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Oral History Interview with Deborah Alexander
Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Weeksville Heritage Center, 2016.027.3.01
Interview conducted by Obden Mondésir at PS 243, the Weeksville School, on January 9, 2017 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn

MONDESIR: Today is Monday, January 9th, 2017, and I am Obden Mondésir from the Weeksville Heritage Center. And I am with Deborah Alexander, and we are at PS 243, the Weeksville School on Dean Street and Troy Avenue in Crown Heights. This interview is for the Brooklyn Historical Society, the Voices of Crown Heights Project. So, would you please introduce yourself by giving your name, birthday, and where you were born?

ALEXANDER: I am Deborah Alexander, born [date redacted for privacy], 1961. And what was the other one?

MONDESIR: So, your birthday, your name, and where were you born?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes. And I was born in Harlem, New York, back in 1961.

MONDESIR: All right. So, could you tell me about your neighborhood? And the first house you grew up in?

ALEXANDER: OK. I was born in Harlem, but I was raised predominantly in the South Bronx. So, the South Bronx, at the time, was in a lot of disarray. It was riddled with gangs, riddled with housing that was poor. No heat, no electricity sometimes, no hot water. So I was -- you know, I wasn't born up in a wealthy household, so we had to endure a lot of that. We always had food, but it was a struggle sometimes, just living in that type of a community. I always went to public school, and education was always stressed in the house. So, we were always engaged in puzzles and games, and stuff inside, but we didn't do a lot of outside, just because of the way the neighborhood was.

MONDESIR: So, could you tell me the streets that you lived on?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I was -- I used to live on Tiffany Street, which is like, Mount Fox Street. I don't know if you know about the Bronx. It's like on the number two and the number five line, Tiffany Street. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Oh, OK. And could you tell me about the first school you attended [inaudible]?

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm. My first school, I -- at the time, I also -- my mother was alive at the time, and she was also a para at the school. So that was pretty cool. I felt like I was treated a little special, because she was also there. But I only went to that school till about second grade, and then I was raised by my grandmother, who lived maybe about 10 minutes away from where we lived, still in the Bronx.

So, that school was wonderful, very nurturing. I got a very good background. I always heard that I was a good student, growing up. I just remember fond -- I remember fond memories there. And nothing negative. The teachers were wonderful. You know, I don't remember anything negative.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm. Did you have a favorite teacher, there?

ALEXANDER: Not that I remember. Yeah, not that I remember.

MONDESIR: Oh --

ALEXANDER: Not that -- But growing up, in junior high, that's when I remember my first teacher that made a major impression on me. Would you like to hear about that?

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: [laughter] OK.

MONDESIR: Where was the junior high school?

ALEXANDER: The junior high school was also in the Bronx. I forget the number. But it was also considered the South Bronx. And what happened is, he -- we were in what they called IGC class, Intellectually Gifted Children. And so, he would pretty much keep us in a bubble. He wouldn't let us mingle with the outside world, as I liked to call it. [laughter] So, for example, lunch, we could bring into the classroom, and have lunch with him. At that time, we didn't have gym with other classes, or anything like that. And our class was also musical. So, we were in the band. So, we did a lot together,

from sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. And he stayed with us those three years. His name was Mr. Gajdosik.

MONDESIR: Mr. --

ALEXANDER: Mr. Gajdosik. G-A-J-D-O-S-I-K. And I understand -- I lost touch with him, over the years, but I understand that he became like a principal in the Pawling area. So, he did move on from the public school there, in the South Bronx. But he nurtured us. With him, I was able to find my voice, and I became a poet and a writer, a little bit. And it was just great. Because we were of like-minded -- we were like-minded individuals in the class -- even though there was competition, we looked out for each other, and we made sure that we all succeeded together.

I remember it not being a huge class. Maybe 20, 25 kids. It wasn't like we were fighting for space, or anything like that. But it was very nice -- it was a nice mix of Hispanic and Black children in the class. So it was very good.

MONDESIR: So, would you say his was your favorite subject, growing up?

ALEXANDER: Yes, definitely. Mm-hmm. Definitely. And I was always a reader, growing up. But he inspired us to look further than whatever we were used to reading. At home, my grandmother was very spiritual, so we went to church a lot. And of course there was always the newspaper. We always had -- my grandfather used to make sure we had *Jet Magazine*, and what was the other one?

MONDESIR: *Ebony*?

ALEXANDER: *Ebony*. *Ebony Magazine*. So, you know, we were always immersed in Black culture in the house. But, you know, kind of look outside a little bit more than that. Which was great. He exposed us to things, to people that I probably wouldn't have ever been exposed to in another venue. Like Langston Hughes was a biggie for me, back then. [laughter]

MONDESIR: So, were your family originally from the Bronx, also, or --?

ALEXANDER: Well, from my understanding, my mother was born and raised in the Bronx, but her and my grandmother, they're from the South. They are from South Carolina. And they came up here to New York. And it's funny, now that I'm older -- like, she

never really talked about her experiences there. You know, and everything that was going on down there, with the racial strife and everything. She never complained. She didn't talk about it. She would just always make sure that we knew there was a better way. But it would be interesting, you know, if I know what I knew -- what I know now, what she would have said about some of the stuff that was going on then, and why did you move here? Why did you move to New York?

Of course, you know, everybody will tell you, for job opportunities. But I would like some detail, and I would like to have that conversation. But unfortunately, she passed when I was 18, and I didn't have that mindset. [laughter]

MONDESIR: I mean, did you ever go back to the South to visit, or --?

ALEXANDER: No. Even though she was from the South, we didn't know the South. As further south [*sic*] as we went was Baltimore. She had a sister there, and we would spend summers in Baltimore.

MONDESIR: OK.

ALEXANDER: So I didn't know, you know, anything about where she exactly came from, or where my grandparents came from.

MONDESIR: Cool. Could you tell me what high school you attended?

ALEXANDER: Yes. I attended Lehman High School in the Bronx. Once again. And that was a pretty interesting experience. I vividly remember *Roots* came out, during that time. And at the time, there was still a lot of Italians that went to the school. So a highly Italian neighborhood in Throggs Neck, there. And we, a lot of us took the city bus to school. And I remember coming to school -- it must have been, like, the first day after *Roots*, and there were two lines of White people waiting for us to get off the bus. And as we walked through, they were making comments about, you know, using "nigger," and all those derogatory -- all these derogatory terms, as we walked into the building. And I was like, wow. That -- that was really my first experience with feeling like, wow, you know, these people really -- I felt like they really hated us. You know?

And nothing happened physically. We walked through, went into the building. I didn't hear about anybody fighting, or saying anything. We just did what we had to do.

And it didn't happen the next day, or thereafter. But I remember, it was vividly after *Roots* came on.

MONDESIR: So those two lines of White people, were they students, or --?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, they were students.

MONDESIR: So, like, they lined up in front of the school, and then you would have class with them afterwards?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I mean, it wasn't anyone I knew. But yeah. I mean, they -- they were -- you know, we were all immersed into the subjects. So, yeah.

MONDESIR: Wow, that's --

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah.

MONDESIR: -- crazy.

ALEXANDER: So that was pretty powerful. I remember that. [laugh] But otherwise, Lehman High School, you know, it was high school. It was OK. It was a good experience, otherwise.

MONDESIR: Did you feel like there was a dissonance between what you were expected to achieve and what you yourself though you could achieve at that school?

ALEXANDER: No, I didn't really feel that. No. Once again, I was on that academic path, where -- they didn't call it IGC at the time. They didn't have AP, as far as I know, at the time, but I was always a great student. And I didn't feel like I was discriminated against, or anything like that, because of anything. No. I feel like I had a fair chance, there. Yup.

MONDESIR: So, like, in general, what did you think of the quality of the high school?

ALEXANDER: The high school?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: It was fine. [laughter] You know, once again, in hindsight, when you -- I was going through a lot of other stuff. And then, you know, you're just going through your growing pains. So, it was more that than the academics was the -- it was more the social than the academics. You know, you want a boyfriend. You know, all of that stuff. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Oh, so, like, where did you hang out?

ALEXANDER: Usually -- because my grandmother was very strict, I couldn't hang out too much. So, I pretty much had to come home right after school. But at one point, she did allow me to join the tennis team, which was good. I didn't last very long with the tennis team, and then that was mostly in the spring anyway. But it was very important for me to get a varsity letter. [laughter] So, I got my varsity letter in tennis. I did that for about a year. I dabbled with track a little bit. I was trying to do anything so I could stay after school. That's what it was. But I didn't enjoy any of it enough to really want to pursue it, you know, enough.

So I pretty much had to come home. I couldn't hang out too much. But when I did try to sneak and hang out, we would, you know, do things when it was warm, or go to, like City Island, or maybe Van Cortlandt Park. You know, we would do a little hanging out like that. But otherwise, I had to go home.

MONDESIR: I mean, were there -- any yearnings to go towards Harlem, or was that just a place too far --?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, we went a lot into -- not Harlem, so much. We went a lot into the city itself, like 14th Street. As a kid -- I have a brother. And he's two years younger than I am. We did a lot of running errands for my grandmother. And so, we would go to 14th Street, and maybe do a little shopping for her. You know, Gimbels, and Orbachs, all the stores that were there at the time. We used to do a lot on Fordham Road, which is in the Bronx. But Harlem itself? No.

The most experience I had, actually in Harlem, after I was born there, was with my mother. And I remember visiting people, but not -- I couldn't tell you a whole lot about Harlem. And it's a place. I mean, I visit every now and again. Now, more for the restaurants. But I don't really -- you know. And I've been to the Schomburg. You know, I've done a few things in Harlem, but it's not some place I hang out. Even though I claim it. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Oh. So, where did you go to college?

ALEXANDER: I went to college in Ithaca College. And I studied speech pathology. At the time, it was one of those things where you had to start your major right away. So, I had to do the four years in speech pathology. I understand now, sometimes you can kind of start somewhere else and then declare a major, but I had to declare a major as soon as I got in. Because it's an intense program. It's not like you can... And would you like to know why?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: [laughter] My grandfather had a stroke when I was a sophomore in high school. And I used to attend speech therapy with him. He had aphasia, which is where he would -- for example, he would want to call me, but he'd call the cat. Or, you know, it was like, your brain does different things with aphasia. You want to say certain things, but it may come out a different way. That was a big part of his disability. And it was very frustrating for him. And he would cry a lot. He couldn't read the same way that he used to. He was an avid reader. He couldn't read the same way. It would take him longer to get through a sentence that he may not understand what was going on. So, all of that. And I used to attend therapy with him. It wasn't all the time, but sometimes. And I was like, oh, this looks like something I might want to do. So, that's how I found speech pathology as a field that I would like to get into.

MONDESIR: Oh, cool. And what was your experience attending Ithaca? Like, was it one of the first times you were leaving New York, for a long time?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, definitely. It was interesting, because Ithaca College was predominantly White. It still is predominantly a White school -- private school. There were a handful of us. And in the speech pathology program, I was like one of two. And then the other girl, she was in and out, because she was like a little ahead, but she needed to take a course here, and a course there. So it was very -- it was kind of stressful. A lot of times, I would sit in classes by myself. Or they would only want to speak to me, if they wanted to know what I got on the test, or, "Oh, did you understand what so-and-so said?" It was never any type of social engagement there, unless it was

forced. You had to do some project together, something like that. But it was a very -- the segregation was definitely there. Definitely.

So, you know, we had a very strong Afro-Latin Society. And we would hold each other down, as they say. [laughter] But in my major, yeah, very few of us. Very few. So it was challenging that way. A lot of times, because of the academic work, you know, you didn't think about it, when you had to take anatomy and physiology, and all of these other things. You're just trying to figure out, like, how I'm going to pass this class? But you're wondering, maybe it would have been a little better if I had more of a partner with some of this? So, that part was a little challenging.

Every now and again, I used to go back to Ithaca College, just to see how things were going. Especially when I first graduated. And the Afro-Latin Society was still strong. From my understanding now -- I mean, there are still issues. They have a society, but I'm not sure if it's called the same thing. There's different names. But there is still a cadre of kids that want to stay together. And there are still a lot of the same issues. A lot. Because especially when kids get drunk, sometimes the rudeness really comes out. And you know, that's when you have to be really careful. Whether you're on campus, or off-campus. That's just the nature of the beast.

MONDESIR: And what kind of demographics were in these clubs? Like --?

ALEXANDER: In the -- with the Afro-Latin Society?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: We were predominantly Afro, mostly Black. We had some Hispanic. But it was predominantly Black. And we had all, from a freshman to senior, it didn't matter. We had a few grad students that were part of the organization as well. And yeah, we would try to meet -- I don't remember if it was every week, or every other week. We would discuss world issues, issues on campus. We wouldn't organize when we had to. You know. One of the things that went on, one of my years -- one of my early years there, on Halloween. A bunch of kids wanted to dress -- bunch of the White kids wanted to dress in blackface.

MONDESIR: Wow.

ALEXANDER: And, you know, then they wanted to drag somebody around with a noose on the neck. You know, and this is like, we can't have this go on. You know, so you make your protest, the president listens. And it didn't happen again. So it was like that. We banded together on a lot of little things like that. Little things that were really major issues. Yeah.

MONDESIR: OK. Well, I mean, you mentioned *Roots* earlier. And there was also the Black Power movement, which was coming into swing. Did that affect you in any way, as a student?

ALEXANDER: No. The Black Power movement? I mean, once again, we stood strong together. And if you didn't realize you were Black at that time, then you knew that you were Black, and you had to be proud of that. You had to get some pride about that. Because a lot of the others that were coming from where we went to all-Black schools. So we didn't really intermingle with White people too much at all. And now we're in this environment where things are a little different. So, we learned a lot [laughter] about the world. You really learn a lot about the world.

We used to have guest speakers come up. I remember one time, we had Farrakhan come, and speak to the organization. He was probably the most famous. We used to try to get entertainers in. Sometimes, we would do stuff with Cornell, because you know Ithaca's in the same city with Cornell. And then I remember seeing Phyllis Hyman perform one time. So, you know, we used to try to do some things together, because it's like Ithaca's on one hill, and Cornell is on the other. So, we would try to do things. But you know, we pretty much just tried to stay strong together.

MONDESIR: And what was it like -- so, you would live on campus, and you would come home.

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: What was it like coming back home?

ALEXANDER: Coming back to New York City?

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: Mm. Yeah, that was always a little -- it was different. It was, you know -- because, you know, up there, it was rural. You know, you have a city, you have a bus system, and all that kind of stuff. But the people are different, of course. And because we stayed a lot on campus, you're more -- I guess you felt more secure, whereas New York City, it was like, as soon as you got into that Port Authority, it was like, oh my God. [laughter] You know, the hustle, the bustle. You have your luggage, and you're trying to get to the train so you can get uptown to the Bronx, and *da-da-da-da-da*. It was just the hustle and bustle was just like a totally different -- Ithaca's nice and easy-going, and you take your time about doing certain things. And you come back here, and *da-da-da-da-da-da*!

But in terms of all the social stuff, of course you love to be back home, because there's a lot more to do. And then you go back to your world. You know, I'm back in my world, with my Black and Hispanic people, and then I go back to Ithaca, and I have to be immersed in the other world. So, you miss it. You miss being home. You really miss being home. The different foods, and having access to things. I did miss it.

MONDESIR: One of the things I notice is sound.

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: Just how quiet it is in other places.

ALEXANDER: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MONDESIR: And then you come back, and it's just like --

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Noise. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: Yes.

MONDESIR: And where did you get your master's?

ALEXANDER: I got my master's at Brooklyn College. And I had to get my master's while I was working. So I would go at night. And you know, I mean, you did what you had to do. I wasn't quite ready to do it at the time, but I had to do it. But one of the requirements of the DOE is you have to have your master's. I was getting close to my deadline. So Brooklyn College made that very easy for me to achieve.

MONDESIR: OK. So, when were you inspired to become a teacher?

ALEXANDER: Hm, that's a good question. See, it's very strange, because at Ithaca College, we -- in the speech pathology program, we were not trained to be teachers. We were trained to be more clinical, to work more like in hospital settings, or to work in settings outside of school. So, like teaching was kind of pooh-poohed. It wasn't -- and then, once I got out of -- once I graduated Ithaca, I didn't go into teaching for a while. I was in the private sector. So, I worked in banking and retail. Because I graduated in '83. I didn't come into the DOE until '94. So, those years in between that, I was in banking and retail.

So, in banking, I did everything from teller, to customer service, to being in charge of the tellers, which was sort of like a system manager type position. And retail, I was a system manager in one of the departments down in A&S, here in Downtown Brooklyn. So, I had some management experience. I was able to grow in the private sector. The reason I left the private sector is mainly because of some conflicts I was having, and also because I was like, you know, I have this degree. And I felt like I needed to do something with it.

And I did speak to my husband, because it was going to be pay cut. I was making decent money in the private sector. [laughter] And I knew coming to the DOE was going to be a pay cut. And we talked about it. And I really felt like it was time for me to -- well, once again, the teaching part wasn't stressed. So, even though I know I was coming to the DOE as a teacher, I also knew that my training was elsewhere, and I knew that my mindset -- so, I had to learn a lot, my first few years, just becoming a teacher. Because even though we're speech, we're under the umbrella of teaching. That just makes it easier for them to deal with us.

MONDESIR: So, what were your first few years of teaching like?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's a lot. [laughter] You know, there's just things that you don't think about, in terms of dealing with the different types of age ranges. And knowing the developmental norms of all these age ranges, and how do you group the kids, and how do you know what's going to be effective for them to learn?

One of the things one of my supervisors told me is, "Never assume anything." So, for example, when you go to your home, you may have a lovely living room, with a couch, and a nice little table in the middle and a rug. A lot of our kids don't have that. You know, that living room may be their bedroom. They may have to sleep on the couch, you know, things like that. So you can't assume certain things. And then you find it to be true. Because sometimes when you're working with different materials, especially those that are made in Middle America, you're giving them a flashcard. And they're talking about mommy and daddy, and some of our kids don't know mommy and daddy. Some of our kids know grandma. [laughter] You know? Some of our kids, they don't know, like I said, about the living room. Or maybe the kitchen is not the way the kitchen looks on the picture. So it's differing things like that, the cultural stuff, you have to be very, very, very aware of.

And even, you know, me, I'm a Black woman. Even I was raised a lot differently than a lot of the kids that I work with. So you really have to be very sensitive about what's going on with the population you work with.

So, a big part of that was just the age ranges. You know, dealing with a little five-year-old, all the way up to 11- and 12-year-olds. And sometimes, a little older. They're in fifth grade, and they may be a little older. Yeah.

MONDESIR: OK. The Albany Houses are very close by.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: So, do you get a lot of students from there coming?

ALEXANDER: Yes. We get a lot of students from there, from Weeksville. We even get some from Kingsborough Walk, which is a little closer to Weeksville. So, yeah. And we get some from -- well, we used to get more from over here on Fulton Street, but I think because of the zoning, that's changed a little bit. But yeah, we get them from all around.

MONDESIR: And could you discuss what the demographics were like, when you first came to the school?

ALEXANDER: From my understanding --

MONDESIR: And when did you first come to the school?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, in 1994, I believe it was pretty much the same as it is now. I live in Bed-Stuy now. And I see more changes there than I see here, in terms of gentrification. I'm not saying it's going to happen, and of course it is, but I'm saying what I see. Which is, you know, Bed-Stuy is right across Atlantic, so it's not that far away. [laughter]

I see, like across Atlantic, you see more the bars going up, and the restaurants have changed, and you have more coffee shops. You know, things like that. I don't see that so much here, but I don't really delve deep into Crown Heights. I -- when I do go a little deeper, I'm more at the museum. I'm more toward Park Slope-y, Prospect Heights. So it depends on, you know, where you're saying Crown Heights really is. Because going toward Weeksville Houses, I mean, unless I'm on the bus or driving, I don't really go over that way too much. It's more toward the museum, and the library. You know, places like that. The Children's Museum. So, I haven't really noticed a lot, to be honest. I still find it to be very similar, like it was years ago.

MONDESIR: So you think the demographics of the children and the teachers are the same --

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: -- as they'd been before?

ALEXANDER: Pretty much, I think they are the same.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: Now, the teachers are changing. [laughter] We're getting more White teachers that are coming to our school, now. And I understand, back in the past, though, it was like that as well. So, I came here in '94, and when I came here, we were a largely Black staff. Now, it's changing. We have some White teachers that are coming to work with our kids, for whatever reason. And, you know, I do see changes like that. But in terms of, like, the look of things, and the feel of things, I feel it's very similar as it was, yeah.

MONDESIR: OK. And did you hear about -- what impression did you have of Crown Heights, before you moved, or started working over there? And how did that change when you started working over here?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. When I heard about Crown Heights, and I'm going to throw Bed-Stuy in there, I heard it was a lot like the South Bronx. So, I'm already familiar with the South Bronx. [laughter] It was like, oh, OK, cool. So I felt that it was going to be similar, I would be comfortable there. I didn't worry about anything like that. And I figured that I'd be with my Black children. I figured it would be more Black than Hispanic, because the South Bronx was largely Hispanic at the time. And I figured it would be more Black children. I figured it would be a lot more Caribbean children. And I was like, cool. You know, didn't -- that didn't matter to me. [laughter] That was a great thing.

MONDESIR: Cool. And so, that was very important --

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: -- feature of where you were going to teach. You wanted to be with --

ALEXANDER: It was important. When I was offered the position here in this district -- I'll just start with the district. I didn't know what school I was going to. But I knew District 16 is in Bed-Stuy. They always say it's in Bed-Stuy. It was a predominantly Black district. And I was like, that's great. I'm working with my children. That's a good thing. [laughter] And then, when they put me here, and then I -- you know, once I started learning a little more about the school, I was like, wow, this is a very important place. And it's just too bad that the importance has sort of, like, gone to the wayside.

MONDESIR: So, you guys would learn about the history of Weeksville, and the school itself, and that made you -- you grew a sense of pride --

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah.

MONDESIR: -- in the school?

ALEXANDER: Definitely.

MONDESIR: OK.

ALEXANDER: Growing up, my grandmother, she kept scrap books of a lot of the historical events. So, you know, at the time, it was a lot of the JFK stuff, and Martin Luther King. So, she had scrap books full of different events that happened. And you know, the good old fashioned, you're cutting out the -- from the newspaper, you're gluing it into

the book, and so, you know, we would always reference those things, if we had to. So, just that pride of being Black was always there. And she was big into music. So, you know, we always listened to all the popular Black artists, and stuff like that. So, coming into a place like this, and to know that it was steeped in such historical value, to me it was amazing, when I first learned. I was like, really? Wow. [laughter] It was amazing. Yeah. And to see the pictures, and how the students were involved in the digs, and things like that. It's too bad it kind of just went to the wayside.

MONDESIR: So, we were talking about the Chancellor Rudy Crew before.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: And I want to ask about the curriculum. So, like when you first came in, was the history of Weeksville incorporated within the curriculum, and did that change by '98? Or --?

ALEXANDER: From what I remember, if the history of Weeksville was incorporated, it's because the teacher decided -- the teachers decided to do that. It wasn't like a mandate. It wasn't anything that was part of the social studies curriculum. If the teacher decided to do it, then it happened.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, he didn't -- you know, Rudy Crew didn't mandate that anything -- that we'd do anything special with that. That was just, you know, you have a curriculum. You know you have to teach math, reading, social studies, whatever it is. And if you want to fit it in, you squeeze it in the best way you can.

MONDESIR: OK, so it didn't change anywhere, like it -- it wasn't like, oh, you guys have to teach the test now, or --?

ALEXANDER: No.

MONDESIR: Oh, OK.

ALEXANDER: I mean, you mean teaching to the test?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: As far as I remember. But remember, I'm out of the classroom. So, that may not be a fair question for me.

MONDESIR: Oh, OK. So, how is it different for you as a speech teacher, as opposed to --?

ALEXANDER: Well, you know, me as a speech teacher, I have to go by what the IEP states. So, whatever goals the child has on the IEP is what I have to work on.

Now, of course, I can -- luckily, I can bring in anything. So, if I wanted to do a whole Weeksville curriculum, and try to make it all speech- and language-related, I could do that. I could try to create something. But I have to really focus on what the IEP says for the students. Yeah, so it's not like I'm -- a lot of it is literacy-based. But it's not like I am pulling from so-and-so's book, and so-and-so's curriculum, and doing it that way.

MONDESIR: Cool. Could you describe the kind of students that you get to interact with?

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm. A lot of them are what they consider speech and language delayed. So, whatever tests were given to them, they -- you know, the test shows that they are not normally developing in speech and language. And speech, a lot of it has to do with-- or a tic-- it's what you normally think speech therapy is. They don't say sounds correctly, or they may jumble up some sounds, a little bit. But the language is what I predominantly deal with, because you know, language is your understanding, and your use of the language. A lot of it is reading. A lot of the students, if they can read, they may not exactly understand what they are reading. So, it's just a matter of trying to teach them strategies to help them attack the curriculum a little better. So, you do it in small vacuums. And you can -- you do it slowly, over time. And you hope that, you know, with time, they can take something back to the classroom and do a little better in the classroom.

MONDESIR: Oh, good call.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah.

MONDESIR: And what did you think of the community of Crown Heights, or the community around this school, when you first came?

ALEXANDER: You know, I didn't really think anything. I mean, you know, of course, after a while, you hear the rumors of, you know, there are gangs in the area, so be careful. You know, there might have been shootings. Sometimes, even now, when we watch the news, and we hear that something happened in Crown Heights, you know, we're

hoping, oh, that that wasn't a student of ours. So, the crime factor is definitely something that you have to consider, but personally, I've never felt like I'm afraid to walk the streets here, or anything like that.

Now, of course, I'm here during the day. [laughter] I don't hang out around here at night. But I've never felt like I have anything to fear, coming to work here. I've always -- you know, when I first started, I worked in different schools. I wasn't always here full-time. But this was always what they called my payroll school. And there was always something about PS 243 that just felt like home to me. I'm sorry, like home to me. And I don't know what exactly it is. I don't know if it's the historical content. I don't know if it's the -- just the makeup of the people, that a lot -- that have been here for a while. But there is always something here about PS 243 that made this feel like home.

Other schools I've worked in, you know, yeah, you go in, and you build a rapport with the principal, and with the staff, but there's something about this school that just -- you know. And when I was told that I can be here full-time, I was like, oh, that's great! [laughter] That was right on time.

MONDESIR: Were there any teachers that come to mind, when you first started here, like took you under their wing, like this is how things work --

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. Like Ms. Derico, Ms. Derico was a big one. Me and her, we're very close, to this day. We started working together on one of the literacy projects that we had here. And she's very dynamic, and we work well together. We throw ideas off of each other all the time. And we're both of the same mindset, where we would like to see the school be top, like I understand it used to be. And we try to do things to help make that happen. Like, you know, a big part of the Weeksville Project was to -- we can't have this as a dump room anymore. The PTA president kind of put the fire under us, and we said we would help, and we just -- we want to make it -- I would like it, where if the students could contribute to it every year. And of course, I have a better relationship with the Weeksville Heritage Society, and just for the students to understand where -- what this used to be, and what stems from it. That's a big part of what I'd like to do, before I leave here.

MONDESIR: So, tell me when you started off the museum again.

ALEXANDER: So, that was last June. It's always been in the wind, you know, the Weeksville Museum. But once again, once the superintendent spoke with the PTA president, and she said she wanted this to be something that happened. Then we took it upon ourselves to make it happen. [laughter]

MONDESIR: What's the name of the PTA president?

ALEXANDER: That's -- um, oh, gosh. I'm drawing a blank, now. Miss Lamont? Miss Lamont. She's the PTA president.

MONDESIR: Oh, [inaudible] like her full name?

ALEXANDER: Was it Jeralyn? Jeralyn Lamont? I think it's Jeralyn. A lot of times, we call each other by our last names, so I'm sorry. [laughter] And yeah, so she came to us and said that this superintendent wanted this. And that she wanted it. And is there a way we can do it? And we'd -- she didn't really say, "Is there a way we can do it?" It was like, "We need to do this." [laughter] And so, we went in there, and with the help of Mr. Butler, and some of the other custodians, we cleaned it out, and made it smell a little better, and put up -- a lot of -- luckily, there were a lot of things already in there, like the pills were already in there. And things were already in there, it was just a matter of making things look nice, and presentable. And to try to organize it in such a way where it had a little more meaning than just being thrown around the room.

MONDESIR: Yeah. I've been to the museum three or four times, at this point. And there's so much. So, would you mind telling me, like, how -- and I know that it started as soon as the dig happened. So, could you tell me, like, the lifetime of it? The cycle of, like, when it maybe kind of fell out of prominence, and to the point where you decided to bring it back?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I can't tell you years, because I'm bad with years. But I know -- I'm trying to remember when I first came here. I kept hearing there was a museum. And there's a room. You know, because when you first hear a museum, you're thinking, oh -- you know, you think you're going to see -- but you realize there's a room, dedicated to Weeksville. And they had more artifacts than we have right now. I don't know what

happened to the artifacts that we had. But I walked around, and I saw. And I was like, wow. You know, you had little blurbs typed underneath each artifact. So, you got to learn a little bit.

Then, as the years went on, it became a dump room, you know, people just kept dumping things in there, for one reason or another. I don't understand why. And we had an art teacher that tried to revive it. She had a relationship with the Weeksville Heritage Society. We had quilting classes, which I did participate in, after school. And we were trying to get the students involved, and teachers involved, and parents. That was a collaborative venture, there. And made sure that it went into the Weeksville School. Once again, [laughter] it just became a dump room. And so, now, we're going to make sure, as long as we're here, that it doesn't become a dump room.

Another part of this is to make sure that teachers, the younger teachers that may decide to stay around here, that they are vested in keeping this going as well. You know, we can't let it become a dump room again. Really sad.

MONDESIR: So, is the PTA president, Miss Lamont, is she unique, as far as a parent?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, her heart is definitely in the improvement of the school. Of course, she wants to do that on the partner end. But because we are a P-*T*-A, she really values the input of the teachers as well.

You know, it was a little challenging, because she may not have the attendance that she'd like at meetings. But people seem to know who she is. And they -- she was voted for. Again, this is her second term. Well, a year is the term. But this is the second time, and she was voted in again. So, people, I think people know that her heart is there, and she wants to improve the school. She wants us to be on the map, as they say. And knowing the importance of Weeksville, if that's going to help, then she's willing to do whatever she can do to help Weeksville get back on the map.

MONDESIR: Cool. So, I guess Black consciousness has a very strong impact on the faculty.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: And it seems like you try to bestow that on the students. Do you feel that's true?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Well, I think it's not as strong as it could be. And there's pockets of it. It's not building-wide. It is mostly with the older students. Last year, we had a group of fifth-graders. They created a book. I don't know if you saw that in the museum. Because the teachers decided that they wanted Weeksville as their curriculum for that time. They created a book. The students wrote about Weeksville, and I guess what it meant to them. And they put it together and bound it into a book, and it was very nice. But we needed more, school-wide. We need the pride to be school-wide, from pre-K, on to five. That's where -- we don't have that. Like I said, there's pockets. And if that teacher decides that that's important enough to spend the time on it, then that's when it's done.

We've been told by the principal, in the email, that she wants us to do a re-grand opening of the museum. And me and Ms. Derico, we have to talk about what we would like that to look like. And I -- for me, it should be done in February, so we need to have that talk right now. [laughter] Because, you know, for Black History Month. So, we have to sit down and figure out -- because even if it can be where we have a few students. I don't know, maybe read something, or if they could write something. Some kind of way, of course, incorporating Weeksville into another grand opening, and inviting some of the political people that we have in the community to see that this is what's going on, and we value everybody to help as much as they can, to keep it going.

MONDESIR: Did you -- while you're here, have you heard any stories about other teachers, and how they would incorporate?

ALEXANDER: No, I haven't heard anything. The book project was last year, and that teacher, she's like in another grade now. So she's with younger students, so it may be difficult for her to do that now. No, I haven't. I haven't heard about anything this school year. But part of the initiative is to get the teachers thinking, because we want as much participation as we can get. [laughter] I know it's going to be a little difficult, because we only have a month. But I think, with some of the experienced teachers that we have here especially, I think we can make it be a very nice re-grand-opening.

MONDESIR: OK. And so, like, beyond the school, where do the students tends to go, get to go on trips on? Like, do they visit the Children's Museum, nearby? Or where else?

ALEXANDER: From my understanding, they don't visit the Children's Museum too much. I know we've had some trips, like to the World Trade Memorial. But in the neighborhood, you know, they may do walking trips. And I know that we've had groups that go to Weeksville. We did have a swim program with the St. John Center, over here, where we would have some kids go over and do some swimming, learn how to swim, and everything. But yeah, they don't trip a lot. You know, they'll go to farms, and things like that, for the fall. Spring, trips will pick up a little bit. But a lot of them would be in Manhattan. Yeah.

MONDESIR: OK. And you said you taught from all age ranges?

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: So, do you have a favorite age range, and --?

ALEXANDER: I kind of like second and third grade. They are, cognitively, they are coming into -- their thought processes are a lot different. They are not as baby, [laughter] as they used to be. They are getting more mature. And I don't know, they seem to have an outlook on life. You know, a lot of them are very positive, and they haven't let the world get them down yet. You know, I guess the hormones haven't quite kicked in yet, and so, you know, that's a fun age, the second and third grade. I kind of like them.

MONDESIR: Do you have any particular student that comes to mind, like --?

ALEXANDER: I don't want to name any names, but I have -- because I have a lot of boys on my case load. So I have this one little boy in particular that, he comes from a family where education is stressed. And right now, he's saying, he wants to be the typical fireman, policeman. You know, but I can see him -- with his parents' help, of course -- wanting to go to college, and becoming a very good citizen of the world. There's just something about him. I just see him going far.

MONDESIR: Nice. And what's it like, getting to interact with people within this community?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, everybody's friendly. They know who we are. A lot of times, when we take a walk around the corner for lunch, for example, you know, you're saying hi to people. Everybody's very friendly. I haven't had any issues, since I've been in this building.

MONDESIR: And like, what are the -- the parents. The parents of -- are they interactive, or has that changed from '94 until now?

ALEXANDER: I think the parents were more involved, back in the day, than they are now. There is some hesitation, coming into the building. But, like for example, open school; I wish we had more participation. I wish parents would come out more, and not wait until there's a problem. Come in, see what's going on, talk to the teachers before there might be a problem, and you have to get that call that you must come in, kind of thing. But yeah, I think participation was a lot better, back in '94, '95 than it is now.

MONDESIR: And what's that like in comparison to when you were growing up in the Bronx?

ALEXANDER: Well, when I was growing up, it seemed like everybody came out. [laughter] Because you know, that's one thing -- you came to school the next day, it was like, "Did your mother come? Did your mother come?" You would talk about it. And if your parents didn't come, it would be like, *ooh*. You know, like, *hmm*. [laughter] It wasn't a good thing.

My grandmother was older, but she would always make sure that she went to our schools, and that she kept in touch with the teachers as much as she could. And she would tell us, you know, going to school and doing your homework, that's your only job. Like, what else do you have to do? So, just do it. [laughter] I wouldn't dare come in with low grades, or anything like that, because it just wasn't expected of us. So, it's different. A lot of the expectations have to come from home. And if it doesn't come from home, then the students don't know how important education is.

MONDESIR: And did you have children before you became a teacher, or afterwards, and how did that affect you, as an educator?

ALEXANDER: I have one son. My son I had before I became a teacher. And my daughter I had my first year of teaching, actually. And having my son helped a lot. Because I felt

like, you know, I was in with the lingo of the kids. I knew what they liked to watch, and I knew what they liked to do, and so it helped. And then, because he was -- at the time, he was seven. And so, of course, I'm working with my first and second graders. A lot of the same toys. So, there were a lot of similarities between what he was doing, or what he liked, I should say, and what they liked.

Now, of course, because of the disabilities, academically, it was a little different. But even with those differences, once you pull in what students enjoy doing, then they're more motivated to try to do. You know what I mean? So, it helped to know that, you know, like the Ninja Turtles, which just seem like they are eternally popular. Or, because I knew some of the wrestlers, at the time. You know, especially because I have a lot of boys. I was cool. I was all right. [laughter] Because I can engage in those conversations with them before we might get to the lesson that I have for them.

Or maybe after we got to the lesson. Because sometimes, they're so excited, they want to talk to you. They want to tell you, because they don't really get a chance to talk in their classrooms a lot. They are always told, "Be quiet and listen." So they have so much to tell you. And you're like, *uh*! So, you give them some time, maybe at the beginning, or at the end, to just get out what you need to do. And most of the time, it's about what they watched, or what they did. And it's kiddie stuff, and you're looking at them like, really? But -- [laughter] you know, you give them that chance to express themselves.

MONDESIR: Cool. And there's also a charter school --

ALEXANDER: Yes.

MONDESIR: -- in this building also. Could you tell me about when that happened, and what's it like, since they've been a part of this building, or school?

ALEXANDER: OK. Yeah, the charter school has been here -- and is this the fourth year? Because I know they started with just sixth grade. And now they do have eighth grade. So, I think this is their fourth year here. And of course, we were a little hesitant, at first. You know, charter school, *ehh*. And because they were older students, as well. We wondered how -- what the mix was going to be like, having older students with our

young students. But that hasn't been an issue. There are separate entrances. Their lunch is different. There is some interaction, but it's not like it's a daily, all-day type of thing.

The teachers are friendly. The administration's friendly. I don't know what else I can say about that. They're here. They are always looking for more space. [laughter] So, you know, we try to use all the space that we can, so they're not trying to take any more space from us. But, you know, they work with us. We tend to try to work together. Whatever issues they have, they come to the table, the principal and whoever is upstairs, and they work on those issues.

It's been things like, sometimes, you know, the kids are on this floor when they shouldn't be. Going to the bathrooms. So it's been little things like that. But they get rectified very quickly, and we keep it going.

MONDESIR: OK, cool. And have you noticed any differences between you, as a student going to school, and students now?

ALEXANDER: Now? Um. The big difference is, it seemed like home was responsible for more, when I was a student. For example, I always ate breakfast at home. It wasn't an option for me to have breakfast in school. If the school said that you had to wear -- well, it wasn't uniform at the time. But, for example, when we had assembly, you had to wear your white shirt, and your little red bow-tie, a little tie. You must wear that. So, there were certain things that the schools mandated when I was a kid that, even though they try that now, it doesn't seem like it's enforced. It's not respected. So, you know, the kids, they don't.

Homework? You're given homework. You must do your homework. Now, you give homework, and you hope that the kids do the homework. And that could be for many factors. Maybe they need help at home. It could be for various things, for various reasons. But the home used to be responsible for a lot more. I think the school does a lot now. And that has its good and its bad, because there are some students, if we didn't have the breakfast program, they wouldn't have breakfast. And we know that breakfast is a very important part of the start of your day.

But I don't know. I think the parent thing, piece. Somebody needs to get on top of that, and make sure that parents do a little more with their children. A lot of the time, my students, they have language delays, because no one's interacting with them. You know, they come in with their vocabulary so much lower than, say, a White kid the same age on the Upper East Side, because those kids have different experiences. You know, they may be taking their violin lessons. So, they're learning vocabulary because of music. And then they go on vacation, so they know that -- skiing vocabulary. Like, they have vocabulary from different facets of life.

Where our kids, they kind of stay right here. They barely even go outside. You know, if they go anywhere, like, "I went down South for Christmas." "OK, where did you go down South? Which state?" "I don't know." Like, they don't even know if they went to North Carolina, South Carolina. So, just to give the students the experiences, and talk to them. Where we're going. Even if you're on the subway. You know, "We're getting ready to go through Park Slope." "We're getting ready to -- you know, the A train is right here in Bed-Stuy." You know, things like that. So, I think the parents need to be a little more, you know -- given them the experiences. We're in New York City. There are a lot of free things to do. Yeah, you might have to pay car fare to go places, but there's a lot of places you could walk, right here in your neighborhood that aren't too far. Get them out, talk to them, and get them these experiences, because, come on, we're in New York. This is one of the richest places in the world for that.

MONDESIR: So, as a speech teacher, understanding the, like if students don't interact with the world, they are delayed, in a way, do you feel -- and also, working at 243, do you feel like you have some sort of responsibility to provide them some form of culture?

ALEXANDER: I would like that. A lot of times -- it could be very difficult. It's not impossible. Of course, more trips could be scheduled, to make sure that when the teachers go on the trips, that they are prepared, with whatever questions, or treasure hunts, or anything like that, city kind of thing. OK. So, yeah. To allow the teachers to go on more trips with the kids, and to have them prepared, during those trips, so if it's just having them with questions, or allowing treasure hunts when the kids go on the

trips, that would be a great thing. And for the parent, the parent piece, you can give them the information. Maybe a trip could be sponsored by the school, every now and again. You know, I'm not sure how much we can get involved with that, but some kind of way, the parents need to just use New York as the resource that it is.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm. Have you been able to attend any of the trips with the students?

ALEXANDER: I've attended a few. I'm trying to think of something educational, because sometimes we'll do things like Sesame Place, and -- [laughter]

MONDESIR: That's still -- that's still --

ALEXANDER: But that's still -- yeah. So, it's fun. But a lot of times, with those trips, the parents are there, as well. So, while they're in the pools, and while they are on their rides, and everything, the kids are having a great time. And it's nice to see the laughter, and the interaction between the parents then. But typically, I don't do too many trips. I really don't. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Do you have any-- a favorite one that comes to mind?

ALEXANDER: A favorite trip?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: I'm trying to think of any favorite trips that I ever went on with the kids. Well, you know, me and the Resource Room teacher, every now and again, every so often, over the years, we used to take the kids on a walking trip, on Fifth Avenue, during the holidays, where they could see the windows and the tree, and --

MONDESIR: On Fifth Avenue? Yeah. In --

ALEXANDER: -- on Fifth Avenue, in the city.

MONDESIR: OK.

ALEXANDER: In the city. And let them experience what it's like to be in the winter wonderland of New York City. [laughter] So, that's always interesting, because you know, you're coming out of the subway, and you're walking with the crowds, and everything like that. So, they seem to enjoy that.

MONDESIR: Do you notice their experience of -- I mean, for some of them, it could be their first time coming to Manhattan --

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: -- do you see that experience?

ALEXANDER: Sometimes, you see that experience. But it's more where -- it's different, because you're not rushing through it. But sometimes, if they do go with their parents, they are rushing to see the tree, and then they might be rushing to a store, and then they're back on the train. Whereas, I mean, we take our time as much as we can, but you know, we're trying to talk to them along the way.

I remember one time, we had a group, and we went into St. Patrick's Cathedral. And they were just, like, fascinated by St. Patrick's Cathedral. And they were in there, and they're looking at the stained glass, and just experiencing all of that. And one of them wanted to kneel down and pray. So, you know, we didn't stop that. [laughter] Her classmates followed along, and that was a lovely moment. And this was one of those students, you're like, really? And so, let her go with it. And so, that was really nice. That was cool.

MONDESIR: Nice. Cool. So, what about the Crown Heights riots, did that affect you in any way, or did that affect any of the students that you were teaching?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, I don't know anything about that.

MONDESIR: Oh, OK.

ALEXANDER: The Crown Heights riots, you said?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: No. [inaudible] --

MONDESIR: Was that before your time?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, I don't -- I don't know anything about that. What year was that?

MONDESIR: It was '92? No?

ALEXANDER: Mm, no. No.

MONDESIR: So you weren't living in this area before that?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, I was living in the area. [inaudible] was going on in the neighborhood too much.

MONDESIR: OK.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, as a young mother, yeah. It was called the Crown Heights riot? I have to do some research on that.

MONDESIR: I mean, it has different names for different people.

ALEXANDER: OK.

MONDESIR: So, it's a very interesting subject, so I was just like, let me ask about it.

ALEXANDER: OK.

MONDESIR: And did -- has your son visited the school, to see the museum, or like -- well, what school did he attend?

ALEXANDER: He attended IS -- PS IS 308, here in District 16. At the time, there was a gifted program, so he was in the school as a gifted student. And don't ask me what year he graduated. I'm bad at dates. [laughter] But he was there from, like, second grade, all the way through eighth. So, he had a really good experience there. Like me, he had the same teacher, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. And she was very much -- very Afro-centric. She was all about her Blackness, and she made the kids proud of being Black, and you know, it was really good experience for the students in her class. She even took a group of students to Africa. Unfortunately, we weren't able to send my son, at the time. But yeah, during one of the -- I think one of the spring breaks, she took a group of students with her to Africa.

MONDESIR: What was her name?

ALEXANDER: Miss Jarvis.

MONDESIR: Oh, OK.

ALEXANDER: You know Cleo Jarvis? I think she retired now. But she was very dynamic. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Oh, OK, so which decade did she send them to the --

ALEXANDER: This is --

MONDESIR: -- get to go to Africa?

ALEXANDER: -- this was in 19-- had to be -- I would have to get the date for you. I would have to figure out the math. But it had to be like the early '90s. Yeah, because he's 30 -- he's 30 now. So, I would have to figure out the dates for you.

MONDESIR: And do you know where in Africa they went, or --?

ALEXANDER: I believe they went to Ghana. I believe they went to Ghana. Yeah.

MONDESIR: That's a crazy thing to --

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: -- to get to do with students.

ALEXANDER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, so she had them very proud. I remember even ancestry was a big thing, for you to pay homage to your ancestors. And so, I remember this project we worked on together, where he made a pillow for his grandmother that just passed. And he had to pick out -- he wanted to pick out a certain type of African fabric, and he wanted it done a certain way. So, of course, he needed my help with the ideas that he had. But it was a nice way for him to really reflect on her, and to pay homage to her, especially because she had just passed over.

MONDESIR: Cool. Ms. Jarvis sounds really nice.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. She left that school, and I believe she went over to 335, when she left here. And she was there, I think, as a librarian over there. So, yeah, she was very dynamic.

MONDESIR: It was 335 here, or --?

ALEXANDER: Three-thirty-five is down on -- what's that street? This is Schenectady. Utica. The street after Utica. I would have to -- I want to -- it's not Buffalo. It's not as far as Buffalo. But yeah. Whoops, here's a PS. Yeah, but I believe she retired -- Rochester. It's on Rochester. They used to have a closer relationship with the Weeksville Heritage Society, because they're closer, I guess, the proximity. And so, you may find Ms. Jarvis's name in your -- whatever information you're looking at, when you're working over there. Because she was very instrumental with that, as well.

MONDESIR: Oh, cool. Yeah, I'll definitely try to look her up. Yeah. So, what relationship have you experienced with the Weeksville Center, Heritage Center, when you first came here and now?

ALEXANDER: Well, we were invited -- as a school, we were invited to the grand opening, the ribbon-cut, ribbon-cutting.

MONDESIR: In two-thousand, and --?

ALEXANDER: What was that -- was it '10? No. Was it that long ago? Was it 2010?

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: It was something like that. Yeah. But yeah, we were invited as a school community. We went over there. We -- I don't know if you saw in the *Our Time Press*, there was an article that students wrote about the ribbon-cut, the ribbon-cutting. Because we took a group of students over -- me and Ms. Derico took a group of students over to the Weeksville Heritage Society, as part of this whole opening of the Center. And yeah, there was an article. Every student kind of gave a little blurb about their feelings, and about what Weeksville meant to them. And it was published in the newspaper.

MONDESIR: Oh, cool.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. So, that was kind of nice. [laughter]

MONDESIR: All right, so how do you see Crown Heights, and the school changing within, like, the next 10 years?

ALEXANDER: OK. Well, I can imagine the gentrification will spill over here, like it has on the other side of -- you know, where Bed-Stuy is, in terms of the businesses changing, to cater more to people that, you know, like to hang out a little more, that like to be a little more social. I keep hearing rumors about the projects being changed over, and to different types of housing. I'm not sure -- when I hear stuff like that, I'm like, well, what do you do with the people? You know, so I don't know how true that is. But I've heard that it does happen. Because you know, it's not too far from the subway, so a lot of people like to think about the proximity of transportation, in an area like this. I see -- So, I see gentrification happening. How fast, how soon, how widespread, I'm not sure.

In terms of the school itself, we have to change with the times. We know that parts of education now, there are different mandates happening. There are different focuses that are going on now. And a lot of it is related to the common core. And to make sure that our children are college-ready. And there's just more of a push toward making

sure that our kids are ready for the world. Technology, being able to think, and to -- to kind of, maneuver the world, in ways where they are more prepared.

How much we are doing on the elementary level, I don't know how effective we're being right now. Hopefully, that'll change in the future. I think technology will have to be a big part of that. Our kids now, they have a problem learning with their hands folded and listening. They need to be more engaged. And my hope is that, if it's technology, if it's project-based learning, however it is, we have to get the students more engaged in learning the way that they learn best. And it's not always with the hands folded, listening to that person standing in front of the room. So, that's going to be our big push, is to go toward that, to make them more accountable of their learning.

MONDESIR: You brought up a good point with, well, one, gentrification; and two, technology. So I'll ask about gentrification first. How do you -- how have you seen gentrification affect education today, like now?

ALEXANDER: I haven't seen anything here, directly in the school yet, but I've heard. For example, there's a group on the other side of District 16 of parents that are really pushing for a gifted and talented program in the district. And they are, you know, a group of White parents. I'm not saying there aren't any Black in the group, but I know that there are White parents in the group. And that's what they want for their children. So, they are pushing -- and I think it's happening. I'm not sure. I keep hearing it may be at PS 26 that there will be a gifted and talented program, here in the district. I think it's on the elementary level. I'm not sure if it's starting K, you know. So, that's one push.

Because you know what it is, is that, you want to make sure -- and that's all of us -- that there's quality education in the district, and our scores are notoriously low, for years, in the district. So, hopefully, with this gifted and talented initiative, when you have a bright child, they are not so immersed with children that maybe consider low performing. They are more with children that are like them. You know, because the assumption is that they will achieve more. So, I have mixed feelings about that. But I know that's been one big initiative, to make sure that you have gifted and talented.

I know that there are -- I've heard about some parents that just want arts in the school. That's one of the things that's taken away first. You know, music, art. So, to get arts in the school. And to make sure that that's part of the kids -- because not everybody learns the same way. And if some form of art will be your forte, then that's what you should be exposed to, to see how that helps. But otherwise, here at Weeksville, I haven't seen anything yet. I'm not saying it's not happening. I just haven't seen it.

MONDESIR: And you also mentioned technology. So, have you noticed anything that's changed in the schools, in regards to how teachers teach, or how the students learn, in regards to, like, how technology has rapidly changed from then to now?

ALEXANDER: Well, we have many classrooms now with Smart Boards. And of course, with the Smart Board, the hope is that it is interactive. You allow the students to come up and move and do what they need to do, to solve whatever problems that they are solving. So, I'm assuming that that's going on. Of course, I don't have one, but -- [laughter].

Also, the students, they pick up technology like nothing. You give them a tablet, you give them a phone, and they can teach you a few things with it. So, they really love the technology, and they are not afraid of it, which is wonderful. How much they are doing with it, like are they actually learning how to use Word, and Excel, and a PowerPoint, or are they actually using the internet to help create and edit videos, and things like that? I think we still have a long way to go with that.

But the basic, you know, trying to type a little report, a lot of them are going that. We have our computer lab here, and a lot of them go on for different -- so they can do their level of reading, and their level of math assignments on there. So, that's good, because it helps individualize the learning that way. So, that's a good thing. But we still have a long way to go.

A big push in the future, and I think we're going to try to start it next year is testing online. So, that way, you can get instant results. You know, you don't have to wait two and three months to see, oh, the child is a level-two, a level-three. You know, it's

supposed to be instant. But I make a face about that, because you have to have the infrastructure involved with that. You can't just say, we're going to do online testing. Where are the computers? Are our servers strong enough to handle something like this, where you have so many kids testing at one time? You know, so it's little questions like that. But that's supposed to be the goal for the future. That way, the teachers get instant access to how the kids are doing. And that helps drive their instruction.

MONDESIR: Cool. And I mean, are there certain things where, as a student -- when you were a student, it was like, oh, I wish I definitely had that, growing up.

ALEXANDER: [laughter] Yes, the technology. And it's funny, because when I used to work at the bank, that's when I had my first experience with technology. I had to learn d-base, and all this old stuff that they don't -- they use probably now for coding, more than anything now. But you know, when you first heard about it, when I was a kid, you saw these huge machines that were bigger than this room. And you're like, computers! Ah! Please! You're like, you never thought that you would be involved with something like that. And then to know now that you have something that can fit in the palm of your hand that's just amazing. I'm sort of like a little geek, when it comes to technology. So, I love it. [laughter] I love it. It would have made my life so much easier in college, with those papers! *Ugh*! A typewriter! I used to use a typewriter. And --

MONDESIR: But like, would you use an electric typewriter, or --

ALEXANDER: Well, I moved up to an electric typewriter, but I started off with the old-fashioned ribbon typewriter, where you're trying to white-out when you made a mistake, and all of that. It was like, crazy, when I think what I used to have to deal with. But the technology is just fabulous. I love it. I just can't wait to see where it's going to go.

MONDESIR: And what about, you also mentioned the uniform mandates a while ago. As a kid, did you have to wear a uniform?

ALEXANDER: We didn't have to wear a uniform, except for assembly days. It was mandated that you wear your white, with your red tie, and your blue skirt. But no. Day in, day out, we didn't have a uniform. Only the Catholic school kids had that. But my grandmother would always make sure that, as a little girl, I wore my dress or my skirt, and then my brother was always -- with jeans, it was like, you didn't even think about wearing that to school. But that was just something that, like, everybody did. I don't even know when jeans started becoming popular. Probably when I was in junior high school, maybe. But you know, it was very -- it was just a different time. You know, I think your appearance was a big part of making you feel like you were successful, I guess. You know, even as a little kid. Because even now, I'm sure, when you put on certain things, and you feel a little differently, then you know, when you're a little more bummed out. You know?

MONDESIR: So, could you describe the dress code that you used to experience, while growing up, in school?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Well, we had our church clothes, and our play clothes. And our school clothes. So, the school -- well, you know, the church clothes were really more fancy. Your school clothes were maybe like one step below that. So, it was always shoes. Always your little socks. Like I said, a dress or a skirt. A blouse, and a sweater. And that's -- and I don't know if it's because it was my grandmother raising us, but I even remember when my mother was alive, we went to school like that. My brother; slacks, sweater, shirt.

[Interview interrupted.]

MONDESIR: You were talking about the difference between --

ALEXANDER: Yes, so the -- the clothing, yeah.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: So, like I said, we -- my grandmother dressed us in the socks, the dress or skirt, a shirt, and a sweater. My brother was the same. He had on his slacks, you know, dress shoes, and he, I think he pretty much wore a tie all the time. They had him very, like -- [laughter] like a little business man, growing up. So, he had a little hard time in

school, as he got older, because of that, because he enjoyed looking like that. So, once he got a little older, and things became a little more informal with jeans, and sweatshirts and like that, and he's still coming to school like that, it was just like, *ooh!* You got to kind of change with the times, so you won't get teased. But he pretty much kept his convictions, and he always dressed that way. He just said he felt better, looking like that. And even now, he's very -- he was always one -- if he wears his jeans now, he'll have on a nice pair of shoes, or a nice little boot. You never see him really dress down. So, I think that's just something from our childhood.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm. And what was it like, going to school with a sibling? Did you guys always go to the same schools?

ALEXANDER: No. We didn't always go to the same schools. Matter of fact, most of our education, we went to separate schools. Because even though I was IGC, he was also IGC, but he was like in a different program. And I'm not quite sure how it was, at the time, but eventually, he wound up going to prep school. He wound up going to a school away, in Connecticut, Choate Rosemary Hall. He went there his junior high school years, and high school.

And so, that was quite an experience, coming from the South Bronx, and being with, you know, the likes of, like, the Kennedy family. You know, wealth, wealth! So, that was quite an experience for him. But yeah, we didn't go to a lot of the same schools. I don't know why. I don't know if it's because we started that way, like when my grandmother got us, we were already established in our schools, and she just kept us where we were. So I'm not quite sure how that happened. But he went the route of prep school. You know, the ABC program, A Better Chance?

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. So, he was more that route.

MONDESIR: Nice. And so, when you had your children, did you ever consider putting them in private school, or charter schools, and why did you choose public schools, in the end?

ALEXANDER: OK. My son went to public school his whole life. He went to public high school. When he went to college, he went to Morehouse, you know, private. My daughter, though, she started public, and went private. My fear with my daughter -- because my son was in a gifted and talented program, and I knew the structures were there, and he would get supports that he needed. My daughter, I was a little more fearful, especially when she was going to third grade, the testing grade, I didn't feel -- and being the type of person that she is, too, I didn't feel public school, in District 16 -- because this is where I live, also -- was going to be good for her. So, we decided to put her in private school. And of course, as a public-school teacher, and having your child in private school, you know, it's like, *uhhh*. But then, you want to do what's best for your child. And charter wasn't as big as it is now. But charter might have been an option at the time, if I'd really explored it. But, we wound up sending her to a private school.

MONDESIR: Did you notice any stark contrasts between, like --?

ALEXANDER: You know, it's funny, because I always tell my colleagues, I say, "Her private school is not doing anything a public school can't do." Really, it's just that it's smaller -- much smaller classes. And the parent involvement. I mean, you were just always involved. [laughter] Whether it's something as simple as just attending a little performance that they are giving. Or just being there every day, for one reason or the other, you were just always involved, as a parent.

Academically, the school seemed to focus a lot on more project-based learning. So, like weekends, she didn't get homework, because the weekends were for them to enjoy life. Whether you were traveling with your family, or you had your dance lessons, and your piano lesson, whatever. The weekends were for them to enjoy. A lot of play dates. A lot of social, very social. And those bonds, she still has today. So, yeah, it was a little different approach to things.

MONDESIR: And you mentioned that with your son, that he had Miss Jarvis, so that was a very Afro-centric teacher.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: Did your daughter get any of those experiences?

ALEXANDER: No. She didn't get anything.

MONDESIR: Oh. Is --

ALEXANDER: The most she got was one summer, I let her -- I sent her here, to the summer program that we had. And so, she got -- that's about the biggest experience she's had, with a lot of Afro-- Black and Hispanic children. Because I don't know, I just felt like I wanted her to get a little street-smarts, I guess. And I said, "Well, you know, I'll send her to the school, as long as they allow me to." And she came, and she was involved in everything. And she had a good time.

MONDESIR: Could you explain what the summer program was like, and what it [inaudible]?

ALEXANDER: It was a mixture of academic and I'll say artsy, I guess? So, for example, she learned how to step. You know, all the academic things were involved, the reading and the writing, and the math. But then they would let them kind of have some fun, too. So you had your arts, with the painting, and then you also had the stepping, and you had, it seemed like double-Dutch. You know, they had a lot of things like that going on. And of course, those were the times when you could be more social, and learn -- make new friends. So, yeah, she had a good time.

MONDESIR: What were the -- so, where was the school that she went to? And what were the demographics like, over there?

ALEXANDER: She went to Berkeley Carroll in Park Slope. And that's predominantly a White school. And there are some Black children there, or they were biracial. A lot of the kids were -- I would say their families were affluent. They weren't -- you know, we were financial aid. The kids generally were very nice. The parents were cool. I liked the school because I found it to be a little more progressive, and not as stodgy as, like, at the time, of Packer, that's downtown, or Brooklyn Friends. You know, because I had the chance to interview at a few places. And there was something about Berkeley Carroll that just seemed like it was a good fit for us.

MONDESIR: Cool. All right, great.

[Intreview interrupted.]

ALEXANDER: -- get going, because you have people in the community that have been here. And we need to hear, like, what did you think, when you heard that the kids went to Weeksville, and are doing this? And how did you feel, and things like that. And once again, it's one of my ideas, but it's just a matter of, I'd never really thought about how to go about, but this is great.

MONDESIR: Yeah, I think it could easily be incorporated within, like, the history classes, or social studies.

ALEXANDER: It's just a matter of, you know, the teachers would sort of like, have to write their own curriculum. So, it's time consuming. You know, all that.

MONDESIR: Yeah, it could be as easy as interview your parents.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, with some things. Yeah, yeah, that's true. Because I definitely said we would have to get the students involved, and to make sure they had a set of questions, like hey. So, this is good. This is getting better. It's a start. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Because like you mentioned before, I had -- I was speech delayed. Is that --?

ALEXANDER: Oh, OK. Mm-hmm.

MONDESIR: I didn't speak until I was two. And it was because my parents spoke Creole in the house. And like, they were freaking out, so they, like, took me to a doctor, and they're like, "Just speak to him in English."

ALEXANDER: Yeah. [laughter] So it's so simple, right?

MONDESIR: Yeah. And then it was like, "No, he doesn't talk." They're like, "No, just take him home and try to speak to him in English. See what happens." And then, like, they would ask me a question in English, and I would respond.

ALEXANDER: You would answer.

MONDESIR: And then they, like, they lost their minds. [laughter] And they just wouldn't stop. Like, they would get a dictionary and just say, like, "Oh, how are you? Do you like ice cream?" Like, yeah. [laughter] It was like, they cracked the code.

ALEXANDER: That's fabulous, though. But imagine, sometimes what happens with a kid like you is you'd get years and years of therapy, all of--. And it's like, there's nothing wrong with him. Because we get that a lot, too. It's called a difference, or a disorder.

And especially with Black English, I mean, you wouldn't believe some of the reports. "Oh, he doesn't say his T-H's correctly." But it's a Black thing. We don't always do our T-H's correctly. You know, so it can get kind of crazy sometimes.

MONDESIR: So, do you feel like that's an issue, when you talk to parents, where, like, their kids have what they think is deficiency, and --?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. It's usually not an issue. Because there are other factors involved. But I don't want to see a report that's a sign that that is solely the issue. I want to see reports where they can't formulate a sentence, for example, correctly. OK, let me see some more language delays. Don't just tell me that they can't pronounce the T-- or that they're not using "be" correctly. You know, we might say, "I be going to the store." And we know that's not correct, but it's not wrong, if you consistently do that. That's just part of your grammar.

MONDESIR: Yeah, it's part of your syntax.

ALEXANDER: That's part of who you are. Right, right.

MONDESIR: So, I mean, do you have --?

ALEXANDER: But usually, with the parents, no. Usually, most of them -- 90 percent of the time, the students that I receive, they don't have that. But it's usually the teachers that want to refer. Oh, so-and-so can't. And so-and-so doesn't. And then when I do my little screening, then it's like, *mm*, there's some of this stuff you can do in the classroom. Like, if you really think his use of "be" is really bothering you so much, then practice that in the class. "T-H," let him know maybe he should put his tongue between his teeth, if you want him to use it so badly, but it's not -- it's not earth-shattering. Some things are not so earth-shattering that it's going to destroy the child in their academic development.

MONDESIR: And what do you think that inadequacy, or that -- fear of that inadequacy, is that what's wrong?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. But a lot of it because -- [Interview interrupted.] English, and how, especially in the academic arena, you want everyone to use standard English. And you know, yeah. Of course, that's the ultimate goal. But a lot of times, the kids, they know

how to switch. Like, if you say, "Can you say that again?" Then they may say it correctly. [laughter] Like, give them the chance. And then, a lot of it comes from -- a lot of the tests, the norm tests are normed in the Midwest still, where the students are, you know, White, predominantly White, and they do use standard English 100 percent of the day. So of course, when our students take these tests, and they are not falling into those norms, then they want to say that there's a problem. You have to look at other facets. You have to look at dialects, and things like that. It's not fair to just say, "Oh, everyone must speak standard English."

But the kids do need to know, though, that when you're reading text, and when you have to respond in writing, especially, that you have to use stand-- otherwise, you're going to be penalized, unfortunately. Especially with the writing, you're going to get penalized.

MONDESIR: Do you think your experience of, like, growing up in the Bronx informed you to understand that difference, or that importance?

ALEXANDER: I don't know about growing up in the Bronx. I think being around a lot of Hispanic people, that helped a lot with that, just to respect the different linguistic diversity that's out there. And then, of course, coming here to Brooklyn, I mean, you have all different types of Caribbean, African. I mean, you have everything here. This is just fabulous. And just to respect it. You have to respect it. And you have to know that difference is OK. And, like, standard English, you don't have to -- it's not the end-all, be-all. As long as you understand that there's a place for it. There's a place.

MONDESIR: All right, last question. Do you think there's an actual -- like, do you notice a Bronx accent, versus a Brooklyn accent?

ALEXANDER: I'm not -- the Bronx -- there's definitely a Brooklyn accent. But I'm not saying that it's predominantly in all of Brooklyn. Like, for example, this weekend, I went to a workshop. We were away, and the girl says she's from Dyker Heights, and she had the typical Brooklyn accent that you might typically hear, with some Italian Americans from, like, the Coney Island, Dyker Heights area. And she said that, coming through her speech program, one of the last things one of her professors said is, "Are you going

to get accent reduction?" And she was like, "What?" Because he felt that her -- she went to Iona College. He felt her accent was so strong that it would take away from what she was supposed to be doing for the kids. Because of course, we're supposed to be a model for the kids. But hey, if she's working in Dyker Heights. [laughter] You know, then that's OK. You know? So, it's all relative.

And then, she's talking to us in the meetings. We understand what she's saying. Of course, you do notice that the Brooklyn is there, but it didn't detract from anything that she had to say.

But the Bronx accent, I don't know about that, so much. But there's definitely a Brooklyn accent, in distinct parts of the borough.

MONDESIR: All right. Great.

[Interview interrupted.]

ALEXANDER: I would go to different neighborhoods. And she'd say, "Oh, I just love the coffee shops." And I'd say, "Yeah, it's unfortunate that you guys had to move, and for me to now be able to go to my corner store, and not have it riddled with beer, and all this other stuff." Now, everything is organic at my corner store. I don't even recognize my corner store anymore. [laughter] It's like a whole different thing. And I have these restaurants here in the neighborhood that I love going to, but I couldn't do that, even 10 years ago. I did everything outside of the neighborhood. You know.

MONDESIR: Oh. So, like --

ALEXANDER: I didn't really hang -- I work here in Bed-Stuy/Crown Heights, but I didn't really hang out here.

MONDESIR: So, where would you go to do your shopping?

ALEXANDER: I would go to Park Slope, or there's a -- there used to be a Pathmark, like 12th Avenue, Gowanus area, just because they had a big parking lot. I would go over there, Costco, like that. But in the neighborhood, even Restoration where the supermarket -- now it's a Foodtown, but it was a Pathmark, and I didn't want to go -- I didn't want to drive, I didn't want to leave my car in a parking lot. It's dark and deserted down there. If I'm by myself, I didn't feel comfortable bringing the groceries, and all that by myself.

So, there were a lot of little things here in Bed-Stuy I just didn't feel comfortable doing, or I didn't feel that the quality was there, for my money. And so, I used to do it outside.

But now, I can think about shopping there, because the Foodtown is there, and it's under new management, and it's beautiful, and it's wonderful, and you can buy all of these wonderful groceries, and everything there. But it wasn't always like that.

MONDESIR: Yup. I mean, that's, like, incredibly frustrating, because, like, I mean, I live in Jamaica, and I think last year, in the *Gothamist*, or one of those newspapers, it was like, "Oh, Jamaica is the new 'it' place." And I was just like, oh, am I going to see these same changes?

ALEXANDER: You will.

MONDESIR: And I mean, the only difference I've noticed is that we have a couple of more, like, sit-down restaurants.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: But it is frustrating that, like --

ALEXANDER: Yeah, you've been there --

MONDESIR: -- I've lived here my entire life --

ALEXANDER: -- your whole life. Right.

MONDESIR: -- and I've known the community board, and they've put in work to get certain amenities here, so we can be a great place. And then, like, once you make it a decent place, you feel like it's being taken away from you.

ALEXANDER: Exactly. And then they look at you like, why are you here?

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: You know, sometimes I'll go into a restaurant, and I feel like I'm a stranger in my own neighborhood. So it's -- it's incredible. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Yeah. I mean, that's why Bushwick's my least favorite place, where I'll go --

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's happening.

MONDESIR: -- and visit a friend, and people act like it's like, why are --?

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: Yeah, you knock on the door and it's like, "Excuse me, who are you here to see?" You know.

ALEXANDER: Exactly. Right. [laughter]

MONDESIR: That is none of your business. There are 30 people in this building.

ALEXANDER: [laughter] Leave me alone. Let me --

MONDESIR: Exactly. Yeah.

ALEXANDER: -- get out of my way. Let me in [inaudible].

MONDESIR: Why would you move somewhere so you could be nervous?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MONDESIR: So, yeah, that's --

ALEXANDER: It's just incredible.

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: The whole dynamic.

MONDESIR: Well, one of the interesting dynamics is that, like, it doesn't -- it even goes across race, where, you don't have to be another Black person, where you can complain about this. Like, I've had supervisors where I thought they lived in the Upper East Side, and I found out she was from Queens, and lived in Ridgewood. And I was -- And she was like, "Yeah, those gentrifiers. I can't stand those people." [laughter] I was like, "Oh, you too?" [laughter]

ALEXANDER: "You too?" But yeah, there's a kindred spirit there.

MONDESIR: Yeah, yeah. I was like, "Yeah, I get it." And it's very complicated, and it's like, one of those --

ALEXANDER: It is. It is. It's because you're happy that these things are in the neighborhood. Now, I love to have the coffee shops, and all of that, you know? But then again, why did it have to be when they move in that things change, when I've been here 25 years, 30 years? You know? And we're home-owners. We pay our taxes. We have cars. We have all of these things. But you know, I guess there wasn't enough of us to fight for better living conditions. I don't know. I don't know what it is. I don't know.

MONDESIR: Yeah. I mean, some of it's zoning, where, like, where these people want to live, they can't afford. So, they decide to live somewhere else.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. That's what it is now. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MONDESIR: And I think --

ALEXANDER: And they're taking advantage of a lot of the elderly people, that either can't maintain their homes, or the home is getting ready to go into foreclosure. They come swooping in, and they can buy it.

MONDESIR: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: You know? So [inaudible] --

MONDESIR: Well, like, one of the --

ALEXANDER: -- a lot of that going on.

MONDESIR: Yeah. One of the more interesting situations that's also happening in Queens is, I attended a meeting and, basically, someone from the City came and talked to them about this proposal. I think it was for affordable housing with Mayor De Blasio. And he presented a very good project, where it was basically more affordable housing. And it was changing the design of the home, so that it could be more amenable to everybody. So, it would be easier for people to get to the subway. But basically, the entire project was like, "We will not have parking lots, because parking lots cost a lot of money." And then the guy leaves, and we're talking amongst ourselves. This was, like, my first time at one of these meetings. And I remember one of the leaders was like, "We all know we're voting no, right?" And I was extremely shocked. I was like, "What? This is perfect." And then I raised, I was like, "Why? I don't understand." And then she was like, "We don't want this place to get Manhattanized, or gentrified." Which is kind of scary, because it's like, we don't want better for ourselves, because we know what comes, if things get better.

ALEXANDER: Right. That's the Catch-22, as they say. Yeah, yeah. It's crazy.

MONDESIR: Yeah, so --

ALEXANDER: And there are so many things that I worry about, because especially having a 30-year-old. My daughter is 22. Like, even the future of New York City, because

everything that's going up is, like, crazy unaffordable. People are paying thousands of dollars in rent? How can you say -- like, what's your future going to be like? Really? What's your future going to be like, when you can't save right now, to have a family, and to have a house?

MONDESIR: That's very true.

ALEXANDER: In New York City.

MONDESIR: Mm-hmm.

ALEXANDER: So, my son is really thinking about moving back to Atlanta. And he's been saying this for quite a few years now, but they are getting ready to have a child in July. And they are going to leave, my baby -- they're going to take my baby away from me. But yeah, because he's just like, "I just can't imagine it here." You know, there, you could still afford to get a decent house, and a car, and all of that. Live! And then, he's thinking about the -- just what's going on in Brooklyn sometimes, the crime factors, and all of that. He really doesn't want to raise his kid here.

MONDESIR: Yeah, this -- it's a crazy situation.

ALEXANDER: It's tough, yeah. But I really worry about, you know, guys your age, and everything. Like, how are you -- what kind of future are you going to have?

MONDESIR: It's going to -- I mean, like I --

ALEXANDER: You know?

MONDESIR: People always ask me, it's like, "Well, where do you plan on living, after your done with graduate school?" I was like, "I'm from here. I'm going to be here." And they're like, "Are you sure?" And I was like, yeah. And I mean, when I do think about it, and --

ALEXANDER: Pay $2,000 rent, before you can own --

MONDESIR: -- pay $2,000 rent before I can own. [laughter] Or, like, even the idea of continuing to sublet, paying like this much money for a room.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

MONDESIR: And it not going to something --

ALEXANDER: To something that you're going to --

MONDESIR: -- I can own for a long period of time, does --

ALEXANDER: -- right, right, right.

MONDESIR: -- it does irk me a lot.

ALEXANDER: Yes, yes. Yeah. Because you know, as a parent, of course, I want to help as much I can. And I'm sure your parents feel the same way. But then we're strapped after a while, because we are thinking about retirement, and you know, so it's just like, I got all this stuff going on in my head, like, oh my God. [laughter]

MONDESIR: Yeah.