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Dr. Claude Mangum Interview Transcription

Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Mattie Armstrong-Price, Caitlin Meehye Beach

Interviewee: Dr. Claude Mangum

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Dr. Mark Naison (MN): Okay. So today, as part of Fordham's Anti-Racism Initiative, Mattie and I are part of a committee to examine Fordham history dealing with racism and anti-racism. So who better to interview than Dr. Claude Mangum, who's been in Fordham since – was it 1969?

Dr. Claude Mangum (CM): Yes.

MN: First as the director of the Upward Bound Program, then as an instructor in the newly formed Institute of Afro-American Studies, and then as an assistant professor, associate professor, and longtime chair of what became the Department of African American Studies. And unfortunately Dr. Mangum retired a few years ago, leaving me all alone, as we were together for over 40 years. So, what I would like to do is have Mattie start it off asking some questions that are important to people who are new to Fordham, and then I will chip in, you know, with questions of my own.

Mattie Armstrong-Price (MAP): I suppose, just to begin, I'm curious to hear about, kind of, how you came to Fordham.

CM: You're asking me how I came to Fordham? I came to Fordham initially as a part-time position with the Upward Bound program. I was getting married and I thought working with Upward Bound for that summer would give me some money toward my honeymoon. Who would know that it would turn out to be a lifelong career at Fordham? So from that experience, I later returned to my full-time teaching position at John Bowne High School in Flushing, New York. I was able to get tenure there, and once I got tenure, I was able to take a leave and go to Fordham University, where I continued for the rest of my life – rest of my career, I'll say. Hopefully not my life.

MAP: Hi, Caitlin.

Caitlin Meehye Beach (CMB): Hi. How are you? Sorry for joining late.

MAP: Not at all. We just started. I asked Dr. Mangum about how he came to Fordham.

CAB: Oh, great.

MAP: But I think that maybe if there are questions that you have, you and I maybe can start with asking questions and then it sounds like Mark might come in.

MN: Yeah, I have a lot backing up, since Dr. Mangum and I worked together for over 40 years.

CMB: Okay.

MN: And it was – I was the one who persuaded him to move from the Upward Bound program to the then newly formed Institute of Afro-American Studies, where he went from being a high school teacher to a college professor. And the rest is literally history, since he is as respons–

CM: You know, had I remained in the public school system, I would've been making much more money.

MN: (laughs) Yeah.

MAP: I was interested in following up in hearing about your kind of pre-Fordham career, and how you came to John Brown High School, and how that was.

CM: Yeah, I was very fortunate. I attended Queen's College, now part of Community College of New York, which was a very selective school. You had to have a certain high school average or SAT score. And so fortunately I was able to get in, and from there I was able to go on to, once I graduated, teach at John Bowne High School in Flushing, which was a relatively new school. It had students coming from well-to-do areas in Queens. And fortunately they had a special program for students coming from Jamaica, Queens, who weren't as wealthy as the students who lived in the Flushing area. And so it turned out that I wound up having a student who lived around the corner from me. And I was able to go to his house and speak to his parents about his less attractive behavior. When I returned to school the next day, the word had got out that Mr. Mangum's gonna come to your house and speak to your parents, so you better behave yourself because, you know, you're gonna get in trouble. So that really set the tone, and I had a very fortunate experience at John Bowne High School, where I went on to become the G. O. Advisor and was very active in many of the student organizations there.

MN: So when did you apply to Teachers College to do your graduate work? Columbia Teachers College.

CM: I guess that was in 1969 or 1970. You know, as soon as I had finished my master's degree, I applied to graduate school as well.

MN: Now, did you have any intention of becoming a college professor when you enrolled in a doctoral program?

CM: No. (Laughs) I wanted to return to the public school system because I was very concerned about helping students who came from disadvantaged backgrounds strengthen their average, via knowledge, and be able to attend universities. So that was my main goal.

MN: Now, one thing I would love for you to describe to Mattie and Caitlin, is the office arrangement on the second floor of Dealy, between the Upward Bound program and the newly formed Institute of Afro-American Studies, which had been created as a result of a student sit-in at the Fordham Administration building in 1969. So, describe, you know – Caitlin, are you a Rose Hill faculty, or Lincoln Center?

CMB: I go between the two campuses.

MN: So you know what Dealy Hall looks like.

CMB: Yeah.

MN: Okay, so describe our second floor arrangement. I think it'll be an insight into what it was like at an institution like Fordham, which in the early sixties had almost no students of color, which suddenly had many more students of color, but also had an Upward Bound program, which was bringing high school students to campus.

CM: Mm-hmm. Yes. It was a very exciting experience. I know, Mark, you had attended Columbia and you were familiar with the programs that they had there for students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. And so the same thing was true for Fordham. It was a novel experience for Fordham. I was fortunate enough to have father George McMahon, who was the Dean of Fordham College at the time, who was really extremely helpful in supporting disadvantaged and students of color. And so during that time there was a small group. We had the development of the HEOP program, Higher Education Opportunity Program, and had a site at Rose Hill and at Lincoln Center. And so fortunately we had a number of students who not normally would be able to attend Fordham, come to Fordham. And that opened the eyes for many students, being able to live on campus with the Upward Bound program. And we, you know, went to a number of other schools and different cities, we traveled. And so that really provided a motivation and experience for those students to apply to colleges and universities.

MN: Now just to put a little background, at that time, Fordham was predominantly a commuter campus, where the majority of students came from the New York City metropolitan area, and a significant number of the students who we worked with actually came from the Bronx.

CM: Yes.

MN: And went to Bronx High Schools.

MAP: I'm curious about the kind of the networks that you were part of, that helped facilitate the Upward Bound work, the work of going to – working with high school students in different parts of the city. How did that work? Who were some of the people who helped facilitate that, or how was it organized?

CM: Yeah. You know, we were fortunate enough to have the Higher Education Opportunity Program, HEOP, and so that encouraged a number of students, and many of those students became counselors in the Upward Bound program. And so there was that sort of give and take. And so many of the students came from similar backgrounds. When I was with Upward Bound, we would attend theater downtown in Manhattan. We would take trips to other universities and colleges by bus. They would stay in the dorms. They just had a very inspirational experience. They were also able to bond with one another. When I first came to Fordham for the Upward Bound Program, it was all male. And so, you know, a lot of the young men were able to bond together. Later the program became co-ed and sort of, you know, lessened some of that. But I really enjoyed the experience that these young men had, coming from areas of the Bronx and throughout the city. I mean, they traveled for a long period of time coming from Brooklyn, for example, all the way up to the Rose Hill campus. But they really enjoyed it. We would go to theaters on Saturdays. We would travel to different experiences. So again, as I mentioned earlier, it really opened their eyes to the opportunities that exist.

MN: Yeah. Tell Caitlin and Mattie about the one very famous person who came out of the Upward Bound program, the singer.

CM: Oh, Luther Vandross, I don't know if you're familiar with Luther Vandross, but he was one of the Upward Bound students and very popular among all the students. One of the things that, you know, I didn't realize, we didn't really govern the students very strictly. Luther would go down to the Apollo Theater for their Amateur Night and other activities, and Luther would become a – would go on to become a very famous celebrity.

MN: I would say Luther Vandross is probably one of the five most famous R&B singers of the last – the period between 1975 and 2000.

CM: Yes. And he was also very popular. He was very popular with his fellow students as well. So it was a very good program. There was a good bond that existed among the students. There was one period of time where some young people throughout the city were getting into drugs, into heroin, and we really couldn't handle that. And so I made a request to the students that they

identify the students who were using drugs. And they came forward, you know, they didn't want the program to be jeopardized. They came forward and I went to the homes of each of the individuals who were addicted to drugs and spoke to their parents. We had to ask them to leave the program because we didn't want them to, you know, spread the use of drugs to other students. But I did speak to each of their parents to explain what had happened, and that I provided the parents with links to some of the drug rehab programs that existed in our communities.

MAP: Were there ways that the political currents of the time kind of shaped the work with Upward Bound, or kind of as you started coming onto campus?

CM: Yeah. I think it was a time where many more students of color, both Black and Latino, were applying to colleges and universities. So this was something that was really nationwide. You know, we had the Upward Bound program, that was a national program. We had the development of HEOP – Mark, you're familiar with what was taking place at Columbia.

MN: Right.

CM: There was a whole movement that was national in scope, and so we fortunately were able to get caught up in it, and I think our students really benefited from that experience.

MN: Now, one question is, how receptive was the Fordham administration to making the students in Upward Bound, as well as students of color entering Fordham – Was the administration working hard to make them feel at home on campus?

CM: It varied. There were some people, for example, like Father George McMahon, who was outstanding. I mean, he really did everything that he could to assist the students. There were some priests who were less supportive. And I even went to the President of Fordham to explain that there were people on the faculty who were priests, who were really discouraging our students and trying to take steps to get rid of the program. And so I think fortunately the President was able to address those concerns. So for the most part, we had good support from our faculty and administration.

MN: So one question – You obviously had a great experience in Upward Bound – Why were you receptive when I approached you with becoming a faculty member, a Fordham faculty member, and joining the Institute of Afro-American Studies?

CM: One, it meant that I didn't have to work as long. We only taught a number of courses and that provided me with a greater opportunity to attend graduate school and take graduate classes. So that was a good thing. Good opportunity. Thank you Mark. (laughs)

MN: But what was the – you know, again, going back to Mattie's question about the political atmosphere – what was it like to enter Dealy Hall 205, the office of the Institute of Afro-American Studies, in 1971? Describe what it looked like and what it felt like to be there.

CM: You know, as I said, I was the director of the Upward Bound program, and we had an office right across the hall, and so I had an opportunity to interact with some of the faculty in the Institute. Quinton Bernard Wilkes was one of them. We were both fraternity brothers from different schools with the same fraternity. So, I was able to engage in activity with him. I was very friendly with some of the other faculty and staff that existed in the department, even with the secretaries. You know, it was just a very friendly and supportive experience for both offices, I would say.

MN: It was like a refuge in the middle of the university. If you were feeling unwelcome elsewhere, this was a space – there were two spaces where you could feel at home. And there was a table in the middle of the office with about six chairs and then a little couch, so students could easily, you know, spend time there. There was actually more room for students than there was for faculty.

CM: Yes. (laughs)

MN: We shared – the three or four people were in one little cubicle, and at times there were famous people who were teaching there. The playwright, Ed Bullins. Yes. And then the theologian, Reverend Calvin Butts, who for many years was the pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church.

CM: Yes.

MN: They had desks, like we did, little desks in there. And then the only person who had their own office was the Chair, who had a little cubicle, but actually had a window.

CM: And when the chair wasn't there, other faculty colleagues would be able to use that office.

MN: Yeah. But one thing, and I think this is important for Caitlin and Mattie to understand, was that when we started teaching in the Institute, all of our courses fulfilled core requirements. In other words, there were courses in Black theology, there were courses in African-American literature, there were courses in African-American history, there were courses in African-American psychology, there were courses in the sociology of the Black experience. And since they all fulfilled core requirements, the classes were packed.

CM: Yes.

MN: And describe the ethnic mix in your classes, because I think it's really an interesting phenomenon that maybe people wouldn't have anticipated.

CM: Yeah. Well, one of the fortunate things was that I was able to teach history, American history, as well as African-American studies. And so there were many students in my American history classes that felt encouraged to take a course in African-American studies. So we had a big opportunity to attract more students, because they had not had those experiences in their high schools.

MN: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And you know, the courses were – many of them were packed.

CM: Yes.

MN: You know, 30 or 40 students. And then as – what we discovered is – and am I remembering this correctly, that faculty and other departments organized to push our courses out of the core so that, you know, we wouldn't be competing for students with their faculty?

CM: Yes.

MN: I think that happened, you know, probably what, like 73 or 74?

CM: Yeah, our classes were really over-enrolled. We didn't set a limit in terms of how many students could be part of a class. So I think maybe the limit was 35 or 30.

MN: Yeah.

CM: I forget what it was then. But we went beyond that, and it really caused some concern in the History department and in other departments because of the popularity of our courses.

MN: No, both for the full-time faculty and our adjuncts, the courses were very, very popular. So, what was –

CM: And I think, you know, again, it's important to realize that it wasn't only among Black students or Latino students, but white students as well. I would say that the majority of the students who took my African and African-American studies courses were white, not Black or Latino, but white.

MN: We even had one student, remember, who organized an Italian American – what was his name? A whole group of Italian American students to take black studies courses. It was

incredibly exciting. Talk a little bit about the sort of cultural atmosphere, the kind of cultural events occurring at the time with students of color.

CM: Yeah. I think there was an opportunity for students who came from prep schools, many, you know, Catholic Jesuit prep schools, to have an opportunity to interact with Black and Latino students. You know, they did not have that opportunity in the secondary schools that they attended. So they welcomed that experience. When we had cultural programs on campus, they were well attended, when we had dances, when we had other kinds of programs. They enjoyed that kind of openness to the larger society, which was not visible in the schools they attended.

MAP: Caitlin, did you have something you wanted to –

CMB: Oh, yeah. I mean, it goes back a little bit, but I'm curious how this also changes. You mentioned co-education and Fordham going co-ed, and I was curious how that kind of changed dynamics as well, like with race, gender, different class dynamics.

CM: Yes. Yeah, I think that we had students – they set up what was called Thomas More College. And that was an all female college. And I think those students were really very accomplished in terms of their secondary school experience. And so I think many of the female students were very high achieving, you know, they did exceptionally well. If you would compare their SAT scores and other scores with the male students, you would see that they were really superior. So I think when they attended our classes, they did extremely well. And I think that they had good advisors. I'm trying to think of the – Do you remember some of the Thomas More College?

MN: I'm having a senior moment about that, unfortunately.

CM: Yeah. Oh boy. I'm trying to think. Well, anyway, they had some very good and talented people there advising them. And I think it was really a very good community. So I know when I would walk from Dealy Hall to the parking lot for faculty, I would pass by Thomas More College and the female dormitory. It was just a very good experience. It was a very good experience.

MN: I mean, it took us all – and it took about five or six years, however, until we had our first woman faculty in the Institute. And although a lot of the student leaders of the Black student organization were women, people like Mary Curtis, you know, so it – you know, I think that for all of us, it took a while for us to address gender issues as seriously as we were addressing race issues. Who was our –

CM: We had one exceptional Black psychologist, Olivia Hooker, who was just a very outstanding person. She had been one of the first waves, I believe, in the US military during World War II. So I mean, she really was an outstanding person. She came from Oklahoma, but she really adjusted herself to the –

MN: She was a survivor of the Greenwood Massacre.

CM: Oh, yes. Okay. Very good. Yes.

MN: You know, the Black Wall Street. And she was probably 75 or 80 when we met her.

CM: Yes.

MN: And she was a powerful figure on campus and – but what was the name of our –

CM: Yeah, in fact, my wife reminded me that she was 103 years old when she died. nAn outstanding person.

MN: Yeah, I mean, I – Fordham was not known for its profound sensitivity to gender issues, as well as race issues. So, for example, you know, my wife Liz at that time was an editor with the Feminist Press, and she had a chance to work with Alice Walker and a young scholar named Mary Helen Washington, on the first edited version of Zora Neal Hurston's writings of essays. So we got to spend time with this brilliant, brilliant, young scholar of Black women's literature. And it must've been 1977 or so, the English department had four openings. We arranged a lecture by Dr. Washington on campus, which was attended by about a hundred people, and asked the English department to, you know, think about hiring her. And they told us there was no such field as Black women's literature. So, you know, it was – everything was a battle. In 1975, and we both vividly remember this, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Paul Reiss, decided that it was time to dissolve the Institute of Afro-American Studies and put its faculty into the cognate departments. And we, you know, were outraged and called for a team of outside investigators to evaluate our department and then make a recommendation. And one of the things we all did is, you know, Dr. Mangum, Dr. Wilkes and I were all working on our dissertations. We said we all pushed each other to finish our doctorates in time for the evaluation committee, which we did. And the evaluation committee recommended not only that we not be dissolved, so we transformed into a Department, which took place in 1977. Unfortunately, the transformation into a Department did not restore our prior position in the curriculum. So from that point on, it was a constant struggle to attract students because we were not in any of the core courses, unless we taught, like, introductory American history. So, you know, from – on one hand, it was a great victory. On the other hand, we were this embattled little outpost, you know, in 205 Dealy, fighting to try to stay afloat and then bring in new people when we could. And I mean, I guess

my other recollection is by the late seventies, the white students had suddenly become more conservative. In the early seventies, you know, there was still a lot of the anti-war feeling around and anti-authoritarian sentiment. And the white students were – they were very much in the same wavelength in terms of curiosity and openness and willingness. And then, that changed to some degree. And it, you know, it became harder to reach the mass of those students. But there was still a significant critical mass of students of color who, you know, we felt it was our responsibility to make sure that their intellectual and cultural needs were being met. And I don't if it's, if you have any thoughts about what that was like. You spoke to Marlene Taylor, Mattie, who was a graduate in 1979. You know, we had amazing students in our classes. But you always felt it was an uphill battle. Did I say too much or does that make sense?

CM: Makes sense to me.

MN: But one of the things is, you know, we made sure we were part of everything. If there was an institutional curricular – What was the name of that program where we had all those retreats that we went to? The values program, or something. Fordham had all these ways of trying to reinvigorate Jesuit values, and we always made sure we were there. And Dr. Mangum especially was always in contact, as he was the Chair with the administration, talking to them, asking them to do more, asking them to do more, to recruit students, provide them with scholarships. And so we were, and so we had sometimes – Are any of you familiar with the Bill Withers song, “Just the Two of Us?” “Sometimes it felt like that. It did, until the late eighties when we got two amazing people entering our department. One of whom was a female religious sister, Francesca Thompson, who was an incredibly dynamic leader in the church, as a feminist and a race scholar. And she ended up–

CM: And an actress. She came from a family of actors.

MN: Yeah. So that she came in what, in the late, in like 85, 86. And that gave us addition, you know, another strong person. And then we had another adventure with another department. Somehow we persuaded the Theology Department to have a national search for a scholar of Black religion. And after a national search, they came up with Dr. Mark Chapman, who had just been in the process of publishing a book on Black Power and Black Theology, and we're thrilled he's going into the Theology Department, even – you know, he's not in our department, because we didn't have the course enrollments to make a search, because again, we're frozen out of the core. So the next day after this, we get a letter – because this was before email – “We have decided against hiring Dr. Chapman.” Claude and I got so angry, we decided to leave Fordham. We actually contacted a friend of mine who teaches at LIU in Brooklyn, Long Island University, on Flatbush Avenue, about coming to LIU to start an African-American Studies and Urban studies program. And we had that all lined up and we said, let's give it one chance.

We went to the then President Father O'Hare and said, "We're gonna leave Fordham unless you find a way of appointing Dr. Mark Chapman in our department." And he did. To our shock and astonishment. So we ended up with this great, charismatic – you're still there. One of the greatest teachers you'll ever find anywhere. And so that by the early nineties we had four very strong people and it was – it gave us more of a fighting position, especially when we got to know our colleagues at Lincoln Center, where there were also two very strong people, Dr. Irma Watkins Owens, and Dr. Fawzia Mustafa. And then when they fused the two campuses, we became actually a powerhouse department. But –

CM: And I was thinking strongly about LIU, because I wouldn't have to pay any tolls on any bridges.

MN: I could walk, I could walk to work, you know, 'cause I live in Park Slope. I could literally walk to work. But we put a lot into Fordham, you know, fighting battle after battle, but also having great students. And we didn't want to give up that beachhead because there was no guarantee that Fordham would replace it. I mean, you always had the feeling that although everybody was very nice, they wanted us to kind of go away if possible. And we refused to go away. And periodically there were racial crises on campus, you know? Okay, remember "Hip Hip Hooray for James Earl Ray?" Okay. Listen to this. Okay. What was the name of the barbecue – there was a barbecue place, that was on Kingsbridge and Fordham Road. I forget the name of it. You know, it was for the Bronx and our neighborhood, it was kind of a higher end place than normal on Fordham Road. So we get word that a group of white students at Fordham and their friends went there, and there was a young Latino woman at Fordham student who worked there as a host, you know, directing people to their tables. They got drunk and started – on Martin Luther King's birthday – started chanting hip, hip, hooray for James Earl Ray in the middle of a restaurant in the Bronx. One of the other patrons had a gun and wanted to shoot them. But you know, people at the restaurant persuaded them to just leave. But this was how white Fordham students felt they could conduct themselves in the middle of the Bronx. And there was just a whole level of outrage on campus about this. And, you know –

CM: Also a very challenging time because we had, south of Fordham Road, what was known as Little Italy was a predominantly white community. And many of the students felt that they were really in jeopardy when they went there or they were there at night.

MN: Yeah. It was not safe for a black male person to go into that neighborhood. I mean, we actually, when we started the Bronx Italian American History Initiative, one of the people interviewed recalled from her youth that they actually had baseball bats in that little Park house – in the park on Arthur Avenue, which they would open to have young men chase out any black person who came in the neighborhood. We have documentation of that in oral history. So, you know, it was – and the eighties is a period of extreme racial tension in New York City. That's the

Howard Beach incident. And so there was a lot of tension. And the other thing is that Black student enrollment, which may have reached as high as 5% in 1973 or 74, by the late seventies was down to like 3%, and was frozen. And that didn't grow for another like 20 years. We're just now catching up to what the enrollment was in the early seventies. We were dealing with a lot of societal issues, as well as issues particular to Fordham. And then you're, we were also – there was a long term battle to transform the curriculum to make it less Eurocentric, that was the term we used. “The curriculum is Eurocentric. We need to change it, especially in the core.” And it took such a battle even to get the concept of American pluralism approved. And that was a battle that was fought first at Lincoln Center, and then as the campus was fused, were able to bring it to Rose Hill. So, we were fighting for a different concept of what culture and civilization are, and trying to make it truly global. And you know, it was a battle that was fought largely through memoranda, because there was no student protest movement capable of shaking things up the way that it did in the late sixties. Nobody was gonna be occupying any buildings in the eighties or the nineties.

MAP: Can I ask a question that's kind of related to some of what you both have been talking about? Dr. Mangum, were there kind of – can you talk some about the relationships between the institute and then the department and organizations or institutions or individuals kind of beyond Fordham? Were there links that the Institute was making beyond the walls of the campus?

CM: I'm trying to anticipate. I think we had colleagues and friends at NYU, at Manhattan College, and at other universities. Certainly a lot was going on in the CUNY system with all the schools there. And so we had friends and contacts that we made in those schools. So that really provided us with an opportunity to come up with different concepts to get some input from other scholars and other institutions. And so I think that fortunately, you know, there was Lehman College in the Bronx and other institutions. What was the new school that was starting down in the lower Bronx? Oh boy.

MN: Hostos. Hostos Community College.

CM: Yeah, Hostos Community College. And so, a lot of that sort of fed into what we realized we had to do.

MN: Yeah, I mean, there were also Black Solidarity Day celebrations, which we participated in. That was led by, I think, a Brooklyn College faculty, Carlos Russell. We started having regular Kwanzaa celebrations, which was something that I think was in common for many black studies programs around the city and around the nation.

CM: Yeah, we had a program on WFUV, the Fordham radio station. I wasn't a good moderator, but I had to play that role in it. But we had some very encouraging and inspiring guests. And

then fortunately, the students were able to take it over, because it meant I had to stay later on campus in order to host it. So, Anthony Carter and others took the program over and WFUV – boy, I'm trying to think of what the name was now. Elimu was the name of the program, right? Elimu.

MN: Yeah. Now one of the people who was most responsible for our becoming a department, Tilden Lemelle, wasn't he a faculty member at Hunter?

CM: I'm trying to think. Possibly. Yeah.

MN: Yeah. I mean, I think that there was a network of scholars in Black studies around the country who were in communication with one another about the issues they faced on their respective campuses. So I developed a strong relationship with the head of Black studies at Ohio State, Henry Louis Taylor, who later moved to CUNY Buffalo. And there was – also, since Dr. Mangum and I are historians, there was also The Association for Afro-American Life and History, which held annual conventions and where occasionally we would give papers. So, you know, you're right, there was definitely a network of people concerned with scholarship in our field. And I think more and more that feminist scholarship in the late seventies and the eighties was moving to the absolute forefront of Africana studies. And that opened up opportunities at Fordham for scholars in that field, first in our department and later in other fields. But it was all an uphill battle. I mean, especially in terms of the core curriculum, because you had entrenched interest in theology and philosophy, and to some degree in history, which were these all white departments, which monopolized the core. And they had a certain conception of what history, philosophy, and theology was, which was fairly narrow. There were exceptions, but not that many. So we're kind of locked out. And you know, also I think it would be very important to interview Dr. Irma Watkins Owens about her years at Lincoln Center because each, you know – they were set really quite separate until the nineties and the battle and they fought many of these battles in their own terms, but there it was two women who headed the department. And I think that it would provide a very different experience, and I'm sure that Dr. Watkins Owens would be very happy to do this. It's a very important conversation. So, I'm very curious, what do you both make of what we're describing in terms of what Fordham and what many universities were like in the seventies and eighties?

MAP: You wanna go first, or I could –

CMB: Yeah, sure. Go ahead. I'll follow up.

MAP: Okay. There are so many layers. I mean, I think that there are various ways that what each of you are saying indicates the kind of closing, in certain respects, over the course of the seventies and into the eighties, that there's a kind of ferment and the social movement pressure of

the sixties and early seventies sort of transformed the institution in various ways and you all were part of making that happen. And then there were these closures. And the change with respect to the core just feels like such a – it sounds like it had such a cascade of effects, to kind of box you all in, essentially, within the institution and prevent the institute, or the department, from being able to be built more widely and have a wider effect and reach on campus.

CMB: Yeah, and it's really interesting to hear both as, yeah, the way you described moments of more open-mindedness and then push back to that, especially amongst students in the classroom perhaps. And I guess the one thing I'm sort of taking away from this conversation, which has been really helpful, is just kind of seeing how institutions do move very slowly, and that it takes a very, very long time to sort of make change. And sometimes, you know, it's not going to ever go in a linear fashion as well. It kind of will bounce back, and there will be moments where things feel like they're stalling. And so that's helpful to hear, I think, on this committee that Mattie and I have been on. I think there – in some sense there's sort of like some questions about how to move forward, what to do. Where can change be made, where is it really difficult? Where – what are the limitations of different kinds of anti-racism work, or when is anti-racism work performative, or does it feel shallow? When is it not? So a lot of these questions are really interesting to have this context that you've just illuminated for us.

MN: I mean, without a social movement pushing a university, the pace of change is going to be incredibly slow, because you have entrenched interests protecting their turf. And I mean, like, I'll give you an example. I teach this seminar in Affirmative Action and two different students have written incredibly powerful papers about how students of color are put at a huge disadvantage in STEM courses and in pre-medical programs. And that not only diversification of the student population and faculty is not taken seriously, but in the case of the pre-medical program, training medical professionals for cultural competence is not even raised as an issue, you know, in terms of dealing with patients. So taking that on, if you decided to do it, you would run into outrage from the faculty in those areas. It would require – you know, I mean, that's my cynical view of it – that it would require an incredible outside pressure to change that. I mean, I wanted to bring it up in the committee, but – because I've mentioned this to Nelsie Rivera and Dr. Prettyman – it's such a difficult nut to crack. It was like us trying to make philosophy and theology less Eurocentric, when all their training, you know, these were the theologians and philosophers we study. What do I know about Asian philosophy, African philosophy, you know, Middle East? I'm not gonna retrain myself because you tell me to, so I think it is very sobering. But on the other hand, persistence does pay off, because the curricular changes we fought for in the seventies and eighties, a lot of them have come to fruition in terms of what kind of courses are at Fordham now, and in terms of the diversification of the faculty. So there are a lot of things which we fought for that are here, just 30 years after the fact. And some of them after Dr. Mangum retired.

MAP: About teaching I – Oh, go ahead –

CM: No, I was gonna say, one of the things that was a real challenge for many of our students who were pre-med and wanted to go into medicine or dentistry was organic chemistry. That really knocked a lot of people out. It really was devastating. And so we had to grapple with that as well, that unless they did well in organic chemistry, they didn't feel that they would have an opportunity to get into medical school or dental school. And so we had to be able to have support for students who were very disappointed in what their aspirations had been from elementary school. They wanted to become doctors and that was no longer possible.

MAP: This reminds me of a sit-in at a university in Montreal in response to a white faculty member who – or that was challenging white faculty member, who acted in a discriminatory way in teaching and effectively was like a gatekeeper of access to medical school.

MN: I don't, I – You know, sometimes I feel we hung on out of sheer stubbornness, you know, during the worst of the years. I mean, the enrollment, also, I think it's important to understand that in the seventies and eighties into the nineties, the Bronx suffered crisis after crisis. First you had the wave of fires spreading through the borough. Then you had the crack epidemic, which drove murder rates through the roof and was particularly dangerous in low income communities of color. Fordham then became like a fortress, surrounded by gates, and then started trying to attract students from around the country who would be residents there, but were told to avoid the Bronx at all costs because it was dangerous. And it was in fact dangerous, but after the danger diminished, the fortress mentality still persisted. And still does. So that's a whole other layer, that Fordham made a – there was all this talk that Fordham is gonna move to Westchester because they no longer could attract, you know, with white and middle class flight from the city. They no longer could have students pay the tuition who were commuters. So they made this transition to a residential campus, attracting middle class suburban students, first from the northeast and later from the country. And that was the formula, but that meant walling off the Bronx.

CM: It was a terrible experience for many of our students, I think, when white students were entering campus off of Fordham Road and, you know, they would just walk in. If you were a Black or Latino student, they had to show their ID in order to get on campus. I mean, you really can imagine how that would make you feel if you were a student of color at Fordham.

MN: And that's been, was going on, since the late eighties and is still going on. It's an issue that students still raise. So there are all these – again, Lincoln Center had a totally different dynamic because while the Bronx experienced disinvestment, Lincoln Center experienced gentrification. So you don't have the sense of – so Lincoln Center is this open campus, because it's surrounded by affluence, and the Bronx is a fortress campus, surrounded by gates and guards. And also, at Fordham in the Bronx, it means that if you are a student of color, you're perceived as a quote “local.” That's the term, “the locals,” which has all sorts of stigma and stereotyping attached to it. So you know, it's – I do think that the Black Lives Matter movement had a big impact at

Fordham in terms of hiring, giving an opening for people to fight, to increase black enrollment and diversify hiring. And you know, I think we're still – the momentum of that is still visible in this committee, but then you're running into what does it mean to change things when the movement is no longer there. So what the hell can we do as an anti-racism committee when we don't have – I hate to put it – the pressure. And the students are not occupying buildings, they're not marching. So what do we do? I mean, this is the issue that Dr. Mangum and I faced for like 30 years. How do we get change? Once we had to threaten to leave! That's probably the biggest cha – you know, it's like, it would've been nice if we were able to negotiate that from like quote “civilized tactics.” It reminds me of this civil rights song, “It isn't nice to block the doorway. It isn't nice to go to jail. There may be nicer ways to do it, but the nice ways always fail.” I think unfortunately, that at times applies to Fordham. I think persistence and negotiation – and I think, again, what Dr. Watkins Owens and Dr. Mustafa did, and other faculty in getting the American Pluralism course at Lincoln Center, that was a huge breakthrough. It set the stage for other breakthroughs. So I, you know – we do need movements, and it's better when students and faculty are moving in the same direction. At least that's sort of, if I was as a historian, gonna make these judgments.

MAP: Can I ask a very different question along a very different track? I'm curious, Dr. Mangum, about your teaching and the classes you taught at Fordham. What were the range of classes you taught and what were your experiences in teaching?

CM: Yeah, I think my experience was somewhat different, that I had been a high school teacher at a very well-respected school. And so I came from a tradition of not only lecturing, but also having discussion. So a good portion of my classes would have a lecture, but then I would also have an opportunity for questions. And I made certain that during my presentations in class, that if students had a question at any time, that they would raise it, and I would respond to it and let other students respond to it as well, and let other students respond to the comments or questions that their classmates made. So mine, I guess coming from a secondary experience, was to have more than just a lecture format, but an interactive kind of format. So I think that was something that I brought with me and I hope my students appreciated.

MAP: And what was the content that you were teaching at Fordham?

CM: I taught a number of classes. I taught African-American History I – I mean African History I and II. I taught Caribbean studies. I taught a pluralism course. I taught American history. What else did I teach? See, I taught – I mentioned, I think that I taught African history as well. So there were a variety of classes, and unlike many of my colleagues in the history department, we had a wider curriculum in terms of the courses that we were able to teach. And often because of our small department, we had to rotate. So I couldn't always teach the same class every semester

because we had to move on and have other opportunities for the students to learn additional things.

MN: I think one thing you probably got from Dr. Mangum, from his high school and Upward Bound experience, is a deep commitment to dealing with students as individuals and spending the time to get to know them. His door was always open and there were always students coming in to talk to him, not only about material in the class, but about everything going on in their life.

CM: So that was one of the concerns – I required that each student come and see me to get approval for their term paper topic. And so, as you know, there may be many students who copy papers from friends of theirs, classmates. And I wanted to really have the students focus on original research. I would not only ask them what the topic was, but also encourage them to go to certain libraries and institutes, talk to particular people. And that way I knew that they weren't copying somebody else's paper or they inherited some information and so on. So they really had an opportunity to get out and get around. And I encourage them to go to other libraries in the city, to go on walking tours in the city, to take, you know – New York City is a tremendous place. And I think students, rather than just staying at the Rose Hill campus, need to get out there and enjoy it and experience it.

MN: Yeah. And that emphasis on research led to a number of our best students becoming professors, two of whom are fairly well known. Craig Steven Wilder of MIT and Brian Purnell of Bowdoin.

MAP: Oh, he was – I was at Bowdoin. Yeah.

CM: Oh, you knew him? Oh, very good.

MN: So, you know, the research emphasis and – but again, every student having to come in to talk, and also given a lot of our students, they wanted to talk about issues outside of class, particularly their Fordham experiences. So I think our department, small as it was, became, – I hate to use the term “a safe space” – but it was a zone where people felt free to talk about a lot of issues, you know? And that was also hard to give up, because you felt like even though you were – We didn't feel like we had much influence in how the institution ran, but what we did, we were very proud of. And it was hard to leave it. I'm still mad at Dr. Mangum for retiring, but it was such a long drive and we – such great camaraderie among our faculty. You know, we were all friends. We love coming to work and spending time together. And that was also a big part of it, you know. So any other thoughts or questions? Does this make you optimistic? Pessimistic?

MAP: I'm just very grateful to have the chance to learn from you and to hear about the history, and it's all part of this oral history project as well. So we're trying to have a sense of the stories and the journeys and the fights as you all have outlined them, that have shaped this institution.

MN: Yeah, and also I want to say something else, that all of us had to really struggle with our own gender attitudes that we came to the work with. So when you had strong women faculty members entering the department when we merged, you know, that was a different experience and we had to adapt to it, and we had to look inside ourselves in terms of understanding our own reactions. You know, that's also part of the process. And I'll never forget after the OJ verdict, when the different reactions between men and women on the faculty at that sort of historic moment, that was – There's a lot going on here that we have to grapple with, that we have to learn from. Look, none of us is perfect and we all carry our histories with us, but there was a commitment in our little space to try to really learn and grow, you know, and also to realize we were modeling that for our students. And we're all still works in progress.

MAP: That's for sure.

CMB: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us, Dr. Mangum.

CM: Thank you.

MN: Yeah, this was wonderful. And we're gonna also put this interview in the Bronx African American History Project archive as well, and have it transcribed and available. I think a lot – it's good to have a conversation with people of different generations at Fordham, so thank you so much for this. I miss you every day. That's all I can say. You know, I used to refer to Dr. Mangum as my partner, until I realized that that term had a different meaning, because we were together all the time.

CM: Yeah. walking to the parking lot, everything.

MN: Yeah. We even also played – when in the beginning we bonded with the receptive administration through basketball.

CM: Yes, yes. Yeah.

MN: Father McMahon was a fanatical basketball player, as were two of his assistant deans, both of whom ended up becoming college presidents. Father Jim Loughran and Dr. Jay McGowan. And part of, in a way – this is again, part of the gendered experience – we bonded with the receptive people in the administration from what would be called homosocial bonding, through basketball. And so they became our friends and sports buddies, and that way we got intelligence

in what was going on. So we sort of knew that the attack from the Vice President was coming before they were ready. So we had a response prepared. I mean, those kinds of informal connections – I even to this day, you know, try to keep – except I don't use basketball. I use food. I do food tours of the Bronx for every Fordham administrator, from the President on down.

CM: But one final thing I should say is that Mark Naison was, and still is, an excellent tennis player. He was a tennis player for Columbia as an undergraduate and graduate, and people would try and befriend me on campus in order to have an opportunity for me to introduce them to him, so they could play tennis against him. So that was one of my little perks that I had. So if anyone is interested in tennis, he is the man.

MN: Yeah. But it's like, in an institution you use what you have, so we use that. But it was also, again, that was a highly gendered strategy, which you couldn't use at that point if you – and so you have to always – we learned to interrogate those things, you know, of differential access to power based on your positionality. So the institution has changed a lot for the better in terms of gender, as well as race, but people like Dr. Mustafa and Dr. Watkins Owens need to be the people to talk to about that, because that was the battle that they fought. They fought those battles on both fronts. So thank you both for being part of this. This is – it was a really important conversation for us to have at Fordham, I think.

MAP: Thank you so much, Dr. Mangum.

CMB: Thank you so much.

CM: Thank you, thank you.

MN: Okay, Claude. So we gotta all get together for dinner. Well our families all know each other, from weddings, you know, and all that stuff. Okay, Caitlin, Mattie, thank you. Take care.

CM: Thank you very much.

MN: So if you could, when you get the link, send it to Matthieu – you work with Matthieu – and have them put it in the box, African American history archive, along with the interview with Marlene Taylor. Because we have the staff to transcribe it, which probably the committee doesn't. So we'll put that in the transcription portal. Okay. Yes. Thank you.

CM: So long, everyone.

MN: Bye.