Avah Atherton [AA]: It's all a process, but, okay, so just speak into the mic, I want to make sure your volume is —

Makemba Kunle [MK]: Hello, hello, Makemba Kunle.

[AA]: Okay, great. And I have this as a backup. Okay, so let's begin. So can you just tell me a little bit about yourself and your background?

[MK]: Okay, I was born in Laventille, Success Village, Laventille. With my... from a Grenadian father and a Trinidadian mother. He was African and my mother was Chinese mixed with Garifuna from St. Vincent. Her mother was from St. Vincent. And from there I moved to Tunapuna, went to school in Tunapuna for a short while, then moved to Barataria here at the age of 10. So, and I've been living in Barataria ever since, so I consider myself a Barataria man. Although I still have strong ties in Laventille and Tunapuna and Grenada. We a normal working class family. Until, yuh know, we striving to go to middle class and so on, all of us.

And in school I was considered to be a bright boy. Either first or second in class all the time. Until I reached, until I was one of the few to get a scholarship to St. Mary's College. I think it was the first year of Common Entrance. Got into St. Mary's College and still considered bright. But St. Mary's College was one of the worst experiences for me. And I started slipping and slipping until it became an almost unbearable experience. But I made it through. I got my three or four passes and was able to get a teaching job. It's important that in St. Mary's, after the fact, I would consider why it is I never enjoyed St. Mary's so much. Part of it, it didn't… nothing that we were doing was relevant to what I wanted to do. And there was no arts and so on. Or drama or anything in the school, things that I might have been more interested in. And not to mention catering to people of lighter complexion, which I was. But I didn't belong to that– But I belonged to the Black tribe. Anyhow, got a job teaching. Not that I wanted to teach, but I had godparents who had some sway in the Ministry of Education. And they got me a job as a teacher. And I started at Nelson Street Boys RC. That was in, around [19]68.

And around that time, that was a time of a lot of social unrest. From 1968, 1969, going into 1970, for different reasons. And I was following it all, but always from the side. Always from the side, until 1970. They started having some small demonstrations. And one day while I was teaching, February the 26th 1970, that was the important day. For me, one of the most important days of my life. Somebody ran into the school and say, Black Power, coming. And… Sounding ominous enough. So, I decided to go out there. Some of the children also left the school to go and see what was going on. I made sure I was there. By that time, they were heading to the cathedral. And they were going into the cathedral. Not too many. Maybe a couple hundred or something. Youths, black youths. And they gone into the cathedral. And I gone through the crowd. Get a front row, in the cathedral. See what's going on here. There we had... Makandal Daaga. Khafra Kambon. Carl Blackwood. Clyde Nunez. I can't remember who else. I think Ayeigoru [Ome]. Yeah. And... They were talking on the mic. Carl Blackwood especially was very fiery. He was the president of the student's union. Or ex-president. Geddes Granger, he was something else.

And Dave Darbeau. Dave Darbeau, I knew from living in Tunapuna. A bigger boy than me. But he was just normal. You know, just a normal person. And when I see him up there… It's

almost unbelievable. This fellow I know from Tunapuna and so on. He's up there talking brave, courageously. Articulate about things going on in the world. That he knows about. How it's affecting us. How it's affecting black people. Making analyses. And sharing a different vision of what he wanted for us as black people.

And also hearing how he was just beaten over at Royal Bank [of Canada]. When they tried to enter and so on. And I was… To say impressed is to say the least. It was a blow mind for me. Maybe if I didn't know him. You know? But I knew him. So I leaving there… Leaving there afterwards.

The main thing that I was left with is... Not so much that we had to change… the country needed a change. That I have to change. That was the main thing. I had to change from being apathetic to what happening. I had to change from being a weakling and a coward. To be strong and brave. I had to learn to be assertive. And I had to get myself conscious. I had to start reading and so on. And I started my journey from there. To change mehself. And I tell this because… I know that it possible for people to change themselves. Because I did it. That same year… I started following up the Black Power meetings after that. Not as a member. As a follower.

Got into Mausica Teachers' College that same year. All as part of this thing for me to change myself. You know? Going there. Start doing some reading and so on. And start developing myself. When I went into college... Very few people knew me. So I had a good opportunity there to create a brand new image of who I am. Whereas I used to sit dong in the back of the class... I started sitting dong in the front of the class. I never used to ask questions. I start asking questions. I was really really nervous. I start asking questions. And answering questions. I joined a drama group. I joined dance. I start to play basketball. Ended up on the basketball team. They had student politics. I went up for president of the student's union. They made me president of the student's union. Started a group of poets. Call what? Black Expressions. We used to go about to schools doing black poetry and so on. With drums and things. Started doing things. And I can say... I changed myself.

So by the time… All that time... Things going on outside. N.U.F.F. [National Union of Freedom Fighters] burning down things. Doing their thing. And getting killed. By the time I left... And also... I was doing a lot of… We were doing a lot of protest action there too. So by the time I left… By the time I graduated... I was a valedictorian. I made the graduation speech. And they printed the graduation speech. In the newspapers. With a headline… "Rebel Teacher Shocks Mausica".

And it was after... After that… I was approached by... People from Tapia House Group. Which was headed by Lloyd Best. And... They asked me if I was willing to join them. Because they read that speech. And I told them... If I was to join any movement... It would be NJAC [National Joint Action Committee]. Because I... I reading about... The militancy taking place. Many things that N.U.F.F. was doing... I was ascribe… In my mind, I ascribed it to NJAC. I wanted to do things... Where you have… You taking action. Militant action or military action. And I thought NJAC was that.

And one of those who came to meet me... Lloyd Taylor from Tapia. His sister was involved with NJAC. And he went to tell his sister what I had said. And then… Ome came to me with... Somebody else. Bandalay… And invited me to join NJAC officially. Which I did. And… I thought joining NJAC would be... My introduction to... Taking action. Getting guns in my hand. Bombs and so on. But it was a lot of meetings. A lot of meetings. A lot of talking. A lot of building consciousness. A lot of developing. And so on. And they were about the business of educating people. At the time and so on. So I was a little disappointed in that.

But it was still one of... It was still a life changing experience. Powerful. Powerful because... Almost... Every time we met. Which might be weekly or bi-weekly or whatever. In our area, which is Barataria, Makandal Daaga used to come and give us a talk. And he was so inspiring. He was so inspiring. And those days it was... Meetings always had to be secret. And... A lot of code. Code words and so on.We used to have... For meetings and different things. And even for people. And we were being... Watched a lot by the police. Watched and harassed. And attacked by the police at the time. But... It wasn't for nothing. Because at the time, NJAC was also involved in... In... Activities. In which they attacking the... Attacking some part of the establishment. Using military action. So... And the police were trying to get us. But they just couldn't pin anything. Pin anything on NJAC. While in NJAC... Apart from the everyday activities that we might have which is building consciousness among people and things. Selling the newspaper. Talking to people. Trying to attract membership.

I had a lot of work to do in communications. Because I had the ability to draw. So I used to do a lot of illustrations. A lot of illustrations for the newspapers. And other publications. And so on. And there's myself and Kolo who was in charge of the Barataria group. He was an Indian fellow. Who was well liked by everyone. But he died. You wouldn't be able to interview him. Yes, doing a lot of artwork. Posters. Billboards. Things... Graffiti. Graffiti. "Don't touch–" "Don't touch Darbeau." And that kind of thing. Because they had him on a charge. "Black power." The fists. A lot of these things all over the wall. And so on. I remember doing a big fist. On Fernandez wall. It was one of my best pieces of art. And by seven in the morning they had already painted it over. So people hardly get... People hardly get to see it. But it was an exciting time.

Eventually I went on to do other things in NJAC. I represented NJAC in conferences in other countries. So I got to go abroad. I met... I met Fidel Castro. Met with... This fellow with Muhammad Gaddafi. Met… Ortega in Nicaragua. Met Botourse in Suriname. So… A lot of opportunities were open to me. And which I took advantage of. That I could now have good memories of meeting people like from Dominica who was involved in the George Williams University thing. Rosie Douglas. Rosie Douglas and his brother [indecipherable] from St. Vincent. Tim Hector from Antigua. Met... And had some good conversations with these people. And then...

Outside of that I was involved also in organizing art exhibitions and so on. We had the first Emancipation Exhibition inviting all the artists. We took them to Barbados.

First time some of these artists ever go outside of the country. We took them there. In 81 I took part in, 82! NJAC decided to enter the elections. And I represented Barataria in those elections. I went up against Kamalludin Mohammed.

If I get 500 votes I get plenty. But it was a nice experience. Eventually I broke, I didn't break. I just stopped functioning with NJAC around 1988-89 I think. I was... By that time I was only, mostly involved with the arts, artist movement and so on. And I was losing interest in the politics. And took a break. But I've been close to them since. And I started working on my own arts. And my own projects and so on.

Started Studio 66. And that's where I am now. After how many years?

Yeah.

AA: I have some clarifying questions. So you said that when you left some random person ran into this school and said Black Power. So what prompted you? What about that call made you curious?

MK: Because I had, I was, I had this rebel spirit in me. But it wasn't directed anywhere. I had started following up Black Power here, Black Power in the States. And so on. I dunno. Something said they're calling me. You know? Something.

AA: So do you believe that the unrest that was taking place before 70 was the –

MK: Transport workers having the thing.

AA: – In 68, 69. Do you think that contributed to the general atmosphere?

MK: Yes.

AA: Sort of galvanized people. Because it became more than a support for what was happening with the students in Canada. In a very short period of time. So you think all of that, it was coming, essentially?

MK: Yes. It was coming But you hafta remember too is not here alone. There was a time all over the world people especially over the third world people now started anti-colonial movements going on and so on. Not to mention the civil rights movement in the States. So it wasn't we alone.

AA: So you said you had a front row seat in the cathedral. Now the news people reported that the Black Power followers protesters, they desecrated the statues in the cathedral. Can you speak to whether that was true or not?

MK: Well if you could call throwing a jersey over, a black t-shirt over one of the saints if you could call that desecrating well right. Other than that, there was a black cloth or black t-shirt over one or two of them of the saints. That was it.

AA: Do you know why the cathedral was chosen as a site of protest?

MK: No, I don't know. But it was, it turned out to be an important thing because it looked like well it have nothing these Black Power followers have respect for again.

AA: You did say that Dabreau said that they tried to go into the bank. So they were originally intending to go somewhere else.

MK: Yes, they were going to the Royal Bank because Royal Bank of Canada and the students were jailed in Canada. And they were going in there and they beat them in the bank, in the bank or outside the bank. And I don't know how I never really got this story how they managed to make it to the cathedral.

AA: Was it about Darbeau that you said you were impressed by him? Is it because he was someone that you knew? Like he was someone you could identify with?

MK: Yes, I could identify with him. I grew up just like him.

AA: How well did you know –

MK: Very good. I know his family. His father and my father were friends. Yeah. He lived just a couple blocks away from where I was living.

AA: So you wouldn't expect him to see someone like him?

MK: No. It's always somebody else. But if it comes right home, that means wait, I could do something too. Yeah.

AA: Okay. So then, fast forward to when you said that you joined NJAC because you associated a lot of things that NUFF was doing with NJAC.

MK: Yeah.

AA: What was NUFF doing that you felt was necessary?

MK: Robbing banks, attacking police stations, that kind of thing.

AA: You felt like that was necessary for the movement?

MK: I thought that yes, I was a reader of Frantz Fanon who said violence is a cleansing force.

AA: Yeah, I have his book.

MK: Yes.

AA: I understand. So when you joined, why did you stay in NJAC instead of joining NUFF? After you found out.

MK: Oh, as a matter of fact, a lot of the leadership of NUFF I was acquainted with even from long before. People like Guy Harewood and Jeffers and so on. And Terry Thornhill. They used to be coming home by me. They were good friends with our family, with my sisters and so on. And so I was really acquainted with them more than anybody else in NJAC. But while in NJAC I wasn't in communication with them. They were all –

(Interruption)

MK: Hey, hello Asabi.

AA: Is it fair to say that a lot of the people who were important to the movement originated from the Tunapuna area? Even Tapia House was based in Tunapuna. You yourself, Dabreau. And these guys from NUFF, they were based in.

MK: No, these guys from NUFF, they were more from the West. Yeah. So the connection you had with them was because they were in school with my sister.

AA: How old were you in 1970?

In 1970, I was 20.

AA: That's young to become a revolutionary. Well no, because there is no age really.

MK: Well no, because Kambon and them. They were in their mid-twenties. Everybody was young at the time.

AA: Young but also educated.

MK: Yeah.

Aa: Usually you'd find that middle class or, as you were saying, aspiring to middle class, they're the ones that would support the government because they're benefiting more. Most from the stability of society. They're the ones with the jobs and all these things.

It's really like when they say the masses it's usually those from lower class. Even right now you have fellas from Beetham, women, whoever throwing out putting garbage on the roads. They're the ones that are leading protests. Not necessarily people that you consider to be school educated. Why do you think that? Was it because of that education that you think that prompted like you said it was sort of like a worldwide worldwide change was coming

especially in what was considered, what is considered to be Third World. Do you think that education contributed to it?

MK: Not the education I get in school. I don't know if the Khambon and dem get maybe they have different lecturers in UWI and so on. I was educated just to be a normal idiot like anybody else and look for a job like a teacher. Yeah. Education had to be your own personal education that you give yourself.

AA: What was seductive about this movement? It must have been frightening to want to join with people who were essentially trying to tear down.

MK: The rightness of it.

AA: It felt right?

MK: Yeah, it felt right. It felt right. We needed some brave people to tear down this thing and I had to try to be brave, to be one of them.

AA: Can you tell me about the steps that you took after you heard those speeches coming out of the cathedral and what not because you said you felt like you had to be brave, you had to be more aggressive, you had to educate yourself. What kind of literature were you reading? What philosophies did you feel inspired by?

MK: Autobiography of Malcolm X and The Wretched of the Earth. These were the two books that were available at the time for me. Later on I got into Marcus Garvey. A lot of NJAC was inspired by Marcus Garvey. Yeah. What other books?

Other books that would teach you more of the African history and so on I got later on but in 70, in 70 mostly pamphlets. "East River Speaks" where I would get a little thing and they might have a drawing of a gun somewhere in between it so you know where they're coming from.

AA: Who was putting out those pamphlets?

MK: Different arms of NJAC Yeah. At that time NJAC was, it was really a coalition of a whole set of forces. Yeah. Unions, community groups, blocs and so on. It wasn't yet just one unit like how it is now.

AA: So you said that when you graduated from the Teachers College, the headline was Rebel Teacher. Why did they call you Rebel Teacher?

MK: Because of the speech that I made. It was rebellious and it could be termed revolutionary and hard hitting.

AA: Do you remember what you said?

MK: Yeah. I have it there. A quote from NJAC paper and all. I have it there. I could give it to you sometime. Send it to you.

AA: Because you were a good student. You joined basketball. Dance, drama. And they made you valedictorian. For you to stand up on the people stage and incite violence and sedition.

[laughter]

MK: Yeah.

AA: So it was printed where? Express?

MK: Bomb. That time they just started The Bomb. Not too long.

AA: Do you have a copy of that? Of that print? Yeah I would like to see that.

MK: Somebody who managed to keep a copy over the years gave it to me the other day.

AA: That's great. It's these things that we need to keep. Digitize and archive.

Why did you think that guns and bombs were necessary to effect change? Why did you particularly want that?

MK: It was a kind of adventurism I think. On my part. Seeing how the Vietnamese do it.

It was a kind of adventurism. I don't know, right now, i dont know if it's necessary. Or sometimes I wonder if anything has ever changed. Yeah. Even with the guns.

AA: And if you're saying that Fanon was one of your core literature. He spoke specifically about Vietnam and how it had galvanized the rest of the world. It's different now though.

Okay, the idea of the people's parliament, I think everyone's idea of that is Woodford Square. Did you join the public meetings and the public protests? The March to Caroni and all that? Were you part of that?

MK: No, I didn't March to Caroni. But I was part of a lot of the marches. Basil Davis funeral and so on. Anything after that. When I joined them officially, well I was in everything. Yeah. That would not have been until 1972.

AA: What was the atmosphere like during the marches?

MK: Sometimes solemn. Sometimes solemn. At all times serious. Serious. Meditative. And disciplined. And very disciplined. Had no dotishness going on. Nobody coming in with a bottle of rum.

AA: There were reports of the marches leading to looting in Port of Spain. Different forms of violence. Would you say that that was something that was coming out of the…?

MK: Yeah, there was some looting in Port of Spain. But it wasn't so much as one would expect with hundreds of thousands of people on the road every day. There was burning down of some buildings. I'm not sure to what extent the organization responsible or people just doing their own thing. I have a fellow in Barataria here who tried to burn down the primary school. Nobody told him to do that. He gone under the school.

[Interruption] Excuse. Hello… Cricketer family?

AA : I don't think so. I don't know. I don't know that side of my family very well.

So what was, in the middle of all of this, what was the relationship like or how did the police treat with NJAC and just generally the protesters? Because you mentioned police harassment.

MK: Yeah. Good question. NJAC Thank you. NJAC developed a kind of mixed relationship for the attitude towards each other was kind of mixed. There was one of respect. The police wouldn't rough up a NJAC man like how they would rough up a normal fellow on the block. Long as they know this is a NJAC man, they treat him with respect. Even if they had to arrest them or search the house or anything like that. There were very few instances of police actually, except on the streets when they want to stop a march or any kind of thing.Whoever they beat, they beat. Some of the students had their altercations with the police. The harassment always stopping in any cars to see what they have in it. Searching of homes. A lot of searching of homes. They were really doing their jobs. It's not that they were against black power. A lot of them were for black power. We got to know over time. We got to know a lot of the secret service.

(Phone rings) Sorry again. Hello?

AA: A lot of police officers were in support of Black Power. How could you tell?

MK: Because of having conversations with them. At the meetings, over time, you get to see the same policemen. And they were even if they were what they call the secret, not secret service, Special Branch. Even the special branch. You know all who is special branch. We

started to talk to one another. He was doing his work. We were doing our work. I knew a few of them around here well. So there was even the real bad police. What people call bad. Burroughs and Carrington and these fellows would have spirited conversations with some of us. Yeah.

AA: You said something about the NJAC man. Did you all have identifying colors or anything that would make you…?

MK: No. After a time especially in the later 70s all the NJAC people were wearing African clothes. All of them started changing their name.

AA: That stood out.

MK: That stood out, yes.

AA: So what was common wear at that point in time?

MK: You mean outside there? When you say common –

AA: You said change clothes to start wearing African.

MK: T-shirts and normal shirts with color and so on. Even pants. We started wearing African pants instead of, and also we were not only it's not a matter of just taking on your African identity. It was a matter of trying to do something about our dependency. All the clothes coming from outside we're wearing. All the styles coming from, we're wearing.

So we're trying to change all that. Let we wear sandals and so we'd wear all that and people start making sandals and so on. I just talked a guy, his grandson his granddaughter coming to do classes with me tomorrow. He's saying, he makes sandals. He said in 1970 he started.

Aa: Really? That prompted him to start. Is it like the leather sandals? Do you think that gave rise to places like the drag mall?

MK: Not think. That is what gave rise to it. 1970 with all this talk, what we could do for ourselves and so on. People were affected. Making sandals, making their own clothes, making this. And people started going down by. "Look we eh eating in dem white people's plates we eating calabash." There was plenty of that too. When we're having ceremonies in NJAC, calabash. No plates. No chairs. We not sitting down on no chair. We sitting down on the floor. We sitting down on cushion. We said only thing that we make. Yeah. It was very radical.

AA: Yeah, it sounds like it. Do you see that now? Do you see echoes of that now?

MK: No. I don't see that now. Where would I see it? I don't think they could ever, I don't think I would ever see that again. That kind of mind. Look, we're in a meeting in Carapichaima. The meeting run late. We have to come home after midnight. We only have one car. So we had to take whatever transports. Daaga send some of the women down in our car. And he said, alright, let's start walking. It was simple.

It was no "what we could do?" We had a different mindset. Let's start walking. He said, alright, let we go. And we walk home.

AA: From Carapichaima?

MK: Yeah.

AA: To where?

MK: Who live in Barataria, who live in Port of Spain. Yeah. Yeah. No argument. No studying what we could do. Maybe.

AA: And do you think he was the galvanizing force behind that?

MK: Yeah, he was something else. He was besides being charismatic, he was an action man. He was a leader. A leader as he who would walk first. He who would go first. Yeah. He had courage. I remember I can't say I remember, but I hear it so many times like I was there. In Tobago. At that time, Pelican. No, what is that beach?

AA: Pigeon Point?

MK: Pigeon Point. March into Pigeon Point because they don't want people, they block the way to Pigeon Point. They had to pay to go in. And he walk up, and police that they march into Pigeon Point and police by the gate, nobody can pass and so on. And he would, he walk up to the man in charge and start talking to him and talking to him and talking to him until the man let everybody go. Yeah. Yeah, he was something else.

AA: So, you said that he –

MK: You never met him? Anyhow, yeah. By the time he died, you must have just sit Common Entrance.

AA: I looking young? (laughter)

AA: But, the composition of the marches because it started this galvanizing, somebody ran in and they said Black Power. Was it a Black Power movement?

MK: Um It was a Black Power movement but it was not only that. It was a people power movement. I think they used the Black too easy, It was too easy. A concept you know

AA: It was easy to take it up?

MK: Yeah, too easy. It was people power and was about sovereignty. The people owning the resources of the country and in control. It was for a new kind of government that's more representative of the people and so on. I think Black Power itself was probably a misnomer.

AA: So, if you were to change the name what would you call it? If you could go back and say alyuh...

MK: I would just call it a people's revolution.

AA: During the marches what was the ethnicities involved?

MK: Mostly African and mixed. Mostly African and mixed and because it was mostly urban and it was after the march to Caroni that it started stirring up the cane workers and so on there. From what I understand it's when they now were able to repeat the march from Caroni to Port of Spain where the Indian and African would get together and that's when they called it a state of emergency on April 21st.

AA: So the state essentially had a hand in collapsing what could have been a true people's revolution.

MK: Yeah. Yeah. But they had to do what they had to do.

AA: Do you think that mostly, you said it was urban, do you think that of course we can't play down what indigenous workers, not indigenous, sorry, indentured laborers were enduring, but was there a particular reason why the larger percentage of the ethnicities in the march was black? Do you think that economic conditions at that time prompted black people to want to change the system?

MK: I'm not good in this analyzing and thing business. I leave it up to others.

AA: So we're talking 1970. This is just eight years after independence.

MK: And the country was already kind of polarized. PNM, DLP kind of thing was already kind of polarized. According to a study that Tapia had done at the time, African-owned business was 4% and Indian, 9%. So they were twice our size in business, but it's really not much. 4%, 9%.

AA: Out of the overall 100%, is nothing.

MK: Yeah, it's nothing. But at the time the African was more out there. And we were trying to change the meaning of the word black to include Indian. I don't think it ever really succeeded.

AA: Do you think that the march from Caroni to Port-of Spain would have been significant?

MK: Yeah. The government would have fallen.

AA: You said you weren't present in the March to Caroni.

MK: Yeah.

AA; But did you hear about it from others? What were you told about it?

MK: That they were well-received all along the road. People offering them drinks, food, and so on. There were no incidents, any kind of abuse. Anybody saying, what are you doing down here? Yeah.

AA: But the reports in the newspaper tend to give a slightly slanted story. Yeah. From what I've read and from what my other interviewee said, that there was fear-mongering done in advance to frighten people in Caroni and to sort of dissuade them from joining or from even listening to what was being said.

MK: Yes. At that time, a fellow named Bhadase Maraj, he was in charge of the Maha Sabha at the time. He was a kind of bad-john. He was a real don. And yeah. He hated the black power movement. When they were passing on the March to Caroni, matter of fact, he would hold up guns, big rifle, and showing them. Yeah. So I'm certain a lot of that would have taken place. Yeah. Because the politics, the conventional politics here, based on race and keeping the two races apart, and they didn't want that not to happen. But I've never heard anybody talk about any kind of any abusive language or anything coming from the Indians when they went to Caroni.

Yeah.

AA: So how did you spend, like, during this state of emergency, things, what was NJAC doing? Everything was...

MK: Meeting in secrets. Um... Um… But anytime they have the state of emergency, they arrest people. So most of the leadership of NJAC under arrest. Under arrest and...And which is very hard for a fledgling organization. You're not even two years old and...

AA: But Daaga himself was not arrested.

MK: Yeah. Yeah. Daaga was… More than once, he was detained.

AA: Okay. Well, I mean... When that march was supposed to happen, I think they caught everyone in one fell swoop, he wasn't...

MK: Yeah. And he was arrested somewhere in...

AA: Afterwards.

MK: Somewhere in Central.

AA: So that is what really put an end to everything. First the joining of the two major ethnicities.

MK: Yeah.

AA: And then the fact that the leadership was dismantled. Yeah. How many years were you involved in NJAC formally?

MK: Um... 72 to 88. 16 years.

AA: 16 years. So from since you were 22?

MK: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

AA: And the words that they used to describe these events, revolution, guerrillas, guerrilla warfare, gangs, those things, do you think that's accurate? Do you think it... Because most of those words tend to have negative connotations. Do you think it's... Do you think any of those terms are unfairly applied?

MK: Um... Let me hear that again.

AA: Words like first of all, revolution.

MK: Yeah.

AA: We already spoke about Black Power itself as a misnomer, right?

MK: Yeah.

AA: But words like revolution...

MK: Yes. NUFF was revolutionary.

NUFF was considered... They were considered to be guerrillas and involved in guerrilla warfare. Yeah. And they were also called like... I read something that said that Beverly Jones was part of a gang.

MK: Oh, no. No.

AA: So do you think words like those –

MK: Guerrillas, yes. They were guerrillas. Operating in a hit-and-run basis and hiding in the mountain. That's guerrilla action. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

But not gang. Mm.

AA: What... What would be the difference?

MK: Motivation, for one. Mm-hmm. They didn't do anything for their own benefits. They're doing something to further a cause. Um... That's the main difference.

AA: So while you were at NJAC, were you... And NUFF was fully active. Were you still in contact with the NUFF members?

MK: No.

AA: Because they were sort of scattered.

MK: Yeah.

AA: Well, how did… What was your family like? Was your family supporting your choices at that point in time? Were they affected by your involvement?

MK: Yes. Um, family, well, first, um... I was living with my parents. Living with my parents before I got married and so on. Um... This is...They were cool with it. Not supportive. My father would support the government. He's a PNM man and so on. Yeah, we'd have our arguments. But not... Not arguments that would lead to...his telling me he dont want me in his house and all that kind of thing. And even when I... When I got married now, my wife was in… She was a member of NJAC also. She was part of the women's... The women's group. Yeah. And children, they grew up in NJAC.

AA: So there was a heavy female presence in the movement?

MK: Yeah. They took this thing seriously when they talk about respect and they debate the women and so on. At least we took it seriously. And… Every... And yes, they had... Daaga used to make sure that in everything we having women, playing a key role. Yeah. I don't know if in the relationships...

Um... Some relationships with men might still want to hit women lash and... Or abuse them in some kind of way. It might have had that still... I'm not so aware of what goes on behind doors. But generally, you had to be seen to be showing women respect.

AA: So... I want to put another side or off to the side. Eric Williams... He was the Prime Minister and... He was initially against the movement, yes?

MK: Yeah.

AA: But then he changed afterwards and he was saying that he was in support of Black Power.

MK: No, he never changed. Um... He never changed. He was against... If... Well, why he could call a State of Emergency or this kind of thing. He never changed. Um... What he did in order to neutralize the movement or to try to neutralize the movement, he would co-opt some of the language of the movement and say, okay, you want us to take over this? All right, we're going to nationalize this. We're going to nationalize that. So what he was doing, actually, is acceding to the demands of the movement. What we was calling for. And as a matter of fact, um... So many of the things we call for he eventually started to do. So pulling out… Pulling out some of our... of the weapons that we would use. You know? Taking it out of the thing and...coming close to neutralizing the movement from that.

AA: So... Would you say that NJAC achieved its aim then if he did acquiesce to some of the demands?

MK: Yeah, we achieved some of the aims. A lot of the aims. Some of them last. Some of the things that we achieved were lasting. Some not. For instance, the same Royal Bank we talked about there. Changed the name to Royal Bank of Trinidad. Now they're going back to Royal Bank of Canada. Um... Up to now, Trinidad… Outside of Africa, Trinidad have the highest percentage of African names in the world.

AA: That's impressive. Okay, I didn't know that. Now, years later, 50-something years since then?

MK: Could be.

AA: Can you look around and say that you see the impact of what NJAC did or stood for or promoted or endorsed in Trinidad?

MK: No, no. I can't... I can't say that. I can't say that. What I could say is that um... It's... History does... I'm wondering how to put it. Sometimes the achievement cant be measured just like that. It might take even more time for people to step away and see. And the history of a movement... The history of a movement um is always in steps, little steps. And this was one little step in terms of, in the journey that Black people be liberated or that there be peace and justice in the world. That's… you know, we play our parts. And the others will do, play different parts in the future. And because same as somebody will say, well, look, what NJAC do? You have to say, well, look, what Marcus Garvey do? What did Toussaint do? You know, everybody play their part and they get reverses and they go again and so on.

AA: Good point. Now, you referenced Vietnam in the beginning and you also talked about how you were, you know, able to travel and go to meet different people um... while you were actively involved in NJAC. Do you think that our revolution here contributed to a general overall... Do you think we had an impact on the world at large?

MK: The Grenada Revolution would not have happened if it wasn't for here. People like Maurice Bishop and them got a lot of support from NJAC here. From since in the 70s. From since in the early 70s. We affected movements in St. Vincent after here and people used to come here, people from they call themselves ULIMO. Used to come here a lot for talks on how to move ahead. I think the whole Caribbean was affected by what was taking place here. Antigua and so on. It gave them... Even if some of them had started before, it gave them impetus. Yeah. And there was a lot of literature passing between the islands. A lot of literature. There was a lot of communication.

AA: What is the... If you... If there was one lesson to be learned from the 70 revolution, what would it be?

MK: I can't say, nah. I'll think about it. If there was one lesson to be learned.

AA: Yeah, even personally.

MK: Personally? I don't know. I can't think of anything.

You can send me a message. You might think about it later. You said it will take 15 minutes. It's been over an hour.

[laughter]

MK: I do good.

AA: You do real good.