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Oral History Interview with Glenda Cadogan
West Indian Carnival Documentation Project records, 2010.019.08
Interview conducted by Michael Roberts on March 10, 1995 in Brooklyn, New York

ROBERTS: ...Journalist, Caribbean American community, native Trinidadian, for Brooklyn Historical Society on the West Indian American Carnival Documentation Project.

How long have you lived in Brooklyn?
CADOGAN: Approximately 7 years.

ROBERTS: Where were you born?
CADOGAN: In Trinidad.

ROBERTS: And what year you came to Brooklyn?

ROBERTS: Tell me something; when you came to Brooklyn, what did you do, and what were your first impressions?
CADOGAN: When I came to live? Or, when I came first time?

ROBERTS: When you came to live.
CADOGAN: I visited here a number of times before, for vacation and in the capacity of work. At the time, I wasn't too impressed. I came for five day stays and stuff. But I came every year, already knowing the place. I had a lot of people coming to see, but having a lot of aspirations and judging from what I've seen on those short visits, thought that there's a lot of opportunities, and a lot of warmth and a lot of vibrations within the community. I felt that I would fit in just right, you know. That it could be like a second home then. That was my first feeling.

ROBERTS: Now when you were growing up in Trinidad, if you were to compare the difference between when you first came to Brooklyn here relative to what you knew in Trinidad, how would you put it together?

CADOGAN: The differences?
ROBERTS: Yes.

CADOGAN: Well, in terms of that communal spirit, which I thought was present here when I came on vacation, when you came here to live, you realized that was absent. Back in Trinidad, that kind of—of these [unintelligible], two a real family kind of spirit where you could go to anybody's house and be at home. When you come here on vacation, they extend that type of warmth to you. When you come here to live, you realize that it was different. That was the first marked difference. You would call and say that, oh, no problem. I'll just spend the night, I just do whatever. You realize that it is different, and you realize that you don't just drop by somebody's house, but you call before, and then you suddenly notice this difference was in the people's attitude. And that was the biggest shocker for me, it was the biggest problem adjusting to it, the difference in people's attitude, because I'm looking for the same sort of spirit élan that I have in Trinidad, and as I said, I mistakenly thought it was present in Brooklyn. I realized that was different. People still have that, what we call back home that cocky spirit, because still like to have fun and like to have parties, but people there, it's different. It's more structured. And there's not a lot of spontaneity. And what I miss most was that spontaneity of somebody passing and you know, passing in the road and, okay, let's go here. Coming into your house, walking in. There was no spontaneity at all. Everything was structured. You do this, you make a call, and it took some adjusting getting used to that.

ROBERTS: When you came from Trinidad here to stay permanently, what did you do first work-wise and probably education-wise? If you want to give us an idea of that.

CADOGAN: Well, I came with hopes of pursuing further education. That was the basic hope at first. Again, you realize that a lot of the hope and good stories that people give you while you're in Trinidad, that it's different. You come here and you have to adjust to, not just the differences within your Caribbean community. You have to adjust to the American society. Right? So, excuse me. So that presented a problem. You realize that you don't, you don't just come and go to school, just like that. It took a lot of not working and going to school was pretty hard. We also thought that work

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was the easiest thing, like getting a job was the easiest thing. And then when you come here you realize that it's not as easy as people make it out to seem. And then, people will tell you things like, you have to do--Trinidad norm, the norm there was as a female immigrant, you come here and you look for some sort of domestic employ, and thereafter find your own niche, you know. I'm not sure what men do, from factory work or whatever, but I know for women that was the norm. I was defying against that. I didn't have to follow the norm. And the first paycheck I ever earned, though, well the first money I ever earned was where I lived, which was in Manhattan, Washington Heights. I went to clean the apartment for the woman upstairs, a young, Puerto Rican couple. You know, I mean, I got forty dollars for it, and I thought that that was the rule, forty dollars in America, and this was a whole lot better. And I thought, oh, this will be easy. Thereafter, the first paycheck that I earned was with the Amsterdam News, when as I said again, I was entire--people told me you come up --I was a journalist back in Trinidad and they said, people do not come up here and fall in the same profession. You have to start at the bottom and work your way up. And I was not opposition to that. I did all that I could. I was able to get a story with published in Amsterdam News. I remember it being a story about Mother's Day show that was going to take place in Brooklyn and the Mother's Day show scheduled at the Gardens, and I received a paycheck again of forty dollars, that was again new work for me. So that was the first thing I did. Thereafter, in terms of actual employ, my first employment was the City Sun. I went to them about six months after coming here. Maybe not six months. I think it was four months. Started at the City Sun newspaper. And that was the beginning of my history, just what I did back home.

ROBERTS: Back in Trinidad, did you participate in Carnival?

CADOGAN: Yes. I was not a masquerader, but was very heavy into calypso. I was a calypso buff, a calypso junkie, whatever you want to call it. The calypso tents, even before I was writing, before writing back home, I worked in the Ministry as a civil servant, in the Ministry of Finance. And even then I would spend my own money visiting calypso tents with every calypso show that you could think of, follow the tents all over
the place, spending hundreds of dollars it would cost then. At the time, it was about twenty dollars to get into the calypso tent, and I’d be going to the calypso tent four or five times a week, because as I said, it was every night. You know, I was able to do that, so I would do that. There afterwards I started writing. It was a natural flow that I covered the thing. So my chief venture was really covering calypso, and it was the thing that I was very heavily involved in covering other aspects of the Carnival, and covering Carnival itself. I have a memory of covering Carnival in Minshall Band in the middle of thousands of masqueraders, you know, with headpieces and stuff, and in the back, tripping with a little book in my hand, and interviewing people. And that was, you know, that was my--it seems it was my calling.

ROBERTS: How important was Carnival to you in Trinidad growing up in Trinidad, how important was Carnival to you?

CADOGAN: As a kid?

ROBERTS: Yes.

CADOGAN: Oh, it was a big time in my household. At that time the structure, the structure of a kid was that Carnival was the time when you get a new outfit. You get a new coat, so you go Carnival shopping. Similar to how you would go Christmas shopping. Of course, you’re also getting something different. And me and my four sisters and mom would take us and we would go. We looked for this one special outfit that is for Carnival Tuesday and something a little less extravagant for Carnival Monday. You buy the shoes to go with it, and you have your outfit hanging up there, and every day you would try it on and dance in front of the mirror and mimic masquerading or stuff like that. Then on Carnival day itself--I lived on the South of the island, so we would as kids go up to see the big Carnival, which is in Port of Spain. But we had Carnival in our area, so Carnival morning; you wake up with the excitement Saturday. The best I could equate it to that people who don't know Carnival could understand is the excitement of a Christmas morning. You cannot sleep the night before. You wake up, you wake up [unintelligible] like: “Mommy is it time to dress now? Is it time to dress now?” And you can't wait. And then dress, and you put on this outfit that you have
been waiting weeks to wear, and you go down to the streets, and you have to be back by six o'clock, and you go and you find your little school friends, and you know, you take a jump. Everybody stand up in a line and you hug each other and you jump, and you take your little trip down the road, and we have a stretch of, like, about a mile long. It's so long. And that was the stretch of Carnival. So roundabout -- roundabout, we used to call it -- and you jump from one roundabout to the next. You turn around one roundabout and you jump to the other one, and then back up again. And you jump until you're tired and you sweat. About six o'clock, you see your mom or dad coming time to go. Round up all the children, and that's it. That was the end of Carnival. You look forward to Carnival next year.

ROBERTS: So you have very good memories of Carnival in your homeland, Trinidad, as an example. When you moved here in 1988, did you get involved in the Carnival organization and so forth as was prevalent in New York City at that time?

CADOGAN: Immediately. The first thing, and again as a natural flow from the history I've had from Trinidad, I immediately got involved in the whole cultural aspect; Caribbean culture in all aspects. Carnival being one of the major components in that; it was obvious that you would get involved in Carnival. From the first year, I remember feeling a similar childhood excitement about Labor Day, because I didn't know, I'd never seen a Labor Day before. You hear all about it, and I was excited in terms of going to see it. At the time, I wasn't involved with actually writing anything. That was entertainment. I was on the political beat of the City Sun, but I was permitted to write one piece about Carnival, and that I gave, as I said [unintelligible] excitement. Wrote a big piece about it, and in doing that piece, what I intended to do was look back. Obviously, you know, it being my first year, I wanted to look back. So I did a little historical piece about the Carnival, and in it clung, clung, clung to myself, [unintelligible] myself the history of the Carnival. That I thought was very enriching. So then, therein was two aspects: one, excitement about finding the history, two, excitement about taking part in it and actually seeing this stuff in the parade there. I just went to the events. Of course, then you want to go to everything, because you
don't know. So going to the whole parade Labor Day afternoon, take the boat rides, and at that time, they still had bellarama. Going to the bellarama, going to the shows, and going to everything, and finally going up to Labor Day. It was exciting doing that, yeah.

ROBERTS: Now, your first Labor Day, what were your first impressions of Labor Day?
CADOGAN: Well, for first Labor Day, it was a little disappointing. It had nothing to do with the Carnival itself. What it had to do with was my ignorance of the Carnival. I wasn't schooled, and I think people need to be schooled in how to enjoy Labor Day as always. There is also a method there. So I came and attempted to do what I knew back in Trinidad and attempted to walk on the Parkway. You know, and I was walking in the Parkway and just walking, just walking, just straight not stopping, not looking at anything, and heading to--where I think you should head is to the museum, and at the time I was living at the start of the parade. I actually started from Ralph Avenue. I was just walking, right? Not realizing that Labor--and looking for people--not realizing, two--what I called the rules of Labor Day. One, you never look for anyone on the Parkway. Two, you pick a spot that you either hang out with your friends there, but at that spot, you stay stationary for a long while, look at what you want to look, have your drink, do whatever you want, and then if you want you can walk along to probably catch some of the bands that you didn't catch. I wasn't looking to look at the bands. I was just walking, just heading to this point, not even knowing how far the museum was. I was just walking. By the time I got home, it took me almost four hours because that's Bedford Avenue. By the time I got there everything was done, and I didn't see anything. So I was very disappointed. And it was thereafter in expressing my disappointment to the people who have been here before. Then they said, "No, you should have stopped at Nostrand and Eastern Parkway. That's where the [unintelligible] Posse hang out! And you see, this one was here, that one was there and Blue Boy would come and stop by because this and Duke was there, and all the calypsonians were going, everybody kept going to that point and you should have stopped there. Right, so next year I knew what to do.
ROBERTS: So by your second year, you were in a better position to analyze both the Trinidad Carnival, the Trinidadian experience growing up, and Carnival in New York. What now, many years later, obviously, do you see as the differences between both Carnivals, Labor Day Carnival and Trinidad Carnival?

CADOGAN: One of the basic differences is logistics. Simply, Trinidad Carnival, you have a lot of space and several streets, and you know, that [unintelligible] Labor Day is just, you know, one stretch, and you just stick to that stretch. That's a difference. That adds a different flavor to it to Trinidad. That's one. Two is the whole organization of the stuff. What I think makes Labor Day different and unique, and to me personally even a little more interesting, is that unlike Trinidad, this is just a segment of the population involved in this activity. In Trinidad, it's like all comes to it. Almost everybody is involved in Labor Day out there. You are not, when you leave from around the main that people would leave and go to camp. The business organization is just, for your own purposes, you don't like Carnival. They go to the secluded areas and the beaches and stuff like that and spend five days. But in Trinidad, it's like five days of everybody involved in this, and there is a feel just as how there is a Christmas feel and a Christmas spirit in the air, there is a Christmas spirit, a Carnival spirit. You can feel the day arrive. You can feel the excitement. If you are in your home, you know something is happening. You know something is taking place. Labor Day is very much unlike that. You move two blocks off the Parkway and you don't know that this big activity is happening there. That was a big difference. But similarly, the similarities is that it's the same gay abandon in terms of how people enjoy themselves. There's no difference in the music. There's no difference in the enjoyment. It's not like because we are away from home, we dance less, we party less. Probably the opposite: They probably party more, because some people who go to Carnival, this is it, and I think people really just sweat out the frustrations and the rigidity that life is in New York. Just sweat it out on the Parkway. And it's very similar in Trinidad. Back home we have two days, and you know, it's like two days of gay
abandon, of where you can forget all your cares. Labor Day, you have a couple hours, and people just make the best of that.

ROBERTS: Now, so in essence, what does this Carnival really represent for you?

CADOGAN: Personally, it represents a cultural community of which I am very proud. I have a personal drive, or if you want to call it that, to each year bring somebody new to the Labor Day activities. And each year I’ve been here and I’ve done that. Somebody who lives here but have never had that Labor Day Carnival experience. One such person was somebody who lived right on the Parkway, but lived just around the library area, just before the bus stop, and never knew that all this activity used to take place. Knew there was a parade, but never knew anything about the activities at the back of the museum, anything like that. And was totally enthralled when she did experience it. So to me, Labor Day represents an ability to help people, and an ideal opportunity, help them, people in the dominant culture, to understand and appreciate my culture at the same time. Right? I think it’s a vital link in terms of people understanding us better, understand—you know, I have taken friends to Labor Day who’ve said to me, now I understand why you are the way you are. This is outside of Labor Day. Now I understand how you talk the way you talk. I understand why you walk with a rhythm. I understand now, and that’s just from coming to Labor Day, and that means a lot to me. And if it is that everybody who take part in Labor Day, and every masquerader, every spectator could just bring one, what it does is that eventually I could see Labor Day as [unintelligible] on the Parkway, and making more and more people realize my culture, and not just understand my culture, but understand me better.

ROBERTS: So do you think that the Labor Day Carnival, as it is presently now on Eastern Parkway, do you think it sends a message, and if so, what message does it send to the broader community?

CADOGAN: It sends a big message, I think, but I think it should be sending an even bigger one. The message that it sends is that, you know, we are here, we are part of this society, we are a strong, vibrant part of this society, and we have the ability to
organize one of the biggest spectacles in the States, right? Organize it from within our community without much financial backing, or much help from the authorities and stuff like that, and that we have been doing this, have done this for the past, what is it? Twenty-seven years. And we are here to stay. We are a vibrant part of this society and a vibrant part of this community, and it sends a very poignant message, I think.

ROBERTS: Do you see for example the fact that now you have about 3 million people on the Parkway, both as participants and as spectators, the majority of whom come from the Caribbean, do you think that this is indicative of a latent kind of political power?

CADOGAN: It certainly is, if we could mobilize and come to that point of harnessing that political power. We do have a potential to be a strong political force. It's just that we have not been schooled, and it has not been harnessed. I think the attempt now is just to do that. I see a big difference from six years ago coming here, where we were politically, in terms of our education, to where we are now. Now we find more and more of our leaders with a civic—even religious—or political addressing of that problem. Finding opportunities to address that so people understand that we must have, that we have that potential for political power, and we must utilize it. So you find this drive and there's this trust, and I think it has made a significant difference from six years ago. Six years ago it was, you know, that Trinidad attitude, you know, not me, right? And now you see people saying, that I have to vote and hear people talking about exercising their franchise. That's why I have to vote. And people who have the ability to vote six years ago weren't exercising it, and there were also people who could have gone through the process and they are able to go around willing to do that. I think this is the era, also, of the US citizenship. You find that that has helped, and people now are exercising their right now to become citizens so that they can go, and realize that they can make a difference in their community. I think it's shifting to that direction.
ROBERTS: Now if you were to take a closer look at Carnival in New York City as evidence over the past couple of years, who would you say are the most important people involved in Carnival?

CADOGAN: By name, or--?

ROBERTS: Generally. Generally.

CADOGAN: Well, of course, if you go by name, of course it's Carlos Lezama. You can't talk of Carnival without saying his name. But equally I think Joyce Quamina. In fact, I think I heard about Joyce Quamina before I heard about Carlos Lezama. I mean, there is a reason for that, because of where I work, because Joyce Quamina and Carlos Lezama are two of the names which stand out. But if I'm gonna put it by trade I would say the musicians, the masqueraders, the steel band musicians, and even the wire benders. I think everybody go towards making Carnival. There are a lot of people who make Carnival what it is, and the masquerader is no more important than, let's say, the vendor. Carnival wouldn't be what it is without the man on the road selling a beer or selling a roti. It would not be the same, right? So it's music, it's masquerade, it's promoters who promote events that you can find avenues to [unintelligible] stuff like that. But I say by name, the two people by name who I would single out is Lezama, Joyce Quamina and their committee. By trade, the people I mentioned before.

ROBERTS: You just spoke about a number of people who obviously belong to West Indian Day Carnival Association [WIADCA], which is the group who spawned the organization of the Labor Day Carnival and the events leading up to Labor Day Carnival each year. I just want to ask a question: do you think that outside of the Caribbean American communities and wider, in New York City, New York state community, are they educated as to what Carnival is, and if not, what in your opinion needs to be done so that people come to understand the Carnival better?

CADOGAN: I don't think that they understand fully what Carnival is about. That's one. And by that, I would say that I think that I think that people in what I refer to as the dominant culture, you know, whether Black or White--I'm talking about Americans here--see Carnival as a parade, and refer to it as such even. I don't think that what
happens on Eastern Parkway the first Monday in September is a parade. It's a carnival and there's a distinct difference. And they're trying to understand it in understanding a parade as they know it and floats and organization. Carnival and chaos is almost synonymous, right? That's what Carnival is. It is this organization, and organization in this organization. Yes, the masquerade bands are organized, and painstakingly so every night in little hole in the wall all over Brooklyn will organize their masquerade band. But when you go to Eastern Parkway, you're organizing for a band, but there is disorganization even there. And it's a wild abandon. It's not that strict, be formalized and go into that line sort of stuff. And it's not about floats; it's not about pretty floats. A parade is about dressing up a float. Carnival is dressing up of people. It's the people that makes that statement that shows it's not the floats that carry this music or even carry the people. Carnival is "street." It's not about people dancing on something that's moving. It's about people dancing in the street. That's what makes Carnival Carnival, the trip of the street. Standing on the float that is moving is not the same as going trip, trip, trip down there. It's a different feel. It's a different vibration. And I think people in their community don't understand that. They look at what they find fault with. It's that same disorganization. So they find fault with what is essentially Carnival. They find fault in the chaos, and they find fault in that the floats are not pretty and stuff like that. The floats are not pretty and stuff like that. Yes they enjoy the costumes, but they are looking, oh, the floats, the floats. But as I said, it's about the people. What I think is needed is marketing and advertisement. And I think the Labor Day is way under-advertised. Yes, again, I will admit that I think there has been a difference six years ago and now, there has been a movement towards solving that problem. But I think after twenty-seven years and what's going on on the Parkway there, we should have been a lot more appreciated and understood, right? And I think that the way to do that is that we have to advertise, not in our backyards. When we advertise in our backyards in Brooklyn, we're preaching to the church choir! You know, these people are already in the church. We need to advertise in other community, we need to go mainstream. We need to advertise on the networks and put
our stuff over the networks and have it seen on the networks as other parades do. Then people will understand that a whole lot better. Right? Then, that's from an organizational standpoint. And then again as I said, what I referred to earlier in terms of how I go about trying to make my difference. I think if everybody realized that it's not just about me and it's not just about jumping on the Parkway, but it is about spreading my culture and make more of an effort to like, look, I am going to school people, help school people into this, and bring people in that aim of the understanding that, not just that aim that I'm gonna party. That people could understand you. People in your workplace could understand why I look forward to a party. They could understand why I have so much rhythm. They could understand that, and you could bring people from your workplace or whatever. It's like, you know, I see culture and religion almost like the same kind of movement, and the same way how religious people go out and get converts, right? It's the same way culturally we have to convert people in course to understand what this Caribbean culture is all about. And if they have never been to the Caribbean, it has to. That's the only other way. Labor Day presents an ideal opportunity to do that.

ROBERTS: Well put. How important do you think this Carnival, which has grown in leaps and bounds over the years, is important to the city?

CADOGAN: Well, if I may, I don't know if I could, draw on the experiences of the last year, which is the first time I think, at least in my history, that there was a threat over Labor Day and the way it was, and it's staging the way that it's usually staged. And I think that made a big statement as to how important Labor Day is to the city. All along there was some sort of doubt. I said that it was gonna come off, and it was gonna come off just the way it was gonna come off, because it's too important to the city for them to do otherwise. It's obvious the kind of money that comes into the city. It's just obvious by just being there. There are less obvious benefits that comes to the city; in terms of people and how much people stay in hotels and everything like that. From that organizational standpoint, it's a lot more heartening than we know. But then, as I said, just being there, just being...[Interview interrupted.]
CADOGAN: ...if parade which generates less people--I'm thinking about parades in Manhattan and we know the kind of support of the city backing it, it gets, then it doesn't take much to multiply it and see if this is happening, and that we have more in terms of numbers, that the city is benefitting tremendously by this.

ROBERTS: I want to bring you back to two particular years. You just touched on 1994 and the obvious problem that the Carnival Association was getting with the Hasidic, and also in 1991, when a little boy named Gavin Cato was killed by a Hasidic driver, and there again was a shadow over the Carnival from the point of view that many people believe that Caribbean people might have gotten angry, might have gotten violent, and a whole array of different things came into the mix. Right now there is still an uneasy alliance with the Hasidic relative to our Carnival. Do you think that the Hasidic community does not understand what Carnival is all about and if you answer in the affirmative, what do you see as necessary so that the perception of tension between the both communities could be eased relative to the Carnival?

CADOGAN: What the first part of the question?

ROBERTS: Do you think that they have been educated or do they know about the Carnival sufficiently, and if it's affirmative, what do you think some of the solutions might be offered to ease the tension between the two communities relative to the Carnival?

CADOGAN: I think they don't understand, but to say that it's not because of a "doubting Thomas." I don't think there is much that could be done. And for that reason I say, one, as I said, I don't think they understand the Carnival and what the Carnival is all about. They understand what they may have seen opening their windows on Labor Day, and seeing the outside, and that's about it. And that's basically because it's the way of the Hasidim. That's within their nature. They are very peculiar. They are very into their own community, into their religion, and they don't care to know about what's happening. They don't care to know about what Carnival is. They know they hear noise and they know they see gyrating on the street, and that's about it. The mere fact that that's the way they are, that's why they don't understand, says that I don't think there is much to be done, right? So I think we just have to do what we do. They
will do what they do, right? And we have to continue doing this. It's a broader picture, and yes, we would all like to understand each other's culture, right? And I don't think that because I may take a Hasidic person into my house and play calypso or take them on Caribbean—carry them into a calypso show that's gonna make them any different than they are. The same way, I don't think that if I go and sit at the table at the Yeshiva, that this will make any big difference to me either. I'm gonna still come out on the Parkway and do what I do. So the two cultures are as far away from each other as the East is from the West. And I don't think that they want to understand any differently. They live as they live and that's their culture, and I respect that, and I say, give me the same respect. I do what I do. If part of my culture is dancing on the street, and part of your culture is standing up next to a wall and [unintelligible], you know, I don't find anything wrong with that. It's just when I see you bobbing against the wall, I don't say anything. If you see me gyrating on the street, that's my culture. And I don't think it's gonna merge. There is no real commonality there, you know? Besides that we are different. The only commonality in these two cultures is that we are as far away from each other as possible. So I don't think there is anything really to be done.

ROBERTS: What changes have you noticed in the Carnival over the past years?

CADOGAN: Like I said, in terms of marketing the Carnival, I've seen a shift. This year for the first time I think I noticed ads on the subway. And so that's a start. It's a small drop, it's a drop in the bucket, but at least it's a start. I've never really seen it advertised in that way. As I said, it's advertised in the community, in the community papers, in the community hall. That's where Labor Day was advertised. And you see the shift, the move, so that you reach a bigger audience. And that I think is very positive and it's the way to go. Other than that, the events leading up to Labor Day, which I think are integral to the celebration as the parade itself is the organization behind the museum. I have seen an attempt to make it more attractive, because it's competing with a lot of other private promotions, and when I first came here, looking at the advertisements and what's happening at the back of the museum, wouldn't really attract me with what was happening outside. I've seen a shift in trying to make
that more attractive and more appealing to a wider audience, and I think it has grown some. I have seen a difference in the demographics of people who do come to see it, who do come to the shows at the back of the museum, and I think that, too, is positive. Off the top of my head, that's all I can really think of.

ROBERTS: What about participation by mas players? Have you seen a decline or improvement in participation?

CADOGAN: I think it fluctuates. I can't remember the years exactly, but there was one year after--well, of course I was basing everything on my first year being here. There was one year where it was really crowded, really big. Last year--not last year--this year, right? This year, which is the most immediate thing in the memory, I thought there was a decline. Some of the bands were kind of sparse to me. I'm a big spectator of masquerade. I like to stand up. I don't participate in the bands myself, but I love tremendously set up and looking at the bands, [Interview interrupted.] and attempting to do that this year, it was very sparse and, you know, just a few people and a couple sections and stuff like that. I haven't been able to figure out what, what are causes to that this year, but as I said, there was another year before where after a decline then there was a rise the following year. So I think it fluctuates year after year.

ROBERTS: Do you think the state of economics both in the city and in the country has any bearing on the Carnival participation? That kind of fluctuation?

CADOGAN: Yeah, I think it certainly does. I also think what impacts on that is the visits to Trinidad Carnival and other Carnivals in the Caribbean. Any year there is an increase in travel to the Caribbean, there is an increase in participation here. Because one, people would probably have spent most of their money. They will have gone home with that. When people know they're not going home the following year, they definitely can't go home, and they didn't go home this year, then they look forward to Labor Day that much, and if it means squeezing out the last cent and leaving some bills up here, they're gonna get that costume. But when you find that a lot of people go down there, maybe, you know, they spend a whole lot of money there, they don't come.
But then again, as I said, economics have a lot–here–have a lot to do with it. Sometimes people just don’t have the money. If you don’t have the money it’s hard.

ROBERTS: Now, over the years, parcel and part last five years events behind the museum and also imparting on the entire Carnival itself you’ve seen the introduction of a Kiddies Carnival. And from observation, there has been a large increase in numbers of kids. As a matter of fact, this year, 1994, there were close to about, between 30 and 60,000 kids in the back of the museum participating. How important do you see this in respect to the Carnival and what do you think causes this constant rise in the participation of children in the Carnival?

CADOGAN: One, I think immigration practices, or immigration patterns. Immigration patterns have something to do with it in the sense, as more and more people come in, more and more people try to take their children to take part. But more importantly, I think even more importantly than immigration is the Carnival itself. The Carnival, the Kiddies Carnival is a statement, and this is going back to my previous comment, I think that every year you have Kiddies Carnival, you have, you know, a couple of thousand [unintelligible]. When somebody come on the Parkway with their kids to see the Carnival–you always find spectators, people come with their kids–oh, Kiddies Carnival, let me carry them to see the kids. When they see those Black kids, those kids gonna start to pester you that much, that you gonna have to find a costume for them in the next year. So every year that we find people come as spectators, the next year they want to be a participant, right? Because the Carnival is so happy, and just so clear, it's such a beautiful experience, that anybody witnessing it is gonna want to be part of it. You want to be part, of course. Even more adults. Every year I see people enjoy themselves in a costume; I want to play mas the next year. You know, but being an adult that would probably win. But as a kid, when that time come around, you want to get in that band. And so that multiplies. And I think that also, the growth of the Carnival here is also indicative of what takes place in Trinidad in the Kiddies Carnival. It's the same pattern. Each year it grows and it grows and it grows. I mean, one of the downfalls is you see people, adults now, getting into it, because in Trinidad,
Trinidad's Carnival has such a--there's a different spirit about it, and I guess it's a spirit because the, the difference because it's kids, and kids have that sort of lifting spirit anywhere you go. And when adults come and witness it, for some reason they want to take part in it, too.

ROBERTS: Have you visited carnivals besides Trinidad, and besides taking part in Labor Day Carnival in New York City? Have you visited other carnivals?

CADOGAN: Yes, in the Caribbean, I've visited St. Vincent Carnival, and in North America to Miami, to New Jersey, to Boston, somewhere else, but I don't even remember it now.

ROBERTS: Could you give us a brief overview of your impressions of these carnivals relative to the West Indian American Day Labor Day Carnival?

CADOGAN: I think I support the opinion that Labor Day is second only to Trinidad's Carnival, from what I have seen. I support that. You know, as I said, that's judging from what I have seen in terms of numbers and everything like that. In North America, Miami is big, Miami is fun, Miami has what it has to offer, which is some fringe benefits of the sun and the sea and stuff like that, and there's a certain kind of gaiety about it, but something about Labor Day still has that magical touch or that feel that is reminiscent of Trinidad Carnival. St. Vincent is more, what I found more structured, one of the more structured of organized Carnivals I have seen in that the masqueraders are very orderly. People don't take part--don't get into the bands, you know, as you find problems in all other Carnivals. People stay out of the bands, [unintelligible] let the masqueraders come out very well organized. Was very prompt, too well, of course it's ten days of Carnival. That's like [unintelligible] spend ten days just partying on the street and stuff like that. But you know, I think Labor Day ranks among the best.

ROBERTS: Let me ask you this question: what do you like best about Carnival?

CADOGAN: Period?

ROBERTS: Yes.
CADOGAN: In all the world? I don't quite [laughter]. That sort of thing come out. What do I like best about Carnival? Um, to say calypso is so limited. I like the calypso shows, calypso tents. That, that renewed drive and energy--I'm talking about Trinidad in particular. The Carnival tents, I could go to the Carnival tents, the calypso tents, I could go to the Carnival tents every night. I could go to the calypso tents every night, and I'll be fighting every night [unintelligible] for several weeks. You know, if I had my way I could do that. They do have some tents in New York. It's not as structured, but when they do have I try to go anyhow. Right? So that is the--in terms of leading up--But in Carnival itself? I love 'ouvert. 'ouvert mas, I'm happy.

ROBERTS: Tell us a little bit about 'ouvert.

CADOGAN: 'Ouvert, the old mas, the waking up of the festival as it were. That's the time when the mythical Mary [unintelligible] would make his appearance, and as I just said, this would just wake up the Carnival for the next two days or the next day or whatever. In New York it's pretty new and is now becoming to be organized, but having been taking part in it for the past two years, I've seen it grow from last year to this year, and this year, you know, it was fun. After that, I have my film coming out on Labor Day; it was like the lining up, right? Because 'Ouvert, there's a different feel and a different spirit about it. And what I like about it, too, is the steel band musicians are actually part to play in the Carnival because we have seen in the might of the steel band musician in the actual Carnival both--both at home and here. But what 'Ouvert does is give the steel band musician a chance to show his stuff on the street and give participants or celebrants a chance to dance to steel band music, which is different to dancing to the brass band and big band music and everything. So 'Ouvert in New York is growing. I think it's gonna get even bigger, right, and it's just a whole lotta fun, and I think it sets a nice tone for what takes place down on Eastern Parkway.

ROBERTS: Of course, I have to ask this question: what do you like least about Carnival?

CADOGAN: When it's over. What I like least about Carnival in New York is six o'clock in the evening, and in Trinidad, 12 o'clock midnight. When it comes that that has ended, it's a feeling--I'm at a loss of words to describe it. It's kind of like, it's a disappointment.
It's a sadness. It's like a farewell. It feels like a farewell. It feels like being at an airport, at a waving gallery in the airport. For some reason, it's like, it's gone. You all know it's gonna come back the next year, but this is it? You know, this is it? No more music? No more jumping up? This is it till next year? I want some more. Hate that feeling, so it's that kind of feeling of sometimes I want to take part, because I don't want to get that bad feeling at the end.

ROBERTS: Over the years have you noticed any problem with the Carnival—with the Carnival, with the WIADCA, the sponsoring body, or with the community at large? And if you have noticed them, how has the community dealt with them?

CADOGAN: Problems in what sense?

ROBERTS: General problems affecting the Carnival. It could be political, it could be economic, could be social. What are the problems you see as problems affecting the Carnival?

CADOGAN: One—I do think of us as people who smoke cigarettes sometimes [laughter]. One of the problems is political. I as a calypso and Carnival junkie am very appalled by the political infiltration of Carnival, right? Now, even having said that, I admit that I understand that everything is political, and you will find a type of politics in everything that you do. Politics is life, and I understand that. But I think that should remain latent in the Carnival. It should not be given a stage. Yes, we know that politics are played. Keep it as latent as we could, right, but bringing it center stage is what I have a problem with. I've seen in the [unintelligible] organization bring it center stage, and I'm very turned off by that. [Interview interrupted.] Right, so as I said the political infiltration I have a problem with. Also, the infiltration of the police into the Carnival. This year was particularly appalling. And you know the reasons for that, but I have this fear that it's gonna set a pattern. Having said that, having said that precedent of having policemen ride in their vehicles and having such a heavy police presence, and I think with police brass thinking that their efforts were successful, I think you're gonna see a continuation of that, and I think that that is impeding to the spirit of Carnival and it's an affront and an insult, you know, to the
spirit, to try to police—you can't police the spirit of a people, you know. And that's what I think is the effect. You can police the Carnival, but what I think is the effect, they police the spirit. And the policemen inside of the band and stuff like that. I have a problem with that. With the community, I think we—even though we want to practice our culture and our cultural craft as we know it, we must have some sensitivity also, that it's not the larger population is not everybody involved in that. And I think that we can practice this with a certain kind of discretion which is not impeding or impacting on our neighbors and our friends, and I see people being very insensitive in us gathering and stuff, together. [unintelligible] nice. I think some of our actions are insensitive, and I think we need to check ourselves there and realize that we have to have some sort of sensitivity and realize that we are in a foreign land among many other different cultures which don't understand our culture, and we must practice our craft with a certain kind of discretion and with thoughts of our neighbors and, you know, our people.

ROBERTS: Now, over the years, we've seen a number of different Caribbean people participate playing bands and so forth in the Carnival; noticeably Jamaicans, some African Americans. This year we even had some Koreans and that sort of thing. You've seen a lot of different cultures coming together from Belize, from different parts of the Caribbean region—and outside of the Caribbean also. Coming together and taking part in Labor Day. Do you think this is good or bad, and what are your general impressions of this new development?

CADOGAN: Personally, I don't have a problem with it. I think it all is well for Caribbean unity, and I think that if you look at the broader picture and you look at the Caribbean region itself and how much, so much difficulty in uniting the Caribbean politically, I think if we could unite the Caribbean culture, it's gonna be a great day. And if it starts off—if Labor Day is part of it, I don't have a problem with it. Having other influences, coming and they can express their crafts, fine. I think Labor Day is a unifying force, and my first opinion is that the power is in the culture and in the music, right? That's where the power lies, and you have to harness that power for its good. So I do not
have a problem with it. I do not have a problem with other people coming in. What I would like to see is the reverse, is that I be permitted to practice my craft in front of those others. Then give me a place in a Korean festival. Give me a place in your Italian festival. Let me go to an Italian street festival and find a roti, you know? Because you come, you know, you can find any food you want on Labor Day. You come, and I find Italian sausages, I find falafel, I find every food from any part of the country that you could think of. When I go to your festivals, I don't find some pelau, I don't see Accra. You know, let me see the reverse. I don't have a problem in uniting all of that, because just as I said, it's gonna help, you know, you make a cultural statement that impacts on the politicians, right? And culturally, we can do for the Caribbean as we have done in sports, and then the politicians have to follow, then it's a great day.

ROBERTS: Now there has been some talk in recent times about city government getting involved with Carnival to the extent that it is done in Canada, where the government subsidizes the Carnivals and plays a major role. There have been both opinion and counter opinion in respect to this idea. What's your thoughts on it?

CADOGAN: I think it's both good and bad. There's some way else to describe it, but it's both good and bad. Yes, we need the funds. We need that funds to help make this an even bigger spectacle, and we need the support. Not just the support of the city organizations and city agencies that could help us even grow and expand and everything like that. But at the same vein, we know that when people give the money, they want a say. Again I have a problem where people would not understand well, at least I gotta say, they would want to make this such a controlled event that it's going to stifle this creative expression of this Carnival. And that's my fear.

ROBERTS: Do you think that Carnival gets enough recognition in Brooklyn and outside of Brooklyn?

CADOGAN: At least I'd have to say it gets enough in Brooklyn, but then in Brooklyn one segment of the community. Because as I said, I have left Eastern Parkway on a Labor Day Carnival and walked two blocks down and see people hanging out on the side of
the street don't even know what's going on up there. Don't even know where you came from. I've been on buses where people will be like, "Why is the bus turning up? What's happening?" And they don't know why the bus diverted. Right there in Brooklyn. So sometimes you tend to think, yeah, everybody know, but when I really think, look at the poster, the people who know, again are the people who are in the church choir. Outside of Brooklyn, certainly not. Certainly not. Not in the way it should be. I think Carnival should be televised. Televised in much the same way that the Macy's day parade and the Halloween parade and all of those other parades. I think Carnival deserves to be recognized, and I think it's--the onus is on major networks to do that.

ROBERTS: So why do you think that Carnival does not get that kind of recognition outside of the Caribbean American community?

CADOGAN: I think some of the fault lies with WIADCA, with the organizing committee. And it's actually for the past twenty-seven years. I think the Carnival committee needs new blood. It needs younger blood, fresher ideas, and I feel a lot of respect for the people who labor over the years to bring it. I guess considering for us, we probably won't even recognize it because we won't hear it, and they know what city politicians was at the time, so I surely have done quite a lot. But now we have entered a different age. We are into the age of the information superhighway, and we need to have the kind of young minds that understand that. It's not--I don't see it as having young people take over. I see it as a collaborated effort. You got experience with the ways and forces of the world. Why not unite them in terms of bringing this Carnival recognition?

ROBERTS: I have to ask this question: do you think that WIADCA, the West Indian American Day Carnival Association, has done a good job of promoting Carnival, and organizing the Carnival for the past twenty-seven years? And as we look to the future, what would you have them do different as they face a new technological age, they face the twenty-first century with all the different nuances of all of that? What would you have them do different?
CADOGAN: One, I think as I said before, they have to be applauded for what they have done. Twenty-seven years is a long time to stick with anything. At the time, twenty-seven years ago, when many of us were still in diapers, we don't even begin to have an understanding of what the effort probably would have been just to get the street blocked off. You know, a bunch of Caribbean people talking about I want the street blocked off to do such and so. We can't begin to understand that. So I think at that time, that age, that era when they did that, they must be applauded for having stuck with that for twenty-seven years. But I think that in recent history, a whole lot more could have been done that has not been done in terms of keeping up with the times, keeping up with the age in which we live and the advancements and utilizing the resources and the technology that is available. For instance, I shouldn't say I'm sure, but I would wonder if the committee has any kind of data on any kind of computer system, anything like that. You know, how do you go about keeping track of vendors and stuff? Is this being done in the archaic way that we know? These are things that--I'm not saying that the committee has to go back to school to know how to work a computer. I'm saying that's where you bring in young blood that both understand the times and have fresh ideas. I think what the Carnival needs is fresh ideas; ideas not even from my era. I talk to young people now who are nineteen--I have ideas of Carnival that I think are also fresh and new, and when you talk to them, they have ideas that are so much different, and I think that's what is needed. It needs to be opened up. The committee has been too closed. It has been a closed group of people and has always been that, and I think it has to be an opening up, and you get more minds and more freedom of expression.

ROBERTS: In recent times, what we have noticed is there have been a lot of Carnivals cropping up all over the United States. Of course, there is Boston, there is an Atlanta now I'm told, there is in Miami, and they are in other places.

CADOGAN: At last count there were thirty-seven.
ROBERTS: Exactly, thirty-seven Carnivals. There is almost one in every state. That kind of thing. What do you think has been responsible for this growth in many Carnivals all over the United States?

CADOGAN: Well, I think it must be [unintelligible] a part of the show in Labor Day and you must give props for that. You know, there was one point when I was tempted to say that Brooklyn was the mecca of calypso and Carnival. And Brooklyn at one time was setting trends even for Trinidad, and it's moving away from that again, but five years ago it was very close to that. And it sets trends not only in Trinidad and in the Caribbean, but it sets trends here. People come. It's certainly the mecca of calypso and Carnival in North America, and people come and here some people can't come as often as they like. So they want to spread carnival where they are. Plus they see that expression for their culture...