BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

GUIDELINES FOR USE

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.
2. Every oral history relies on the memories, views and opinions of the narrator. Because of the personal nature of oral history, listeners may find some viewpoints or language of the

recorded participants to be objectionable. In keeping with its mission of preservation and unfettered access whenever possible, BHS presents these views as recorded.

3. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
4. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
5. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
    - Staton, Meredith and Staton, Lula, Oral history interview conducted by Walis Johnson, March 28, 2017, Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Brooklyn Movement Center, 2016.027.2.07; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Oral History Interview with Meredith and Lula Staton
Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Brooklyn Movement Center, 2016.027.2.07
Interview conducted by Walis Johnson at the Statons's home on March 28, 2017 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn

JOHNSON: Okay, so today is Tuesday, March 28th, 2017. My name is Walis Johnson. I am representing the Brooklyn Movement Center for the Voices of Crown Heights Oral History Project. I am in the home of Meredith Staton and his wife --

L. STATON: --Lula Staton.

JOHNSON: Lula Staton, and -- at 20 Hampton Place in Crown Heights. So, I'm going to ask you, can you, Meredith, introduce yourself? Give me your name, your full name, your age, and where you were born, and what you did for a living.

M. STATON: Okay. My name is Meredith Staton. I was born in 1938. I'm 79 years old. I've been living in this community for over 54 years. I originally came from Germantown, Pennsylvania. I moved to Harlem, and then I moved here to Crown Heights. I've been a resident here for all those years, and I was in the police department for over 40 years at the 77 Precinct.

JOHNSON: And what was your position there?

M. STATON: I was a captain.

JOHNSON: You were a captain of --

M. STATON: Auxiliary police.

JOHNSON: So, you were a captain of auxiliary police. And --

M. STATON: Yeah.

JOHNSON: -- yeah, amazing.

M. STATON: My badge.

JOHNSON: And what was your -- where were you born?

M. STATON: Germantown, Pennsylvania.

JOHNSON: Germantown, Pennsylvania, which is right outside of --

M. STATON: Philadelphia.

JOHNSON: Right.

M. STATON: It's actually a part of Philadelphia now.

JOHNSON: And so, let's just -- usually, the way we start these interviews is we begin in the past.

M. STATON: How far back you going?

JOHNSON: Well, it depends on you, right?

M. STATON: Well, I mean, are you going back to Crown Heights? Or are you going all the way back? [laughter]

JOHNSON: So, I can start all the way back, just so that people know more about you.

M. STATON: All right.

JOHNSON: And then, we can start moving toward where we are now. Does that make sense? So, what's your earliest memory?

M. STATON: Of Brooklyn?

JOHNSON: Of --

M. STATON: What? What do you want -- give me specifics.

JOHNSON: What's your earliest memory?

M. STATON: I was -- with my family, in Jenk-- who lived in Jenkintown at the time. My grandma, my great-grandmother, I remember them. I remember running around Division Street, which is a part of Jenkintown. Growing up in the area, I went to Germantown. I went to Pastoria, which is a school there. I moved to Harlem. I lived on 2645 8th Avenue, which is 141st Street and 8th Avenue. I went to school there. I went to Haaren High School, which is now part of John Jay. They -- it's part of John Jay. I moved here 54 years ago. I became active in the community, and I joined the police department. I joined -- I was part of the federal government. I was a carrier. I rose from the rank of a patrolman, all the way to captain, and I was going to go to a deputy inspector before I had my illness. And, you know, I had a stroke and I had to resign. But all that time, I lived here in the community. I saw a change from what it was to what it is now. We have gone through a tremendous change. And even people

who have moved in and moved out of the community -- it's become more integrated now. Some people are afraid of it being so integrated. The housing has changed. A lot of the housing here is torn down and built up-- some of the housing-- or very expensive. Some people feel they're being pushed out. Some people think they've been threatened to get out. Everybody has a different story or a different take on it. But basically, the neighborhood has changed. And people are coming into the community now that haven't lived in the community. And they feel that they're not as involved in the community as they should be.

JOHNSON: Can you tell me about Crown Heights, the year you moved to Crown Heights, and --

M. STATON: Oh, when I first moved here, 54 years ago --

L. STATON: In 1960. Was it that, 19-- [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- Sixty-two, '63?

L. STATON: [inaudible] '63 -- '6-- '63!

M. STATON: Sixty-three, that's correct.

L. STATON: Sixty-three, yeah.

M. STATON: At one time, Crown Heights was not divided. It was one Crown Heights. And then, after Mayor Koch became mayor, he divided the community into two boards; Community Board 8 and Community Board 9. We had a big march on that. We didn't want the community to be separated. But the powers-that-be decided to do what they do, and they divided the community in two parts: Crown Heights North and Crown Heights South. I'm in Crown Heights North, which means Eastern Parkway is the dividing line between north and south. It's also the dividing line between the precincts and the borough. You have two different boroughs that divide this community. And basically, that's what happened. We had a struggle. We lost that struggle, but we continue to -- involved and try to create a stronger community. Sometimes, we are successful, sometimes we have setbacks.

JOHNSON: Can you tell me a little bit about what the arguments were around splitting the community?

M. STATON: Well, some people felt that they wanted to control their own community. We felt-- "we" meaning the people in the area-- felt that we wanted to keep it the way it was. However, like I said, the powers-that-be divided the community for north and south. And it also split the boroughs between north and south. And so, Eastern Parkway became the dividing line. A lot of people felt that when you divide a community like that, it separates the feeling that people may have. A lot of people still think of it as one Crown Heights. Like, when you look at the news, they say Crown Heights. But they don't distinguish between north and south. They just say Crown Heights. I think of it as one Crown Heights, as one community. What affects one side of the community also affects the other side. And sometimes, there are different divisions within the community. The people in the southern side or the -- don't like a lot of the divisions that they have, especially when it comes to housing. There's a big fight over the housing project. We have a fight over here. On our own side, we talk about the proliferation of homeless shelters. We have over a hundr-- 1,001 -- 700 -- 1,700-some shelters in the community. And there are other communities that have zero. So, that's one of the arguments. We went before the judge and say, "Listen, it's all right to put shelters, but you should do it in a more humane -- and do it -- what we call fair share. We felt that we have done our fair share, and you shouldn't just keep dumping homeless in our community." So, that's one of the things we're struggling with now. I know the mayor feels that he's going to go forward with that, but I think we are trying to explain to him, "Okay, you want to do -- but let's do it in a fair way. Let's have fair share." It's like when they were doing the garbage collections or putting power plants in the community, or -- you have to do it within a fair share. Everybody should either have the fair share of the good -- as well as the bad.

JOHNSON: So, when -- what year was this, do you recall, when this [inaudible]?

M. STATON: Now that's 1968 -- oh, I think after Mayor Koch got in -- this is, I think, his second or third term he was running -- is when he divided the community from north to south.

JOHNSON: I think that was in the '70s, Mayor Koch was --

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah.

M. STATON: That's why I said it was either -- second or third term. I don't -- can't remember exactly what year it was. But --

JOHNSON: Right, because Dinkins took over from him after --

M. STATON: Yeah, well, that's -- it was already done by that time.

JOHNSON: Right. So, the community was divided. How do you think that affected people on this side?

M. STATON: Well, you know, it's not so much on our side -- whether it's on the southern side -- because they felt that they had lost some of the control of the community, because they thought they were making political hay-way -- to give the Jews a bit more control over Crown Heights South. I didn't -- I don't quite see it that way, because even though there's a lot of Jewish people in the community, we still had a lot of Blacks who are, who are running the community and the community board.

JOHNSON: And so, that happened, and how did you become so active in -- I mean, first off, how did you buy this house?

M. STATON: Well, I think I bought it from the last White folks that owned this house. I think --

L. STATON: [inaudible] sister and brother.

M. STATON: Yeah. We bought --

L. STATON: Yeah.

M. STATON: -- we bought the house from Kane Young, who was our representative. We bought the house. My wife and I had just gotten married.

L. STATON: And your mother.

M. STATON: Yeah, my mother --

L. STATON: Your mother was alive.

M. STATON: Mother was alive then. And we bought the house, and we've been living here ever since.

JOHNSON: And what was that like for you, to -- I mean, that -- you said that that was the last

White family --

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: -- on the block?

M. STATON: On the --

JOHNSON: Or in the vicinity?

M. STATON: Then, but now it's, like, 50 percent --

L. STATON: It's turning back over again.

M. STATON: [laughter] And it's already turned -- right, 50 percent is already White.

JOHNSON: So, how many White families lived in the neighborhood when you bought your --

M. STATON: We were the last one --

L. STATON: It was the last one to come in [inaudible]

M. STATON: —the last one.

JOHNSON: On the block?

M. STATON: On the block.

JOHNSON: Or in the neighborhood overall?

M. STATON: Well, in the neighborhood overall.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: But especially this block. However, now it's just the opposite. There's 50 percent Caucasian now. Some -- that's why some people say, oh, that they feel they're being pushed out. But I say to them, "You own the house, you don't have to move. You move because you want the money, and maybe you have other places you want to go. And so, you sold." The problem is that the way the prices are going -- say, when we first bought the house, it was, like, 20 grand. Today, it's over a million. So, it's -- becomes an economic -- how can you afford to stay in the community when the price has gone up like that, you know? The average income in this community is about 30, 35,000. You can't afford a house that's over a million dollars. It's -- becomes an economic engine that drives people to either move or sell.

JOHNSON: Tell me about the neighborhood when you first moved here.

M. STATON: It was like it is now; very quiet. This is a very quiet block, very non-- we did

have some crime problems. We have a -- projects a block or two away. We had some --

L. STATON: When we first moved, didn't have any crime. When we first moved, there was no crime. And we moved in, in six— three decades later -- the crime came later [inaudible] with the projects going.

M. STATON: Yeah, so --

L. STATON: It was very calm.

M. STATON: So -- because at one time, it was for veterans. The projects were for veterans who had served this country for a while. As they died out, other people moved in, and then we had -- started having crime and drugs and --

L. STATON: [inaudible] came in the '80s [inaudible] --

M. STATON: Right, so --

L. STATON: -- it sort of, you know, got bad.

M. STATON: So, then I joined the police department. I came under the civil defense program, which was where they allowed you to carry a weapon or whatever it was. So, after it became part of the police department, the police department said, "You can't carry any weapons." So, we had to either turn the guns in or keep them in the house or whatever it was, because they'd -- they didn't allow you to walk around armed, although outside of New York City— say, like in Westchester or Nassau— they're still armed. We're the only community that is discriminated against as an auxiliary. But that's a, that's a decision that the politicians make. So, we just went along with it. We patrol the neighborhood. We try to keep it safe. I think we did a pretty good job. At one time, we had over 200 volunteers. Now it's down to about 80 that they have now. Our patrol area is between Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway, from Flatbush to Ralph. However, under Mayor Dinkin-- under Mayor Bloomberg, they changed the precinct lines. So, now we go from Vanderbilt to Rolfe. At one time, our precinct stretched all the way from, say, Winthrop to Fulton Street. But after the changings in the community board, we moved from Fulton Street to Atlantic Avenue. And from Winthrop, we moved all the way to Eastern Parkway. That's how they separated the -- one side is Community Board Nine, on the other side is Community Board Three.

JOHNSON: When you fought the change, I, I have this feeling that you were part --

M. STATON: Well, we were part of the change.

JOHNSON: [inaudible] change [inaudible]

M. STATON: Even the church people had gotten involved with us. From St. Gregory, we had a pastor who was working with us, and other churches that were forming to try to keep the community in, in one shape. But, like I said, it was a political move and we lost.

JOHNSON: What impact do you think that had?

M. STATON: Well it, it had some impact, because people felt that City Hall didn't listen to us -- I guess maybe because they figured it was an all-Black community, they can do what they wanted to do, you know? That's the feeling that people have, you know? "Oh, they do a lot of things because it's a Black community." They feel that way because sometimes they see it in a different terminology. I'll give you an example. While they dumping -- or we should -- while they -- allowing things to happen in one community that they don't do in another community. That's what we call fair share. So, when you look at what they're doing in the communities and why they're doing it, people feel that because this was an all-Black community, they could do that. I don't quite see it that way. I think that because -- if you have -- if you don't have the political clout to fight back, they can override a lot of things. Simple as that. You have to show muscle at the ballot box. You have to get yourself up and go and vote so that you showed strength, so the -- and by voting, you have strength. A lot of people don't vote. It's like you -- my wife worked in the polls.

L. STATON: I'm a poll worker.

M. STATON: She's a poll worker. And she can tell you how many people actually come out to vote. Especially, like, in the primary. You don't see it.

JOHNSON: So, your background is African American?

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: From the South or --

M. STATON: No, I'm from --

L. STATON: Phila--

M. STATON: -- Pennsylvania. My wife is from the South.

JOHNSON: But your other -- your ancestors from further back --

L. STATON: South, yeah.

M. STATON: Yeah, they're from the South.

L. STATON: Ancestors --

M. STATON: Right, right.

L. STATON: -- from the South, yeah.

JOHNSON: And many of your neighbors are from --

L. STATON: The islands.

M. STATON: They're from the islands.

L. STATON: Yeah.

M. STATON: From -- they -- we have -- lady from Africa right here.

L. STATON: Africa.

M. STATON: We have -- it's a, it's a mixed community.

L. STATON: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And --

M. STATON: And when I say mixed, I mean mixed Black community. Let me estab-- you know, some people are Catholic. Some are people -- Protestant. Some people are Jewish. You have, actually, some Black Jews that live here. You have people from different areas; from the Caribbean and different areas from the South. So, it's a mixed bag of people; Black people. Okay, so it's not a conglomerate with everybody -- comes from one division or one religion. Like, a lot of the Jewish people may come from one religion, but they have different sects. But it's still considered one religion. We come from different religions. It's, it's like sometimes, say, "Well, how come they do—" It's the way you were raised. If you were raised a certain way, that's how you think. Like, they were talking about the -- what's his name? The guy that was fighting with the bull-- fight, the dogs? What's his name?

L. STATON: Oh, they -- from Virginia?

M. STATON: Yeah, from --

L. STATON: They're [inaudible] football player?

M. STATON: Football player.

L. STATON: Yeah [inaudible].

M. STATON: And he said, "Well, that's" -- but that's the way he was raised!

L. STATON: Raised, yeah, that's [inaudible].

M. STATON: He didn't know any better, you know? And people said, "Well, he should've known." No, you don't know.

L. STATON: Yeah.

M. STATON: You know? It's what you --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- see, it becomes --

L. STATON: Your -- part of your --

M. STATON: It's part of your lifestyle. And people who don't understand that can't understand it, because they never see it.

JOHNSON: So, did you raise your children --

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: -- in this neighborhood? How many children do you have?

L. STATON: We had three.

M. STATON: I had three children. One died.

L. STATON: One just died.

JOHNSON: Oh.

L. STATON: My baby.

M. STATON: She just died.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: Last year, she died.

JOHNSON: I'm so sorry.

L. STATON: That was a big shock to a -- big hurt, big hurt on us, yeah. And one grandson. He's in Kuwait, in the military.

JOHNSON: And so, what was the neighborhood like for them to grow up here?

M. STATON: Well, I -- they seemed to enjoy it, you know? I took them everywhere; we went to Disneyland, we went to Canada, we went to Quebec, went almost everywhere, you know. I don't see where they had any particularly bad seasons. I mean, my daughter had gone to --

L. STATON: Tell them about that, yeah, they did -- the education.

M. STATON: Oh, my daughter's education? She went to --

L. STATON: [inaudible] institute -- went to public --

M. STATON: She went to public school here, and they went to some of the best schools.

L. STATON: To the best schools, yeah.

M. STATON: And she graduated -- one of my daughters graduated from Music & Art, and she went on to Manhattanville College. My other daughter went to Medgar Evers. The other daughter went to Hampton University.

L. STATON: Yeah [inaudible]

M. STATON: So --

L. STATON: -- those two went through a Catholic school system.

M. STATON: Right.

L. STATON: Didn't put them in public school. They went to the Catholic school.

M. STATON: I could afford it --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- you know? [laughter]

L. STATON: [inaudible] afford it that much, but because their education -- not that the education was going down, but the discipline. It was so— children had become so violent in their public schools, you know, with the fights and all that, and with the drugs and everything. That was a -- you know, because I always stayed involved in the schools, so I always kept up with what's going on in the public schools. So, you know -- and then, so the difference -- so, when the last two came along -- because we raised my grandson, also -- they went their whole term, whole 12 years through Catholic school. I sacrificed; [laughter] not that much that we couldn't afford it, could afford it, but a sacrifice. [laughter] I did it. And it wasn't so much difference with the education,

because the public schools -- if you had a good school and you stayed involved, they did teach the children. Those teachers did teach. So, I didn't notice that much difference with the education in the Catholic school, but the discipline -- and then, plus, they had the religious --

M. STATON: Background, yeah.

L. STATON: -- programs there, too. So, that -- all that made a difference, yeah.

JOHNSON: So, you got involved with the auxiliary police.

M. STATON: Mm-hmm.

JOHNSON: And so, what kinds of things were going on at the time in the streets that you --

M. STATON: Well --

JOHNSON: -- recall, and --

M. STATON: -- like I said --

JOHNSON: [inaudible]?

M. STATON: -- they -- lot of robberies going on.

JOHNSON: Street crime?

M. STATON: Street crime. We patrolled -- we had to make some arrests, had to go to court several times. We did what we're supposed to do, and we kept the crime in our area down for -- to a minimum. However if you, if you looked at -- what's the name, Franklin Avenue? That was a very bad spot at the time, Franklin.

JOHNSON: What years were these?

M. STATON: Franklin Avenue.

JOHNSON: What years?

L. STATON: Well, this was the '80s.

M. STATON: In the '70 -- '80s, they were pr— [inaudible] you know?

L. STATON: [inaudible] '80s and '90s.

M. STATON: But now, the area's completely changed. I think it's, like, 80 percent White now. They have banks and things that moved there. They have new buildings -- are going up. They have -- what's the name of that coffee shop?

L. STATON: What, Starbucks?

M. STATON: They have Starbucks. You know, everything is changed, you know? [laughter]

L. STATON: And that was a drug haven. You wouldn't stay out there and [inaudible] --

M. STATON: At night.

L. STATON: [inaudible] Avenue after dark. [laughter]

JOHNSON: What was the geographic area of Crown Heights at the time? Like, in '63, where did [inaudible] --

M. STATON: Well, like I said, it ran from Winthrop to Fulton Street.

JOHNSON: Crown Heights.

M. STATON: Mm-hmm.

JOHNSON: And east-west, what were the, what were --

M. STATON: Oh, east-west was, say, from Washington Avenue to Ralph. On the other side of Washington, it was not as bad; as it -- as you followed -- went east, it got worse.

JOHNSON: So, tell me. Tell me about your decision to join the auxiliary --

M. STATON: Oh, like I said, because of people being robbed -- I think my mother was held up once -- I decided, listen, either we -- going to become vigilantes or we become a legitimate -- and belong to the police department. Like I said, when we first came into the -- we were under civil defense. So, we wore the civil defense patch. We didn't have the auxiliary patch. We had the civil defense patch. And, like I said, we patrolled the area. And then, the police department decide to take over the civil defense program, and they changed it to make it the auxiliary police, and that's how we stayed into the program.

WALIS JOHNSON: So, were you part of the auxiliary police? I guess you were. Was—

M. STATON: Yes, I can't --

JOHNSON: —it in 1991, when there was all of the [inaudible]?

M. STATON: Yes, yes.

JOHNSON: Can you tell me a little bit about what that was like, or -- were you participating in that in terms of policing the neighborhood?

M. STATON: Well, this is what we were told, that -- we were told that one of the things that started the riot was that when they had the accident over there, off of Empire --

L. STATON: —And Eastern Parkway.

M. STATON: —and Eastern P— no, Empire.

L. STATON: Oh, is that right?

M. STATON: Okay, with the cars, the Hasidic had a -- an ambulance corps that came to help the people. But when they got there, they took the people who were in the car, but they left the child there—

L. STATON: The Black child.

M. STATON: —the Black child there, and that's what started the whole mess, you know? What about the little boy, you know? And they just left -- so, that created more anger.

L. STATON: And that was -- that's a Black -- I mean, from the Caribbean, there --

M. STATON: Yeah, that's what started -- that's what—

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- started the whole mess, you know?

L. STATON: [inaudible] -- yeah.

M. STATON: I can't blame everybody for that. But that was a decision that the ambulance drivers decided; they were going to help who they helped and who they didn't help.

L. STATON: But that was their own private --

M. STATON: That was their own private --

L. STATON: —ambulance—

M. STATON: -- ambulance.

L. STATON: -- corps. Yeah, the Hasidic Jews.

JOHNSON: So, you know, tell me about your impressions of, sort of, the two communities, and how they interacted and --

M. STATON: Well, at one time, there was a lot of suspicion, especially after they divided the community. There was a lot of division, and people felt that they were coming there to control the area. I didn't see it that way, because I looked at it as people being people. You have to live together whether or not you agree with them or not. One of the things that people got upset about is that they look at things different than I would look at it. When they bought the houses -- especially on President Street -- they went through a

lot of changes. They changed the outside; they changed a lot of -- made a lot of areas -- The schools; they changed the school, there was a hospital there. They changed that school into a Hasidic school, they --

L. STATON: Over on Kingston, and --

M. STATON: Not Kingston. The one on Lefferts.

L. STATON: Oh, on Lefferts and Brooklyn.

M. STATON: Lefferts and Brooklyn. They changed a lot of things. They created their own community. So, people say, well, how do you come into a community and change everything? But they had the wherewithal to do it, and so they did it.

JOHNSON: So, when the situation exploded, where were you?

M. STATON: I was on patrol at the time, until we were called out. We were called out to deal with the traffic, to deal with the crowds. At one time, they tell us, "Stand back and wait until we call you again." And by that time, it was too late. We had to go in and try to hold some of the people back. By that time, Mayor Koch had gotten the rest of the community and the rest of the precincts together to try to calm the crowd down. But it was a bad night.

L. STATON: Yeah, true, yeah.

M. STATON: It was a rough night.

L. STATON: And who was that man named Green [inaudible] that—?

M. STATON: Oh, the -- Green was part of the --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- the --

JOHNSON: Is his name Richard Green?

M. STATON: Richard Green, right. He was part of -- to try to calm --

LULA STANTON: Calm --

M. STATON: -- a lot of the situations down, you know?

L. STATON: And the Jewish came together --

M. STATON: Yeah.

L. STATON: -- together there to calm the situation --

M. STATON: To calm it down.

L. STATON: [inaudible] they calmed it down more and more and more, because he had a lot to do with that -- with the calming down there of -- situation. Because they were -- everybody was angry. We [inaudible] a lot to ease, have a lot of leaders, a lot of coming together to try to ease that situation.

JOHNSON: So, what was, kind of, the result? So, was the result --

M. STATON: Well, it took a while. It took a long time --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- to get together. But we finally started to break through, so to speak, and we started to meld together. I mean, we had a rap group that got together, and it was just wonderful to see how the young people— not the older people so much— but the young people who come back and got together. I think I have to give the youth of this country and our community a lot of credit. A lot of the young people got together and started changing things. And, of course, when the young people got inv— we start to change. People started looking at things differently, trying to understand how one group feels vis-à-vis another group, you know? So, there's a lot of things that the young people did to calm the situation down.

L. STATON: [inaudible] with the music, and with the sports like [inaudible]

M. STATON: With the sports and the musics and --

L. STATON: -- music, yeah.

M. STATON: -- you know, it was just wonderful to see young people --

L. STATON: Even Jewish boys was rapping. [laughter] Had them rapping -- [laughter]

M. STATON: Yeah, you know? [laughter] I mean, there's still, there's still some people that have some old ways of thinking, because sometimes when you walk down the street, you hear them -- the young people -- these are young kids, say, in junior high school saying about, "What are you doing here? And I keep saying, "I live here. What are you doing here?" you know? You ask them, "What are you doing here?" He says, "I live here, too." So, "Well, we all live together, right?" Then they shake their head yes, you know? [laughter] Oh, another thing that people get upset about is housing. I didn't— I

never thought that housing would be such a tremendous situation. I'm on the housing committee, and I see the housing has changed this community in such a way you would never believe it. Every day, there's new housing going up. I can show you -- if you had time, I would take you around the community and show you all the housing and all the changes of the housing. What's happening? Who did what? This is before even Medgar Evers had even had a college over there. You know, it -- the community has changed in such a way it's unbelievable. And every year, saying, starting say, 10 years ago, it has changed 100 percent more. If you go downtown -- you know, because I said, our community board goes to Flatbush Avenue. You can stand on Flatbush Avenue and look up, you'd think you was in Manhattan. I mean, this community has gone through such a tremendous change. The housing; people feel they're being pushed out of the community. I don't know if they're really being pushed out as much as they're being bought out. Some people said they're being threatened. I come to the housing committee and I say to them, "Well, who's threatening you? Can you give me some advice?" We go to the buildings department, ask them, "What's going on here? Why are these people feeling threatened?" And they get so many different answers. I don't know if the judge hears all of that, because all he wants to do -- "I want facts. Give me some facts." And if you can't give them facts, something that they can hang their hat on, it's just something that people think; you can't prove anything. But people feel that they are being pushed out of the community. Now, a lot of it happens because, like I said, the neighborhood has gone through a lot of changes. With housing it's really, it's really the key to a lot of things. Now, he -- my mayor talks about quality of life, but he doesn't see it the way we see it. We live here. So, we see things a little different than, say, the mayor, who lives on the other side. Now, we live on Crown, on Crown Heights. He lives in Prospect Heights, which is right across the street from Flatbush Avenue. That's where Prospect Heights starts. And because --

JOHNSON: I'm sorry, the mayor -- de Blasio?

M. STATON: De Blasio.

JOHNSON: I thought he lived in Park Slope.

L. STATON: Park Slope.

M. STATON: Yeah, but I'm saying Prospect Heights is part of our community. But on the other side of Flatbush is where de Blasio lives. So, even there, it's a difference. I can tell you that the schools over there've changed. I remember when that school was all Black. Now, it's 90 percent White. So, I said what happened? It's the housing, see, because what happens is the house you live in determines on the school you go to. And when you change the formulas of how they do that, that's when it becomes so changeable. It becomes -- why is it all-White now, when it used to be all-Black? It's because the people were being moved out of the housing. I can't explain what's going on, because I don't live in that particular community. But de Blasio should give you a better idea on why they have a separate school district, say, than ours.

JOHNSON: Can you ask— Can I ask you -- you know, you became an auxiliary police person, policeman. You rose up through the ranks. How did you define community safety when you started?

M. STATON: It was bad.

JOHNSON: And how would you define community safety --

M. STATON: It was, it was bad. It was rough. We had to make a decision on what to do. We could've became vigilantes, or we could have become part of the system. We decided to be part of the system. We started making arrests. We started tracking down people. We started -- involve ourselves with the police department. We told 'em, "Look, there's something going on over here. There's something going over there." And they started investigating more. They brought more police units into the community. And every police officer we had went up in the ranks. Now, we did have some problems at the precinct level, and we were upset about that, because they claimed that they were in collusion with the people who were stealing from the airports. And they were bringing it into our community. And I kept saying, "Well, why would they bring it in our community and -- it should be in Queens." But, no, it was in the 77 Precinct. We had a big --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- fight in -- about the 77 Precinct.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: They changed every --

L. STATON: Everything.

M. STATON: -- body in that precinct. Everybody.

L. STATON: Was that the '90s?

M. STATON: Whatev— but they moved them all out, everybody that was --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- in that precinct, they moved them out and they brought all new people in. And it changed the character. It -- so any things were happening at that time. It was a lot of corruption in the police department. And there was a lot of things that they changed to clean it up. Our precinct was at one of the worst. Now it's one of the best. One of the best; I have to say that with pride, because I feel that we have done a lot in this community to change the perception of our precinct. And it -- if you look at what we're doing now with our police department, I think we have one of the best records in the whole city. I mean, that's my opinion, but I believe that can be factually checked, that we are now one of the top precincts in our, in our community.

L. STATON: And they only leave the people in there now for— the police officers— for a certain amount of time. They don't leave them that long.

M. STATON: Well, we --

L. STATON: They used to—

M. STATON: -- we've lost a lot of --

L. STATON: —in the past, used to stay in there, like, forever. They get in there -- that's where they found all that corruption. But now, it may get in there still and stay. How long they stay in, [inaudible]?

M. STATON: I don't know, because every officer that we had here --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- has risen up in the ranks. Even our inspector, Lott, has moved up. Everybody's moved up, so --

L. STATON: He was the only Black in our area, right?

M. STATON: Yes.

L. STATON: And --

M. STATON: At one -- yeah, right.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: Inspector Lott.

L. STATON: And his wife's family lived right across the street from us, right over there in number 11.

JOHNSON: So, with all your experience, how would you define good policing?

M. STATON: Well, you know, I wish they had -- I think they're going back to it now. At one time, we had what they call community policing. Now they're coming back to it. I think that's what they should -- never went away from it. Community policing is when the officers walk the beat or had the beat, knew everybody in the block. When you walk up the block, you could say, "Hi, Officer So-and-so." Today, they were all in the cars. They didn't know the people in the precinct. But now, they're bringing that back to community policing, which I think they should never have left. At one time, we used to have a law they used to call -- what'd they call that law? Where if you got paid for the City of New York, you had to live within the City of New York. See, when they got away from that, that's when all this foolishness starts to happen. Police officer could live miles outside the City of New York and still come -- become part of the police force. You could live in Jersey, but they changed that law so you had to live within the state in order to become a police officer. But still, they need to keep it within, I think, within the confines of the, of the precinct, within the, within the barrel of the City of New York. Again, that's the state that -- state legislature that changed that ruling. So, again, you got to have the political clout and the power to change things so that you don't drastically move away from what you thought it was. Like, even the judges -- if you were paid by the City of New York, you had to live here. You couldn't live, say, in Upstate New York and then have a judgeship here. You couldn't do that. But they changed the law, and it is what it is.

L. STATON: Did you want any water?

JOHNSON: No, I'm good, thank you.

L. STATON: Good? Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

M. STATON: That's what we call community policing. But, again, they did that --

L. STATON: And what do you call it? You call it NCO? You call it --

M. STATON: Well, the NCOs, that's the non--

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: --commissioned officers.

L. STATON: Yeah, [inaudible]

M. STATON: That's a different program.

L. STATON: -- I know, just, new and it had just come out of there, I think it was.

JOHNSON: So, there are lots of new people moving into the neighborhood.

M. STATON: Oh, Lord, yes.

JOHNSON: And there're perceptions— why do you think they're moving into this neighborhood now?

M. STATON: Well, if you -- okay, I think this community, Bed-Stuy, and Central Brooklyn as -- in general, I think when they first built this community, they did it -- they built it the same way they had lived many years ago, in the fancy houses. So, I think that the housing in this community is above standard when you look -- in comparison to other communities. We have larger homes, larger buildings, larger everything. And that's one of the reasons why people came and looked at the community.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: They said --

L. STATON: -- and what'd our daughter said, when they had the open house --

M. STATON: Oh, okay. I --

L. STATON: -- really [laughter] and the folks, and they start coming in by droves and seeing what these houses look like inside. Then they, like, it blew out of [inaudible]

M. STATON: I don't know why they left in the first place. Yeah --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- I would never have let this -- left this community in the first place. But they left. They came and -- I'm also a member of the Crown Heights North Association, which -- we have made the area historical. If you -- we had an open house, and people came in --

L. STATON: And sold the houses [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- by the house, and people said, "Oh, my God, I didn't know you lived like this." And I kept saying, "What do you mean you didn't" -- I mean, I -- you know, sometimes you live in a bubble, so to speak, and you don't quite see what other people see. You only see -- because you live here. When you look at the community and see how it has grown -- people say, "Oh, you live like this?" I said, "We always lived like this." I spoke to Carnegie, who is our councilperson, and he said, "They always lived like this." I said, "Well, how come they're coming in -- said" -- now, because they didn't see housing the way we look at it. So, it's a different -- for Central Brooklyn, it's completely different than other parts of Brooklyn.

JOHNSON: Can you explain that further? Like, what -- how you see housing, how -- the way you look at housing and you --

M. STATON: Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: -- look at housing, versus --

M. STATON: You -- take a look at this house. Do you see how big the kitchen is, huh? A lot of people don't have this kitchen like this, or have a bedroom like that, or have rooms upstairs. This house; we have a two-family house. I think we live well. We have a backyard, we have a kitchen. The average place may be half the size. The bedrooms might be smaller. They don't have the rooms that we have. So, a lot of times, people say, "Well, I'd rather live here than to live, say, in parts of Borough Hall," because our homes are much bigger; a much larger scale. And I think that's why they look at it and say -- it becomes more desirable to live here than other places --

L. STATON: The transportation, museums; what was -- it -- everything is easy access to get to. And parks. So, we, you know, have a lot. All that's, you know, in the area. So, I guess,

overall, when they sell all this, you know, I guess they say, "Why can't we live there, also?"

JOHNSON: So, do you think that the new people moving in have a different perception of policing and safety in the community from --

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Can you talk about that a little bit?

M. STATON: Well, they have not lived through the bad years. They only see the good years. They only see now. They haven't lived back when we were struggling just to keep a roof over our head, you know? Or just to keep the neighborhood safe. They didn't live through that. We lived through that. Now, they come in, it's a completely different atmosphere. It com-- they can come in and leave their pocketbooks on the desk and walk out the door. I said, "Lady, don't leave your pocketbook there. Somebody can steal it!" "Oh, it's" -- I said, "No, it ain't all right," you know? Years ago, you would take your pocketbook everywhere you went. You wouldn't leave your car door open. I tell them, "Lock your car! Don't leave your car open. Somebody can steal it!" But they have a different perception. "Oh, it's safe." No, it's not safe. It becomes an opportunity for thieves to steal. But they have a different perception. It's completely different. They see policing completely different. They see the community completely different than what -- when I was first coming up. It -- they have no concept of how bad it was here. They only see how good it is now. And they say, "Well, it's not as bad as it was then." No, it's not. But you still have to be able to think that there's something that could happen. But they don't see things like that. I'm saying they just don't see it that way. We had a -- what do you call that? Those police walking around in— what do they call that? I forget what they call it— Santa Claus uniforms.

L. STATON: Oh, [inaudible] that.

M. STATON: And they run from bar to bar, and I said, you know --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- we didn't have that. But now they have that. I mean, it's -- when we first came here, we used to fight for the Shuttle. Finally, we went to Al Vann, who was our --

L. STATON: —Councilman of the area.

M. STATON: -- councilman at the time --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- said to him --

L. STATON: -- concern, right.

M. STATON: -- "We are not going to give the MTA the money until you fix up that shuttle." The Shuttle is now part of our community. We fought hard for that shuttle. Other people fought hard for a shuttle and didn't get it, but we got our shuttle. It, it unites us better. We have a better transportation system; we have a better infrastructure system. We have a better housing system. We have -- I would say we are better all the way around than other communities. We don't have to worry about transferring to a bus or subway all the time. We can get on a subway and take you anywhere in the city. We have a Long Island Rail Road here. We have the train system. We have the -- a bus system. So, to me, it's one of the best areas to live in. In some areas, you have to --

L. STATON: Location, location, location. [laughter]

M. STATON: Yeah. Yes, mother.

L. STATON: Yeah. [laughter]

M. STATON: So I, you know, all the way around, I think we have one of the best systems in the area.

JOHNSON: So, you have these new neighbors and -- do you ever talk to them about—?

M. STATON: Yeah, we spoke -- right next door, we have, like, a -- I spoke to 'em all the time.

JOHNSON: And are they -- I mean, what's their background next door?

M. STATON: Well, most of them are professionals. Some of them are lawyers, you know? I mean, the kind of money that they make is way past my pay grade, you know? They have a lot of funds that they can spend and use to fix up the house the way they want it. And when I first moved in here, they used to cut up the houses, you know? Every little room was somebody renting in there.

L. STATON: Yeah, yeah.

M. STATON: So, when they came in, they changed all that. Maybe that's why they feel that

people are being pushed out. I said, "Listen, the only reason you were here the first time is because they had cut up the apartments so that more people could live here. But now that they came in and changed the housing, they want it for themselves." So, if you were living there and they came in and bought the house and changed it, you didn't have three or four people living there. They only have two people living there. So, where are they going? I don't know. Is that why they feel they're being pushed out? Maybe so. But I don't, I don't control the economics of the housing. It's a completely different set of people who have moved here. I mean, you got people here that come in and speak French, and they're not from Haiti. Yeah, so I -- you know, I know they're from France or whatever country they come from. Or they -- Canada. It's a completely different set of people who are moving in now than when I was -- first moved here, completely different. And you can -- like I say, you can look around. All that you do is look up in the air and see all the cranes. It's completely different.

JOHNSON: Can you tell me about these? Are these the police things? Badges?

M. STATON: Oh, okay. These are some of the awards that I've won. Citations; I've won just about every citation that there is. Valor; this citation's from the World Trade Center. I've won several awards. Unit citations; it's a unit citation, it says how many hours you put in as an officer. Police -- this is for correction. I've won so many citations, it's not even funny. And I have these awards that you can see. And I've won them all.

JOHNSON: So, how do you feel now that you're retired?

M. STATON: I'm retired, but I still have a lot of --

L. STATON: Retired from working on the job, being paid, but he -- [laughter] that's stuff he do, every other day.

M. STATON: I'm still, I'm still doing --

L. STATON: [laughter] [inaudible] --

M. STATON: -- working for the community, you know?

L. STATON: [Yeah, he loves doing a -- serve [inaudible] community.

M. STATON: I've always been working for the comm-- I remember when I ran --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- for public office and at the time, I told them. I said, "Well, I don't get paid for this job," you know? Like, there are some people -- I said, "I don't get paid." The guy says, "Doesn't matter whether you get paid or not. You're a federal worker. You're running on a, on a Democratic line" --

L. STATON: And it called [inaudible]

M. STATON: The -- I was --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- and said, "Now, either you resign or you may have to go to prison" --

L. STATON: [inaudible] [laughter]

M. STATON: I said, "Prison for what?" You know, I'm thinking that I was doing something for the community and they were telling me I was, I was in violation of the Hatch Act. So, I'd -- and then, the borough president put me on the community board. That was pretty scary, I tell you, I had no idea that I was in jeopardy.

L. STATON: Did you tell her you were in the military? Did he tell you -- if you put -- you say -- got that down?

JOHNSON: You were in the military, as well?

L. STATON: Yeah.

M. STATON: Right.

L. STATON: Was in the military. Yeah, you --

M. STATON: You want to know about that?

L. STATON: [inaudible]

JOHNSON: World War II?

L. STATON: -- when I met him --

JOHNSON: Or World War --

L. STATON: No.

JOHNSON: -- or --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: Vietnam.

L. STATON: Vietnam.

JOHNSON: Oh, Vietnam.

L. STATON: Mm-hmm.

JOHNSON: Okay.

L. STATON: Vietnam [inaudible] yeah.

JOHNSON: So, you're a Vietnam veteran, too?

M. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: So, okay, so I'm going to kind of wrap things up, but --

L. STATON: Okay.

JOHNSON: -- what is your hope or your dream for --

M. STATON: I --

JOHNSON: -- community --

M. STATON: I just want the community to keep growing, doing better.

JOHNSON: Crown Heights.

M. STATON: Yes. I mean, I'd -- I just have such a feeling for this community. I just wanted to see it grown and get better and better and better. That's my hope for the community. And before I leave, close -- I close my eyes -- because I'm 79 years old now. Before I close my eyes, I just want to see the community grow and become better.

L. STATON: And we don't want -- after we leave it -- because now, with the taxes and all -- see, we pay a different -- in a different bracket for paying taxes --

M. STATON: Ah.

L. STATON: -- because of our age and with him -- with, yeah --

M. STATON: Being the veteran.

L. STATON: -- soldier, veteran. And if we pay as -- and left to the younger -- our daughters and the kids, then they might be in a different --

M. STATON: Tax bracket.

L. STATON: -- tax bracket.

M. STATON: Right

L. STATON: And now that the houses are going for so much more money, it would be a -- upkeep and trying to keep it with all that. We don't want them to have to lose, you

know, the house or --

M. STATON: See, that's another thing.

L. STATON: -- well, plus, that's how a lot of the [inaudible].

M. STATON: They had to sell -- a lot of people had to sell their houses because --

JOHNSON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- they lost the benefits of being older and everything.

JOHNSON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: So, that's why people are selling these houses. Plus, there's a -- they can sell them for $1.5-1.3 million, and they can't keep the houses up.

L. STATON: It's a lot to -- keeping up.

M. STATON: They're -- you know, it's --

L. STATON: They take the money and run.

M. STATON: And especially -- being landmarked now, a lot of our property here in this community is landmarked. So, you have to go for a landmark, to get things approved and -- which costs an extra few dollars more. I'm hoping that I'll be able to keep up with all of that. It's a lot to think about. I want the community to grow, but I hope that the young people can stay in the community. I don't -- I'm a little upset about --

L. STATON: Be able to afford it.

M. STATON: -- if they can't afford to stay in the community, they may be forced to sell and be pushed out. That's another reason why people are upset. I think it's just the process that goes through -- I don't want to see my kids sell the house, but they may have to if they can't keep it up, you know? That's -- this was hap -- that's what -- that got -- like I said, it's all about holding onto what you've got. And you can't hold on, you either got to sell or move on.

JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, you know, yeah. I mean, I could tell you my story, but -- yeah, my parents died and the taxes went up.

L. STATON: Yeah, my taxes are going --

M. STATON: Yeah, but sometimes they go up, they, say from 2,000 to 9,000.

JOHNSON: That's what happened to me.

L. STATON: [inaudible] to me. [laughter]

M. STATON: Okay. I'm saying, you know -- and if you don't have the funds to keep that going, it becomes a burden.

L. STATON: (inaudible)

M. STATON: Like I said, the average income in this community is around 30-35,000, and that's before taxes. So, if you start adding taxes, you know, it becomes a problem.

JOHNSON: Why do you think this neighborhood went down so --

M. STATON: Down? You mean --

JOHNSON: You know, in terms of the crime and the activity and -- I mean, besides the -- was there a difference in the way these neighborhoods were policed long ago, when you first--?

M. STATON: Yeah, so it's a, it's a difference. Years -- like I said, years ago, when we became part of the auxiliary police office, we had to patrol the neighborhood, because we didn't have the police here.

JOHNSON: But why do you think that was?

M. STATON: I, I have no clue. All I know is we needed to boost the police force up so that we could try to keep the community going and keep the community as safe as we could do.

L. STATON: And they had plenty of crime at [inaudible].

M. STATON: We -- every -- all --

L. STATON: -- all over the projects. Oh, my God.

M. STATON: It was bad!

L. STATON: There was so much crime coming out of there. There were, they had gangs. Oh, the gangs. Gangs. Got rid of those gangs. We've had plenty of gangs, plenty gangs. So, that's one thing that came in and -- clean up them gangs. Yeah. That's what caused a lot of crime, right [inaudible]

M. STATON: Yeah, lot of --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- lot of changes. I'm saying, you know, it --

L. STATON: -- so, gangs on it. When --

M. STATON: -- you know --

L. STATON: -- they came in and cleaned up those -- man, right in the -- fire with two doors [inaudible]

M. STATON: Was shot.

L. STATON: Shot that man. He was getting ready to go back to Jamaica, and he had bought this --

M. STATON: Boombox.

L. STATON: --Boombox; it was popular. He had bought the boombox to take back to the island with him. He was leaving that morning, and they came, and he was getting ready to come -- go through this door, because he lived right here. And they saw him, asked him for that -- his boombox. He told them, "No!" I mean he was an elderly man. He said, "I'm not giving it up." And they said, "Well, if you don't give" -- they point their guns. "If you don't give it up, we're going to shoot." And he said, "Do what you got to do, but I'm not giving it up," you know? You know, because they worked hard all their life, and [inaudible]

M. STATON: They shot him right in front of my house.

L. STATON: -- [inaudible] teenagers and --

M. STATON: And he lived upstairs.

L. STATON: -- going to take something from you. They shot him, killed him, right there.

JOHNSON: Oh, [inaudible].

L. STATON: Yeah, so [inaudible] gangs. Had plenty, gangs. And even the people in there, that lived there at -- over there. They formed together inside, they had the community, and [inaudible].

M. STATON: As you come through the door, they would check you in the projects. You come through the --

L. STATON: -- they all -- yeah, it's --

M. STATON: -- they want to know you live -- "Who you going to see?" They didn't -- they formed their own little group.

L. STATON: Yeah, their own group. They [inaudible].

M. STATON: You know?

L. STATON: And they had the prayer vigils. They got together. They did prayer and all that. So, I just -- move it all out. Move it all out. Move out a little -- so that's where -- cut down on a lot of crime, was from -- that project was terrible. Yes.

JOHNSON: So --

M. STATON: Now, we're having problems over there, in the Weeksville projects. That's where they have a lot of crime over there, too; right across from Weeksville.

L. STATON: They --

M. STATON: We have a lot --

L. STATON: [inaudible] used to be [inaudible] over there by my church.

M. STATON: Yeah. It's, it's -- a lot of things are happening. But we're trying to keep -- like I said, we're trying to keep the community strong. We're trying to do the best we can. We went through a whole -- back in the '60s, we tried to get this area landmarked. And then later on, I think a few years ago, we finally got it done. Thirty years it took us to get a lot of this community fixed up and landmarked. We finally got it. It's --

L. STATON: And then the police got it, with their different -- you know, what you call the commanding officers and all that came in. They started different --

M. STATON: Programs.

L. STATON: [inaudible] all that. I don't know what they call it -- to get the drugs out. It's [inaudible]

M. STATON: Oh, oh, yeah. They --

L. STATON: -- in certain areas.

M. STATON: Yeah, they surveyed.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: They even got --

L. STATON: Reported [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- reporters and everything, right.

L. STATON: But they had drugs in this area. They -- what did they call that [inaudible] they

called it --

M. STATON: I don't know. It was like a sting --

L. STATON: [inaudible] area.

M. STATON: They had a sting --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- operation. They cleaned it out.

L. STATON: But they cleaned that out --

M. STATON: Block by block.

L. STATON: --block by block.

M. STATON: Street by street, with the --

L. STATON: Then go into another section, and target that section. Clean that section out. All that helped to calm down the area, yeah. And we're different now.

JOHNSON: What's your view of stop and frisk?

M. STATON: Well, it has its advantages and its disadvantages. Disadvantage is that you stop everybody, regardless. The advantage is that you can get a lot of guns off the street. But the disadvantages seem to outweigh the advantages.

L. STATON: Oh, yes.

M. STATON: So, it's better to, you know, only select certain people. People that you feel that -- if you see a bulge in his pocket, you know, whatever, stop him. If you don't see it, leave him alone, you know? But actually, the crime rate has gone down whether you -- you know, has gone down even further. They don't have stop and frisk. So, what's driving the crime rate down?

L. STATON: Yeah.

M. STATON: The reason we're driving the crime rate down, in my opinion, is that people are being moved into different areas. I don't want to say that, but when you look at where people and how people are doing economically, if they can't afford to live in a certain area, you have to move. That's why I get upset about the way the land -- the way they are taxing the people here. Like I said, these houses are going for over a million dollars. So, how many Black people are making that kind of money? I hear de Blasio's

talking about, "Well, if your house is over two million dollars, we're going to tax you at two million" – but, I don't see it that way. It's what the city says the land is worth. And I just got my tax saying it's over a million dollars. That's ridiculous. I mean, I didn't pay that much for it, but that's what they say the house is worth now. So, how are the people going to keep --

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: How are the people --

L. STATON: -- [inaudible] taxes.

M. STATON: -- going to keep their property if prices keep going up? It's, it's a struggle. So, we're not all bankers. We're not all making money from Wall Street. We got to have a living wage so the people can stay in their homes. The way things are going now, I really -- it upsets me. I want to see the community grow. I want to see the community get -- do better. But, on the other hand, I don't want to see the people being pushed out. It becomes an economic struggle. We're fighting against this homeless shelter in Bergen Street here. We're saying, "Why are you putting all these homeless shelters in our area," you know? We're fighting for fair share. We want, we want our community to have shelters. We, we'll welcome shelters. But not all of them shelters are -- in one area or one, you know -- don't swamp us, or -- and don't leave us with all the bad products and you don't have -- areas that don't have any at all. So, I'm saying we got to have our fair share, that's all.

JOHNSON: Well, I want to thank you both. [laughter] You ended up being part of the interview, as well. [laughter]

M. STATON: Yeah, well --

L. STATON: Because you know I – [inaudible]

M. STATON: -- that's my other half. [laughter]

L. STATON: -- add-on, but he's the one --

JOHNSON: Add-on.

L. STATON: -- that knows all the --

JOHNSON: You're the main one, but --

L. STATON: Yeah, he's the main one.

JOHNSON: But do you want to say your name for the record?

L. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

L. STATON: I'm Lula Staton. You want to know my age and everything?

JOHNSON: Mm-hmm.

L. STATON: I'm 73 years old, and I live here at 20 Hampton Place. I was born in Camden, South Carolina. I grew up during the Jim Crow. I was in the Jim Crow stage. I could -- the whole day, I could get -- could write a book on --

JOHNSON: I bet you can.

L. STATON: Yes.

JOHNSON: That's another interview.

L. STATON: That's another interview. [laughter] That's right. [laughter]

JOHNSON: All right.

L. STATON: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Well, thank you so much --

L. STATON: You, too.

JOHNSON: -- for your time.

M. STATON: Is there anything else you want to know?

JOHNSON: I think --

M. STATON: Did you have any other questions that you want to ask?

JOHNSON: No, you kind of covered everything that I can think of in the moment, you know? Well, one question. You know, I've interviewed a few people now. And one person said -- a younger man, he said, "You know, the way I feel safe is if I know my neighbors." So can you, can you comment on that?

M. STATON: I know all my neighbors. I know all my neighbors, either by name or sight. Like I said, I used to patrol the neighborhood, so I knew my neighbors. I still know my neighbors. When I see them, I know them. I may not know them by name, but I know all my neighbors. I mean, that's another thing. When you have a community like this,

almost everybody there belongs to an association, by -- block association. We know most of the people in the neighborhood. How can you live in a neighborhood and not get involved in some of the things that a neighborhood g-- Now, some of the people who have moved in haven't gotten involved in the block association like they should. But then, we got some older people who had to drop out because they can't, you know, can't come to the meetings, can't make the -- you know, they're elderly. They can't -- we have ladies, 90 years, 100 years old. They can't make all those meetings. Even if it's around the corner, they can hardly get up and walk, you know? But it's true. You feel safe if you know your neighbors. That's true. That's a -- you know, that's a -- that's one of the best things he could have said as a young person. If you know your neighbors, you feel safe.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

M. STATON: We even know the neighbors who may not be good neighbors, you know what I mean? If you -- but you know them. That's a true statement.

JOHNSON: Okay, thank you so much. Both of you. Thank you so much.

L. STATON: Okay.

M. STATON: Anything else?

JOHNSON: Nope, I got it.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

JOHNSON: Think so [inaudible]--

M. STATON: Anything else you need to think about or you want to ask me?

JOHNSON: --sure I'll walk out of here and think of many things. [laughter] But --

M. STATON: Let's get me -- give me a couple things that you think about.

L. STATON: [inaudible]

JOHNSON: No, but I can't. I have to --

L. STATON: She's got to -- yeah.

M. STATON: You got to think about it?

L. STATON: [inaudible]

JOHNSON: I think I've got all the questions --

L. STATON: Yeah.

JOHNSON: -- that I came with.

L. STATON: Yeah, right, you're right.

JOHNSON: But I'm sure -- you know how it is. You leave, and then [inaudible]--

L. STATON: Yeah, then you say, oh --

JOHNSON: -- oh!

L. STATON: -- I forgot --

JOHNSON: But --

L. STATON: -- yeah [inaudible]

JOHNSON: No, I think I'm doing good.

L. STATON: [inaudible]