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Maxwell, Richard, Oral history interview conducted by Brigitte Winston, February 17, 2017, Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Weeksville Heritage Center, 2016.027.3.06; Brooklyn Historical Society.

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Oral History Interview with Richard Maxwell

Voices of Crown Heights oral histories: Weeksville Heritage Center, 2016.027.3.06

Interview conducted by Brigitte Winston at the Weeksville Heritage Center on February 17, 2017 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn

WINSTON: —is Friday, February 17th, 2017. I am Brigitte Winston from Weeksville and I am with Richard Maxwell and we are here at Weeksville Historical Center. This oral history interview is for Brooklyn Historical Society's Voices of Crown Heights project. Now if you will please introduce yourself, Richard, giving your full name, birth date and where you were born.

MAXWELL: Good afternoon. My name is Richard Maxwell, Richard John Maxwell. I was born in Harlem, 168th Street Medical Center in the year of 1944. [date redacted for privacy], 1944 is my date of birth.

WINSTON: Nice. Now thank you for agreeing to be part of this oral history project of Crown Heights. As an educator in Crown Heights, during the time of the Crown Heights riot, can you tell me about— Being you were born in '44, did you grow up in Crown Heights?

MAXWELL: I grew up Bedford-Stuyvesant and later I moved to Flatbush. And Crown Heights was the community between the two communities, so I was in Crown Heights very often.

WINSTON: Mm-hmm. For what were you in Crown Heights, school?

MAXWELL: I went to -- I worked in Crown Heights later on and because Crown Heights is also one of the districts covered by the school district that I worked in, District 17. I attended St. John's Center, still considered Crown Heights, as a boy. I played sometimes on Eastern Parkway. I attended the Lower East [unintelligible] on the corner of Nostrand Avenue, the big one. As a young man I went to Gayheart's, which was on Eastern Parkway -- which is part of Crown Heights. So I had a lot of involvement with Crown Heights back and forth and I played with the trains at the Brooklyn Children's Museum, which was also in Crown Heights. Most of the time I

didn't know many residents of Crown Heights. Because when I was a boy, most of the time when we saw someone on either of the avenues; Kingston Avenue, Brooklyn Avenue, New York Avenue, on the other side of Atlantic Avenue, they were usually going to do servant's work for somebody in Crown Heights.

WINSTON: When you say "somebody," what kind of somebody? At that time it was a majority of Jewish -- it was a Jewish community, which it still is today.

MAXWELL: Yeah, yeah.

WINSTON: So the somebody that you're speaking of, were they also Jewish, African American--?

MAXWELL: Yes, yes, yes. They were usually servants and housekeepers for Jewish families.

WINSTON: So you said you played with the trains at the Children's Museum. Was that your first experience with engaging in Crown Heights? Because the museum is founded there.

MAXWELL: Hmm, no, I— It's hard to -- the park that I played in most of my childhood was off of Atlantic and Kingston Avenues. We called it "Kingston Park," but it's actually St. Andrews Park, and it was like a rallying place. So many of the— many of my friends and associates that we interacted with lived on Pacific Street and Bergen Street and Dean Street, which is on the other side of Atlantic Avenue. The boundaries of designated neighborhoods in Brooklyn generally change according to the games that were being played by real estate brokers and neighborhood politicians that— At one time Bedford-Stuyvesant ran from Stuyvesant Avenue to Bedford Avenue and from Atlantic to Gates. And then as Black people expanded within that community, Bedford-Stuyvesant grew and the boundaries grew. So the boundaries crossed Atlantic Avenue somewhere between Eastern Parkway, and Atlantic Avenue came the beginning of Crown Heights, and that borderline moved as I grew. But Atlantic Avenue was no longer the separating -- it had the railroad, but it was no longer the boundary that it served in my childhood.

Then Bedford Avenue became, I mean Bedford-Stuyvesant, went over to Reid Avenue and it extended beyond Bedford Avenue to Franklin and to Classon because obviously the designation was attached to any place that Black people live and expanded beyond those boundaries. So it moved beyond Gates Avenue. It went all the way back to DeKalb and Kosciuszko on the north side and on the south side it passed the boundary of Atlantic Avenue and it became Bergen Street, which would have begin— become the beginning of Crown Heights.

I only say that because the same events are taking place today with language and news reporting, in terms of Clinton Hill, Fort Greene, Cobble Hill. You know and what people choose to identify as a neighborhood when some horrendous crime takes place, it's usually associated to a heavily populated area where Black people live because White people don't have crime. So for the rents that they pay and for the games, that's what I call it, "real estate games," you know, any day of the week you can hear a newspaper report where something is actually in Fort Greene, taking place in Fort Greene, but they call it Bedford-Stuyvesant. You know, or it actually takes place in East New York and they choose to call it Crown Heights.

Right? So the lines are not clearly drawn for the news people and the politicians that choose to report negative news attached to where Black people live in large numbers, and they try to change the names of those places when something happens and the residents are predominantly White.

WINSTON: So it's interesting; the racial boundaries continue to change over time and continue to change contemporarily regarding these spaces. With you growing up in the neighborhood, Crown Heights/Flatbush, over these years, has -- the Jewish community seems to have maintained a section of it. How has the boundaries of Crown Heights changed as a result of the race?

MAXWELL: It has changed just like the boundaries of anything else. Crown Heights at one point was predominantly, you know, a Jewish community, but it was more -- It was more, I would say it was, more mixed. And what happened -- there was a housing allocation giveaway political thing that came out from as far back as the Koch

administration, and they were allocating housing projects to different ethnic groups. You know, one for us, two for us, one for you. [laughter] So we ended up with a very mixed community that then, as times went on, people were leaving and I don't say that they were necessarily forced out, but the Hasidic community became extremely aggressive in the acquisition of housing— in Crown Heights.

WINSTON: —In Crown Heights. At this time, the recognition of the increase in the Jewish community in Crown Heights, do you recognize that as part of the -- it being center of their synagogue? Understanding that their religion is— they should -- they need to be within walking distance of a synagogue and Crown Heights did have— and 770, I believe, is their— on Eastern Parkway— is their, like I would say, Mecca. Their synagogue is found there and those properties around it?

MAXWELL: That's a new building. That synagogue is a new building. The apartment buildings and all the other real estate acquisitions came, came after. It grew like -- I don't want to attach the word "fungus" to the evolvement of a people, but Kingston Avenue was a very integrated block that went through different communities. It is now primarily a Hasidic block from approximately St. John's or Lincoln, all the way down, down, down to maybe Winthrop Street. You know, so a lot has happened.

Some of it very suddenly, but I personally know people that were offered huge amounts of money for their property -- properties on Union Street and the adjacent blocks to Eastern Parkway. So that that Mecca became a mecca because of the -- of the work and the construction and the building permits that were granted and allowed a lot of -- religious, polarized construction to take place on the corner of Eastern Parkway and Kingston Avenue. On all three or four corners you have Jewish buildings.

The synagogue that you speak of is down, is down the block. That's basically a new building. You know. But when I say that I mean as far as the neighborhood goes, so one of the things that I've watched happen is people that come after the residents that were there, claim it for their own as if the prior people never lived there. I lived on Eastern -- one of the places that I lived was on Eastern Parkway. I was raised in Bed-

Stuy, but as a man and coming home from the military and getting married, I lived in Crown Heights. I lived on -- one of my addresses was on Eastern Parkway. Another place I lived was on Maple Street. I lived on St. Marks and Albany for a while, before moving into Flatbush, so Crown Heights served as my place of residence after leaving Mcdonald Street where I was raised. I was raised on Jefferson and Nostrand and then my family moved to Mcdonald and Tompkins, between Throop and Tompkins. And I stayed there until I was 18. So my experience with Crown Heights would start with me as a young adult, all the way to the time that I got married, when I came home from the military and then I— I lived on Parkside Avenue and I lived on Maple Street.

WINSTON: During what years would that be around; once you came from the military and were— was a resident in Crown Heights— around?

MAXWELL: Those years would be, they would be in -- they would be in the '60s. I came home before war was declared in Vietnam, so it would be '65 all the way through to-- '65 I lived at 721 Eastern Parkway. I lived at Maple Street. So I would have to say -- and then when I got married was '68 and I moved into, I don't quite what you call that community, but it's 52nd Street and Clarkson Avenue. It's in the vicinity of, you know, it's one of them in between communities, I don't know what to call it, but it's a neighboring community to Crown Heights -- to Flatbush -- to East Flatbush. It would be more East Flatbush, I guess.

WINSTON: So as an adult you said that you were -- you worked in District 17.

MAXWELL: Yes. School -- Community School District 17.

WINSTON: Community School district 17. What was that like and in what capacity did you -- were you employed?

MAXWELL: Well, I need to identify the fact that before I went with the Department of Education, I had 13 years of teaching experience, before I went with the Board, I taught vocational subjects. I worked for the Port Authority Model Cities in a joint program that they were training residents in drafting and whatnot. So all of those experiences took place prior to me going with the Department of Education.

WINSTON: Tell me more about those experiences in education outside of the Department of Education.

MAXWELL: Well, I was a— I taught— I taught drafting and hand tools and mathematics and stuff like that and I taught in programs and I taught outside of the school system.

WINSTON: Was it independent programs?

MAXWELL: These were just -- this was primarily a program that was jointly started by Model Cities and the New York City Port Authority, to train East New York residents in vocational skills that would be of service to them in later life. From that, I went to Africa for three years and I taught drafting and mechanisms in two different languages, right. So I had no Board of Ed. experience prior to that. I came to the Board of Ed. with those things, so my first, my first license with the Department of Education was an industrial arts license. Right? Then my next license was— they— it didn't work too well— they didn't pay me right, they didn't get the paperwork right and I was, you know, it was a very frustrating experience. But under that, when I came to the Board of Ed., I taught at Girls and Boys High.

They hired me because of my industrial arts license, but they didn't have room for me to teach in the Drafting Department, so I taught English Grammar for, for Evelyn Niles, who was a friend of mine. She was part of the well-known Niles family of Brooklyn. She was [unintelligible] Niles's wife and she told me that if I taught English to these cooperative education students that nobody could handle, she wouldn't bother me with anything. Just maintain some order in the classroom and I'm proud to say that some of these guys became -- what do you call them? Emergency, emergency cops; big guys. They, you know, we got along and you know, I'd close the door and we did that. Then I taught— I taught math. Because they needed a math teacher. So I never worked in my license from the time that I worked. Then they wasn't paying me right, so I quit the Department of Education. And I went and I got a job as the Coordinator of Special Events for the Parks Department for the Borough of Brooklyn, so I only had one person between me and the commissioner.

WINSTON: And who was the commissioner at that time?

MAXWELL: Spiegel, Julius. Julius Spiegel.

WINSTON: And what was that political [unintelligible] like?

MAXWELL: Well, that political -- that political piece plugged me in, in a lot of ways because I did the Borough President's concerts over the summer. See, Special Events for the Parks Department covers an array of entertainment and using city property for public events, especially during the West— so I was— I had Brooklyn. I had every place in Brooklyn except Prospect Park. Prospect Park was a special place that was run by Tupper Thomas. She answered to the commissioner but she was her own boss when it came to Prospect Park because that's the crown jewel park. But Cannonball Park and, and Knickerbocker Park and all of those baptismals out—

I signed the permits for people to have special events. Right? So I sat with Carlos Lezama and them when they were first starting the West Indian Day Parade, right. Because few people know this, but Ocean Parkway and Eastern Parkway is Parks Department property. The city -- but it's Parks Department property, so when you have to give an event it involves highway, EMS and all those people. I sat at the table with those guys to coordinate marathon runs and all of that stuff. That's what I did. Right? So I left the Department of Education and went into public service. That's where I got on a first-name basis with some of the politicians. Even today I got to know them. So -- and they know me and I'm a soldier more than a general. Right? So I have -- Howard Golden left office owing me something because I did— I did him— his campaign a solid. I've known Marty Markowitz on a first-name basis. He went to Wingate. He's younger than me. He went to Wingate with Roger, with Roger Green. Roger Green and him went to Wingate. I went to Boys High and I mean -- the three schools that I went to were all, I want to say notorious, but P.S. 44, Junior High School 35, and Boys High had big names and top worldwide graduates that left that school. Right? And when I went to Boys High, guys were coming to Boys High from the Bronx and places like that, you know. I mean it was a school— Max Roach went— I can go on and on in terms of who went to Boys High. Right? But my era for that was

I, I played a little basketball. I wasn't that good, but "Connie" Hawkins was before me and Vaughn Harper was after me. All right.

I just, you know, we just buried Vaughn Harper. Right? And the irony about that is Wally Briggs, who made "Connie" Hawkins look good, was a friend of mine. Right? And when he died, myself, Vaughn Harper, Dennis Watson, Butch Niles and somebody, oh, and Mike Sneed carried— carried his body. Right? So we have all -- and I married -- I married Johnny Owens's sister. He had a game like "Dr. J." He was bad. He played with the 'BLS All-Stars that came right out of here, out of the Kings Borough. All of them. All of them were guys from uptown. Right? And he just never made it to college. He never made that because he died from an overdose. All right? But Johnny, Johnny was bad. So I had, I had the sister of basketball royalty. Right? And in a social setting that means a lot. It doesn't mean anything in the newspaper. It doesn't mean anything, but she was a Palladium dancer and a lot of the people that danced mambo, that were good at that, came out of Crown Heights. Right? They came out of Crown Heights, they came out of Fort Greene, they came out of Bed-Stuy. I mean, they were doing that. I never got good at that because I decided I wanted to something else, and I didn't like the image of a lot of dance and stuff. The guys I moved around with didn't -- we didn't --

WINSTON: Dance?

MAXWELL: We didn't dance a lot. That wasn't our -- we knew how, but it wasn't important to be on one show.

WINSTON: So as a soldier and not a dancer, [laughter] in your affairs of political, educational, community activism, tell me about the community activism. Because during this time of Crown Heights, "Save our Streets" was a big thing. And you had mentioned prior about the Crown Heights Youth Collective. As a soldier in the community, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

MAXWELL: Oh, I have my trophies in the car. Right here.

WINSTON: Tell me more about it.

MAXWELL: Well, what really happened was my -- I have face— facial recognition with most of the people -- most of the politicians. I was on the planning board for Board Nine. I was articulate and fearless, you know, and that can be a plus or a minus. But I spoke my mind and I spoke the truth and at some point I because a nationalist, so I got to know Imamu Baraka. I taught as a mat-- that's what I mean. That's one of the experiences that I brought to the Department of Education, because I taught in a school right across the street from Imamu's place in Newark. I got on a PATH train, went every day. These kids were like wards of the state and I taught history over there. I went -- got on the subway, take the PATH train, and went to Newark every day to teach, to be with these boys. I was a counselor and a teacher.

So that's what I'm saying when I say I had— It was between 17 and 13 years teaching that I had before I even started getting time and grayed with the Department of Education, then I didn't like it so I quit. And I started doing this other stuff.

WINSTON: How long were you doing the -- working outside of the Board of Ed. before you came back? With these independent --

MAXWELL: Oh, no, no. I was an educator before I worked for the Board of Ed. I worked for the Board of Ed. and got abused money-wise. I left them. I did other things with my life.

WINSTON: For how long of a period, do you [inaudible]?

MAXWELL: Until about 19 -- until about 1988, '89. And then I came back to the Board of Education and I took the ex— a 400-question exam to become a guidance counselor. So I put all of the math and all of the technical stuff behind me and got into guidance. I passed the test. I didn't get real high marks, but I passed it. Because the Board of Examiners was no joke. You know, I don't know what these people are doing out here today, but we had— we had hoops to go through and qualifications to meet before we got someplace on salary, beyond the fingerprinting. You know, we had to pass tests. We had to be interviewed. I don't know what they're doing now. There's the Leadership Academy and you go for three weeks and become a principal. I have nothing -- no -- nothing but disdain for watering down the process. Because when you

give a young person with a master's degree $150,000 a year coming out of the gate to supervise people who are doing something that they've never done, it brings about a lock step mentality that makes people more conformist than being about education.

WINSTON: So that's a change.

MAXWELL: Major.

WINSTON: As in education. As an educator, that you witnessed.

MAXWELL: Major, major change and— and it wasn't -- it didn't begin with Bloomberg. It -- Giuliani wrestled control from the— from the appointment of a chancellor to the mayor's bailiwick, so when— by the time-- By the time Bloomberg got there he didn't want anybody near him that knew anything about education, because his idea was to run the school system successfully like he ran his businesses and you can't do it. So you end up with all of these young people in these $500 suits with their legs crossed, sitting down in interviews, popping buzz words, but they don't really know how the system works.

You had to be in education, you had to be a teacher; you had to know something about the joy of seeing the lights turn on in children's eyes after you've taught them something and they finally got it. These people skipped over all of that and the only qualification that goes to the Leadership Academy is a letter from a sitting principal. So you got a buddy who can say, "Oh, I think -- oh, go to him, go for --" I'm being facetious, but you go in three weeks. Come back and now -- yesterday I couldn't spell principal, today I are one. Put that proper grammar right in the recording.

So what happens is, the veteran people that know what they're doing and that have a love for doing this, always, always are a challenge to these young people who-- We had to teach, develop relationships with children and find ourselves in a place where if you felt like you wanted to do more, you got an OTP position out of— Out of Classroom. You know, you became audio/visual something or whatever, you know. And then on the next level you became maybe a cluster teacher or something, so you'd specialize in the reading of something. But you do all of these things and then maybe you turn around and say, "I'd like to be an administrator," and you become an

assistant principal. An assistant principal usually gets a floor or a section of a building to run and a subject area. So now you are the science specialist. Or you are the math specialist and you have the third grade, all of the teachers in the third grade answer to you. This is all stepping-stones to running a building.

WINSTON: Has, has that been your experience? Because I understand that you came back to education as a counselor in Jackie Robinson. Tell me about your educational process. How you— how did that [unintelligible]?

MAXWELL: Well I came back, I came back as a Special Ed. guidance counselor because it was a position that was open that nobody wanted. I worked in District 75. District 75 has no physical boundaries. District 75 is all over the city. They usually rent or have the third floor in a school building here or there. That's what District 75 consists of and the kids range in difficulty, in challenges from real severe stuff to, you know, milder "mis 2" you know, kind of stuff. So my point being that that's how I came back, because I wanted a job. I needed a job and no -- this job was open for a couple of years in a tight job market. So I didn't care. You know, where I'd been and the walk that I had taken, I just needed a job.

WINSTON: And where was this at?

MAXWELL: I took a job in District 75 and they assigned me to three schools, really two schools, but I found myself doing work in three schools.

WINSTON: How far was it?

MAXWELL: This was in Brooklyn. This was -- I worked -- I don't know how well you know Brooklyn, I worked -- a lot in Amboy. Right? A lot in Amboy. [laughter] On the third floor, District 75 and I worked on Macdougal and Rockaway at P.S. 73, which has got to be the oldest school building I've ever worked in. Right? And the kids that I dealt with were Special Ed. kids, the problem kids in the building. Right? So they have to be like contained to the floor that we were assigned and you had to deal with the problems. I remember -- I wasn't a teacher; I was a guidance counselor in a, in a very challenging situation.

Right? And in more than one building. So I had two days over at their— and this is not about driving. This is about public transportation, you know, so I went through that and then my brother, who's also a combat veteran, was dying. He was, he was in Peekskill. He had relocated from Brooklyn to get a new start in life and he was in Peekskill and he became a male nurse in Peekskill. But there was a -- there was a disease that he contracted while in Asia, along with being sprayed with Agent Orange that -- that took him out. Right. The family, his family, his children, everybody should be rich, you know.

But anyway, my brother got sick and he had— and he contracted the virus after these other things that happened to him. Right? So when, when he got real sick they put him in Sloan. Right? Because there was only a few people that even knew how to deal with what he had. Alright? And -- I had this master plan where my brother was not going to die in a, in a hall room up in Peekskill. He was going to come home. Right? And because my thinking was self-centered, I had no idea of what it might have been to have my mother, who is elderly, experience her baby boy in the house where she lived, dying before her. But I didn't think about that. I'm going to bring my brother home.

Right? So why am I telling you this? I'm telling you this because I left District 75 and I went for an interview at 320, Jackie Robinson, because it was close to my home. Everybody told me, don't go to that school. Sister Muhammad runs that school and she's crazy and she's rough on people. I didn't care about any of that, because my whole plan was to redesign my house, get a job near my house. I don't care if I have to work with the devil himself, and so that I could take care of my brother and my mother. Alright? As God would have it, he didn't -- my brother didn't survive that experience, so he died.

So now here I am in the notorious 320. I don't know if you understand. Sister Muhammad got into public disputes with the chancellor. She argued back and forth with guys like Larry King, on television. You know, she was a real celebrity and-- So many people had made complaints that she was recalled to Bank Street, to be re-

retrofitted to become a better principal. They would— This was their way of controlling. So when I went to 320, somebody that I went to 44 with that was a bully -- that I had some feelings with as a kid, when he saw me -- I did surveillance. Just like a military operation. I went to the school after hours. He saw me. He said, "Where's your hair?" You know, because me and my brother wore -- we wore a part with butterfly wings on, anyway. I said, "You really asking me about hair after all of this time?" and this guy had a name. They called him "Mad Dog" Richardson, because he was, he was vicious. [inaudible] In the schoolyard he and I had a dispute, so he's always remembered that. He said, "You interested in coming here?" Now, he's security. He's not even uniform security. I knew something was wrong with the school, when security guard, un-uniformed, gets up from the desk, greets me, takes me by my hand down to the principal's office, where the assistant principal is sitting in the office, covering for Sister, who's up north being retrofitted. So I get a job.

Without further detail, they bring down the Special Ed. supervisor. It's somebody that grew up across the street from me and so I get a job and they want to get rid of somebody that's complaining, that's trying to get -- a lot of people are trying to get out of there. I didn't care. Right? So I make my way into 320 and I got kids with names like Outlaw, Badlander, I mean, real names. This is on their birth certificates. And I did a good job with them and I --

WINSTON: In what capacity were you there? [unintelligible]

MAXWELL: I went there as a Special Ed. guidance counselor, coming out of District 75, but now I have a school. With a school you get a population to work with. You do, you do sessions. You do -- you work differently than their IEPs, Individual Education Profile plans. Right? That you have to write up and whatnot according to each child's needs and whatnot and you get a caseload. That's how it works when you leave District 75. All right? So I did that and I was good at that and what happened was they needed a superintendent suspension-hearing officer and they, they offered me the job. It would mean that I would now leave the school and go to the district office and sit and wait for all of the kids that had done egregious things in schools; carry

knives, put their hands on teachers, put their hands on other students and whatnot. So as a guidance counselor, because I had the Special Ed. population, I was downtown in a hearing often anyway, representing the school.

And I was exposed to a lady down there who is now a judge, who taught me how to conduct hearings and that's what I did for District 17 for about -- it must have been maybe a year and a half, almost two years. I did Superintendent of Suspension Hearings, but you have to adhere to the law. You've got to really know what you're doing and those are taped interviews. They're really serious stuff because of the nature of the offenses that get a superintendent suspension, as opposed to a slap on the wrist and a couple days home.

WINSTON: In thinking about that position, because now today with -- the police are associated with public schools, with that kind of a firsthand -- first initiation of policing in the schools, was there like legal consequences for this, for these suspension-hearing officers?

MAXWELL: No. There were these little consequences for not handling situations properly. There were parents who knew the law and if the school abused their child or didn't treat their child right. Like when you send a child home with a superintendent's suspension, you must give them a work packet. From all of the teachers that they have. Those are t— the things that you must follow and if a parent knows better, they can come back on you and the entire school system for a violation. So you need to know what you're doing because you represent the principal and the school system, in terms of trying to administer some discipline to bring about change. Alright?

WINSTON: So this sounds different in the fact that it was concentrated in educating the child, even as a discipline, education was a part of it. Whereas today with the police in the school, the education part [unintelligible] discipline is different.

MAXWELL: Yeah. That's a whole different move, trying to bring school safety into the police department. You know, they want to mix apples and oranges and whatnot, but the training was different and it was, you know, on another level of vigilance and whatnot, but the demands of the children made it necessary that you couldn't just be

school safety on chill. You needed to be about knowing the law and knowing how to handle disruptive students, knowing how to, how to suppress or deal with situations without punching somebody in the face or knocking them down.

You need to know that there're limits. You know, you can't tase and do the things that the police do, but the behavior is going in-- was going in the wrong direction. During the time of Crown Heights, I was, I was in several schools. I was in 320, first as a guidance counselor, then as a hearing officer. I was in -- Middle School 2 as the superintendent's representative. I became an anti-gang specialist because the Bloods at that time had infiltrated into that school, which was a new school and the first recruits were 14 girls that could all read above average. They recruited these girls. So now the Bloods are lining up at dismissal, right, on the other side of the street, because it's a factory on the other side of the street, and they have picked these girls that are reading in the 95 percentile that have paw-marks on their legs and are wearing beads, that come out of good homes. Right? One of them, 14, was pregnant.

Now the leadership of the Bloods at that time were high school dropouts. So not only are they older but they're people that don't really have a future, don't have a whole lot going, other than selling drugs and guns. And when they get a group of girls, you know that, that are not streetwise, girls have a choice of getting beaten or getting sexed-in. So the girls that want to protect their faces or whatever, they would rather get sexed-in than to get beat down like the boys. Well, some of the girls that were hard got the beat down, you know and then the love that comes after. But the, the -- their first introduction into this school was through these 14 girls that cut together, that you know, there were patterns.

I had sheets of their attendance and all of that kind of stuff. So these are things that didn't have impact necessarily on the riots, but it's about understanding that this free-floating energy, you know, where kids don't know what to do with themselves, right, and pick up a cause and hurt that cause by their behavior. Alright? The sequence of, of the Crown Heights peace has to do with a horrible accident and a young man that was covered and permitted to flee police, flee the police and leave this country and go

somewhere else after taking somebody's life. The result of that -- as a result of that, there was a murder that took place of somebody looking just like him. They knew it wasn't him, but it was an eye-for-an-eye kind of thing formulated by the undisciplined, uncontrolled youths that were able to appear to be the leadership of some kind of riot, which it was just random bedlam and chaos that allowed that boy to get killed.

WINSTON: Now --

MAXWELL: I'm just talking about the center of the, the cause. But there was a lot of dissention and malpractice and discontent within the community that this Cato, Gavin getting killed was like putting a match to a tinderbox.

WINSTON: It sounds like it would go -- environment that was carrying on in the school, with the gangs and the girls and then this; this happened in August. So schools were out and the young people were free with all this energy that you're talking about.

MAXWELL: I need to identify the fact that Richard Green rose to notoriety as the CEO and founder of the Crown Heights Youth Collective, because he formed a catchment area in which the kids of Crown Heights and a lot of them were given something to do through programs; those are the things that I grew up with. We had lots of things to do, you know, and idle hands is the devil's workshop. Richard ran education programs, he ran art programs; he ran a school. His wife, Myrah Brown, was a certified educator. Richard has, has a master's. He's a Vietnam vet, you know and, and Crown Heights Youth Collective was created in the '70s, alright, in a storefront.

So when this came along, you know, it had moved from one storefront to two storefronts, to three storefronts and then to the large concern that was over on the corner of Crown Street and Franklin Avenue, which is the center, the epicenter of Crown Heights. Alright. I was on Richard Green's Board of Directors: Myself, Delridge Hunter, Don Quinn Kelley, some brothers that were connected to Medgar. All right, we were either -- we were all professors at Medgar. Right? That decided that we were going to pair up with Richard. He put on the Board of Directors and we started getting funding for summer youth employment and all of the things that counteract the stupidness that went along with, with having a negative reaction and

wanting to, you know, burn down your own house because you mad at somebody. But his kids did not -- the kids of the Collective did not participate in that.

And the reason why I'm bringing that up, because when we get on this downward slide, talk about how bad things are, we must give great credit, great, great credit to the people that choose to light a candle instead of cursing the darkness.

WINSTON: That's— I must say that you are definitely a candle in the darkness, with—

MAXWELL: Well, thank you.

WINSTON: With all that you've done in education and in community activism, I want to talk a little bit more about the cultural dynamic and, and influence of the Jewish, African American, West Indian community of Crown Heights. You told me that, you know, because you were born in '44 and you saw that cultural face change from seeing servants mostly, to --

MAXWELL: The domestics and household servants were the people that I encountered in Crown Heights on the other side of Atlantic Avenue, from when I was a boy. I mean, it changed and there was Black ownership and brownstones and people going to concerts and going down to Berklee School of Music and studying the oboe and playing the cello and all of those things happened simultaneously.

You know, when I talk about the Children's Museum, I'm talking about a railroad set that would marvel anything that you've ever seen on television. And all of the other amenities that went along with that. So we had crown jewels resting in the middle of, of a very residential community. You know, I have problems with the mixture of residential and commercial, because commercial brings about garbage and traffic and stuff that residential does not. But people need to buy things someplace, but that exploded along Kingston Avenue, you know.

And you know, then there were the bars. If you know anything about it, there was Brownie's, Brownie's -- Brownie's was a top-notch hangout and the main people that hung out there were cops, so you were like pretty safe. There were no robberies, no stupidness there. Brownie's on St. Mark's and there was Sylvia's on -- on St. John's and there was the Jaguar; all these are Crown Heights places. The Gayheart

Ballroom was down Bedford Avenue. Town Hill was at the top of Bedford Avenue and Eastern Parkway. There's a bank there or something now. And then we had the Blue Bar down Nostrand Avenue. I'm talking about the bars because there's a time in my life, like right after the military— before— I'd, like, hung out in bars. You know, so -- and there was a lot of social importance assigned to who went where and who you drank with, who you socialized with, and stuff.

So I went to the Blue Bar, I went to Brownie's, I went to the Gaslight over in Bed-Stuy, Harvey's— and— on Halsey Street and like I say, Brownie's on St. Mark's. The Baby Grand; before it was relocated -- because the Baby Grand wasn't always on Fulton Street; it was someplace else. Tip Top was over at the foot of Schenectady Avenue. So you know, those places were also institutions for meeting people and sharing information and learning who lives where. I don't want to call the name of number bankers, but bankers and controllers are people that have like as much money as God and they own things. Not trying to be ostentatious or anything, but they didn't have a lot of ways to hide their money back then. So they bought things. They bought apartments, they bought women, they bought cars, and they tied their money up in things that gave them pleasure. But they didn't have, you know, access to the Swiss banks and all of that kind of stuff.

But I know by name several controllers and several bankers. A controller is a higher level in that game, in terms of policy— number policy— than a banker. But a banker has to be able to back X number of runners and bookies. You know, if everybody under him hits, he's got to pull that money out and get it, you know, and pull it together. So our royalty represented musicians, church leaders, and, and number of bankers that gave a considerable amount of charity because they had money that they couldn't hide anywhere. After you finish buying whatever/whatever, you know, you give. You know, you give money to the church. You give money to the PAL, you give money to the— you know. That's how -- and the gangsters weren't all, you know, of one ethnic persuasion.

I'm going to put it that way. You know, these guys, for the most part, aside from being a little vicious, they were gentlemen. You know, I came up in an era of things -- those people had principles that they didn't violate and for violating them you paid. You know, so you don't— you don't come and not pay your bills or you don't clean up your side of the street, you know -- guys do public events. You know, just like in the movie with, with Frank Lucas -- Frank Lucas learned how to give away turkeys and do all of those things because he was a— He was a driver first for Bumpy Johnson. You know. Bumpy Johnson -- and this is not Crown Heights history, but we had -- and I don't want to call the guys' names because they're not all dead and I don't need to be put in any position for anything. But these guys brought Christmas to people's houses. They fixed up things. They sent people's kids to school and whatnot, you know. It was a different -- it was just a different time. Bumpy Johnson was policy.

He got all of those little envelopes. With the nickels and the dimes and the single hits. Right? He didn't cross the line with dope. He worked with Queen. In the movie, the only movie that they did Bumpy Johnson a little solace -- Laurence Fishburne played in "Hoodlum." The hoodlum in that movie was Bumpy Johnson. Bumpy Johnson had a force that protected Harlem businesses against Irish policemen that would close us -- that would close people down. You understand? Because the police department at that point was mainly one ethnic group. Not just Caucasian, but coming from a particular country. You know? And they -- Bumpy had an army that he used, so Frank, by making that move to -- do I need to be talking about all of this? No.

WINSTON: Well. [laughter]

MAXWELL: But, yeah, yeah.

WINSTON: Yes. Because we're talking about community and culture of our community and --

MAXWELL: But that's Harlem. What I was talking about just now was Harlem, where I was born. I was -- and the reason why I was born in Harlem is because my mother was beautiful high school girl -- that it was a disgrace to be pregnant without having a

husband. Right? She belonged to my father. Nobody bothered her because my father had a nickname in the street also and nobody would dare bother his flower. So he'd see that she came back, she had me. I'd stay -- we stayed in Harlem and then she went back to Girls High and got her diploma.

WINSTON: Hmm. Tell me about that your mother moved you out here and you were here— was born there— on Eastern Parkway. Right? There was -- I'm talking about community activism and -- how the Jewish communities started or implemented their own patrols, as you know. Because I remember after the riots, or maybe before, you can tell me how they had their own type of neighborhood [unintelligible] --

MAXWELL: There were two that have really gone upscale now, you know, patterned after the Maccabee or— I don't want to call them vigilantes. But they were people that were assigned, volunteers, and accepted as forms of protection, particularly for the Jewish community. The two such -- one starts with a Shalom, Shalom something. They had vehicles and everything now. Right? But back then they weren't as organized, but they had radios and neighborhood watch activity going on, because that was a part of how they chose to protect their property in Crown Heights. But when I was coming up, Sandy Ray, Reverend Taylor, and any major pastor in Brooklyn lived on President Street. Beautiful, wide street with gorgeous mansions, beyond imagination. I mean, 18, 20-room houses are on President Street. That's why they call it President Street. [laughter]

WINSTON: Tell me about the block associations, like the neighborhood protection that the Jews had [unintelligible].

MAXWELL: They were patterned-- I don't know if you know of the Maccabee, but it goes back to volunteers that were assigned to protect Jewish interests and-- I think today they probably have permits and permission and this, that, and the other. But back then it was about having cars, walkie-talkies and patrols that were organized to service the community. My problem is -- that wasn't always just their funds. They got some public funding, too. Because people who make the mistake of thinking because you have a Black mayor that he is going to particularly focus on addressing Black

issues. You know, it seems— no disrespect to, to David, to David Dinkins, you know— but it seems when we get in position, we generally always have to prove that we are fair and we are a politician that believes in all people getting a fair shake. Then you get guys in the office, like Mayor Beame and other people that have no shame in their game about taking care of their people.

WINSTON: Well, in the African American community, I understand and I've witnessed and I'd like to know if you participated in any way in block associations, you know, just as the Jewish people had. And they were grass roots organizations that were politically connected to precincts and such and --

MAXWELL: I've participated.

WINSTON: So tell me about that in the African American community.

MAXWELL: In the African American community, what we-- I've been— I've been a part of one, two, three -- I've been usually an organizer or a leader of at least three different tenant associations. All right. And beyond that I became involved, I'm still involved in a block association over at PLeGNA now. It's a whole -- it's a different flavor because it's a landmarked community, you know, that is, is protected by ethical law. You know. But the tenant— the tenant fights were always a thing of us against them. People that own buildings with 90 or so families making millions of dollars and not wanting to put money back into the building and into people's lives -- respond -- had to respond to pressure.

But the community organizing core of what it takes, like you know, is attached to tradition in another fellowship that, that we are more alike than we are different. Right? And so even though many of the tenants in the two or three organizations that I've been involved in were of different ethnicities and different races, we had common, common ground to pressurize the landlords to do what they're supposed to do. You know, boiler repair, you know -- I mean, it's standard procedure that some of these large places are floating with hundreds of violations. And they don't get a flashlight or an airing until somebody dies; until the kid falls out the window or somebody dies from whatever, whatever.

WINSTON: So, okay. So they— that kind of thing, because everything begins at the home. In education you're always hearing about, you know, you have to understand where these children are coming from. You know, it's hard to study if you— if you're hungry, you know, and that's why I asked you about the, the neighborhood associations.

MAXWELL: Well, the neighborhood associations; where they are strong, so other people that they produced are the kids and what's going on. I came up in a -- on a block that you didn't want any adult to see you do anything wrong because they told your parents and depending on your relationship with that adult, they may give you a good smack and take you home for some more smack-up. Right? So we did not disrespect older people. Right? We were afraid of the adults and then the ones that were too old to hurt us could report and, and that got us problems.

You know, so we called them "nosey people." I -- the Weeksville Project was such a project that evolved out of the inquisitive investigation of a gentleman by the name of William Harley who collected artifacts and old things from worksites and discovered things early in the diggings of Weeksville that brought about this whole thing. And he then became an urban archeologist teaching at New York City Community College as a lecturer downtown. But he was a janitor that worked in my building for my grandmother, who owned the building that I, that I came up in.

WINSTON: And this was also in Brooklyn, or the streets—

MAXWELL: Bed-Stuy.

WINSTON: Bed-Stuy.

MAXWELL: MacDonough Street, between Brooklyn, between Throop and Tompkins.

WINSTON: So William Harley.

MAXWELL: We called him "Dewey." We didn't call him Uncle Dewey. He had no title. Dewey was his name. He was, he was a World War I vet. He had old bayonets. Anything old; like he had a trunk full of stuff and he just carried that interest right to the digging site of Weeksville, and discovered a lot of their finds and was awarded a title and became a lecturer downtown. What a success story.

WINSTON: Tell me about your, your understanding and knowledge of Weeksville.

MAXWELL: My understanding and knowledge of Weeksville is Weeksville is one of many, many, many places that we fled to avoid slavery and live as free men and attempted to live the American Dream, own property and build community through a strong sense of community. You have Weeksville here in Brooklyn. You have Sandy Ground in Staten Island. You have Roseland out in the, in the west in -- and you had Black Wall Street out in another part. There were hundreds of places. What has happened that makes Weeksville special is a massive destruction of history and the genocide of a people that make us think that this is rare and unique. This is what we did, whatever we got out from under the man's boot. Whenever we could stop sharecropping and go and live someplace that's free people, how it gets sanded over by historians, how it gets run over by bulldozers is because we live in a society that spends a lot of energy on burying the truth, which will always rise again once crushed to earth.

So although I want to give, Miss Joan Maynard and all the people that did the fundraising, with Con Edison and Brooklyn Union Gas and treated this like it was a very special, isolated unit -- if we dug up the truth, we would find many villages and many places with the remain— with the remains of Black people in the artifacts of the culture that they served. We're talking about the Gullah Islands off of the coast of, of South Carolina. We're talking about -- we -- culture has always moved with us and through the oppression has always squeezed out some manner of, of truth and had us thinking that there was only one Marian Anderson. Had us thinking that two Black girls could never become tennis champions. Had us thinking— I mean not just champions, I mean international, the best there ever was. Right?

So as time goes on, this truth that has been bulldozed over, buried and you know, there would be no need for Black History Month if we just recorded history the way it was. But we have to now, in order to come back to get a look at the truth, reinsert our role in a historical document in which we were already a part of it anyway and it's gotten wiped out by the evildoers.

WINSTON: Wow. I thank you for the exposition of us as a people always having been -- even if the recognition hasn't been so -- I just want to go back a little bit, because you said something about renaming and the location -- the boundaries of Crown Heights and now they're renaming things. Right? In regards to space and us and the racial boundaries, are you familiar with the Crow Bar? That's a recently owned, purchased property, and others have purchased in Crown Heights and they named it the Crow Bar and the community stood up against it. Are you familiar with that?

MAXWELL: Mm-mm.

WINSTON: Okay. It just makes me think about that -- in that aspect because we're talking about different bars and Crown Heights and it being a place of people gathering and meeting.

MAXWELL: The Inkwell.

WINSTON: Yeah. And how important these places are in, in the African American community and the naming, you know. The crow having an association -- a negative association.

MAXWELL: Do you know that the same group of people have gone all over this country using the same names of White forefathers for every city, every street, every town in this entire country, that you will find Robert Fulton, John Quincy Adams, you know.

WINSTON: Lafayette.

MAXWELL: The same, the same names over and over again. It is not until a grand lady like Doris Bell dies and somebody raises up and says, "We need to name this intersection Doris Bell Boulevard," and they're getting ready to do it. So Reid Avenue, which was attached to another man's history, became Malcolm X Boulevard. Right? And that was more like Malcolm and his history and the Harlem and everything else and then the other block, Reid Avenue. Right? So we got Marcus Garvey replaced Sumner, who was a Civil War murderer. You know? So we take little bites. But when you look at the layout of this land and the nomenclature, you know, it's like they've attempted to erase us and we ain't going nowhere.

Right? I mean, no matter what they say, you know, it's like we're here. We're here and we've survived some of the worst stuff, so now we got this ill-equipped mama's boy running the country, who is a descendent of pimps, drug dealers, and foreigners, talking about building walls and doing things that would have never allowed him to exist, because that's what he comes from. He's the grandson of a German immigrant, that was a drug dealer and he ran brothels. Right? So now, "Hey, we're going to do this nicely." [laughter] You know? But I— it is my hope, it is my hope that all people, Black and White who have chosen to go to sleep, that they wake up. That they wake up for this.

WINSTON: Well, thank you. I think I've been awoken just a little bit more, with this information that you've shared with me, as an educator, community activist, and, you know, someone who's lived and continues to participate in the community through just your generosity and your skill of knowledge. I thank you very much, Richard Maxwell, for sharing this information and this time with me and with us and I look forward to seeing you again.

MAXWELL: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to express these things and I hope in the replay that they make sense. [laughter]

WINSTON: Thank you.