

8-28-2005

Mincy, Kenneth

African & African American Studies Department. Kenneth Mincy
Fordham University

Follow this and additional works at: https://fordham.bepress.com/baahp_oralhist

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

Recommended Citation

Mincey, Kenneth. 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 DigitalResearch@Fordham. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of DigitalResearch@Fordham. For more information, please contact considine@fordham.edu.

Mark Naison (MN): This is the 126th interview of the Bronx African American History project. It's August 28, 2005 and we are here in East Hampton with Kenneth Mincy who grew up in the Patterson Houses in the South Bronx. Could you please spell your first and last name?

Kenneth Mincy (KM): Kenneth: K-E-N-N-E-T-H, Mincy: M-I-N-C- Y.

MN: What year were you born Kenneth?

KM: 1956.

MN: What are your first memories of the Patterson Houses?

KM: My first memories of the Patterson Houses were very good memories. I felt safe, I felt protected, I felt loved. It was a kind of community raising situation, where other parents got involved with other parents children. If I did something wrong I would expect a whipping from whosever parent that caught me and then they would tell my mother and then she would reciprocate. I just felt very, very safe and secure my early years at Patterson.

MN: Which building did you live in?

KM: I lived in two buildings actually. The first building I lived in was 271 and then the second building was 291.

MN: And which street was that on?

KM: 143rd St.

MN: So that's in the north side, close to PS 187.

KM: Yes.

MN: When you were growing up was your mother working?

KM: Yes.

MN: What sort of work did she do?

KM: My mother was a nurses aid for Goldwater Memorial Hospital on Welfare Island in Queens.

MN: What childcare arrangements did she have for the children when she was at work?

KM: When I was a baby before I went to elementary school, I went to PS 18. Before I went to PS 18, she generally had a babysitter that would come up and watch me. My other brothers, Gregory and Ronald, were old enough to go to school, so I was the one that was at home. So she generally had some women that'd come up and watch me.

MN : Were you part of an extended family? Were there cousins around in the New York area or relatives?

KM: In the New York area but not in the Bronx. An interesting thing about my family was my mother lost several children when her and my father were trying to have children, so me and my two brothers weren't born until late. We have first cousins that are almost 70, so my mother kind of got a late start.

MN: So this was her brother's or sister's children?

KM: Her sister's children.

MN: So they were like fifteen years older than you?

KM: Exactly. So we were kind of isolated from that - -

MN: So the sociability was less with family members then with - - it was more with neighbors in the Patterson Houses.

KM: Yes, absolutely.

MN: Were the families who looked out for each other multi ethnic?

KM: Yes. In 271 we had Puerto Rican families and white families.

MN: And everybody - -

KM: Everybody took part in looking after each others children.

MN: What were the grounds in the hallways, were they well kept when you were growing up?

KM: The grounds in the hallways when I was growing up initially were well kept, the projects had a staff, custodians that would go around and cut the grass, sweep the walkways, sweep the hallways in the stairwells - - that started to change a little later, but initially yes, it was very, very clean.

MN: You told me that you had quite an adventure when you were four years old, could you tell us a little bit about that?

KM: When I was four years old it was Christmas, 1960. The babysitter - - we had a bird, and - -
[Laughter]

MN: What sort of bird?

KM: It was a parakeet. And we used to be able to let the parakeet out of the cage and the parakeet would fly around and land on our shoulder or land on our finger, it was trained. And so this particular babysitter did not want me to take the bird out and I got upset about it. So she put me to bed probably around noon time and so she put my pajamas on and put me to bed. But I was kind of ticked off, so I waited until- - I knew that this lady even at four years old, had an alcohol problem so I waited for her to pass out and when she did I put my clothes on over my pajamas and got on the subway.

MN: You knew where the subway was?

KM: Absolutely.

MN: That's interesting - - how did you know where the subway was? Did you go there

with your mother or your brothers take you on the subway?

KM: No, I was fascinated by the New York Subway System. I studied subway maps and I rode the subways quite routinely at four years old. I was so good that my relatives used to call me and ask me where to go.

MN: Could you read at four?

KM: Yes.

MN: So you were a precocious reader?

KM: Yes.

MN: Was that true of your brothers as well?

KM: Definitely true of Ron, now I don't know about Gregory; Gregory's the oldest.

MN: Did your mother know that your being precocious was presenting issues?

KM: Yes. She was threatening to put me in boarding school because I was one of the worst truants in the Bronx, I never went to school.

MN: That's a little bit of a paradox; here you are, four years old, you're reading subway maps, I'm assuming you were going to kindergarten, and the other kids are - -

KM: They weren't as advanced as I was.

MN: Did somebody in the school identify you as having - -

KM: Special?

MN: Yes.

KM: No. They knew I had potential but --

MN: Did they know you could read when you were in kindergarten?

KM: Yes.

MN: So they didn't say OK we have a kid here, he's way out of --

KM: Yes, I would have had - - PS 31 which is up the street on the Grand Concourse was considered a special school and they wanted to send me there but I was such a bad truant that

they wouldn't take me.

MN: Can you go back into your mindset at five or six and say what's going on through your head while all these other kids are kind of - -

KM: School work always came easy to me so I was bored. When I got bored I started looking out school windows and daydreaming about what was going on in the streets, and so I had to find out. That's where I was hanging out, I was hanging out in the streets, I didn't go to school.

MN: And this is at five or six and seven?

KM: Yes.

MN: Now you said you're living in an environment where everybody is looking out for everybody; were people telling your mother "Kenneth's out in the streets?"

KM: The kids did. Because my mother would come home around 3:30/4:00 in the afternoon and the kids would tell her that I didn't come to school today or they would give her my homework assignments that I wasn't there to give personally. So that's how she knew I wasn't going to school.

MN: Did anybody ever try to send you to a therapist or a social worker or anything?

KM: No.

MN: So this just - - were there other kids like you in the neighborhood?

KM: No.

MN: So who did you spend time with?

KM: My first friend was a kid named Stevie Barhan, grew up in 414 in the Archibald's building on the sixth floor. He's the one that taught me how to sneak on the subway, how to steal, how to lie, things like that.

MN: Was he older?

KM: Yes he was a year older. But he was a prisoner of the projects, meaning he refused to venture outside the general vicinity of Patterson. To me, the whole city was a playground.

MN: Was his behavior typical of people growing up in Patterson who saw this as sort of a self-contained world, or he was unusual?

KM: I think he was usual. I was the one who was unusual.

MN: So you were like an eccentric character as a child, relative to your peers?

KM: I would say that's a true statement.

MN: And in your family.

KM: I would say that's definitely a true statement. [Laughter]

MN: What did your - - and your brothers I take it were good students.

KM: Well Ron was an outstanding student. Despite the fact about my absenteeism I was an excellent student. I would get excellent grades on tests, I would get excellent grades on homework assignments. I just wasn't there.

MN: Did they keep passing you along?

KM: Yes.

MN: With good grades.

KM: Yes, to give you an example the way the grades were constructed, they had kindergarten I through kindergarten 6 and then grade I through 6.

MN: Yes so they had the tracking.

KM: Exactly. So if you had the I, that was the best class, 2 was next - - The goal was to go through PS 18 in all I classes. I slipped up in the 6 class, I made it to 6-2. But all the other classes - -

MN: And that was true of Ronald also?

KM: Ron went all the way through I classes, Gregory I'm not sure about.

MN: If we got a look at your report card - - you don't happen to have - - did you save anything?

KM: No. My mother may have.

MN: Which would be interesting, so you would have excellent grades -

KM: It would say excellent grades - -

MN: And then the conduct - -

KM: Exactly. Absenteeism - - I didn't cause trouble when I was there, I just wasn't there.

MN: Were you getting in trouble when you were not in school?

KM: Trouble being defined as getting caught by the police?

MN: Yes.

KM: No. Because I just didn't get caught.

MN: What were some of the things you were doing?

KM: Sneaking on the subway, stealing from the supermarket and from department stores, I was in the streets in Harlem so pimps befriended me, I used to watch their Cadillac's or go up to a restaurant and get them a pork chop sandwich or a fish sandwich or - -

MN: So you became aware of the people in the street economy at a fairly early age.

KM: Yes.

MN: And how did you see those people; did you look up to them, did you just see them as part of the scenery? Was this a sort of romantic ideal for you?

KM: I was fascinated by their lifestyle, it was different from anybody that I knew back in Patterson - - Harlem is a completely different atmosphere than the Bronx is. And I was fascinated by the Harlem street life. In the daytime, restaurants were open, churches were open,

you had the street comer orators out there talking, you had the Fiver Per centers, the Muslims, there was just a lot of activity going on, a lot of energy. And that's what I got off on.

MN: When you were growing up in Patterson were there a lot of fathers around, or mostly mothers?

KM: No, our family was unusual we didn't have a father, but most of the families did have a father. You couldn't get into the projects unless you were a married couple, so my father got us in but then he split.

MN: Did you see yourself - - OK, you're ten years old and you're getting pork chop sandwiches for pimps, did you say to yourself I want to be doing this sometime?

KM: Sure.

MN: OK so that's what - - that appealed more to you than anything you were seeing.

KM: The first two things that I wanted to be when I grew up was either a pimp or a subway modal.

MN: So when was your first exposure to the drug scene that hit both the Bronx and Harlem?

KM: Well, I saw a lot of guys OD when I was a kid.

MN: And this is in your - -

KM: In Patterson and in Harlem.

MN: Really. And when you're saying "as a kid," how old?

KM: 10 - - mid 60's.

MN: In the mid 60's is when this hit, not in the 50's?

KM: No.

MN: So when you were 5 or 6 years old, you didn't see people nodding out or ODing?

KM: I may have but I didn't know what was going on.

MN: So by the time you're 10 it's a very visible - -

KM: Absolutely.

MN: Anybody you knew fairly well or anybody in your building?

KM: Well, you've got to understand when you grow up in an environment like that, you try to stay away from cats that are older than you. They don't want to be bothered with a kid, and so you kind of watched them but from a distance. You don't get to know them unless one of your brothers is real tight with them, which my brothers weren't, they didn't have those kind of friends.

MN: Now when you were growing up did you get seriously involved in any nonscholastic activity like sports or music?

KM: I played a lot of basketball but not scholastically, I played on the streets. You've got to understand that in New York City back in those days you got more notoriety playing street ball than you did playing for the school.

MN: Did you play in the night center at 18?

KM: Oh sure. All the time, as a matter of fact, Tiny Archibald's brother Geronimo whose real name is Ronny was a coach, he was my coach. I was coached by Mr. Lane, Mr. Brewer, Geronimo - - a lot of people.

MN: What about music, did you ever get into music?

KM: Not playing any instruments.

MN: What junior high school did you go to?

KM: Clark Junior High School.

MN: What was your experience there, were you also in the 1 classes?

KM: No, their structure was set up differently. I went to school at Clark but only because all of my boys were going to school. There was nobody out on the street because everybody was in school. By that time of course I was interested in girls, all the girls were in school. There was the best competition that played basketball because of all of the guys were in school, so there was nobody to run the streets with. Plus, my best friend Bobby Brown, I met him in 1964 in the summer day camp and we didn't know where each other lived but we were reunited in the 7th grade. So that's another - - the main reason I went to school was to be with him because he was my best friend and still is today.

MN: And when you were in school, did you take the schoolwork seriously?

KM: No, I was just there to hang out, play ball - - the only reason why I got out of there was in the 9th grade I finally got serious when my grade advisor told me I wasn't going to graduate if I didn't buckle down.

MN : Were there any teachers that took an interest in you?

KM: Oh yes, because they saw I had a lot of potential and I was just wasting it.

MN: Anybody who got through to you?

KM: Mr. Carter, he was my grade advisor.

MN: Was there ever a point at which you would sit down with Mr. Carter and you'd feel OK, I can really tell him what's going on?

KM: Yes, he was the kind of person that you could - - he was kind of like a father figure to a lot of us because some of us didn't have fathers. He took a personal interest in all of us, particularly those who he felt needed help. He used to call my mother in the 9th grade and of course he knew that Ron was my brother, which added a lot of pressure on me because we had the same teachers and a lot of them would compare us. They would often tell me that you can do better than your

brother, why don't you? That kind of stuff. And then eventually I just got tired of hearing that stuff.

MN: Where'd you end up going to high school?

KM: Roosevelt.

MN: Which is also –

KM: Where Ron went.

MN: By the time you went up to Roosevelt, was Patterson Houses becoming a dangerous place or not really?

KM: It was dangerous. Actually me and my mother - - my mother moved out of Patterson when I was a junior in high school.

MN: Which would be '69?

KM: Which would be '70/'71 something like that. She moved out basically because she felt that she could do better and so we wanted to move into another project but much nicer one, uptown in the Baychester area.

MN: What was it called?

KM: It was Shefford Place. So 229th St and Shefford Place, right across from Edenwald.

MN: So what was going on, were there robberies - - did your mother feel like she had to be careful coming home late at night?

KM: Well, see about growing up in that kind of culture, everybody knows what everybody else does. We were considered a good family. My mother didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't have a lot men running in and *out* of the house, she worked everyday which was unusual for the women because most of the women were home because their husbands were working - - none of the sons got into any trouble except for me, Gregory and Ron laid a good foundation, so we were

considered a good family so the people didn't bother us per say, particularly my mother. When they saw my mother coming if they were smoking cigarettes or smoking - -

MN: So there was a kind of respected - -

KM: Yes and they would hide it when they saw my mom.

MN: Which is interesting because even when things were falling apart there was a certain respect extended. Now were there problem families moving in as the original families were moving out?

KM: Sure.

MN: So you could see the difference between the people who moved in there in the 60s?

KM: Sure, a lot of people came up from the south and they were just different. They just a different way about them but they were desperate to fit in and had to fit in order to survive that neighborhood so they were pretty much willing to do anything to show that they were worthy.

MN: At what point did you begin to get involved in seriously dangerous activities - - to yourself or to other people?

KM: Not until I left New York.

MN: And when was that?

KM: I left New York in April of 1978.

MN: In those intervening years you go to Roosevelt, what was that experience like?

KM: Same thing, I didn't go to school I just went primarily to play ball. That's when I started selling drugs, I sold marijuana, I think almost all three, at least my last two years there. I wound up dropping out in April of my senior year because I knew I wasn't going to graduate.

MN: Were you aware of - - obviously you're a brilliant person - - of the Vietnam War and the Black Power Movement and the political things - - were those events intriguing to you?

KM: Well to be perfectly honest I didn't even know who Martin Luther King was until the night

he was assassinated. They didn't teach us about black history in school, all they taught us was white history; George Washington, Abraham Lincoln - - I didn't know anything about any black contributions to this country at all, they just didn't teach us. I came home one night in April of '68 and my mother was crying listening to the radio and I asked her what was wrong. And she told me Martin Luther King got assassinated and I said who? So - - and Gregory and Ronny were both political, but they didn't share their views with me for whatever reason.

MN: And the kids you were hanging out with were more like you, it was all the street stuff and day to day - -

KM: We didn't start becoming "Black," seriously, until probably 1970/'71 when the record "I'm black and I'm proud" came out by James Brown. That gave I think my cohorts awareness of who we were.

MN: After you dropped out of Roosevelt what did you do then?

KM: Sold drugs, stole, just hung out on the streets - - wasn't doing anything.

MN: And your mother is aware of these things?

KM: Oh yes. I lived with her.

MN: And your brothers are aware of it?

KM: Not really because my oldest brother had come back from the air force then but he was out doing his own thing and Ron was away at Harvard.

MN: So you have a brother at Harvard and you're out in the streets selling drugs?

KM: Yes.

MN: And was this mostly in the Bronx or also in Harlem?

KM: Mostly in the Bronx.

MN: Did you ever get caught?

KM: Never. Never. Never.

MN: How was that? You were very careful or you were lucky?

KM: I would prefer to say blessed.

MN: Did you ever go back to finish high school?

KM: Yes.

MN: When was this?

KM: I got my GED in 1981 at St. Mountain's College in Lacy, Washington.

MN: Lacy, Washington State?

KM: Yes, on the west coast.

MN: So in between - - Jesus - - what are the things you're doing in those intervening years?

KM: Well I went to the military.

MN: Oh OK. When did you go into the military?

KM: I joined the military April of 1978.

MN: How old were you?

KM: 22.

MN: What branch of the military?

KM: Army.

MN: How long did you stay in for?

KM: Two years, fifteen days. I was AWOL for about a year.

MN: And what happened when you came back after being AWOLed?

KM: Well I turned myself in because I was tired of living like that and so I turned myself in, took my punishment, and that's how I got to Washington state.

MN: And then you went back to school?

KM: When I got out of military I stayed out there, I didn't want to go back to New York because I figured I'd get back in trouble. So I stayed in Washington, got my GED and went to college.

MN: Which?

KM: I went to the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

MN: Sure.

KM: Oh you've heard about that?

MN: Yes, I've heard of that school.

KM: A lot of people haven't, that's a great school.

MN: And then you became involved in all these technical areas?

KM: Yes. Well, actually, my first computer job was for a company called Conbow Corporation in New Brunswick, New Jersey. So I used to drive from the Bronx to exit 9 on the New Jersey Turnpike.

MN: So this is while you were still - - before you joined the military?

KM: Yes.

MN: And you got a job at a computer company?

KM: Yes.

MN: How did you get that job?

KM: One day I was downtown on 42nd and Lexington, right outside Grand Central Station and looking for work and a guy approached me, wanted me to put boxes together for the tourists - - put like a Hershey bar, miniature statue of liberty, empire state building, stuff like that - - twin

towers were built then. And it was a building on 41st and Lexington, so you'd go up, you'd build these boxes, you take the boxes out and you'd hand them out and then after you finished handing them out, you'd go back and you got paid per box. But down the hallway, I kept hearing this humming. And I said what is that? So every time I got finished fixing my boxes, I went and opened the door and I saw these computers and these were second generation computers, they were all big and had lights and the big tapes - - and I was just spellbound. And the manager kept chasing me out of there but I kept coming back and eventually the man said "Look, you like computers." I said yes, he said "Would you like to work with them?" And I said yes. They hired me. Pure luck.

MN: And this was something that just really suited you?

KM: Yes.

MN: What about in the military, did you get to work with computers or technical-

KM: No. Back then, high school drop-outs could not pick what their job would be. They assigned you where the army needed you most. But the recruiter lied to me and told me - - he asked me what I wanted to do and I said computers and he said OK. But there was no possibility of doing computers. I wound up - - my first MOS was an antenna installer.

MN: In looking back, what do you think schools could have done differently with a person like you that they didn't do? I assume that there's people like you going through the school systems all the time.

KM: Well, I'd be pretty good in computers without a formal education, or a technical education. I got pretty far - - I was a - - I guess my highest point would have been I was a systems manager and operations manager at McCaw Cellular in Kirkland, Washington. McCaw Cellular is the

inventor of cellular phone technology. They were recently bought out by AT&T so I was in charge of the computers and the operation staff nationally. So I would say that's my highest point. I had a formal education though, I probably would have been running a computer installation - - even though I did that one, I probably would have been a director or something.

MN: But could - - if you were designing an elementary school, what would you do to do a better job with kids like you? Or is that something that just - - no matter what happened it wasn't going to work with you at that time?

KM: No, I mean - - it was up to PS 18 to find a way to captivate me. What they were trying to teach me was boring, I knew it already somehow. So I think it was up to them, to the school system, to figure out what it was. Probably what they should have done, is they should have promoted me a grade. Instead of being in the first grade, they should have put me in the second. It was up to them to challenge me.

MN: Did your mother ever tell them to promote you?

KM: I don't think she did.

MN: Interesting. What are some of the things - - clearly you saw a lot of very negative things on the street. What were some of the worst aspects of the underground economy as you experienced it in the late 60's and the 70's in New York?

KM: I saw a lot of cats lose their lives. I saw a lot of careers ruined, particularly basketball. There was a lot of talent at Patterson: basketball, art, music, cats were funny could have been great stand up comedians, singers, dancers - - it's just an incredible amount of talent and a lot of cats just didn't make it because of the drugs.

MN: Did the drugs hit the guys harder than the girls?

KM: Absolutely.

MN: Why do you think that was? A lot of people have mentioned this to me. What was it that made - - you're talking particularly about heroine - - what is it that made the guys so vulnerable?

KM: I can't answer that. I don't know. I think - - see the girls - - see you're talking about people that were older than me. My generation wasn't hung on heroine.

MN: Really?

KM: No. The guys that I grew up with, I didn't know any of them hardly - - few of them were strung on heroine.

MN: Fascinating. So this was the generation a little older than you that was hit by it?

KM: Absolutely. Cats that were three and four years older than us. We had a few guys, but - -

MN: So your generation ended up doing a little better?

KM: Oh yes, as far as drugs are concerned. It was in the weed and drinking.

MN: So of the friends you grew up with, are most of them still around?

KM: No.

MN: What's happened to them?

KM: They're dead. One of the guys I really respected, Albert Thomas, was a big time crack-cocaine dealer in New York. Went to Washington DC to try to open up new turf and he got murdered execution style. Glen Brochenbauer got shot and killed trying to rob a gas station - - which was a big thing back then, robbing gas stations, token booths, liquor stores. A lot of cats lost their lives that way.

MN: So robbery was a big thing, because you don't see much of that these days.

KM: Robbery was a huge thing back then. [Inaudible] had the big plate glass windows

around the liquor stores then the stores that you do now - - it was just like you and I.

MN: Did any of your immediate cohort end up going to college through open admissions?

Because when I was talking to your brother he said in his cohort, a whole bunch of them went to college when the schools opened up.

KM: Two guys that I know of went to college: Lyle Rotkins and Anthony Dorey, that's it.

And myself.

MN: And you went after about ten years.

KM: But I went - - I only did one year, I didn't graduate. I only know two guys that went to college out of all of us.

MN: Were there any mentors in the neighborhood who tried to steer people into things that would basically save their lives?

KM: Yes. Clark was - - the junior high school I went to, Clark was very special. The teachers really cared about us to the extent where they came into the projects after school, played ball with us, sometimes they'd even smoke grass with us, drink beer with us. You may look at that and go like this, but I think that's what - - and obviously they indulged in those things in their private time - - but I think that's what they felt they needed to do to earn our trust and respect.

MN: What about the people at the night center and PS 18 and the coaches?

KM: Yes. There wasn't - - you have to understand, basketball was a big thing in that area.

There was no you have to get certain grades in order to play, if you were good, you were going to play. They didn't care what your grades were.

MN: And this was in high school or college?

KM: Didn't matter. In that neighborhood if you could play ball, that was like a magic carpet.

MN: So it sounds like you had people looking out and still a lot of people went under.

KM: We had it made, there were no excuses for any of us to fail. We all had solid families, good educations, a safe environment, but things started to turn when right around the 1970's things started changing. Drugs hit, gangs took a lot of the guys, I lost a lot of friends that joined a gang and they got killed.

MN: Which gangs in particular?

KM: Black Spades.

MN: And they had - - kids from Patterson were involved in that?

KM: Absolutely. They took over our project, took it over.

MN: Really. What years were those?

KM: When I was between 13 and 16 so that would be -

MN: '69 - '72.

KM: Yes. Later junior high school, early high school. Took it over. One night - - I'll give you an example of how vicious they were - - one night we were sitting on the benches in the court yard and a Puerto Rican kid named Robert Vager - - by that time I was living in 291 but I grew up with him in 271 - - his whole family were just brilliant, talented people, harmless didn't bother anybody. Robert Vager was a brilliant artist, you could sit down and he'd make a drawing in 5 minutes - - was definitely on his way to becoming a great artist, no doubt about it. And he was walking his Chihuahua one night behind the benches and one of the gang members, his name was Coke, real big guy, bigger than me, picked up one of the cinderblocks and dropped it on the dog, smashed him instantly. So Robert was standing there crying like why, why would you do this? And everybody was standing by and the guy pulled out a pistol and shot him in the head. Killed him in front of all of us. That was the defining moment for that gang. We knew then that we had a serious problem on our hands. When he did that it kind of

established them as being very dangerous.

MN: What gangs would they fight? Did they have rivals?

KM: Yes. I can't remember all of the gang names because I wasn't involved but technically, project gangs fought other project gangs.

MN: Were there rivalries - - were there other projects that Patterson had particular rivalries with?

KM: Oh yes. Melrose, Courtland, not Mott Haven and Mitchell because those projects were newer, we're talking about the older projects. Our biggest rival of course was Edenwald. If you went uptown, let's say to see your Grandma or something, and they found out you were from Patterson, forget it. And the same thing if you came down to us.

MN: Now you're part of the generation where hip hop was created; was that something you were aware of, DJ's like Herc and Afrika Bambaataa, any of that stuff?

KM: I never got involved in any of that stuff. Well, actually you see no, that's not true. My generation, when I turned 18 it was 1972, that's when disco hit so that was before hip hop. We were from the disco generation.

MN: Right. Did you go downtown to any of the clubs?

KM: Oh absolutely.

MN: What about - - did you ever run into Pete DJ Jones?

KM: No.

MN: What were some of the clubs you went to?

KM: The Tunnel, Strawberry's, I got into Studio 54 a couple of times. [Laughs]

MN: Now back in the day, did you have certain outfits that you liked to wear?

KM: Sure.

MN: Any favorite stores that you liked to get your stuff at?

KM: Well all of us went down to Delancey St and Temertle Avenue in the Bronx and g01 our stuff made because we saw our older brothers do it. We used to get pepper silk pants made, you'd go to one place and get the material, then you'd go to Temertle Avenue and they'd take your size and then they'd make the pants for you. We used to get the [Inaudible] Shop sweaters, you know the wide brim hats, the playboy shoes - -

MN: Do you have any pictures of that?

KM: No. [Laughs]

MN: In looking back at all of this, the comment you made is that when you say "We all had it made." How do you account for people throwing away the opportunities?

KM: We didn't know we had it made, we didn't realize we had it made and I think it was because we grew up in a housing project. We didn't realize how special a place it was. We had it made Dr. Like I said, we had parents - - even if our parents weren't totally involved in us, somebody elses parents were or somebody in the school was. We didn't have any excuses to fail like we did, collectively as a group.

MN: The people that got out did unbelievably well. As you do now and all these other folks. Yes, it's - - I mean I don't have any explanation either.

KM: I would say that - - now without knowing what everybody has done - - but I would probably say out of my group, I was probably the most successful one. Because – and I think the reason why was because I got out of there early. See, a lot of cats are still there. See, a couple of my buddies are still in the same apartment they grew up in today. And if they're not in the Patterson, they're right in the neighborhood. I was fortunate, like I said I moved out when I was about 14 or 15 and I just always had a bigger picture. Even when I was in Patterson, I saw the

city when everybody else just saw the neighborhood. So I just always had a bigger vision, that's just me.

MN: Let me ask - - this may seem like an odd question - - if they had science programs in your neighborhood like they had basketball programs - - do you think something like that would have absorbed you, if people put together - -

KM: Me?

MN: Yes you personally. Laboratories - - or the street was just too - -

KM: I think if they would have come up with something that would have fascinated my interest I wouldn't have ran the streets so much. My whole thing is I just wanted to learn. You weren't going to learn the streets in a day, but in school, you're going to learn that stuff in a matter of hours and then it's all over.

MN: But if somebody had said OK, we're going to give you the universe to learn -

KM: Right. I think that I would have been fascinated by that.

MN: Anything else that you would like to say or reflect on that we haven't touched on or over-looked?

KM: No I think you pretty much covered the basis. It's just that - - I just really think it's unfortunate that we didn't realize the position that we were in and that collectively as a group we could have done a whole lot better than we wound up doing.

MN: OK well thank you very much.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

KM: I think what's probably different about my cohort than my brothers is that we were close. See, we were real close, it was almost like we were a gang without being a gang. We didn't carry weapons and all of that. But we were just really close; we hung out all day, we

hung out at night together, I was kind of different because when it was time for everybody else to go home, I went and did my thing. I went downtown or went somewhere else in the city. But I just think that we were really close, we looked out for each other, and I think that kind of affected - - I don't think that we looked at ourselves individually, like what we were going to do individually. I thought we looked at each other collectively. Like what were we were going to do as opposed to what I was going to do.

MN: One thing that's sort of missing from your account is books. Did you read a lot on your own?

KM: Yes but I didn't read school books.

MN: What sort of things did you read?

KM: I loved Donald Gongs, Iceberg Slim, that kind of stuff, street stuff. I loved that stuff.

MN: Did your friends read that also?

KM: Nope.

MN: So this is all stuff you read on your own?

KM: Yes I read that stuff on my own. I was reading newspapers before any of those cats did - - I read the newspaper everyday.

So I read a lot, but I just didn't read text books.

MN: OK.