



### **WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at [library@brooklynhistory.org](mailto:library@brooklynhistory.org).
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online: [http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn\\_Historical\\_Society\\_Reproduction](http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction).

### **GUIDELINES FOR USE**

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.
2. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
3. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
4. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
  - Oral history interview with Narrator's Name (First Last), Year of interview (YYYY), Identifier/ Catalog Number; Crossing Borders Bridging Generations Oral History Collection, 2011.019; Brooklyn Historical Society.

**Oral History Interview with Corbin Laedlein**

**Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.043**

**Interview conducted by Amna Ahmad at the interviewer's home on March 18th, 2013 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.**

AMNA AHMAD: Today is March 18, 2013 and I am Amna Ahmad from the Brooklyn Historical Society. We are here in the dining room of my home in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and this interview is part of the *Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations* oral history project. Now, if you would, please introduce yourself.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Uh, hello, my name is Corbin Laedlein. I am 25 years old and from Brooklyn, New York.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. Thank you. And can you tell me your date of birth and where you were born?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Sure. Uh -- my date of birth is [date redacted for privacy] and I was born in Methodist Hospital.

AMNA AHMAD: So, Corbin -- uh -- why don't you tell me a little bit about where you come from?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Oh, sure. I -- uh -- I guess there are a couple of ways that one could interpret that question, but, geographically -- like I said -- was born in Methodist Hospital in Park Slope -- I grew up in Red Hook, Brooklyn until I was about 10 and then from the age 10 until around the time I went off to college, I was living in Bedford Stuyvesant. I guess the other way to interpret that question, in terms of where I'm from -- you know -- my sort of ancestry -- and I would say -- uh -- you know -- my mother is African-American and my father -- you know -- I just sort of consider him a white guy -- sort of an amalgam of different European ethnicities.<sup>1</sup> Both of their families trace back a number of generations here. My mother's side of the family to the slave trade and my -- uh -- you know -- I know somewhat less about my father's ancestry in terms of when his ancestors came.

---

<sup>1</sup> Not wanting to speak for my parents in how they identify, I asked my parents. My dad identified racially as 'Caucasian' and ethnically as Alsatian (although he has British ancestry as well). My mother identifies as African-American.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So, I'm really excited to get back to your genealogy soon, but first, I'm curious to know a little bit more about your -- um -- childhood and your early years -- um -- why don't you describe it a little bit to me.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- we um -- before I lived in Red Hook there was maybe about a year where we lived in Warren Street, but that -- you know -- I wasn't a conscious human being back then, so -- the beginnings is in -- is in Red Hook for me. My parents rented a two-story house on Van Brunt Street. My mother was a teacher in the neighborhood in PS 27 and my father worked for the New York City Housing Authority and he -- he worked there pretty much his whole career until he retired and then started working somewhere else. Um -- and so -- I would say -- um -- my parents were sort of -- you know -- children of the '60s counterculture era and were kind of -- you know -- hippies -- uh -- radical hippy folks and um -- and then both of them went into sort of public sector jobs and -- so they had -- I had a pretty middle class sort of lifestyle growing up. Um -- it was me and my brother -- who is four years older than me. Um -- and -- I guess -- you know -- I went to school -- I didn't go to school in Red Hook -- I didn't go to PS 27 -- where my mom taught -- and I think partially a lot of that had to do with sort of the environment there -- it was a very tough school that had to deal with a lot of the environmental problems plaguing -- uh -- Red Hook -- and so -- my mom -- uh -- sort of being an educator, knew the ropes of the education system and got me into a quote unquote "gifted program" in -- uh -- Cobble Hill at PS 261 -- and so I was -- I would -- you know -- take the bus and go to school there -- um -- and yeah -- you know -- I think -- you know -- it's interes--- I now live in Red Hook now and it's -- uh -- a very different place than what it was back then. Um -- the area -- the part of Red Hook -- that -- you know -- the Van Brunt street area -- that's called the back -- was not what it is today -- there weren't sort of boutiques and trendy restaurants and all that stuff. There was a -- artist community there -- that's been there for a while -- and -- you know -- similar [05:00] industrial places where artists can get lofts and stuff like that.

AMNA AHMAD: Um-hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But, it was kind of -- there wasn't a lot much going on in my block - - there was like a glass factory across the street and storage places and car shop -- auto

shops and stuff -- and our next door neighbors were these like bikers -- and so I didn't have a lot of friends in my neighborhood -- there were some people who lived across the street who we'd play with -- but it was mostly me and my brother in my neighborhood that we would -- you know -- so -- yeah -- it wasn't -- you know -- it was different -- in Bed-Stuy there were a lot of young people on the block and it was more of a social environment -- but -- uh -- one of the things I remember in Red Hook is just like not really having a lot of friends in the neighborhood. Um -- yeah -- and so -- so, yeah -- and I think one of the interesting things was that both -- you know -- going -- being in Red Hook and being in Bed-Stuy was sort of like a -- um -- middle class background -- um -- biracial kid who is very light skinned and so -- um -- folks would often assume that I was a white kid. Uh -- but I was in both instances -- was living in a predominantly low income neighborhood that was -- majority people of color -- and -- uh -- but -- I was going to school -- most of the people that went to my school were from neighborhoods like Carroll Gardens or Park Slope -- um -- it's a more affluent -- um -- almost all white -- um -- and so -- so yeah -- I think in Red Hook it was less of a -- of a big deal in terms of where I was living -- you know -- we even had a school trip come to my house at one time -- but after we -- we ended up -- um -- you know -- having to leave the house because my parents -- um -- someone bought the house and my parents -- uh -- you know -- we had to move and so -- we then moved in with my grandparents and so this brownstone in Bed-Stuy -- on Monroe Street -- which is sort of near the border of Bushwick -- kind of -- um -- that was the house that my mom grew up in -- and so we moved in -- back -- back to that place -- and -- uh -- I remember -- you know -- after that -- like -- I never had anyone over -- um -- because -- uh -- I think my mom was like embarrassed about the state of the house and -- um -- you know -- I was embar-- because I was like going to school with a lot of these affluent kids -- um -- sometimes I hear -- hearing comments about neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy and stuff like that -- it was like -- I was embarrassed -- I wouldn't even like tell people I lived in Bed-Stuy -- I would say -- like -- I would make up na-- I was like -- oh -- you know -- I live -- like -- you know -- if you keep going down Atlantic Avenue -- like -- I live over there. And so -- yeah -- looking back it was just like -- whoa -- like that's -- you know -- I think that's the essence

of -- sort of -- internalized classism and racism -- where you're like ashamed of where you came from or where you live -- and -- uh -- so, yeah -- so then -- yeah -- living in Bed-Stuy was -- was even more -- in some ways more lonely than Red Hook -- that I couldn't have anyone over -- um -- and my parents -- um -- didn't really want me socializing a lot with folks -- other kids on the block -- even though I did a little bit -- um -- mostly I would -- when I was home -- I would either bother my brother or hang out with my grandparents -- um -- and -- uh -- yeah -- in Bed-Stuy is another place very -- very different than what it is now in terms of -- it wasn't being gentrified back then -- and -- you'd go down the block and -- you know -- crack vials -- syringes -- like -- all that good stuff -- all over the place so that -- you know -- and you know -- gunshots weren't an uncommon sound to hear -- and so -- in that case, I think it was sort of warranted for my parents to be like -- "Don't hang outside too much."<sup>2</sup> Um -- but -- yeah -- I think -- um -- as far as -- you know -- this is sort of an interview about being multiracial -- Brooklyn -- I think -- I first -- I'd say --

AMNA AHMAD     Keep going.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN:     Keep going? OK.

AMNA AHMAD:     You're doing a great job.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN:     I think my first memory -- I have two memories from like when I was sort of elementary school age of like race being -- being something that was an issue [10:00] -- um -- and -- actually -- three. The first one is -- we were -- I was -- I distinctly remember myself in the lunchroom and eating like -- I don't know -- Lunchables or something -- and one of my friends is like -- asked me -- like -- "Were you adopted?" --

---

<sup>2</sup> Hearing this interview again, I felt sad that I seemed to only portraying the challenges of growing up in Bed Stuy at this point. In spite of some of those challenges of growing up in Bed Stuy at that time, I often look back at my time living in Bed Stuy with a lot of nostalgia. We had some wonderful, kind neighbors, many of which were families who had been in the neighborhood for generations, similar to my family. That sense of rootedness to that place, even if my family had only for a couple generations, made Bed Stuy feel different from anywhere else I've lived. I would often play on my front stoop with my grandfather sitting by the basement entrance of the brownstone we lived in, and he knew many folks on the block and other passersby. My grandparents, Charles "Chase" and Retta Greene, had been very involved in their church, so I believe I they knew many people through that. I think its important to include that part of my experience as well, because I wouldn't want to contribute to the many one-sided narratives that portrays neighborhoods like Bed Stuy in ways that only show violence, drugs, etc., without discussing the wonderful and positive characteristics of these neighborhoods.

and I was like -- “What? No. What?” -- and -- you know -- at the time -- I guess I was -- you know -- so shocked by that question -- like adopted -- no -- like what -- you know -- and he was -- and I don’t exactly remember what -- verbatim -- what was said -- but I think the essence of it was like -- “Well, you know, your mom is like a different skin color than you -- so -- like -- you must be, right -- like -- what’s going on there?” Um -- and so that -- I think that’s my first memory of being like -- but -- like being confronted with people being confused by -- um -- or uncomfortable by -- or like -- asking questions about my race. Another one is -- and I think I hear other multiracial people ask more -- have more stories of this -- but -- um -- this is -- there’s only one that I vividly remember where I was in a supermarket with my mom and -- uh -- at the cash register -- and this -- this man comes up to me and taps me on the shoulder and asks -- like -- and like stoops down and points to my mom and is like, “Is that your mom?” And I -- just like -- I don’t know how old I was -- but even then -- I was like -- I knew -- like -- “What? Who the hell asks a question like that?” -- like -- get the hell away from me. Those are two things -- instances -- oh -- and another one was -- we were playing dodge ball or something and -- I don’t even remember what I said, but somebody on the other team was like -- “Oh, Corbin’s trying to act black.” And then -- and I remember I was like startled and like -- I don’t know -- unnerved by that statement and then also I got very confused because that -- one of those things where they said it in such a negative way that your automatic response is, “No, I’m not.” Like -- but then -- but then the ques-- but then you ask yourself, “Wait -- my mom’s black -- what does that ma--- and my dad -- my dad’s white -- like -- what does that make me?” And so -- I think -- in elementary school -- those are the -- just the first instances of me starting to -- uh -- grapple with those issues of race and identity.

AMNA AHMAD: Um-hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Uh -- yeah.

AMNA AHMAD: Um -- you’ve --

**END OF FILE 20130318a**

AMNA AHMAD: Um -- you’ve raised a lot of very interesting tensions -- um -- in your

lifetime -- or your early years. So -- um -- as we both know -- race as a construct as opposed to a biological reality -- so how did your parents explain your background racial socioeconomic or otherwise to you as a kid? Because it seems like -- um -- it was fairly obvious that you were confronting these situations fairly early.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: You know -- I -- to be honest -- like I don't remem-- well, I don't remember my parents ever having a discussion about like -- this is what race is -- this is what racism is -- um -- and sort of encouraging me one way or another to -- to identify a certain way -- um -- but -- I will say that -- you know -- what -- in elementary school when we were living on Van Brunt Street, my mom would -- uh -- like my family would celebrate Kwanza -- um -- and they would get my brother and I -- like -- Kente cloth outfits and stuff like that -- and so I think they encouraged us to celebrate and appreciate and -- you know -- be proud of our -- having African ancestry -- um -- and I remem-- you know -- that -- that's -- that's all I can remember. I know that my parents would tell stories about their -- the struggles they had -- um -- as a multiracial couple in the late '60s and '70s -- and -- and with my dad's family in particular and stuff. Um -- and I know my dad -- my dad told me the story one time -- I think he told it to me when I was in middle school -- but -- where he was talking -- well my brother went to Brooklyn New School and there was another -- um -- mother -- I think -- who went to -- whose son also went to -- uh -- I guess he also went to Brooklyn New School -- also was biracial -- and she said to my dad like [10:00] -- at one point or another -- um -- you know -- your son is going to have to choose which of the tables in the lunchroom he's going sit at -- like he has to make a choice one way or another -- like -- how he is going to identify -- and my dad was kind of like -- f-- fuck you -- so -- um -- I don't know -- am I allowed to curse on this?

AMNA AHMAD: You can curse -- go ahead.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But, uh -- yeah -- so I think -- and I think that just illustrates like -- my parents were kind of -- um -- weren't very -- too assertive in -- in trying to guide us in shaping our identity in one way or another -- which -- um -- which -- you know -- has its ups and downs in terms of me having to just sort of figure some of that stuff out on my own -- um -- yeah.



AMNA AHMAD: So, when did this process of figuring this stuff out on your own start occurring? And how did you manage these different aspects of your identity?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- I was -- I think it was like a process -- uh -- uh -- really starting in middle school and ending -- sort of -- in college. I think in middle school -- and I think one of the things -- reasons why I -- you know -- I loved -- and parts of middle school experience were awesome -- other parts I was just -- like -- middle school is a nightmare -- because -- you know -- everyone is -- that's like -- I feel that's when you first start -- are starting to explore id-- your identity -- and like -- you, as an individual -- and -- um -- and so... I went to the Museum School -- which was -- it was a pretty diverse school -- it was an alternative high school -- oh, sorry -- alternative middle school and high school -- um -- and it brought -- it drew kids from all over the city, but also drew some -- some kids from the local community -- it was in Chelsea -- um -- and so -- yeah - - that was probably one of the most diverse schools I've been in -- you know -- in comparison to elementary school and high school -- but -- in terms of race -- um -- and socioeconomic -- I think -- sort of economic status and stuff like that -- so -- that was interesting because -- at some point I started to feel like -- you know -- I understood that my racial identity confused people because we're sort of -- you know -- conditioned -- we -- you know -- at that -- at that point -- I think maybe it might be changing a little now in terms of young kids -- but, who knows? Um -- in terms of understanding race as these mutually exclusive categories that people fit into -- um -- and so if you understand race in that way -- like somebody who's multiracial or doesn't fit clearly in one -- any of those boxes -- like -- I don't know -- it just like freaks people out and they have to -- like -- figure out which box you fit in -- so -- um -- I know when I -- in like sixth and seventh grade -- I like hung out with these kids and we were -- like -- skateboarders -- like -- we would skateboard all the time. Most of them were people of color -- interesting enough -- but -- at some point -- I st-- kind of stopped hanging out with them and -- sort of went with another crowd -- um -- and then around -- and at that same time I was sort of -- uh -- I think because of a lot of these -- these questions about my identity and all this stuff -- like -- I was -- like -- I need to -- like -- I need to act more black -- you know -- I need to like wear this on my sleeve -- and so -- I think one of the problem -- I think a lot of

people -- not just biracial people -- struggle with that -- like -- what does it -- what does blackness mean? And -- you know -- um -- and -- I think one of the ways that young kids go to find out what that answer is -- through -- like -- popular media. So -- like -- “Oh what are...if I look on TV, what do -- what do black people wear and what do -- you know -- what do they do?” And how -- how am I sup-- you know -- I’m supposed to replicate that? And so -- (laughter) And so -- like -- I changed -- like -- the clothing I was wearing -- um -- at the time -- I guess -- I had my hair really short -- buzz cut -- I had a little ‘fro in pre -- in preschool -- but -- like -- throughout elementary school -- up until like eighth -- seventh grade -- like -- I always had a buzz cut and then -- I started to grow my hair out -- and then -- like -- I got braids and people were like, “Oh,” -- well -- like -- “Corbin used to be a white boy when he was skateboarding” -- even though most of the people skateboarding were people of color -- interesting enough [15:00] -- but -- and now -- he’s like -- now Corbin’s ghetto -- now he’s like changed it up -- um -- and then it was just like -- uh -- it was just -- and that frustrated me because -- like -- people -- it just showed that people were trying to -- like -- box me in into what I was supposed to me -- and I was sort of playing along with that in some ways -- and so -- in that way it was -- that was a really frustrating time -- um -- yeah -- and then -- and then I went to high school -- I went to Stuyvesant -- um -- not a whole lot of black people there -- um -- and it was a pretty tight -- like -- because there was so few -- um -- black and Latino students there -- they sort of like -- like -- hung out together across grades -- um. And so I knew some of them -- some of them I was pretty close with -- um -- but -- I knew that there was a lot of -- like -- I think what I struggle -- I didn’t h-- I think then I started -- started thinking about like -- Stuyvesant’s a place of like -- immense privilege in terms of like the resources --

AMNA AHMAD: Um-huh.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- that that school has and -- um -- and also like raises a lot of like interesting and difficult questions about race and privilege -- because you have kids from like -- the upper east side -- upper west side -- um -- and the borders of Long Island -- who are like pretty affluent and have resources -- um -- that allow them to -- to get into that school -- and then you have a lot of kids who are from -- like -- real working class

immigrant backgrounds -- um -- who go to these prep schools<sup>3</sup> -- like -- some of them since from when they're in elementary schools from wherever and are just like -- have this attitude is like -- if you didn't get in then -- like -- that's on you -- you know -- I worked hard as hell and -- um -- I think it created an environment where -- when you talked about race and racism in -- in Stuyvesant -- and as particularly when you are talking about the lack of black and Latino students there -- um -- the later group -- the folks from immigrant working backgrounds -- would get very defensive and -- um -- even -- outward -- sort of animosity towards -- um -- you know -- these -- when you're talking about privilege and -- and race -- and access and stuff like that -- you know -- so -- so -- I think -- I'm not sure where I was going with that -- but, I think that sort of got me thinking about those questions -- um -- more -- in terms of race and privilege and -- uh -- and what that meant. And, interesting enough, most of the -- uh -- students of African descent at Rutgers were from immigrant backgrounds too -- so -- so -- it just raised a lot of these questions for me -- um -- and seeing -- and at the time -- at that time I was living in Bedford Stuy -- in Bed-Stuy -- there was only one other kid from -- from Bed-Stuy who was going there -- um. And it started to raise these -- these questions in terms of -- you know -- if I were to go to my local high school -- which was Boys and Girls, I think -- like -- there's no way the education I would have -- be getting there would be anything near what I would be getting at Stuyvesant -- um -- but I -- and I believe that the people living on my block -- the kids my age living on my block -- were -- were no less capable -- um -- than I was -- but I just had certain opportunities because of my class background -- um -- and probably because of the color of my skin -- in terms of people -- you know -- having certain -- um -- assumptions about me and my ability based on that -- uh -- that got me to where I was -- and so -- that started raising questions about race and racism for me as well. But, as far as like my personal identity -- um -- I didn't really -- it wasn't really a huge part of who I was... or what I was grappling with until -- like -- um -- senior year -- and that's when I had -- I forget the name of this class -- but, it was -- like -- a back-to-back class -- you went to Stuyvesant, right?

---

<sup>3</sup> I believe it would be incorrect to suggest that everyone goes to those prep/cram schools, but it appeared to me to be pretty common.

AMNA AHMAD: Yes, I did.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Did you -- did you have Mr. Donin -- [20:00] do you know?

AMNA AHMAD: No, I didn't --

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: OK.

AMNA AHMAD: -- but, I do -- I do recall the name.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: OK -- (chuckle) Mr. Donin had -- uh -- it was two classes -- electives -- like -- one of them was called -- like -- Hate, Bigotry and something -- something -- the other one -- and the one after that was like -- Race, Sex, Identity -- something like that -- and so -- and still to this day, I don't know if -- if the person -- if Mr. Donin was actual-- if that was his actual persona that was teaching it -- or if he was -- like -- in character -- but, he was just like -- the class was just insane -- and he was like intentionally provocative around issues of race, particularly -- um -- to get kids -- um -- talking about these issues -- like -- uh -- and one (chuckle) -- and one of the things that was hilarious was -- like -- whenever he would call on a person of color -- if it was -- if it was a male person of color -- he would be like, "Original man -- speak." And, if it was a -- a woman of color -- he would be like, "Righteous queen" -- like -- "Tell the class da-da-da." And so -- like -- it was hilarious -- and that was good because -- um -- we touched on a number of issues. One of them was multiracial identity and we had Jen Chau and Carmen Van Kerckhove come into the class and talk about -- um -- mixed race -- identity and issues related to -- um -- racism -- with a particular lens on -- like multiracial folks -- um -- and -- I was really excited when they came in and I spoke to them and then -- you know -- that started a relationship -- particularly with Jen Chau -- who sort of introduced me to this world of -- sort of -- multiracial -- um -- worked around -- worked multiracial identity around race and racism through -- through a lens of -- of multiracial -- um -- folks -- and uh -- yeah -- yeah -- I think -- I'm trying to remember what summer that was -- I think it was the summer after my freshman year -- yeah -- must have -- yeah it was -- um. So, anyway -- so I go to Rutgers and -- I guess I will just continue on -- like -- my relationship with Jen Chau -- is that I -- uh -- she sort of introduced me to Swirl and other activism work she was doing and I -- uh -- and so I interned for -- um -- Jen Chau and Carmen Van Kerckhove when they were running an

organization called *New Demographic* -- um -- and I interned for their podcasts, *Addicted to Race* -- and so -- and so -- this -- that class that Mr. Donin had and from -- you know -- starting to immerse myself in issues related to race and racism -- um -- I was like, “I want to study this stuff in -- in college” -- and so -- I was looking for schools that had programs in Africana Studies -- where I could study -- like -- sort of -- the construction of race -- and be able to compare race -- racial constructions in different -- um -- different places -- so -- so -- yes -- I went to Rutgers -- um -- with the intention of -- uh -- majoring in Africana Studies. This then -- the summer after my freshman year -- I -- uh -- interned with -- with the *Addicted to Race* podcast -- and I talked about -- I -- I got to interview one of my professors and made a podcast about Eurocentrism in education -- because I think that was one of the things that -- uh -- I sort of became really interested in -- in terms of the -- sort of -- overwhelming omission of African culture in history and that -- the contributions -- um -- that people of African descent made to human history and -- sort of -- the impacts of that -- in terms of -- um -- if you’re a -- if you’re a person of African descent and in your textbook there is only representations of you as slaves --

AMNA AHMAD: Um-huh.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- and Egypt is sort of framed as -- sort of an anomalous quasi-European civilization that isn’t really seen as -- like -- essentially African -- um -- ancient Egypt -- that is -- uh -- you know -- how -- what does that effect -- how does that effect you in terms of your view about yourself and your people and your potential -- um -- where you see white folks -- white men -- as -- as making all of the accomplishments that -- that are celebrated -- um -- and -- uh -- and so -- yeah -- I originally wanted -- was thinking about becoming a history teacher -- um -- with particular emphasis on -- like -- African culture and history. Um -- so -- yeah [25:00] -- and then -- also -- and so -- so -- the next step in terms -- like -- my personal identity and engaging with those issues was -- uh -- going to a -- there was -- uh -- sort of a diversity retreat thing at -- um -- Rutgers called *Bridging the Gap* and I went -- uh -- and it was -- sort of -- a two day retreat where -- um -- students gathered together and talked about issues of structural oppression related -- you know -- sexism, racism -- all those things -- and I met other multiracial people there -- particularly a good friend of mine now -- he’s still a good friend of mine -- his

name is Phillip Handy -- and we -- uh -- he was also male -- black -- white -- multiracial -- and -- uh -- we -- eventually started an organization -- and it was called -- uh -- *Fusion* -- the Rutgers union of mixed people -- and -- it was really cool, because -- I think most people who are multiracial -- and even more -- you know -- we met a lot of people through that organization who were -- like -- you know -- I've never known another person who was multiracial -- I've never talked about any of these issues -- um -- and so, we were able to come together and explore issues related to multiracial identity, internalized racism -- um -- interracial relationships -- like -- all these things -- and -- uh -- yeah -- I think that was really an interesting and important time for me in terms of -- like -- becoming more comfortable in my identity and not -- sort of -- having to fit into pre-existing -- um -- constructs of race -- uh -- and it was also interesting because -- you know -- Phillip and I -- sort of -- and other multiracial people who were black/white -- um -- had different ways of -- of identifying ourselves. Like -- Phillip was a member of a group called *The 100 Black Men* and he was -- like -- "You've got to come to this." And, I went a couple of times and I was -- like -- "You know" -- like -- I think when they -- when we were talking about certain issues -- it's like my experience as a -- um -- light-skinned multiracial man -- although I am from Afri-- um -- of partial African descent -- like -- my lived experience is very different from somebody who presents as black -- and even -- my brother -- who is significantly darker than me -- it's like -- you know -- phenotype is -- is -- does play a role in terms of your experiences --

AMNA AHMAD: Um-huh.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- of race and racism and identity. It's not all there is to -- to it -- I think -- um -- but -- I think that raised certain questions about -- like -- all right -- you know -- I don't -- I don't have to -- you know -- it's OK to have different -- um -- ways to identify yourself and for that to even change across time -- and I think that's -- that's something that -- that experience -- um -- sort of -- allowed me to -- to appreciate -- and to -- uh -- hold onto. So -- so -- yeah -- after -- after -- uh -- finding a community of mixed race folks, I definitely felt more comfortable with -- um -- in -- in -- in how I identify and -- and -- sort of -- navigating certain -- you know -- insecurities or frustrations I had with -- with how people -- um -- tried to sort of define me -- so.

AMNA AHMAD: That's really great. Um -- so Stuyvesant is -- sort of -- known for having a very small number of -- of minority students -- so -- I was wondering if there were any instances in which race became particularly relevant to the way that you interacting with other students -- or -- even learned -- um -- while you were there?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Well -- (throat clear) (chuckle) I think one of the things that's interesting about being multiracial -- um -- you know -- mother who's African-American, but presenting in many ways -- many people not knowing that [30:00] or seeing -- you know -- and certainly seeing me as white -- um -- I'm not going to coin this term -- because I didn't make it up -- there's a book by this term, but I also -- I like to say -- like - - at times I'm "incognegro" -- you know?

AMNA AHMAD: That's a good one.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah (chuckle)-- I think sometimes people would forget that -- um - - someone of African descent was in the -- in the space -- and -- uh -- stuff would come out that I think people wouldn't say if there was somebody -- um -- who presented as -- as black -- um -- in that space. So -- like -- a lot of racial slurs -- um -- and just racist comments -- um -- by a lot of -- I wouldn't call them friends because they're not friends - - because they are racists -- but --

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- acquaintances -- um -- and I think -- I mean -- to be honest -- I think that made me -- sort of -- very pessimistic and -- um -- what's the word -- pessimistic isn't the word -- but -- I guess like untrustworthy<sup>4</sup> of a lot of white people -- in terms of -- you know -- they will say one thing -- you know -- when people of color in the room -- but when -- behind closed doors or when they think they're not being heard -- um -- they'll say something else -- and -- and -- some of that -- sort of -- I was able to -- I felt like I was able to get a glimpse of because -- um -- either people didn't consider me black enough to be -- like -- to be somehow offended by the -- the inst-- what they would say -- or they would just forget -- um -- I think that was part of my experience -- um -- Other than that -- the question was -- did -- did it affect my ability to learn?

AMNA AHMAD: Um-huh.

---

<sup>4</sup> I misspoke here, I meant to say "untrusting".

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- the only thing I can say is that I know in my history classes, I would be -- like -- why are we just talking about Europe and China? Like -- you know -- as if that was all that mattered and it -- like -- kind of got me frustrated and -- um -- as those were the only two civilizations that mattered -- and -- and no -- not touching on the -- you know -- contributions and -- uh -- I don't know -- all kinds of things -- science and medicine -- the things that I later learned in -- in college when I studied these things -- that were totally omitted -- um -- and so -- I think -- yeah -- I think -- some -- at some points in -- in high school -- I really started to feel -- um -- some real internalized racism because there was this feeling like these textbooks aren't talking -- are only talking about people who look like my dad. Um -- there is very little inclusion of positive contributions or -- whatever -- of -- of people of African descent -- and so -- you're in a school with so few people of -- with so few -- uh -- black and Latino students -- and the -- um -- I think the underlying assumption there is that -- that's because black and Latino students aren't capable -- or aren't smart -- um -- and then -- you open a textbook and it shows no contributions to h-- human history of -- of people from -- who descended from Africa or indigenous people for that matter -- from the Americas -- um - and just like -- you think to yourself -- like -- holy shit -- like -- what -- part of me is -- you know -- deep down you know that all that is not true -- that people -- black and Latino people are just as capable as anyone else -- um -- but -- if I'm not seeing that same -- those same contributions in [35:00] the textbooks that I'm reading -- so what does that mean? And -- like -- I would legitimately think that I would feel very guilty and sad about thinking -- for thinking those things -- um -- and it wasn't until I went to college and -- sort of -- was able to deconstruct some of that stuff by learning about all the history and stuff that had b-- that is omitted from our textbooks -- and then -- I was just more -- that guilt sort of moved to like a lot of rage and anger and -- sort of -- plus what I also mentioned in terms of my experiences with -- with white people -- um -- you know -- and my ability -- my being "incognegro" and hearing stuff that they would say -- it was just -- like -- I think that -- in that way -- it didn't -- it didn't affect my ability to learn, because I was a good student -- um -- more or less -- but -- uh -- you know -- I think my -- that educational -- um -- that sort of deficit in actual education that I received about -- um -- you know -- about people



who represented one half of my ancestry -- uh -- definitely m-- left a mark.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah (whispered). And, how would you say, if at all, this anger manifested itself outwardly?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: No -- no -- I never -- I didn't really manifest outwardly -- um -- I th--  
- uh -- I think at the time -- I di-- I used to do Capoeira -- which is an Afro-Brazilian  
martial art -- so I started that in high school -- so -- it was -- sort of -- like -- my catharsis  
-- um -- for some of that stuff. Um -- but no -- I think I would -- no -- I don't think it  
manifested too much in a way that was palpable to other people. I -- sort of -- just kept it  
inside and -- um -- you know -- I confronted it when I witnessed it -- um -- in terms of  
people saying certain things -- um -- and often t-- it depended on who it was -- sometimes  
it would be -- like -- I don't know -- I think I might have -- like -- slapped someone or  
something -- but -- nothing --

(laughter)

AMNA AHMAD: Nothing serious.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: A classmate was like -- someone we were -- they were talking about  
a -- a classmate -- um -- and they were like -- um -- oh -- you know -- like -- "Do you  
think x, y, z is hot?" And then, that other -- this person said, "Oh, x, y, z can't be hot -- x,  
y, z's black." And then I was -- and I was like -- it was one of those moments where you  
just -- it's just like numbing and you almo-- you don't know what to say in the moment  
and then the moment passes by and you're just like -- you dwell on it -- you know -- like -  
- oh, man -- I really wish I could have just punched him in the face or something.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Not that that would really -- like -- remedied the root causes of a  
statement like that -- but -- um -- yeah.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah -- um -- so you brought up your parents' experiences -- um -- as a  
mixed race couple prior to starting a family -- so -- have they shared their experiences  
with you? Um -- could you describe them?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- for sure -- um -- so -- my parents met -- um -- oh -- I guess  
[40:00] -- my mom was like born and bred in Bed-Stuy -- um -- and I g-- I guess I can go

more in detail about her parents later -- but -- and my dad was sort of -- moved around a lot -- mostly was in southern New Jersey -- sort of -- like -- suburbia -- um... My dad went to Hobart College and my mom went to Keuka -- and those are -- sort of -- up in the finger lakes of New York. And -- I guess they must -- I've never been to them -- um -- must be close enough by -- but -- uh -- my dad -- um -- needed a date for a dance and his roommate was like -- "Oh, you should call up -- I think -- you should call up Penny at Keuka" -- and my dad's like -- my dad didn't know Penny -- um -- but, he was like -- "OK" -- and so, he calls Penny's room -- um -- Penny wasn't there -- my mom picked up and she was like, "Oh, Penny's not here." And, dad's like, "Oh -- do you want to go to this dance with me?" -- and -- mom was like, "No." And then -- uh -- I guess my dad's roommate knew my mom -- Sharyn -- my dad's name is Rowland -- um -- and -- so yeah -- they went -- he -- my dad's roommate convinced my mom to go on a date -- or to this dance -- with my dad. And -- so they went -- and then -- I think -- what they have told me is that -- maybe like -- on their third date or something -- they like -- decided they were going to get married or something -- um -- and they are miraculously still together -- it's kind of incredible. But -- um -- I always ask them -- like -- "What were you thinking?" -- um -- asking after two dates and "What were you thinking, mom, saying 'yes'?" -- but -- uh -- so yeah -- but this was in 19-- I think it was 1970 -- um -- and uh -- so -- so -- yeah -- um. I think my dad said that there was -- you know -- they were kind of like -- it was like -- you know -- the '60s -- '70s -- like -- radical -- like hippy -- counter-culture kind of environment up in small colleges -- so -- my dad didn't ex-- experience a lot of hostility there -- um -- but -- uh -- my dad's family was not down with it --um (chuckle) -- they tried to stage multiple interventions by -- like -- having people talk to my dad -- um -- to get him -- them to like -- break up -- and my dad's dad -- who I've never met -- he was a pastor -- but -- he -- uh -- he -- what did he do? He wrote a letter -- I don't know how he did it -- but he got my dad -- I guess -- this was during the draft -- right -- for Vietnam -- and so -- my dad -- because he was a student -- was like -- way down on the list -- or -- like -- had a different classification of -- of a draft card because he was a student -- but -- my dad's dad got him moved up to -- like -- A1<sup>5</sup> -- which is -- like -- you could get called

---

<sup>5</sup> I misspoke, his draft classification was changed to 1A.

to go -- um -- and he also -- like -- tried to get the school to -- like -- cancel all my dad's financial aid and stuff like that -- because he was (chuckle) dating my mom.

AMNA AHMAD: Wow.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: And so -- yeah -- it's kind of crazy -- it's like --

AMNA AHMAD: Extreme measures.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- like he would rather have my dad sent to Vietnam to get killed than to marry my mom -- a black woman. So -- I remem-- I don't know when I first heard these stories, but I was -- like -- maybe middle school. I was just like -- whoa -- like -- what? And -- um -- and I think -- it was a long -- my -- my grandfather on my dad's side died before I was born -- or my brother -- so I never met him -- but, apparently -- like -- as my dad's -- my -- that grandfather was -- like -- on his deathbed -- he -- like -- had a -- just like a reconciliation -- or he was like -- realized how stupid and meaningless a lot of that was -- you know -- he didn't go to my parents' wedding and stuff -- um -- my grandma did go to the wedding -- um -- but she -- and -- you know -- I think she was the one who -- like -- staged some of those -- at least one of those -- sort of -- interventions where they had -- like -- a family friend talk to my dad about stuff. And -- I think -- and one of the -- the things that they would use was -- like -- imagine -- like -- how hard it's going to be for these -- your -- your kids -- they're going to -- I don't know -- I don't know what they were expecting would happen to us -- but --

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- that was always sort of part of the ammunition [45:00] they used -- you know -- the lives -- "You're going to ruin the lives of your kids." Um -- but -- uh -- and then it was funny -- because they would tell me these stories and I was like, "Mom -- like -- did grandma and grandpa want y'all to get married?" And my mom would be like -- like, "No, no way." And, it was -- like -- "It was because dad's white?" And, she was like, "No -- it was just they didn't want me to marry anyone."

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: And so -- like -- they were much more -- and I think -- you know -- um -- I think there's a lot -- a long history of African-American folks -- um -- intermarrying with other -- other people -- and so -- there's like -- I guess -- a precedent

set where -- um -- if you look at the hues of people in my mom's family they're -- a really wide range -- very dark to very light -- um -- and so -- there's obviously -- like -- a lot of racial mixture already in my family on my mom's side anyway -- um -- yeah -- so -- And then -- you know -- I heard comments<sup>6</sup> -- like -- from one of my aunts saying, "Oh, your kids are going to come out striped." Or -- you know -- just -- like -- ignorant stuff like that -- um -- but I think -- you know -- they've -- I don't know -- I haven't really seen them -- so -- I don't -- you know -- they probably wouldn't say any of those things around me -- but -- uh -- I think that also -- like -- contributed to some of the sort of -- um -- anger and frustration I had -- um -- and I think -- I made this realization in middle school where I was talking to my mom that -- we were talking about -- um -- some of these problems I was having -- or -- you know -- issues I was having about people being so obsessed about how they can categorize me -- um -- in -- into which of these boxes of race -- you know -- I fit in -- and -- and -- uh -- it eventually -- I made the realization that it's not my problem -- it's that peop-- they have -- those folks have a problem -- um -- that they need to -- like -- fit me into this box, but I think -- for a little while -- I was think-- you know -- I think people -- in terms like, "Oh, your kids' lives are going to be so terrible." And, it's like -- "It's going to be terrible because of people like you -- like -- you're the problem -- like -- it's not -- it has nothing to do with -- like -- a person who is multiracial -- it's about people who want to perpetuate -- um -- these constructs and -- and -- sort of force people to fit into what their definitions of -- of race are. Um -- so I think that was an important realization to come to -- for sure.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah -- great. Um -- so -- I think we stopped a little bit at your Rutgers days -- in terms of your -- at least educational and pro-- professional trajectory -- so -- you were honored with the Clarendon Scholarship -- and you spent a year at Oxford -- so, why don't you tell me a little bit about that?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Uh -- sure. I -- um -- as I was -- sort of -- going towards my senior year, I didn't -- I didn't really have -- know what I was going to do next -- um -- I was working on a thesis project and so I didn't really have a lot of time to think about what I was going to do. But, then it sort of came -- uh -- this opportunity just came up -- like I

---

<sup>6</sup> I meant to say that I had heard of comments; I never heard them myself.

had -- you know -- I was a good student -- um -- and so -- I had relationships with some deans and stuff -- and they -- they suggested to one dean -- who was in charge of -- like -- fellowships and stuff -- like -- “Oh, Corbin -- you should look into--” like -- you know -- “applying for -- for the Rhodes and Truman and stuff like that.” And I was -- you know -- it was cool -- and it was kind of crazy -- because I had never even imagined of -- applying for any of those things. So -- I then -- sort of -- went through this process of -- you know -- “Why not? Let’s just apply for it” -- and that -- sort of -- got me looking at different programs. I didn’t get either of the fellowships, but I decided -- I -- there was a program I thought was really cool -- it was a comparative social policy program at Oxford -- I applied for it anyway -- and then -- and then I was -- like -- maybe I’ll figure out some way I can pay for this -- like -- um -- but I didn’t really have any plan on how to do that (chuckle) and then -- I just got an email not too long -- you know -- a couple of months after -- it was -- like -- “You’ve been selected for the Clarendon Scholarship -- you get -- like -- a free ride” -- um -- to go there -- and so that was [50:00] very unexpected and very -- um -- awesome -- uh -- to have -- to have gotten that experience -- um. And -- so -- yeah -- I studied -- it was a one year program studying -- uh -- comparative social policy -- uh -- I think -- in being in England and st-- yeah -- sort of -- it was really interesting to -- like -- be talking -- or in -- thinking -- uh -- coming from a place where I was -- like -- thinking about engaging the issues of race and racism -- so much -- and then going to -- to England and to Oxford and -- sort of -- like -- not seeing that happen there -- I was kind of like -- it was -- it was really interesting because -- you know -- in the states -- like -- I think a lot of -- uh -- the elite universities -- they at least have one guy or one professor -- not necessarily a guy -- but one profess-- at least one professor who is -- like -- engaging with issues of race and racism and those things because that’s what you need to be -- I don’t know -- to market yourself as -- like -- a progressive, cutting edge university -- or whatever -- you know -- like -- you know -- I think of -- like -- Cornell West -- who was at Harvard and then he was at Yale and then -- now he’s at Union. But -- um -- there was -- like that discourse wasn’t really happening -- um -- at Oxford -- and it was -- and most of the people I was hang-- I was hanging out with were other international graduate students -- a lot of them were in my program -- the ones that I got close to were from

Canada and it was really interesting to act-- when I would say that to them -- they would be like -- “It doesn’t seem like people were talking about race and stuff here.” And they’d be -- like -- “Oh, it’s America -- it’s an American problem.”

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Like -- but -- like, “What?” Like -- England -- like -- y’all -- they like -- started white supremacy -- and we just like refined it here -- I don’t know -- like the whole empire was based on the -- sort of -- manifest destiny of -- you know -- these other inferior cultures that we need to -- um -- liberate by taking them over and -- you know -- modernize -- civilizing them -- uh -- and that -- that sort of fed right into the constructs of white -- white supremacy we have here. But, there’s so few -- like -- I found one panel that was on -- like -- the concept of whiteness -- in England. And -- and it was like that was really disappointing and weird. And -- a lot of other American students -- um -- a lot of American students of color that I spoke to were -- like -- “Yeah, that’s weird -- no one’s talking about race.” Um -- and see racism as -- like -- an American phenomenon. Um -- but -- uh -- other than that -- I think -- yeah -- it was a great experience. Um -- I was living with a German dude, a Spanish dude, a dude from China, and a British dude -- and so it was -- I think in that sense it -- like that was -- although it wasn’t as -- it was a lot less diverse than I was hoping it would be -- uh -- because I imagined -- I was -- like -- England -- like -- colonized the whole world. There must be people like from over the world (chuckle) who -- like -- go there -- um -- but there were far fewer folks from -- um -- like -- the Caribbean or from Africa -- than I was expecting. Uh -- but -- that being said -- like -- it was still the most international environment I had ever been to -- um -- and so for that, I really -- I really appreciate it. I think the program -- um -- wasn’t the most -- uh -- I guess I could say -- like -- I figured out a lot of what I don’t want to do from -- from that program -- um -- but, it was definitely -- uh -- a valuable and awesome experience -- um --

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So, from everything you’ve described about your past, it seems like you have this commitment to social justice -- um -- so, where do you think the source of that commitment and that passion is -- is from? Sorry (chuckle).

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: The source of... Um -- I th-- I think it’s -- sort of -- going back to

that -- that realization of -- when I was in Bed -- living in Bed-Stuy -- and -- uh -- interacting with [55:00] people -- young kids my age -- um -- who were going to -- like -- the shitty zone schools<sup>7\*</sup> -- and -- while I was going to schools outside of the neighborhood and -- and that sort of rea-- that realization at first was -- like -- man -- I don't -- I did nothing to really deserve these opportunities that I'm getting -- that people in my neighborhood aren't getting just because they live in this neighborhood -- and that being connected deeply to class and race -- um -- I wouldn't -- I wouldn't say -- it was -- it's like -- and it's not about guilt -- really -- but it's about knowing that these conditions that are -- we are living in are just so unjust -- um -- and that they've been -- they're -- it's created and maintained by -- by institutions made by people and it's about people not having power or self-determination and -- um -- knowing that -- if you're not in some way working to dismantle those things, then you are complicit in them -- um --- I think that's what started it -- and what -- what maintains it now is -- um -- I guess my analysis has -- sort of like -- at first it was -- like -- me and the people in my neighborhood -- and -- a lot about education and all those things, but as my analysis -- sort of -- like -- expanded -- um -- I don't know -- it's just like so many instances of -- of where -- uh -- I guess -- our -- just this system that we're living in is -- sort of -- so very violent and --

AMNA AHMAD: Um-huh.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- oppressive to many people -- and -- uh -- realizing that it -- it doesn't have to be like this -- um -- I think that's what - that's what maintains my wanting to -- sort of -- work on those issues.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So, what are the kinds of activities that keep you busy nowadays?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- a lot of it is -- where I work at -- Added Value which is -- uh -- a non-profit organization -- um -- whose mission is to promote the sustainable

---

<sup>7</sup> I regret referring to the zone schools in the neighborhoods I grew up in as “shitty”, and the ease at which “shitty zone school” rolled off my tongue troubled me. Not only because my mother taught at one of them (and the zone schools in other neighborhoods), but because there are amazing teachers at those schools who do amazing work in spite of the extremely challenging environmental factors that teachers, students and administrators have to grapple with in zone schools in low-income neighborhoods. What I did a poor job at expressing is that my neighborhood schools were known to not deliver the same education as the schools in other neighborhoods for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are the various environmental issues stemming from structural racism that have disadvantaged communities of color throughout the history of this country.

development of Red Hook by nurturing a new generation of young leaders -- and -- uh -- and they -- well, we do that through urban agriculture. So, I -- um -- I run the youth program there -- so -- I work with 14 to 19 year olds. And, I like that work because -- um -- I think that age -- 14 to 19 -- like -- I think about myself and -- uh -- how I started to become attuned to -- to issues related to social justice and identity and -- like -- trying to figure out those things and wanting to get -- you know -- have those conversations with other young people so they can -- sort of -- become agents of change and -- in their community -- and also -- and particularly around issues of food and environment and ecology -- uh -- so that's -- yeah -- that's my paid work and it takes up -- um -- you know -- a lot of my time -- but -- uh -- I've also been involved in -- uh -- a lot of -- like -- community activism. I think Red Hook is a unique and awesome place, because it's -- uh -- it's -- it's only 11 -- like around 11,000 people -- and so -- for a New York City neighborhood, it's pretty small and it's also very -- sort of -- isolated -- because it's only -- it's sort of like a peninsula sticking out there -- and -- so -- it's pretty tight-knit -- and there's a community of people there -- um -- who are into -- like -- community organizing and -- and activism -- and so -- that sort of -- well -- I -- I moved back to Red Hook -- um -- in 2011 -- in the fall. So -- since then -- I've been k-- involving myself in community activism and organizing -- um -- you know -- last year -- we did work around police violence -- [1:00:00] particularly stop and frisk-- um -- there was a lot of work after Sandy that we -- had to work on -- um -- I was -- right when I got back from -- well I moved from D.C. -- um -- I was there for six months before I moved here -- back to Red Hook -- um -- I did involve myself with -- uh -- Occupy Wall Street -- and what was going on there -- um -- I since am not involved with Occupy Wall Street -- but -- uh -- a lot of the folks that I met through there -- um -- maintain relationships with and -- and work -- working on different activist and organizing projects -- um -- not affiliated with Occupy Wall Street. Uh -- yeah -- I mean -- now -- I'm -- I'm involved in a -- a community play --

AMNA AHMAD: Um -- hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- and it's -- it's a -- an enemy of -- it's an adaptation of *The Enemy of the People* -- which is by Henrik Ibsen -- and was adapted by Arthur Miller --



but -- and it's a -- it's sort of a -- in response to this conversation that's been happening about the Gowanus Canal clean-up -- and so -- I'm excited to be a part of it because it's a creative way to engage in -- in these conversations about -- um -- what's happening in our community. But -- yeah -- those things keep me busy.

(laughter)

AMNA AHMAD: Pretty busy.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah.

AMNA AHMAD: So, from an earlier conversation that we had, you expressed an interest in researching your genealogy --

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- hum.

AMNA AHMAD: Um -- so could you please describe it for me? What you know so far?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- I -- I wish I could tell you more at this point -- but -- uh -- I know my grandmother passed away in 2005 -- we had folks come for the -- you know there's a wake and a funeral and all that stuff -- and --

### END OF FILE 20130318b

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: One of -- we call this guy -- Cousin Bobby -- I don't whose cousin he is --

AMNA AHMAD: (chuckle)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- I think he's my mom cousin -- um -- but -- it's just one of those things -- everyone calls him Cousin Bobby -- but -- uh -- his wife -- Eva -- was at the funeral -- and she had this -- this spiral bound book that she put together -- that was sort of like a genealogy of my grandmother's family and she was -- they were the Blakes -- um -- and -- uh -- so -- they were from -- sort of -- like -- Norfolk, Virginia area -- um -- and so -- I -- I don't remem-- this was -- I was a senior in high school then and I just remember -- like -- flipping through it -- not really interested in the text, but just like pictures and stuff. And I came across this picture and I believe this person was my -- my grandmother's grandfather -- and he was -- uh -- half native -- half black -- and was married to this -- like -- fresh off the boat -- English woman -- um -- and this was -- like --

in the mid -- I th-- I know -- I think this was like mid-1800 -- late 1800s or something -- and -- so -- I remember seeing that picture and I was with my aunt at the time -- and I was like -- “What?” -- I was like, “How did they get away with that?” -- like -- this guy -- half black and half native -- marrying a white woman in the s-- like -- what -- “How did they that?” -- like -- um -- I still don’t have an answer to that question -- but -- um -- so that -- I remember that being like, “Whoa -- like -- that’s crazy.” Um -- and I believe -- like -- the -- the native side was Blackfoot -- and I know my grand-- my grandmother would some talk -- sometimes talk about her grandfather as being like -- like continuing --like -- sort of -- indigenous cultural traditions and stuff like that.<sup>8</sup> But, that wasn’t ever part of how my grandmother identified herself or -- so that was -- you know -- was her identify -- but -- um -- she said it seemed to be a very strong part of her grandfather’s identity -- which I thought was interesting to hear about. But -- um -- yeah -- so -- I think -- I’m trying to think -- I think some -- some discussions that I’ve had with friends and stuff about -- um -- a lot -- a lot of the friends I have in the city are other twenty-somethings -- most of which are in -- live in New York City, but aren’t from New York City -- um -- somewhat transient. Like my -- I have a friend who calls -- has a name for it -- calls -- this is EMUS -- like -- Elite Mobile Units -- and like -- they just --

AMNA AHMAD: (chuckle)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- can move around and stuff. But -- uh -- you know -- if you’ve being -- moving around and all this stuff -- always brings up questions related to -- place and identity and history and all that stuff -- and so -- I think having those conversations with people started having me thinking about how I don’t know -- like -- enough about my -- um -- family history and both of my parents -- all of my grandparents are deceased now -- and -- you know -- wishing I had asked them more questions about their lives and all these things -- I remember -- like -- my grandparents on my mother’s side would tell me stories about -- and my grandfather was a train conductor -- he would tell like -- these

---

<sup>8</sup> I got the chance to visit Aunt Eva not long after this interview and I was able to access her genealogical files. My grandmothers’ grandfather was Nathan Blake, who was half Cherokee and half African American, and he married Annie Holden, a white woman from England. As I stated in the interview, I believed that my grandmother told me he was ‘Blackfoot’, so I did a tiny bit of research and it seems like its not uncommon for folks of mixed Cherokee and African ancestry to be referred to as ‘Blackfoot’ (not to be confused with the Blackfeet Native Americans of the northern plains).

kind of morbid stories -- but -- he goes like (chuckle) -- talk about how it was during the Depression and “I was a train conductor and people would be jumping from the trains and stuff like that” -- and I was just like -- “Whoa -- that’s real intense, grandpa -- I’m only a child.”

AMNA AHMAD: (chuckle)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- like -- questions about their lives -- like -- the more I learn about -- like -- I learned about history and all these things -- it’s like -- wow -- I had people I was living with who lived through these events and -- like -- really wishing I had asked them more questions -- anyway -- so -- that eventually was like -- led me to want to know more and I’ve since contacted Eva and she was like -- “Oh, I was about to throw all those things out.” You know -- like -- all the boxes --

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- “No -- save them -- I’m going to come visit and get them from you.” So, that’s my mother’s side -- unfortunately -- like -- I don’t know too much which I regret. In -- but -- I think of the things that was kind of cool was when I was -- when I was in England, my parents came to visit me -- um -- and we took a trip -- we took the train over to France -- and -- um -- [05:00] appar-- like -- my dad -- so, my last name is Laedlein -- that’s my dad’s last name -- and -- um -- this relative who had done this -- sort of -- genealogy of that name and stuff -- uh -- tracked down people in Europe in France and Germany who had this last name and so, my dad was able to contact them. And so, we met up with them in France and it was -- it was really interesting because (chuckle) -- like -- um -- so this -- the name -- the name Laedlein is like -- not -- it’s like a made up name -- like this guy -- I don’t even know -- like -- he was Austrian -- he moved to Alsace -- which is -- sort of -- like -- between France and -- you know -- sometimes it’s part of France and sometimes part of Germany -- depending on what era in history we’re talking about. But -- um -- he changed his name to Laedlein so people could pronounce it -- and so -- whoever has this name -- Laedlein -- is -- like -- a descendant of this dude who -- like -- changed his name. And, so -- but -- it’s like -- goes way back -- like -- and so -- th-- we are s-- not remotely related to these folks --

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- very remotely related to these folks with this last name Laedlein -  
- but -- they just -- my dad and this guy -- Renee -- got very excited to meet other  
Laedleins -- you know -- um -- and it was cool -- and I had seen correspondence between  
this relative who had contacted the folks in France and there were actually people -- um --  
in that family who were in interracial relationships -- and -- when we visited them -- the  
family in France -- one of the -- Renee's daughter was -- um -- had a multiracial baby --  
and I was -- like -- "All right -- that's awesome." But -- uh -- yeah -- I think -- I wish I  
did know more -- um -- and it's -- you know -- my intention to learn more before it's too  
late -- you know?

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So, through the course of this interview you have discussed issues  
of gentrification, class difference, in addition to race itself -- so, what would you say is  
the state of race and class in Brooklyn right now?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Uh -- that's tough. Uh -- whew -- yeah -- at -- what I think -- um --  
I -- you obviously cannot talk about race and class in Brooklyn without touching on -- I  
think -- two main issues -- what -- like one is the police -- the second is gen-- issue of  
gentrification -- um -- and I think those two are very closely intertwined -- um -- And, I  
think -- I guess -- one way of -- that I have sort of been thinking about it -- is -- in  
response to Sandy -- after Sandy, there was a lot of -- so, I guess before going into that --  
Red Hook is split into -- what people call the front and the back -- and the back is sort of  
the most -- the -- sort of -- the west -- along the water -- the western strip of it -- like Van  
Brunt -- and going west -- um -- and the front is sort of the area -- easterly -- which is  
mostly -- um -- public housing -- which is somewhat -- like -- at least two-thirds of the  
population of Red Hook -- and -- any -- I -- I -- you know -- people say -- like -- even  
before there were the housing projects there -- there was -- there was a divide between the  
front and the back and all this stuff -- but -- uh -- I think it's very -- um -- it's very  
palpable that there is -- sort of -- two -- this division -- you know -- kind of exists where  
this -- this back that's -- like -- heavily gentrifying -- um -- mostly white folks -- not only  
white folks, but mostly white folks gentrifying -- um -- and then you have a mostly black  
and Puerto Rican back -- um -- and I think that -- after Sandy -- the result where everyone  
was sort of affected by this -- this tragedy -- or this national disaster -- um -- people --

there was a lot of talk of -- you know -- we need to -- [10:00] there's no more back -- there's no more front -- we need to just -- there's just Red Hook -- and that always kind of bothered me when I would hear it because -- and it's sort of reminiscent of the -- what is it -- that Barack Obama -- like -- speech -- where he's like, "There's no white America -- there's no black America -- there's no Republican America -- there's just United States of America" -- which I think is -- sort of -- just like post-racial liberalism bullshit where we just ignore differences and that -- and we think that will make them go away -- uh -- so -- and I think -- uh -- there's so much to talk about about race sometimes.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- um -- I think -- with regards to Red Hook -- when people are sort of like thinking of, "Oh, you know, Red Hook is coming back -- it's like -- thriving -- you know -- hip new neighborhood" -- um -- but, most of the -- if you go to Red Hook -- the restaurants that are popping up on Van Brunt Street and the boutiques and stuff -- are only really accessible to -- to gentrifiers -- because it's just -- out of -- out of -- well one -- like -- issue be-- access -- who can -- who can eat at those restaurants and buy from those boutiques? The other thing is -- like -- do -- would people who don't fit into a certain -- um -- class background even feel comfortable going there? Um -- and so I think that's another issue -- where it's like -- beyond just -- just issues of -- of class -- but like -- or -- or physical<sup>9</sup> wealth -- you know -- it's like who -- who feels comfortable in these spaces and who is -- who are these spaces being made for? And, I think that's where the police come into it where -- um -- you know -- and I think this is -- I recently heard that -- someone say -- like -- "Bloomberg views residents of New York City not as -- like -- citizens of the city, but as customers." And, when you think about it that way, it's like, "Whoa -- that makes so much sense" -- because he's try-- and he's -- and that he's heard before -- I've heard -- there's a quote where he said, "New York City is a luxury item -- it's not Wal-Mart."<sup>10</sup> Right? And so, it was just like -- if you go into -- like -- that

---

<sup>9</sup> By "physical wealth", I meant "material wealth".

<sup>10</sup> The quote was: "If New York City is a business, it isn't Wal-Mart -- it isn't trying to be the lowest-priced product in the market . . . It's a high-end product, maybe even a luxury product."  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/08/nyregion/mayor-says-new-york-is-worth-the-cost.html>>

mindset -- what -- what does that mean? Is that he's trying to make -- um -- New York City and Brooklyn -- um -- cater to rich folks -- safe for rich folks -- and so -- you see in these areas that are gentrifying -- people of color -- you'll -- mostly young -- black and brown men are being targeted, victimized, harassed, killed by the police. And -- and because white folks aren't affected by it, they -- most of them -- are -- are happy to -- to feel safe -- you know? But, it's at whose expense? Um -- and I think that was one of the issues with -- uh -- when we organi-- we were organizing around stop and frisk in Red Hook -- we were really trying to engage in issues like -- how do you respond to police violence? And people (chuckle) -- it was -- I mean it was always funny -- like -- you'd go to the -- we'd go to the precinct meetings and -- some of us thought that these were plants -- but -- they very mer-- it was very entirely likely that these were just real people where -- at the meeting -- they -- folks from Carroll Gardens would be like, "Thank you" -- like -- to the police chief and all this stuff for -- like -- getting the riff-raff out of my -- front of my store -- and like -- you know -- you got those kids that were -- you know -- dealing drugs in the hallway out of there -- like -- great -- great jobs -- like -- "You guys are awesome." And then, it would be like people from Red Hook -- and being like instances where police were just like -- violating and harassing young people and making them not feel safe to walk outside -- you've got people looking out the windows when their kids leave the house because they're afraid that they're going to be snatched up by the cops -- um -- and it was just like the -- the -- uh -- difference in attitudes towards the police was just so palpable -- where it was like -- and it -- you know -- I don't think necessarily unique to Brooklyn [15:00] -- um -- race and class in Brooklyn -- um -- yeah -- and I think -- I also think it's important -- I'm sort of interpreting this from my lens as somebody who is half black and half white, but the other part of this discussion is that race and class in Brooklyn -- obviously -- goes way -- way beyond that -- sort of -- binary -- um -- and -- I think there's a lot of work to be done in talking about how -- and -- you know -- a place like -- I -- I'm dating somebody who's in -- my girlfriend lives in -- in Bay Ridge -- and --

AMNA AHMAD: Um-hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: I had never really been around here before then -- but -- it's like --

it's so -- and I also have a -- a lot of friends in Sunset Park -- where it's like -- it's really cool -- Red Hook isn't -- isn't so much like this -- where it's like such an eclectic mix of people from all over the world -- um -- and I always think about -- like -- in what ways do people interact with one another -- in -- in -- both relationships and community with one another -- in -- in such a multiracial, multilingual -- lingual -- space -- you know? Um -- that's not something I can really speak to, but I think it's -- it's super interesting and pertinent for any discussion about race and class in Brooklyn -- for sure.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah -- so, we're living in the era of -- or during the tenure of -- a president who is of mixed race -- um -- so, is this something you would have expected growing up?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: No -- no -- not at all -- I think -- and I think that -- um -- (chuckle) from my experiences of race and -- you know -- through my high school and -- you know -- middle school and high school years of seeing like -- I wouldn't -- yeah -- I think it made me very cynical -- um -- and I would not have known -- definitely never expect-- actually -- I remember -- I was working (chuckle) -- I was working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art -- in the gift shop -- and there was this -- I was a temp there -- um -- and - - there was somebody else who was also a temp who was just working summer jobs there -- this person went to Georgetown and so -- they were -- like -- all up in the -- you know - - politics -- it's sort of party politics stuff -- and -- um -- this was -- this was 2000-- I think it was in 2006 -- wait -- no -- wait -- it was like -- 2000 -- must have been 2004 -- actually -- I don't -- I don't even remember -- but it --

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: It was after Barack Obama -- what -- it was sometime after Barack Obama gave the -- that speech -- um -- at the Democratic National Convention -- where it was sort of his debut --

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: You know. I didn't watch it -- so -- I didn't have him on my mind, but this person was like, "Barack Obama -- like 2008 -- he's going to win." I was -- like - - "You've got to be out of your mind -- there's no way."

AMNA AHMAD: (laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: I was -- like -- "This country is racist as hell -- there is no way he's

going to win -- like -- you're out of your mind.” And, I always think about that -- I was like -- oh -- she called it -- like -- damn -- like -- I did not see it coming. Um -- yes -- and I -- I actually went to the inauguration in 2000 -- 2008 -- or 2009 -- whenever.

AMNA AHMAD: So, what was the experience of the inauguration like?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- it was actually funny because (chuckle) -- I -- uh -- so Jen Chau connected me to -- um -- somebody who was giving -- who was making a documentary -- it was called -- um -- I think it was called *Generation O* -- and it never came out. So -- but -- it was a -- it was a documentary of -- where people of -- different multiracial people were given webcams -- not webcams -- it was like flip -- what do they call them? Flipcams? And to -- like -- document their [20:00] -- their different journeys to go to the inauguration and talking about what does it mean to be multiracial in this -- this era where we've got an interracial<sup>11</sup> president -- da -- da -- da. Um -- so -- that was just -- thought that was funny -- so -- I have a lot of funny videos from that --

AMNA AHMAD: (chuckle)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- experience -- that never went anywhere -- unfortunately the person who was going to make that -- um -- got -- had family issues -- um -- emergencies after that -- so -- then -- it just never happened. But, it was a cool experience -- because I got to -- a -- part of me being there was -- like -- meeting these other multiracial folks -- and like -- engaging in these conversations about race and other stuff. Um -- yeah -- I think -- you know -- my grandmother passed away in 2005 -- and I think one of the things I kept feeling was like -- man -- if only she had seen -- like -- this -- like -- if she had just waited out a couple more years to have seen this -- like -- that would have been pretty incredible. Um -- given what she had lived through in terms of -- like -- you know -- she never talk-- she never spoke about her experiences growing up in Virginia -- but --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh -- huh.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: It was the Jim Crow south -- so -- I'm sure it was crazy -- um -- so -- yeah -- it's just -- that was one of the things -- that was like -- ah -- I really wish they could have seen this -- um -- I think -- uh -- yeah -- it was like super emotional for me -- just -- I think because I was in -- in some ways -- um -- very cynical -- um -- that it was --

---

<sup>11</sup> I misspoke; I mean to say “multiracial”.



you know -- at Rutgers when we were like -- I think w-- yeah -- any -- a-almost as emotion was -- um -- being at Rutgers and the night of the election -- and -- um -- being around all these other people of color who -- just -- like -- whoa -- like -- I can't believe -- like -- none of -- like -- really imagined it. I mean -- um -- this is not too -- uh -- I don't intend for this to be -- sort of -- like -- any endorsement of any of his -- his policies in any way -- but -- um -- in that sense I am very cynical -- but -- uh -- but I think at that time -- it was -- yeah -- it was pretty -- pretty emotional and pretty -- like -- yeah -- I definitely felt hopeful for at least a brief moment (chuckle) -- yeah.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So, from speaking to you, I've gotten the sense that you have, not only a concern for the U.S. nationally, but you also seem to have a global conscience. So, what do you think are some of the most pressing social issues that the world faces now?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Oh -- goodness. Um -- I think that -- I mean -- I think that our -- the time we're living in now -- is sort of like -- we're seeing a con-- the sort of multiple crises facing us -- um -- that -- are very much -- um -- global in their scope. I think now that we live in a thoroughly globalized economy that is very -- it's sort of intricately woven from -- you know -- wraps around the globe -- like -- any -- the impacts are just -- so widespread now -- because it's all -- it's all connected and there's so much -- sort of -- consolidation and -- and -- I mean -- these -- like -- these corporations that rule the world -- you know? Um -- I think that -- you know -- and I think it's -- it's a buzzword that annoys me -- but -- I think the essence of it is like the issue of sustainability --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh-hum.

AMNA AHMAD: Um -- and it annoys me because it's -- like -- become totally meaningless -- but -- um -- and then -- you know -- although -- like [25:00] -- these are global phenomena -- I think a lot of it has to do with what happens in this country and that's why -- I personally -- every -- you know -- at some points I was like -- oh -- maybe I just don't want to live in the United States -- but, I think a lot of these issues -- like -- are -- originate from here -- in terms of -- like -- what is the paradigm that's -- that's driving a lot of what's happening and what are the institutions that have power that control these phenomena? And -- and -- this all is very -- sort of -- like abstract at the moment -- but -- um -- I think -- I mean -- we li-- you know -- I think -- for awhile -- my understanding of

social justice issues was framed in a -- sort of -- we -- people in the United States -- fighting for social justice because of these economic inequalities -- um -- the -- sort of the wealth of this country needs to be -- wealth and power need to be more equally distributed -- but then as I -- sort of -- dug deeper in those issues, it's like -- oh, man -- so much of the wealth of this country -- um -- come from the extraction of resources from places across the world. And so, if we -- people without resources and power in this country are asking for our fair share of the pie of the wealth and power, then -- but we're not questioning how that wealth is created -- then we're essentially asking for a fair share in the exploitation of people across the world. Um -- and so -- that's why -- I mean -- that's something I grapple with a lot -- in terms of where the contradictions of fighting for social justice in this country when -- we're on land that was stolen by native people -- and our way of life depends on the oil that is stolen from other people's countries and on the cheap labor and exploitation of -- of people working in sweatshops -- um -- and our -- I don't know -- you can go on and on, right? You know -- the food that we eat is -- or the food that our country produces -- like -- it's so cheap because it's subsidized and then that -- those subsidies -- like -- put small farmers across the world out of -- you know -- they can no longer subsist and then they have to go to cities and then sell their labor instead of being able to live off of the land that they were once doing -- and so -- I mean when you -- when you take -- sort of -- like -- uh -- whatever -- a million feet view of things then -- it's just -- um -- just like -- whoa -- and then when -- and then -- the fact that this -- our lifestyle -- like -- that we would need five planets to sustain -- if everyone were to have the lifestyle of people in the United States or at the same levels of consumption -- we would need five planets -- um -- to sustain that.\* And these are very -- like frightening, sobering things to think about -- um -- and so -- so -- I think that's like the -- the question of the day -- I don't think many people are asking it -- or many people in power are asking it -- because -- I think their -- their job essentially is -- is how can we make this existing system work? Um -- but -- the question -- but aren't willing to question -- like -- you know -- even entertain the possibility that this system isn't working and that we need other systems -- need another way of just existing on this planet and existing with one another if we want the human -- you know -- the (chuckle) human race to survive. And

so -- yeah -- it's just like heavy stuff. Um -- and it's -- and it's just -- and I think about myself -- you know -- and -- you know -- a lot of these issues I'm talking about -- I'm like -- alright this is what I'm talking about with -- with teenagers -- you know. Um -- and how -- or this is what I want to try to talk about with teenagers -- but -- a lot of it is just -- understandably like -- not interesting to [30:00] them.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: And I can totally get it -- like -- you know -- when I was a teenager -- I mean -- I think a part of what politicized me and made me start thinking globally was the Iraq War -- and -- um -- like -- questioning these -- like -- global systems of -- and what is the connection between these -- these wars that our country is -- is -- seems never ending -- that -- our involvement in seems never ending. But, what is the connection between all that and -- like -- social justice issues hap-- you know -- people's day-to-day survival -- um -- and well-being here -- um -- and those are difficult questions -- and -- even more difficult to get teenagers to be really excited or interested in.

(laughter)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: You know -- and I f-- from when I was a teenager there was no Facebook -- there was no Twitter or Pinterest or any of those things -- I am very grateful for that -- because I feel like -- it's now frying my brain now -- like -- engaging with social media, but -- like (chuckle) -- if I were a teenager -- it could have been worse.

AMNA AHMAD: So, are there any memories that stick out to you from your experiences speaking with these teenagers -- um -- maybe something that surprised you?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Yeah -- I think I see -- sometimes what I see is -- is -- and what I mostly try to disrupt -- you know -- I don't -- I don't hit 'em with any of that stuff that I was talking about --

AMNA AHMAD: (chuckle)

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- it's like -- it's like -- "Why did you just ruin my day, Corbin?" But -- um -- and I think -- in terms of pedagogically -- I like to just -- you know -- I have certain things that I want to talk to them about -- but, I also want to have discussions and dialogue with things that affect their day-to-day and make connections between that and some of these other issues of power and oppression and racism and --

um -- so -- for instance -- we talk -- you know -- some of them talk about police or the prison system --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh -- hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Um -- and relate that back to some of the core concepts we try to engage with -- um -- but -- uh -- I think one of the things that was interesting is that -- I'm trying to think how we got -- I don't remember what led up to this -- but we were talking about -- um -- don't remember -- but -- we were talking about something about colonialism and -- you know what it was? It was because -- I think -- maybe last year around 60% of the youth I was working with were Puerto Rican. And -- uh -- a lot of them didn't even know what Puerto Rico's status was -- like they didn't know if it was a state or what -- and they didn't know -- like -- a lot of -- sort of -- basic underst-- I mean -- they grew up here --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh -- hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: But -- um -- and so -- I was like -- "Let's talk a little bit about -- you know -- Puerto Rico." And, I found that when we started engaging in these discussions about -- like -- when I would be like -- "Who was there first and then who came and colonized it." Um -- and people started shutting down and being like, "I don't want to talk about this. Because it -- it -- it -- makes me sad and it makes me angry -- and -- um -- I just don't even want to -- I just don't even want to touch it" -- um -- which I understand -- but at the same time -- I think -- it goes back to that question of why there are so few black and Latino students at Stuyvesant -- if you don't understand or dig into the contextual, environmental, historical causes for these -- for present day situations -- then you are left to feed into what the dominant narrative is -- where it's like -- it's black -- it's people -- it's black and Latino people's fault that they're not in Stuyvesant -- it's -- you know -- Puerto Rico's fault that -- it was their destiny to become colonized into -- you know -- now depend on the United States for their -- um -- I don't know -- to maintain their well-being [35:00] -- you know -- um -- so -- I think it's important even the painful conversations to talk about -- um -- you know -- I have some youth that are undocumented and -- um -- trying to find ways to navigate those conversations without going too deep into painful or possibly traumatic experiences people have had -- but then

also connecting them. Many people don't understand that -- um -- I think what's important is that -- I think in this culture -- it's very -- it's so individualistic -- that people -- um -- always -- their perspective and framework is always about individuals and not as much on -- like -- institutions and systems that create our lived realities. Um -- and so -- that's -- that's mostly what I encourage folks to do -- or the youth to do -- um -- and I think -- you know -- that clicks with some and it takes a little bit longer with others. Um -- yeah --

AMNA AHMAD: So -- just imagine that someone 50 years from now was listening to your interview -- what do you hope that they'll get from your story? You know -- it's kind of a hard question -- so (chuckle) -- you can take your time.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: I think -- 50 years from now will be 2063 -- right?

AMNA AHMAD: Yep.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: So -- I think it will be interesting because it is my understanding that they've predicted that by 2050, the United States will no longer be a majority white --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh -- hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: -- country. Um -- so I think it will be interesting -- you know -- how will that -- those realities -- change people's understanding of race and racism and power and all those things -- um -- and things like multiracial identity -- like -- oh -- you know -- because race is definitely not a static concept -- it's changed in -- in -- over time in this country and in other places and -- so -- it might be interesting to see -- you know -- it might be there understanding of race might be completely through a different lens -- um -- and so I th-- yeah -- that's something that may be interesting for them to compare about what -- what was the reality of race at this point in time, but then contrast it to their understandings at that time. Um -- and I think -- I think our generation -- in some ways -- is sort of -- the point where -- it seems to me where -- multiracial identity is something that is becoming more -- um -- accepted or allowed to be part of the discourse in a way -- and is not -- sort of -- you know -- people aren't -- like -- pigeon-holed in one way or another -- you know -- I think partially because Barack Obama -- also because changes in the census and how people are allowed to identify on these forms and stuff like that. So -- and I think that's obviously had huge impacts on the way people understand race and --

yeah -- so maybe somebody will be like “I wonder what people were thinking about at this time when...” -- sort of -- the constructs of race are being flipped upside and -- maybe not flipped upside down -- but -- altered in some ways.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah -- so -- this has been such a wonderful interview. You’ve given so much information -- so I was wondering if you had anything that you wanted to add or that we -- any ground that we haven’t covered?

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: There is one thing that I sort of remembered and that I think is sort of relevant in terms of understanding my identify and stuff like that. But -- uh -- I remember (chuckle) [40:00] -- this was back in Bed-Stuy -- where we had dial-up internet and -- um -- I think I was (chuckle) -- I was like researching -- I don’t know -- it might have been after meeting Eva -- when she had the genealogy thing -- where I was -- like -- for some reason I was interested in finding out this information that I was -- like -- because my name Corbin -- is from a family name on my grandmother’s side -- um -- and so -- I remember -- I think I looked up -- I was -- like -- on the internet -- like -- Corbin -- Virginia -- or something. And, I eventually -- I don’t know where -- I eventually found that there was a -- this Corbin family that lived in -- I think it was Virginia or North Carolina or something. Um -- and I was like - whoa -- like -- this is -- these are the Corbins -- like -- and I remember showing it to my -- to my dad -- I mean like -- “Look at this stuff I found” -- like -- “These are the Corbins” -- like -- um -- but then realizing they were actually like -- uh -- a plantation-owning family --

AMNA AHMAD: Uh -- hum.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: And so -- and obviously like -- any family name on my mother’s side is going to likely be related to the people who owned them.

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: And so -- I was like -- OK -- um -- but then I was just like -- whoa - like -- my first name is the name of one of the families that owned my ancestors and I think that realization -- it took a while for that to sink in and be maybe like -- whoa -- like -- that’s kind of fucked up -- but -- um -- I also really like my name -- so -- um -- yeah -- so, I have a little contradiction. But -- like -- I don’t know -- that is -- you know -- the history of this country and my family -- and so -- I don’t think it does anyone good to ignore those things -- yeah.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah. Well -- um -- you've done a great job of not ignoring those things --

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: (chuckle)

AMNA AHMAD: -- especially today -- so -- um -- thank you so much for your interview and thank you for sharing your story. I really hope that people will take the time to get out of it what you wanted them too -- um -- so -- yeah -- I guess all we can do right now is thank you (chuckle).

CORBIN LAEDLEIN: Thank you -- I appreciate the opportunity.

AMNA AHMAD: Thanks.

**END OF FILE**