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Oral History Interview with Richard Green

Voices of Crown Heights oral histories, 2016.027.1.02

Interview conducted by Zaheer Ali at the Crown Heights Youth Collective offices on  
October 18, 2016 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn

ALI: I'm going to start by slating the interview. Today is Tuesday, October 18th, and I am Zaheer Ali from Brooklyn Historical Society. This interview is for the Voices of Crown Heights project, and if you can now introduce yourself by stating your name -- your full name, your birthdate, and where you were born.

GREEN: Richard Green. My birthdate is [date redacted for privacy], 1948. I was born in a little town in Honduras called Tela, and I lived there until I was eight years, going on nine years old.

ALI: OK, and where did you move after that?

GREEN: I moved to Texas.

ALI: What brought you to Texas?

GREEN: My family moved up -- my aunt lived in Texas, and we moved up to live here in, in the U.S. My mother came first, and then we came. And, from Texas, in the summer of '58 -- we came to Texas in '57, and in the summer of '58, we moved to Crown Heights, we moved to Brooklyn, when we moved right here in Crown Heights.

ALI: What was -- so you spent about two years in Texas?

GREEN: No, uh-uh. We spent -- I finished the fifth grade there. After the fifth grade was over, I came here, probably close to about nine months.

ALI: Oh, OK, so less than a year. What was it like in Texas? This is, this is before the Civil Rights Movement--

GREEN: Right.

ALI: This is 1956, 1957 -- what was it like in Texas?

GREEN: You know, you almost accepted the whole idea of segregation was-- that was a norm. That was the life, the lifestyle. You know certain stores you didn't go into. The

big department store, Joske's of Texas— I always remember— when we went there, you had to go through a side door. All the trimmings -- we came up on the train from New Orleans, we had to sit in the back of the train. When you got off the train to get a cab, you couldn't take a cab unless it was a black cab. The bus -- we were still getting on the back of the bus. So it was, it was in the height of the whole segregated South.

ALI: And you coming from Honduras, which was a more pluralistic society, what was your -- do you remember what your first reaction was?

GREEN: Well, you know, it's funny you should say that, because Honduras had a similar kind of scenario with the United Fruit Company, where -- I mean, their area, where they live was fenced off, and to this day, I cannot rem— imagine that -- at a certain point a night— during the night, the fences were electrified. Yes, the fences were electrified, so that anyone knew they couldn't go near those fences during the night hour -- I think maybe nine or ten o'clock, it would be electrified until the next morning. So, I remember -- so you kind of lived that -- well, how you related to White folks, there were— it was a very tentative relationship. I remember the school I went to was an Anglican school. So the father, Hurley, he was White, and if I could remember, that would have been one of the people that I would get— would have gotten close to. My mother was a nurse, and in the hospital she worked, there were White doctors that came from the U.S. So that would be, pretty much, your relationship with the White world. So when I came to Texas, it was sort of -- totally segregated schools, the -- as I said to you, you lived in a very— you lived in a segregated neighborhood. So it was almost like you accepted that as a norm. So, when I came to New York, [laughter] that was like, you know, a whole different life coming into New York. Where I went to school, it was White and Blacks in school -- the first time I've ever, you know, had that relationship.

ALI: What brought you to New York? What brought your family--?

GREEN: My mother came to New York to work. She was a nurse, and she came to New York -- that was where I think -- this was where she wanted to end up anyway, as opposed to living in Texas. So, we came to New York, and I finished— I finished the

fifth grade. Or did I do the fifth grade? Maybe I did the fifth grade in Texas-- I mean, in New York, and finished the sixth grade at PS 92, here in Crown Heights. So, it was during my elementary years of schooling.

ALI: So, growing up, how long did you live in Crown Heights?

GREEN: I've lived in Crown Heights just about all my life.

ALI: OK, so growing up as a teenager, what high school did you attend?

GREEN: I went to Erasmus -- first I went to, my junior high schools were right here in Crown Heights -- I went to PS, I mean junior-- we used to call it junior high school -- Middle School 61. Now, it's called Lefferts. Then I went to Walt Whitman. Actually, we moved, maybe a year -- more than a year -- we moved to Brownsville for a minute -- East New York, Brownsville, then we moved to Flatbush for a minute, and then I came back to this area. I went to Erasmus Hall High School, finished there 50 years ago -- 1966 -- and, pretty much, that was my education.

ALI: What kinds of things were there for you to do as a young person in Crown Heights growing up?

GREEN: Well, I was tall, so I was-- at that time I was considered tall, so I played ball. That was my major piece, was playing basketball. You know, I did little things, you know, I had like a handyman attitude -- I fixed bikes, and things like that. But, I worked -- the grocery store right on Kingston Avenue was called Bernstein Brothers. Early on, I worked there, and then I worked at A&P right up on -- there used to be an A&P up on Nostrand. I worked there; packing bags, helping people, carrying groceries. So, I made myself handy, because my mother was a single mother, and I, you know, worked to try to help her along in the house.

ALI: And what were your peers doing around the same time that you were doing this?

GREEN: Well, you know, like I said, we all found time to play; the sports, ringolevio, hide and seek, you know, tag, the whole nine -- you know. We did the typical things that 12-year-olds, 11-year-olds do, but basketball was my focus. I was always in the park, looking to play ball. I had in my eyes, I guess, in my dream thoughts that I would probably end up -- could play professional ball at some point, so I played -- as a matter

of fact, that little trophy right there, I won that trophy in 1966. It was a PAL third -- see how big the trophies were in those days? That was a third place citywide PAL.

ALI: Wow.

GREEN: You know, and -- so, you know, we played -- I got a chance to travel to Red Hook, and Bed-Stuy -- you know, in those days, you traveling to these neighborhoods, it was like going out of town. You lived in your little neck of the woods, you know. So we got a chance to travel; the coach would take us around.

ALI: You said PAL?

GREEN: Police Athletic League.

ALI: So what was the relationship with the police at that time?

GREEN: Well, you know, we always-- I always could remember, I grew up between the 71st Precinct, which is up there on Empire, when I lived in this area. When we moved out to Flatbush, it was the 67th Precinct. And, I could always remember, you know, a fairly good working relationship with the cops. It was such that the cops, you knew -- they were almost like the -- they were like the city parents, you know? They parent you. I always remember Officer Domico. He was a guy -- the truant officer, like -- it was a cop who handled people that played hooky. And he would know you by name. If he ran up on you, you'll try to run, he would say, "Oh, I know who you are, don't even bother running," you know. Hopkins -- it's funny, I met Officer Hop -- we used to call him Officer Hop. I met him maybe 20 years later when I started working out here. He was at the last end of his career, and he was on patrol on Franklin Avenue.

ALI: Still?

GREEN: Still, still on patrol, but that time -- at that point, he was a detective, but he was in uniform, on patrol. And, we stopped and we talked, because I remembered, we stopped there for a minute, and conversated, you know, and he told me, you know, "I'm still the same," you know, buh buh bah, and -- but that's the kind of relationship when I was -- the year, the same year, the same month that Kennedy was assassinated, that was '63, we had a serious fire in my house, and we were burnt out. And, I'll never forget that night when the -- it was like, mid-- two o'clock in the morning, and it was in November,

and the cop who came was a Black cop -- his name was Sergeant Harris, because I remember relating with him. And he gave me and my brother and sister blankets out of the trunk of his police vehicle -- I didn't even know they carried blankets in their trunk -- to sit in the backseat and covered up while they were putting the fire out. So, you know, we had a relationship that was a working relationship, you know? We knew, if they say "Jump," you said, "How high?" on the way down. It wasn't like you stood there and argued with them, because you know, they did their thing and you did yours, you know?

ALI: So, the 1960s was a very-- a period of change, significant change in the country, and even in New York. In Central Brooklyn, there were activist organizations like CORE who were working to deal with issues of city services, deal with, you know, trash pickup, to deal with school, you know, segregation. Do you remember encountering any of these issues or organizations while you were growing up in--?

GREEN: You know, I remember one name that comes to mind, and you probably run into in the history book: Reverend Galamison. And Reverend Galamison was like our Malcolm X, our -- well, actually, it would be like Dr. King here in Brooklyn. And, we would be, would be honored if one of -- because one of my friends, I'll never forget one of my friends Michael, and his brother, they went to Reverend Galamison's church, and it would be like, if they would invite us to go to church at Reverend Galamison's church, that was like a special moment, to go to his church. I remember 1962, they were building Downstate Hospital -- I'm going to say '62, '63, somewhere in that area, they were building Downstate, and what happened is, they were building Downstate -- who is it?

[inaudible]

GREEN: OK, I'm going to take this, and see who it is.

ALI: OK, then I'm going to pause. [Interview interrupted.]

GREEN: Yeah.

ALI: So, let me just -- we're continuing the oral history interview with Richard Green on October 18th, 2016. When we last left off, you were talking about Downstate.

GREEN: Downstate -- they were building Downstate, and what happened is, Malcolm X used to have his -- a march, they had a place right up here on Bedford, then they had a Steak-N-Take on Franklin, and Fulton. The Steak-N-Take was like -- you know, the Muslim Steak-N-Takes was, like, special, you know, and they would organize at the Steak-N-Take, then they would march down Fulton, up Nostrand, to Downstate. You know where Downstate is located, on New York Ave. And, that was the first time I ever heard of people laying down in front of bulldozers. They were trying to get more Blacks to be hired on the building site, building this new hospital. And, of course -- I might be a pre-teen, maybe 13, 14 -- but I would always ask my mother, could I go? Could I go? They're going to come down Nostrand -- I lived near-- Beverley, near Nostrand. I'd say, "Can we go, just--" My mother would say, "Oh, no, no, no, you can't do that, that's not--" [laughter] "That's not the place to be," you know, because of these demonstrations could be changing -- turning away. So, but I always remember that, you know, Malcolm coming down, marching down, and -- yeah, the '60s were kind of-- But the Muslims, I guess, were the people who had made the most impact -- Muhammad Ali, of course. We used to sneak into Loews Theater to go see him fight. And, it was like -- you know, Muhammad Ali was like the greatest thing in our world -- well, he called himself "The Greatest," but in our world, he was like, ah! You know, everybody couldn't think of a greater man than him. And, of course, Malcolm X was special then, and then of course, Dr. King had his part to play in the whole piece, and then -- well, not long after, a little while after that, we had Shirley Chisholm came along, right here in the neighborhood. As a matter of fact, we had this street right here named for her -- Park Place and Kingston is named Shirley Chisholm. I worked with her for a minute when I came out the military. So, you know, the '60s was -- we kind of kept them at a bay, you know -- you kind of knew about it; you knew about demonstrations, you knew about, maybe at night, you know, there'd be something, and you may have to leave out of your house -- those kinds of thoughts entered your mind. But to us, I guess, growing up, we left that to the adults, we left that to the other people, you know. The biggest thing in our world was to buy a copy -- we didn't have money to

buy a copy of *Muhammad Speaks*. The guy used to come around selling *Muhammad Speaks*, and he was so -- I'll never forget him. He always used to say, "Go on, you don't have it" -- it was like a nickel. "You don't have it? Here, take it. Give it back, give it to me -- just make sure you read it, and give me the nickel next week." You know, we would never get the nickel to him, but he would always come every week and give us a copy of *Muhammad Speaks*, and in those days there, sitting down and reading *Muhammad Speaks* was kind of on the militant side, you know what I'm saying? That was my, my notion of the '60s. And then by '66, I'm in the military, I went in the military.

ALI: So what, what motivated you to join the military?

GREEN: Well, the draft notice. [laughter]

ALI: So, you were drafted.

GREEN: No, but I got my draft notice. You know, those days -- I'm going to tell you how it worked. When you get out of -- when you were in high school, you automatically had what's called "2SH" -- they left you alone. Once you got out of high school, you became a 1SH, and then you had to go and take a test, and I think the date they were giving me the test, it was in the Bronx. But I just got me a job. I had a really, fairly good job -- I got a job on Wall Street, and, those days, getting a job on Wall Street was, you know, that was the place to be. You wore a suit and tie every day, you know -- and I missed taking the test. I'm going to college now -- I started Brooklyn College at night, taking full credits but taking them at night. And I didn't go take the exam, I didn't go take the test, I missed it. And I tell you, they got you quick -- they didn't have computers working in those days, but they got, they got to me real quick, sent a note -- I came home one evening, and my mother said, "There's a letter on top of the refrigerator for you," and I went and looked at it: "Greetings from the People of the United States," you know [laughter]. So, that was Friday afternoon. Saturday morning I went downtown to the recruiter and enlisted. I wanted, I didn't want to go where they wanted to send me, I wanted to go where I wanted to go. So I enlisted in the Marine Corps. I had seen the Marine Corps when I -- my brother and I used to go down to

Washington, like Memorial Day Weekend, we'd spend the weekend down there. We used to watch -- I used to always watch the Marine Color Guards, and I kind of liked what I saw. So, and you know, ironically enough, I came back from Vietnam, and that's where I got stuck in duty, you know, in the Color Guards. And so I joined, and '66, I went -- they sent me to school. '67, I spent in school.

ALI: Where did you do your training?

GREEN: They sent me to an Air Force base out in Colorado, Lowery Air Force Base. I did part of my training with a Navy base, and then I went to an Air Force, because the Marine Corps -- my MOS -- MOS, Military Occupational Specialty -- my MOS was intelligence, and the Marine Corps didn't have their own intelligence school, they had to send you -- how'd they call it -- TDY, out to another agency, which was either the Air Force, Air Intelligence, or the Air Force, and the other was the Navy. So, I went out there to school, finished school in the ending part of '67, and as soon as I finished school, not long after that, I got my, I got my orders for Vietnam. They used to call it WESTPAC, Western Pacific. So I got orders to WESTPAC, and that was January -- yeah, the Tet Offensive in '68. We were part of that whole deployment for the guys who -- you know, for the units that were getting knocked out at Tet. And, came home on leave, and there was a strike -- the airlines was on strike at that time, so I had to take the train out to California. Took the train out there, went to what was called staging, at Camp Pendleton, and staging after staging, battalion after -- they gave me a home leave for I think like 30 days home, and then I went to staging. And, April -- the same -- the day before Dr. King was assassinated, we deployed, but we were flying over the Pacific, so we lost a day. So, we left on Wednesday, and we got to Hawaii on Friday, and when we got to Hawaii and got off the plane, the brothers there told us that they had shot Dr. King, and they put us right back on the plane, and sent us to Japan -- Okinawa. And when we got there, they told us that Dr. King had died -- we didn't know he had died in Hawaii. And they told us at that point that what they were going to do was -- well, they didn't really tell us. They wanted to secure the island. They didn't want, they didn't want the brothers on the island to start going off. So, about three

o'clock that morning, they woke us all up -- they came in the barracks, and just started banging on the beds -- woke us up, put us on a truck, took us to the airstrip, and put us aboard a C-130, and flew us -- first they flew us to Taipei, Taiwan, and then in Taiwan, we couldn't even get on a -- they kept the plane right on the airstrip, and we had to get off the plane and stand under the wings to stay out of the sun, because it was hot. And then, put us on another -- put us back on that plane, and flew us down south. We got to Vietnam that Saturday evening, and that was it.

ALI: What were your thoughts -- tell me when you first heard that Dr. King was shot, and then when you heard that he had died, like, what was running through your mind?

GREEN: Really, really traumatic, because we saw Dr. King as, you know, that voice of reason, the voice of peace. You know, I remember when Malcolm -- when I heard Malcolm, I was on the Flatbush train going home -- my mother, and my little brother and sister, and a guy ran on the train at Church Avenue and said, "They just shot Malcolm X!" But, you could have said, you know, "Malcolm X was a hardcore, hard-speaking" -- you know, voiced his opinion. Meanwhile, Dr. King was that other -- that voice of sort of calm and reason. So, we were -- I was shocked when Malcolm was shot, because at that point in time, I had seen them shoot Kennedy in '63, and that was really -- because I worked as a young boy, I worked for the Kennedy campaign. I'll never forget going out and giving out fliers. Kennedy was like really a special character to us, and it's funny, because he ran against Richard Nixon, and I said, "Oh, man, Richard Nixon, he has my first name," [laughter] you know, "Maybe I should be supporting him," you know. But Kennedy was special, you know, he had that kind of charisma that we were looking for, I guess, as a people. And then, when they shot Malcolm, that really blew my mind, but then by '68, King knocked us off our feet, and then while we was in the 'Nam, we heard they killed Bobby Kennedy. You know? But it all started in my world with Medgar Evers, because if nothing else my mother used to make us do, she used to make us watch the six o'clock news every night -- Walter Cronkite on the six o'clock news. She used to make us watch it. You couldn't watch no other TV, but you'd watch the news, and I remember the day when Medgar was killed. So we lost five

great civil rights giants, from 1963, June, until 1968, June, in Medgar, Malcolm -- actually, Medgar, JFK -- because I'll always remember the picture of JFK at JFK's funeral— I mean at Medgar's funeral: JFK standing there with one of his children holding in his arm. I always remember that very, you know, vivid picture. And then, after JFK, we lose Malcolm, and then Dr. King, and then Bobby Kennedy. So we lost five, you know -- and this is, you know, you imagine a 19-year-old, 20-year-old, trying to fathom that, you know -- white and black. You know, as I'm looking at it now, and looking back at it, it was kind of like traumatic, and then we are now in the middle of Vietnam, you know. So it became like this -- that solution of what I was seeing, what we were seeing was a solution that, you know, war and going after pe— going after one another was the only way, you know. You got to that point where you were trying to figure it out, and I was trying to figure it out. Is there another way? At least I thought there was another way, you know, but when you're going out on an operation, the chaplain is there with you -- you know, we had chaplains; we had Catholic chaplains, we had Jewish chaplains, you know, we had chaplains from all different denominations, and to them, it seemed all what was happening was cool, you know it was, it was acceptable. You know? So it was kind of confused moments, you know; the '60s, Vietnam.

ALI: So did you -- you mentioned chaplains, and you also mentioned Reverend Galamison. Did you, growing up, did you attend a church? What was your religious--

GREEN: My religion was Seventh-Day Adventist. And, you know, like Malcolm says, the most segregated moment in America is Sunday morning at 11:00, you know [laughter] - - everybody went to their own church, you know, nobody could go to another -- should go to another church. So, I went to a Seventh-Day Adventist church, right around the corner, on Park Place. [Phone rings.] Oh, boy.

ALI: I'll pause it. OK, wait. [Interview interrupted.] We unpaused it. So, you said the church you went to was located where?

GREEN: Right around the corner, on Park Place between Nostrand and Rogers.

ALI: What was the name of the church?

GREEN: It was a Seventh-Day Adventist church, it was Park Place Seventh-Day Adventist

Church. And -- sorry about that. Park Place -- we rented, the church rented, shared the church with a Baptist church that met on Sundays -- we met on Saturdays, and the church is still there. Then they bought their own building down on Hanson Place, and they moved from here, and it became Hanson Place, which is still there -- Hanson Place Seventh-Day Adventist Church. So I was a Seventh-Day Adventist, which made it kind of deep, because we were Sabbath observers, you know. And, so people like Galamison's church, or Reverend Jones -- it was strange when you think back in those days how people were augmented towards their own churches. You almost never thought about going -- when I got to go to college, I got to go to a Catholic college, because-- that's-- I got a scholarship to go to that college. You would be amazed to know that that's the first time I've been around Catholicism. You wouldn't think about going into a Catholic church, or going into -- forget it -- going into a synagogue, or going into a mosque. You know, but now, people are much, much more open to accept -- but when I think back in those days, you know, you were always -- you were just your religion, and you went to just your church, you know?

ALI: So tell me, how long did you serve in Vietnam?

GREEN: 395 days. [laughter]

ALI: That's a very specific number. Why is that so specific?

GREEN: Because the Marines had-- we had to serve 25 more days than the Army. [laughter]

The Army served 12 months, and then you rotated. We served 13 months, but they rotated you on the 12/25, to get you five days to get you out of country, back to another side, because of -- from what I understand, it was some sort of liability, that if-- they didn't want you to get hurt or killed, you know, and you're still there -- 13 months is gone, your tour is 13 months. So they took five days to make sure that you were out of combat -- they took you out of the combat zone; they had an area where they put you, where other people were there to protect you, and then from there, they put you on a plane and flew you down to Hawaii -- I mean, flew you to Japan, and then back to the world.

ALI: So you just had one tour?

GREEN: Yeah. That's all I needed. [laughter] I feel for these guys now that out here going two and three tours sometim— to Afghanistan, and Iraq.

ALI: So when you came back to the United States, there was a strong antiwar movement. The Civil Rights Movement has turned toward Black Power. The Black Panther Party had just been founded in '66, right, 50 years ago, actually, to October. What did you encounter? What was your impression when you came back to the country?

GREEN: You know, it was strange. I was on— what we called— Colored People Control, because I was in an MP, well, security unit. We were attached to something called "8th & I," but we were attached down in Norfolk, Virginia -- we were stationed with the Navy. We were the Marines on the base that took care of all the -- you know, we were the police of that base; of the base, and the area, a big Navy town. So we were there, and I remember we were on riot control. Every day, we would be dressed, fixed bayonets -- not fixed bayonets, but have our bayonets to be fixed if necessary, and just sitting there, waiting, and if something happened -- there were demonstrations down in Washington, and if something happened and they needed us as backup, you know, as reinforcements, there were helicopters, would take us right down. And every day, we would fall out for riot control, and I was a sergeant at that point; I had made sergeant, so I had a unit. I was the sergeant of that unit, called Sergeant of the Guard. And all the guys under me came to me and said one day, they said, "Sergeant Green, we don't want to fall out on riot control anymore." [laughter] So, we had gotten to where 13:00 -- one o'clock, we'd be downstairs. So, my CO, Major Ariola, I went downst-- no, I went out -- we were in these big squad bays, and the top rack, I heard him yell out, "Sergeant Green," you know, "Second section, fall out!" And I went downstairs and told the CO, I said, "Sir, all due respect, second section requested that they don't fall out anymore on riot control." And, my CO was a real hard-nose; Korean War, Vietnam -- and he looked at me and he said, "You know, Sergeant Green, you understand that disobedience of a lawful order is punishable by court-martial. It could be also punishable by death." That's just how hard he was. I said, "Yes, sir." And he says, "OK." And, I went back upstairs, and I told, I told the group -- my section was about, what, it's about 50, maybe

60 people in my section, and I told them, and I said, “Yeah, the CO says that it’s a court-martial offense to disobey a lawful order.” And they said, “Yeah, we understood it.” And later on that day, the CO called me back downstairs, and said basically, you know, we respect your position, and we’re not -- we’re calling it off, you’re not going to be called about— called out any more for that. And there was nothing more ever said about it. But that’s how we were able to, you know -- as a sergeant, I was, like, the go-to person from both ends, and the guys wanted -- when the Afros came out -- well, Afros were out during the ‘60s [laughter] -- they wanted to wear Afros, and we went— I went to the CO with it, and he gave me an order how they could wear the Afro. They could have three inches on top, and high and tight on the side. [laughter] So, we were able to put on a stocking cap at night, keep our hair down, when we went to the barber, they did a high and tight around the side, and then at night, when we were going on liberty, we get our picks out, and we picked out our Afros, and we’d have our— as long as it wasn’t more than three inches. And three inches was pretty, you know, good lot of hair. So, we were able to get Afros, and I think we might have even set the standards of Afros in the Marine Corps, [laughter] you know? You know, and we would go on liberty every night, we would go out to town, and in town, it was Black. Norfolk was a Black town, you know.

ALI: Did you ever feel—? Well, let me ask it this way. What did you feel, being essentially a representative of the United States government, you know, as a member of the military, at a time when there was a significant kind of social and political movement protesting the government, both from the student movement, antiwar movement, also like the Black Power movement? How, what were you— how did you feel in the midst of all of that, being where you were?

GREEN: Well, I mean, I told you about us going on riot control. I had been called out for reading -- and it wasn’t, I wasn’t even really reading it, I just got a whole heap -- one day, I was home, here, on the weekend. My car stalled out right up there on Fulton and Bedford, and these brothers came along and gave me a jump, got me started, and they were Muslims, from the mosque -- as a matter-- from Malcolm’s mosque, and they gave

me, in fact, some of the old *Muhammad Speaks* -- not the newspapers, but his books: *Message to the Black Man*, *How to Eat*, you know, *Fall of Ameri*-- they gave me copies of it, you know. I said, "Oh, thank you," gave it -- took it, I went back to my base, and rushing to get back on post that next morning, I laid them on my bed, and went on post. Came back the next evening, when I came off duty, my books were gone. But that was normal, because you know, we had that relationship in the squad bay; if you see something on my bed, you like it, you borrow it, just let me know, and get it back. So I figured some of the guys had borrowed it, and I got called on the next morning. Went to Officer Naval Intelligence. They sat me down, they questioned me -- some strange questions. Now, I'm a sergeant, now. [laughter] You know, I've been in Vietnam, I've been the whole nine, I've been through the whole -- so, you know, that started me kind of feeling a way, you know, because they were really adamant. "What do you -- how do you refer to White people? What do you call them? How do you feel about this? How do you feel--" And I was just totally in the other side of that, you know, not-- it-- don't-- sound like a cliché that some of my best friends were White, you know. But my very best -- two of my very best friends -- one of them; bless his soul he, he became a cop, got killed in Atlanta. And then the other one; Bobby Farrell, out at Chicago -- and these were my tight buddies, you know? So it wasn't even a thing about black or white. These guys would lay down for you in a minute. I would lay down for them in a minute. So I kind of felt stressed -- said, "These guys don't really know me," you know? [laughter] They think that -- I tried to let -- you know, I said, "Hey, somebody gave me the literature, I laid it on my bed, came back, it was gone. I assumed some of the guys took it." "Do you want it back?" "No, if you don't want to give it back to me, keep it," you know? So, that was some of the feeling, so I started to feel a way about this whole thing, and by the time I got out; the day I got out the Marine Corps -- I got an early out, Nixon gave us all an early out. You served in Vietnam, they gave you like a 90-day cutoff, and I took it, and I got out September 7th; the d-- the day Jimi Hendrix died. That's [laughter] -- yeah, that's how I remember the date, because you know why I remembered it so vividly? I was going to check out--

they call it "checking out" when you're getting out— and when I went to the other base to check out, one of -- what we called them the lifers -- the brothers who had been all their life in the Marine Corps, he said, "Yo, your boy Jimi Hendrix died!" At that point in time, they started to see me in that kind of Hendrix mode, you know [laughter]; that I was more the radical Marine rather than the— So I says, "Jimi Hendrix?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah." I thought they were j— he was just playing with my head. Then I looked at the, to the PX on the newspaper and I seen that Hendrix had died. And, I got out, and one of the first places I wanted to join was the Black Panther Party. I said, all these skills -- and, you know, we had talked about that; some of the guys, you know, we would sit down, and watching what was happening, and, you know, in Vietnam, we got very militant. When John Carlos and Tommie Smith did the piece at the Olympics in October of '68, they -- our CO, Colonel White had to tell us, if we get caught with a black glove on, you're out of uniform. [laughter] We all, in a hot 120-something degree temperature, we was all wearing black gloves. Black gloves, everybody was wearing a black glove, you know, machine gunners, everybody would have that one black glove on. We were so proud of those brothers. I mean, that was so powerfully special. I'm going to tell you how -- they say a coincidence is God's way of staying anonymous. Helicopters coming in -- I'm standing there on the helipad one day, I see a black glove come out of the door. The door gunner was a brother, [laughter] and he had on his black glove. Almost 50 years later, my son is in the— in this Broadway play *Fela!*, and they go down to play in Atlanta. Who invites them over to dinner? Tommie Smith. And when my son realized it was Tommie Smith, the Olympic man, he said to him, he said, "Man, my father is your biggest fan," [laughter] you know? He said, "All— for years and years, all I hear is about you two." He said, "Well I'm going to give you--" He's hanging right out there. He signed -- he autographed a picture, and sent it with my son for me, and I framed and put it on my wall there. But that was so powerful; that all them years later -- and that had to be 40-something years -- yeah, almost 50 years that was, last year? Yeah, 40-something years, that Tommie Smith ended up sending me a signed picture. So that -- you know, I

thought about the Panthers, I thought about that, but by Wednesday -- I got out of the Marine Corps on a Monday, by Wednesday, I went and signed up for college. I signed up at Norfolk State. I said I didn't want to get into another regimented scenario. I just came out of four years of regimentation, and the Panther Party to me -- and I really was sort of shying away from guns at that point. I'd had to carry -- in my job, I had to carry a gun every single day. In Vietnam, I had to carry two guns a day. Here in the U.S., I carried a gun and a shotgun, because I was an MP. So, I didn't want to wear a gun anymore. I didn't want to have much to do with it. Even then, my friends would tease me. "You know it's better to be judged by six of your peers than be carried by six of your peers," but I just got away from guns, you know, I didn't want no parts of it, and I kind of started being in a kind of a state of peace, you know. I didn't want to be bothered with that whole scenario. So, I went to school, and then I transferred from there and came up here. I got a little scholarship to go to Marist College, a little Catholic school up in Poughkeepsie, New York, and then from there, I went over to graduate school at SUNY New Paltz. And in six-- '77, came right back to the good old Brooklyn, after going for ten years -- actually, '76 I came back, bicentennial year I came back, ten years later. Six years in college, four years of Marine Corps.

ALI: And what did you find when you came back?

GREEN: Strange, you know; the neighborhood was changed. It had a lot of abandonment. It just wasn't the, wasn't the neighborhood I left. I mean, I had come home, back -- but I hadn't been home long enough to really see it, and I saw a lot of need. I saw a lot of needs; community needs, and what have you. So I just started working -- tutoring. Yesterday, I went to a woman -- a lady, bless her soul's, service, and she had given me my first tutoring job; to tutor her two children, and I tutored them for a while, and I said, "Oh, this is something that I—" Because law school was really what I had in mind to do next. And, so I tutored them, and I said, "Oh, this is good." I saw, could see continuous progress in them; in just showing them little shortcuts to do an algebra project, or how to take the SATs, and stuff like that. So I said, "This is something I think I might want to do." And, I moved over here on Carroll Street, between Bedford

and Franklin, and I was looking -- I was up on the fourth floor -- I was looking out of my window one morning, and I seen these little boys. At that time, the sanitation was there -- I saw them playing on the roof. So I yelled out to them, I said, "Why are you all up there on the roof there? You don't belong in school?" and they, you know, said something to me. So I went downstairs, and when they came off the roof, I started talking to them, and I realized that they had the idea in their minds that they found something they couldn't find in school. They were playing hooky. So that started me thinking about it, and I went around the corner -- there was a youth program there called Hurricane Cadets -- one of the cadet corps. That was like one of the big things during the '50s -- I mean, the '60s and '70s, and I linked up with him, and asked him if he would give me a room in the building to tutor in, and I started tutoring. And then, from there, I got my own space at Ebbets Field, and then we got our own little storefront, where Medgar Evers is today. It was an abandoned building there. We took it over, and we made it over. In those days, there was so much abandonment in the community. That whole block was abandoned, the entire Bedford to Franklin, Crown to Montgomery -- used to be a shopping mall there, and we took the old lumber from the old shopping mall and rebuilt the center -- right where Medgar Evers is today, 1650 Bedford -- that was our center. We were there for a little while, until 1983. Medgar came in and took it over, and we were -- what they call eminent domain. And so we moved right back down the block to where we were originally. The guy, at that point in time, he wanted to retire, and we took over that space. Then they took that space, and we moved over to Franklin and Crown, and we were there until we moved here. So we've been in Crown Heights, just in the neighborhood, since I came back home.

ALI: So within a year that you came back, it was the famous blackout, the New York City blackout.

GREEN: '77.

ALI: '77. What do you recall of it now?

GREEN: Oh, yeah, it was a deep, deep scene. I mean, at first, I really thought -- I'm glad that it didn't go like I thought. That first night, just being in those streets and watching

what was happening, I thought this whole Brooklyn was going to just burn. You know, the looting, and breaking, and -- I had, I had experienced a blackout before then, in the early -- in the '60s, I want to say '63, '64. There was another big blackout, but it was nowhere near like that, you know. People were on the street, helping direct traffic, you know, people had flashlights, helping people, but '77 was a little different, you know.  
J—

ALI: What did you do that day?

GREEN: I was out there. We were kind of moving, helping people along. We were over in Flatbush, over by near -- used to be called Vanderveer Houses, it's now a new name. We were in that area there, working. We were out playing ball that night. We used to play ball in the park, Foster Park, and when it hit-- So we were trying to help people in that neighborhood there, come through, trying to get off -- the subways, of course, were stopped, so people were trying to trail out of the tunnels, and whatnot, and that's what we did that night, and hurry sun, hurry sunup, [laughter] you know. And then, I think the current came on that next day at some point.

ALI: So, when you returned back to New York in the late '70s, there were a series of conflicts that had erupted, and I wonder if you, if you had any encounters with this. It was the killing of Arthur Miller, who was a black businessman, who died--

GREEN: Right across the street.

ALI: --strangulation from the police. It was a choke-hold that killed him. Then there was a young teenager, Victor Rose, who was beaten critically--

GREEN: Here in Crown Heights.

ALI: --by a security patrol from the Hasidic community. And then there was like a protest, of like 2,000 people converged on Eastern Parkway to protest these incidents. So I'm wondering, what -- if you had any encounters with any of these issues, or what do you remember about that time?

GREEN: Well, I mean, I started to hear about them. I started to, you know, be part and parcel -- when the marches and whatnot that came in Crown Heights, we were trying our best. You know, I'm remembering back then, the Victor Rose scenario, to try to

remember reaching out to people in the Hasidic community. We started to do some outreach in that area. I had -- of course, Reverend Daughtry had been a big player in the leadership here in Brooklyn, so, you know, we would look to him. One of the things he was doing -- and I'm trying to remember a young man out in East New York that was killed by the cop. It'll come to me in a minute. But after that happened, Reverend Daughtry and them had started demonstrating in Downtown Brooklyn, but one of the things they were demonstrating for was jobs. They set up a program that they were asking the businesses in Downtown Brooklyn to hire Black youth. So I got involved with that, because a lot of the youths that I started working with here, we would be able to get them in jobs down there, so we did some work along with that. I remember the Arthur Miller case. Like I said, it was right across the street here on Rogers, and there were a few demonstrations -- I might have even been out there at some point in time, but I wasn't really as, I might say, active, active in there. I was more like a participant, a bystander, observing, rather than in any kind of a leadership capacity. Like I said, there were those who did a lot of that work. I think of Reverend Daughtry, but there were other people, also, that did that work. And, a young man who organized to get the jobs in Downtown Brooklyn -- memory fails me right now, but there was a young man who did a lot of that work. I see him right now, big Afro, and I had connected with him, and over the course of time, we stayed in contact. Whenever there'd be jobs that opened up, I remember -- in those days, it wasn't Macy's, it was A&S. He would say, "Oh, send some of your youths down to A&S, send some of your youths down to whatever whatever whatever store," so we had that kind of relationship.

ALI: So, do you -- if we were to talk about what are the -- you said you saw a lot of need when you came back to Brooklyn. What were -- I don't want to say what were the grievances, I think need is a better word -- what were some of the needs? What were some of the things that people in the community felt were calling for or needing?

GREEN: Well, you know, that started the whole notion of jobs -- high school dropping out started then. When we went to school, it was unheard of -- you could count the people who dropped out of high school on your hands, you know. You didn't drop out. But

when I came back, that whole picture had changed. A lot of young men now were out on the streets. The end of the old gang-banging days, and the abandonment in the community -- a lot of the folks who I knew growing up in the neighborhood, either they had moved out, you know, to the suburbs, or moved away. Some of the middle-class Blacks had moved to like Queens, or moved out of the city -- Staten Island -- and many of the Whites had moved out of the area. The Jews who were here, who were non-Hasidic, they had moved. Only the Hasidic community pretty much remained here in Crown Heights. And you had -- excuse me -- a new kind of attitude of people coming in. Everybody who came in now were new people. They weren't familiar with the runnings of the city, and the municipality. So you had to -- my work became very intense, because we had to now help to acclimate them, and I think back: When I read of history of, you know, the Urban League and these other groups that started out, I see why that was there in the '20s, of people migrating up from the South, and there was that real need. With the youths especially; they spoke different, it was hard for them to manage their academics, because where they came from, they had a different academic system, and when they got here, they were being put back in grades, and -- it was just a tough time for the new immigration. They spoke different. It was -- we would call English as a Second Language -- and they were talking about English as a second dialect. So we were busy, continuously work. Then, of course, there was now that antagonism between the new guys. The same thing happened when they came from the South. Because, I remember when a young girl in one of my classes, they called her Virginia, and I always thought her name was Virginia. I was foreign, because I came up from Texas to New York, and she was foreign, she came from Virginia, and then one day in the lunchroom, I'm sitting down there, and we're talking, and she said, "You know, my name isn't really Virginia." [laughter] She says, "My name is whatever." She said, "They call me Virginia because I come from Virginia," and that's how it was now for the youths coming up from the islands, you know. They were going through a lot of drama, we had to kind of like help to broker the marriage between them and the youths here. So that was some of the-- a lot of the work we were doing at that particular

moment.

ALI: So let's talk a little bit about what the '80s were like. So, when was the Crown Heights Youth Collective formally established?

GREEN: 1978.

ALI: Oh, 1978.

GREEN: We incorporated in 1981. And, the '80s was -- the time of the '80s, I can remember just being able to start to turn the tide, turn the-- turn what was happening, you know. We have -- the mayor came in, was Mayor Koch. And, Koch and I had built up a working relationship --I'm just trying to think -- the Hasidic community, by '85, '86 -- maybe it was even earlier than that. There was a new group coming in-- called themselves FREE: Friends and Refugees of Eastern Europe-- and they were in the Hasidic community, and we started to work with them. One of their members ran a feeding program, and we got our lunches through them. So, we had a-- we started a working relationship now with the Hasidic community. Lots of work with the schools: Becoming chancellor in '88-- '87, '88-- Chancellor Green had my name, my namesake, and we started doing a major program with the Board of Ed in two schools. We started in two high schools. But the whole, the whole tides of the '80s was turning this whole scenario around; the abandonment. [laughter] You know, I laugh to myself when I walk up the street now and I see a driveway and a building that's going up in the driveway, you know. It just amazed me, because I remember us trying our best to try to talk to people, to help rebuild the neighborhood. We would have these abandoned buildings, and we were working with a program here on Washington Avenue, BNIA -- Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Association, and we would go into these apartment hou-- apartments that landlords had walked away from, and teach the youth to do some basic repairs. My good friend, bless his soul, Carlyle McKetty and I would set these youths up to go in there and do basic stuff, and--

ALI: At the time, what would you attribute the abandonment to?

GREEN: Well, people left the neighborhood, and just-- many of them just walked away.

Buildings -- the building we were in downstairs on Bedford Avenue, before we moved

down around the corner, that building went into what they ca-- was not *in rem* -- it was *in rem*, it went into *rem*, and then a lot of the buildings was where the state took it over, I'm trying to think of the name. The state have a name that's named for the two senators, whoever th— it will come to me in a minute. But these buildings were all into these abandonment -- landlords would walk away, tenants would take it over. Just like where we were; where we were where Medgar Evers is now. The landlord wasn't there. Every now and then, they would come around and try to collect some rent, but they did nothing. We did everything ourselves. We had to put a heating system in there, we had to do plumbing, whatever -- we had to do it. And, but so the landlord was happy when Medgar came in, or the City University came in and took it over, and that's what we were trying to do, is just hold off abandonment. If these buildings were around then, it would have been beautiful, I mean. I mean, it was so many buildings, and empty lots. It's just, like, even the empty lots -- our garden right here, as you notice, it's boarded up. [laughter]

ALI: What's happening with that?

GREEN: Some folks went down, this old man in Florida, and had him sign to it, took it from him for little or nothing. And, they walked away with that other garden down the street -- Bette Midler's people took it, but before -- by the time Bette Midler's people took it, we had turned it over to some other people, and now I couldn't even go buy that garden. There was another one we did -- this is all abandoned buildings, abandoned lots -- abandoned, broken-down buildings. Many times, this building there -- they broke it down. The city came in and demolished it, and just boarded it up, took -- carted it away, and we took it out by hand, and set up a garden in there. The other one on Dean Street, the same way, behind Dean Street -- I see people have chickens in there now. Another one further up on Pacific Street -- we had gardens all over, because there was so many abandoned lots. They're building one on a lot right now on Franklin and Crown. That was a big abandoned lot. I'll never forget, one morning, early in the morning, I get a call, "Mr. Green, Mr. Green, there's some bulldozers going in our garden." [laughter] Yeah, some youths in Ebbets Field had seen the bulldozers coming

in.

ALI: What kind of opportunities did tenants have for organizing to, like, ensure that their living conditions were what they should be?

GREEN: Well, it was a lot. We -- like I said, BNIA was doing a lot of work. We were doing work with the tenants. I helped that building to become a low-income coop, the one that we were on downstairs. We worked with them, you know -- there was a lot of work, you know, set up meetings with the different people. And, Koch had what he called a Solomonic Plan here in Crown Heights, where he would say to his administration, one building would go to the Hasidic community, one building would go to the Black community, so there were people -- Reverend Norman, Senior -- he did a lot of work with holding the buildings, and there were some other people whose names escapes me right now, but these folks began to organize tenants, because in many cases, the tenants had the buildings. They were tenant-controlled -- that building, that big giant building on the corner of Bedford and Carroll Street was tenant-controlled. Tenants collected the rent, they did the repairs, and then they ended up buying out the deed from--

ALI: So they -- that's kind of like they were a coop.

GREEN: Yeah.

ALI: Operating as a coop.

GREEN: They call it low-income coops. They own the building now. There are apartments in that building now -- at that time, it was \$250 an apartment. [laughter] Now, it's probably about \$2,500 towards \$5,000, you know, to get one of them apartments. So, that's what we were doing. It was mostly like educating, educating -- Ebbets Field came out of Mitchell-Lama. They came out of Mitchell-Lama, and they had a chance to buy the building, but they didn't, so the buildings -- folks bought the building. Tivoli Towers is the same thing -- it was on the Mitchell-Lama. A lot of these buildings were -- you know, the state took them over under Mitchell-Lama, and -- just educating the tenants, that was what we did mainly. When I think back at it now, we didn't have a whole lot of funds, or resources. We had sweat equity. We would get into these

buildings with these -- like I said, one summer youth program was just helping old people get their buildings -- the seniors would have an apartment, they wouldn't have-- A radiator not working, the sink is leaking, the bathroom isn't working; our young people were trained to get in there and fix it for them.

ALI: How did they get trained?

GREEN: BNIA had -- we had staff, as well as plumbers, professionals -- even this building right here that I'm in right now, initially, where people -- we got Berk Trading School, Berk Trade School, down on Atlantic -- I don't even know if they're there still, but Berk Trade School; their people. When they finished class in the morning, they would send them out here in the afternoon to work at getting things done. And we were able to get a lot of build-- so like I said, I was massively surprised, I'll be honest with you. I'd be honestly shocked when I saw, all of a sudden, bang [laughter] -- the neighborhood started to change, you know? I was happy, you know -- I was happy in a sense, because I said, wow, as hard as we fought -- I remember Franklin Avenue, one time, they said it was the highest infestation of crack cocaine in the country [laughter] -- not in the city, in the country! We were working so hard with these youths, and trying to just keep it, you know, going -- I mean, that '94, homicides are up to 2,200 a year. Sometimes I'd go to two, three funerals a day, you know. Young people, 25, were senior citizens. You know? So, as I said, when I saw -- I didn't want it to happen so quickly, [laughter] you know -- I would have liked for it to have been more -- and not see anybody displaced, because a lot of these people lived in these apartments when landlords walked away, and left them, and still owned the buildings, probably tried to collect rent, and did very little to repair -- and these people lived on, suffered, you know, went through whatever drama it took, and then all of a sudden, one morning they woke up, and they're putting their stuff in the storage buildings, and they're homeless, they're in shelters, you know? And it happened so quickly, they didn't even realize it was happening. Crown Heights all of a sudden became, you know -- like one youth said to me, "Mr. Green, Franklin Avenue reminds me of Park Slope now," [laughter] you know? And you don't know how hard it was for us to hold on to little pieces -- you know, we had a merchants'

association, when the merchants started to go -- you would see a merchant just come in, and just abandon his shop, even the Korean markets, and we formed a little merchants' association called Ebbets Field Area Merchants Association, and we put th— we put those banners up on Franklin Avenue. So, you know, that was what we did in the '80s, and then into the '90s.

ALI: So, before we get back to the '90s, you said one of your youth said Franklin Avenue now looks like Park Slope. What does that mean?

GREEN: That, he was saying how it's become sort of like, you would say, modern -- not modern, but lovely, you know, the ambience of Park Slope -- you know, Park Slope would be the ambience of neighborhoods. So now, our Franklin Avenue's looking like Park Slope, [laughter] you know? And, you know, I kind of agreed with him, because I said, "You know, it's true." I remember when Franklin Avenue was such when we were working with the precinct to do the night patrols on the Ave. -- we would walk our dogs, and the cops would come and teach people how to go home at night walking up the Ave. -- I'll never forget -- teaching them to keep your keys in your hand, things like that.

ALI: What do you mean, keep your keys in your hand? How?

GREEN: Hold your keys in your hands as, you know, to ward off, if somebody came and tried to grab you, you know.

ALI: So, the keys.

GREEN: Keys become a weapon, yeah, to kind of keep people off of you. And all of this time, we're doing this work, and doing this work, and doing this work, to just keep it -- you know, sometimes I watch when some folks will walk down the block, and they'll look at -- you know, they'll look at me, they'll look at the other place -- I says, "You know, if you only knew [laughter] when this place was going under, that we were the ones out there on that block that kept it up, kept it up, kept it up, kept it up." We started the first van patrols, we got the Department of Youth Services -- I brought a Councilman out there, Councilman Sal Albanese. One day I brought him out here, and we rode right up Franklin Avenue. We had leased a van from New Hampshire, and was using that van to do our van patrol, and he said, "Oh, no, we got to get the city to

buy into this.” The city bought the first seven vans.

ALI: And what were you patrolling? What were you doing?

GREEN: We just did all throughout Crown Heights. This is Crown Heights, north Crown Heights, south -- everybody knew the van after a while, if they have an issue. Then we set up what we called peace zones. You might even see some remnants of them still, like on a building, you may see an old basketball hoop torn down. That was -- we set up what we called peace zones. Gardens were peace zones. We had one over on Albany and Union in the Hasidic community -- Hasidic people gave us a lot that they had there, and we set up a peace zone there, and we, we did murals -- painted up the abandoned buildings. So many abandoned buildings, we painted them -- you know how they cinderblock the front? We would paint the cinderblock, put maybe a picture on there.

ALI: What -- when you say you were patrolling, what were you patrolling for, and what would you do?

GREEN: To grab the youths, to let them -- you know, keep them out of harm's way. Our young people -- they were in such, you might say, despondency, of how the neighborhood was going, and how opportunities were for them. After a while, summer jobs became less and less and less and less. Jobs became less. They were leaving out of high school. We had a program called the STAR program -- Success Through Achievement Reinforcement, where we would pick them up off the street, bring them into the schools. We had a relationship with the high schools; that we could get them in the door -- this was back in the '80s, we started this program in '85 -- get them into the building without going through -- I use a little thing we used in Vietnam called the Chiêu Hồi program. Chiêu Hồi means safe passage. And what we would do, we'd throw out these little yellow slips -- helicopters would throw out 20,000 of them around where Viet Cong area would be, and if a Viet Cong picked it up and came to your, to your wires, waving a Chiêu Hồi, that's safe passage, they could come in. And I said to the principals, I said, let's have like a Chiêu Hồi program. The youths come in with one of our cards, they could get in the building, and so we, we even got the cards where, my

card is a bright yellow, so they could come in the building, and the security wouldn't stress them, and it would get them off the streets, get them out the park, get them off of Franklin Avenue -- it was a monster. [laughter] We'd get them off of Franklin Avenue, get them down -- we'd find the hooky parties, break them up, bring them back into the school. Like I said they, they inherited a, you know -- this neighborhood being inherited now is the reward of a *lot* of hard work, a lot of people who put a lot of their lives in it. I mentioned Carlyle McKetty, a young brother who could have been probably in his late 30s, died of a heart attack out here, and many others who did this work, who were just, you know, people who were soldiering, they just -- because we didn't, we never saw that the community would come back like this. I'll be honest with you-- you know, I guess I'm the perennial optimist at times-- but even I would not have felt that we would see the revived, you know, resurgence, as we see now. I'd just say we were just like holding the lead, you know, keeping our pinkies on the, on the dam so it didn't bust open. And, when I saw this happen -- I'm going to be honest with you, I'm happy to see our neighborhood coming back and revitalizing, but I don't-- I'm not happy when I see the people who suffered through. We do a Christmas feeding at the shelters, with Medgar Evers College, for Christmas, and when we pick up these shelters, and bring them over to the college, and people begin to hail me, you know, who lived in the neighborhood -- and the city has a plan now, in order to get in, say, public housing, you have priority one if you're coming out of the shelter. So a lot of families go into the shelter -- I had a young lady, she had to go into the shelter with her baby, and they put her in a shelter way up in Manhattan, then they put her in the Bronx, a female women's shelter, and I remember at night, driving her in a van to the subway, so she could get on the train and go to the shelter, and then in the evening -- I mean the morning, she would come back to Brooklyn. So that's what hurts me. I'll be honest with you, that's painful, and I see people that are, you know, one family, a Puerto Rican family, lived on 1600 Bedford, and that mother had a lot of children -- she had, in fact, it's funny, because she had all boys, and next thing, I ask for her, I see one of her sons, he said, "Oh, my mother's there -- she's in the shelter." So, that kind of bothers

me, and it still bothers me. I'd like to see our neighborhood re— revitalized, but I work every day to just help people to just be able to keep what they have; keep their apartments, you know. I have people who work with the City and the court agencies and attorneys -- the City of New York. Mayor De Blasio has just come up with this package -- this is the second year -- to stave off evictions, where we're able to get, you know, like mothers coming out. Like, one mother just came out of the hospital, she was getting ready to get evicted, and they paid up all her back rent, and keep her -- so that's what we're doing now, you know. But, that to me -- when we kept the neighborhood going, not in my wildest dreams would I -- as I saw our gardens, that was the first thing I would see: Us beginning to lose our gardens. Every time you'd look around, another garden was gone.

ALI: You mentioned also the peace zones. What were--? Tell me how that worked. What was the motivation behind that, and how did the peace zone work -- what was it supposed to do?

GREEN: Wherever we found an incident took place, we set up a peace zone there. We saw an ar— an area that was active in shooting. One of our ballplayers -- I'll give you a good example -- he was shot on St. Johns near, off Utica, and we set up a peace zone; an abandoned building right on that corner, right where he would have been hanging out. We painted a mural, we found a way to put up these basketball hoops, or if we couldn't put them up, we would get the portables, put them out there. We would put up a chess table, or -- and those guys played dominos. Those were the peace zones. And the van - - people knew the van. When the van came around, they h— they had an issue, they would stop us, family members. During Crown Heights, during the crises, that was one of the things that helped quell things down. The van would go out, and we would be able to interact with the youths that's running around. Coming up a block: Cops are coming this way, they coming us this way. We would stave them off, move them out, talk to them. We had a van with— that they, the city gave us a van with a loudspeaker, and -- yeah, that van -- we down to two right now. The one I have, they gave it to me, it came from Far Rockaway. I've had -- I was -- the first van -- I had one, two, this is the

third van I have, because we got the first one in '92. And this one here was Far Rockaway's van, and they didn't want it, I guess, after the crisis. Well, even before the crisis, we got the van. And, I understand there's only two left. There was a time, there was a whole fleet out there, but each administration, you know--

ALI: So, do you -- so the peace zones, they were kind of marked by the murals, and people knew -- they knew what should happen or not happen at the peace zone.

GREEN: Yeah, and there was a place where I would go by, my crew -- I had a crew. We rode in the van; folks who would go out there, we would counsel them. We had all the information they needed, you know; if they needed to get into school, they had school information, job information. So, the peace zone was a spot where we could always meet them at.

ALI: Do you -- can you give me some of the locations of the peace zones?

GREEN: Right around the corner here on St. Marks, between Bedford and Rogers, there was one. St. Johns and Utica, there was one. Right around the corner here on Park Place near the schoolyard, there was one. In fact, if you go right up to that corner of Park and Nostrand, you'll see the names of the people who were killed on that block. We put the, you know, we put the mural up there. We had a step garden up there. That's Crown Heights North. Crown Heights South, we had one on Crown and Nostrand, Crown and Washington, Westbury Court, Lincoln Road between Flatbush and Bedford. But the funny thing with the peace zones, because there were basketball hoops, people would call it in, call them, and -- because the youth would try to get them to cool out at night -- they'd play out there nine, ten o'clock, and people started stressing, and I'd get folks coming at me, now, and now they had to deal with the cops. The cops would come take them down, and they would disappear. The other day, youths was still -- one of the peace zones, the cops took -- and the youths -- this was recently, too -- trying to find out from me, "Where did they take our peace zone too? How can we get it back?" [laughter] You know, "Where did they take it?" I said, "Maybe they took it all the way out to Queens, to the Property Clerk's office." I said, "You ain't gonna get it back, you know?" But, yeah, the peace zones worked a lot, because -- and then we had something

called the "Peace Games," where we got all the bangers together playing ball. I had, the other night, I had over 300 youths in a gym. A couple of guys, youths, had gotten killed up on -- a young boy got killed over the baseball cap, and the girl got killed on Clarkson, another one on Woodruff. And, we had all of those people together -- Clarkson versus Westbury. I just got a call from the guy, one of the people who organized it, thanking me, and these same young men that we see running around, shooting these signs, wanted to march in the-- they marched in the, in the Breast Cancer Awareness Day, Sunday, and he called to tell me they were out there all day, because I made him a post-- a banner, big two by four banner, and they carried the banner with their website and the whole nine on it. And these guys marched. I was so proud of them, because, you know, that they want to do something for breast cancer awareness, nobody would -- you know, that don't show up in the box score, you know? Nobody will talk about -- hopefully, hopefully someone out there might have picked them up, you know, maybe. I didn't get out there, I had to go to church that day. But the basketball game, News 12 came out, and did it. But, you have 300 people in a gym. We had maybe six cops in there; three in the Community Affairs, and then a couple uniform, and thank God, we didn't have one incident. One guy got mad over the game and kicked the ball. Some young person from the other side of the gym came over and whispered to him that that was unsportsmanlike conduct. [laughter] Do you know, the end of the day, the end of the evening, he got on the microphone and apologized? [laughter] He said, "I want to apologize for kicking the ball, I didn't mean it to be--" But, the youths are really, really penetrated now with peace, you know. Like I said, the Peace Games, the youths are still asking me about it. "When are we going to do some more Peace Games?" So, we did this one, and I told them, December, I would try to do something else with them. And, I mean, but it was a time we had youths coming from Brownsville, East New York, Crown Heights, Bed-Stuy, and they would all come into our park and play, and they understood that when they came here -- we might have had, one time, an incident, but basically, they came and just played and went home.

ALI: So, are most of the young people that you work with young men, or do you also--?

GREEN: Oh, no, no, I work with the young women too, a lot of young women.

ALI: So, how do they fit -- I mean, I don't know how -- so how do they fit in with the initiatives around like the Peace Games, or do you do other things with them--?

GREEN: They come out, and -- like the other night, I think we had to have more women in there than we had men. They come out and support it. Some of the things, you know, in the past, we've done activities that had women involved, like maybe double Dutch, or -- did a lot of murals where women were involved. I'm trying to think -- my wife do a lot of things with the women, with the girls. She has a program where -- it's called, like the song says, "Tell Mama," where the girls can come and talk, and talk about -- I mean girls, now, who are like 40 years old, that was part of the program, and they're now mothers -- some are getting ready to be grandmothers -- you know, they come to the program. We did things. We had girl ball players too. I took a group of ball players to Africa in, what, '85? No, no, '87. I went in '85 and set it up, I went back in '87, and there were girls in that group, and I brought a group -- girl teams from Africa over here, and some of them ended up -- one girl got married and stayed here, and another one played ball in Georgia. So, you know, the girls, we're involve-- got a lot of things.

ALI: I want to backtrack again a little bit to the '80s. So, in the '80s, there was-- there were some challenges in terms of ethnic relations in New York, broadly, but also in Brooklyn, with the killing of Michael Griffith in Queens, and Yusef Hawkins in Bensonhurst. In '87, there was the-- I guess, some say a firebombing of Willie Mae Reddish's house. You know, tell me -- what were your reactions to some of these?

GREEN: We wor-- we worked -- it was funny, because myself and Ms. Griffith, we talk at least every week; Michael Griffith's mother. This is the 30th-- yes, his 30th anniversary.

ALI: That's right, it was '86--

GREEN: Yeah, '86 -- yeah, coming up, yeah, and we talked--

ALI: '86.

GREEN: '86? Yeah, this is the 30th, because Ms. Griffith and I speak -- like I said, last week, she called me, we spoke, and that's what we did, we just -- at that point in time we were, we were deep into our peace movement. When these things happened, we went in as

to try to -- not say, "Let the police do what they're supposed to be doing," or "Let the City of New York do what they were supposed to be doing," but our job was to get the people who might have the peripheral attitudes with the incident -- get them together to move on certain things, and there were others who wanted to do the marching, and -- you know, I think there were a lot of groups here that you'd probably realize, that they did the big marches, and what have you. And, they did what they had to do, but our job was to comfort the pare-- comfort the family. You know, I remember that night, going up to -- they lived right up here in Weeksville, Mrs. Griffith and her family; Chris, and the other members, and just try to just comfort them. You know, keep them kind of in a stable mindset. With the, with the marches, whenever the marches took place, there were those who marched -- we met, we met -- I remember meeting with Chief Calzerano, at that time was the Brooklyn South Borough Commander, and we set up a meeting with him and his team to talk about policing issues for the Bensonhurst scenario. Because remember they were going out and marching in Bensonhurst on Sundays. In fact, Reverend Sharpton was stabbed in one of those marches, and we-- quietly was meeting with the police department, and finding out what we could do to ameliorate the conditions, to not let another Yusef Hawkins happen. It shouldn't be. You know, how could you work with us and how could we work with you to talk to them -- and we d-- we did some work with Bensonhurst. I had a team -- I had a program, a youth program out there, that we worked with. We actually went out and played games, played ball with them out there. We did a few things with some Bensonhurst youth, and I'm trying to think -- it'll come to me -- the name of the program out there that we met -- it was a program that was run out of one of the big Catholic churches out there. So that's what we were doing. We knew that the others were going to do the marching, and that other piece there, and, you know, it's fine with that, you know. I mean, that's their -- my calling is to attempt to get it to the next day and the next week and the next year, and how do we do that now? We have to make sure that what took place to make this scenario happen doesn't happen anymore, and people know who each other is. I mean, I've had things happen and folks have come to me and said,

“You know, I just want to go to the family and just apologize to them,” where there was a, there was a killing. And, they would come to me and say -- the lawyer of one incident said, “You know, we really truly want to -- the person wants to really apologize,” and I said, “Well, it’s kind of tough now -- the family, you know, would want to accept that or not. But, I’ll bring it to them, but I’m not sure if they’ll go for it, but I definitely will bring it.” I brought it to the family. You know, it’s just that these things happened -- we realized that -- and when Brixton broke in England in 1987, I remember Koch calling us in one morning, eight o’clock breakfast meeting at Gracie Mansion, and Mayor Koch said, “Whatever it takes to make sure that that does not come to New York, I’m ready to make it happen. I’m going to give you more summer jobs, I’m going to give you all activities for the summer to do with the youths; all the things you need, I will provide you. Just, we don’t want that coming over here.” And we were able to hold our own on this end right here.

ALI: So, when ‘91 happened, I wanted to ask you -- you used the term “crisis.” People have used various terms to describe that. Tell me why you choose crisis.

GREEN: Well, I use crises, because it was a crises. It could have reached a point where people might say, you know, riots or whatever, but I saw we kept it from reaching there. We kept it, from that very first night I was out there. I got the call right here, and the very first night, we were out there, and we held on to this neighborhood. Had -- when we looked at what happened in South Central LA six months later, a year later, after the Rodney King verdict -- even before that, what happened in Washington Heights. They were calling me to Washington Heights that day -- I’ll never forget -- to go up to Washington Heights after that incident -- Mayor Dinkins -- to what we’re going to do to keep Washington Heights from going off the deep end, we were able to do that. My good friend at Alianza Dominicana, Moisés Pérez, myself, we got a school, like we did here in Crown Heights -- Crown Heights’ crisis was a, was a sample. We was the example. We did the school over here -- my old middle school, I mean my old elementary school, PS 167, on Schenectady and Eastern Parkway, we met -- used it as a meeting point, and I got my team. See, Mayor Dinkins had put together something

called "Safe Streets, Safe City." So, we had -- that's where we got -- the van came out of Safe Streets, Safe City. We had— He said, "I'm going to hire 5,000 new cops. I want to empower 5,000 new youth." So we had one of the programs -- there were like seven programs around the city in different boroughs, so we had those street -- those leaders, in the leadership group. So, as soon as this happened in Crown Heights, my leadership team was out in the street -- Kim Hubbard, and Shawn Joe, and others -- we were out there on the street from day one, when there could be a scenario where there could have been a major event happening, we were able to quell it. One evening, some young boys were being chased in an alley over there, and if they had been caught, it could have been a major piece. We were able to get in between that. We were able to talk to the leadership in the Jewish community. I was able -- at this point in time, I had a relationship going with the big rabbis who, who commanded authority, so I could speak to them and say, "Listen, we want to make sure this community lasts forever, if necessary. Whatever it takes, let's help me, and I'm going to help you make sure it does. Crown Heights is our home. I live in the same zip code you live in." So, we were able to do that, and that's what we kept doing. We didn't make it get to the point where -- we saw what happened in South Central; how many bodies, how many people were killed, how many buildings were burnt. We were not going to let that happen. That was a riot. We were able to stop that right then, and like I said, it took -- the West Indian Day Parade came up two weeks after Crown Heights. They were ready not to let it happen, because they were worried that that might -- we were able to get out there. My team and us, we were able to get out there and pick bottles up -- WBLS donated these portable litter boxes. We were out there around the areas that would have been volatile areas, picking up those bottles, my team, and getting them off the street, so they would have -- nobody would have nothing to pick up and throw. We walked with the group up the block. When there was a march -- you know, they kept marching against the -- to 770, we would have our people in between where the marchers were, and 770. They would have their people, of course, there also, but our people would be there to keep that antagonism down. We would talk, again, with the young -- I would

be able to talk to the young Hasidic youths. I got a picture of me and the Rebbe together -- I went to visit the Rebbe, so that was like an ID card, you know. If I showed them my picture with the Rebbe, [laughter] you know, things would step back. And the Rebbe found out what we were doing, and he accepted it -- he said, "From now on, everything you do will flourish." And, so, you know, Crown Heights to me was a crisis. It could have been -- we could have lost it. Had we not got out there that very first night, had Mayor Dinkins not done what he did -- they could talk about Dinkins, history will pre-- history, as they say will, will forgive him, because had he not, had he— did, if he did not do it the way he did it, we could have had a major, major, major, major scenario. Because New York City, Brooklyn, Crown Heights is so tight, it's not like even South Central where people are spread out in one-family homes -- this is a tight community, people live in apartment houses. And that very first night the people were out in those streets, the second night, the cars; you know, a couple of cars got flipped and burnt. But, the cops came out, they did what they had to do, and Mayor Dinkins did what he had to do. I think, I think history will absolve him from what people have said about how he handled this.

ALI: So, moving into the '90s, there were some other -- you mentioned what happened in LA after the verdict with the police officers that beat Rodney King. There were some other flash points -- there was the OJ Simpson trial in '95, there was the Million Man March in '95. Did those things have any impact in what was going on in Crown Heights from your perspective?

GREEN: Always, always -- anything happened, during those times, Crown Heights was always on the top of each mayor's agenda; Giuliani, Mayor Bloomberg, Mayor Giuliani, Mayor Dinkins, of course, earlier on. Each time these things happened, they were right on top of it, Crown Heights, because they saw this has always had that volatility; that there may be something here that still is, you know, a little dwindling spark. So they would always be there. Crown Heights, when they— I mean, Rodney King, the youths marched out of school here, the big high schools. We had -- I would probably venture to say 10,000 youths march over to Manhattan. We marched with the cops, and again,

having a relationship with the cops— with the Chief at that time, Chief Sheridan— was able to say, “If you, if we keep them here, will you keep your cops here?” and that’s how we were able to do that. We marched them over to Manhattan, they went to 42nd Street. But with us being there, it was so good, because now they want to go into Penn Station. Chief Sheridan says, “No, it’s almost rush hour. [laughter] We’re not going to have you in Penn Station.” And we were able to talk to them, with the loudspeakers and what not, and say, “No, no, we’ll let you march, we’ll march back down Seventh Avenue to the Village, and then over back to Brooklyn.” Those were the kinds of things we were able to do; look back at the record, look back at each incident.

ALI: Where did the idea to march come from? How did that come about?

GREEN: The youths walked out of school. Some people aggravated it. I only know -- some of the agitating groups at that time pushed the youths to march out of the buildings, you know, [laughter] and they— 2,000 youths walked out of one high school, the word got out, another high school downtown, they got out, another high school, Sarah J., they walked off, and as the word got out, high schools -- and it was almost the end of the day anyway. So a lot of them were just leaving for the day, and they just kept marching, across the bridge into Manhattan, down to 42nd Street.

ALI: And how did you get drawn into this?

GREEN: Well, it was our high schools, because the schools were our schools, right here in Crown Heights. And I had a good relationship with some of the students, but the cops also. The idea to keep things from going amiss is to have that working -- whenever something’s happening between cops and the people involved. Because the cops are -- like, one old -- well, she’s retired now, she would say, “If the cops yell, people will push. If the cops push, people will swing.” You know, so I want to keep my cops quiet, quietly speaking. So people are not shouting, people are not pushing, and people are not swinging, and that’s what we do. We just kind of keep them -- have a relationship where wherever you see that white shirt out there, Crown Heights at night on St. Johns was -- going, really that Wednesday night was really a tough night. And the white shirt out there was a guy -- he just, I heard he just passed, Chief Foster -- he was a Black

Chief. And, his cops came after us -- to this day, one of my famous instruments out here is those bullhorns, like the one you see back there, because that's how we talk to the youth on the street. And the cop thought we were the agitators, so they came at us. The young lady who was, with the bullhorn. They literally picked her up to take her off to the police car, and we ran over to the white shirt. I saw the white shirt, and I ran over to him, because what happened -- when you cross Eastern Parkway, you're in a different police borough. On that side, we were in Borough South, and now we're in Borough North. Borough North cops didn't know us as the Borough South cops, seven-one. So, I ran to Chief Foster, said, "No, no, no, no, we're with the city, we're working with the youth, we're a youth program," and they put her, put her down. But the cop took our bullhorn and left with it. [laughter] And, we were able to get the youth to turn back. They were running up Albany toward St. John, we were able to turn them around. And, that Wednesday night, I think, was the turning point. That was the day Dinkins had came out, more -- I mean, spoke to the people on the steps of the school. By that time, Commissioner Brown was back. So, we -- you know, the things, like I said, that was able to be done out here in this community to keep this, keep this community and keep this city, it just doesn't show up in the box score, you know? And like I said, I appreciate others doing what they do. They do it every day. But I know what I, what I do, and I know what I have to do, and I know it has worked for me for all these many years. Where, had this not happened, who knows? Maybe things might have still worked out well, but I kind of want to dare to not take that chance, you know.

ALI: So, in a lot, a lot of your-- a lot of what you talked about, you talked about the role of the City. Tell me more about what that has been -- you know, who, what offices in the City that have been most instrumental, for -- maybe it's not offices, maybe they're officials -- have been most instrumental in the work that you've done.

GREEN: Well, you know, the Council Members, whoever the Councilperson who were in this neighborhood, I always had a good relationship working with them, going back to James Davis, Tish James, now Laurie Cumbo. Even the Council people in other districts; I built a relationship with Borough President Howard Golden, Marty

Markowitz, now Eric Adams. Now, if you go to the city mothers and fathers across the river, Department of Youth Services; we still have their van, we still use their hotline. Police Department plays a very big role. Whoever that commissioner is in that spot, I've always been able to develop a working relationship with the commissioner. When Bratton was here the first time, Kelly twice, Brown, before him, one who sometimes -- it'll come to me in a minute -- he was the first Black commissioner, we worked with him. Fast forward into Kelly coming back again, Bratton coming back, and now, the new commissioner, I haven't -- we've worked together, when he was in the-- Chief of the department. Chief O'Neill -- so, those are the -- Police Department is the, is the most important. The Chief of Community Affairs -- now it's Chief Jaffe in there, a female Chief -- to have those people on your cell phone; that you can call on and say, "You know, this is what's got to happen. You cannot let this happen." One night we had an incident right here on Lincoln Place, a Hasidic driver driving, hit -- struck a little girl, and it looked like Crown Heights all over again. And at that time, Chief Esposito -- he's now Chief of the-- he's now Commissioner of Emergency Management, he called me, and he says, "One of my chiefs are out there right now on the spot -- look up the block." He's on my cell phone, he says, "He's up there. Go find him, and tell him, tell him what you need, and he'll get it for you." I went down there, and I found the Chief. I said the first thing could happen is to get the helicopter from flying around -- it makes it seem like it's tense. He made his call, the helicopter left. He called, and the other Chief from Brooklyn North, he was out there -- he came from home in his civilian clothes, and we-- he stood there and talked to the people. And the people just wanted to hear from somebody in authority -- here's a two-- I even told the people, they were like yelling and swearing. I said, "Wait. There's a two-star chief right there. He's listening to you." You know, they were mad because the cops said some things to them that they didn't think was correct. "Say no more. Speak to the two-star chief." And then I got in my vehicle, and I went to Kings County to be with the family, with the little girl. So, those are the kinds of relationships you need to have with the precinct all the time. You need to have the Borough Commander, the Commissioner, the Chief of Community Affairs;

these are important people on your Rolodex— or these days, on your cell phone— that you can always call on them and kind of back things up. If the cops are going to come out full force, the people are going to come out full force. You try to keep that away. And it's worked. We did it in Washington Heights -- after Crown Heights, we went up to Washington Heights. And, I made some friends of cops in Manhattan, because Manhattan cops are like in a different city, you know? But the Manhattan Community Affairs cops -- she just retired, Officer Yarde -- they wear the blue shirts, you know, we call them "blue shirts," the Community Affairs -- they were working in Washington Heights, and for the first time, I got a chance to work with the Manhattan crew. So, you know, some of the same things we use here in Brooklyn, we use there, to get the people together. We took over a whole park -- it was a crack-infested park, the Parks Department had locked it down, and, you want the community to feel like they own a community? Best take that park back. Get the locks off it. Have them go in there and clean it up. Start painting it up. Get the Parks Department to come in there. And not long ago, I drove by that park, on, I want to say, Amsterdam -- one of the streets right on the other side of the highway, and I drove by there the other day, and I saw that park is still pristine, up and running. Those are the kinds of things that you could get the city mothers and fathers to do; little things that may not be major for the city, but it's major for the community.

ALI: When you say city mothers and fathers, what do you mean?

GREEN: Whether, you know, if it's a female in authority, whether it's a female commissioner, female chief, male chief -- whoever that is in authority, we want to be able to have a relationship with them.

ALI: How do you, how have you established a relationship with these various people, I mean, so that they respond to you? What do you, is it that you've done that--?

GREEN: Easy: Clear, correct, and consistent, I think that's something that, I'm always the same when I'm coming -- and I'm clear about what I'm about. If I see something happening, and it's not correct, I'm not going to put my fingerprints on it. I'll help the person get an attorney, but I'm not going to stick my head out there and say, "Oh, no,

no, you shouldn't be doing that," you know. Normally -- well, today's Tues-- Wednesday, the rookies, two rookies will be sitting here with me, just came out of their academy, and I always tell them, I say, "If you're out on the street and you're in a car stop, or you're doing an investigation, I'll walk right by you and I won't even speak, because I don't want to interfere with your rhythm. When I, when I see you in your professional capacity, I'm not going to interfere with it, and it's the same -- you're giving me the same kind of respect. If I'm telling you I can deal with these youths, that you won't have to make an arrest, let me deal with them, you know what I'm saying? Let me first talk to them." The other night at that -- we had 300 youths in that building on the park, and every time the cops was getting ready to do something, they would come and say, "OK, tell them to cut the music." I would go and tell them to cut the music. That kind of relationship, you know, because they may listen to them from an authoritative point of view. From me, they'll listen to me from a familiar point of view -- they know me, they know if I'm telling them, "Time to cut the music," I'm not just being hard on them. I'm telling them this is the time that we have on the permit that we have to close the gym. So those are the little things that I do every day.

ALI: I'm going to wrap this up, but I know that you served on the Police Community Task Force that was formed after Abner Louima was brutalized. Can you tell me a little bit about that experience?

GREEN: Well, I've been on that blue panel -- I was on the Diallo task force. We were able to go to speak to cops, again, in all of -- there are, I want to say, eight police boroughs? Let me just make sure -- Brooklyn North, Brooklyn South, Queens North, Queens South -- four -- Manhattan North, that's six, seven, eight -- there are eight police boroughs. We had to go to each police borough to speak to the cops, then all the bureaus; Housing Bureau, Transit Bureau-- we-- and the people from that particular area. Very, very, very hard, hard nights. I'll never forget -- I'd come home and tell my wife -- we did the Bronx one night, and I was just completely devastated, because there were so many of the incidents of parents coming about their child, you know; the Baez family, and other families. And then, the other side of it are the cops, telling me how

they feel about their loss, one of their people. One cop was a narcotics cop— was killed— young brother, and how they feel about that. And, you're hearing it from both sides. You know, they say there's two sides to every story, and then there's the truth. You're hearing it from both sides, you know. "We police this way because we feel threatened." They feel that they over-police us because it's the 'hood. And you're hearing it from both -- and both have legitimate -- I remember doing one night in Queens, and one young cop sat there, because they had to come. It was like the Police Department mandated they come [laughter] to these sessions, you know. And they would sit there, and act a way, and then one cop said, got up and said, "You know something, my mother taught me CPR." You know, they have it on the side of their car, "Courtesy, Professionalism, Respect." He said, "My mother taught me that. Nobody has to teach me that. I know it already." After the Diallo case, we had to speak to the street crime cops, and that was a very tough call, because these cops will tell you -- I mean, I remember one cop saying to us, "We're not social workers. When you call us out here, when you, when you see street crime out on the street, it's because they called us out, because it's crazy things happening out there, and we're coming out there to clean it up." And I, I remember saying to the Chief -- Smolka, he's retired now -- I said, "Well, you know something, what we did at the police academy, with the street crime cops, they were, like, on eggshells, they couldn't -- you know what I'm saying? We got to get them some kind of way differently." So I said, "What if we get -- I get my youths from the street of Franklin Ave, you get some of your street crime cops, we go upstairs in the gym, and we get together and have a game?" And we did that. And it was so beautiful. One young man -- he didn't, he didn't make the fi— I mean he didn't make the police department, but he made the fire department. He's a fireman now. The cops said to him -- he says, "Yo," he says -- he's a young guy. This guy's an older guy now, but, he said, "If you want to become a cop, I'll help you. I'll show you how to take the test. I'll do what I -- to get you, get you on." These were street crime cops. So, we were able to do that with them, and the— The Louima case was a little difficult. We did that - - they did that march across the Brooklyn Bridge, and that came close to a tense

moment. But we got it across the bridge, the demonstration had, then downtown by City Hall; all of that went well. It got a little hairy trying to get them back to Brooklyn. I'd gotten -- these are little things you can get done -- the Chief to let them get on the subway free, because they marched over from Brooklyn. A lot of people just wanted to go home, [laughter] you know. So I said, "What if we let them get on the subway?" He said, "No problem." So, they allowed them to get on the subways down by City Hall. Everybody got on free to come back to Brooklyn, so there was no big drama in the subway. But a few said, "No, we're going to march back across the bridge." They marched back across -- not in the traffic, but on the footbridge. When they got back to Brooklyn, they got into a little scuffle. I'm home thinking everything was fine, I looked on the-- turned on the news [laughter] -- it wasn't big, but a little skirmish between them. And the Diallo case was pretty much, we were able to -- I have a whole file drawer of this stuff that we were able to come up with -- the plan, you know -- things that we couldn't do. One thing was residency requirement: Cops said, "You know, I don't want to live in the neighborhood I patrol. My wife going to have to go to the supermarket where I just made an arrest. My child shouldn't have to go to school where I'm making arrests every day." And I, you know, I never saw it that way, but going to each place asking them -- you know, and Giuliani gave us some goodies to go with -- he said, "You know, one of the things I pr-- I would do" -- I don't know if it even panned out, but he says, "We would offer housing, residency help" -- percentages of rent, and stuff like that, if they live in the city. But most of the cops said, "We want to go home away from where we patrol," you know. So, tough call, because people would say, "Man, we want them to live in the neighborhood." Cops would say, "Yeah, well we don't want to lock someone up and then have to go deal with them when we go home at night." Another cop said, "Well, I don't want my doorbell ringing, and somebody's breaking into a car down the street, call 911 -- if you live on the block," you know -- [laughter] if you live on the block, they're going to come ring your bell. Which makes sense. So, those are things out of it -- we came out, and every now and then, I see a little one of the little things sneak in that we came in with; the recommendations --

every now and then, I see one sneak in that the police department will adopt, something along the line that we did. But, after the Diallo case and the Louima case, I think Community Affairs really took off. Ben Ward was that Commissioner -- apologize, my memory -- Ben Ward had been the first one to put in a separate office of community policing, what they called Community Affairs Bureau, and he put a Black woman there -- the first Commissioner was, Billie Holliday was her name. And that started community policing. But it came out of -- that, and then by the time we get to Diallo and Louima, each time, the police department put a lot more effort. Now, you go and you see blue shirts in every precinct, you see them all over. And, I think that's one of the pluses that came out. A lot of people, we were able to get hired, a lot of the Black cops, were able to get Black and Latino cops. We were able to convince the police department to allow Traffic and School Safety officers to cross over, without -- I think it's gone back now, but we were able to get a lot of folks that came on behind this; the task force that we were able to put together. Just the simple things to allow people to be able to go to their precincts with an issue. Not co-- not so much what they call the civilian complaints, but just with an issue, where you could walk into the precinct. It don't always happen, but we know more now than ever before.

ALI: So, last question: What -- ten years from now, what do you think Crown Heights will be like? Or what would you like to see?--

GREEN: Wow. [laughter]

ALI: Maybe those are two separate questions: what would you like to see, what do you think it will be like?.

GREEN: Well, what I would like to see is continuous improvement. I'd like to see this real issue that we hear, this word -- term, "affordable housing" -- I'd like to see that become a real reality, where: My daughters, my son and my daughters, my granddaughter, when they look to live, I want them to still live in the neighborhood, and they should be able to find an apartment without having to stress, you know, stressed out. Everybody should have that opportunity. I'd like to see, you know -- one of my -- my youngest daughter said to me the other day -- she was living in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and she just

recently moved back to Crown Heights, and she was saying to me, “I’m feeling a different vibe with the youths,” I mean, the people -- because she lives right near the Jewish community. She said, “I’m feeling a different vibe with the people in the Jewish community now. It seems like they’re a little more open and more friendly and more,” you know. Maybe because it’s the same thing happening from the other side. So, that’s what I’d like to see continuously happening. I’d like to see that the youths, that—growing up now— will realize that this is their community. But it’s not *theirs*, that it’s exclusively theirs, but it’s our community; that the Jewish youths feel that way, and our Black youths, and Hispanic and other -- and we have a lot new ethnics coming in now, and we want to be able -- not, I didn’t mean to say “ethnics,” but new groups coming in. Say, we have a large population coming in from West Africa, in Ebbets Field, from Guinea and Mali and these other places in West Africa. We want for them to be able to, as quickly as possible, acclimate into the communities, their children get to schools, and -- you know. I want to see what I— when we talked about way back when the population changed— I want to see, with the changing populations now, that this continues, the rhythm continues.

ALI: Thank you.