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Allen. Ray

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Interviewee: Ray Allen

Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison

Date: June 29, 2004

Mark Naison (MN): Hello. This is the 69th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're here with Ray Allen who is an actor, singer, and organizer of theater and education programs in the Bronx and this is the first of what will probably be several interviews and what I want to do today is focus on Mr. Allen's childhood and school experiences. Mr. Allen, when did your family move to the Bronx?

Ray Allen (RA): I came to the Bronx in - - that was December 9, 1968. I came here to 1225 Boston Rd which is by 168th St. in the Bronx. It was my sister and I, my second sister and I; we came here after my fathers' death. My father died that year in March. - - I was born on the island of Curacao, which is in the Netherlands Antillies, the ABC islands. My Mom is from the island of Anguilla, and I spent a few years in Anguilla prior to coming here. Matter of fact, it was in Anguilla where my father had the heart attack and passed away on my mothers birthday, March 3, '68. Well, I was - - we were in Anguilla for a few years and I was in school there. When my father passed away my aunt Mayetai and my uncles John Richardson and Victor Richardson, they said well look we have to do something for their sister, my mother, Evelyn. So they wanted us to come here to get a change of scenery you know, after my dad's passing and my mom said well, there was a lot of other business that she had to tie up down there, so my older sister Bennett and my mom stayed back for a couple of years and - - My second sister and I - - I'm the last child, only boy- - came to join my aunt and my uncle's here with their families. At this time my aunt was still living at 1225 Boston Rd. in apartment 22, my uncle in apartment 23. My reason for saying this is because there's a history in this building. My great aunt and uncle were the first African Americans to have an apartment at 1225 Boston Rd. when it was all Jewish.

MN: Now, do you remember what year they moved in?

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RA: They moved in around the turn of the century, it was early 1900's - - it was around 1920's, early 1920's when they moved in there. Because my mom, she's 83 years old now and from the time she was a little girl she remembered 1225 Boston Rd. apartment 19 where they lived. Now when my aunt came here, Mayetai, my uncle John, they all came to 1225 Boston Rd. It's a five story building, and it's interesting that all my family have lived on the top floor and the fourth floor, so it's four and five - - Never lived on second - - First, second, or third floor.

MN: Is that building still there?

RA: Oh yes very much - - In fact. [Laughs] It was renovated - - Renovated with people still living in the building; they went from apartment to apartment

MN: Are there any members of your family still living in the building?

RA: My Aunt Mayetai - - still in apartment 22. She is the manager of the building. Because see what happened is back in the 70's - - this was actually around 1978, 79 right through you know, that whole burnout situation. And the landlords stopped giving services to the building and the tenants - - we formed a tenants association and we took over the building. I was the treasurer of the building - - until '94 where I got married while I was living there with - - I was the only male on the tenants association board and they wanted me as president, but I was so busy with the arts and everything else I said no, I don't want it anymore, a position. And they went down vice president, secretary and everything, and then they came to treasurer and they said "No. We want you as treasurer. There's no if's or and's about it. We want you as treasurer." So I said OK, so I ran all the financial things in the building and in spite of the fact that I was not the president, as the male, I had to take on a major job. We had drugs in the building. I had to confront these guys, OK? It was to the point where which they threatened me and they threatened my family's life. My wife was going to school, she was going to school for a masters

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degree at Columbia University and coming home very late at night. So my family said look, you really need, for your wife's safety, you need to get out. So, I bought a house a block away from my old school - James Monroe High School, which was 1517 East 172nd St., one block away from James Monroe. And I lived there for 15 years. Unfortunately, my wife and I we have separated, so I said well the best thing to do is to move back. So I moved back to Boston Rd after 15, 15 years later moved back to Boston Rd. in apartment - - by the way I had apartment 20 on the fourth floor -- moved back 15 years later in apartment 19 [Laughter] Now Mark, [Laughs]

MN: And you're still in the same building?

RA: Yes!

MN: That's - -

RA: Apartment 19!

MN: That's remarkable.

RA: Where it all began.

MN: Yes, that's - - Wow.

RA: You know, and I feel as though this is a revelation because I am the researcher of the family, in terms of history where my aunt Elise in Brooklyn, she is very much a researcher; she's been doing things like that for many years but in terms of the younger generation I am the researcher - - to come back and get, to have apartment 19 vacant at the time, I think is phenomenon.

MN: It is, it certainly is. Now this is your - - they're from Anguilla?

RA: Anguilla

MN: Anguilla.

RA: It's A - N - G - U - I - L - L - A.

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MN: Yes.

RA: A little paradise in the West Indies. It's very close to St. Martin - - And it's a throw away from the Virgin Islands.

MN: Right. Now was there an Anguillan Association that the members of the family were involved with when they were in New York?

RA: Yes. My Uncle John Richardson, who now lives in Concourse Village, he was the president of the Anguillan Association for many years. It then became defunct back in the late 80's - - No, I'm sorry, the early 90's and they have restarted, revamped the Anguilla organization which is now headed by Seymour Hodge. He's in, he lives in Long Island. But they have every year, we have Anguilla dinner dance. We have it for many years at Eastchester Manor, Eastwood Manor, sorry - -

MN: And that's in the Bronx?

RA: In the Bronx. The last two years it's been over in Long Island. But the Anguilla Association as a matter of fact, the Prime Minister of Anguilla he for the last four years he's been coming up for the dinner dance and I - - up to, this is in May, the end of May - the last Saturday in May they have the dinner dance and I have the pleasure of sitting with him and having very long talk about Anguilla and doing some things down there this year. So, we met at the dinner dance and then the day after, at the Barbeque in Long Island and spoke about a lot of things.

MN: Yes. Now was the Anguillan Association when you came to New York, in Harlem or was it in the Bronx? Where was its headquarters?

RA: The headquarters in Harlem. They had a brownstone in Harlem - - They had a brownstone in Harlem and - - but majority of the Anguillan's that were very involved in the association came

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from the Bronx and that's the reason why we for many years have had the dinner dance at Eastwood Manor.

MN: Yes. Were many of the Anguillans located in Morrisania?

RA: Morrisania area, that's correct. Morrisania area is a very heavy area where which you find a lot of Anguillans, people from St. Martin, a lot the little islands. Antigua, you know, Barbuda, you know, those islands there. So you talk about that whole surrounding; Crotona, Crotona area, goes right over to Concourse Village a lot of Anguillans are there.

MN: Right. Now was there any particular occupational niche that Anguillan men or women were located in?

RA: They're very much involved, the men, working with the railroad, which became of course, the MTA - - and the women nursing.

MN: Now what sort of occupations within the railroad did most of the men have?

RA: They, they worked with - - they worked as conductors, they worked on the tracks, supervisors, etcetera. My uncle John Richardson, he was one of the top supervisors there - - night supervisors.

MN: Right. Now was this migration a migration of fairly well educated people?

RA: Yes, very much so. For example my cousin Milton Gumbos Dr. Milton Gumbs who is the - - he is for a number of years now, been the vice president for Bronx Lebanon Hospital and he's the head surgeon there. He's been doing this for many years, holding that position there. We have lots of - - the church that I attend St. Luke's Episcopal Church, which is 222nd St. in the Bronx right off White Plains Rd., is the largest African American Episcopal church in the Diocese. It is, it rates number five in entire dioceses when you talk about Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Yonkers - -

MN: Now did you begin, when you first came to New York what church were you attending then?

RA: When I first came to New York I attended St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Manhattan 127th St. and 5th Avenue. There at that time my uncle John was attending there so I started there singing in the choir. I sang in the choir there and then we changed to Trinity Episcopal Church [Crosstalk] - - Across the street from Morris High School

MN: Now Bob Gumbs was in the congregation at Trinity Church, Bob Gumbs from Lyman Place.

RA: Well, well my dad, not my dad I'm sorry, my uncle John Richardson, he would know him very well.

MN: Yes, because Bob is older than you are.

RA: Yes, yes. I'm quite certain that once I see him I would know who he is. [Laughs]

MN: Yes, yes.

RA: So there is - - I believe there is a definite connection right there.

MN: Right.

RA: But as I was saying at the Episcopal Church in the Bronx, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, which is the number one, African American Episcopal Church, the highest rating in terms of patrons - - I came there on the ministers Dr. Patrick Walker from Jamaica, but when Dr. Patrick Walker died in '78, the person who took over - - No that was not '78, I'm sorry '85, the person that took over was my, my cousin Canon Franklin Reid, you know so - - I and that is another occupation in which a lot of the male Anguillans go into, which is ministry.

MN: Yes. So the women went into nursing and the men went into railroads and ministry and then other professions - - [Crosstalk] Now when you came to New York City, how old were you?

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RA: I came here at the age of 14. So I started James Monroe High School - - I started at James Monroe High School in ninth grade and immediately - -

MN: Why did they place you in James Monroe rather than in Morris, which was like, walking distance?

RA: It's very interesting. [Laughs] There's - - At that time in 1968 there were some gang members and some things that was happening where my aunt did not want me to go to Morris. They were afraid that I'd get beaten up, that I got into drugs and all that. So at that time, Monroe had a better reputation.

MN: Right.

RA: And my cousin, which is Dr. Milton Gumbs mother, Eileen Gumbs, lived just on Crotona Avenue just a few blocks away, so I used my cousin Eileen Gumbs address for - - as my address, which is Dr. Gumbs mother.

MN: Right.

RA: Yes. [Laughs]

MN: Now what - - how did you compare the education you received at Monroe with the education you received in Anguilla and Curacao?

RA: In Anguilla and Curacao it was, I think it was at a higher level, it was at a higher level. What I realized was that a lot of the work in which I did in Curacao and Anguilla was the much, much higher levels. The high school's like college, college work, you know. And the discipline is tremendous in the islands. I mean, when I moved from Curacao to Anguilla I went to school, first I went to a private school when I moved to Anguilla and it closed because of lack of funds so I was then forced to go to a public school. It was a one room school house and most of my education was done on the tree.

MN: Yes.

RA: Yes a tamarind tree you know this tamarind? Tamarind tree, OK? And the Marley tree. And it was some of the best years you know? But I came, I came to Monroe - - I enjoyed Monroe very much. Reason why my first day in class, my first day they gave me music class – music appreciation. Michael Don was my teacher and I was very shy, I was singing all my life really. I came up in a very musical family and all that. And - - but I was very shy. So I was, I sat behind one of the kids and I was just singing my heart out. And I noticed Mr. Don looking at me and he said at the end of the class - - he called me up says “Son, you have a beautiful voice,” he said “how would you like if I recommend you to the boys chorus, boys choir here in school?” So I said fine. Well, at the time I had my mind set on going into medicine. And then that was Mrs. Rollins was running the boys choir. And she’s a medical doctor in New Rochelle. And the next recommendation came to audition for the All-City High School chorus under John Markley. I went down and at the time, being a part of the chorus, the All-City High School chorus was very elegant, very prestigious. In order to get in, in order to get an audition, it was like being an equity member.

MN: [Laughs]

RA: Equity show on Broadway. [Laughs] You had to have a letter from your music department on letter head, the chairmen, recommending you. Sealed envelope that you took to the audition, just to get an audition – that did not mean you get in.

MN: [Laughs]

RA: So I sang with the All-City High School Chorus for four years I was in - - which was a wonderful experience. It really gave - - It made a turn around for me. And - - and in those days, it was sponsored by the Board of Education and the New York, the Daily News, OK? We had an

hour for our annual concert at Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center, which was the first Wednesday in May of every year. It still takes place by the way. But the difference is an hour of that show was broadcast live from Lincoln Center. They would pick up - - CBS would pick up running live for an hour. And this was a wonderful thing Mark, for young people. You know, young people getting this kind of experience. And that was the beginning of my show business career. I mean Curacao and Anguilla I sang with glee clubs and all that. I was, I belonged to a glee club that was, it was like the Boys Choir of Harlem. These kids, all boys choir. And we would win all kinds of awards. We went island hopping, from island to island singing winning all competitions. Now my sisters, their school, they had, they were the real spellers. They would win the spelling bee competition every year. We couldn't spell to save our lives, man.

[Laughter] We could sing.

MN: So this was fairly quickly in Monroe, that you know, that your musical abilities were honored and respected. Now what was the academic curriculum like there?

RA: Oh it was very good, very good. We had, I had some great teachers. Ms. Rosenthal was a great English teacher I had. I mean she was remarkable. I had math, science and all that.

MN: Was the school tracked by ability so that some kids were in like, general courses, some commercial, some academic, and were you placed in the academic track?

RA: I was placed in the academic track. I was also very involved in the music department. We had in those days we had boys choir, a mixed chorus, the school choir; the school choir consists of juniors and seniors only. And you had to audition to get into that, the school choir - - We also had a band, school band and an orchestra.

MN: An orchestra? Oh that's - -

RA: Oh yes. And we had an organ, at that time we had a pipe organ. You go in there, into Monroe now, Monroe Campus I should say because it's no longer Monroe High School.

MN: It's all these different little schools - -

RA: Schools in there, well those types of schools there.

MN: Now did you also have Sing at Monroe? Something called "Sing?"

RA: Sing, yes! Yes! [Laughter] Oh yes, oh we used to have some wonderful times, hearing that organ play. And we have, it was a jam session with all the choirs performing and orchestra and the band and all - - it was marvelous.

MN: Now was this a multi-ethnic/multi-racial school at that time?

RA: Yes.

MN: What were the different nationalities and groups that were at Monroe when you were there?

RA: Well we had, we had a good percentage of white at that time and but African Americans were the highest percentage.

MN: Right.

RA: Then came Latino. We had - - we still had a decent number of whites there.

MN: Yes. Were the African Americans from a lot of different nationalities, a lot - - many people from Caribbean countries?

RA: A lot of Caribbean. A lot of Jamaicans.

MN: Yes.

RA: Trinidadians were there; a lot of Jamaicans on the soccer team, they were extraordinary. We had a lot of Hondurans.

MN: Oh really?

RA: Yes, yes. A lot of Hondurans there. And matter of fact my ex-wife, she's Honduran. She went there, we didn't meet at Monroe. But we hooked up because of Monroe connection.

MN: Right

RA: And of course in college.

MN: Now did you ever feel afraid going to Monroe, of gangs or any kind of physical intimidation?

RA: Not at all.

MN: Or any negative peer pressure for being a good student?

RA: More - - the thing is, in my first year in Monroe, starting with Michael Don, my teacher Michael Don, who started the recommendation trend for me, led to the boys choir, and then to the school choir by the time I was in my sophomore year. And as I said, they only took people in junior and senior year, OK? But by the sophomore year I was already in the school choir. I was a very shy kid. And my aunt and uncle would come to the school for parent-teachers night and all that. The big - - I would get praises with all my classes. There was one negative: that I would not associate, that I would not raise my hand to answer the question and all that. The only way which the teachers would know if they call upon me. And 90% of the time I had the answer. But I would not raise my hand because I was very shy. So, I found it very important to, to uh show them recommended. Matter fact it was Michael, Michael Don recommended that I take some acting classes. So I went down to the Double Image Theater, which was in the back of Lincoln Center at the time, at Lincoln Sq. And I started taking classes with Helen Mayor the artistic director of the Double Image Theater. The Double Image Theater was for all races. That's the whole idea: double, image.

MN: Right.

RA: OK? The productions were multi-racial you know? I mean, me playing Jim Morgan in Superman production.

MN: [Laughs]

RA: And Superman is a Cuban, [Laughter] you know, that kind of thing. It was wonderful. And that's where I actually got my start in the acting, in the acting career. As I said, while I was in, while I was there, the Double Image Theater that I got involved my second summer, I got involved with the teenage performing arts which uh - - at Manhattan School of Music. Now the teenage performing arts which usually young students - - like the southern youth workers?

MN: Right

RA: But these were art.

MN: [Laughs] Southern youth workers in the arts.

RA: Yes, in the arts. And, this was with the Board of Ed. John Mockley headed this up. At the time, we had a wonderful arts Mayor: John B. Lindsay.

MN: Yes.

RA: He was our Dad. We called him Dad. We used to hang out at the Gracie Mansion. Us youngsters - - John Mockley, very put together, the cream of the crop because he - - kids, about four to five kids, which were called the Concert Choir of New York. 'Cause he saw that he was losing a lot of youngsters who were graduating from high school, going on to college and what have you. And they were going on with other groups after he did all this training. So, he formed the Concert Choir of New York, this was 1969 and he would put on - - we were considered as the youth ambassadors of New York City. Now this is all before Boys Choir of Harlem.

MN: Right.

RA: So we were the youth ambassadors; we sang everywhere. Gracie Mansion, the Wall of Astoria, City Hall, any uh dignitaries come to New York City; we were the group to perform. John B. Lindsay every, every Christmas would have the Christmas show on television, be it channel four, channel five, eleven - - and we did this Christmas show every year. You know? As I said before in terms of getting bitten by the bug, was my first year with the All City High School Chorus, performing at Avery Fisher Hall Lincoln Center and doing an hour live show on television.

MN: Yes.

RA: That was it. That was it.

MN: Yes, Wow. Now, this is a time, this is you know, late 60's early 70's when in Morrisania, the - - you know, there's a visible deterioration of the community in terms of the housing, the social climate. How did you, you know, balance off living in a neighborhood which - -

RA: Keeping myself busy.

MN: Yes. Did you know the neighborhood was becoming dangerous?

RA: Oh yes.

MN: It was something you were quite aware of as - -

RA: Very much aware of, very much aware of. But as I said Mark, there's an old saying my Mom always said: the devil finds work for idle hands to do.

MN: Yes [Chuckles] Right.

RA: I was no different to the other kids. I would have gotten in trouble and all that, but I was too busy. I was constantly keeping, putting trouble on hold.

MN: Right.

RA: Because this is the kind of schedule I carried when I was at James Monroe: I had to be at school at 7:40 in the morning, my classes began. I was never late. OK? I never missed a day of class. All my classes - - my classes ran from - - well let me put it - - my second year, my sophomore year, I had evening classes because it was two sessions. So I had afternoon classes probably like one to [Inaudible] - - Rather than 7:40 in the morning. OK, but my first year and then my junior and senior year, I had morning classes. 7:40 in the morning, I was out of there by 1:10. I did not take lunch; I had all my classes back to back.

MN: Right.

RA: When I finished there I went to work, at the Time and Life building on 50th St. and 6th Avenue. Having a part time job - -

MN: Now how did you get the job?

RA: Oh it was doing messenger work - - Someone recommended - - I was looking for a job, a part time job. Someone said look you can do some messenger work. So I went down - -

MN: Was this a family member do you think?

RA: No, it wasn't a family member, I don't remember who it was but someone told me about Fleet, Fleet Messenger Service - -

MN: Right, yes I remember that.

RA: And there was this guy Paul Schiano, Italian guy, he ran the office. And he loved the arts. For some reason, he was not performing in the arts at all, but he just loved the arts. And he knew that I was, I was an artist 'cause when I finished there I had to go to rehearsal for the All-City Concert Choir in New York at Double Image Theater. He would let me go.

MN: Yes.

RA: Very often I couldn't work, I had to take off days at a time - - I didn't get paid for that, but he would let me take off whatever time I needed.

MN: Right, right.

RA: During the summer time I couldn't work at all because I was involved in the Teenage Performing Arts which at Lin - - that had the school of music. And there where we - - I received so much great training. People like the late Coleridge Taylor Perkinson who just passed away earlier this year. Matter fact it was about three weeks ago we had a memorial service at St. Peters church, uh the jazz church in Manhattan for him. He died in Chicago. Now, this man was a great composer and arranger and all that. He was born in Harlem and he is a man who raised Coleridge Taylor Perkinson, just like the great composer Coleridge Taylor, he was named after him, and he became an extraordinary man. He taught us so much about music composition, about conducting, about singing. He did a lot of his music on television.

MN: Yes.

RA: Live at Lincoln Center and all that. Did back up with Dizzy Gillespie. The Mandrill I don't know if you remember the old group from Brooklyn, the Mandrill?

MN: I, I - -

RA: [Laughs]

MN: Fence walk, I love Mandrill. What is your connection to Mandrill?

RA: Well, Mandrill, this was a band.

MN: Right, I know them very well.

RA: My connection to them was through Coleridge Taylor Perkinson who was the founder of the New World Symphony Orchestra. Now check this out: [Laughs] Mark, 1973, February 1973 we are at the first Sunday in February we are at Lincoln Center backing up Dizzy Gillespie and

his band (this is the Concert Choir of New York) - - Angela Bofield who came out of Shakespeare Avenue in the Bronx – great Jazz singers, OK, she was one of us, OK? The forming - - during the week we left New York, went down, flew down to Washington DC on chartered flight with Mayor Lindsay, the governor, I think was Hugh Carey at the time.

MN: Yes.

RA: Alright, we flew down - - we were representing New York, the fashion capitol of the world in Washington DC our nation's capitol OK? The fashion industry made our outfits. We had to make our coats and all because it was winter time. Flew down on a chartered flight. It was a big celebration at the Sheraton, the Washington Sheraton Hotel with President Nixon.

MN: Yes.

RA: OK, flew back up and the next Saturday we were at Avery Fisher hall once again with the Mandrill, backing up the Mandrill with the New World Symphony Orchestra. Coleridge Taylor Perkinson: that's the first time I've ever seen a man in an all leather suit. Walked out on stage and instead of a tux, he walked out on stage in an all leather suit. The audience that afternoon Mark, there were so many black kids - - In that audience, you talk about kids that who didn't have money man - - they would wear - - the show was sold out a week before - -

MN: So you, your chorus was backing up Mandroe.

RA: Mandroe that's correct.

MN: OK because they're one of the most - - among people who know music, they're one of the great funk groups of the 70's - -

RA: Oh yes.

MN: Who's constantly sampled in Hip-Hop.

RA: That's right! That's right!

MN: So, they're constantly sampled and I actually have them on an alb I put together on - -

RA: [Sings] Ace is higher - - and all that - - every time, I tell you, that was the greatest high I've ever had. I've had some wonderful highs - - Natural high that is.

MN: Oh god [Laughter]

RA: Natural highs in the theater.

MN: Yes.

RA: But that was the greatest high I've ever had. Experience - - that night, that Sat - - Sunday afternoon - -

MN: Is there a recording of that anywhere?

RA: I don't know.

MN: That would be an amazing thing.

RA: It would be, it would be - - you know I must speak to Julius Williams because Julius Williams is now the president of the archival committee for Coleridge Taylor Perkinson.

MN: Right.

RA: And Cool - - Julius Williams, very good buddy of mine. Matter of fact he's my daughters godfather. Coolidge Taylor Perkinson took him under his wing.

MN: Right.

RA: And that was oh, in '73 when he took him to London for the film of A Warm December - - But anyhow, getting back to the Mandrill. What happened is, at the end of that night, we walked off that stage at the Avery Fisher Hall - - I mean, we were so high, the natural high - -

MN: Yes.

RA: It lasts 4 days. 4 days we were walking [Laughter] Oh yes. Polk Street Carnival, that was one of the uh - -

MN: Yes, I remember Polk Street Carnival. I still have the alb somewhere, but - -

RA: It was wonderful.

MN: Yes. So you were in this unbelievably exciting, artistic, cultural, intellectual, uh you know, ferment in that year.

RA: Yes.

MN: And that then propelled you into Fordham Lincoln Center?

RA: Yes. Before going to Fordham, my first experience in terms of the community and the arts in the community was at Claremont Neighborhood Center.

MN: So that was before Fordham?

RA: Before Fordham, uh just, right before entering Fordham. Because I went to Hunter College for a semester, then I left and went on the road, on the road tour.

MN: Now who was the road tour with?

RA: The road tour was with, it was a group living as a [Inaudible] with Tom Brim, it was a group down in the village. And I, I went on a road tour with them. I came back and transferred to Fordham University at Lincoln Center.

MN: Now you were still at 1225 at this point?

RA: I was still - - oh yes. I was there until I got married. I got married from when - -

MN: Now one of the things I wanted to ask you about, what was the music scene like in the late 60's in the Boston/Prospect area? Were there still clubs in the neighborhood?

RA: Oh yes.

MN: And which were the major ones that were the major venues for music at that time?

RA: There was a club down on 163rd St. , between, just east of 3rd avenue that - - right next to All Saints - - all saints church, right up the hill - - I forgot the name of the club, but it was - - that

was the jumping area. Then there was some clubs there on Prospect Avenue area. It was the Hip-Hop, this was the Hip-Hop generation now.

MN: It was starting to uh - -

RA: It was starting to come into focus. The young people at the time, there was a, considered as a generation gap going on - - a heavy generation gap and that's when the hot pants came into style. They even had the boys' hot pants - - I had two! [Laughter] Two hot pants, and - - which led into, by 1972 it was a lot of - - as I said that whole generation gap we were going through a lot of things. The Black Panthers were heavy at that time - - were heavy - -

MN: Were they visible on Boston Rd., the Panthers? Or was it more in Manhattan and Harlem?

RA: They were visible in Boston Rd. too. Jamaal Joseph, who was a professor, he was a professor at Touro College for a number of years and he was a great artist – actor, director, writer, and all that - - matter fact we share the same birthday: January 17th. A lot of other great artists do, such as Dennis Lospy - - [Inaudible] [Laughs] James Earl Jones, Muhammad Ali, all January 17th.

MN: Yes.

RA: [Laughs] Well anyhow, Jamaal is a year older than I am, and he was one of the junior Panthers.

MN: Yes.

RA: Out of the Bronx

MN: Right.

RA: It was visible then. Matter of fact 1971 we did again with Coleridge Taylor Perkinson at Manhattan School of Music, a major production of Passion of Justice was the name of it. He wrote this musical Passion of Justice on the Panther Angela Davis and the Panther Party trial.

MN: Right, yes.

RA: You know, so I got involved in that through the odds.

MN: Yes, [Crosstalk] so there was a political thrust in New York in the artistic community you were part of.

RA: Oh yes. , we had, there were a lot - - Leroy Jones was now Baraka he, he came out with a lot of plays that tell of the movement [Crosstalk]

MN: Now did you have any contact with Ed Bullins?

RA: Ed Bullins? Ed Bullins of course.

MN: Yes, he was actually at Fordham when I arrived there in 1970.

RA: Oh really?

MN: He was, an adjunct instructor.

RA: Yes, Bullins, uh Joseph Rapp of the public theater, uh he was responsible for the workshops and everything there, he was responsible for getting Ed Bullins really started as a writer out there.

MN: Yes.

RA: And publicly known. Ed Bullins I saw him on Willie King with the New Federal Theater, , was doing a whole season of one actors, like two years ago. And that was the last time I actually saw Ed Bullions because he's a professor at one of the universities out of town, out of state.

MN: Yes.

RA: But Ed Bullions, Baraka, all these guys, were doing these protest plays at the time, you know. So they took part in the movement. And as I said, again, going back Coolidge Taylor Perkinson, we call him Perky, he took part in that movement, and he introduced us to that movement. He wrote the musical you know?

MN: Now how did you get involved - - You went to Hunter for a semester, then you went on the road with this, experimental company in the village - -

RA: Yes. While I was at Hunter, I was blessed enough to get an opportunity to study with Lloyd Richards, the great Lloyd Richards from American Negro Theater that my teachers like Maxwell Glambille and all that - -

MN: Now when did you meet Maxwell Glambille? Was that later?

RA: Yes. I met Maxwell Glambille while I was at Fordham. , in this, this - - we're talking about - - , I met him in '75.

MN: Well lets do Lloyd Richards first, keep the chronology - -

RA: OK. Lloyd Richards: we talked in 1972, and I got the opportunity to, to take a course with him at Hunter College. This was just before - -

MN: This was Hunter College in Manhattan or - -

RA: 68th St. in Manhattan.

MN: Right, yes.

RA: Just before he went to Yale as the Dean of Theater there, I mean, this man is a phenomenon, to get the chance to study with him - - And while I was there, also that summer, I took some theater courses that summer with Mike, Dr. Michael Lessac. Michael Lessac was - - he had the Colony Theater lab for a while, down across the street from the public theater.

MN: Yes.

RA: This man was such a genius, such a genius. Right at Hunter College, and he taught me so much. Matter fact, Dr. Davis, who's the chair at Fordham University Drama Department, he was one of the - - one of the students - - Oh Dr. Michael, yes sir. And a part of the company there, you know, it was a great company. [Laughter]

MN: Wow.

RA: Yes. , so I then started at Fordham University - -

MN: Now did you go there knowing they had a strong arts component?

RA: Yes.

MN: Was that part of the appeal?

RA: Yes that was part of the appeal, because going back - - I'm just jumping back a bit - -

MN: Oh, that's OK.

RA: At Hunter - -

[END OF INTERVIEW]