your mother work?

Turner: Ya my mother worked she was a civil servant. She worked with the traffic department and also with the Board of Ed.

Naison: Now was she working when you were growing up?

Turner: Yes she was. Both my parents were working.

Naison: And what sort of childcare arrangements did they make when you and your younger siblings were growing up?

Turner: Urn, I don't remember. So I don't remember having babysitters, of course I don't remember too much of ... toddler or anything. Haha.

Naison: Right, right. Uh but when you started kindergarten ...

Turner: Whenever I started first grade.

Naison: You started first grade- did your parents, what time in the morning did they leave to go to work?

Turner: Well my father worked nights.

Naison: Oh, ok.

Turner: So that was another thing in the house. I didn't see him too often because of his hours, he worked the midnight shift. So he would wake up at 10 pm. and start getting ready for work. And usually you know I was in bed you know by that time or I would have been so ...

Naison: So who made breakfast for you?

Turner: Uh, my mom did. My mom did, and then she I guess then she'd go to work. Urn, ya at night- and my father of course cause he would always get home when we were already in school. He'd get home at about 9:30 in the morning or something and we would already be in school. And of course when I got home from school, my father is asleep so uh I pretty much

only saw him on his days off.

Naison: Did you go to the same elementary school PS 18 as the kids in the north side? Or you went to different schools?

Turner: Uh, I went to a different school. As a matter of fact uh this will be pretty much of a big scoop uh here right now, but I went to Yeshiva. I grew up in a Jewish household. And so I went to Yeshiva in the Bronx on Morris Ave.

Naison: Wow!

Turner: Ya, on 170th St and Morris Ave right sort of diagonally across from Taft High School in the Bronx. Ya.

Naison: When, was it your father or your mother?

Turner: On my mother's, on my mother's side. My mother's side, my father converted when he married my mom. But, that is the household that I grew up in I went to that school for six years. Urn, until I started going to the public schools.

Naison: And when you went to middle school? Or you went to ...

Turner: They call it Junior High.

Naison: Junior High in those days, right.

Turner: I did go to a neighborhood Junior High.

Naison: Were you the only African-American child in that Yeshiva? Or where there other black families?

Turner: Uh, just me and my brother and a couple- three four more. You know the school had a population of 750, and of those there maybe five of us in that school that were African-American.

Naison: Now do you think you got a better elementary school education there?

Turner: Yes, definitely. Um, only because it was parochial. I mean, not because it was particularly Yeshiva but it was a parochial school and were not public school. Urn for instance when it comes to reading for example the parochial schools taught phonics the public schools did not. And I think that that was a much better way of teaching students how to read.

Naison: Now did you have to also read Hebrew?

Turner: Yes I did, yes I did. As a matter of fact my day was very interesting. We started school at 8:40 in the morning. And it went all the way till 4:15, whereas the kids in public school were 9: 15 ...

Naison: I actually remember that because my high school Erasmus was right next to the Flatbush Yeshiva, and they got out an hour later than we did.

Turner: That's right because you had what is called a ... where everything was Hebrew and English. So, Hebrew was language and bible study and English was everything else they had math, the science you know we call that English. So in the morning up until about one o'clock was Hebrew and the rest of the day was uh Hebrew.

Naison: Right now.

Turner: When I hit, once you hit fourth grade it changes and you were there till 5: 15 and you went to school on Sunday from like nine til one. So I went to school six days a week.

Naison: Now, very interesting. Did your two siblings also go to college?

Turner: Uh, college ya.

Naison: So, all three of you ended up going to college and becoming professionals. Which is ...

Turner: Ya, right urn my youngest brother he is, he works for the Post Office and he has you know a handicap he's deaf. So, you know there was that you know handicap fear but he did go to college yes.

Naison: Urn, did-how did you get there?

Turner: Get where?

Naison: To the school from the Patterson Houses?

Turner: Oh, I took the bus.

Naison: And so from first grade you were ...

Turner: From first grade and in my parochial school you could start a year earlier. I was five years old.

Naison: And you were getting on the bus?

Turner: Getting on the bus by my self ever since I was five years old. You can't do that today.

Naison: Now did you have a bus pass?

Turner: Ya we had bus pass.

Naison: That's ... So you were getting on-do you remember the corner you got the bus.

Turner: Sure I got on at 141st St and Morris Ave and rode for 30 blocks you know to a 170th St.

Naison: So it was very simple you just got on the bus. Now were the people who got on the bus very you know.

Turner: Cause it wasn't unusual.

Naison: It wasn't unusual for a ...

Turner: Back in those days for a five year old to be traveling by himself. Today it is unheard of, you know you'd be put in jail if somebody put their kid, five year old kid, on public transportation.

Naison: That is amazing!

Turner: And I started riding the subway at six years old by myself. Cause I would go to my grandmothers house by myself, and ride that number six train to a 103rd St by myself.

Naison: 103rd and ...

Turner: Well she lived on a 102nd and Madison. So I take the train to a 103rd and Lexington. And the number 6 train was like I don't know four, five, six stops on the train. But I started doing that at six. So buses at five and trains or subways at six, alone.

Naison: Now, where you in those days wearing a yamaka when you were going ...

Turner: Only in school.

Naison: Only in school, so not in ...

Turner: Right.

Naison: Now did the people you were growing up with know that you went Yeshiva?

Turner: Yes.

Naison: And was there any stigma or discrimination?

Turner: Yes there was, there was a lot of discrimination. Um a lot of anti-semitism in the African-American community. But you know I grew up with it, and as a result of that as a result of going to that school I have a .. I feel I have a better rapport with non African-Americans.

Naison: Ya.

Turner: I just felt that you know because of that.

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Joel Turner

Date: N/A Page: 6

Naison: Now was the building you lived in multiracial or was it overwhelming ...

Turner: Actually it was multi-racial but it was predominantly African-American.

Naison: And the other groups, was the largest group Latino? Or was there a significant group of whites?

Turner: There was Hispanic and Whites in the building ya.

Naison: And did people pretty much get along across those lines?

Turner: We pretty much got along except there was this one white family who had a mentally challenged boy in the family. Now they got teased a lot because of that and also the fact that they were white. And uh they got teased a lot. I remember that.

Naison: Now a lot of people I've interviewed speak of a very supportive community when they were growing up. Did you feel a part of that or did the religious difference make you feel more of a sense of alienation?

Turner: No, I never felt alienated I had friends. Urn but I felt there was always something different though about my family versus a lot of the other families in that growing up ... Well first of all I was never what I call a leader or a follower, I just did my own thing. So I didn't succumb to the drugs that a lot of my friends did, I didn't succumb to you know the smoking, the alcohol, the crime. I wasn't a part of that.

Naison: Now did your family have books in the house? Was it, would you say that your family was more intellectual than ...

Turner: We had books in the house but that wasn't predominant thing in the house. I watched a lot of tv, my father watched a lot of tv. To this day I watch a lot of TV. You know, my father he pretty much ... he never he didn't curse you know. The only time he ever cursed was when the TV went on the blank. You know and ...

Naison: Now did urn, the people that I interviewed in 414 mentioned that there was a lot of supervised activity for young people.

Turner: Yes

Naison: And there was also a lot of that in your side of the household?

Turner: Ya, well they had a community center, of which I was a part of that from the age of 13 for the next probably 30 years.

Naison: Where was the Patterson Community ...

Turner: Patterson Community Center was underneath the building of 340 to 360 Morris Ave. So it was underneath those two buildings on the Morris Ave side. And as a after school kid, I would go to the after school program at the age of um ... I was less than thirteen. Oh probably started

around eleven, started going there. And then at thirteen I started working there as a volunteer in the after school program. And then I worked then for years, even through high school and in to college where I worked as a group worker, after school group worker and on the work study program at Bronx Community College.

Naison: Now did you go to ... Oh so you went to Bronx Community ...

Turner: I went to Bronx Community College and then I would also work as a day camp counselor in the summers with the city youth ...

Naison: Neighborhood Youth ...

Turner: Right. And I remember getting I think it was like a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week, which was a lot of money to someone back then. That was a lot of money.

Naison: That was probably the mid-sixties? Ya, ya. That was the riot control money.

Turner: Ya, that was great. And I remember when I first started to volunteer I was getting a little stipend it was six dollars every other week, and I always had money left over. You know when I came time to get the new six dollars. So urn it just shows you the difference um ...

Naison: Now obviously there, people must have felt the neighborhood was safe if they let a five year old on the bus.

Turner: Well ya I mean, ya.

Naison: So, when you were growing up do you remember much violence or police activity in the Patterson Houses?

Turner: I remember some. I wasn't involved in any of that. Like I said, I don't know ... my parents, they were strict not overly ...

Naison: I guess I am trying to envision, ok let's say you know 1956-57. You know you are seven years old. Are there things you know, do you feel there are things happening around you that you know even in that time that you know ...

Turner: No I would hear about things, I didn't witness a lot. Like for example today they say in some neighborhoods you are always hearing gunshots and all that. I ain't, I never heard that growing up. You heard about like stabbings, and you'd hear about gangs ... you know which I wasn't. ..

Naison: Right, now did you see gangs when you were a child? Did you see people you would say, ok those young men are wearing a certain outfit and that is a gang.

Turner: No but when I got older there was, like in my teens, there was a gang called Savage Skulls.

Naison: The Savage Skulls, ya that was ...

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Joel Turner

Date: N/A Page: 8

Turner: I would see those guys but I wasn't, I just never dealt with them. I was never concerned about staying away or anything cause I just did my thing. My thing was going to school you know, I was always going to school. It took up a lot of my time.

Naison: Now um, was there much of a visible underground economy in the Patterson Houses when you were growing up? Things like numbers?

Turner: Oh ya, there was numbers, ya my parents played numbers. I don't remember them hitting too often, but I remember them playing. But a lot of people would religiously play the numbers in the neighborhood.

Naison: And this was a largely non-violent activity?

Turner: Well you'd hear stories sometimes about maybe how somebody would get paid off or something, problem with that. But um you know I wasn't affected by that.

Naison: Now what sort of music were you exposed to as a child?

Turner: I was exposed to a lot of Motown, you know a lot of Motown. Doowop, ya Doowop and then Motown.

Naison: Right, now were your parents, did your parents have a lot of records?

Turner: Ya my mom, mostly my mom bought the records.

Naison: And what sort of music did she listen to?

Turner: Well that same, same stuff ...

Naison: So she was you know was not more of a big band person or ...

Turner: No although when my mom, my mom passed away six years ago. And, I'm sorry two years ago, my dad past away six years ago and my mom passed away two years ago. And going through her stuff I found a lot of like Jazz. And I was like ...

Naison: You remember hearing it growing up ...

Turner: You know she had a lot of Jazz stuff.

Naison: Was there much Latin music?

Turner: In the area, but we didn't have too much in the house. Urn, I remember when like the latest records would come out I'd tell my mom hey could we go get this record. And we would go up on 3rd Ave. to shop. And there was this record store named Stan's Records, and we would go there and buy the' 45, which cost I don't know maybe seventy nine cents maybe each one, or something like that.

Naison: Now, what kind of sports did you play when you were growing up?

Turner: Oh ok. Growing up we played a lot of city urban sports. We played stickball, softball, stoopball, punchball, basketball. Now tennis is a very central and focal point of my life, I didn't not play that until I was like an adult. My mom played a little tennis when she was growing up. I remember seeing tennis rackets in the house but I didn't have access to tennis courts when I was growing up.

Naison: Now did you play basketball in organized leagues? Or it was mostly like pick-up games?

Turner: Uh pick-up and, well both; I played a lot of organized. Every once I might join a team, you know a local team or something and play. I wasn't one of the better basketball players, but I did play. I didn't play too much over at PS 18, if I did play it was in the park on our side.

Naison: Right, on your side?

Turner: Uh-huh.

Naison: Uh-huh. Um what. ...

Turner: But I did know Tiny, Tiny Archibald.

Naison: Where did you know Tiny from?

Turner: From school, when I started public school, towards junior-high, that is when we met up.

Naison: Did you go to Clark?

Turner: Ya I went to Clark, we had a few classes together. Then of course, then we were both in the same grade and then we went to Clinton at the same time. And had a few classes together there.

Naison: Now, did you have any contact with Eddie Bonamere, the music teacher?

Turner: No, Eddie, Mr. Bonamere was not one of my music teachers I think I had Mr Taylor. There were two music teachers I had Mr Taylor the other one, I didn't have I never had Mr Bonamere in the three years I was at Clark.

Naison: Now were you musically inclined?

Turner: No but I sang when I was a kid. In fact I was in a choir, in a Jewish choir in a Synagogue.

Naison: Wow!

Turner: Yes on ..

Naison: Now, which Synagogue did you attend?

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Joel Turner

Date: N/A Page: 10

Turner: Well I went to a Synagogue in Harlem, which was an African-American Synagogue on a 120th and Lenox Ave. called ... And um but the choir when they came Yeshiva when I was in fourth grade for auditions for a choir. And that's where I started singing. You could say I was a profession cause if being paid for your services is called professional we were paid to sing. They even gave us singing lessons. And we would go to Synagogue in 96th and Broadway, I'm sorry 93rd St and Broadway in the city that is what, I can't remember the name of it right now. And um we would sing and we would get paid for it, and we got paid like a dollar ten per hour.

Naison: That is pretty good money.

Turner: Tellin you! You know it sounds like nothing now, for young people hearing this. But, that was a lot of money, and every Saturday sing for three hours you get paid three dollars and thirty cents. But we would get once by a check once a month. And that thirteen dollars and twenty cents came, for a kid that is eleven years old that was a lot of money.

Naison: In those days.

Turner: But on Holy days we got paid more you know so ...

Naison: Wow,

Turner: But it was interesting growing up in a you know African-American and Jewish. It was, that was very interesting growing up. You know that in the neighborhood, in the neighborhood in the South Bronx.

Naison: So, there was, what was some of the form of the anti-semitism? If somebody would say you know say something to you, what kinds of things would they say?

Turner: Jew. You know.

Naison: Oh, just Jew?

Turner: Ya you know ...

Naison: Eeh Jew!

Turner: Black Jew. Oh I got the discrimination from both sides. From non-Jewish people, and in school from the white Jews being black. Like they would say in school, well how do you know when you are clean when you wash ? You know how can you tell whether you are clean or not? You know so stuff like that.

Naison: So those kind of things.

Turner: So I got it from both sides. Even, I was even discriminated against by the Jewish teachers. So, not all of them but I remember one or two of them in particular.

Naison: Ya, um. Did the school authorities try to do anything in response to those incidents?

Turner: No I never reported them, you know I just sort of dealt with it in my, within my self.

Naison: Right now. Did you ever sing in Doo Wop groups?

Turner: Ya, I sang in street comers, in hallways, and you know hallways were great with the you know the aesthetics there.

Naison: Did you ever like try to make a record with some of your ...

Turner: We did one time. We went, you could go in these places, in these video- not video. They call them petty arcades, and they would have a booth and you could make wax record, '145. And we did that, I think we did Earth Angel.

Naison: Oh, Earth Angel.

Turner: That was one of my big songs.

Naison: You don't have to have that preserved?

Turner: I might I don't know I'd have to look for that thing.

Naison: That would be ...

Turner: And what else? Another favorite song was Why Do Fools Fall in Love.

Naison: Oh, ya.

Turner: So I had voice something like a Frankie Lymon type voice, or a Michael Jackson ...

Naison: Oh really like a high alto, ya high alto. Wow, now. Outside of your family were there any adults who had an important influence in your life?

Turner: My dad.

Naison: Oh, outside of your...

Turner: Oh, outside of my family I'm sorry. Uh, ya ya there were a few. When I was in my senior year of high school we had this organization called SEO, Sponsor for Educational Opportunity. They came in to the neighborhood and they wanted to find urn young kids that seemed like they had some potential and help them in school with their education. And so they would have like a person who would be assigned to be the sponsor, and my sponsor's name was Jack Macolyndin, he sponsored me and for that organization. And to this day we are still friends; we are talking, see that was 1965. So we are talking God 38 years ago and we are still friends. Urn, but he was very influential in helping me to set goals, to put study habits, and what not. And they also gave me a little stipend to help me along, urn you know financially with school and books and things like that.

Naison: What was the trip to Clinton like? You know the train.

Turner: Oh, the train ride?

Naison: Oh, because people sometimes call it the Booty Train.

Turner: Ya there was a Booty Train, I didn't ride. The only time I, well um I'd got out of class sometimes, depending on what my schedule was sometimes after 7th period or after 8th period. Which was usually maybe a halfhour or an hour or so before the time for the Booty Train. Because the Booty Train coincided with what time the girls from Walton got out, which was two stops away. So, the only time I would be on that train is sometimes when we would have half days or something. And both schools got out at the same time. And I saw a lot of incidents, negative incidents on the train with the girls being groped and fondled and things like that. Where they would pull the emergency cord, particularly when you are going in to the tunnel from 161st St. at Yankee Stadium going in to 149th St. Grand Concourse, in between the tunnel they would pull the emergency cord stop the train. And that was kind of dark, when they had the old time trains, not the kind they have now, and they groped the girls. And it was interesting because one year after there was so many incidents Walton, they used to have a thing called the GO club, called the General Organization our school had a GO club. And sometimes they would have a pin that you would wear, a badge like thing but a pin. They redesigned the pin, for Walton, so that the pin was longer than the button so that the girls would have something to protect themselves. That is how bad it had gotten, that they redesigned a GO button so they the girls would have some protection against these boys that were groping.

Naison: Now was there a point at-which you, you and your family began to perceive the Patterson Houses becoming dangerous? Or is it a very gradual, slow evolution?

Turner: Yes, it was perceived as that. But because I lived there I didn't feel particularly in danger going there. Now you always had this phenomenon you know when you go in to other neighborhoods you know you'd be in, you'd feel in danger. But I didn't feel it in my own, you know, neighborhood.

Naison: And you didn't feel it even when you left in 1972?

Turner: The danger? Like going back or something? No, no because I grew up there so um you know... I sort of knew what the deal was, you know not street wise even though I didn't consider...

Naison: Now you had mentioned that there was a point in which some of your friends started getting in to some serious trouble.

Turner: Oh ya, oh ya.

Naison: And how old were you when you started noticing friends ...

Turner: Young teenager, oh whatever in High School when they start dropping out of school for instance, started taking drugs, smoking pot, drinking, urn getting in trouble, going to jail. All this stuff, this is happening all around me.

Naison: Really, and this is in the middle sixties.

Turner: Yes, ya but I didn't, me and my brothers we didn't succumb to that.

Naison: Now was that kind of disintegration connected to things happening in families? Do you think that your ability to stay, resist was in part due to the kind of family you had.

Turner: I think it has a lot, had a lot to do with it. Urn, my family just you know just didn't tolerate certain behavior, there was discipline in the house, and you know we just didn't let things go. And we you know we were taught to respect ourselves as well as respect others. You know education was a major thing of importance in the house. That my father would establish number one in the house education. You know we had to show the report card, you know we had to have good grades, we had to study, you know. So, and I never played, I never played hookie until um I think I played hookie twice in my whole life and that was like in High School, Senior Year in High School. I had never played ...

Naison: So you were centered ..

Turner: You know you were supposed to go to school so I just went to school, you know. That was that simple really. But there was with my friends that was going on all the time. But like I said I didn't do what, to me what my friends were doing was silly to me. So,

Naison: Now, in your friends' families were fathers starting to leave? Were you starting to see a phenomenon of more single parents?

Turner: Ya you started to see that. Even my own family, I mean my mother and father separated when I was fifteen. So at least they were you know fifteen years that I had both my parents in the same ... But even though my father his presence still was always there. Because again, even when he was not living in the household education was still important, he still stayed on top of me and my brothers with that. So, he wasn't there physically but his presence was always there. So,

Naison: Urn, how did the sixties affect the Patterson Houses? You know all those things ...

Turner: Wow, it was uh...looking back I mean it was fun time music, you know Motown. When I think of the sixties I think of Motown, you know. Urn you know Martha Reeves and the Vandella's "Dancing in the Street", and the Temptations and the Tops you know. So, music played a big part. The sixties also was the love generation so the late sixties that is when I hit, I was as started college in '66. Um, you know hair styles changed the afro's you know come in. You know the sixties it was fun, it was fun.

Smith: Were you were involved in any Civil Rights Movement, I know you were pretty young back then but did you see friends...

Turner: No a lot of my friends, like we had, there was an organization that was that we had in the neighborhood called TWO, which was Third World Organization. And even the girl I was going out with at the time she joined the organization. And actually that caused kind of a rif between her and I, because I felt her she was having more loyalties to the organizations than she was

having to me at that time. Um ...

Naison: Now this was a neighborhood group?

Turner: This was neighborhood yes.

Naison: Did it meet in the Patterson Community Center? Or was it more you know ...

Turner: They'd meet, they might meet in someone's house, you know apartment or something, or in the park or whatever you know.

Naison: Did anybody get involved in the Black Panther Part in those days that you knew?

Turner: Not that I was familiar with. However, I remember that the guys and a lot of girls were changing their names. This girlfriend of mine to this day that still the name she used, the name she changed to. She still uses that name, her sister also. Um ya. But changing their name, changing the way they dress you know the more militant Daishiki and the Kufi's and uh you know. So that affect was there.

Naison: What about Vietnam? Did any of your friends go to Vietnam?

Turner: Ya a few of my friends did go to Vietnam, a few of my friends did go to Vietnam and when they came back some of their attitudes were changed somewhat. You know, I remember one guy in particular who went in to the Navy you know. And when he came back four years later, he and I we had a problem. Because here is this guy that lets say went away at 18 comes back at 22, he still lookin at me like I'm 18 you know. So, the way he was interacting with me I didn't appreciate because he didn't realize that ya he grew up four years, but I also grew in four years. But he was still seeing me as the 18 year old that he left. So we had a little problem for a while with that, but eventually grew out of that. But urn, I was never in the service I had I was in school so I had a student deferment classification in the draft system.

Naison: When you were going to Bronx Community where was the campus located?

Turner: It was located on 184th St, not far from Jerome Ave. from Jerome and the Concourse. In a building that is now I don't know Junior High School or something I am not sure. So I wasn't on that old New York University Campus where it is now, University Ave. I was never in there because I was at the 184th St Campus.

Naison: Now do you have recollections of heroine becoming a big problem in Patterson? Or was ...

Turner: Ya I remember guys being strung out, junkies on the comer nodding off. A lot of my friends turned to you know narcotics.

Naison: What do you make of this? You know here you are you know you have what seems to be a pretty normal childhood, and then all of a sudden people around you are dropping out of school, they are getting involved in drugs.

Turner: Um, ya I just felt it was a sign of weakness in others. You know, it would just never occur to me to want to do that stuff because I never wanted my mind to be in an altered state. That is why to this day I mean I don't drink alcohol, no wine, liquor, beer. You know none of that.

Naison: But, you know I guess I wonder that you are watching this, did you feel like look at this is strange. Here I have my friends, I mean I'm ...

Turner: Well, it wasn't strange in terms of so many people were doing it, that it wasn't strange. You know, but I still remember I still never succumbed to that peer pressure. So, it wasn't strange to see it because it was so prevalent, so I just kind of felt sorry for them.

Naison: Now did you know Guy Fischer before ...

Turner: I knew Guy ya I knew Guy.

Naison: What building did he grow up in?

Turner: Uh, 2595 was his building, next to mine. His was the very end building, mine was the second from the end.

Naison: Ya because Allan Joan just told me about a time when, you know because Allan was very big in an early age, but he saw Guy and he started slapping him in the face. Was he always someone who was you sort of knew was going to end up in uh ...

Turner: No actually, well before Guy got in to that he was always a popular guy. Always happy go lucky, always laughing, always smiling always smiling. And I didn't hang out with Guy, he knew who I was I knew who he was but we never hung out together. And urn you knew each other because of close proximity of where we lived. And then eventually he got in to the whole drug thing and then I sort of got out of touch with him, but I would see him around. But I you know I knew that eventually something was going to happen you know. I never knew that he was still gonna be in jail this long you know. But ...

Naison: Now when your family left Patterson where did they move to?

Turner: Well I moved out before urn my mom, because I moved out in '72 I moved to another location in the Bronx. That is when I first living on my own, and my mom was in Patterson for two more years, she eventually moved out in '74 so and bought a house in Queens. So, that is where my mom stayed until she passed away.

Naison: Now when you entered high school, did you know that you were eventually going to go to college?

Turner: No you know why in High School it was a thing were I never took college for granted, it was like I am got to get out of High School. And I think there is a point in High School you believe, am I going to graduate? You know, you know you trying to pass those tests and everything. But you know eventually did, but I always knew that once I did yes I

was going to go to college. I mean I went to college right away following from semesters. So there was no break.

Naison: Now, after Bronx Community did you go on to more schooling? Or did you go directly to the work force?

Turner: I went directly to NYU in 1970 and I was there for about five months when I started working doing both full-time. Working with IBM and going to NYU both fulltime at the same time for the next two and a half years till I graduated from NYU. And then well I continued working you know for IBM for the next 29 years. But in '74 I went back to school to Fordham University, right here Fordham University. Not here on this campus, I went to the Lincoln Center Campus in Grad school and I got my MBA in '76. So.

Naison: So did ... your mother moved to Queens. And you continued to work in the Patterson Houses in the community center long after?

Turner: No, I worked in there until I worked there until the summer of 1969. Um, and then that is when I went I started going to Bronx Community. I'm sorry '69 I started going to NYU and then in January of '70 that is when I started working at IBM. So I never worked, but I still was affiliated with the community center, because they had something called East Side House. Which the four community centers were under the auspices of East Side House, you had Patterson, Mitchell, Mott Haven, and what's the other one- Mill Brook. And uh I was on the Board of Managers in East Side House for about 20 years, the next twenty years. I also was the President of the Board of the East Side House College Assistance Program, for about two years in there.

Naison: Now did you reach a point where you became really pessimistic about what was happening in the Bronx?

Turner: No ...

Naison: Or you always saw that you know even while some bad things were going on there are also good things?

Turner: Ya, I saw both. I mean I wasn't pessimistic nor optimistic. Um, you know I am just concerned about just making sure that I was just a good citizen. But I did try to make a difference, working on the Board. Those of us, we had programs for the youth, programs for senior citizens, we got education programs and all this kind of things. So I was involved in that aspect trying to make a difference in the community.

Naison: Now do you think kids growing up now in Patterson have a very experience than you had growing up?

Turner: Ya, because the world is different now. For instance kids they don't play outside anymore. You know we used to go outside and play, they don't do that now. Kids hang out, to me there is a difference between hanging out and playing outside. Kids go to malls and hang out, you know you don't see any kids playing stoopball too much anymore you don't see those

kinds of things. Urn, you know kids are into, you have hiphop generation you know they are into their music now and that kind of thing. So, it's different.

Naison: Were you very aware of hip-hop when it first came out? Were you know, or was this something that sort of passed you by?

Turner: No I was aware of it, but I was already an adult at the time. So I didn't really get into it too much. Some of it I like, some of it I don't. I like, the only thing about hip-hop I like is certain music that make you wanna dance. Not the hardcore, thug type, I am really not in to that. There is one hip-ho guy in particular that I like a lot is called Nelly. I really, I am really in ...I am a Nelly fan! But the rest of them, they can have it.

Naison: Now, are there are any subjects that we didn't touch upon that you want to go in to in more depth?

Smith: I wanted to ask you about your college experience. You went there in the 70's?

Turner: Ya, I went there from '70 to '72, '69 to '72.

Smith: Cause NYU, obviously now is you know one of the prestigious universities. Dh, back then I think it was a little easier to get in to. But how was it like racially, was there racial tension? Do you think, was that a factor? Did you live on campus?

Turner: No I didn't live on campus, I always lived home. Ok, and commuted to walk to the Washington Square campus Ok. I majored in Business Management when I was there. Urn, it was very inter-rationally mixed, you know. All my classes you know it was you know a mixture of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds there. I thought I got a good education, but if you recall only after my first semester there did I then start working fulltime. So, remember I would go to school lets say from 9 o'clock to about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and then I'd go to work from four fifteen, four till midnight. You know, then I'd get home, I'd get home at one o'clock in the morning and I might do some homework and then I'd go to bed, get up and start all over again. This was like for four days, Fridays I was always off I didn't have classes on Fridays. And I did that you know for two and a half years, you know till I graduated. But urn no NYU was fun, I didn't get too much in too much of the, I think they had the BSU Black Student Union there. I wasn't involved in that too much, I knew people that were in it. Like I said I would go to school and then I would leave because you know I wasn't involved in with fraternities. I wasn't in to that pledging and all that kind of thing. My thing was go to school, go to work you know. Because ever since I graduated from high school I couldn't stand school, I mean I hated school. But I went because all I wanted, I wanted those credentials I wanted that piece of paper and if, and that was my whole focus was to graduate. Not to education, if I got an education in the process fine I just wanted a piece of paper so I could go to work. But then I was working while I was in there anyway. You know, urn so that was at NYU.

Smith: How did Microsoft deal with you being ... IBM how did they deal with you being, cause I could imagine that there weren't too many African-Americans working for the company back then.

Turner: Ya, there were a few, you know there were a few. More than the percentage than going to Yeshiva. But, you know four out of 750. But urn that was never an issues, you know like I said I never had a problem with non-African-Americans so ... So I didn't have a problem with my fellow employees or anything like that.

Smith: Was promotion, like you getting promoted to higher positions in the company ...

Turner: Ya, I thought so pretty good. In particular I noticed that I would see for example, after I graduate from NYU then I started noticing that the guys around me who were ... first of all I've always considered, I've never considered myself better than other people. But at the same time I don't consider other people better than me, I'm like they can do it I can do it. And I would notice some of the guys around me, they were going like to grad school. And getting their Masters Degrees and they seem to moving up a little bit faster. I said if they can do it I can do it, that is when I went back to grad school. Because after I graduated from NYU I said, I am never going to school again cause I couldn't stand school. But they were moving ahead so I went to Fordham and had a great education at Fordham. Because at the time the program was pass fail so I didn't have to worry about letter grades. And it was only two years at night, I was exempt from taking the computer thing cause I was working in that industry. And there was no thesis required, so and IBM paid for my tuition. Who could pass up all that? And after that I started moving faster up the corporate ladder. You know coming to senior level technical level, then became a manager and so on. So, that was my experience there.

Naison: Ok,

Turner: Oh, oh I just wanted to talk about my work experience.

Naison: Well let me just go to the other side of the tape, and just take a quick... Ok, so Joel you wanted to talk a little more about your work experience?

Turner: Ya work experience. It is interesting well the contrast how I got started between how people attempt to get started nowadays. Urn, I decided that you know I was in school full-time I wanted to work. And I said well I knew I wanted to be a computer programmer I want to go to IBM. I just went to them off the street, no appointment. Said Hi I would like to apply for a job as a computer programmer. Well do you have a four year degree? No at this time I only had my Associates Degree from Bronx Community. But, I am pursuing a ... Well no you have to have a four year degree. I said well my Associates degree is in Data Processing, is in Data Processing that is what my Associates Degree's in. No it could be a four year degree from anything English, History, as long as it's only a four year degree that could apply for a computer processing job. So what was the next best thing that you have? And they said computer operator. I said fine I'll apply for that. It was probably the same aptitude test that they gave me, so off the street I applied. And they said ok we'll get back to you. I think that I applied at the end of January and a month later March 1st or March 2nd I was working.

Naison: Was this the early '70's?

Turner: This was 1970. And a year, 18 months later I started as a, I got hired as a computer programmer because I would as an operator I would volunteer for different programming assignments and one of the programming managers eventually saw my work and gave me my shot. So even before I graduated from uh NYU I was in computer programming. And I did that

for the next uh twenty or so years um but you know going up through the ranks, you know the technical ranks in the programming field until I became a manger with the programming department. And then in 1999 the division I was in got bought out by AT&T so I retired from IBM and when I became an AT&T employee. And where I worked for the next three and a half years till 2002 November where I retired from AT&T. So I am a double retiree now.

Naison: Right, now when you moved out of the Patterson Houses where did you get your first apartment?

Turner: In the Bronx, up on Crows Ave off of Westchester up near the Soundview or Parkchester area, up in that section of the Bronx.

Naison: Right, now did you know other people who moved there? How did you find the apartment?

Turner: Um, again with IBM they were affiliated with a lot of different things. They had something called Operation Open City, and they gave you assistance in finding you know housing dwellings. And I went to them and it was funny because the woman um she gave me a list often different places I looked them over, said ok this is my number one choice here. And I went, she was an advocate for getting me in, and I got in to....

Naison: So those were neighborhoods were if you were an African-American housing consumer on your own you would have had trouble getting or not necessarily?

Turner: I don't think so, no.

Naison: Was it a racially mixed neighborhood?

Turner: Ya, it was predominantly I would say predominantly African-American. But you know it was a nice you know high-rise building, young high-rise building; I remember I lived on the top floor, the twenty-first floor. It was a great apartment for me the first time out you know out of my house.

Naison: Was this Mitchell-Lama house?

Turner: Yes it was a Mitchell-Lama, it was a Mitchell-Lama house. Yes.

Naison: And did you ...

Turner: The rent was like a hundred and sixty-five bucks a month.

Naison: For like a one bedroom or two bedroom?

Turner: One bedroom.

Naison: Now, did you move within the Bronx before you went to Westchester? Or ...

Turner: No. Oh, before I went to Westchester? No I moved from that apartment which I lived

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Joel Turner

Date: N/A Page: 20

for nine years into a condo that I bought in Yonkers. And lived in the condo for nine years, in fact the day I moved into the condo was March 30 I believe of 1981 which was the day President Regan got shot. I remember moving in that day, but I didn't find out until that night, I was moving all day and I didn't hear the news. And I was there for nine years before I then moved to White Plains where I am now. Bought a house there in 1990. So uh.

Naison: So have you made, when you were working for IBM and moving did you still maintain contact with people you grew up with?

Turner: Yes I did, Ya. To this day, well I only have a few contacts not so much now there. But, some of them have moved away, oh well my daughter's mother that is where I met her at Patterson Houses, she lived there. And so we have you know my daughter and it was, she's gonna be twenty-eight next month ya. So we have that union, so I still, you know her mother, my daughter's mother grandmother still lives in Patterson. So, ya I have that connection.

Naison: When did you start attending Patterson Reunions?

Turner: Urn when they first started which was, must be like maybe five six years ago.

Naison: So they haven't been going on for that long?

Turner: No not that long. No, but I've been attending each one I've made it to everyone.

Naison: Now what about Old Timers Day in Crotona Park, when ...

Turner: I don't go to that one. I don't know why but I don't go to that one.

Naison: Just the Patterson House.

Turner: Ya that is a whole lot of different neighborhoods. I do play tennis, I was there two weeks ago playing tennis in Crotona Park. I don't. ..

Naison: Ok, do you have any more questions Mark?

Smith: No.

Turner: Ya that's everything else that I can think of.

Naison: Ok well lets play some tennis! Ok, great.