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**Oral History Interview with Carlyle Price****Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Brooklyn Movement Center, 2016.027.2.04****Interview conducted by Jenny Goldberg at Brooklyn Movement Center on  
May 23, 2017 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn**

GOLDBERG: Hi, this is Jenny Goldberg, today is May 23, 2017, and I'm sitting at Brooklyn Movement Center with Carlyle Price, conducting an interview for Brooklyn Historical Society's Voices of Crown Heights oral history project. Carlyle, could you introduce yourself?

PRICE: Wow, that was super-formal. My name is Carlyle Price, I am currently the lead organizer for the Crown Heights Tenant Union, as an employee for the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board. I grew up on -- I grew up around Remsen and Clarkson Avenues. I am 37 years old, and although technically Remsen and Clarkson aren't Crown Heights, to get anywhere you have to go through Crown Heights. And so, while I'm not necessarily a long-term resident of the community, I would say that I'm definitely a long-term member of the community.

GOLDBERG: OK. Can you tell me a little bit more about growing up where you did?

PRICE: Sure. So, like much of Crown Heights, my neighborhood was very West Indian. As we got, as I got older, we started seeing a couple of Puerto Rican families moving in, fair number of Haitian families moved in around '90, with the Aristide stuff. Then we started getting a lot of African families, when I was a teenager, I think -- or pre-teen. I personally have had a very atypical, I think, Crown Heights experience. My mom was a teacher -- some would say she still is, because it's a calling -- and she, my first schools were actually schools where she taught. And then after second grade, the school she was working in shut down for reasons I never fully understood, and I end up going to public school. So it's a public school across the street from me. I went there for two years, for third and fourth grade. And then someone decided I was smart, and then I got into the Astral Program for fifth grade. That put me in Canarsie, two miles away,

when Canarsie was still White. [laughter] So I would, every so often, got called “nigger” in school, I would, every -- by kids who didn’t necessarily understand the power of the words. But, based on how I performed in the Astral Program, in fifth grade, my teacher signed me up for this program called Prep for Prep, which takes fifth and sixth graders, puts them through basically an academic boot camp for anywhere from 2 to 14 months, and then places them into elite private schools in Manhattan or around New York City. So I went through the 14 months of that. Ended up going to a private all-boys school on the Upper East Side, called St. Bernard’s, did that for three years. Then went to boarding school at St. Paul’s in Concord, New Hampshire, which-- just yesterday-- announced that over the years, 13, 12 or 13 teachers have sexually abused students. So one of those great, elite boarding schools. At the time I went, it was supposed to be, like, number two in the country. And then, I never finished there. I finished back in Brooklyn, at this school called Berkeley Carroll. From there I went to Swarthmore College, didn’t finish there, got tired of being secluded in the suburbs, came back to Brooklyn, finished up at Brooklyn College, working my way through school over the course of more than a decade. I’ve worked in -- I worked my way through school doing, mostly working at Barnes & Noble. Which was great, because I always loved to read and it was a great way to absorb knowledge. I didn’t necessarily have to read everything. Just the fact that I knew what books talked about what, gave me a great kind of perspective on how the world works. And then I went to France to finish my studies, for a year. Did a linguistic anthropology thesis on that. I was studying -- officially, I was studying how non-natives in France use the French language differently than natives in France. Unofficially, what I wanted to study, and kind of was studying, was how those non-natives were integrated into the French society through the education system, and language was kind of a way to do that. The short answer is they’re not integrated into the French society, France shuns them for being immigrants. That’s something we can get into if you like. Came back, worked in Albany for a while. And by “a while,” I mean about eight months as a member -- as an intern, paid internship-- for the state assembly; working for the assemblyman, at the

time, of Crown Heights, and for the, the state legislative caucus for Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asians. Had a run-in with the police that kind of cut that career short. And then, after a while of doing odd jobs and basically being what I called an education consultant, which is a very fancy way of saying I tutor any and everybody, from second-year-old-- second graders, to people trying to do their dissertations. I ended up volunteering for an assembly member, which led to my current position as an organizer for the Crown Heights Tenant Union. That's my life in a nutshell.

GOLDBERG: Can you tell me what it was like being a little kid in the neighborhood you grew up?

PRICE: I felt -- I felt good. I mean, I know there's a huge mythology around Brooklyn in the '80s and '90s, in terms of crime and everything. I went to church every Sunday, on Franklin Avenue between President and Union Streets. The building is still there, but I don't think it's doing anything these days. I know the church itself actually moved down the block, towards Empire Boulevard. But I never felt unsafe as a kid. And I was a pretty paranoid little kid. I, my mother has, you know, eight brothers and sisters, my father has six or seven brothers and sisters. I never quite remember, some of them died before I was born. But I've got more cousins than I can count, and I was the oldest of, kind of, the third generation within that generation, if that makes sense. Because my mother's oldest sister is, like, 15 years older than her, maybe even 20. So there are generations of cousins, all within the one generation of the family. And I was the oldest of, like, the youngest and the last. So I spent a lot of my childhood looking after my cousins. I was the most paranoid little kid. Like, "If anybody runs into the street, it's my fault and I'm going to get my butt whooped." "If anybody falls and scrapes their knee and doesn't like me for it, I'm going to get my butt whooped." If -- you know? Like, and it's not like I'm going to get my butt whooped once, I'm going to get my butt whooped by their parent, and then I'm going to get my butt whooped by my parent. So, like, I was a very watchful little kid. I was always looking for something to be wrong. That said, I felt, like, safe. You know? I didn't buy into the narrative of Crown Heights being, you know, the hood and danger around every corner, and-- Don't get me wrong,

I saw the older kids in the neighborhood who weren't necessarily up to good stuff. But I also knew them as people, you know? They looked out for us, too. You know, they weren't trying to get us involved in some dumb stuff. They weren't necessarily telling us not to do what they were doing, but they weren't trying to get us involved into some heavy stuff. You know, as I got older I feel like I've realized; what was happening in Bed-Stuy kind of defined all of central Brooklyn, from Bed-Stuy to Crown Heights to Flatbush. And people didn't really-- who weren't familiar with Brooklyn-- didn't really have those distinctions, you know? But where I grew up, which is kind of between East Flatbush, and Crown Heights, and Brownsville, we were cool. You know? And even when we were in Crown Heights, it wasn't as safe but it was still relatively safe. You had a community of people watching people on the street. So, it wasn't as if you were just out there on your own and nobody was paying attention and anything could happen to you at any time. I mean, obviously, yes. Because that's life. But people watched. And if somebody said something, you respected your elders. Because they could whoop you too, like. [laughter] But you know, it, it was, it was in a loving way. It wasn't all some, like, it wasn't always awesome, just super-angry, control, "Why are you doing what I told you not to do?" stuff. You know. I felt pretty good as a kid. I think that really changed -- I think that really changed when I was 9 or 10 and I got, went to Canarsie for school. I was precocious. I was reading this book by this author from South Africa, called Mark Mathabane, that was really famous on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. My parents had been paying attention to it, and they wanted me to -- well, they had it around the house, and I was interested in what they were interested in, because I was also the kid who watched a lot of *Jeopardy!*. So I was reading this book, and it's called-- wow-- *Kaffir Boy*. Kaffir is the South African term for nigger. And it's about him growing up in South Africa under apartheid. He wrote a sequel, *Kaffir Boy in America*, about how he got out as a result of getting a tennis scholarship, of all things. But I'm reading that at the same time that I'm going to school in a mostly-White neighborhood and making my own White friends for the first time. Because my family -- my mother has a sister that worked on Broadway, so we'd go up to Broadway every

once in a while and, like-- So White people weren't foreign to me. And I think because we're West Indian-- because my family's from Barbados, both sides-- it wasn't as daunting. Like, people are people. I think I grew up somewhat naively thinking, "OK, well, you know, the world is a meritocracy. People are equal. And Civil Rights has happened and it's all good now." And then I got to Canarsie, and I'd be late, you know, somebody was supposed to pick me up after school, people were late. You know. Playing games with these kids to while away the time, and instead of learning my name, they just called me, "the nigger boy." And it didn't occur to me, I think, for a couple of years, that I should have been pissed off at that. But it didn't feel good. I knew it wasn't meant with kindness. It wasn't necessarily meant with, like, outright hostility, but you know, it was, it was a marginalization, it was an objectification. And then I think that exemplif-- that, that exacerbated when I got into that private school on the Upper East Side, and had to travel an hour and a half each way, every day, to get to school. And saw a completely different world. Because the Upper East Side is the Upper East Side. [laughter] You know? And I'm coming from Brownsville, and -- Crown Heights, really, looking at it, going like, "OK, this is their normal. Cool. I can't invite any of these kids back to my house, ever." Mostly because it's far, but also because, wow. They couldn't get it. And I had people say, "Look, don't ever invite me to Brooklyn because that's too far, I'm never coming." Now they're moving here! And taking over brownstones and neighborhoods. It's amazing. I ran into one of them at a reunion recently, he was like, "So, how would people feel if I came into the neighborhood and ran for office?" You know. Indian-American kid, right? His, his parents are from India. And I'm like, "No, they're not going to respond to you. Not because of your educational background, although that plays a role in it, but it's also, like" -- this particular human being is a very smarmy individual. I don't know that he's necessarily a jackass. I don't know him that well. But he comes off as a very egotistical human being. And I feel like Brooklyn has generally, historically, responded to authenticity. And his authenticity is a little bit too inauthentic. But, that's thing -- that's when things felt different. I went through this Prep for Prep program, which is

basically: you do a summer of -- school, summer school, after fifth or sixth grade. You go to classes from 4:30 to 6:00 on Wednesdays, and 9:00 to 5:00 on Saturdays during the school year, extra classes after your normal school classes. And then you do another summer's worth of school. The idea behind it is, by the time you get placed into your school, you can spend the first year not having to worry about the work and focus on trying to socialize. I guess it works to varying degrees. I find the boys in the program have generally flamed out worse than the girls do. They tend not to do -- they tend to fare worse than the girls do, I should say. And they tend to straight-out bust. I would argue the program would look at me -- or, the founder of the program would look at me -- as a bust. Which is problematic, because I'm not a bust. I took my own long way to see things, but just because I didn't go straight through, you know, my boarding school, and my elite college, and then grad school, and get myself the cushy job-- the white-collar job with the corner office-- doesn't mean that I'm a bust. Just because I can't make enough money to give back to this organization which I felt didn't really see me as a human being, doesn't mean that I'm a bust. So between that organization and the school, is when I, in many ways, started feeling more objectified, in large part, for my, my Blackness. And then when I went to boarding school it was worse, because I was in Concord, New Hampshire, and I would actually get followed around the grocery stores. I think this is when the policing stuff really started to kick in for me. I'd get followed around grocery stores, I was accused of stealing more than once -- wasn't that kid. I was always too paranoid and conscious of people thinking I might be that kid, to be that kid. One of my better friends in boarding school actually got kicked out of school because he, at the prompting of our lacrosse captain, helped him steal some stuff while we were on an away trip to another school, and they got caught. And people assumed I must have been involved because he was one of my better friends. And I'm like, "Yeah, no." [laughter] They know better than to ask me to do something like that. I'm the one that would try to talk them down. You know? If I'm going to do something like that, I'm not going to get caught anyway. But, you know, I started becoming more aware of it, you know? I had people talk to me and treat me very -- it was really



screwed-up. My sister's sister-in-law is actually trying to do a dissertation on the experience of people of color in elite boarding schools. And I was helping her with that a couple years ago, and revisiting, like, this very tr-- somewhat traumatic aspect of my, my life, and I was like, "I wasn't crazy. It wasn't just me. This is a -- this is what it is." You know? I mentioned, earlier, that my school, my boarding school was in the news recently, for having teachers, over the years, who had -- it wasn't necessarily sexual assault, but inappropriate sexual contact with students. When I first got to the school just a couple of years before, one of the first -- it used to be an all-boys school until the '70s, and they finally let women in. And one of the first girls to be let in was a scholarship student from Philadelphia. She wrote a book in which she details, I mean, among many, many other things, like just detailing what is, what's it like to be a Black kid from Philadelphia, a Black woman from Philadelphia, going to a private elite boarding school. You know, there's a lot to that. But, you know, there's a small part of her story that is about her being raped. And this is the same school that, a couple of years ago, had the kid allegedly -- no, I think he was found guilty of raping, like, a 15-year-old sophomore. I can't say I ever saw any of that in the school, but there's definitely a sense of privilege, a sense of entitlement, a sense of objectification that clearly still exists, and definitely existed when I was there. And that's when I started to see myself differently in the public eye. And realizing not everybody was equal, not everything was gonna be cool. And that not everything was merit-- meritocratic. I remember -- because my holidays were different because I was at boarding school, so I came back. And I was waiting to meet some friends of mine, who went to an all-girls school on the Upper East Side. So I'm waiting, and there's a promenade on the Upper East Side. You can just kind of look over the water, and you can look over at Queens. I'm waiting for the -- you know, school for them to end so that I can hang out with them. And these cops just show up, and they're like, "What are you doing here?" And I'm like, "I'm waiting for my friends to get out of school." And, you know, I'm not at school, so I'm not prepped out. I don't have khaki pants on, I don't have a collared shirt on, I don't have, you know, a blazer on. I'm in, like, a t-shirt and jeans because it's

spring break. I'm in Brooklyn. I'm not dressing up if I don't have to. [laughter] I think I was 15, maybe 16 at the time. And -- yeah, I was 16. And the cops were like, "Well, do you mind sitting in the back of the squad car while we check in on this?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I mind. Like, there's no reason for me to be in the back of your squad car. Like, I don't know that I'll be able to get out. I'm good, thank you." And I knew I was riding this fine line, right? Because when I was seven or eight, my aunt drove my mom and my family-- or my mom and some other people-- to this store, and they parked the car, and they were like, "If a police officer comes, tell them we'll be right back." And they ran in to get whatever, buy whatever, and a cop, of course, rolled up. And I'm trying to protect my family. I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no, they said they'd be right back. You don't have to write the ticket. Da-da-da-da-da." And he was like, "Who are you? Do you need to step out of the car?" I'm like, "No. But they're coming right back, like, you don't need to" -- I'm kind of getting, you know, anxious. I was a really shy kid, I didn't really like talking to strangers, and here I was, left to fend for myself against an adult who doesn't know me, who's in super-authority and can do stuff if he wants to. So, I was agitated, but not in the sense of being upset. Just kind of like, my energy's up, I'm trying to figure out what to do here. He writes the ticket, leaves. My family comes back. My aunt says, "I thought I told you to tell him we were coming right back." And I'm like, "I did," and I'm explaining everything that happened, and they're like, "What are you doing? You can't do that." And I'm like, "But you just told me to--" And it took me years to come back to that memory and realize, like, you know, black boy child. [laughter] You know, fearing for his life. Not me necessarily fearing for my life, but them fearing for the consequences that could have had. You know. And that was the closest I ever got to that version of "the talk." Everything else kind of came by osmosis, you know. But I'm on the Upper East Side, and I'm talking to these cops. And my friends come out and see me, and come get me. Thankfully. And it's an all-girls school, so then it's like, "What is this 15-year-old boy doing with, like, five different girls?" We'd all gone through this Prep for Prep program together, so we knew each other. But, that made me even more mindful. You know? And at that point, I learned

to carry myself differently. I learned to dress differently. I'm wearing blue jeans today, that's a new thing because I happened to find some jeans, and I needed to wear them. I generally don't like, don't like blue jeans. I'm actually most comfortable in khakis. Part of that is school uniform from middle school, and, to a certain extent, high school. Part of that is, if I'm wearing khakis with this button-down shirt, button-down, collared shirt, I'm less likely to get messed with. I have locks, yes. My facial hair is not, you know, cleaned up. Right. But if I'm walking around with a vest or a blazer or a tie, and slacks and not jeans, and a proper shirt, and some decent shoes, I feel more comfort-- more confident, and more comfortable about my ability to be, to be bothered on the street by the cops. You know, when I was growing up, all the time I would hear-- not me so much as my brother, because I can kind of switch it up, I guess, code-switch or whatever they want to call it, but-- you know, it was like, "Why you -- why do you talk White, why do you act White?" Heard that all the time. My response would be, you know, "Just because it's educated doesn't mean it can't be for us." Like, I don't know how I came to that, but at some point I realized that was the right response. I'm glad I did. You know? Because there's a lot of other responses you could give where it's like, that, and - there are a lot of other responses that imply that the white way is the right way. Or the better way. And my mom was great, you know? She was a teacher, so we had [sirens] - [Interview interrupted.] po-po! Don't shoot my people! Hopefully it's an ambulance. Let's see. It's an ambulance. Good job. [applause] Good job. Save some people. Save my people. [laughter] No. So, so, you know, a lot of, a lot of people kind of have this idea, right? Like, "Oh, if you're speaking educated, you're trying to be White," or, you know. My mom always had, you know, as a teacher, she had these -- I grew up with three things that really always stick in my mind. The first is, she had this series of comic books about Black Americans in history, or just Blacks in history. Right? So we had books that talked about different tribes in Africa -- series of comic books. Black cowboys; the fact that *The Lone Ranger* was probably built on this guy by the name of Bass Reeves, who was a Black sheriff in the West. he was alone because no White person would work with him, which is why he had a Native American working

with him, [laughter] right? “Tonto” means fool, by the way, which is a messed-up thing to call somebody’s sidekick. Just saying. The history of Toussaint Louverture; which is why, when the Haitians started coming into my neighborhood, I decided to be in their barber shops and learn French. Because I figured, if I wanted to go to Africa one day, French would take me further than Spanish-- precocious kid. That’s the one thing that sticks with me, that she had in the house, were all these black comic books about different aspects of Black history. The fact that, you know, the guy who wrote *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Alexandre Dumas, was a Black man. You know, among all these other books that he wrote, you know? So *The Man in the Iron Mask*, and all that stuff; written by a Black dude. If you don’t go looking, nobody tells you. The national poet of Russia is a guy by the name of Alexander Pushkin; Black dude. And I had comic books telling me all of this different history. Second thing that we had in the house that sticks with me is, *World’s Great Men of Color, Volumes I and II*. Books I have yet, to this day, to actually finish. Maybe I’ll do it this week, now that I’m on vacation. But, like, I didn’t realize how powerful that stuff was until I’m at my private school in, in the upper, on the Upper East Side. And I’m saying, “No, so-and-so was Black, and this was this, and this was this.” And my history teacher’s just like, “What are you talking about?” And I pull out the book, and I’m starting to show him different things. And he’s like, “Who is this kid, reading these book—” like, you know. And it was just -- for me, it was just about -- I think for my mom, it was just about perspective. I think I came around the, the tail end of, for lack of a better term, the “Black is Beautiful” movement. Kwanzaa being started as a holiday. You know, and these are kind of, like, the -- the extensions of the Black Power movement. Right? Along with school lunches. But just, just Black consciousness. You know. And part of that was also: We were West Indian. So our experience, and our way of getting through things, wasn’t quite as set in stone, I guess? Or predetermined, as it was for a lot of people who were raised in this country, and who are, you know, whose people had been here two or three hundred years. Like - - and, and suffered slavery in this country. Our mentalities aren’t quite like that. On the one hand, we aspire to Britishness. Which was why I went to the middle school I

went to, because they aspired -- very Anglophilic school. Like, named for a street in Belgium that was a British school in Belgium. Like -- but, like, very proper, very, like, you wear ties on Fridays, when every other school would dress down. We had a, we had a Christmas concert every year, where the entire school would get together and sing Christmas carols in multiple languages. So I can sing "O Christmas Tree" in German. Like-- Which was great when I started singing later on and, and got into languages and, you know, started singing in Italian, and French, and all this other stuff. But our path, our way of thinking about what we had to do to get ahead, wasn't prescribed to, you know -- in this country it's like, you either get really good at sports, or you become some kind of a gangster and, you know, do the ghetto thing. Or you become a great artist, probably a musician, right? Those are the three categories of things to aspire to as a Black person in this country, that's what you see all the time. And you get told, "Yeah, if you've got your education, you can -- you can become a lawyer, a doctor, whatever." But I mean, I'm -- I do housing organizing now, but the stuff that I went to Albany for, really, was because in many ways, I'm my mother's son. I'm an educator. Maybe not officially by trade, but in my being. You know? I think of what I do as a housing organizer, and trying to get people to understand their rights, as educating them about their possibilities. And a lot of what I did, working my way through school at the bookstore, at Barnes & Noble, is educating people about the wealth of knowledge out there. You know. In addition to some of the part-time stuff I did; teaching at summer programs for schools, or being a camp counselor, or, or doing the education consultant stuff for all those years. You know, I was never going to be someone who was going to write the paper for you, but I could show you what sources you needed to d-- to use. I could show you what a good paper would look like, I could help you edit your paper so that, in the future, you'd have some skills to know, at least, what to look for. But I'm not a teacher. I feel like that's a calling. It's not my calling. But I figured, education policy? I could do. That was a better use of my abilities, and more in my, my interest. But then you realize that education is so tied to housing, and land prices, and the quality of schools in the district are directly proportional to the quality of the

housing in a district, and/or the policing in that district. And then it's like, "OK, so we've got a bigger battle here." I love politics in part because I didn't want to have to deal with those personalities. And, in part, because it occurred to me that it wasn't a place where you could actually be innovative. If you want to get something done using politics, you have to show them something that works so that they can scale it. You can't innovate within the political system, they -- the -- it's not built for that. You can't try something out, for the state or for the city, unless you've seen a pilot program somewhere first. I'd rather work on a pilot program. You know? I'd actually try to accomplish something. Which is not to say it's not important to try to scale it, but, to me, that's not -- that's too much people trying to take credit for stuff. But my point, in bringing that up, is: We do a lot of talking about the community, and I've tried to do all of this stuff for the community. And it seems to me that, in some ways, I got something that a lot of people who grew up generations-deep in the States didn't. And I don't know what that thing is, I don't know if it's a confidence, I don't know if it's a sense of capability, I don't know if it's a lack of cynicism. I don't know if it's the fact that, at the end of the day, I'm first-generation. My parents came here believing in this idea that things, opportunities, were better here-- to go further here-- than they were on the Island, where everything is basically subject to tourism. I went back, not too long ago, and I realized that the beach that I grew up on has basically been covered by a resort. Still a public beach, you can get to it, but you've got to look. It's like, "The hell? I grew up having to walk through Times Square all the time. I hate dealing with tourists. Now I've got to come to Barbados and deal with tourists? 'The hell?'"

GOLDBERG: Just -- you've had experiences in so many different neighborhoods in New York. Can you talk about -- well, a few things. One, just the feeling of safety, like you were talking about? What, how that felt different in Canarsie, Upper East Side, Crown Heights. And also, maybe a bit about the relationships that you were building in those different times of your life; friendships or otherwise?

PRICE: So, that's a great question. In Canarsie, it was my first time kind of being out of my community on a long-term daily basis. One of my, one of my best friends, for that year

that I was in Canarsie, was actually this Asian kid, James, who went to school in the neighborhood. And it wasn't because we were the only-- like, there were other Black kids in the school-- but in the Astral Program, which was, like, this gifted program, I think we were the only two boys of color. But that wasn't what brought us together. We just like -- at least, I don't think it was. We just, we just clicked. [laughter] Like, we were both pretty nerdy. We would have extensive conversations about *Star Trek*. Yeah. I can get into some stuff, when it comes to *The Next Generation*, and -- and I'm actually in the process of re-watching as much of *Deep Space Nine* as I possibly can. Because it's the one with the Black captain. But when I got to school there, I think I was a month or two in when someone told me that a Black family had tried to move into Canarsie and had gotten burned out the year or two before. And it wasn't said to me, I don't think, in a -- I don't remember it being said to me in a threatening way, I don't remember how I heard about it. But for me it was like, "OK. Watch yourself out here." I didn't want to be out there after dark. I didn't like that. There were times when I would actually walk the bus route home if I didn't have bus money and nobody had remembered to pick me up. Because I didn't want to be caught out there after dark. At least if I can get myself down to-- Because that was, if you down Remsen Avenue, it was down by Seaview and, like, Avenue M. So if you walk down Remsen towards Utica Avenue, Eastern Parkway, you walk all the way past Avenue B, Avenue A. So there were times when I would walk because I didn't have my bus pass, or I didn't have the bus money, or if someone didn't pick me up, I would just walk all the way. Because I knew, once I got around Church Avenue, Kings Highway, I knew where I was; I was familiar with that area, I was going to be OK. But I didn't want to be caught out there at night. And I had a couple of friends that I was cool with. But I was only there for one year, and none of it really stuck. I ran into a couple of them, like, a coup-- a few years later, at this performing arts camp. I went to band camp at this great place called Usdan, out in Long Island. So we had to get bused out there every sum-- every day during the summer. But, you know, I didn't really maintain any of those friendships. I think my very best friend was this kid, named Ira, who lived over by Ocean Parkway?

And he ended up moving to Long Island the following year. I want to say to, like, Roslyn. And then, on the -- when I went to school on the Upper East Side-- So, that's interesting because, a few years ago, we had our twentieth-anniversary reunion. Which is a strange thing to have when you're 34. But this is how these elite schools work. And some of those guys, I'm actually still close to. Or at least, we still talk. A couple of them have moved to Brooklyn, and we have very interesting political discussions. And they're generally left of center. I go to those reunions, and I know I'm one of the few Democrats in the room. And I'm not even a Democrat, really. I have this joke that I tell people, that I'm going to re-bring-- bring back the "Rent Is Too Damn High" Party because, really. But yeah, I know I'm in a room full of Republicans, and it's, it's weird to be in this room full of, like, stockbrokers, and bankers, and people whom I know are, in some way, shape, or form, contributing to, to wrecking my community by, by over-leveraging the housing market. Like [laughter] it's, it's kind of crazy. But I'm, I'm still close to a couple of those guys. I make it a point of trying to see them on occasion. My very best friend from that time -- I think we're friends. Well, we're friends because we're friends. But I think we had a lot in common. We were both kind of first-generation. His mom was a, a London Jew, and we both got sent to this private school that was British, having parents from British backgrounds -- but outsider British backgrounds. And, I don't know, we found each other and we made sense. He's now a photojournalist who's spent, like, a decade in Iraq, like. [laughter] So he's got a very different view of the world, and he knows I do, too. And we talk about these things constantly. But then I have a couple of other kids who went through the same program I did, the Prep for Prep program. One of them became the perfect prepster -- prepster's not the word we use. I don't know that they use a word. But, you know, he went and got his MD-PhD, so he's a doctor-doctor. I think he's been working, recently, in Costa Rica or something. You know, my other friend who was in my class, who went through that program, ended up in the military. I want to say, the Marines. And had just a very different life experience. And it's interesting, because I don't know that he necessarily needed to go to the schools that we went to, to do that. And to come out with the



perspective he did. You know? And I say, often enough, like, "I think I might have been better off if I'd never gone to some of these private schools." In the sense that people might have held me accountable more and made me work harder. Because there was a long, a long period of time where I was so caught up in how I was feeling that I wasn't working as hard as I could be. If I didn't have to deal with all that emotional stuff, and I could have been at a school with people of -- who were like me, and just worked my butt off, but been at a pretty good school, I -- you know, I wonder. I used to wonder. Now I think it's all coming together. I've got quite a number of friends from going to Swarthmore, most of them are people of color. But not all. I've reconnected with some people, recently, from all of these places. And it's funny because you, you know, at the end of the day, we're all just -- we were all just kids, we were all just teenagers and we were all trying out these roles that the adult world seems to have prescribed, and seeing which one of those fit for us. You know, I haven't run into anybody that I considered an enemy back in the day. I'd be really interested in seeing how those conversations go. I've got one friend who -- from middle school. We did not get along well in the beginning, at all. And it took me a long time to figure out that he was dealing with some stuff at home, and felt -- And the reason he always annoyed me was because I liked having my space, and he wanted to be my brother, you know, in a spiritual sense. And, like, we did that thing that boys do, where you have to fight to become friends, sometimes. But, like, we're pretty good friends now. You know? Like-- I think the strangest friendship from all of that, that time was probably my friends in France. I did a two-year exchange, where he came to -- he came to my boarding school for two weeks, and then I went to his house in Paris for two weeks. And, you know, that turned into me going to his wedding in Corsica in 2009, and we just, we f-- we stay in touch, we, we text every so often, and emails every so often, and talk about French politics, or American politics, or what it means to grow up in, just, the different, you know, culture, immigration. Yeah so, those are some of the people I've stuck with. Or who have stuck around on different levels. But then you've got your superstars. Like -- and they're almost always people who hated the school the way I did,

which is why I say I'm not a bust. It just took me the long road. You know, I've got one friend who ended up becoming an environmental lawyer, and she took a year off from this, from the boarding school. Because she was like, "I'm done with this, I hate this school, I hate these people." You know, White woman who grew up in Upstate New York. Like, Westchester County. Ended up at the boarding school, I forget how, but she never liked it, we never liked it. We hung out a lot as, like, the weirdos. But I was always the guy that had a lot of different friends, and never hung out with people that people expected me to hang out with. Because, between going to school in Canarsie, and then going to school on the Upper East Side, I wasn't afraid to talk to anybody. You know, and growing up the way I grew up. I wasn't afraid of anybody. You know? I, I think it's, I think part of what I may have -- to answer that question that I posed to myself earlier -- that other people don't? Black people who grew up in this country and have generations in this country? I would go home every summer and see a country run by Black people. And that? It's a different kind of empowering. To go to your -- to go to the country and see, yes, the queen is on the money. But so are, you know, Black prime ministers, and Black, you know, secretaries of -- or ministers of foreign affairs, and you know. Authors, and figures who play prominently in the development of the Caribbean as, as a -- and the West Indies as an entity, as a collective entity. Like, you don't realize it, but that stuff is powerful. My other superstar friend is currently a lawyer in Miami. She grew up in Harlem. We went to Swarthmore together for two years. She left after her junior year to have a kid, came back for sn-- no. She left after sophomore year to have the kid. Took a year off, finished her last two years with the kid, went straight into grad school for -- went into Penn Law with a two-year-old, got through in three years. Like, I don't know how she did this. I, I -- and this is why I say women are stronger than men. Like, this is, that's amazing to me. Like, it didn't occur to her that this was going to be hard, it just needed to be done. So she did it. And then decided she hated law. And then found her way back to it. But the whole point of all of this is to meet different types of people, right?

GOLDBERG: Well, I wondering, I was -- do you think spending time on the Upper East Side

made you look at your own neighborhood differently? And if so, like, how do you think it changed your idea of home and your neighborhood?

PRICE: I can remember being a kid and thinking, "Well, if we're so upset with management, why don't we just get together and buy the building?" I didn't know what a co-op was. I didn't know -- I don't know if I knew that that was a thing, or if that was just my intuition. But turns out it was a thing. [laughter] I work for an organization that made that thing happen for many, many, many people around the city. So, on some level, I always, I guess, believed in a certain sense of empowerment. What I remember most, in terms of differences between my neighborhood and other people's neighborhoods, were that I never felt they would be safe in my neighborhood. And it wasn't because my neighborhood was unsafe, it was because it was unsafe for them. I knew that a White person coming through my neighborhood was not going to get treated well. (Terry the bum.) In the '80s, before Dinkins -- I love that Tribe lyric, "Mr. Dinkins, will you please be my mayor? You'll be doing us a very big favor." And I have to wonder how that went. He did a lot of stuff that Giuliani took credit for. A lot of the policing stuff that happened, and the safety numbers going up, or the crime numbers going down, were policies put in effect by Dinkins. That Giuliani ended up getting credit for. And I don't think a lot of people really understand that. Now, if you look at policy, you need to understand that it takes a while for things to kick in. It's just how it is. Which is why Bill Clinton was saying, "Look, he's done all the right stuff, Obama's doing all the right stuff. I promise you: you elect him for the next four years, you will feel it." And we did. But it takes a while to turn around an economy, right? It takes a while to turn around a policy decision. Sorry. So, the one -- one thing I remember is that, feeling they wouldn't be safe in my neighborhood. Now, my brother, who ended up following me to some of these types of schools, never was that aware. And so he would have people come over and spend the night, and then be confused when they caught static on the street the next day. And we'd all just look at him, like, "Come on, dude. Like, do you not understand the world you're in?" Like-- But I guess he just didn't. But the other thing I was going to say is, in terms of policy: I think I became aware

relatively young -- at a relatively young age, if not consciously, that they were getting resources we weren't. And that, if we got those resources, they would want us to leave. And I knew that because my grandparents, my mother's parents, were living in Harlem. And I was seeing what was happening in Harlem. Harlem was really run down when I was a kid. I remember going to watch a -- the Fab Five at my, m-- for -- during the NCAA tournament at my grandparents' house after church one Sunday. If you don't know who the Fab Five were, they were five freshmen from the University of Michigan, who ushered in the baggy shorts era of basketball. They were all freshmen and, in their first year together, they almost won the whole damn tournament. As five freshman starters. Like, wasn't supposed to happen. Four of them went pro, the fifth one should have been -- got robbed. But they were a cultural touchstone -- touchstone moment for a lot of people. Because they were unabashedly Black. Like, "We're gonna wear our shorts baggy, we're gonna listen to hip-hop music, gonna do a little bit of dancing on the floor, we're not going to be afraid to have some flair, as we play our basketball." It was kind of like when the ABA came around and put the NBA to shame, except on the college level, 20 years later. And, like, I was a Georgetown Hoyas fan, I think, before that, partly because I'm a New York City boy, and Patrick Ewing went to Georgetown. But also because Georgetown had a Black head coach, and had a lot of Black players and, like, it was the Big East and it was rough-and-tumble basketball, and it was like, "Yes. That's our team." No one told me this. I had no conversations with people about these things, it just was what it was. But to the point about resources. I remember being in Harlem and in the '90s, the early '90s. Because the, the Fab Five was, like '93, Ninety-two, '93, maybe even '94? And Harlem was really run down. And then I started seeing -- it wasn't just people moving in, it was buildings getting renovated. And then seeing who was moving in afterwards. You know? And then, five years later, I would go up to Harlem and it was a completely different scene. So it was like, on some level, I had -- already knew. And that had been happening since, it had been happening really slowly since the mid-'80s. And on some p-- on some level, I already knew. Like, "OK, if you brought these resources into our neighborhoods, they would want to take our

neighborhoods from us." I don't remember where I first heard the -- the phrases, "white flight" and "gentrification." But I heard them early. You know? Because part of the dream was always, like, "Can we buy a brownstone in Brooklyn?" Well, why are these brownstones available? Because there used to be White people living in them, and they all ran away. Flip side of that, you know? People get pushed out, and the neighborhood's become more valuable so people get pushed out. I don't know how I figured that out, but relatively early on, I'll say around 10 or 12, I had figured that out. So when I was in those neighborhoods, I was like, "It would be great if we could get our neighborhoods here. But I don't know how we're going to do that and then be able to keep our neighborhoods." I used to not like *The Cosby Show*. I still kind of don't. I watched it because it was a Black man on Amer-- on TV, and you support every Black show you can at that point. I feel like I'm being very pro-Black today. I'm usually not this -- this, this -- biased, I'll say. (I studied opera, y'all; I can sing stuff. Speak many languages; not many, but a few.) No, but-- I hated *The Cosby Show* because it didn't feel like my Brooklyn. I often refer to him, frankly, as, "the Philadelphia Negro." Like, there's something uppity about everything. And then when he went off and started talking about how Black people need to do this and that and the next, and I was like, "Have you lived in a Black community in the last 30 years? Like, who are you to judge people?"

GOLDBERG: How did your Brooklyn feel?

PRICE: It was grittier. I used to say, I used to hate-- My Brooklyn felt like this: Terry the bum. In the '80s, the building across the street from us -- was next door to a school -- was abandoned. I'm talking, like, four or five-story building, must be at least 40 units in the building; completely abandoned. We knew that Terry the bum lived in the abandoned building. Terry the bum was this dude who'd walk around the neighborhood, and he was -- I think he was a crackhead, but he could have been a heroin addict. But I think he was a crackhead because the heroin addicts were different. They did "the nod." I don't know if you've ever seen a "heron nod," or know what a "heron nod" is, but, like, right. OK. So, you know, we used to see that in the

neighborhood constantly. And you just kind of went, "We don't want to be that." No, we'd see crack vials on the street and try to say, OK, be careful when we play, not to fall. Because if that gets in our system, we'll be -- we'd be screwed. We didn't know how the shit worked, you know? We should have been thinking about AIDS on that level. We kind of were doing that, too. But, um, it was -- it was -- but it wasn't, it was trouble around us, but it wasn't trouble for us. If that makes sense. I know I used to complain that they cleaned up Times Square before I got to enjoy the grittiness of it as a young boy. [laughter] Right? Like, "Come on, let me have my chance to enjoy, you know, whatever wildness it was supposed to be before you decided to clean it all up. OK, fine. It's cleaned up." I remember going to Times Square, and there were no fences, there were no gates. Same thing with the West Indian Day Parade. There didn't used to be gates every day, every parade. People used to be able to get back and forth between the sidewalk and the street smoothly. It was fine. It wasn't -- yeah, you'd smell somebody smoking whatever, but, like, the police weren't going to mess with it; it was our day. There was a lot more sense of -- I think there was a much greater sense of empowerment in the community. And because of that empowerment, it felt safer. It felt self-policed. Now it feels like a bunch of outsiders trying to tell us how to live our lives. At least, that's how I feel about it. I mean, I understand. My, my mother does things differently. If we -- if I'm, if we're walking down the street late at night, for whatever reason, and she sees the cops, she says hi. I just try to keep it moving. I don't want to be perceived as some kind of a problem. You know? I tolerate their presence, is probably the very best way to put it. But then every once in a while, I'll see them in my building, doing verticals. Just going up the stairs to do whatever. I didn't feel great about that, either, but I kind of let it ride. Until the Ramarley Graham situation, and my man gets shot in his own building, coming out his own apartment, and I'm just kind of like, "Yeah. See? No." Now, one of my very best friends in life right now is a guy who calls himself a mountain billy. He's from Colorado, sorry, Colo-RAH-do. And his dream right now is to get -- he has a, he has a carrying permit, he has a concealed carry permit. And his goal, right now, is to get a permit so that he can -- he can

manufacture and distribute guns. And I'm like, "Nah, bro. That doesn't work for me." Now, do I believe that everybody should have the right to the gun? Yes. I am not -- I don't consider myself a super-radical person. But I can understand what, you know, the Black Panthers were getting at, I can understand what early Malcolm X was getting at, like, I can understand-- if you feel like the entire government is against you-- the need to, as a community, protect yourself. I think the problem that we're having today is, the community isn't a community to protect itself, but we still don't trust the authorities to do it for us, either. So where does that leave people? You know, they're doing a great job of destroying the sense of community by -- I say, "they," like this is a plan. I don't know that it is. Maybe it is. I'm not those ultra-lefties in the housing movement who hate all landlords. But I was having a conversation with somebody earlier, about how, you know, it's one thing to be pushing people out of their apartments, but we forget that a lot of this starts with storefronts. And cost of living is going up because grocery stores are coming in and doing whatever. Sure, you know, you're getting your Whole Foods, or your Rite Aid, or whatever. But the other side of that is: There's a lot of storefront churches, and the churches are starting to go. So where do you -- what do you do when the community doesn't have a church to go to? I'm not a big church person anymore, but I spent a lot of time in church as a kid. You know, when your-- when your holy spaces are-- When your religious spaces are being taken, so the community can't congregate, that's a blow at one of the, the sources of mortar for the community. So, now what? So, to me, that's kind of -- at least a huge part of the problem. The community's not a community anymore, and we still don't trust the authorities to do whatever. Now, I started seeing these commercials on TV that are talking about trying to get people to talk to the police, and be more involved, and-- And I advocate, to my tenants, that if they really feel like they have an issue in their building, they should talk to the community council in their dis-- in their police district. You know? Like, I think the structures can work if we put in the energy to hold them accountable. But then, the other side of that is having the energy to hold them accountable. People are working two and three jobs just to make it. Just to survive.

You know, I talk all the time about how what I do, as a tenant organizer, requires an immense, and intense -- an immense amount, and an intense level of emotional energy. You know? I have that, in part because I have no kids, I have no girlfriend, I have no boyfriend. You know? Like, I don't -- my family's relatively cool. Or was until recently, so I haven't necessarily had that kind of, like, stress at home. Like, I can pour that energy into that. But I only have so much. What do you do when you're taking care of your parents, and your kids, and your spouse or partner? You know, and you're trying to make sure you do stuff to make sure that you have a life. Do you really have time to be part of a tenant union? Do you really have time to make sure that you're doing the groundwork, or are you able to make the time to make sure you're doing the groundwork to, to maintain the community, you know? I was -- so this book, *Root Shock*, by Mindy Fullilove: The analogy she uses is, if you pull up a tree by its roots and replant it, you think it's fine. But what you don't realize is that there's all these little strands coming off the root. It's like when you get a carrot, the carrot is, itself, a root. But there's always some little things dangling off it. That's how the nutrients get to the main root. Right? So if you rip out a tree from the roots and replant it, all those little things, all those little roots coming off the main root? Those are what's important, those are what, actually, allows the nutrient to get into the roots, it's like having a mouth with no teeth. You can't -- you can't do what you need to do to get the nutrients into your body and break -- you know, and break them down beforehand. So, that's what we're losing. You know, we're -- we're slowly losing the little bits of the roots that, that help the nutrients get to the main root. Now, I'm thinking it's ostensibly possible for new people who are coming in to replace those, if they're so inclined. But they have to also know how to be connected to the main root, and what type of nutrients to bring to the root; to get to the tree. And, for various reasons, they're not necessarily able to do that work, either. Either they're not inclined, or they're intimidated. And so, you've got a community that isn't incorporated. It's not an actual body social -- or a body politic.

GOLDBERG: How do you think gentrification and policing relate to each other? Can you



talk about that?

PRICE: So, there are some studies that have been done that say that, if you actually want to predict the best chance of what's going to be gentrified next, you look at the policing and the security in the neighborhood. Which I found interesting, because the argument I made to somebody at one point was, "So, if that's the case, what you're telling me is, some developer can decide to get cozy to a politician, give them some money -- not even have buildings in the neighborhood -- and just say, 'We just want you to make sure that your neighborhood is safe.'" Seemingly altruistic, maybe there's no ulterior motive behind it. Maybe they honestly want that, and they bring the resources into the neighborhood, as I mentioned before, to make the neighborhood safe-- or safer. And then somebody goes, "Hey, the neighborhood is safer. I'm going to buy a couple buildings and try to rent them out. Oh, these people are about to leave, and the -- I can get these, you know, these apartments up to market rate when we get these people out." And maybe you do it with a good conscience. "Hey, listen, I'll give you a buyout for way more than you expect to live, you know, for rent for the next however many years. You can go somewhere and be comfortable, get your nursing home, whatever it is. This isn't a good place for you to be any more. You've been here 30 years, 40 years. You're not able to get up the stairs, there's no elevator." Could be completely altruistic, right? And they go. And you bring in some new people, who are looking for rent that's just lower than the last place they were trying to be. I tell people all the time, "The people who you look at with the evil eye, as gentrifiers, have all been displaced already. You've got to keep that in perspective. Or, many of them have. So, they come in. And then somebody else is walking around the neighborhood and goes, "Oh, well, if they're here it must be safer." So they move in, too. And then it just kind of comes in on itself. And other people start realizing they can get higher rents, and they start buying things out. You know, that's basically what they say the cycle is, or what it seems to be that the cycle is. So it's this weird thing, where a policy decision to make a neighborhood safer could actually contribute to the neighborhood's-- could actually contribute to the community's demise. I say all the time, "People keep talking as if

economic development and community development are the same thing, and they're not. One is monetary, and the other is social." Bed-Stuy will always be Bed-Stuy. Crown Heights will almost always be Crown Heights. But -- in terms of the name of the neighborhood, let's say. But who is Bed-Stuy? Who is Crown Heights? Different thing altogether.

GOLDBERG: Yeah. I mean, when you think about growing up here, and -- and now, what are the places and who are the people that you think of, when you think of the community as you're defining it?

PRICE: I -- so, I think part of the reason I got this job is because I look like the neighborhood. Or, I look like what the neighborhood has been. You know: I've got locks, I've got this beard. I understand where I come from, culturally, I understand what this country is, culturally, because I went to those schools, too. So, I can, you know, I can talk to the old-timers who've been here 20, 30 years from the West Indies. I can talk to the rabbis and the Hasids and the other Jews in the neighborhood, because I don't have an innate antipathy to them that a lot of other people in the neighborhood tend to. But because I went to these schools, I can also talk to -- and because I've lived in other places, I can also talk to the, the kids who went to the fancy colleges. Or just the -- the kids who came from working-class White America. Like -- because I've seen enough to get it. You know? It's, at the end of the day, they've -- I keep saying "they;" The Man, The Man! Capital-t, capital-m. No. But at the end of the day, you know, this -- this -- this country, and the people who have profited o-- in this country, have often thrived off people being divided. And fighting against each other. Certainly in the Black community, definitely in working-class communities as a whole. But the community that I grew up with was a West Indian community. Which, in and of itself-- for the record-- is kind of fascinating because, if you go to the Islands, you will hear so many different jokes, in Barbados about Trinidad, or Guyana, or Jamaica. And you come here, and all of these people are living together. [laughter] Because they have to. And every once in a while, some of that inter-island politics rears its head. It's like, "Oh, you think you're better than me because--" Or, "Oh, you think you know such-and-

such because--” Or, “Oh, you’re so stubborn because--” Or, you know, not in a positive way, like-- But, you know, traditionally speaking, this neighborhood was -- or has been, in my mind -- West Indians -- West Indian immigrants, their first-generation kids, and then you’ve got your Hasids, Hasidim. And, for the most part, that was the neighborhood. As I said at the ti-- off top, like, in the ’90s, we started getting some more Haitians, a sprinkling of -- of Latinos, and a fair number of Africans moving into the neighborhood. So, like, it’s cool to me, now, to walk around and, every once in a while, see a mosque. I’m like, “Oh. All right,” you know. If you know where you’re going, you’ll -- you’ll see some Nigerians, you’ll see some Senegalese, you’ll see some -- you know. And it’s -- some Ivoirians. And, for me, that’s what the community -- I don’t want to say, “was,” because that seems a little bit too final, but, “has been.” Hopefully we’ll be able to figure out a way to maintain. But -- it’s also a lot of people who put in a lot of work to make this community their own, and are, in my mind, having the rug pulled out from under them after they’ve invested so much in trying to make it their own. You know, I’ve got friends who are West Indians, who bought some of these brownstones around here. Like, that’s a beautiful thing. That was the dream for a lot of people, you know; buy a house up here, have a house back on the Island of your own, good. And, for various reasons -- a lot of them economic, a lot of them otherwise structural -- like, that’s become harder and harder to do, and more and more impossible. And maybe the dream wasn’t all that ma-- attainable in the first place, I don’t know. Haven’t done that study. That’s what the community was to me. Or, has been to me.

GOLDBERG: What -- do you feel safe here, and what does feeling safe mean to you? What does -- what do you think of, when you think of safety?

PRICE: Comfort walking down the street, lack of scrutiny. I used to tell people all the time, you know: I go to the Upper East Side, and people look at me assuming I’m the danger, and I look at them, going, “No, you’re the danger. I’m, I’m the alien here. I’m the one who has no friends up here.” Like, I’m the one in trouble if this doesn’t, if you decided to cause a problem. So I keep my head low, and I just keep walking. I always felt like I was being watched in the Upper East Side; in Concord, New Hampshire. Less so at

Swarthmore; sometimes it felt like people were assuming I was a threat, sometimes it just felt like I was out of place. I think I'm at the point, now, where I feel as if I've learned to be comfortable being unique. I've learned to be comfortable being out of place. Because I can bring you into my space in the moment, as necessary. And I was a really shy kid, too. That took me a really long time to do. But I don't feel like I can walk into my own apartment building, now, if there are police officers standing in front, without feeling a certain level of scrutiny. "Do I belong here? What am I doing here? How long am I staying there?" And even if it's not meant with a certain hostility, it's still the fact that I have to be assessed in my own building, walking down the street that I, you know, basically grew up on. You know, I was never one to really do a whole lot of drinking, but I'm definitely always cautious to -- it plays out in different ways, too, you know? Like, I -- part of it is that I'm an introvert, but part of it is that I've just trained myself to be very measured. Because I never know what I'm going to deal with, and I don't ever want to seem as if I'm trying to come off as confrontational or aggressive. And so I've learned to have a certain level of self-control that can be really stressful at times, but I look at that as, like -- not "like." I look at it as a life-preserving measure. Same thing as the khaki, and the vest, and the -- and the blazers, and the ties. But I'm still going to wear my hair the way I want and I'm still going to keep my beard as -- as unkempt as I choose to. Because I don't want to have to feel like I'm fully conforming to something, I need to have some kind of freedom. But, in a lot of ways, it comes down to just the assumption of belonging, I guess. Like, "I belong here. These are my streets. I know these streets. I know the history of these streets. I know what I want the future of these streets to be. I am invested in this community. I don't care if you mean good or ill, I'm not going to take kindly to some outsider coming in and telling me how things should go. And let's be clear, the police are outsiders. Like, by definition they are not supposed to be policing the neighborhoods they live in. So, how well do you know my 'hood? How well do you know the people of my 'hood? To talk to me, or to look at us, and judge who belongs and who doesn't? What -- on what basis are you making your assumptions? And what are your assumptions about the people in

the neighborhood? Because just because you assume that I belong here, doesn't mean that you assume good things about me. I still got this hair and this beard, right? I was talking to someone about this new coffee shop on Ocean Avenue. At the very top of their chalkboard, they've got this thing saying that they're -- "For an extra \$2.50, you can get a shot of CBD" in your tea, or in your drink. I'm like, "Wow. You can just put a shot of weed in your drink. Y'all can just sell that. Like, if I tried to market that as part of an ital spot, or just a health food-whatever, like, the amount of crap I would get. Or, would imagine having to think about getting. And y'all just do that." Like, that -- that freedom; that's the other part of it, just the freedom. You know? And it -- it's funny to me when people move into Crown Heights and are like, "Yeah, I feel the way -- I don't feel like I can be free walking the streets" -- I'm like, "Welcome to our world. That's how we feel when we walk anywhere outside of our neighborhoods. That's how we're feeling now, walking in our neighborhoods." Like, we're not free. The ability to play. Be that the dozens, be that just running down the streets, being foolish, playing tag, be that teenagers just being recklessly foolish on the street; like, that's part of the freedom. That's part of the belonging. You know? It's the difference between a habitat and a home, I guess. I've been listening to a lot of Mos Def recently; he has this great song called "Habitat," on the *Black on Both Sides* album. Where he actually, he starts by going through a dictionary definition of habitat. [laughter] And then just starts talking about it for a while, and then ends up talking about Brooklyn. But it's, it's all of those things to me. You know, I, I feel like we used to have some freedoms, and we've lost some of those. You know? The, the fences on the West Indian Day parade, and being able to walk into my apartment without feeling like I have to be watched, going to my door. And even that assumption of belonging. Because people are coming into the neighborhood, like, "Well -- well, I live here. So you can't tell me that I don't belong here, because I try to contribute." And I'm like, "No. Dude." I, I have people in my -- in my -- I have people in Crown Heights Tenant Union who try to push back on me on some, like, "Well, you've only been here for, like, a year." And I'm like, "And you've lived here for seven years, and I've lived here for 35. Do you really want to get into

this? Like, do you really want to go here? Because you're not going to win. You know? I can beat you on the, the cultural test, I can beat you on the historical test, I can beat you on the, on the philosophical test, and I can beat you on the intellectual test. Do you really want to go here?" I read about this all day, I live this. This is, this is my skin and my walk define me. You, you can't come out here and try to tell me how things should be.

GOLDBERG: Speaking of history, I realize I didn't ask you about the, quote-unquote, "riots."

PRICE: Yeah. That happened in '91, I was 11. And I had already been going to the school on the Upper East Side for -- had I? I used to have to pass that area every day. Because I would walk up, or take a dollar cab up, Utica Avenue to get to the 4 train. Because I took the 4 train up the, up to the Upper East Side. And so that happened in August, and I remember, basically, not being able to go up that way for a couple of weeks, really. But school wasn't in session yet, so it was cool. But then once school got into session, I would drive past the place where he got hit every day. I can still see the -- I can still see the memorial in my, in my head. Now it's fenced off for garbage, or something, but I can still see the memorials that people-- And that was the first time, I think, I'd properly seen a memorial. They became a lot more commonplace after that, just on different spots and sidewalks, with people putting up candles and flowers because somebody got hit by a car, or killed, or whatever it was. But -- but I remember walking past it-- and somebody had done, like, a mural of him-- and thinking, "So, that kid was younger than me." And I didn't have the full story, and I didn't, you know. I just understood the fallout more than anything. But, I do remember thinking, "So, if I got hit by a car here, somebody might just leave me to die?" Which is a hell of a thought to have when you're 11. I can remember, like -- I can remember, at one point, taking a shower and just crying in the shower because I think that was about the moment where I fully realized what death was. And, like, I imagined being dead. And, like, the totality of it. You know? The not breathing, the not s-- the nothingness, just the-- And the other thing I remember thinking is, like, "What would I be thinking if I had to lie there? What was that kid thinking when he lay there?" You know, he's lying

in the street, and he probably wants his mom or whoever. And that was part of my break with religion. Because to justify something like that on religious grounds just seemed to me inhumane, I guess. Although it seems, to me, that inhumanity is sometimes some of the most human things we do. But I wasn't really around to see any of the reconciliations that people talk about. I saw a couple movies, recently, that were made around the time, discussing the reconciliation. One was: It had Howie Mandel and Mario Van Peebles in it, and Howie Mandel's playing a rabbi in the neighborhood, and Mario Van Peebles is playing a community activist. And they get these kids to come together -- Jewish kids and Black kids -- to come together to dance to hip-hop, and do routines, or something like that. And it's -- there's all this stuff going on because they can't make sense of each other's worlds, and they're not mature enough to understand the need to ask questions, and proceed slowly, they're just kind of like, "Why doesn't it work the way it works for me? What's up?" Like, "Why don't you just do this?" And it's funny, thinking about that particular movie now, because I remember feeling that way, going to school, and realizing I could not talk through any of this stuff with the people I was going to school with. Like, they just weren't going to get it. And I'd been there a year-- at that point-- so, like, I knew them. But it just didn't, didn't click.

GOLDBERG: Do you think, as a child, you understood the reaction by adults? Did you--?

Like, was there -- was there -- what were the feelings that are, what were in the air, with the adults that you knew?

PRICE: There was a lot of self-justified anger. There was a lot of -- I mean, anger almost always comes with a certain amount of self-justification, right? There's always a sense of, like, "Yo." Like, "I'm -- I have the right to feel this way, you can't tell me I'm wrong to feel this way." You know, you can't -- you can't get to angry without that kind of being a part of the component. I was always a different kind of kid. I was cool with people being angry. I wasn't cool with some of the stuff people were saying in their anger. I was definitely not cool with the retaliation aspect of it. I was like, "Wait." I remember when I -- I think his name was Rosenbaum, got yanked off the bridge and beat. I was

like-- Honestly, my reaction was, as the same kid who grew up reading all of these comic books about Black history, and had a mother who tried to make it a point, of saying, "OK, so this is where you come from, and -- and we are," you know. I mean, my name is Carlyle. Like, that is not a name you give to a child you expect to be dumb. Like, you know? I, I grew up going to new classrooms every couple of years, and having to explain my name all over again. "What's your name, little boy?" "Charles." "What's your name, little boy?" "Eddie." "What's your name, little boy?" "Carlyle." "What?" "Carlyle." "Oh, with an S?" "No, with a Y." "So Y-S-L--" "No. C-A-R-L-Y-L-E." "Huh. OK." "What's your name?" "David." Like, [laughter] and then people want to call me Carl. I'm like, "I'm not a Carl." A couple people tried to call me Lyle. But I don't think I can even say it right, to make it sound good to myself. And there's no real, like, nickname for that. Like-- But my point is, in terms of the anger; I understood people being angry, I understood people wanting to react. But part of this is also having, like, family members who are also prone to blow up on people. I also knew that wasn't my way, and wasn't the best way to handle anything. And it did not help us, as Black people in this country. Because it fed into all of these other stereotypes. Because the other thing that happened around that time was the Central Park Five. And realizing, a couple years later, that they got railroaded scared the crap out of me. I'm like, "If I'm just hanging out in the park, that's it?" Because I used to just hang out in the park. Because-- That's the other thing: In New York City, you're a teenager, where do you go? What's your s-- what's your space? You know? And that gets me back to the freedom to play on the street. Like -- and I don't mean play, like, in terms of games, or sports, or whatever. Just, like, just acting the fool. Like, you know, I used to get really upset at how loud kids would be on the bus or the train. But at some point I started to get it. You know? They can't do this at home, and where else are they going to be able to cut up, outside of school, but be friends? Like-- You know. Is it inconsiderate? Hell yes. Do I understand it? Sure. I can bear it for two hours out of the day. I can make sure not to be on the trains for those two hours of the day, or the buses for those two hours of the day. I can try to make that happen, or just walk,



whatever. But I get it. You know? That's all they were really trying to do. And they were locked up for 20 years, behind something that was provably wrong. Our current president saying, like, "They should get the death penalty." The entire country talking about super-predators, and talking about kids who look like me, like we were animals. Like, I have put a lot of work into being disciplined and controlled. But the price of that has been-- and I think this might be a price for the community-- when you're so focused on avoiding punishment, you're not willing to take the risk to do something great. And so we haven't put the energy into investing in our communities that maybe we could have. You know? We're so focused on avoiding backlash, and on assuming we're going to hear a no, that we don't know, necessarily, how to get to yeses. We're so comfortable dealing with the thorn in our paw, so to speak, of, you know, be it racism, or classism, or poverty, or horrible education systems. You're just the product of all three of those. Or sexism, or homophobia, that we don't-- And the homophobia is a -- is -- is really crazy because Black churches are now trying to come to terms with that, and they don't know how. Because, when you're tak-- when your power is taken away over the course of centuries, the last thing you can be is a -- a weak man. And so, to be a gay man in the Black church is like-- [laughter] You know? I -- I -- you know. I have friends who, I wonder how they deal with it. Because I'm just like-- It's tough, it's tough. But my point is, when you're -- when you hear no, or learn to expect no all the time, or when you're trying to control yourself and not seem like you're trying to step out of line-- right? -- it's easy to fall into the trap of not trying to do things. Conversely, I know I feel like I'm always walking this line, where -- I got stopped the other day. I was on a select bus, I asked the driver if he could wait five seconds, 10 seconds, for me to get the ticket. Because, you know, you've got to push the button, you've got to put in your card, you've got to wait for the thing to come out, you've got to get your card and get on the bus. Like, can you wait 10 seconds? He's like, "No, I'm running late, just get on the bus." So I get on the bus. I get off at the next stop for the train. In France, they're called controllers -- are there. They let the four people ahead of me go. They ask me for my ticket. They don't ask any of the four of them. They ask me for my

ticket. "I don't have it, the driver told me just to get on." "Well, that's not acceptable." "Ask him, he's right here." "No, the driver's busy." "I know. That's why he told me to just get on." "Oh, so you want to be difficult? Why are you being difficult?" "I'm explaining a situation to you, and now I'm being difficult. You start writing out the ticket, you ask me, 'Is there a phone number you would like me to give -- is there a phone number you would like to give us?' 'No. I would not like to give you a phone number.'" Now I'm "being uncooperative." I'm like, "No, I'm not being uncooperative. You asked me a question, I gave you the answer. Wait, you're asking me my race? Is that a question that you need to have answered?" "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, some of these are in red, like they're mandatory, and some of these are in black, like they're not. Like, that's in black. Do I have to answer that question?" "OK, fine." And just start marking off everything, like I'm-- And I'm like-- And this is part of the problem, I think, with being a person of color in America as a whole. You start to assert your rights, and people think that you're being a jackass, or you're being difficult, or you're being uncooperative. Even though they look like you. It becomes about the system, and not about the person, and the empathy of it. Because they're, they'll say, "I'm just trying to do my job," and it's like, "Well, I understand that, but that doesn't mean that the system is right." The system lacks empathy. The system is built to lack empathy. The system is built not to be flexible enough to-- to accommodate certain situations. "The dude told me to get on the bus. If you would take five seconds to ask him, he will tell you so. Instead, you're trying to get \$100 out of me. Damn right I'm going to fight it. I did nothing wrong. I tried to do the right thing, and was told to go ahead and skip it. How is that my fault? You have the bus number I was on. Find the dude. If he doesn't remember, that's not my problem. You're going to make it my problem, but it shouldn't be. Now I'm going to be difficult. Now I'm going to be uncooperative." [laughter] I completely got away from your question, I'm sorry. I don't even remember what it was. I was doing so well, in my long-winded fashion. [laughter]

GOLDBERG: Well, we should probably wrap that up, I think. [laughter] Is there anything you want to talk about that you haven't mentioned yet?

PRICE: I haven't talked about it because it didn't happen in New York City, Brooklyn, Crown Heights. But, the reason I left Albany was because I was starting to date somebody who got drunk one night, and accused me of flirting with a bartender, and flew off the handle. And the cops in Albany told me to go home. I'm like, "But she doesn't have keys, she doesn't have whatever." "Take a walk." In that, I'm-going-to-mess-you-up-and-make-sure-you-get-locked-up "take a walk" kind of way. Because in Albany, there's not a whole lot to do. So those guys take their jobs too seriously. Welcome to the prison-industrial complex. So I went home. I had just signed the lease for the apartment a couple months before, the plan was to stay there for a year. I had just finished doing six or seven months, working in the state assembly for the assemblyman for Crown Heights, and for the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus. You know, I'd done a couple interviews. Turns out that I actually did get a job offer from someone who's now a state senator. But I went home. Went to sleep. Woke up to said girl punching her way through the mesh screen, trying to grab my head through the window. I'm like, "What the hell are you doing?" "You locked me out, what the F is wrong with you, why'd you lock me out?" Very long story short, she came in -- she got in, she started going for the knife. I held her and tried to get her to calm down. She was making so much noise, the police came in. Arrested me, even though she broke into my apartment. Which meant I was locked up when I got the job offer, so I couldn't accept it. And then had to wait a year for trial. And then was effectively -- I had a lot of people try to tell me that I should just plead guilty-- do the community service or whatever, for resisting arrest, and be done with it-- including my family. Which, if I'm honest, I still don't know how to feel about. Like, I get the calculated decision, but at the end of the day, I felt like I wanted to either go into a career, at that time, in politics or education, and they had my fingerprints on file, which basically meant I couldn't do either. So if you're going to take my clean record from me, you're going to have to take it. I'm not going to give it to you. So we went to trial, and I won; not guilty. Unfortunately, in New York, they don't expunge your record. They just seal them. So there is a record that something happened. Frankly, I don't care, because I

talk about it anyway. Because the entire situation was screwed up. I had a lawyer who wanted me to plea, who convinced my parents that I should plea. I got arrested when I got my own apartment broken into. Like, can someone please explain that to me? I don't think this is atypical. When Black Lives Matter started a couple years later, I was very much on board. However, I was also very much still broken from the experience that that had, that I had just suffered through. It took me, easily, three years to recover from that. And that's not just the emotional part of it. The emotional part is the start. I kind of got after that over the first, maybe six, months after the actual trial was over. But then it was like, "Well, I just spent a year not really being able to get hired. So now I've got to figure out a way to get hired. Who's going to take me if they know that this is something that I went through? Who's going to give me the benefit of the doubt?" Because I was accused of domestic violence. And a lot of people who heard this story were like, "You be? Nah." I'm like, "Yeah, I know, 'nah.' But this is -- this is my life." Right? I grew up with, like, a dozen aunts. I would have to be insane. I mean, in-sane, to think that violence against women is okay. Like, there would have to be some things that went seriously wrong in my childhood. And I'm not saying it's impossible, because it's very possible. But I'm not that person. I guess the broader point I wanted to make is, one; I wanted to tell that story-- and get that on the record-- just because I think that happens to a lot of people. Where, you know, an officer's decision -- and, in my case, I would say, lack of thoughtfulness -- basically took away four years of my working life. Of allowing me to contribute to a world that I would really like to do a lot more to better. But I think the other major point I wanted to make is, that we tend to focus on our individual decisions, in terms of what we should and shouldn't do as the people who are being policed. Part of the problem is the policing. And by the policing, I'm referring to the training. But I'm also referring to the encouragement to actively use your empathy. Because I -- I'll, I'm unashamed to say that, when they separated us, I was pretty thankful because I didn't have to worry about somebody trying to stab me. And I just cried. And then I was truly shocked, when I was getting arrested. Because I'm like, "But she broke into my apartment," and then ended up staying in my

apartment-- rent-free, for months-- and I was supposed to pay that. I had to go to housing court in Albany to say, "Wait. I'm not allowed to go there. I have a restraining order against my own apartment." For the judge to say, "That doesn't make sense that you should be paying rent, then." He showed empathy. He showed common sense. But as I like to say, common sense is not all that common. People are too invested in the idea of the system working. We need to hold the systems accountable. It's one thing to say that we need to have our own alternative systems, policing ourselves. But in a world where the community is constantly changing, and so unable to reinforce its own networks, if we can't trust the system then we need to at least do our best to make sure that the system is working as it should. Because we can't create an alternative, and we don't trust what it is. It's on us to hold the system accountable. Because what happened to me shouldn't happen to anybody. And I know it happens to many, many people. And worse. You know, I'm lucky. I didn't die. I don't even mean that flippantly. Like, I didn't die. Turns out, in Albany-- by the way-- that jail is the same thing as the general population for prison. So the county jail is the prison. Other things that don't make sense. People are talking about shutting down Rikers, but all they want to do is put up more housing developments. And what's going to go up instead of Rikers? Prisons around the city? Let me know how that works out, because nobody's going to want them. Although I was just reading something, recently, that was talking about, "Are prisons obsolete?" It's always been about punishment in this country, it's always been about the industry of punishment, in this country. It's never actually been about rehabilitation. You'd like to think that we understand that now, but I don't know. Finito.

GOLDBERG: Thank you.

PRICE: Thank you.