

*Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*

## **Introduction: The Bronx African American History Project (BAAHP) and Approaches to Scholarship About/For Black Communities**

**Brian Purnell and Oneka LaBennett <sup>1</sup>**

“I think that part of the (the black scholar’s) responsibility is to help the people to see themselves in a new light, to see themselves not primarily as victims of America but as co-creators of the past, as co-creators of the present, and as co-creators of a new vision for creating the American future. ... Wherever and however possible, (scholars) must direct as much of their writing, their speaking (and) their teaching ...directly to the life and heart and growth of the community.... The responsibility of black scholars is to return to people a higher, deeper, cleaner version of the light that the people have given them, for they would have nothing to write their thousand monographs about were it not for the people.”

Vincent Harding, “Responsibilities of the Black Scholar to the Community”<sup>2</sup>

This issue of *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* contains four articles whose primary source research and themes are connected to a public history research initiative called the Bronx African American History Project (BAAHP). Each piece draws inspiration from the BAAHP’s community-based work with Bronx public schools, elected officials, churches and non-profit agencies, or relies heavily on the primary source material the BAAHP has uncovered in its oral history project. The purpose of this introduction, therefore, is to explain the relationship between the BAAHP and these scholarly articles. In the process, there also will be brief discussion of the ways the BAAHP fits into long traditions that serve what Vincent Harding referred to in the

above epigraph as, “the life and heart and growth of the community.” Such service has been one of the chief hallmarks of African Americans’ historical scholarship since at least the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The guest editors of this issue also contend that the original research and analytical arguments contained in these articles exemplify the types of scholarship that can emerge from a community-university collaborative endeavor such as the BAAHP. Each article highlights voices and subjects that are often overlooked in scholarship on black people in New York and indeed, the larger fields of urban history and cultural anthropology. Such scholarship has emerged, in large part, because of the BAAHP, whose mission and methodology draws much of its direction from the very same people it studies and documents.

**“A TREMENDOUS DEMAND FROM PEOPLE:” ORAL HISTORY’S REDEMPTIVE PROPERTIES**

The BAAHP is a public history research and education initiative administered by Fordham University’s Department of African and African American Studies and the Bronx County Historical Society (BCHS). While these institutions provide the organizational structure for the BAAHP’s work, the project’s heart and soul is an ongoing community-based oral history project whose lifeblood flows through a dynamic partnership between university trained scholars and over a dozen enthusiastic, engaged individuals – artists, educators, activists, local elected officials, retirees, veterans, and local church members – known to the BAAHP as community researchers. These women and men make possible the BAAHP’s research into the roles that black people have played in Bronx history and the ways twentieth century black Bronxites lived, learned, worked, worshiped, built communities and interacted with diverse groups of neighbors. Community researchers identify potential interviewees; they serve as an essential bridge between scholars in the academy and the history that is housed, literally, in the collective memory of the community; and they help shape the project’s direction by advising its staff on topics to research and themes to emphasize in programs and exhibits. This partnership between academia and the Bronx community has created a remarkably rich collection of primary sources, which includes close to 250 oral history interviews (over 180 of which have been transcribed) and organization records and personal manuscript collections, all of which specifically underscore the

ways people of African descent influenced political, religious, civic, economic and cultural life in New York's northern most borough.

The BAAHP began with a goal to find and preserve the largely forgotten history of blacks in the Bronx. The project's Principal Investigator, Mark Naison, Professor of African American Studies and History at Fordham University, described how, "a tremendous demand from people in community organizations and churches and schools," provided the impetus for the creation of a project dedicated to uncovering information about black history in the Bronx. "The local historical society simply didn't have any information to give people," Naison remarked, which was startling given the sheer number of people of African descent – close to 500,000 – who called the Bronx home. "It's the eight largest concentration of urban African Americans in the United States," he continued, a fact that makes its total absence from accounts of black life in New York City. This omission diminishes scholars' and citizens' capacity to understand African Americans' experience in New York City and the full extent to which racial ideology shaped that city's social, economic, political and cultural development.<sup>4</sup> At its most benign, this was a problem of oversight, a function of the black Bronx being overshadowed by its well-known neighbors in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, places studied extensively by scholars, captured eloquently by artists and poets, and documented thoroughly in film and print. At its worse, however, the systemic lack of attention paid to people of African descent in the Bronx by researchers and archivists served to marginalize further thousands of people whose poverty, race and geography already placed them on the extreme periphery of American life.<sup>5</sup>

From 1940-1970, the Bronx, similar to many other large urban areas in the United States, experienced a dramatic shift in its racial demography and economic base. These trends not only negatively impacted the Bronx's social development, but they also had a profound influence on how people imagined the Bronx and its residents. During 1940s, 95% of the Bronx's inhabitants identified as white, but thirty years later that number would plummet by over 40%. The borough's black population, by comparison, was miniscule in 1940 when they represented less than 2% of the Bronx's population. But by 1970 close to 25% of the borough was black. Spanish-speaking migrants and immigrants also radically altered the Bronx's demographic composition. The numbers for Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics rose from a very small percentage of the borough's population in 1940 to over 25% in

1970. Along with the Bronx's racial and ethnic composition, its citizens' class backgrounds also changed dramatically during this period. By 1980, 335,000 additional whites had moved out of the Bronx and overall, from 1970-1980, the borough lost 20% of its total population, double the amount lost in the entire city. Most of these citizens were middle and working-class and upwardly mobile. At the same time, the Bronx's black and Latino population continued to rise until these "minorities" comprised the overwhelming majority, 64% (30% black and 34% Latino), of the borough's residents. Blacks and Latinos, however, became the Bronx's dominant racial and ethnic groups at a time when the borough, indeed the entire city and much of urban America experienced intense periods of economic decline. In short, during the thirty years after WWII, the Bronx had transformed from an overwhelmingly white, blue collar and middle-class residential and manufacturing outer-borough of New York City into an urban space that was overwhelmingly African American and Puerto Rican and poor. As one of the most economically depressed and socially devastated urban centers in America, the Bronx, and its black and brown citizens, became notorious representations of the social and economic pandemics connected to America's postwar urban crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Life was hard for many Bronx citizens at the height of the nation's urban crisis. African Americans and Hispanics bore the double burden of living through one of the worst periods of economic and social decline in New York City's history since the Great Depression and serving as the public face that explained why the borough suffered such unprecedented levels of disinvestment, abandonment, crime and arson. A school of social scientists argued that since the mid-1960s, a "ghetto underclass," defined by preference for government welfare over participation in the mainstream work force and countless social pathologies, the most devastating of which was the pervasiveness of single-parent, female-headed families, dominated America's post-war "inner cities."<sup>7</sup> Ground zero of the Bronx's social and economic devastation occurred in the infamous "South Bronx," which by the late 1960s was solidly African American and Puerto Rican and poor. These neighborhoods were literally ablaze throughout much of the late-1970s, and by the early 1980s seemed to have become, in the eyes of outside commentators, an urban wasteland. Statistics paint a harrowing picture of the Bronx's bleak social landscape after nearly two decades of dizzying downward economic spiral and veritable crisis in human capital: in 1989 in the

Bronx there were 484 murders, 604 rapes, 16,220 robberies, 20,659 burglaries, 9,577 felonious assaults, 29,698 cases of grand larceny, and 11,438 other felonies; out of the twenty-five elementary schools with the lowest reading scores, over half were in the Bronx; over 160,000 children in the Bronx lived in impoverished families; the Bronx also became a place in which to witness the beginnings of the rapid spread of the AIDS virus.<sup>8</sup> Such grim realities became the building blocks of a cultural meta-narrative in film, journalism, popular consciousness and literature, which stereotyped the Bronx as representative of the nadir of twentieth century American cities.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, many other parts of the city suffered the same depressing fate, but nowhere seemed to be so enveloped in social crisis as the "South Bronx," a region that had slowly inched its way northward and spread out west and east until it encompassed practically the entire southwestern third of the borough. In the minds of many, it became easy to equate the black and brown residents of the South Bronx with the area's destruction. While the problems the borough faced were the direct results of political and economic neglect, many observers equated the rapid deterioration to African Americans' and Hispanics' culture and behavior. "Look, let's face it," an owner of a building in the University Heights section of the South Bronx said of that area in 1971, "white middle class people just don't want to live in that kind of an area." A banker claimed in 1975 that one could "write off the entire area south of the Cross-Bronx Expressway." Borough politicians lined their pockets with graft and kickbacks while the South Bronx, which in their minds was merely a breeding ground for "junkies and welfare folks," totally collapsed.<sup>10</sup>

One South Bronx resident described the atmosphere in 1973 as being "geared to crushing a person's spirit, and most people don't have the kind of strength to resist."<sup>11</sup> Neither do most local historical societies. Before the BAAHP began its oral history project, the BCHS's archive was practically devoid of any primary source material pertaining to black Bronxites. It did contain a few scattered items that individuals donated, such as an undergraduate term paper on African American communities in the North East Bronx, but nothing that provided substantive insight into who black Bronxites were, where they lived, where they worked, went to church, school, and how they related to borough and its other citizens or shaped its culture and politics. Even in the periods after African Americans and Puerto Ricans became numerical majorities in

many South Bronx neighborhoods, there was little documentary evidence depicting their lives and contributions. In fact, the lion's share of records documenting blacks in the Bronx the BCHS possessed came from newspaper clippings, and therefore reflected many of the biases that shaped reporters' coverage of the South Bronx's social and economic problems. Simply put, the BCHS had very few primary source documents on African American Bronxites because no one had given them any such records.

Several structural and ideological factors contribute to creating an archival silence of this degree. On the one hand, an archival repository's operating and acquisition budget plays a significant role in determining the size, scope and quality of its primary source collection and staff. Budgets also may determine the amount of storage space in an archive, or its ability to acquire climate-controlled facilities that can house old, brittle documents and maintain materials' quality for longer periods of time. On the other hand, all historical archives are inherently selective: the type of material they hold and the type of material archivists seek to acquire in their collections reflects the institution's *raison d'être* and its archivists' biases. Ideas about what constitutes important documents and primary source collections greatly influence the type of material in any repository's holdings. In short, ideological predilections and monetary restraints play a deciding role in determining what history is preserved and what history is silenced.<sup>12</sup> A complex, diverse picture of who blacks were and the various roles they played in Bronx history was therefore selectively omitted from the Bronx's official historical record because, in large part, very few people imagined them present in the Bronx's immediate past as anything besides "junkies and welfare folks." Rarely appearing in discourses on Bronx or New York City history, many African American Bronxites contributed to this silencing of their past by not contributing their historical documents to a public archive.

But histories, especially the ones that have been silenced, have a sneaky way of surviving in spite of their exclusion from professional archives or official repositories. One important place in which to find these silenced pasts is in the collective memories of the living. Indeed, oral history can serve a profoundly important role in preserving a past that is entirely absent within extant records. Oral history also helps uncover memories of pasts that have been erased from a public's collective consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

Historians and other scholars have long examined oral history's redemptive possibilities.<sup>14</sup> With respects to the South Bronx, oral histories have provided evidence of the ways that black communities nurtured stable working- and middle-class families and inspired the preservation and creation of rich musical traditions. Dozens of oral histories in the BAAHP collection highlight the importance of the South Bronx's Morrisania, a racially integrated neighborhood in the 1930s that, within the span of 20 years, had become a center of African American political power, religious life and cultural productivity. In Morrisania, as in East Harlem and other parts of New York City that experienced sprinklings of migration from Cuba and Puerto Rico in the 1930s and 40s, African American music traditions, such as jazz, fused with emerging Latin styles to create new hybridized musical forms. The American and Latin jazz scene in the South Bronx enabled black Bronxites to mingle socially with whites and Latinos, sometimes as co-creators of new musical genres; oftentimes as fans of the sounds of the African Diaspora – drumming, polyrhythm, call and response styles of jazz – which filled the streets of many Bronx neighborhoods. The Bronx's jazz age and Latin jazz phenomenon shared cultural space with a vibrant doo-wop scene, an emerging rhythm and blues and rock-and-roll sensation, and eventually gave way to the Bronx's own hip-hop culture and rap music. In the midst of urban crisis, a dynamic musical culture, as well as vibrant churches, active political clubs and concerned citizen groups preserved much of the richness and complexity of black social life in the Bronx.<sup>15</sup>

The BAAHP makes an innovative contribution to the history of blacks in New York City, but the project is also part of scholarly traditions pioneered by progressive historians, sociologists and anthropologists that sought to promote social and cultural analysis from “the bottom up.” Oral history has long been an invaluable asset to African American history precisely for its redemptive properties: through oral history, pasts that were lost (or ignored) have been found and brought to life.<sup>16</sup> The BAAHP set out to recover this lost past that was preserved almost entirely in the memories and minds of the Bronx's black griots. What its researchers found was that the Bronx's past, no different from the nation's past, encompassed the lives and experiences of people from all races, classes, and walks of life. The BAAHP also discovered that African Americans' past in the Bronx was not limited to the memories of its citizens. After conducting scores of oral histories,

people asked how they could better preserve documents, material records, photographs and other primary sources that detailed the historic experience of people of African descent in the Bronx. The research process into the forgotten past of African Americans in the Bronx had become regenerative: the BCHS went from having little to no sources on blacks in the Bronx to becoming a central repository in which such historical records would be collected, preserved and made available to future citizens.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

The BAAHP's scholarly mission to preserve, complicate and bring to light the lived realities of black Bronxites animates all of the contributors to this Special Issue. Each contributor offers a revisionist historical account, a narration of the Bronx's silenced past, as told by its inhabitants. As we have argued throughout this introduction, scholars who utilize oral histories are uniquely positioned to present and analyze previously untold stories. The authors herein insist that oral histories reveal "hidden narratives," mending fissures in our understandings of vibrant, historically neglected social and geographic sectors of New York City. The essays explore African American life in a broad sense of the term, centering on black Americans, West Indians, and Afro-Latinos. There is also an emphasis placed on how blackness is socially constructed in relation to Latino identity and on intercultural relationships between African Americans and Latinos. Focused on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the articles employ the interdisciplinary perspectives of history, anthropology and African American Studies to locate black life within various contexts, portraying individuals and groups involved in distinct pursuits and from a range of ethnic, age-based, and national positionalities. Beyond the methodological strategy of oral history-based research, and the geographic starting point of the Bronx, there is an overarching objective of uncovering silenced pasts, and common threads have emerged around the following themes: (1) Community organizing and political activism; (2) Black and Latino coalition building and interethnic cultural exchange; (3) Migration, global notions of blackness and localized definitions of racialized belonging.

Natasha Lightfoot's essay accentuates the breadth of the BAAHP's primary source database. Drawing on approximately twenty-five oral



histories of West Indians who migrated between 1930 and 1990, Lightfoot's paper bridges geographic, ethnic, racial and historical divides. Her essay places the historical experiences of Anglophone Caribbean migrants to the Bronx within the larger research on West Indian migration to New York City and in so doing, corrects the literature's bias towards Brooklyn. Lightfoot's work also complicates the discourse surrounding race and ethnicity which has preoccupied West Indian migration scholars who strive to illustrate how black West Indians make sense of their ethnic identities within American social and ideological constructions of race. She builds on research exploring the ways West Indian immigrants use community institutions in forging "tripartite" identities that draw simultaneously on specific West Indian nationalities (i.e. Jamaican, Antiguan), broader pan-West Indian notions of belonging, and African American identity constructions. Engaging with the literature on transnational identity formation, Lightfoot asserts that BAAHP oral histories reveal how West Indian Bronxites depended upon "migration machines" to create extended family networks spanning multiple locations and aimed at meeting migrants' employment, housing and social needs. Skillfully weaving together West Indian immigrant experiences that span the two main waves of West Indian migration, Lightfoot offers a nuanced overview of consistent West Indian settlement in the Bronx over the course of the last century. Lightfoot employs vivid narrative accounts of life in Morrisania and other parts of the Bronx to bring to the forefront how West Indian Bronxites forged complex ties between their home and host societies and utilized churches, benevolent organizations, businesses and political groups towards weathering the Bronx's crisis-ridden years between the 1970s and the 1990s. Arguing that close attention to Bronx West Indian's social institutions "help(s) to uncover the dual processes by which these people became inscribed into the Bronx's social fabric, and the social fabric of the Bronx itself became Caribbeanized," Lightfoot speaks to current scholarly discourses surrounding local and global definitions of blackness. Oneka LaBennett and Frederick Opie echo these questions around what constitutes local and global constructions of "blackness," and how individuals define and negotiate racialized belonging.

While Lightfoot amends the historical record on West Indian migration to New York City by mapping the complex and shifting experiences of the Bronx's West Indians, Brian Purnell situates segregation in the South Bronx between 1953 and 1973 to offer a critical

adjustment to our understandings of Jim Crow policies in the North. In keeping with the Issue's unifying theme of uncovering hidden accounts, Purnell focuses on Anita Brown's efforts to integrate the Castle Hill Beach Club (CHBC), shedding light on the overlooked history of the Jim Crow North. Arguing that, "Americans have ignored the ways twentieth-century racism was a national, not merely a regional, phenomenon," Purnell uncovers the story of Anita Brown's struggle to integrate the CHBC and uses it as a springboard for parsing what racially changing urban communities, such as Classon Point, meant to both black and white residents. Purnell charts the lines of Jim Crow segregation in the Bronx and fills crucial historical gaps in this period by drawing on three rich narratives: Brown's account of her experience with Jim Crow northern racism; the CHBC's Cold War-inspired rationales for rejecting Brown's application for admission and practicing racial segregation; and BAAHP oral histories that have preserved an historical memory of the twentieth-century Bronx's complex color line.

Frederick Douglass Opie continues our exploration of political activism and struggles against institutional racism, investigating black and Latino coalition building between 1965 and 1969. Focusing on case studies of Lehman College in the Bronx and City College in Harlem, Opie presents critical interpretations of student activism within and beyond these sites. By emphasizing the parallel and intertwined missions of African American and Puerto Rican student organizations, Opie complicates our grasp of the Black Power and student movements of the 1960s. Opie revises the scholarship on Black Power ideology, asserting that it was based not solely on a rejection of white student participation, but rather, it hinged on alliances between black and Latino student organizations. Through a detailed periodization of campus life and student activism at various colleges, Opie bellows a resounding call to recognize that what have long been referred to as "separatist black movements" were actually "black-and-brown movements." Drawing on oral histories with individuals who participated in these movements and on archival and printed sources, Opie presents a step-by-step historiography of how various student groups fought for increased Black and Latino enrollment, the creation of African American and Latino Studies programs and increased black and brown faculty. The result is a meticulously detailed examination of the dynamics of African American-Latino student activism. Opie asserts that in order to accurately portray the relationships between African American and

Latino youth on New York City campuses in the late 1960s, we must understand “the complexity of the factors that influenced the students, such as the racial politics of the New York public schools, the shared cultures that developed in black and Latino neighborhoods in the city, and the catalyzing roles played by employment, racism, music, language, and food during campus takeovers and strikes.”

Those conjoined black-Latino cultures emerging from the Bronx--especially along the lines of music—represent the backdrop for Oneka LaBennett’s exploration of female hip hop artists’ narratives. LaBennett’s essay brings the Issue’s scope to the twenty-first century and addresses some timely critiques surrounding the role of women’s artistry in hip hop culture. All three of the Issue’s reoccurring themes, political activism, black-Latino cultural exchange and global/local articulations of blackness come to the fore in LaBennett’s study. Unlike the other contributors, however, who are all historians, she utilizes an anthropological approach to oral history research, in order to “explore the unexpected, complex and often contradictory ways in which women’s ‘creation narratives’ figure into their use of hip hop as an educational tool, as a mechanism for political activism and as a springboard for articulating feminist ideologies.” Women’s “creation narratives” --their stories about how they came to think of themselves as hip hop artists, their articulations of how they use hip hop in their daily lives --form the backbone of LaBennett’s analysis and enable her to rethink women’s role in popular and academic hip hop historiographies. Drawing on accounts by three women of Puerto Rican descent, all of whom claimed and asserted African ancestry, LaBennett “emphasize(s) that Bronx women’s hidden hip hop narratives speak as much to social constructions of blackness as they do to feminine subjectivities.” In so doing, LaBennett reveals how Bronx female hip hop artists’ racial identities are contingent on African diasporic racializations, on local, Bronx-based notions of belonging, and on hip hop-inspired performative identifications. While in Opie’s analysis these sometimes seamless, other times fraught black-Latino identifications were often subsumed under the rubric of the Black Power or black student movements, in LaBennett’s treatment, ideological constructions such as *Blanqueamiento* work to render these intersubjectivities invisible. In keeping with the Issue’s goal to “present the silenced past in the collective memories of the living,” LaBennett concludes her essay with a Langston Hughes-inspired poem recited by the hip hop emcee and spoken-word poet, La

Bruja. Underscoring a dialogue between Hughes/La Bruja and American racializations, LaBennett stresses the performative quality of oral histories, gives the poet the last word and leaves the final interpretation up to the reader.

While each article adheres to the standard research practices and narrative methods of their respective academic disciplines, they, similar to the BAAHP, are nonetheless part of a larger process of engaged service performed in partnership with members of the very same communities these scholarly pieces depict and analyze. Such is oral history's strength, perhaps even its gift, to scholarship and culture. Oral histories are produced through relationships: the relationship between an interviewer and an interviewee; or the collective relationship that forms between a group of participants and an oral history project. Oral histories therefore have the potential to infuse scholarship with a greater sense of humanity, a crucial element that, in spite of many academic professionals' strivings for pure objectivity, is part of all scholarly work. The articles of this special issue, and the community research project that inspired them, are part of a larger effort to enable people who were once ignored and maligned by the historical record to, "see themselves not primarily as victims... but as co-creators of the past, as co-creators of the present, and as co-creators of a new vision for creating the American future." These articles are a part of the BAAHP's growing orchestra of voices and its ever expanding community of researchers both within and outside of academia, who are engaged in an effort to "return to people a higher, deeper, cleaner version of the light that the people have given them." The contributors to this special issue hope people will read and debate the articles and through that process contribute to a growing knowledge of the Bronx's past, New York's past and all the forgotten people who, when American cities seemed left for dead, contributed in dynamic ways to the country's urban communities. The ideas in these articles and the ever expanding BAAHP research materials are small ways these scholars hope to serve the people and the communities of the Bronx who have given them so much by sharing with them the stories of their lives and enabling them to make those stories part of an established, preserved, accessible historical record.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Oneka LaBennett and Brian Purnell are Assistant Professors of African & African American Studies at Fordham University and Co-Research Directors of the Bronx African American History Project.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Harding, "Responsibilities of the Black Scholar to the Community," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 281-82.

<sup>3</sup> On the historic development of African American history and changing roles of African American scholars in the US, see John Hope Franklin, "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History," in Darlene Clark Hine, *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 13-22, and "The Dilemmas of the American Negro Scholar," in *Race and History Selected Essays, 1938-1988* (Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 295-308; Robin D.G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem:' Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* (December 1999), 1045-1077, esp. p. 1048, fn 5; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (University of Illinois Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Naison's comments are in a promotional video posted on the BAAHP's website. Follow the link entitled "Watch the BAAHP promotional video," at [www.fordham.edu/baahp/](http://www.fordham.edu/baahp/) For more on the early history of the BAAHP, see the various articles posted to the BAAHP website at [http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham\\_/bronx\\_african\\_american/newsroom\\_21958.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/bronx_african_american/newsroom_21958.asp)

<sup>5</sup> A few key books have discussed African Americans in the Bronx or, more broadly, the ways that racial ideology has shaped the Bronx's economic and social development throughout the twentieth century. See Jill Jonnes, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall and Resurrection of an American City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002): 96-98, 111-112, 175-177, 219-224, passim; Jim Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995): 55-56, 61-64, passim; Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx*

(New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 99-102, 109-119, 144-151, passim. Mark Naison published many of the first scholarly articles that drew from the BAAHP's oral history project. See, Mark Naison, "'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child': Growing Up in the Patterson Houses in the 1950s and Early 1960s – An Interview with Victoria Archibald-Good," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 40:1 (Spring 2003): 4-22; Mark Naison, "From Doo-Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 40: 2 (Fall 2003): 68-81; Mark Naison, "From Jimmy Castor to Grandmaster Flash – The Role of Morrisania in Hip Hop's Evolution," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 44:1-2 (Spring/Fall, 2007): 60-66. Other important articles that contribute to the BAAHP's research and overall mission are Judy Perez, "'Movin' On Up': Pioneering African American Families Living in an Integrated Neighborhood in the Bronx, New York," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 43:2 (Fall 2006): 68-93; Anthony C. Greene, "The Black Bronx: A Look at the Foundations of the Bronx's Black Communities Until 1900," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 44:1-2 (Spring/Fall, 2007): 4-18; Regina Amédée-Hartfield, "The Lincoln School for Nurses: Sixty-three years of Excellence in the Bronx," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 44:1-2 (Spring/Fall, 2007):41-49.

<sup>6</sup> For a close analysis of demographic change in the Bronx, see, Emanuel Tobier, "The Bronx in the Twentieth Century: Dynamics of Population and Economic Change," *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal*, 35:2 (Fall 1998): 69-102, esp. pp 81-87. In 2000, the Bronx had probably the largest population of people of African descent in New York City: just under half of all people living in the Bronx were Hispanic and Black, non-Hispanics were 31% of the borough's total population. See, "Borough of the Bronx Strategic Policy Statement, 2002-2005," p. 8, found at the following web address: <http://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/en/gv/president/strategicpolicy.pdf> (accessed on January 24, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Literature on "the underclass" is voluminous. Certain key texts include, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965) available at <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>; William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); a call for attention to poverty as a social product shaped by a host of economic and political factors that shape people's behavioral choices is Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1989); an anthropological analysis of the

black “underclass,” that attempts to depict the ways poor African Americans define their own family groups and social groupings is Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Stack was writing against a subfield of black “underclass” literature focused on either black males’ inability to act as husbands and fathers, such as Elliot Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) or on black women’s “matriarchal tendencies,” which were interpreted as emasculating to black men, such as Lee Rainwater’s “Crucible of Identity: The Negro Lower-Class Family,” (*Daedalus* 95: 258-64, 1968); for a useful overview of the underclass literature as it relates to black families see Jualynne Dodson’s “Conceptualizations and Research of African American Family Life in the United States: Some Thoughts” (*Black Families: Fourth Edition*, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, ed. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007); a critique of many arguments and analyses of underclass culture that eschew political and economic structure is Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (New York: Beacon Press, 1998), esp. chapter 1; a captivating journalistic account of the Bronx underclass is Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble and Coming of Age in the Bronx* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Jim Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx*, p. 61-63.

<sup>9</sup> Examples of cultural representations of the Bronx as nadir of the American urban crisis include Tom Wolfe, *Bonfire of the Vanities* (Bantam, 1988); *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (1981, Dir. Daniel Petrie, Twentieth Century Fox); *Escape from the Bronx/Fuga dal Bronx* (1985, Dir. Enzo G. Castellari, Fulvia Film); *Pride and Glory* (2008, Dir. Gavin O’Connor, New Line Cinema). An excellent documentary that captures the grim realities of life in the South Bronx is *The Bronx: A Cry for Help* (1987, Dir. Brent Owens, Brent Owens Production).

<sup>10</sup> Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, pp. 109-129; quotes on 127, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, pp. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995)

<sup>13</sup> For an example of how oral history served this redemptive function see Ben Alexander, “Excluding Archival Silences: Oral History and Historical Absence,” *Archival Science*, 6:1 (2006): 1-11; and various works by Alessandro Portelli (see next citation.)

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (State University of New York Press, 1990), *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), and *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); See also, Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2000); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (State University of New York Press, 1990); Ron Grele, *Envelopes of Sound* (Greenwood Press, 1985); Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); Robert Orsi, "Introduction to Second Edition," of *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (Yale, 2nd ed., 2002); Ben Alexander, "Excluding Archival Silences," Op. Cit.; Alistair Thomson, "Sharing Authority: Oral History and the Collaborative Process," in *The Oral History Review*, (30:1), 23-26; Rhonda Y. Williams, "'I'm a Keeper of Information': History-Telling and Voice," *The Oral History Review* (28:1), 41-63; Carl Wilmsen, "For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* (28:1), 65-85. As Oneka LaBennett notes in this volume, anthropologists, in particular, have relied on oral history as an essential methodological tool towards uncovering hidden or marginalized histories. The ethnographic literature based on oral history research is too expansive to recount here but some key works include Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (Simon and Schuster, 1978); Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (University of Chicago Press, 1980); Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Mark Naison, "From Doo-Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx," Op. Cit. See also, BAAHP interviews with Genevieve Brown, Dennis Coleman, Jessie Davidson, Donald Brown, Paul Himmelstein as well as others that discuss Morrisania and the South Bronx's jazz scene.

<sup>16</sup> See, Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller (Editors), *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation* (New Press, 2007); William Henry Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad (Editors), *Remember Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* (New Press, 2003); Elaine Lutzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Wayne State University Press, 1994); David Perata,



*Those Pullman Blues: An Oral History of the African-American Railroad Attendant* (Madison Books, 1999); Michael Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism and the Union Struggle* (University of California Press, 2000); Timuel Black, *Bridges of Memory: Chicago's First Wave of Black Migration* (Northwestern University Press, 2005); Kim Lacy Rogers, *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); D'Ann R. Penner and Keith C. Ferdinand, *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also information on two ongoing African American oral history projects – Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Afroamerican Urban Studies and the Economy oral history project on blacks in Pittsburgh: <http://www.hss.cmu.edu/cause/Coralhistory.html> The History Makers: <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/aboutus/> See also the work of the Southern Oral History Project: <http://sohp.unc.edu>

<sup>17</sup> For an example of BAAHP archival collections housed at the BCHS, see [http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham/bronx\\_african\\_american/archival\\_collections\\_21956.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham/bronx_african_american/archival_collections_21956.asp)