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Oral History Interview with Jasmine Mitchell
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.055
Interview conducted by Jeanmarie Theobalds on August 19th, 2013 in the West Village, Manhattan.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. My name is Jeanmarie Theobalds. I'm with Jasmine Mitchell for the Brooklyn Historical Society Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations. Today is August 19th, 2013. We are in the West Village of Manhattan, New York. Jasmine, could you please start by introducing yourself? Perhaps say your name, tell me when and where you were born.

JASMINE MITCHELL: OK. My name is Jasmine Mitchell and I was born in West Philadelphia on [date redacted for privacy]. And when I was two years old, my parents moved to Brooklyn, and I consider myself a Brooklynite, really, and grew up there until I was 14. Where -- then I went to boarding school and college, lived abroad for a little bit, and then eventually came back to New York in 2004.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. What part of Brooklyn did you live in?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I grew up in Park Slope. And my parents actually picked Park Slope on purpose for a number of reasons. My father decided he wanted to be an actor, so it was close to the subway, and they moved from Philadelphia so you could pursue this acting dream of his. And it was affordable, which was very important for a struggling actor. And most importantly for my parents, they thought that it would be a comfortable neighborhood to -- for an interracial couple and to raise multiracial children. So they researched a couple different neighborhoods, talked to a couple different friends, and decided on Park Slope for those specific reasons.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Want to tell me about your parents?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Sure. So my parents -- my mother's African American. She grew up in West Philly. And my father's -- well, for all intents and purposes, considers himself to be -- well, actually he wouldn't consider himself to be. My grandmother would consider them to be white, but there's a little bit of American Indian on that side. Her grandmother was American Indian. And he grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania,

which is now very suburban, but when he was growing up, there was a lot of farmland and he worked as a stablehand. And even when I was growing up and would visit, I remember going through lots of cornfields. Not as many Applebee's as there is now. And my parents actually met on the trolley in Philadelphia, where my mother was reading some art history book and, by each account, you know, my mother said that she hit on him, and my father says that -- I'm sorry, no. My mother says that he hit on her, and my father says that she flirted with him. Of course I believe my mother. I -- my father definitely started flirting with her. Yeah, so they kind of met randomly on the trolley and ended up getting married in -- at City Hall in Philadelphia. And then moved to New York, here, and -- first they describe it as being really difficult. My dad trying to be an actor. Would often drive a cab at night. My mother was selling Mary Kay cosmetics for a while and just trying to get income to put together, and then started substitute teaching, then eventually became a full-time teacher. And she's still a teacher now for middle school there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: In Brooklyn?

JASMINE MITCHELL: In Brooklyn. But my family eventually left Park Slope -- when was it? -- in 1999, because it got very expensive. Just really, really, really expensive. And we started to see droves of other families moving out as well because it was getting too expensive. Also, our landlord was horrible. I mean, using pretty -- tactics that I'm pretty sure were -- not even pretty sure -- they were illegal. You know, such as turning off the heat in the winter, letting in crack addicts. So just kind of making an unsafe environment and -- almost unbearable, so that people were ready to leave, even when she raised the rent. And we saw that happening to lots of different families in the neighborhood. So when I go back now to Park Slope, it feels kind of bittersweet, because it feels like a night-and-day different neighborhood from when I was growing up there. And as much as people talk about it being very diverse, it's -- wasn't the same kind of diversity that I felt like I was growing up with.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Tell me a little bit more about the diversity in [05:00] Park Slope. So this would be 80s, 90s?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Mm-hmm, 80s, 90s. Sure. So we lived on Seventh Avenue,

between Windsor Terrace and Prospect. And that was kind of a border neighborhood. It's funny, I met the director of the film The Squid and the Whale a couple of years ago, Noah Baumbach, at -- his film was fil-- was screening at BAM. So my friend, my Jewish friend, [Laurie Frumpkin] and I -- my oldest friend -- both went to this. We're excited about it. And he said, "Raise your hand if you actually, like, grew up in Brooklyn or are from here." So we raised our hand, and there was an older couple in the audience, and that was it. Everyone else, they're all transplants. So later, they were having this party at this place called Mo's in Fort Greene, and we go there and we introduce ourselves, saying that, "We really liked your film," and we start talking about Park Slope, and then I realize the Park Slope that he grew up in was very different than the side of Park Slope that I grew up in. So we were kind of joking about, "Yeah, you know how no one's apartment buzzers worked, so you would have to, like, scream to try to get someone's attention to get in through the door? And the police wouldn't ever come if there was a problem, but you could find them at Joe's Pizza." And, you know, all these different things, and he just looked at us like, what are you talking about? And I didn't -- and then I remembered, I did feel there was this stark divide, actually, between -- starting really at Ninth Street and Seventh Avenue in Park Slope. That was where it was, like, lawyers and doctors and mostly middle-upper-class white. Like, yuppie. And then when you started to get around to my neighborhood, it was a little different. It started to get very Latino, really around Prospect, 15th Street. And Windsor Place, though, was very Irish. And we kind of lived on the block that was Puerto Rican, Irish, and then us, where it was a mix of things, like a Chinese restaurant, a bodega, the Italian pizzeria, and you just saw everything go through there. So, you know, our apartment had -- let's see, we had the Japanese exotic dancer, who would smoke marijuana all hours. And I remember my father going downstairs and, you know, yelling at her and -- because she would practice her routines at three in the morning -- and saying, you know, "I have children that need to get up in the morning to go to school." We had the transvestites that would hold these big parties, you know, at the time, and, like, run up and down the stairs. We had a drummer for Tito Puente, who was also the super. We had this white yuppie couple. We had, before that, another super that was like this nice, you know, Puerto Rican family that

was there, too. And then there was my family. So it was just kind of a mix of different people at least on apartment building. But to me, that was kind of actually like a microcosm of Park Slope in general. Just, just really a mix of different people. Artists, like, activists, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers. Like, Irish, Puerto Rican, African American. We had some American Indian friends there. We're all kind of -- some jumbled together, and then sometimes separate --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- depending on the block that you were on.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. Well, the way you describe the Puerto Rican and the Irish block, were those kind of dividers or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um. I wouldn't say that there was no interaction, but I never really saw the Puerto Ricans going on the Windsor Place block, and the Irish Americans going on the Prospect Place block. Sometimes maybe all get in the same place if you were going to the -- there was a schoolyard where we played baseball. So sometimes you kind of saw that. But where you did see people come together, at least the kids, is I went to this elementary school, P.S. 107. So there you had some of the, like, Irish American kids that were from, like, the Windsor Terrace area, you had some of the Puerto Rican kids that were from, like, Fifth Avenue, from Prospect Place, that area, and then you also had a lot of the, like, white yuppie kids. And then you had everyone else. So then you had, like, some Jewish kids, you had some, like, Caribbean kids, you had some, like, Asian American students. And then you also had students -- because it was a relatively better public school -- that would try to get their children into that public school. So they weren't really from Park Slope, but, you know, for all intents and purposes, were, because it was a better option than what their own neighborhood school might be.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What memories do you have [10:00] on the block about the -- any...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Ah, yeah, there -- lot -- lots of memories on the block. Um. Well, let's see. We actually moved a couple of blocks down. So when first moved to New York, we were a little bit further down. I think we were on, like, Twelfth Street, and then we eventually moved, still on Seventh Avenue later, down closer to Windsor and Prospect.

Yeah, so a lot of -- you know, a lot of the memories were just really playing outside, which I also feel is different now whenever I go back. We played outside all the time. You know, and parents would let their kids play outside, which also seems different than now, because the idea of that -- if you did something wrong, someone was eventually going to find out. If you broke a window playing baseball or something, you know, no one -- and no one liked that their window was getting broken, and they might tell your parents about it, but it wasn't going to become a be-all and end-all. Spent a lot of time at the pizzeria, the little Italian pizzeria down there, and the bodega. But, you know, really we would go all around Park Slope. You know, so kind of traverse all those different -- a lot of different blocks. Especially as my mother was very social in the neighborhood, and I used to hate it in elementary school because I felt like it would take us an hour to walk, like, six blocks home, because, you know, she would just talk to everyone. And they were also -- my parents were pretty good about letting me loose, I guess. Like I could walk home, you know, from school, or take -- I used to take swim lessons at the Y and, you know, there was -- I could go back by myself. And by the time I was 11, I was going to junior high school in the Upper West Side, so I was taking the subway by myself. And so that brought me to, like, a whole different side of New York, where I'd seen before. My parents took me out all the time. But I was able to start exploring, like, other parts of Brooklyn and other parts of Manhattan by myself, because now I had this fancy new subway pass. So I feel like my parents were pretty good about letting me explore different sides of Park Slope. And I also got to see those different sides, where -- like, the bigger mansions that were on Seventh Avenue and Eighth Avenue. You know, OK, that's where the wealthier people live. Fifth Avenue, where you would often go during the day, and a lot of Latino residents there, and you could get lots of cheap clothes and good food there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What kind of food?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like -- oh, we used to get, like, lots of rice and beans all the time. Tons of rice and beans. I mean, that was good. And my brother actually jokes -- started speaking Spanish almost before he spoke English, even though we don't speak Spanish at home, because his babysitter was Puerto Rican. And we still joke that's where he gets his

favorite food, being rice and beans, from having, you know, that babysitter and just being in that environment. So he still will drive to Fifth Avenue to go get rice and beans at some places. And there used to be a place right on Flatbush that was kind of on Seventh Avenue that closed. That used to be our favorite rice and bean place. I can't remember what it was called, though.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, no, the one in the -- that's in the court -- not the one that's in the -- that's like -- was it -- it's a -- well, it's Flatbush, down from kind of St. -- up from St. Mark's Place towards Grand Army? It's like the last holdout in the neighborhood.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, what's the name?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It's like El -- I want to say El [Jaguar] or something.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I mean, it's the last holdout in the neighborhood.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It might have been that one.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It might have been that one. Now we go to -- it's like -- sometimes we go to this other place, El Viejo Yayo, but we like the place on Flatbush better. Yeah, that place was better. Oh. Yeah, so it's just -- um. It was just different. And then it was, it was funny. A couple years ago, I was with my father and we were walking, you know, back from Prospect Park, and that was a huge part of my growing up, too, was Prospect Park. Spent a lot of time there. And this -- a homeless man, you know, comes up to us and initially saying -- you know, he's going to ask for money or something. And then he kind of gives my father a pat on the back and says, "I recognize you guys." He says, "What?" And he's like, "Yeah, you guys are from the old neighborhood." And he was like, "I miss you guys." Yeah, it was just very different. He was like, "Yeah," he's like, "the neighborhood's so different now. Like, no one speaks to each other. Like, no one even sees me or acknowledges me." You know, and it took us a while to realize then -- he said, "Oh yeah, that used to be the guy who you saw sit out in front of, you know, the old apartment on 49, like in front of this wine store, and just, like, drink wine all day. Drunk." But it was kind of a funny -- you know, a funny moment there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That was fairly recently, like...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I want to say that was maybe like three years ago.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow, that's funny.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, it was pretty funny. It was pretty funny. Yeah. [15:00] You know, yeah, and Prospect Park, too, I think that was a big part of Park Slope as well for me. We'd spend a lot of time there. Because we had a black lab, so I'd go out and walk her all the time, and that's where I started running as well. So eventually in high school, I, I was on the cross-country team, so I would also go and train there, and, you know, go and train with my dog. And there you would kind of see the diversity of the neighborhood as well. So you would see, like, the Seventh Avenue side. Eventually you would see, like, Windsor Terrace, and then once you start getting more by the Parkside and Cortelyou Station, then it becomes, like, very West Indian and, like, steel drummers. And then you kind of come back and, you know, it becomes a little different. So you'd kind of also get this, you know, diversity within just by going to Prospect Park, that you would see there, too. So that was also kind of interesting and, and nice. And I think that had a big -- well, it's not even I think. I know that had a big effect on me growing up, in terms of having a certain kind of worldview that really is able to see and appreciate diversity.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: How did you feel that your family was received, if I may ask, in the -- in --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Sure, yeah. You know, sometimes it's a little hard to remember, because you're so young, right, when -- where you don't always necessarily perceive difference. I didn't know that -- I think my brother and I, especially growing up multiracial, I think sometimes didn't realize little differences of how people were treating us, and now I have picked up on some of it better now and say, “Oh,” you know, putting the two and two together. So I think that -- I remember growing up and a lot of -- sometimes people would ask if my mother was babysitting us, because we looked a little -- my mother's a lot darker than my brother and I. I also noticed a lot of people assumed that I was Puerto Rican. And it's interesting, too, would think that my brother was Puerto Rican, and he grew older, and he's a little -- he's a little bit darker than me and looks a

little bit more like my mother. We look very similar, but people would think that he was Dominican. So that's its own kind of interesting, like, slight nuance there. And so we also grew up where people would just start speaking to us in Spanish as well, because they just assumed that we were Puerto Rican or Dominican. Usually Puerto Rican. So that was a difference, you know, in how we were perceived. And I remember being upset, my brother and I being upset, when we realized we weren't Puerto Rican. You know, we would ask, like, "How come we don't speak Spanish at home?" and, like, different questions. And they would explain, "Well, we're not Puerto Rican." You know. Sometimes it took a while to realize that, because I would go to other people's houses, and, like, their families would assume I was Puerto Rican as well. You know, and we would dance, like, salsa and all these things, and I'd be very confused about, like, how come I wasn't doing that in, you know, my own house necessarily. You know, and my parents, though, didn't -- it's not that they ignored -- they didn't ignore race, but I think they tried to let my brother and I figure it out. So they never said to us either like, "Oh, this is what you are" or "This is how people are going to treat you." They just let us figure it out, really. I don't think it was until I was in junior high, actually, that I realized that -- well, let me say this. Like, New York has so much going on and so much, you know, so much different kind of diversity. But I remember being 11 and being made fun of for the first time that, you know, I acted just like a white girl, or talked like a white girl, and --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Can you describe the incident a little bit?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, sure. I started going to this wonderful junior high, you know, on the Upper West Side, and a lot of the students were coming from the Bronx. I mean, they came actually from all over. Like, the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn. And many of the students from the Bronx were -- a lot were, like, West Indian or African American. Some Latinos, and also, like, Asian Americans, especially from Queens as well. And I don't think I ever really thought about where do I fit, because growing up I would just be friends with everyone. So, in elementary school and growing up in Park Slope, I would hang out with Irish American kids, I would hang out with African American kids, I'd hang out with the Puerto Rican kids. I would kind of just hang out

with everyone.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And you mentioned your [20:00] best friend, Judy.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah, my best friend was Jewish. Yeah. So that was funny, too, because we would go over to -- I actually was at a Jewish wedding last night, and sometimes some of my friends joke that I am like an honorary Jewish person and more Jewish than, you know, than some of them, because I got really upset when they ran out of latkes, so we went to, like, go find latkes. And I have this weird thing about having, like, dairy and meat on the same table, and, and they're like, "What is that? You're not even Jewish." And like, we even -- when I got married, we had the Hora at our wedding, even though my husband and I aren't Jewish, but our friends just did it for us because I thought it would be fun. You know, so I think actually having her as my best friend growing up was a big influence. And her parents were Communists, they were Polish Communists. And since -- I realize now that I would be handing out Communist pamphlets on the street, and I had no idea that's what I was actually doing. You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Old-school Brooklyn.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, it was like very old-school Brooklyn. And they were kind of one of the last holdouts. Like, the rest of the neighborhood around them was, like, West Indian, because they lived on the other side of Flatbush. Like more -- past the botanical gardens. And so they were, yeah, these, like, radical, you know, Jewish Communists that were very into, you know, cooperation among everyone. And I would hang out there all the time. I didn't realize, like, people would come over, they'd have these meetings, we'd sing songs. I was like, oh, wow. Later -- now when I hear some of the songs, my friend and I joke, we're like, "Oh, wow, those were Communist songs." I had no idea I was basically learning Communist songs and doing, you know, Communist sing-a-long. Like, you know, instead of, like, pre-K or, you know, kindergarten kind of songs, I was singing Communist Manifesto-type songs. So, you know, it was kind of funny. And she would also come over to our house a lot, and she would always ask, like, why she couldn't have a Christmas tree. They eventually got her a Christmas tree. And her brother, you know, was also friends with a lot of other people in the neighborhood, her older brother, and he would ask his father -- I remember being in the car with them a lot -

- and say why can't they be Pentecostal, and Pentecostal people had so much fun and they were happy, and like, why couldn't you sing happy songs, you know, for once? So I think that would drive our respective parents a little bit crazy. But -- yeah, but it was a good thing.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: "Why can't we be Pentecostal?"

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, "Why can't we be Pentecostal?" But it was good. They were, like, very well-educated. Pretty radical. Like, now, looking back on it, I didn't realize that at the time. So I had her, yeah, and she was, you know, one of my really good friends. And I was friends with some of the other, I guess, like white yuppie-type kids in the neighborhood, some that were better-off, and then also some of the, like, Irish American kids that were really not very well-off. So they -- there was almost like a different kind of whiteness there in, in that neighborhood, and even within that school. So there was kind of like this privileged whiteness, and then there was also this very, like, working-class, blue-collar whiteness as well. And, you know, they would hang out with the -- like a lot of the Puerto Rican kids as well there, too. So I just didn't -- I just didn't know. And so when I went to junior high, I remember some of the girls -- you know, because girls can be mean -- would make fun of me and say --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What? Girls can be mean?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Can be awful. Girls can be awful. Say, "Well, you know, gosh, like, why are you so happy all the time and so smiley?" And, you know, I was a little bit of a weird kid. I loved studying, but I also loved sports. And being outside of your neighborhood then, sometimes you become a little bit of a fish out of water. So in elementary school, I remember I could be, like, one of the really smart kids that everyone wanted to be paired up for their homework or some school project, but everyone also wanted on their team for dodgeball or -- I was also on, like, the track team there, and -- so you could kind of have it both ways and be a little bit quirky. And there, you know, people would say, "Well, why do you like ice hockey?" and -- because I also played ice hockey in Brooklyn as well, too, at the, the Wollman Rink, both my brother and I did. Which is interesting in itself. I played on a boys team because...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What was the name of the team?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I can't remember, actually. It was kind of like a Mighty Ducks type of scenario, though, where, like, people would have, like, pad -- like magazines on and that kind of thing. And there was this ice skating instructor -- his name was Aaron -- who -- a lot of the kids would just go and skate around the ice rink, and then he would approach some of the parents and said, "Well, what do you think about starting a hockey team?" And so my brother started that, and then I got kind of jealous and said, "Well, I want to do that, too." And he was on a younger team, because he's six years younger than me. And Aaron thought that was a great idea, and my parents said OK. So I played on this boys team when I was 11. But they also had a women's team, where everyone was like in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. So I played [25:00] on both teams. So -- because I was 11, so I couldn't -- you know, would just play on both. Especially for the boys team, you know, everyone's growing at different speeds and heights, so it wasn't that big of a deal that, you know, I was a girl on their team. So, you know, things like that. And I played a lot of softball, and we'd go and see my grandfather, who lived in Central Pennsylvania, so I also liked country music there, which I didn't realize was really not cool for -- when you're from Brooklyn. You're not supposed to like country music and do that kind of thing, so I would talk about how Dolly Parton's cool, and I liked this song. And, wow, I would just get really made fun of. And had no idea that that was what, what people liked. I just, I just didn't know. And I didn't really quite understand. So I remember there was one night that I was getting made fun of really badly, and I just came into my parents' room and, you know, was crying and was like, "Why is everyone making fun of me?" and "What does it mean to talk like a white person or like a white girl?" You know, I just didn't understand. So the principal later called me into his office. And he's wonderful. I'm still good friends with him, Brother Brian. He's this very old-school, like Irish American brother who's fantastic, who's really devoted to working with, you know, all kinds of kids, all kinds of families. And, you know, basically just told me to be myself. And that really stuck with me, that people were going to make fun of me, and it's just because they have their -- it was not my issue, it was really their issue. And I didn't have to be perfect. I was always trying to be perfect. And that also I would put on -- he knew me really well even then -- a facade of where I was always trying to be happy,

but it was OK to sometimes be upset or be emotional or not have everything be, you know, okie-dokie all the time. So that was really great. So I kind of took that, and I had, you know, already made some friends there in sixth grade. And then I guess I became friends with some of the other misfits, you know, in the school. Like one of my still really good friends -- we met in sixth grade. She's still my great friend and, like, gave a toast at my wedding, and she was one of the, like, Nigerian misfits that everyone would make fun of because they said she looked like this character, Sheneneh, from Martin, who -- you know, she would have these, like, braids and, like, bright-colored pants, so people would make fun of her.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I was Whoopi Goldberg.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: In The Color Purple.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Kids just can be mean. And then I think I got -- it got a little bit better, even though I didn't want it to get better that way, of -- I mean, I just started, yeah, just being myself a little bit more. And then -- I didn't want it to be that way, because especially in my junior high, you weren't allowed to date -- and I never did date Brother Brian, so don't worry. But some of the other sixth-grade boys decided that I was pretty cool, so a lot would try to send me Valentine's notes and, you know, different things like that. And so then the girls decided that maybe I was OK, because I was getting attention from some of the --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Now is this a mixed --

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- from the boys.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- race of girls group kind of bag or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: The school was a mixed race of girls. Yeah, had, like girls from, from all over. But the girls, I have to say, who were mostly making fun of me were mostly the black girls in there. And, you know, I think I also just didn't -- I was also different from, I think, what a lot of them had seen in their own neighborhood, so they didn't understand a girl that was sort of black, or thought who's black but just liked country music and looked like me and... I then made friends with one of the other white girls in the school, who was from the Upper West Side, who also liked hockey, and we would hang out a lot

together and we were very tomboyish. I also think part of it, too, was I was very tomboyish, too, so I didn't like to, like, wear skirts, and I'd wear pants almost every day, and -- so yeah, that was a little bit of it, too. You know, so I eventually made friends with her, and then my seventh grade was totally different than -- you know, then I had lots of friends and a new crop of students came in. And then by eighth grade, there was -- the junior high was a little bit different. You actually voted for your valedictorian and salutatorian, and it was supposed to be based on the school's values. On academics and also, like, who best espoused, like, the school's values of community and, like, brotherhood and sisterhood. So by eighth grade, I actually ended up being, like, voted salutatorian. So, you know, something turned out right there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And I think it was really from just learning to, yeah, just be myself and be a little quirky and, yeah, you know, show other people how to line dance to "Achy Breaky Heart." And I was also in that stage where I started listening to grunge music and started to like Nirvana, so I'd hang out with those kids. But then would also go [30:00] and, like, do the Running Man, and like the Cabbage Patch. So tried to, like, navigate all these different sets of people. And I also had a thing where I would try to sit -- I'd sit with my group of friends, but I'd also try to go around and sit with different groups of people. You know, which --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Why was that?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I did that even when in college. I would just -- I don't know, just -- maybe I just get a little bit bored. Maybe -- you know, I don't know if it's boredom. Just interest -- just interest. Yeah, just wanted to see, like, what was this group of people like? And so try to get in, like, on their conversations and hang out with them for a little bit. Not every day, but, you know, I'd kind of rotate around. Yeah, and I think that actually, now that I think about it, followed me, yeah, all the way until college, where I would just -- sometimes I would plan to eat with a certain group of friends, and sometimes I would just show up in the dining hall and -- it wasn't someone like I had never met before, but I would just go over and say, "Hey," like, you know, "Is anyone sitting here eating? OK. Awesome." And maybe sit with people who I mostly didn't

know. But usually there was like one person that I knew. So I think that did -- you know, that kind of awkward stage where I really didn't fit in actually ended up helping, now that I think about it, later on with that. And by the time I got to boarding school -- you know that was really different in itself, because that was its own kind of culture shock in its own way.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Can you tell us where you went to boarding school? And also, just for -- just so that we know, what high school did you go to? What middle school?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, sure. So I went to junior high at De La Salle Academy on the Upper West Side, on 97th and Amsterdam. And through that junior high school -- that junior high school sent a lot of its graduates to different boarding schools and independent schools. Some Catholic schools and then some of the schools like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science. And then I also got into a program called the [Albert T. Oliver] Program, which would recruit and place African American and Latino students in independent day and boarding schools. And so the way that worked is that you interviewed with different admissions officers, and my admissions officer that ended up interviewing for the Oliver Program ended up being one of the head admissions officers for Andover, Bobby Edwards, who is fantastic. Fantastic. And I wish he was still there. And we had a great time. We were talking about, like, Jell-O, and, you know, all kinds of things. I think I just didn't necessarily have that -- I was a little self-conscious in junior high, but not that much. So I think in some ways, I was a little bit lucky that I would just say what I thought. And he ended up recommending me for Andover in Massachusetts. And I loved the school and it was a great experience, but it was definitely an adjustment, because you're away from home -- and actually, that part wasn't hard. It wasn't hard being away from home. And I loved it in the sense of being with people from all over the world, and I still have so many of them as my friends. But I remember, for example, my second day there, I was with this one student, a white, blonde student from Saddle River, New Jersey, and I had a Swiss Army knife on me. Because, I don't know, I was still, like, in that tomboyish phase, and family used to go fishing and hiking and all that kind of thing, so I would just -- I don't know, I just had it on me. And she asked, "Oh, you know, is that for getting into gang fights?" No, it's for being outdoorsy in case you need

something. It's just handy. You know, it's anything from, like, a nail file to cutting something. And she said, "You know, you're the first black person I've ever met." And that was just kind of a shocker, too, like, how have you never met another black person, you know, growing up in the Tri-state area? That just kind of blew my mind, too. But she was serious. And I think -- that made me feel lucky, too, for living in a neighborhood where you did -- where you were forced, at least, to interact with people that were different from you on some level, you know, every day. And I realized, wow, there's different areas of the country where you really don't have to do that. You know, so that -- so that was -- but it ended up being a good experience, and I had a lot of friends from -- a lot of Asian American friends who I'm still friends with to this day and hang out with. We'll hang out with -- actually later tonight, probably. Different African American friends from -- but not just from New York, too. Some were from Atlanta, and some were from California, different parts of the country. I was friends with a lot of international students. One of my really good friends freshman year was, you know, Irish/Italian American from right outside of Boston, [35:00] who was really working-class, and I would hang out with her family all the time. And then my best friend to this day was -- her family's from Ireland and she was actually born in Ireland. I went to her wedding -- was the maid of honor at her wedding in March, actually, and -- you know, so you kind of have these, like, odd couples there. And my roommate for four year-- no, three years there -- and you can choose your roommate after your freshman year, but we just stuck together -- was -- she had emigrated from China when she was seven.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And we were very different from each other. You know, she was very type-A, would read romance novels. Brilliant. Still one of the most brilliant people I ever met. And her parents would come over every weekend and do her dorm duties for her so she could focus on studying. Just really intense. We were very different. I was like the messiest person that you could possibly meet. Hated things like romance novels. Would make fun of her. You know, we'd make fun of each other a lot. So I think that experience at boarding school was also really fundamental for me as well in just being able to, like, navigate among lots of different kinds of groups with -- you know, with

somewhat ease. Yeah, somewhat ease. Although there was always, I think, somewhat of a class divide as well, too, with -- I was never super, super chummy, even in college, with the really wealthy white girls. You know, I felt like that always was a little bit different. So I was maybe friends with the really, really wealthy Hong Kong girls, but not with the super, super wealthy, white, Park Avenue girls.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Why?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know... I just felt like we didn't necessarily speak to each other, and I almost felt invisible. And actually, I can almost still say that. You know, to this day. Like I felt like -- I didn't realize that when -- by the time I got to boarding school, all these families already knew each other, you know, and had already vacationed with each other. They, they were part of a different subset of New York, or Connecticut, or, you know, wherever they were from, that they'd already gone to camps together, or their families had, you know, gone to Andover two generations before and knew each other. So I felt like they had their own little set. And then there was also like the cool group. I mean, it wasn't I never spoke to them, and I was kind of friendly with some of them, but I knew that I could never actually be in that circle. So I wasn't going to try, and I wasn't even really interested in trying. It was just I didn't think it seemed that interesting. You know, and there was also the set there, too, that they're kind of like the rebellious, like, white girls and white boys, I would say, that would go and, like, smoke pot and, like, try to drink off-campus. And I knew that this was my one shot, so I wasn't going to mess it up, which was very different. Yeah, I just didn't want to mess it up. I was terrified of getting kicked out, whereas I knew, for them, if they get kicked out, they're going to get -- they're going to go to some other boarding school. You know. And I'm still upset to this day that I got in the same amount of trouble as this one student, who will go nameless, who literally burned down a bakery in downtown Andover, because she was smoking and left the cigarettes there, as -- we got in the same amount of trouble as I did because we had this parietal system where you're allowed to have, like, male visitors. And we actually had signed my friend in the parietal system, so we were trying to do the right thing, but he had overstayed and we didn't realize it was past the time. And it was very innocent. You know, there were lots of other people there. And one of the assistant

dorm counselors decided to make a show of it. So I got in trouble, and, like, I wasn't allowed to have visitors for a week or two weeks or something, and had to, like, be in room confinement. But I was upset that -- I was like, wow, we got in the same amount of trouble. She burned down a bakery, and I had someone overstay half-an-hour in the parietal system. This seems very unfair.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yes, it does.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It seems very unfair. You know, and little things, too, like when there was a -- something stolen from the dorm. I realize now, looking back, they would call down all the scholarship kids, too. And it actually was never one of the scholarship kids that stole it, because you have too much to lose. You know, it was usually one of them. Or one of, like, you know, the rich kids that's trying to rebel, you know, in their own way. So, um. You know, but I actually think that part of that living in Park Slope and kind of navigating among these different groups was actually useful as well for boarding school, because even though I was a little bit more conscious of the time, I in some ways didn't have that boundary of, oh, I'm not supposed to be in this group, or I'm not supposed to talk here, or I should stay with these kind of people. I just didn't realize.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Now, on break, between breaks, you would go back home to Park Slope?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And did that create a divide for you with your friends, or were you just [40:00] happy to see your friends, or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um. By the time I would go back for breaks -- trying to think. I definitely lost touch with people from the neighborhood. You know, it was just -- it was just different. I kept in touch with my one really good Jewish friend. I'm still in touch with her to this day. She moved to Chicago, but we'll email or I'll see her if I'm in town. But other people I didn't really hang out with anymore, or maybe I would see around the neighborhood, but by that time people were starting to move out. And then if you lived on the block, you would see, oh, people were starting to get pregnant. You know, just -- you saw people's lives start to diverge. And also by that time, I think, too, by the time I got to the end of junior high, I did start to realize that I didn't necessarily fit in completely

with some of the different neighborhood groups. Like specifically the Irish American group there. Because I think when you're younger, there wasn't so much of a divide between like, oh, they're white and you're not. But by the time I got to, like, junior high -- because my brother and I also played in a lot of the sports leagues there, so there was kind of the, like, white baseball team, like white softball team, and then there was kind of like the black and Latino teams. By the time I got to junior high, you kind of realized like, oh, that team is like this, this team is like that. I'm still a guest on the white team, which was like the 70th precinct but I didn't feel like the other girls, really, and think I started to notice that a little bit as I started to get a little bit older.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And then on breaks, though, most of the time I would just hang out with my friends from junior high school, and we would just hang out all over the city, really. So mostly in Manhattan, actually, because that was the easiest point for people to get to. And then I did have a very good friend who also went to Andover with me. He was Dominican, and he lived kind of by Ocean Parkway. So sometimes we would hang out in, like Park Slope or he'd pick me up and we'd go to, like, Sheepshead Bay. But mostly we would go into Manhattan, and actually the Village, where we live now, because, for us, that was the place where you could just kind of be yourself. So you could be -- you could be anyone. And especially for some of my friends who were, you know, coming out, you know, even at that age, that was the place -- or had -- didn't, you know, fit in completely into what their family's idea of what, like, a good girl or, you know, a good boy was supposed to be. This was a place that you could just hang out, you know, and do anything. And actually, I do see a bit of a difference with that now, I think. You know, you still do see a lot of, like, African American and Latino, like, youth in this neighborhood, and especially gay youth. But it doesn't feel the same way that it used to. It feels much more, like, policed and like, "Move on. Keep moving on, keep moving on" than -- whereas before, you could just kind of hang out. So. You know, so that -- so that was different. And then, yeah, I guess when I came back for breaks, I would mostly go into Manhattan, hang out some in Brooklyn, especially if my -- you know, with some of my friends who I'd stay in contact. And then just spend a lot of time in the park. Just -- I

spent, like, hours and hours in the park, sometimes like five hours in the park, just, like, running, take a break. Would just watch people, like people-watch. You know, throughout that time. And I -- I guess I didn't come back. My parents eventually moved to Old Mill Basin when they got pushed out, and from there, I just didn't feel any connection with that neighborhood.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It just felt very different and -- and by that time, I was almost going to college. I was like a senior. So it didn't even feel, like, worth it to try to make friends there. And it also just felt kind of foreign to me. I hadn't even heard of the neighborhood until my parents moved there. I remember playing softball in some of the fields around there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What neighborhood is it?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, it's called Old Mill Basin. It's right by Kings Plaza Mall. But at the time we moved there, it was much less diverse. Much less diverse. And I remember my parents being, you know, like the first black family on the block, or like really in the neighborhood. And that's its own thing, too, because that was -- I wasn't really there for most of that adjustment, but I know that was kind of uncomfortable for them at times. And I think especially for my brother, where he made a lot of friends in the neighborhood, but I feel like we had very different experiences growing [45:00] up. Because, you know, that neighborhood, it was -- it was mostly white. This was like Italian American, like Russians and Ukrainians moving in. Much more insular. Much, much more insular. So, you know, he had stories where -- you know, he eventually made lots of friends in that neighborhood -- but, you know, being chased down the block, you know, by --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Your brother?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, with, you know, some of the other, like, black kids and such, because people didn't like that people who looked so different were coming into the neighborhood. You know, so now it's -- now it's different, because there's a lot more West Indian families moving in, but there's still a lot of -- at least like the stories that I hear from, like, my mother who teaches in that neighborhood, you know,

it's much more, like, racially tense because there's just a lot of families that look different from, like, the original, you know, family standbys, into that neighborhood.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And that was just so different than growing up in Park Slope, where, yeah, there were, like, racial divides, but I don't remember anyone being, like, chased down the block or people not talking to each other, necessarily. And it didn't feel so insular -- maybe because even, you know, in junior high, I was like going into the city, and like different parts of the neighborhood. Could walk around. And I think just having some of that diversity with these different pockets in the neighborhood, it just -- it just felt like a completely different kind of navigation system there. So, yeah, I felt very -- I guess you would say, like, free, you know, in a sense. Not to say that you always felt completely safe. You know, there was always people who were afraid of, like, getting jumped.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Park Slope is still pretty dicey into the 90s.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. So, you know, sometimes had a little bit of fear of, like, getting jumped because other people in my junior high -- they lived in different neighborhoods, but -- we had a dress code at my school, so you weren't allowed to wear jeans. You weren't allowed to wear sneakers. So I especially felt bad for the boys, because a lot of the boys in different neighborhoods, especially in the Bronx, they would get jumped, you know, all the time. I would feel bad. But the school was very much into, like, if you want to be -- you know, that it's about self-respect and showing up to school, and thinking of school as, you know, being professional, and going in with that kind of attitude. So, yeah, I remember one time, this group of Puerto Rican girls tried to jump me as well. And, you know, that was a time where it was a little scary, because that was when -- what was going on, there was a lot of the --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The box cutters?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, the box cutters, where they try to, like, slice your face and, you know, that whole kind of thing.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So -- and you would see people in the neighborhood sometimes that would have, you know, slices on their cheek. You're like, oh man, they got jumped. So, you know, sometimes there's a little bit of that, because since I'd walk by and -- I think because I was going to the school, I wasn't hanging out with people in the neighborhood, and I was also, yeah, a little bit different, they would say, "Oh," you know, "you think you're cute. Oh yeah, you think -- you know, because you have good hair, and you think you're this, and you think you're all that." And I was like, actually I don't think I'm all that. Actually, I have lots of insecurities, if you only knew. You know. But people would assume things, and they'd say, "Oh," you know, like, "I saw my boyfriend look at you" and "You're trying to get with my man. I'm going to cut you." You know, so -- I still haven't told my parents this, actually. There was one time the -- they were waiting for me when I got outside of the subway, and I was taking, like, tennis lessons, and like, you know, was going to hockey practice and all kinds of stuff at that time. So I kind of just, like, beat off people with like a hockey stick. Literally.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Really? You were physically...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Well, I mean, I didn't even know -- I don't actually even know if I hit anyone, because it was just like a blur, but I was just like -- you know, maybe you just start waving it around.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You created space.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You create space, yeah. Like, I don't think -- I wasn't, like, getting on the ground with anyone, you know, but you just create space. Just like any way you can.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But yeah, I mean, there was some of that going on, where you also developed a sense of who to avoid. Like, you know, cross the street here. It wasn't -- it wasn't all, like, kumbaya, you know, all the time with different types of groups, and sometimes there was definitely tension. You know, especially girls -- girls can be mean, too. Girls, girls can be completely mean. You know, and sometimes like different kinds of mis-recognition as well. Like I remember one time we went to summer camp, and

there was this one girl who was in this Puerto Rican gang, and I didn't realize until later, she was trying to get me to be in the gang as well. I had no idea. And like, they would wear these different kinds of rosary beads. And I got saved because she assumed I was Puerto Rican, but once she learned I was not Puerto Rican, it was like, oh, you can't be in this. And I was really relieved. I was like, oh, I didn't realize that she [50:00] wanted to...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What did she do?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Hmm?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What did she do? She just, like, followed you around or kept inviting you places?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, she would just talk about -- well, this was at summer camp, so we're in the boonies, but she kept talking about how, like, we were going to hang out, and then I was going to hang out with her girls and that I could be in their group, and like -- then, like, I had to wear these colors. I didn't really understand, you know. And then I started to put it together and was like, oh, she wants to put me in a gang. Oh no! Like, or -- maybe it's not even like a violent gang, but it's just something I don't want to be a part of. You know, I just -- I don't want to be part of that mean girl clique at all. And I don't want to wear rosary beads, and I'm not even Puerto Rican. Which saved me, you know, which is good, so. You know, sometimes there was that kind of mis-recognition as -- you know, as well, throughout that process. And now when I go to the neighborhood, sometimes you'll run into people. Like, I'll run into people my age and -- that I know from elementary school, and we'll kind of look at each other, say, “Oh, did you go, did you go?” And actually, you know what, I went to a wedding last month, like, yeah, end of July, and it's funny, because this one person from my elementary school actually ended up going to college with me and recognized me in college. We were trying out for an improv troupe. And he said, “Did you go to P.S. 107?” I said, “Yeah, I did.” And he's like, “Yeah, you look exactly the same.” I was like, wow. Yeah, I guess I do look exactly the same. So he's actually friends with one of my friends in college, and now friends with my husband and such. And we were kind of sitting there at the wedding, talking about some things at our elementary school and some of the, like, different

dynamics in the neighborhood. You know, and there were some things that were pretty racialized that I didn't realize at the time that I talked about with him, and then also, you know, a couple of years ago I was talking about with my Jewish friend, Laurie, where we had something called the penthouse at our school, where it was the top floor. And everyone knew there was tracking. We didn't know that -- we didn't know what the word was for tracking --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- but everyone knew, like, oh, this is where the smarter kids are, and, like, this is where, you know, where that is. And then we also realized, we're like, wow, most of the kids who were in the penthouse were, like, the white kids. Not all.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But most. And then the kids who were below, who were not in the penthouse, you know, were mostly like the, the black kids and Latino kids, and then like the, like, real working-class, blue-collar Irish kids. Not all. You know, there's definitely movement between. But looking back, it's like, wow that was really messed-up. They called it the penthouse. You got all kinds of privileges that you could do. You know, like you could kind of walk around, like you had -- there was just much less restrictions, and everyone knew it because everyone wanted to be in the penthouse. Like from -- you knew from like second grade on, like, I hope one day I'm going to be in the penthouse, because that's the cool space. And they had fourth grade and fifth grade on the same -- on the same level, so it was an open classroom with both. Yeah, and you knew that the other classrooms were much less fun, much more restricted. You weren't necessarily going on as many field trips. You weren't going to have so many circle times. You weren't going to have, like, dance practice and, you know, fun things. You weren't going to have hall passes, where you could just kind of walk around. You weren't going to be able to watch TV in the principal's office. You know, things like that. Yeah, things I was like, wow, I can't believe that that was actually going on. You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But it was kind of like an incentive program, they kind of envisioned it, or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I have no idea. I think -- maybe it was an incentive

program. There was definitely tracking. Everyone knew, like, this is the better third-grade class, this is the lesser third-grade class. And depending on what class you were in, you might make fun of each other a little bit, too. And, you know, the lower-class, the ones who were, like, often in trouble more or, like, had restrictions, they didn't go on school trips as much. But, you know, looking back, noticing, I was like, oh, those were mostly -- like this -- like working-class students and students of color that were mostly in that. But at the time, you didn't necessarily realize it. And I was in the penthouse. I thought it was all good. I didn't even notice that. And my -- all my friends were in the penthouse. I didn't have friends that were in, you know, the other kinds of tracking that was going on. Because you're tracked pretty early on as well. So, yeah. So that was different, too. And actually, like, you know, looking back on it, you also realize, like, those students that were not in the penthouse were also the ones later, I noticed, that were pregnant by the time they were teenagers and -- you know, just a different space.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Different space.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Right. I always kind of wonder about those programs, whether or not -- because the penthouse, you have a certain motivational support, you know, outside, in a lot of instances. And the ones in the not -- you know, if energies were applied to them like that, would that have -- you know, rather than segment -- segment -- [55:00] segmenting them away,

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. I don't know. I mean, it's, it's hard -- I'm definitely a product of tracking.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Right. Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: (inaudible) see how it works. But then it also just seems so early to make those kind of decisions about students that -- you know, other -- I still see, see some people from the neighborhood once in a while. Like, one of my friends from elementary school, like his father founded Brooklyn Beer, you know. He's doing just fine. You know, that family. And his mother was the art teacher at our elementary school. And my

other friend, you know, Laurie Frumpkin, she went on to college. My other friend, [Tracy Buddhu], they were from Trinidad, but like ethnically Indian, you know, went on to college as well. Like, Victor was an Asian American kid. Goes on to college. But maybe it's just because I don't -- I don't notice.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But, like, I notice more of those students were more -- or at least seemed more, like, college-bound, right, than -- at least, at least being able to run into them later. But honestly, I haven't run into other people, you know, from the neighborhood for years, and I don't know if it's just their families moved, or I'm not there, so I just don't run into people around the same circles. You know, could be all kinds of reasons for that as well. So. But by the time I moved back, I guess in 2004, I ended up moving to Fort Greene. Just Park Slope felt so different. And I actually have a lot of friends that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Tell me how Park Slope felt different.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah, it felt so different. Because, well, one, some of my good friends live in Park Slope. And -- or have lived in Park Slope. And the way they talk about it -- it's actually a little tense for me. I feel I'm getting a little bit better about it, but I think I was really bitter for a while. And still a little bit somewhat. That I still feel like it was my neighborhood that was kind of taken away. And even when I talk with -- you know, run into other people, like I ran into Billy Potter, right, whose father was, like, one of the founders at Brooklyn Beer, he's like -- you know, so he's relatively privileged. He's like, "Yeah, you know, it" -- he's like, "It sucks. Everyone moved away." And his family still has a house there. But our families worked so hard to build this neighborhood to be a desirable neighborhood to live in in the first place, and then most people had to leave to make room for the people who they made it a desirable neighborhood for. You know, so now a lot of my friends, like, they move there because they're having babies and they like the strollers, and they'll tell me about the neighborhood. I'm like, "Yeah, I actually grew up there, so I can tell you something about it and how it used to be." Yeah, I have a bunch of friends that, like, live on Fifth Avenue. Some, some of my husband's and I friends have actually bought property there, so they own condos on Fifth Avenue.

Fourth Avenue is like night and day. I remember I wasn't allowed to go there. When I was going to move there, I guess in 2004, my parents were kind of horrified. I ended up moving to Fort Greene and they were kind of -- they were OK with that. But I was like, "Oh, I'm thinking to Fourth Avenue. You know, the rent's cheaper and, you know, I think it's fine." They're like, "You can't move there." Like, "That's where Gowanus projects are, and, like, there's all this prostitution, and like there's crime. And it's awful, you can't move there."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, now it's like these big, you know, highrises with pools on top and -- so it's very jarring to, to see that. And yeah, it does make me often bitter. On my block that I grew up on, there was like a Baby Bird where there's clothes that are more expensive than, you know, what I would usually buy for myself, and Jacques Torres Chocolate, and it just feels so different. So, so different. And almost a kind of willful naivety, I would say, as well, I think, by -- I'm even calling out some of my friends there that don't seem to want to know about the -- what the neighborhood was like and feel very entitled to it. And it's a cycle. Like, I don't know we can actually change that. And when I moved into Fort Greene, I was like, well, yeah, I'm also -- my mom would joke, she's like, "Oh yeah, you're one of those, like, buppies that, you know, going to hang out here and hang out there." And I would justify it, "Well, yeah, at least I'm from Brooklyn, so I'm coming back and..." You know, but it's a cycle that's, that's kind of difficult. But I just -- I feel especially with Park Slope, even more so than other neighborhoods, there hasn't been any kind of awareness, or even attempt of awareness, of what the neighborhood used to be like.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Why would that be important to you, for them to know what the neighborhood used to be like?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I think to have some kind of grounding of what steps were taken to enable the neighborhood for it to be what it is now. And I see that happening, for example, a little bit in Fort Greene, but I -- well, actually a lot, yeah. Now I need to go back. [1:00:00] I'm like, what are all these people doing here? And I feel bad sometimes, they're like -- but, you know, some of my first senses sometimes are like, "What are all

these white people doing here?" And then I remember a couple of years ago -- actually, it was kind of funny, too. I was going on a job interview in the South Bronx and I saw these, like, white hipsters on the train.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: In the South Bronx?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, in the South Bronx.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: SoBo?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, SoBro, yes. That's what I learned. I didn't know that was the name --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: SoBro. Oh!

JASMINE MITCHELL: I didn't know that was the name for it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, gosh.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And I feel really embarrassed now, because I'm like, wow, that was really presumptuous, and that made me sound like a jerk, but I kind of went up to them and said, "Are you guys lost? Like, do you need some directions or help?" Because I was kind of worried, you know. I was like, oh man, like, they're going to get jumped. Like, I would jump you. You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You're going to get your ass whooped!

JASMINE MITCHELL: They're like, "No, no, no, we live here. It's SoBro." I was like, SoBro? Oh, excuse me. You know, I didn't know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (inaudible) go home now, please.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. And you know, you see that in a lot of neighborhoods. Like, I think two years ago, I was going to do work in this cafe, and I got off at 110th Street in Harlem and walked up to -- like, I think it was like 117th Street, to go meet this friend in this cafe. And I realized I'd only seen one black person the entire walk up, and in the cafe there's not a single black person in there. And it just dawned on me. Wow. And I had worked for a little bit at the Museum of the City of New York. And, you know, it was going through a transition then, I guess, when I worked there, from like 2005 to 2007. But this was just a whole new wow. I didn't think there was a time where I could go to Harlem and not see black people, because that's what you think of when you think of Harlem. You think of African American culture. I think for me, a little bit was

also Fort Greene, I also thought of, in some ways, in that way. And then now I also have a number of friends that have moved in there, talk to me about how great it is all the time, when they actually didn't want to visit me a couple of years ago because, you know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And you let them come over, didn't you? It's your fault.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I did let them come over. I would have -- I had too many cool house parties. What can I say? I had too many cool house parties, and they saw that it was OK, that they were not going to get robbed and it was fine. And -- yeah. And now they're like, "Oh, you know, I love this new bar, blah, blah. It's such a shame, you know, Brooklyn's getting so expensive. People are going to have to move to Queens." And it just kind of makes me sick to my stomach. Just like, ugh. You know, but I don't know what necessarily you do about that. But at least I feel, like in Fort Greene, even, it's changed so much, but I feel like more of the people in Fort Greene own their houses compared to Park Slope. At least the neighborhood that we were in. Most of the people I know there -- some of the, like, Irish Americans in Windsor Terrace own their houses, but most of the people I know, unless they were kind of, like, you know, the wealthy doctors and lawyers, or wealthier at least, own their houses. Other people didn't. So I feel like that whole section and that whole history has really been wiped out, when, looking back on it -- and again, I have a child's vision of it, but looking back, it was actually, I think, really such an interesting place to grow up, where, you know, you had the Koreans, you had Irish Americans. I had -- my father was friends with a couple of people in the -- what was it called? -- the American Indian -- I'm forgetting the name. There's an American Indian center that was here in Manhattan. But he had some friends from the neighborhood that lived in Park Slope, you know, from there as well. And it just seemed -- yeah, just very different. So now when people talk about it being diverse, you know, I feel like, oh, it's diverse because, like, someone went to Vassar and, like, the other person went to Brown. But it's not actually that diverse in terms of -- like, racially and ethnically diverse, but it also doesn't feel class-diverse at all, whereas, in that neighborhood, yeah, you had these divides, but you did encounter -- you know, it was possible to have someone that was on welfare be in the same -- or whose parents were on welfare -- be in the same classroom as someone whose parents were lawyers. And maybe

there's some of that today, but it doesn't seem like it. It just doesn't seem like that at all. But it also seemed like some of the residents, you know, work to support that kind of diversity as well. And it doesn't feel that way to me anymore, at least when I go and visit. I'll admit, like, there's part of me that actually would love to move back to Park Slope, because it feels like this reclaiming, you know, of space. And it's a great neighborhood. You know, I do like the neighborhood. My parents always wish they could move back, that they could afford a place back there. It's really nice living by the park. You know, that's fantastic. But I do have this weird sense of feeling like an insider, but also feeling very alienated from, from the neighborhood as well, because it's not the kind of Brooklyn that I know. And I talk about this all the time with a lot of my friends, and finally one of my friends said, [1:05:00] you know, "You're always looking for a nostalgia that doesn't exist anymore." And that was really true. That kind of resonated with me. "You're always looking for something." And my husband and I have always -- you know, we're talking about moving and I'm trying to convince him to move to Brooklyn. And I'm like, "Oh, we can't move there. I don't like that neighborhood anymore. I can't move there." And so I keep asking, like, "Where's the next Fort Greene? Like, where, where is there Fort Greene?" They're like, "That doesn't exist, Jasmine. Like, that, that doesn't exist." You know, where...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. That would be [ProCro].

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, maybe. Yeah, and even that -- like we have, you know, a friend who is a former venture capitalist, who lives in San Francisco, who's, you know, closing in on a house in Crown Heights, even though she lives in San Francisco, because she's thinking of it as like an investment property. You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where in Crown Heights?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I'm not quite sure where in Crown Heights she is, but she's, you know, trying to get this, like, four-bedroom place, and we're like, mm, OK. But you start to see that kind of happen. And for me, that's different, too. You know, there were also certain neighborhoods that I didn't necessarily go to. I went to Crown Heights and it's a little bit -- to go to track practice when I was in junior high, but I never really felt comfortable there. And it was also because I remember hearing about the

Crown Heights riots, you know, growing up. And I would go -- I loved to go to the Grand Army Plaza library. So I would spend, like, hours there, you know, on Saturdays, and I could go by myself. My parents were fine with that. I would just walk to the library and, you know -- it was before cell phones and stuff to say "All right, I'm going to spend a couple of hours there and then I'll come back." And then there was a time when the riots started to happen, they were like, "You can't go there anymore. Just wait a couple weeks." And, you know, I got this sense like I don't quite know what's going on there, but something bad is going on there. By the time I got to junior high, sometimes I would go through that neighborhood and also go through Bed-Stuy, because we had track practice at -- what was it? -- Boys and Girls High School.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Bed-Stuy is the new Fort Greene, just so you know.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Well, yeah, it -- starting to see that, too, when I was living in Fort Greene --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Stuyvesant Heights, actually.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, is that what they call it?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, with all the old brownstones.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh. Yeah, there's also all these new neighborhoods, too, like South Park Slope. I'm like, no, that's Sunset Park. Like, I don't know what you're talking -- like, don't try to make it sound cooler than it actually is.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's the people from out of town that they do it to. We had some -- I had some friends that moved from out of town. They're like, "Yeah, South Slope." (inaudible) I'm like, "You're in Sunset Park." They're like, "Oh."

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, like, yeah, that doesn't (inaudible).

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They did end up moving in closer.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Closer from there?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So, yeah, I know, we'll see. Yeah, so there were certain neighborhoods that I didn't necessarily go to either during that time. Like Crown Heights like a little bit, or like Bed-Stuy a little bit, like just to get to practice, but it felt much

more tense than it did in Park Slope.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, for example, where I felt like, oh, I could walk around and like, yeah, like maybe I don't look like everyone in that group, but because there's so much diversity, you could kind of be -- it's not so obvious, like I don't belong here. Whereas when I go to Crown Heights, it's like, I don't belong here. I don't belong here. You know, I very much got that sense. Where it wasn't necessarily like that in other neighborhoods, like Park Slope or when my parents would take me to Fort Greene and we'd go to BAM, or my dad was friends with some, like, jazz artists and such there. Like, I didn't feel like I don't belong there. And even my dad, who's white, didn't feel like, I don't belong here either, necessarily either. And we actually know some -- hmm?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Go ahead.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, and my parents are friends, actually, with some other interracial couples there that also decided, actually, instead of Park Slope, on Fort Greene, specifically for that reason, where they knew it was majority an African American neighborhood, but it wasn't "You don't belong here and cannot be here" kind of neighborhood.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, Fort Greene always seemed to have kind of the reputation as the -- kind of the multiracial. If you were a mixed couple --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- that's where you would -- it was a safe place to be.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And my parents go to the -- actually, the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: There, too, which -- and that's interesting, actually, in itself. My parents like that church for lots of reasons. My mother's actually an elder there at the church. And my father, you know, was not religious and kind of came to it later, but he really appreciated, like, the openness of the church and it being very tolerant. And even inside the church, there are paintings of people that are supposed to be like everyday Brooklynites. So it's supposed to be very much like a people's church. And when we

started going to that church, it was really diverse. And you know, it still is, but now you go back, it's much -- each time, it's whiter and whiter and whiter and whiter and whiter and whiter. You know, it was always very multiracial, but it's just -- the shade is just getting lighter, like, each [1:10:00] year that we go there. But it still feels, you know, very racially-mixed and tolerant, at least compared to many other neighborhoods there. And, you know, I also liked Fort Greene, moving back there, you know, after college and living in Brazil for a little bit, because I also felt very comfortable there. You know, so I didn't feel like it was -- I was going to encounter like the mean girl kind of, "You're not black enough" kind of dynamic that I had a little bit in junior high and elsewhere. So felt very comfortable having, you know, lots of different sets of friends. Spent a lot of time at Mo's, because I lived right across the street from, you know, from Mo's there. And also it felt comfortable bringing in different people that were visiting. You know, so if I had some French friends visiting, it wasn't like, oh, they can't come to Mo's because that might look weird. You know, it was kind of like anyone can come to Mo's. My dad would meet me at Mo's. It's fine. Anyone can go there. And even that -- like I went into Mo's, like, earlier this summer, and I was like, what happened? It feels very different. What happened?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Changed owners.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, it changed owners. OK. I'm like, what happened here? It feels...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. Yeah, it -- the people who own Maggie Brown --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The pi-- kind of the restaurant pioneer --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- of Fort Greene, and Pequena's.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, OK.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Pequena is still owned by the same, but there was some lease dispute --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Ah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- with Mo's, so they decided to keep the name, but they lost

the spirit.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, that's too bad.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Because it's funny, when I talk to actually other people who lived in Fort Greene, too, and who don't live there anymore, so they might live in New Jersey, or they might live in like other parts of Brooklyn -- or I've even run into people abroad who said, "Oh yeah, I used to live in Fort Greene, too, Lafayette," and they were like, "Yeah, I used to hang out at Mo's," and like, "Mo's was the spot." And it was this kind of like buppie place, but not necessarily all buppie. You know, it wasn't exclusively buppie that could be there. And now it just feels -- it just feels very different. So...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Describe, like, how you keep saying "different."

JASMINE MITCHELL: I don't know. It's just this -- it's the spirit that feels very different. Like I remember going in there, and sometimes, you know, it was a Friday or Saturday night, and it was mostly black, but not all, and there were a lot of artists. Like, musicians, singers, lawyers. Like, accountants. Kind of just everyone. And I also started playing capoeira, which is a Brazilian kind of like martial arts/dance --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, where did you play?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Terrible at. Hmm?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where did you play?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, it was actually this gym, Crunch Gym. Right, it became a Crunch. And there was this one instructor from Brazil who actually opened up his own studio, (inaudible) -- what is it called? -- (inaudible) Brazil. It's fantastic. So it's him and his wife, who's actually from South Africa. She's white and from South Africa, and they --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Ana.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Hmm?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Ana.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Ana, yeah. Ana.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I trained with her.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, you train with her?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: OK.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: She's from (inaudible). Yeah, I --

JASMINE MITCHELL: OK.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They're very nice.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Really, really nice. I haven't seen them, actually, like in years, since I kind of moved away.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Haven't seen them in years. Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But super nice. So they had a class there, and then they also opened up their studio in Flatbush. And sometimes after, you know after practice, I'd go and hang out with, you know, some of the people who were often, like -- there was this one, like, black/white biracial guy. We kind of bonded. Another -- a black guy from South Carolina. Another white guy from Park Slope. So we would talk a lot about, like, how Park Slope was so different, and he would joke that his father, who's, you know, this very liberal Quaker, would say very inappropriate things, like, "You know, I can't walk down the neighborhood without, like, you know, being -- you know, running into, like, strollers and lesbians. It's driving me crazy." You know, like -- just like, ah. You know. So --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And that's in a nice way.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, in a nice way, but just like this, oh, things are so different. Hang out with him, and then this one other, like, Korean American student, and we would all go to Mo's. And you know, you could be kind of, like, slightly sweaty, like in your capoeira gear, or at least -- you know, at least in, like, loose pants, and just have a beer. You know, play some karaoke. And just felt very mellow, like anyone can be there. And I don't quite -- I don't quite know how to put my finger on it -- and honestly, because I don't even really go there anymore, because I just don't feel the vibe. It just feels much more restricted there. And less friendly. I lived across the street, so there were times where, like, I would forget my keys, or if it was really late at night, I would go into Mo's and say, "Hey, can you just -- can you just make sure that I get into my -- in

my building?" [1:15:00] And they would come outside and, you know, I'd give them the thumbs-up and say, "OK, got into my building OK, so, you know, all right, great, thanks." And I just don't feel like I could do that anymore.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It just -- and actually, I think that's actually somewhat in general, actually, what happened to Park Slope, too. Just this kind of community vibe of, you know, anyone can be here. Not that there's not tension, not that there's not factions, but... When I moved to Fort Greene, in our neighborhood, I started to talk to our neighbors downstairs, and, you know, they were fine. It was this kind of, like, you know, white yuppie couple, and they were very nice. And then I would try to talk to other people that would move in. They would treat me like I was a sort of freak, you know. And that weirded me out. It was like, wow, like in -- where I grew up in Park Slope in Brooklyn, I know you talk to your -- you just talk to your neighbors. You just, you go and you introduce yourself, or you say hi when you pass each other on the street. And I feel like that happened to Park Slope in general. You know, when I talk to my friends who live there, I'm like, "Oh, don't you, like, know people around here?" They're like, "No. No, why would I?" And I feel that way somewhat in the Village. Um.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But the Village was supposed to be anonymous.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But it's supposed -- exactly. It was supposed to be anonymous. And there's some people that -- like in this -- most of the people in the building are...not my favorite people. A lot of snide girls that give a nasty look. But, like, you know, I talk to -- there's very -- this elderly Puerto Rican gentleman who lives like right across from us, and he's really nice, and he picks up our mail for us when we're, you know, on vacation, and I talk to, like, the people at the dry cleaners and some of the restaurants and stuff. They know our names. But I don't necessarily say hi to everyone I see on the street, which is what I remember -- and maybe this is part of my nostalgia that gives, you know, rose-colored glasses. I remember more in Park Slope -- not that you talk to everyone in the street, but you would just at least acknowledge each other. And in Fort Greene -- I liked living in Fort Greene then because it felt like it had a little bit more of that. Not with everyone, but, you know, like the clean-- the laundromat next door, I

could leave my laundry there. It was this, like, Persian family that had it, and I would talk to the two sons a lot. They would hold my FedEx stuff for me. They can -- I can pay them later. You know, that kind of thing. And that felt a little bit more like Park Slope. There was also a guy who always had his boom-box, who listened to Whitney Houston every day. Like, you know, on blast. And, you know, and you could kind of talk to him, too, and he'd ask how your day is. Like, I don't know his name, but, you know, you were just kind of friendly with each other. And then when he saw me, like, packing up boxes and stuff, he was like, "Are you moving?" He's like, "No, you have to stay in Brooklyn. Why are you moving?" Whereas when I talk with people in Park Slope, it just -- the Park Slope now, and granted I don't live there, so maybe it is different in certain blocks -- it just doesn't even feel like that exists at all. You know, like I helped my friend move about a month ago, and I said, "Well, what are you going to miss?" And she's like, "Well, I guess I'll miss, you know, some of my mommy group." Like, you know, one of the, like, Park Slope mom groups or something. But that's it. And I was like, oh, wow. Whereas when my family left Park Slope, granted I was in my senior year of boarding school, it felt very traumatic. I mean, that's also, like, you know, as a child, but I think it was also kind of traumatic for my parents as well, because they had made real ties. And granted they had lived there much longer than -- you know, Park Slope is much more transient with, you know, with younger people. But it, it feels like people just kind of keep to their own a little bit more, which I think is really a shame, really. And just feels very different than, you know, when I was growing up, where it was much more, you know, community, and like even sometimes when I talked to like some of the mothers and stuff, I was like, "I think it's OK. Like, you can let your" -- maybe it's just different, like, "You can let your kids outside." And when I tell some people that I used to ride the subway by myself when I was 11, they're just, like, absolutely horrified. They're like, "Oh my God, that's so dangerous" and like, "Can't believe your parents let you do that." And I was like, well, I didn't -- I wasn't going to get in trouble. Like yeah, we did some stupid things --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, like you would jump the turnstile, and, like, go to

certain neighborhoods that, like, you weren't supposed to. But just New York feels, in general, different. Like my father worked on the Lower East Side for years. Years and years and years. And that was its, you know, its own thing. And he actually ended up getting transferred to East Harlem, because he worked for the Boys Club of New York, and he had worked for years for Henry Street Settlement. And they actually ended up not closing the Alphabet City location, but moving his program to East Harlem. Which is actually too bad, because there are boys who are coming from all over, that it's much harder for them if they're coming from Brooklyn, for example, to, like, get all the way to East Harlem.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But they felt --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Plus, the Lower East Side still has a...

JASMINE MITCHELL: Exactly.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Still has a need.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It still has a need. That's what my father was trying to, you know, argue, but he lost that argument.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. He got blocked by the, the big skyscraper.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, the big [1:20:00] skyscrapers, and like the, you know, fancy juice bars that are across the street from him, and the gyrotonic studio that's on his block at the Boys Club of New York. But just -- you know that Lower East Side just -- that's an extreme level, but feels in some ways like what had kind of happened to Park Slope. You know, because I felt comfortable also going to the Lower East Side, and I was also able to walk there around by myself. It was not dangerous, and you had, you know, some of the Puerto Ricans, you had some of the Hassidic Jews. You know, it was just different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: My mom had been there since the 50s.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Your what?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: My mom. She grew up here. She grew -- she -- that was her place to go shopping.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, oh yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And she, she went to high school around there, too --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- so she -- that was her old -- when I said I was hanging out there, she's like, "Oh, really? Huh. Let's go look at some shoes." True story.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. No, no, it's true. And like, you know, what was that street? Orchard Street.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yup.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Like, you know, there was a lot of, a lot of things there. It still blows my mind when I go there and it's like some cool restaurant or -- I think a couple of years ago, I went -- I think it was like 2004. I went and I was dating this guy who worked for Bacardi, and he was -- you know, had to be there to, like, promote Bacardi or something and said, "OK, come to the club." And I got there, and there was a velvet rope and a little red carpet, and I'm like, what? We're in the Lower East Side. I don't understand. Why is this even happening? And, yeah, and then I remember graduating from college and, like, running into some people and saying, "Oh yeah, I live here now," and going to their apartment. It's like, wow, this is like Disney World. It's like Disney World for, like, 23-year-olds here. And it's Alphabet City. You know, whereas I remember I could go around the Lower East Side, but I was not allowed to go to Alphabet City. I was not allowed to go there. I remember one time I went there and my father was so angry at me. Because I went to, you know, go see a friend who lived around there, and he said, "You're not" -- you know, like, "You can go most places, but you're not allowed to go there." Because --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I don't --

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, that was when, like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It was Alphabet City.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, it was Alphabet City.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It's not even called Alphabet City anymore. If you say Alphabet City, people will look at you.

JASMINE MITCHELL: What is it called?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The, the East Side.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, just the East Side?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The East Village. The East Village.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It's called just East Village now. If you say Alphabet City, there's people who will look at you, go, "Where's that?" You're like [gasps].

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. (inaudible) Because that was when there was crack and --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh yeah, it was like the den of inequities.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, it was not good. Not good --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Not that that's what you want.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. And that's the hard balance, right? So -- because then I talk with some people, like my husband. He's from Kansas. He's a conservative. Which is pretty funny, because my dad is, like, you know, the arch opposite, and he's like, "Wow, like I'm dating" -- his father calls me a pinko. In jest. You know, in jest, but still. You know, pretty different. You know, and some of our friends, who are kind of like that Park Avenue crowd -- now I am friends with actually some of those people, you know, now, who I don't think I would have been friends with before. Not the girls, the guys. And they all talked about, like, how great Giuliani was, and Bloomberg was, whereas I'm just like, wow, like Giuliani -- maybe he was great for some neighborhoods, whereas I remember it just being really bad. Like, really bad. And my brother still gets stopped, actually, with --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Stop and frisk?

JASMINE MITCHELL: The stop-and-frisk thing, yeah. I remember he first told me about that a couple of years ago. He was a teenager, and I was like, "Oh, Ben," like, "that happens." Like, "Just keep your arms up. Just stop. Don't argue." And now he knows the drill. You know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- and he'd stop, but, yeah, he's just like, "Yeah, like, I went to boarding school. You know, like some preppy boarding school where you're required to wear blazers and stuff, and I'm getting stopped, you know, because I'm in the" --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, did your brother follow the same kind of trajectory?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, he went to a different boarding school.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But yeah, actually very similar. Yeah, very similar trajectory. So he actually -- he actually went to boarding school when he was 12 or 13. So actually a little bit younger than me. He went to junior boarding school and then ended up going to boarding school for high school in Connecticut. That was actually even preppier, and all boys, than Andover, where it was actually much more -- not relaxed, because it was a very stressful academic environment --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Is it relaxed?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Not relaxed, but -- like there's no dress code. It was much more -- you had to be much more independent and self-focused there. So there were no study hours. They just trust that you're going to handle on your own. So it's actually very much -- it's -- you could say more relaxed, but it's much more sink-or-swim. So either you're going to do well or you're going to fail out.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Kind of one or the other.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So yeah, you know, so there was that going on, and, you know, Bloomberg, who I have mixed feelings about. But at the same time, it's not that I want it to be back where -- you know, one of my memories of my building in Park Slope was there was a crack addict who had -- like, lit her -- you know, she lit herself on fire, like right in the foyer of our --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh my God.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- um --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You saw this?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah, yeah, I saw this. Yeah. You know, so it's sometimes things like that that you don't actually realize are traumatic. But I think it just becomes almost naturalized, that it's just -- it's just what it is. So, you know, it was kind of scary, and we called the cops. They didn't come, of course, because they wouldn't come to that part of Park Slope. But you always [1:25:00] knew to get them whenever there was a problem. You would go and get them at the pizzeria that was next door. So -- because

that's where they would hang out. So we would go -- we got them from the pizzeria, and, they --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: So you had to walk past her and go to the pizzeria?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. You know, and there was -- there was that kind of stuff, where you would see -- yeah, you would see things that were bad. You would see domestic violence, sometimes, that was out on the street, and you would -- you know, someone would get the cops out or something. So it wasn't completely idyllic. Sometimes my father would get into -- now, you know, looking back on it, realizing, oh, that could have been actually a kind of dangerous situation. But he's the kind of person where, if he sees a fight or sees something that's going on, he'll try to stop it. You know, whereas -- and actually, that's something different now, too. I feel like that doesn't happen as much.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Because someone's going to pull out a gun.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Exactly. Someone's going to pull out a gun. Whereas there, I didn't -- it didn't feel like someone was going to pull out a gun. Maybe that person was going to hit you. You know, so I remember he stopped like one domestic violence fight, where this guy was like beating his wife. You know, and that guy hated my dad, you know, from, like, then on. But I don't -- you -- I don't think my dad thought he was going to pull out a gun or -- and he's also just that kind of person. For good and for worse, my brother is also a little bit that way, too. Like he'll stop a fight. But it just feels much more dangerous now. And actually, in, in the neighborhood they live in now, there was a fight where -- there's this one guy on our block who's very strange, and sometimes we're like, "Something doesn't seem right about him." Like, just -- something seems very sketchy. We don't know if it's like drugs or what. Like, just seems sketchy. No one really talks to him. He just kind of, like, sits out there. And he saw this one guy just beating him up, and my father jumped in, and now this guy -- you know, he kind of will give my dad a thumbs-up or kind of smile at him. You know, that's all you can really do, because he basically kind of saved this guy, you know, from being beat up. But now it's

like, wow, like he could have been shot or --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, something could have happened. And I guess that still could always happen. And as soon as I see my brother do the same thing, I'm like, "Oh, Ben, like, just, like be careful about" -- he's very loyal, so he'll kind of jump into any fight or try to get people to stop fighting. And it's like, "You have to be really careful." And even I will -- my husband will even say that about me, even though I'm very tiny. But he's like, "Don't say anything." And that's really hard for me. Actually, I remember -- I think actually one of the worst things of violence I've ever seen, it was actually right in front here, on Sixth Avenue, right in front of the West Fourth Street Station. And I've never seen anything like that, where these group of teenage boys were just beating this woman. Like, just, like, kicking her to the ground, like beating her face. And it was in the mid-- you know, it was crowded. It was like the middle of day, and no one did a single thing. And I was just like, I've got to help her. I've got to call the police, I've got to help her. And everyone was just like, "No," like, "He's going to beat you up." You know. And we actually later found out that she had tried to stop a fight and had gotten kind of in the middle and said, "No, stop fighting," and then it -- and she was just a -- they didn't know her. You know, just a lone person. And then they just started beating her up.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They both turned on her?

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, not both. Just this one group. It was just like a group of teenage boys. And then they just walked around in the subway, because no one wanted to touch them or say stop. You know, like, I don't know what happened with -- in the end. They probably never got caught.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I don't know why no one called 911.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I think, like, they were trying to start calling 911, but I think we were just like also kind of in --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- shock. You know, of like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- wow. You know, and so that also just feels different, too, where I can't imagine having seen that earlier -- yeah, maybe you would see things where, like, someone would break into a car window and everyone just walks by. Because, you know, it's a car. Like, it's not worth getting --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- over that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And not to say that there wasn't violence. My dad, I remember, one night had come home late, and this was before cell phones, and he was stood up at gunpoint in Park Slope --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- there, and they just said, you know, "Do not look back." He didn't look back. He didn't argue with them saying, "Do not look back." He didn't look back. You know, and he also (inaudible) -- this was like during -- actually, it turned out later, Giuliani was the prosecutor who got these -- got these police officers, but he was part of the scam where this one female police officer would accuse people of, like, molesting her or assaulting her, when actually it wasn't true, so they could bring up their arrest records. Yeah, it was crazy. This was, like -- it was like late 80s, like early 90s. And my dad was actually part of that, where he was accused of that. And, you know, it was fine. Like later --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: How?

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- it got thrown out. Hmm?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: How? He -- just wrong place, wrong time?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Wrong place, wrong time. Yeah. Wrong place, wrong time. And he actually realized it wasn't just him. Like, this was a pattern, because it was part of a scheme to get their, you know, arrest numbers up. And Giuliani actually ended up being the prosecutor to put away those two corrupt cops [1:30:00] that were running this. So it's kind of -- you know, and then he later became the mayor. So it's not necessarily that he -- I mean, my father was grateful for Giuliani in that sense, but didn't necessarily, you know, make him want to be mayor later. But, um. You know, so there were -- so I

wouldn't say, like, it was perfect. You know, there were bad crime things like that that would happen, and people would -- I remember our car -- we had a car, and so I remember growing up and people would steal our battery, and we knew exactly who it was. So my dad would go and demand our car battery back. And they would say, "Well, no, you have to pay this price." And he's like, "Well, no, because you stole it. Like, I can see that's my battery right here." Like, and he would just come and take it. You know, and then they didn't say anything, because what are they going to do? You know, things like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yes.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- like little things like that. Or I remember, like -- one of my early memories was actually a break-in as well in our apartment building, where -- and I tell this to people now. They're like, "Wow, that's, that's crazy." Like, "How are you not super traumatized?" And it is actually probably why I always want to lock the doors a lot, and my old roommate in Fort Greene used to make fun of me because I used to, like, sleep by a broom -- like with a broom by my bed, just in case there was an intruder. So that probably did have an effect on me. But I was young enough to still be in footies, or, you know, like those onesies. And I remember this guy coming in and having a conversation with him and offering him cookies. My mother and I had just made cookies, like, earlier that day. And then later, it turns out he had robbed our apartment. And my parents were horrified, because they're like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: He snuck into the apartment?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, he snuck into the apartment --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And you saw him?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, I saw him, but I was too young to really understand that this wasn't right.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So I don't remember -- you know, I was too young. I don't remember what the conversation was about, but I do remember -- like, it's one of those flash images that you have. I do remember, like, seeing him and having this, like, jar of cookies, these cookies laid out. And then the thing that I was very upset about the next

day was he ate almost all the cookies, or ate -- maybe not all, but like a bunch of the cookies, and I said he could have one. You know, and that's what I was really upset about, not the fact that he had stolen all this stuff.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But your parents came in eventually or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: No. No, no, no --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It was just you and him?

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was just me and him. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: At night?

JASMINE MITCHELL: At night, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And your parents were just asleep?

JASMINE MITCHELL: They were just asleep.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh my goodness.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, so they were horrified. But I was too young to realize that that was actually really scary. You know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- I didn't know. I was still in onesies. You know, and, and actually the guy who did it ended up -- he lived in our apartment building.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. Oh, so you recognized him?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I don't know. You know, I don't remember.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Probably.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Probably. I don't know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Probably.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But he lived in our apartment building, and he was a drug addict, actually, as well, and he would do -- like, he was stealing, like, baby clothes, like baby money, from, like, his own sister.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And my mother eventually had to go to court to testify, you know, against him. And, you know, I remember later, when he eventually got out, he was -- you know, we'd see him in the neighborhood and be like, “Uh, let's cross the street.” It made her a little nervous. So not to paint, like, Park Slope as like, oh, everything was great,

and like everyone got along, and like there was nothing ever to worry about. There was. So it's hard to balance like that not wanting those drugs, like that -- especially because I really feel like so much of it was the drug influence. That feels a lot -- I'm not saying completely better, but feels different now. You know, the drug influence and the crime and just some of that general, like, insecurity, with some of that spirit of community that I felt like Park Slope really did have. So it's how do you balance that without having neighborhoods be completely gentrified and lose their character. Because I feel like more and more neighborhoods just -- they all seem the same to me.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I thought one of the th-- one of the ways that you described Park Slope I thought was interesting, I'd like to hear you talk more about that, is like the naivety that you feel is there now.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Mm-hmm.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: As opposed to what you described growing up.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Mm-hmm.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Talk about more of that sense of -- that sense of naivety in, in that area, and how is that translating?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, honestly, I think it's a lot of white entitlement, really. Most of the people -- not all, but most of my friends who have moved in there are white, with good jobs, that come from upper-class families, even though they don't realize that they come from upper-class families. You know, or they -- I mean, middle-class has become so meaningless. You know, everyone's middle-class. But I was like, if you could pay to go to private college, like an Ivy League college or a place like Williams, where I went to college, and -- at the time, it was like 30-something thousand dollars a year -- I don't think you're middle-class -- and you were not on financial aid. I don't think you're middle-class. So it seems -- and a lot of them will come, sometimes, with, like, [1:35:00] Brooklyn T-shirts and such, and they get a little upset with me because I kind of joke, "Oh, you can't wear that yet." They're like, "Well, when do I get to deserve to wear it?" I'm like, "I don't know. When you're committed."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Almost like a 10-year rule for New Yorkers.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I think maybe. They're like, "Well, your dad didn't grow up here,

so he's not a New Yorker." I'm like, "Yeah, I don't know, but he's been here long enough."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: He's a Brooklynite.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I was like, "He's been here long enough." And he's kind of been through, like -- you know, he's committed to, like, when it's not so good. You know, he didn't -- he didn't move out. Because what I do see now, actually, is a lot of those same people -- yes, some will buy condos, but a lot of time, people, like, they're ready to move to the suburbs as well, so I also see a lot of my friends -- like a mass exodus to Jersey or moving to other cities where it's cheaper and -- I mean, it's great that people care about their families. It's not that I'm anti-baby. That's fantastic. But it just seems so -- you know what it really seem-- it seems so individualistic, the neighborhood, and really kind of narcissistic. And all about, like, how great it is that, like, we're organic, and how great it is that we're part of this community, but not actually --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You don't know your neighbor's name.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, you don't know your neighbor's name. And, like, maybe that's great that they create their own little communities within that. Like, there's the mommy groups and, like, I don't know, the organic groups, and like the Park Slope Co-Op and -- like, that's fantastic. But it doesn't really feel to me like a move to try to get to know anyone else that's different from them. And even when people know that I'm from the neighborhood -- maybe they're afraid to ask because maybe they know I'm a little bit bitter, and so some know that I am a little [embarrassed]. They just don't want to broach it. But no one really asks questions about, like, what did it used to be like? Like, I feel like I have to be the one that has to bring it up --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- and say, "Well, actually, like when I was growing up, it was like this." Or they'll say, "Oh, well, I know this great place." I'm like, "Yeah, I know. Like, that place has been there, like, for a while. Like, since I grew up there. It's awesome. Great. Great, good for you. You know, I'm glad that you're discovering that. Good for you and your Brooklyn Industries T-shirt. Fantastic." But I don't feel like there's actually, like, commitment to making the neighborhood better for everyone. So it's more

about making it better for them, like as a couple, or like them as their family, making it better for their kid. And that's great. Those are great goals. But it just seems also very much not a questioning of what was this neighborhood like before, but this neighborhood was already made for me. You know, but not a questioning of like, what made this neighborhood actually a desirable place to be?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Because I try to tell people, it didn't always used to be this way.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and -- you know, who knows. Maybe people would feel the same way about when my parents moved in as well. You know, I actually don't really know some of those stories as well, so maybe people also felt the same. But I also felt like my parents tried to get to know people in the neighborhood as well. They would talk to people that were different from them. My brother and I had, you know, lots of different friends in the neighborhood and were engaged with, like, different, you know, softball leagues and baseball leagues, and were on the hockey team, and I ran track, and my dad taught at the Y, so he knew all these people from, you know, the YMCA, and I would go to the Y and take swim classes there. So it just felt much more integrated, whereas now when I talk to people, it just feels much more of, like, how can I make my own little family center, like, you know, better? And much more competitive, too. Like, I can't imagine -- everyone always says, too, like they can't -- some of my friends who have moved say, "Oh, I can't -- I just can't" -- I get a little offended sometimes -- "I just can't imagine raising kids in the city. It's so stressful." You know, and will kind of like start poo-pooing everything about the city. I'm like, "Well, I don't know. My parents did it, and I think I turned out OK. I didn't -- I turned out great." You know, I have a Ph.D., and, like, I went to good schools. And yes, I got very lucky. I acknowledge that I got really, really lucky. I had parents that were very invested in my education. I also had teachers who were very invested in my education. I actually had my elementary school principal -- I didn't realize this until a couple of years after, when I was in boarding school, that she had actually helped pay for all my applications to private schools.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Because she thought that I shouldn't go to the public junior high --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- that was there. Yeah. So, you know, things like that. But at the same time, there were things that were really messed-up. Like my mother also found out about the junior high I ended up going to, De La Salle Academy, because she found the fliers in the trash. Because the guidance counselor -- when she asked the guidance counselor -- and this, you know, I learned years later -- said, "Well, no one would be interested in this." You know, so just this assumption that other parents wouldn't want to send their kids to a school that might be far.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was like an hour for me to get there each way. That were, like, low-income and middle-class and couldn't really afford Packer. Because there were some kids that, like, eventually ended up going to Packer Collegiate and Brooklyn Friends. And I interviewed for those schools, too. [1:40:00] It's much more expensive than where I went. And actually, in the end, like Brooklyn Friends and --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's Berkeley, right?

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, Berkeley Carroll was different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, OK, sorry.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Brooklyn Friends is in Brooklyn Heights. Kind of like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK, that's the Quaker school?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, a Quaker school. Ended up being like the same price, so my parents said, "Well, which school would you want to choose? It's up to you now." And I eventually chose De La Salle, even though it was going to be a much longer commute, because it just felt -- yeah, it just felt right. Whereas Brooklyn Friends, I went there and there were kids that were talking back to the teachers, and stuff I couldn't really imagine. I mean, it was supposed to be this very, you know, open school, and I was like, that's great, but it felt -- I think even then I could sense it felt much more entitled. Whereas where I went to junior high, it was -- you know, most of the kids were like working-class.

A lot of first-generation, you know, immigrants. And, yeah, there were some parents who were not invested. And, you know, one of my best friends, I'm amazed at how well she's done without, you know, the family support. Basically a complete lack of family support. But most of the parents there were -- really wanted their kids to go there because they knew that it was a way to lots of different opportunities, you know. And it was competitive. Like, there were three -- there was an admissions test, there was an interview, and then there was like a daylong, you know, fake class schedule, where you would come in and like observe you. And teacher recommendations and essays and all these things. So you know, it was kind of an intense process, but because you were there, you know, they wanted to work hard, and it wasn't nerdy to want to work hard and do that. Sorry, I got off track there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Brooklyn Friends.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, Brooklyn Friends. But no, there was something from... from -- oh, just the competition that it seems like in, in, in Brooklyn now, or especially in Park Slope. Where I feel like it's not even so much about the kids, it's about the parents being able to prove that they're a successful parent because their kid got into, you know, Packer or Berkeley Carroll and they're able to, like, socially engineer their kids to be, you know, in this way. And here are some of my friends who have kids -- I feel like I'm throwing some of them under the bus. They're lovely people. But just really complain about, like, how hard it is. And yeah, like I'm sure that -- you know, I don't have kids, so I'm not one to judge, but just like, well, my parents somehow figured out a way, and they -- my mom talks about how it was really hard. You know, she's like, "Yeah, I was selling Mary Kay, and I remember eating a lot of spaghetti." Like, growing up, we ate tons of spaghetti. And my dad was also in the theater, and he eventually ended up founding his own theater. I remember being there late at night and -- so my teacher was saying, "Oh, Jasmine seems very sleepy in the morning." And my dad feels -- when I left for boarding school, he says he felt terrible, you know, about me kind of growing up like that, and I actually thought it was wonderful. I'm actually really grateful for it, because I thought it was fun to be backstage. And, you know, he worked. It was often at night, so he -- like I wouldn't see him, necessarily, after school. But early on, he was kind of like Mr. Mom, because his --

so much of his productions were at night, or if he was on a -- you know, didn't have a show, right, then he could pick me up from school and such, and hang out with all other, you know, people at the playground. But yeah, this kind of naivety of saying that they're all about community, but actually having it be very individualistic, and for having a certain kind of community that I actually feel is very exclusionary. That says, yeah, we're all about, like, diversity and celebrating diversity, but it really makes me question, like, what kind of diversity are they actually talking about with that? And --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What kind of diversity do you think they're talking about?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I think they're talking about a token kind of diversity, where, "Oh, you know, isn't it great" -- like, you know, "Oh yeah, our neighborhood's so great," or like, "We had a kid who's on scholarship." Great. Awesome. You know, and sometimes I do feel a little bit divided, actually, with some of my friends. Especially the ones who live in Park Slope, who tend to be, you know, from kind of like white upper-class families that are not from New York. I'm like, "Well, I was the scholarship kid." Like, you don't realize like -- sometimes the naivety, I think, with me, actually, too, with not realizing who they're actually talking to. And I think some of that actually does fit in a little bit into some of my friends not wanting to see certain parts of me as well, or seeing the certain parts of me when it's convenient.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, as well.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Describe that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like one of my best friends from college, you know, who was one of the two maids of honor, I remember having a conversation with her in college, and she was wanting me to go to some party [1:45:00] that I just didn't really feel like. And I was like, "You know, honestly, I just don't really feel like this -- like, I just don't -- I don't really feel like I belong there. And people were talking about their private pilot lessons and such, and I just -- I just don't really have a good time when I go to that kind of thing." And I think she was trying to get me to go because she just didn't want to go by herself. And then she was like, "Well, you know, but you" -- you know, "Are you jealous? Or like, do you -- you know, why do you think that you're not part of that -- why is that --

why is that not part of a group, you know, for you?" And I was like, "It's pretty obvious." Like, you know, no matter -- it doesn't matter if I went to the same prep schools, if we're in the same college, if I get the same kind of grades, if I'm on -- if I also play a sport and do all these things that, yeah, like, help me fit in. And it's not that I am discarding a part of myself, right. But no matter what I do, I feel like with certain sectors, especially this, like, very white, privileged sector, they're never actually going to see me, because they don't want to, and I'm invisible. You know, and I felt that way with some people in boarding school, and definitely felt that way some in college. And even now, sometimes I'll run into people from college and they'll say, "Oh, I didn't realize you, you know, you went there." And -- like last night, I ran into someone who went to college with me. I said, "You look really familiar. Did you go to Williams?" And we actually realized we were in the same class. And he's like, "Oh yeah, it's -- you know, it's funny, I never saw you." And I kind of felt saying under my breath, I'm like, yeah, because a lot of people like you never saw me. You know. I'm just invisible. Like, I could be even -- go to the same exact kind of parties with you, but -- or even things like there was another girl, who's actually another biracial girl. It was funny, people would say we were twins, because she went to Exeter. I went to Andover. And she ran cross-country, and her mother was from Guyana and her father was from Germany. And everyone thought we looked alike. We don't actually look alike. I mean, kind of. See, a little bit.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (inaudible)

JASMINE MITCHELL: But -- and people, still to this day, will call me [Lindy], and people call her Jasmine. I'm like, "We're not the same person." And actually, it was so funny. There were some guys that would, like, try to hit on us at parties, not -- being very confused about which one they were talking to. And I was like, "We don't look the same." And I remember both of us would stand in the mirror saying, like, "OK, is it our smile? Do we both look the same?" And we're like, "We just don't look the same." I think it's just like we're both kind of tan and racially ambiguous and, you know, they just all kind of look the same. So there was that sense of invisibility. And I do feel like some of my friends, who, you know, are friends from track or cross-country, so eventually became friends for, you know, lots of different reasons, or lived in the same dorm, don't

want to see that I'm not -- that I'm different and that I'm not treated the same as they are, and I can't just kind of blend in, necessarily. And, you know, I tried to explain to her -- she was like, "Well, you know, when I see you, I just see Jasmine. I don't see anyone" -- I'm like, "Yeah, then you're not really seeing me, because, like, being multiracial is a huge part of who I am. And if you don't -- like, how could you possibly not see that?" You know. Like, I grew up differently. My, my parents and my family background of, you know, being very close, actually, with both sides of my family. Yeah, that's a huge part of who I am, just like your family is a big part of who you are and, like, where you grew up. It was a big part of who you are. And so not wanting to see that is not really wanting to see parts of me. And I think sometimes it's because that makes people uncomfortable, because they don't want to see you as different, necessarily. And especially when it comes to class, don't want to see you as class different. And -- so not just racially different. So there's that whole thing. Like, they don't want to see you as, like, racially different. But they also don't want to see you as class different. But I said, you know, even, even if I grew up in some wealthy family and, like, we spent our summers in Martha's Vineyard and I grew up this wonderful black bourgeoisie, I still wouldn't fit in with them. Like, I just look different. I'm not going to be taking -- I don't fit into that Park Avenue crowd. Like, I just -- I just don't. I'm not -- or that, you know, people who wear Nantucket Reds, like, all year long, I just don't. I don't look like them. And I feel like some of that is actually apparent in Park Slope a little bit, of not wanting to really engage with people who look different, necessarily. Because you can kind of be in this bubble. You know, where I went to college was pretty -- you know, it was two-and-a-half hours from Boston and, you know, like three-and-a-half hours, four hours, from New York. So you were kind of in this bubble. And I liked being in that bubble and I, I loved where I went to college, but it was definitely a bubble. And, you know, interestingly enough, I feel like more of my working-class white friends, we don't necessarily always talk about it, but they know that there's something different. You know, [1:50:00] or sometimes we might talk about a book. Like, what was it? For example, like one of my friends, she's from Maine, and she lives in Brooklyn now, actually, too. She lives in Boerum Hill. And she tries really hard to put on this, like,

preppy facade. I really know it's up, because we both will -- we both worked in the cafeteria in college, and actually we both hated it, and we both preferred to actually work cleaning the dishes rather than having to be out front.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, yes.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I hated being out front, because I had to wear, you know, this like head wrap, and then people would come up and say, "Oh, I didn't realize you worked here." You know, and then that's when I felt really different, and that's where the class divide -- I felt racially different --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- and then -- but then people would kind of assume, oh, well, you know, whatever, she went to prep school. Like, she's just, you know, kind of like us. Looks a little different. Kind of like us. And then I'd say, "Yup, I am really different." I would just dread it. Dread it. And I know she felt that way, too. That's actually how we started becoming friends. We lived in the same dorm. And we still don't really talk about it, but I think we both kind of know. Because she was from Maine, so she can also kind of pass as, like, maybe she's one of those wealthy Maine people, but she's actually not. You know, so even though she lives in Brooklyn, like, she -- we were reading -- what was the book that came out, actually -- shoot. Um. That took place in Baltimore, Maryland and it was about, like, cancer gene cells. Oh, it was like the...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, the mother? The, the cells? The cancer cells --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- that they saved the --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- life of [Nelle] -- [Netsy] somebody?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, exactly.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. Right, right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Exactly. So she was reading the book and I was reading the book, and I was kind of talking about, "Well, yeah, I have some feelings about this, and I don't quite know, like, how you feel about, like, how the author wrote the book and her own positionality." And she was just like, "Oh yeah, I could kind of see that." Like, you

know, “It's hard for me to see, because I'm white, but that's interesting hearing your perspective.” Whereas I feel like some of my other friends would, like -- you know, just wouldn't even care. Or like my other friend who lives in Park Slope. You know, like I said, still one of my, you know, best friends. You know, I don't wash my hair every day. And -- because it gets super dry and it's going to become a frizzy mess. And she was like, “Ugh, you don't wash your hair every day? That's nasty.” And she was like, you know, “It's all, like, kinky back there.” And my -- my other friend, who's Jewish, from Brooklyn, upper-class family, she was just like, “Oh no.” She could just tell. She was like, “This is bad, Maggie.” Like, “You can't say that,” like. But it was just naivety. Like she just had no idea, you know. Whereas my friend who grew up in Brooklyn Heights -- and granted, that was always like a very privileged neighborhood in Brooklyn, you know, and she's Jewish -- she even knew, like, you don't say stuff like that. Like you just don't. So I feel like even -- it's not just the neighborhood, but I also think some of the time period. You know, like she knew, like, you don't say things like that, and that's not good.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Well, it sounds like also she'd -- you know, she had a diverse life, whereas this other girl didn't (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, so --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: So she could say that. And of course, what's funny is the response of the -- yeah, well the French don't either.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. And she actually loves France.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) said that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: She loves France, too.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: If a French woman had said this to her, she'd be like, “Oh, really? Don't wash it every day? It's better for your hair?”

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, and she actually became a French teacher, so that's actually kind of funny. Like, later on. You know, so things like that. So I feel like those are some of the groups of friends that I have that, you know, live in Park Slope now.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Or I went to -- you know, would go to Harlem with me to, like, go

find fried chicken, you know, and then like be very proud that they were in Harlem, and, you know, tell all their friends, "Oh my God, I went to Harlem and I had the best fried chicken ever." Where it's almost like a -- like a notch on their belt of, like, you know, "I survived, and I'm a real insider because I'm here." So I feel like there's, like, that kind of group of the, like, "I don't want to see difference," and then some other people on Park Slope who, they want to see difference, but it's like an exotic thing of -- and they're like really proud of, like, "I'm from Brooklyn and I'm tough." And I'm like, "Yeah, you're also from Kansas." Like -- you know, that's great, and like...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: At least they're trying to be tough.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, at least you're trying to be tough, you know. And it's kind of, you know, put on. But have so much -- I feel like both of those groups, somewhat -- and I know I'm talking about people who are, like, also relatively younger, like in their thirties -- have a stake in keeping it that way, because then they're not allowed -- or they're allowed to not question, you know, what was before and also what were the material stakes involved in actually allowing Park Slope to be what it is now, and for them to be able to, you know, go to strollercize, and for them to be able to wear Brooklyn Industries T-shirts and have Brooklyn Industries, you know, set up there. For being able to, you know, eat fancy food. For being able [1:55:00] to have, you know, these big condos. Some of them live on Eighth Avenue, some, you know, live on Fifth Avenue. Without actually really being able to question that and be quite comfortable, really, in this, I think, actually kind of willful naivety about their own neighborhood, but also about their own position within the neighborhood. Because if you don't ask questions, then you don't have to think about yourself or be self-reflective, really, with that. So I, I do think that's a big difference that I see in Park Slope, where, again, it just feels very much about creating a kind of community that's actually pretty exclusive that I'd see.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Now, if we say, for instance, your family, as it exists today -- your mom, your dad -- do you think you would feel comfortable as a unit living in Park Slope now? Or how could -- you know.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Hmm. I think so, actually.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: My parents still go back to Park Slope, actually, and will still go to, like, Cousin John's Cafe, and like go to Connecticut Muffin. And when we're also finding like a meeting place, you know, we'll often go back to some of those places. And when we meet up for dinner, we'll often meet up in, like, Park Slope or, like, Fort Greene or something, as kind of like a meeting point from me coming from the Village and such. Or like Prospect Heights or something. And I know my parents, like, complain about Park Slope, but would actually, like, move there, I think, in a -- you know, in a heartbeat. Because their neighborhood is just -- yeah, I think it's just so much more insular. I'm not saying like Park Slope isn't insular in its own way now, but I think they felt very much part of the neighborhood. So they know they don't live in the neighborhood now, but will still go back there to, you know, go to cafe or a coffee shop. And my dad rides his bike around, you know, in Park Slope -- not around Park Slope -- in Prospect Park, with like all the cyclists that, you know, have their little cycling groups around the park. You know, he does that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The aerodynamic gear.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. Right, right. He hasn't quite gotten there yet, but I think he's going to get there. So I think -- I think they would, and would actually like that. They know that Park Slope is very different than it is now, but I think they also miss being closer to the city. They actually just put their house on the market, or are thinking about it, to -- I'm trying to convince them to try to downsize to a place like in -- so they can afford it, like Ditmas Park or someplace like that, that actually feels more Park Slopey than what -- and more diverse, actually -- Ditmas Park does, at least to me when I go there -- than what Park Slope does now. So but it -- and I'll be honest, if I could afford it, like I would move to Park Slope, too. As much as I'm complaining about it, I would move there, too. You know, I, I would like a nice brownstone. That would be nice. I would -- I would do it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I'm definitely Fort Greene over Park Slope.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah. If I could choose, I would still choose Fort Greene. But I mean, you know, you wouldn't have to -- if someone was -- if someone was willing to give me a very cheap price on a Park Slope condo, you wouldn't have to pull my leg too

much to, you know, get me to go in on it. If I was able to find some rent-controlled place, you know, you wouldn't have to pull my leg.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like I would -- you know, I, I would go. But I do definitely prefer Fort Greene over Park Slope for sure. For sure. And if I had to choose a neighborhood to move back to, that would probably be it. Also, too, being an interracial couple with my husband, you know, as well, which he's aware of, you know, as, as well. I don't think he quite understood when we were first dating, and I think understands more now what that dynamic is like. I think that neighborhood -- I mean, the Village is a great place for us, too, but I also think that Fort Greene, I think, would be better for us. But for him, like more of his friends live in Park Slope, and I think it's easier for him to kind of assimilate. Not saying that I don't belong, but I do -- and I don't think that I actually leave out parts about, like, my multiraciality or like how I grew up, but I feel like I'm the one who has to bring it up. Right. Like, I have to bring it up. Whereas my friends who grew up in the city, we don't bring it up. I mean, not saying we don't bring it up. We don't have to bring it up; it just comes up in conversation. You know, you talk about it. And I don't think it was -- some of them have moved. You know, some of them have moved to New Jersey and such for, for various reasons. But I don't feel like it was [2:00:00] terrible growing up in the city. Some of my friends are like, "Oh, I can't -- you know, I can't imagine, like, growing up in the city. It must have been so hard. It must have been so terrible." And, like, "I wouldn't want to raise my kids here." And my husband sometimes gets concerned about -- because he grew up in the suburbs -- about, you know, "Jasmine, like, I don't know. You know, we need to grow up, because, you know, eventually if we want to have kids, we should move someplace where the lifestyle is calmer." Whereas for me, I would love to raise kids in the city, because I saw so much of a benefit to it. Of -- I don't feel -- yeah, sometimes I feel self-conscious in certain situations, but I actually feel like the most part -- my husband always says that I seem very at ease at being able to, like, go and talk to different sets of, like, social circles and just kind of introduce myself. And I think some of that does have to go with, you know, growing up in the city, going to boarding school. Being forced in that. And also, you know, to some extent, a little bit of,

you know, coming from two different family backgrounds that are very different and kind of fitting into both. Like I don't feel like -- sometimes people ask me -- I think they try to go into this, like, you know, tragic, like, multiracial child kind of thing, of like how hard must it have been to, like, grow up and be so confused. I'm like, I wasn't really confused. Like -- I mean, yeah, sometimes I was confused, and, like, thought that I was Puerto Rican, but like -- you know, that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) speak Spanish, but...

JASMINE MITCHELL: That was because people would speak to me in Spanish. Like, you know, (inaudible). But I was never like, I don't belong, and, like, you know, everyone hates me. No, there was -- you know, none of that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And with your -- with your parents' family, there wasn't -- because that was the 80s they got married?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. They got married --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Late 70s?

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- in, like, 1980.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. So was there -- was there...on either side of the families?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Was there what?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Was there tension on either side of the family? Was it tense?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I don't really think so. They actually didn't really talk about it. But not really. I mean, I think the big thing on my mother's side of the family, you know, this African American side that grew up in -- she grew up in West Philly -- was my mother was still in college, so my grandfather's big thing was that she had to finish college. So when my father went over to talk to my grandfather about marrying my mother, he didn't say anything. Came down the stairs. Brought like a stack of diplomas, because my mother was the youngest, and said, “I just need one more.”

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh! That's a sweet story.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know? So -- you know, and that -- I think that was it. And my dad's side -- my grandparents, I know, were going through a divorce, I think, when

they got married. So I think that was more of the tension of, like, no one was sure who was going to show up to the civil ceremony and, you know, and that kind of thing. But, yeah, and there's jokes, right. Like, there, there are jokes that happen, you know, on family sides. Like my grandparents would always -- and rest of my family members on my mom's side -- would always joke about how, like, my father doesn't eat collard greens, you know, and doesn't like them. So little jokes like that. Or there was a jazz club that you would see people, like, literally in these kind of like, you know, ostentatious, like, brightly-colored, like, almost like, you know, pimp suits that you see from, you know, those bad blaxploitation movies. But they actually did wear that in West Philly at this one jazz club, so they would kind of joke about, "Oh, you know, I saw you at the -- you know, at the Bluebird." "No, I saw you at the Bluebird." Because my grandparents are not, you know, religious zealots, but they're elders in the church and, like, respectable, and they like music, but they're not going to be with that kind of crowd. You know, so they would joke about things like that. Or my dad's side of the family sometimes, yeah, would say inappropriate things, like my uncle who passed, and he was kind of a family jokester. And sometimes there were uncomfortable moments where it was meant in jest, but it was like, that wasn't really appropriate, Uncle [Duddy]. Where, you know, during Thanksgiving, where you're passing around the turkey, you know, my dad would ask for the dark meat and he would say, "Oh, you would like the dark meat, wouldn't you?" You know, stuff like that, where it's, like, kind of funny but kind of awkward, but like everyone else thinks it's funny.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So little things like that. Or -- I mean, I do remember there was a point where -- I didn't really notice this, and I think he, he really just didn't know better. It wasn't to hurt anyone. But my grandfather, who we'd go visit in Central Pennsylvania -- he lived about an hour outside of Williamsport. I remember we came in, and he was starting to get older and was -- he'd always been very mentally with it, but was starting to decline a little bit because he had -- you know, ended up dying of, like, congestive heart failure. And towards the end, I remember he came in and he was like, he's like, "Man, you guys are dark like spics." And it was just awkward. Like, (inaudible) correct,

because he's kind of older, but I also know it was -- it wasn't meant to be hurtful, it was just the kind of language that he used, and it wasn't trying to say that he loved us any less. You know, like -- [2:05:00] he loved my, my brother and I, but it was just -- and I think my father was in the room, too. I think he called my father a spic, too. You know, like -- but -- because my father is, you know, he's white, but -- he gets very proud of this, but he, you know, gets dark in the summer. So I remember some of my friends from boarding school would think my dad was Puerto Rican, too. So they would say, "Oh, you're" -- you know, and he would -- he was a baseball coach, so he always had some, like, you know, baseball hat on, and like his, like, baseball coach, like, shirt. And they're like, "Oh, your dad, like the Puerto Rican baseball player?" and I'm like, "He's not a -- he's not Puerto Rican. We're not Puerto Rican." I don't know how many times we had to say this. "We're not Puerto Rican." You know, but dad -- my dad would get kind of excited about that a little bit. Like he would say, "We're not Puerto Rican, but, you know, it's cool. You know, a lot of people speak Spanish to me, too." Because it gives him like a little bit of insider-ness. And I think, you know, he also realizes, you know, in some ways -- like he's still, like, white on his own, but then when he becomes part of our family unit, he becomes a little less white.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Uh-huh.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, as well. There's that dynamic. And even among his friends here, like in New York, most of his friends are not white. Like most of his friends are, are black and, like, Latino. But a lot of his good friends from growing up, that he still maintains ties with, are, you know, are white. But, you know, he kind of also has his own, like, diverse group in the city. But he has his own moments when he realizes he's white. Like, "Dad, you're white." He's like, "Oh, OK." No. Fine.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Describe a moment like that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Oh, sometimes it's embarrassing things, like dancing. My mom will joke that, you know, my husband takes after my, my dad in that way. You know, my dad will try. Like they took salsa dancing lessons together. And not saying my mom's the best dancer either. But my dad, from working at Henry Street and the Boys Club, a lot of the staff Christmas parties would become like these big kind of like

dance parties, and dad would always kind of be there, awkward, or like not want to get up and dance. And people who did not -- had not met my mom, or not met us, so like newer staff members, were often surprised when they met my mom, too. So going in and he would say like, "Oh, this is my wife, Janise" and they'd say, "Oh. Oh! That's your wife. Oh, I didn't realize that. Oh, that's your wife. Oh, oh." You know, just really taken aback. And also going in -- and this happens, actually, even with my mom, too. People were often very surprised that I'm one of their progeny, as you could say, and say, "Really? That's, that's your daughter? That's your daughter?" Like, "Yeah, that's my daughter." Because I think they're just expecting something that looks different. And actually, sometimes, sometimes they're not surprised. Sometimes they say, "Oh yeah, I can see that," or "Actually, you guys look really alike." You know, depending on how well they know my parents. But yeah, so sometimes when I go in and visit, some of the people were surprised that I'm my dad's daughter. And a couple of times, where I've encountered my mother's, like, middle school class if they -- since they used to come and like do visits at the Museum of City of New York, so I would come down and like see them, or I'd give a workshop at the school, you know, where she's at. And she says, "Yeah, this is my daughter." And they say, "Oh, that's your daughter? No, that can't be your daughter. Your daughter is Chinese! Your daughter is Chinese!" Like, "Oh, no, your daughter -- she must be one of those Cherokee." That was actually another thing that I forgot about. That was a big thing when I was growing up in elementary school. Everyone thought I was Chinese. It was really annoying. It was really, really annoying. I don't know why. It was kind of bizarre. But there were a lot of those, like, racial jokes that little kids make where -- I don't even know if they were intending to be mean, but they're trying to signal difference, you know. So they would do like, "Ching, ching, ching, wah" or like, you know, do the slanted eyes, and like then ask about, like -- oh, one of the big things, I remember -- my mother was very angry about this. I got asked about Chinese New Year in my class. And so I was very upset, because I think it was a well-meaning teacher who decided, "Well, you should talk about your Chinese heritage." I was like, "I'm not Chinese." "That's so awful." Like, "You should be proud of your heritage." I was like, "No, I'm not Chinese." It was kind of traumatic in its own way.

It's like, "No, I'm really not Chinese." So I feel like that was --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What did your mom do, though?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I don't quite know. I think she went in and, like, had a talk and -- she was actually substitute teaching, but I don't think everyone put two and two together. Because she didn't try to always give, like, special treatment.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, to let people know that I was her daughter. So my brother had some of that, too. Like I think initially they had like wanted to put him in ESL or something, even though he -- we speak English at home, and that's the only language we speak. But I think both my brother and I had -- or, you know, it's been a lot of our world experience, I think, is this constant, like, mis-recognition of people wanting to put you in certain kinds of boxes. You know, so when he went to LA for college, he encountered a whole different kind of like mis-recognition of having to navigate, [2:10:00] because he would say like black gangs would ask him if he was Mexican, Mexican gangs would ask if he was black, and finally he would just say he was Samoan and hope that he would not encounter --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: A Samoan?

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- a Samoan gang. You know. And like would kind of call him --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's smart. Very smart.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- call him out on that. Yeah, you know, and...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Samoan. What -- oh, OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. You know, just, just that kind of thing. So, um. I got off track. I don't remember what I was talking about, but, anyway.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The -- kind of your -- the -- your world order on -- of being -- kind of the misconception of trying to fit -- you know, people trying to fit you into a box and check you off (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. And I do think that was true. Like I don't think -- even to this day, I don't think that I'm often read as black. And so people are often surprised, or they try not to act surprised and say, "Oh." Or they want to talk about it a lot. And that's where, especially in the Park Slope thing, the new Park Slope, I feel that

kind of tokenism, where I often feel like I'm the only, like, minority -- well, maybe it will be -- and they are minorities, so I'm not, like, trying to discount that. Like, you know, some of their East Asian friends, or like Indian friends. But then, like now, they get like a real minority. You know, and they get kind of excited about it. You can tell. They're like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I have a cultural diverse --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Exactly. And it's like, "I have" --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, "I'm very progressive. Here's my friend's (inaudible). Her mother is black."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: No one does that! Tell me you're lying.

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, I'm not lying. I wish I was.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh!

JASMINE MITCHELL: And you're like, "OK. That's great." And actually, my roommate in Fort Greene, she grew up in San Diego, but her grandmother is from Brooklyn, and she's multiracial, too. Her mother is half-Puerto Rican, half-African American, and her father is Jewish. But she -- I mean --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's Brooklyn.

JASMINE MITCHELL: That's Brooklyn. And she has -- but she grew up in San Diego, but she has her own -- she has her own racial dynamic issues, and we often talk a lot about, like, passing or non-intentional passing, and people often don't realize that she's not, like, just white or, like, just Jewish. We talked about that with her, because I kind of call her out on that. I mean, like, you know, you can do whatever you want, you know, in your life, where I don't really feel like I have that option to pass as white. You know, that's just -- and that's not a desirable option for me either. But there is -- and I talk with a lot of other multiracial friends, too. Sometimes it's this unconscious passing, where -- and it's not passing for white, but, you know, it's a mis-recognition/unconscious passing, passing for something other than what you are. So in my case, sometimes I feel like that's often -- depending on the location -- like Puerto Rican, New York. Minnesota, sometimes they were just confused. Sometimes American Indian. Hawaiian. It just

really depends on the context of where -- and I've lived in different parts of the U.S. and like in Brazil and Argentina, so you know, people just read you in very different ways, like depending on where you are. But rarely is the first recognition of me as -- is as black. So I also think that's why some people kind of want to announce it, if they have an investment as being seen as, like, progressive in that way. Even though I self-identify as multiracial black. I don't see -- people often ask about that, and I don't see a contradiction between the two. Like, you can be -- just be both.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And unless -- some people -- some people will a-- will just kind of straight-up ask. But interestingly enough, the people who usually ask are other African Americans, because, you know, there's --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They'll ask where your people are from.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, they -- yeah, they'll just ask. Sometimes they'll just straight-up ask. They're just like, "Are you black?" I'm like, "Yeah." Or one of my friends talks about, you know, like the first time I walked into the black student union meeting, and she was like, "Oh, I felt bad because people just kind of looked at you like, what are you doing here? And you didn't even realize. You were just, hmm." You know, like that. And then people kind of like, oh, OK, we kind of get it. And all the Jamaicans thought I was Jamaican for a while, because they're like, "Oh, she has light skin, but she's here, so I don't know what she's doing here, so she must be Jamaican." And that happened in high school as well as in Brooklyn, too. You know, yeah, sometimes I'll get recognized as that, who will assume like Jamaican or, you know, something. But often it's other African Americans then who just, like, straight-up ask, because they just -- and I actually -- I don't mind that, because I think it's more of a sense of, how are we going to talk to each other? Right, because sometimes people ask, they're like, "Well, do you talk differently with some groups of friends?" And I'll say, "Yeah," [2:15:00] and they'll get a little offended. I'm like, "Well. Yeah, we just talk differently." Like there's a different language that we might use, different topics that we might use, different slang that we might use. That isn't necessarily because I value some people more or less. It's just you're in just like a different context or you're able to talk with someone in a different

way. So there's that, definitely, and -- of sometimes this mis-recognition/unconscious passing/people just, like, asking. Just -- most of the time what I get asked, though, is just like, "What are you?" Which I always -- that's my favorite question. Not. People just joke about that. My husband jokes about that all the time, because I still get that all the time, and he kind of just like stands there and like cringes for me, and he's like, "Oop, yup, you got that question again." And so that's actually interesting, his own trajectory, because I think he's much more actually racially aware from being married to me and kind of seeing that all the time, or people asking him what, what am I. You know, they just want to know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Do you just -- "Human."

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Well, I mean, I actually don't -- some people -- some people I know get very upset. I just -- it depends on my mood. I get more annoyed. Sometimes it's, "What are you?" Most of the time, though, it's like, "Where are you from?" where I usually know what they're trying to ask, and so I'll say, "Oh, I'm from the U.S. I'm from New York." And they're, "No, no, no, where are you really from?" and I know exactly what they're trying to ask. I'm like, "No, I'm really from Brooklyn. My parents are from here, from the U.S., too." It just irritates…So I like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You make them work.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I want to make them work for it. So they're just like, "No, no, no, like where's your family from?" I'm like, "We're from the U.S." We've been here for, like, generations, at least since the 1600s, I know, and longer if we count the American Indian branch of, you know, my family. But yeah, been here for a long time. You know, so really make them work, because I want to -- I want to force them to just point-blank ask me, so at least maybe they'll think about, like, why are they asking in the first place. You know, and sometimes it's just wanting to, I think, know how to relate, and sometimes I'll see other multiracial people who will do that to each other, and it's almost this kind of -- I don't know how to describe it. I don't want to say like it's a radar, right, because there's lots of people you can tell. But sometimes just kind of look at someone, or they'll kind of look at me, and we'll just kind of look at each other and then go up and be like, hmm. And you just kind of know, you know. And then you'll just

start talking --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- without even actually really needing to ask, and I might actually volunteer that information. Because that's different, because it feels like it's a place where it's not trying to make a judgment about me, but about being able to see how we might relate to each other and how we might share experiences with each other, rather than being like a token or saying like, "Oh, OK, well this person -- you know, she must be like this." Or of making a certain judgment call on that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Sharing experience. Talk about that a little bit.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um. You know, I would say that probably didn't start happening until I was in college. Because growing up, the other multiracial person I knew was my brother. And my brother. That was it, my brother. Not to say that I wasn't aware of, like, racial mixture, especially on my mom's side of the family, where, you know, we would go to family functions, and, like, the colors of our family just run the gamut. You know, there -- I have aunts who are like much lighter-skinned, you know, than, than I am. And so you realize that, but I didn't know anyone else who had, you know, two parents from very different family backgrounds. I just -- I didn't know anyone else like that. And once I got to college, it's kind of funny. You would start -- just start seeing people in the hallways or just around campus, and start -- yeah, we'd just kind of look at each other and you just kind of knew. You just, just -- and not always. You know, and sometimes you're wrong and sometimes you don't know exactly what their mixture was. But yeah, I don't quite know how to describe it. You would just start talking to each other, necessarily, and then -- and you would eventually learn more about, like, their family backgrounds or how they grew up. And eventually when I was in college, I actually restarted Students of Mixed Heritage with another friend of mine, and that was really just, you know, to have space to talk about experiences, to talk about, you know, different cross-racial and interracial issues. But we really tried hard to make it open to everyone. And [2:20:00] also tried very hard to not make it a separate group from the other minority organizations on campus. So tried to work -- or -- especially based a little bit on who my friendship group was. Like tried to work really hard with the Brazilian student -- what

am I talking about? Sorry, I'm in a different mode. The black student organization, Latino student groups, some of my other friends. Like would work -- try to work with the Asian American student organizations. So to not seem as like we were trying to separate ourselves, or like (inaudible) in terms of membership, but really it was like a complementary space where some of the experiences that we wanted to talk about, we didn't feel like was given enough space in some of those groups. And also, if you went to a black student union meeting, you weren't necessarily going to talk with the same kind of multiracial experiences with someone who was in the Asian American student organization. Not to say that those experiences were the same, because being multiracial Asian and multiracial black and all different kinds of mixtures is very different from each other.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So -- very, very different. So not to conflate that. But it was able to at least bring together what some of those commonalities, as well as differences, were in that. And I do have to say I do get suspicious of what I think are a lot of multiracial groups that try to be very separatist of -- saying, "We're different, we're different, and, you know, isn't that great?" And the question I always ask -- OK, that's great that you're different. Awesome. But so what? What are you going to do with that?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And yeah, I think it's -- but I do think that first stage is important, though, in terms of being able to have some kind of recognition of multiracial experience. So that's kind of a first step, I think, is, you know, recognizing, OK, my experiences, or my family's experiences, might be, you know, different than what some other families' experiences might be. And a beginning step, I think, is to start talking about that and talk about other people who also came from multiracial backgrounds. But, you know, what else can you do besides that, right? So I think it's really important to work in conjunction with other, you know, other minority groups, because in the end, you're trying to work for the same kind of social justice issues and the same kind of, you know, struggles. So I do see a little bit of that happening. And it is actually interesting, because some of my friends' like older sisters and stuff, I think like 10 years ago, started calling my mom to

talk about what it was like to raise a multiracial child. So that's, you know, also kind of interesting. And I do have to say, I see a lot more multiracial children, like, just walking around. Like, just like, wow. Like, what is this? And even interracial couples walking around. I do have to say I don't see as many black/white couples, you know, predominantly, and even when, you know, I go with my husband to different functions, he sometimes even notes that he feels that difference. Or we'll sometimes kind of joke, he's like, "It's really diverse here." You know, if we're at a mostly white function, we'll kind of joke, "This is the most diverse wedding I've ever gone to." You know, when it's like all white people. Or sometimes I think he does feel that discomfort, which I don't think is a bad thing, when we've gone to like mostly black functions, and then he realizes, oh, like, I feel different. I'm like, "Yeah, now you know what it's like for me most of the time." Like, most of the time. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I have to say, I agree. That's like -- it's an interesting spot for a white American to be into, to have that juxtaposition, and be like, "Oh."

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. You're like, oh yeah. I'm like, "It's different. Different for people." You know, so there's some of that, but I do -- so, so I did notice that, you know, people started to call my mother, like probably a couple of years ago, like my friends', you know, older siblings and such, because I think they wanted to know what it was like, but it was mostly other black mothers, you know, that were going to have multiracial children, usually multiracial black/white children, that just wanted to talk, just to see what it was like.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What did she tell them?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I don't really know. I don't really know what she told them. That would be interesting, actually, to ask. I do feel, though, that -- I am kind of grateful that my -- I think my parents just let us figure it out for my brother and I. Sometimes I talk to other multiracial children and their parents raised them a certain way or said, like, you know, "You're multiracial" or like, you know, [2:25:00] "You're black, and the world's going to see you as black." It's not that my parents didn't talk about it or that they ignored it. You know, they were willing to talk about it. But they didn't tell us what our identity was going to be. They let us figure out what our own, you know,

identity was going to be like. And that change-- and they also, like, let that identity change, you know, over time as well. And now, it's interesting, too, seeing some of my friends start to have their own children, some of whom are multiracial children, and seeing them navigate that as well. Although I do have to say most of my friends who are having multiracial children are usually Asian/white children, which has some similarities, but it really is pretty different than more of a multiracial, like black/white experience.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's a historical -- big historical collision in the United States.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's...

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, there's -- I mean, there's some, you know, commonalities in terms of, like, merging different family backgrounds and the kind of questions -- like their -- some of them -- most actually haven't asked. Because, actually, worries me sometimes, or maybe, you know, it's a willful, you know, ig--

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Naivety?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Naivety that they have. They're like, "Oh, it's going to be just fine, you know, and things are so good." I'm like, "Yeah. Um, I think you should prepare. You know, when they start going to elementary school, people are going to start asking what they are, and they're going to ask you. And people are just going to point-blank ask, like, 'What are you?'" You know, and maybe it's a little bit better, but that's going to happen, you know. And some, I don't think, have necessarily realized that yet, because their children haven't gone into, you know, school age yet. So. I'm not wishing that on them. I'm like, just wait. It's going to happen.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You're warning them.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Just because you got married and you're interracial married doesn't mean that the rest of the world is used to that, necessarily. So -- but I -- but I do think that it is different, though, than when my brother and I were growing up, though. Like there's just a lot more, like, multiracial actors and models that are on TV. But -- you know, which is great. And I think it's really important to have those images, but it's also not all, you know, rosy-colored glasses with that either, because I think some of those images, you know, allow for this naivety in some ways of, "Everything's great," and like

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JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- "See how much racial progress we've made, and like, "Everything's fine," without actually really having to think about many of the racial inequities and differences, you know, that there are. Because not -- everyone's not the same. Yeah, like we're all human, but, you know, there are differences, and that's OK. It's OK to, you know, have differences. We don't all have to be the same. You know, and sometimes I worry a little bit about this, like, assimilationist model that, you know, everyone has to be same. I'm like, no. That's fine. We can eat different foods. That's OK, and that's fine.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: We can pray to different gods.

JASMINE MITCHELL: We can pray to different gods, yeah, and that's, that's, that's fine, you know, just as long as we're, you know, not nasty to each other and we can learn from each other. But we don't all have to, you know, want to be the same thing. And, and that's sometimes where I see some of the tensions a little bit --more so with my white friends, actually -- that I feel -- not all of them. Some of them like really have this vested interest in wanting everyone to be the same. And sometimes I feel pushed into that, too. When I say, "Well" -- you know, or I'll kind of make a joke about things, you know, about being different or something -- and I think that's often, actually, the way that I deal with it, is just to make some joke. And then they'll kind of ignore it, like it didn't happen, or, "Oh, I don't know why you say that." Like, you know, "Everyone loves you, Jasmine" or "No one thinks you're different." I'm like... OK. I'm glad that you think that. But. You obviously don't think that, because you sometimes treat me in different ways, too, and you don't even realize it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: How? How do you find that?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Um. More -- like, you know, even little things like the thing that I talked about before, of like the hair. You know, like, "Oh, you don't wash your hair?" Like, you know, "That's nasty." Or I remember, for example -- and this was a little bit of a class, but also racialized as well. And she wasn't really a friend, necessarily, but I was going on this trip with my high school to New Mexico to work on an archaeological

excavation at Pecos National Park. And so it was a joint program with the National Park Service, the [2:30:00] Pueblo tribe, and Andover that had actually -- I was kind of like a nerd, so I would hang out at the museum that actually tried to like help bolster. So I was just hanging out a lot when they were starting the repatriation process and thought it would be great to, like, try to get more Andover kids involved in the fantastic museum that we had on campus. And so one of the students was this like very wealthy, you know, Park Avenue, white, blonde family, and my parents live -- had just moved and lived by the airport, JFK, like 15 minutes away. And they were going to be out of town, so my parents called up, you know, her parents and said, "Do you think that you could pick up Jasmine along the way? We live really close to the airport. You know, it would be a huge favor for us. We're going to be out of town." And they got very, like, upset about it and said --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The parents got upset?

JASMINE MITCHELL: The parents. "No, we can't possibly do that." Like, "The chauffeur can't stop in that kind of neighborhood." You know, and -- like, "That kind of neighborhood." I don't even think they knew what neighborhood it was --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- but it was just the idea of, like, stopping somewhere in Brooklyn that was -- you could almost say cl-- like a -- you know, certain ideas about class, and also certain ideas about, like, those kind of people live there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So it was certain ideas also about race as well. So sometimes like little -- little things like that. And also, I feel like some of my friends, if a certain topic comes up that's about race, they get very, like, skittish about it. I'm like, "It's OK. We can talk about it." Or, like, one of my friends -- oh, God, she's hilarious. I love her. She's actually one of those very, very wealthy people. You know, her family somewhere back were like slave traders, you know, and has like more money, you know, but her parents are wonderful. Love her parents. And the kind that you can tell she has money, but she really doesn't flaunt it, and neither do her parents. And she's always, you know, gnashing her teeth about her privilege, and like, you know, that she's a legacy in college

and how bad she feels about it. And, you know, she would apologize sometimes about, like, you know, her family background to me and how awful it is that her family, you know, got so much of their wealth from what she knows must be like the backs of, you know, like, blacks in the U.S. I'm like, "You don't have to apologize to me. That's great that you acknowledge it, but it's not your fault. You can recognize your privilege. You can do something with that. But I'm not mad at you. Like, I'm not mad at you. And you don't have to, like, tiptoe, you know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- around like what you say."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I also think sometimes people will make comments -- and actually, this is-- this isn't just necessarily white friends. Being multiracial, people definitely make comments that I know they wouldn't make if they actually knew what my background was.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So, you know, a lot of, like, racial jokes or -- where they'll be like, "Oh, you know, that neighborhood's so bad and there are so many black people there." I'm like, "Oh, my mom's black." "Oh, I'm so sorry." You know, "I didn't know." I'm like, "No, but you're actually not sorry. Because you're sorry that I was in the room. But you're not -- but you're not sorry because you actually -- you did feel that sentiment."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, so you're just sorry that...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You got busted.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, that you got busted. You were just sorry that you got busted, exactly. And but that also will happen among, among black people as well, where people, they'll make fun of white people a lot and would talk about how they're, you know, bad people, and you've got to fight the white man, all this. I'm like, "My dad's a white man." "Oh. We don't mean you." You know, where it's a little awkward. Or I do remember in college -- this is like one of those things where like -- another instance where I did feel different, where I was at -- they had orientation that was like a pre-

orientation for -- especially for minority students. Well, they say, like, diversity, whatever, so you could -- I mean, it's basically code. Like, if you're a minority, you can come to this early.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I had a minority affairs office and went to -- yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: OK.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I got it.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You got it? Yeah. So one of those things. So we went, and it was the black student union talking. They had different representatives to talk about the transition for people. And honestly, college wasn't that much of a transition, I think, because I had already gone to boarding school, so I kind of, like, knew what was up. I knew what was up, I knew who the different groups were. And then they just start going off about these white students and white people and white people, and being, like, really negative. And my mom was sitting next to me, and I was like, "Oh, this is a little awkward." And then my dad walks in, because, you know, it was like family orientation.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It's family.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It's family orientation, like, and it was also to help parents, like, you know, help their kids navigate. And then my dad walks in and everyone just turns around, and I just like kind of went back in my chair, [2:35:00] you know, and just kind of tried to, like, put my seat down. Because it was one of those awkward moments. I was so -- I was embarrassed for the people who were speaking -- who were speaking. I was embarrassed for my father. I was embarrassed for myself. I was just embarrassed for everyone. You know, it was just really awkward. So, you know, things like that, where I think people wouldn't necessarily make the same kind of statements if they actually knew what my background actually was, and wouldn't say things that are kind of offensive. Yeah?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What did your dad do in that instance?

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I think he just sat down. I think -- he might have known and just, you know, tried to remain blissfully ignorant for my sake, or maybe he just didn't know. You know, one or the other. And, you know, it's, it's one of those things where I felt bad because I was kind of embarrassed of my parents then. And I felt

so guilty about it, you know, at the time. I was like, oh, this is so awful to feel, you know, embarrassed of your parents. And I did sometimes feel that way -- rarely, but sometimes -- at boarding school as well. Often, sometimes, like a class thing where they would have the family orientation, and there's just different social cues that you know what to do and not to do that sometimes I felt my parents didn't know what to do. Like, you know, chew loudly, or like at the buffet thing, you only take a couple of things, and you use the napkin. You know, just like really like little things that I don't think they had picked up on, because that's just not their -- especially my dad, because my, my dad grew up -- you know, for a while, he grew up poor. Like, they were kind of like at the poverty line growing up. And so that's something I think he often feels -- I know he does, like feels very self-conscious about. Even though he can like fit in in some ways, in some circles, for being white, but I know he doesn't always really feel like he fits in, because he feels a big class divide.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and in some ways -- never talked about it, but I think that's why, in some ways, he feels more comfortable around like other working-class, and especially, I think, at least in the city, he has more black and Latino friends, because he doesn't really feel like he's part of the kind of white, elite circle that, you know, are social workers but, like, went to Brown, or the board of trustees, you know. Like, he, he just doesn't fit in.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I always try to tell him, like, "Dad, those are the people who give the money and they have the power. You really need to, like, learn how to play golf or something. Just do it." You know, like you need to play the politic games, and he just, you know, never got that. So there were times like that, where sometimes I would feel a little bit embarrassed of that. But I never felt embarrassed like that, though, in Brooklyn. Because that just feels like its own world, you know. It never felt -- and I think also because Park Slope just didn't feel so -- it wasn't -- yeah, there was some self-segregation, but my parents as a unit and us as a family, it felt much more fluid that I didn't -- yeah, there were times like, yes, I definitely felt different. But I didn't have that moment of, oh

my God, I'm really mortified, or, wow, I feel like I really don't belong here. No, that I didn't really necessarily have growing up so much in Park Slope, and it wasn't really until I started going to other neighborhoods, or living in different cities, or going to college or boarding school that -- of having those moments of, ugh, this is really awkward, or, you know, this is very uncomfortable, or I feel kind of mortified or embarrassed, or I'm embarrassed for people. You know. So again, not to like paint Park Slope as this, you know, dreamy picture, but it did -- and my parents purposely, you know, say they picked Park Slope because they, you know, realized that they were an interracial couple and were going to raise, you know, multiracial children. They picked the neighborhood for that reason. But, you know, I did feel a little bit of not having to -- I didn't -- I guess I didn't feel like I had to work as hard to negotiate, like, different groups. Whereas later on, I think, you know, I've still been able to do that, but sometimes I know that I have to work harder at it to do that. And [Park Slope], you know, it also could just be because of age, right, as well. I just didn't necessarily feel that way. Not to say that, you know, there weren't times where it was like -- you know, it was awkward. Or like there was one time, I remember, we had this dance celebration in elementary school, like the end of the year, where each class would put on some kind of dance performance. And we were doing some song to "Batman." [2:40:00] And the teacher -- there was going to be, you know, some dance part where, you know, they -- we'd get like a little -- a more important role than the rest of the class. And the teacher said that only, like -- that I couldn't be it, and a couple of other students couldn't be it, and it had to be like this person, because she was blonde. You know. So things like that. (inaudible) you felt different and you were like, well. And now, looking back, I'm like, man, that was messed-up. But at the time it was just like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Put a blonde wig on her.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. Or it's like I don't even know why she has to be blonde. I mean, I guess because that was the movie, but like it didn't really matter. Like Catwoman doesn't --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- have to be blonde. Like, you know. Eartha Kitt was Catwoman.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yes.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I thought you were going to say they made you be Catwoman because of Eartha Kitt.

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, no, no, no. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) It was because like you couldn't be -- yeah, because of Kim Basinger.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Or Michelle Pfeiffer.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Or Michelle Pfeiffer. Yeah, like one of those, and like, you know, so -- so, you know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Well, just a few years later, it would have been Halle Berry.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And Halle Berry, yeah. But, you know, there, there were things like that. Or, you know, I know a couple of years later, especially like an Irish American neighborhood, there's some tension with, you know, some of the coaches, and like my brother and myself, because we're trying out and we're starting to get older, so race starts to become more apparent and matter more. And I remember my dad being really upset because he overheard this conversation where, you know, my brother and I should play in the nigger leagues. You know. And that was another sign of, like, oh, things are different now. Like it's not all like, oh yeah, we're all playing around the same block. But, you know, things are -- you know, things are a little -- things are a little different. You know, and things now that you realize, like, you know, I used to be really excited to go to St. Patrick's Day parade because my dad's part Irish American, and actually one of my other friends from the Bronx talks about this, too, because she's half Irish American, half Puerto Rican. She said she would also (inaudible) go to St. Patrick's Day and, like, be real exciting. Be like, “Yeah! Yeah!” And people would look at her like... Like, why, why are you excited and why are you here? Like, you know. And not understanding like, oh, not everyone sees you that way. Like you might think you're that way, or you might actually be that way, but because of, you know, what you grew up in your family, but the outside world isn't necessarily going to --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- see you that way.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. But I think that's a very particular Irish American caveat, because the Irish actually aren't in Ireland.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I've been there three times.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. No, they're not. And there is -- yeah, there is its own kind of interesting, like, white ethnicity, especially with the, you know, Irish Americans here and their own kind of tensions. It was interesting, though. I just went to Ireland for the first time in March for --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Did you like it?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Oh, I loved it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where'd you go?

JASMINE MITCHELL: My best friend got married in County Cork.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So we went to Dublin, and then went to County Cork. And I was really excited and, you know, I got like all this Mitchell, you know, like whiskey, and I was very excited about it. And my friend's been trying to get me to go for years, because she was like, "You don't understand." She was like, "You are really Irish, like, in terms of your" -- and her family -- see, and that's what's interesting, too. Like, because her parents are actually Irish, too, and I can sit around and joke with them, and we actually talk about, sometimes, how -- I don't talk about race a lot with my, with my Irish friend, but she realizes like, yeah, there are differences.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and sometimes we'll talk about things. And I remember a couple of years ago, she was like, "Do you hate white people?" I was like, "No, (inaudible), of course I don't hate white people."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But the Irish will say that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Because they're talking about English.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I was talking to this Irish guy and he said that. I was like,

"Uh. I, I don't know what you're talking about."

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I was like, "No is the short answer, but why are you saying that?"

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Well, I think in that sense, like she was talking more about the U.S., and I think she was also realizing more of our -- see, and this is what's different, too -- more of our differences. Like where she wasn't trying to, like, hide it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know. So I was talking like a lot about white privilege and my graduate program and some of the annoyances here, but she kind of -- she -- if she doesn't understand it, she won't say that she understands it. Right. She'll say like, "Oh, I don't -- I don't understand, but I don't -- I can't completely understand because I'm not you."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: "But I realize that, like -- yeah, that you feel difference."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, "In a different way than like I feel difference."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know. And it's funny when talking with her parents, too -- and she's so funny, too, because her parents will also kind of put on these Irish accents a little bit when they have guests over. I mean, they do have Irish accents, but they put it on even more.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, really?

JASMINE MITCHELL: So she's hilarious. Like she'll make fun of them all the time. You know, and like how they try to like perform. But it's funny, because I was with her, and, you know, she just married [2:45:00] this like very Pennsylvania, like WASPy family, and we're kind of like sitting around there, and I've known them for years, and just like joking and like making fun of each other, and you can just do that. And so we're talking in some ways about how there's some similarities, actually, that we found between African American culture and Irish culture in the sense of -- and I was talking about it with her father. And her father said, "You know, when you're an oppressed people, you learn to put on one kind of face, and you learn to put on a different kind of face, and you

learned when to put on those different kind of faces, depending on who you're talking to." And that really resonated with me, and we'll talk about that a lot. And there's also this culture of, like, you can just, like, ride on each other and just make fun of each other so much, and it's all fun and games. You're still friends. And it was really funny sitting with her fiance's parents, and they just looked mortified and like really --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: WASPy?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, just like, oh my God, what is happening? Like we're just making fun of each other, you know, incredibly like that. And that happens a little bit on my dad's side of the family, too. I mean, they're not, you know, from Ireland, but definitely -- you know, my father was the first to graduate from college and such. And yeah, you just kind of sit there and make fun of each other. Whereas I feel like some of my friends that now live in Park Slope, you know, come from more upper-class families, like you just don't do that. You know, because it's about being polite. Even if they're not actually being polite, and, you know, asking things that are actually very inappropriate, but don't realize are inappropriate. Like -- you know, or are very well-intentioned. So I can't say it comes from like a bad place, sometimes. Like I remember my friend's aunt was over, and somehow she basically asked like where I was from, and I was like, "Yeah, I'm multiracial," and she was like, "Oh. You know, I would like to talk with you because I would like to talk -- I would like to maybe think about writing a book about multiracial people and about how difficult it is to be multiracial."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Is she?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Was she multiracial? Oh, is she? I hope not. I haven't talked to her again.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I was just like, oh God, like, seriously? You know, it was just like -- I had to explain to her, "It actually wasn't difficult being multiracial. What was difficult about being multiracial is that people have certain expectations of what your experience should be or what it must be like, even if it wasn't actually that way. And I didn't feel that it was actually difficult, you know, in that way."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: She's going to hide when she sees you again.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. You know, I hope so. But I mean, it was from this well-intentioned place, you know, of like wanting to understand, but just completely -- and that's what I mean again about like an investment in a certain kind of naivety, right.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. But she actually othered you.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, and othered. Yes, yes. Yeah, so -- that's true. Like in a -- sometimes it's an othering and a naivety, but sometimes it happens at the same time. You know, and then --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The naïve othering.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, of a -- or like not realizing, like, oh -- you know, "This is my friend, Jasmine. Her mother's black. She grew up in Brooklyn, and she also ran cross-country, just like you." You know, so to try to like other, and then put this common bond at the same time. You know, and I can just -- like there's numerous times that I've been introduced to people like that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Where it's this, "She's just like you" and like, "Oh, she also went to prep school" and like, "She went to Williams, and her mother's black." And I'm like, wow, you're not giving that introduction to anyone else. You know, like... OK. Great. And that, you know, again, is this -- again, like that naivety and othering at the same time, of having certain investments. See, like, "Most of my friendship group is white, but look, I have this friend that's different." And like, "What a great person I am because I have a friend that looks different than some other people here." You know. Or my friend -- the same friend who lives in Park Slope, and her friend also lives in Park Slope now. You know, I was already dating my husband, and she kept on trying to set me up with this guy. And he's actually a very nice guy. He'd be great for someone else. But what she kept on talking about, "He's also biracial, Jasmine."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: She was color-coordinating you, was she?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. She was like, "He's also black and he's also white. And he was adopted, and they think he might be American Indian, too. You guys should date." Like -- just like this constant. I was like, "I already am seeing someone. I already am seeing someone." She's like, "But I think you guys are really good." And like, yeah,

he's funny and I've met him, and he's actually a great guy, but it was like that was the, you know, key --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The only match that would --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, that was like the main match. And I've had other friends do that, too. They're like, "Oh, like, you should meet my friend, so-and-so." And I meet him and, like, he's black, and you can tell he's the lone, like, black friend in that circle of friends, too, and then they just automatically think that you guys should, like, match up because he's also, like, their, like, token black friend, you know, that gets to be there. Like, OK. So. [2:50:00] And what's funny too, too, is when I started this relationship with my husband, and you know, people were very worried that he was Republican and, like, you know, very still are. And it was like he had -- he was a pariah or something, and had like leprosy or something, because he was Republican, and like how awful that was, and like, you know, everyone was really worried about me, and almost having these like pseudo interventions. And not to say I agree with my husband politics. We're like -- we have political fights all the time. But I was like, "You know, he's not a bad person because he's a Republican." And one of the things that some of my friends were really worried about -- but what's interesting, was not my black and Asian, Latino friends, it was my white friends were really worried about us continuing a relationship, because was my husband going to be ultimately OK with that I was not white? And they were really focused on that. I was like, well, yeah, we're different, and (inaudible) sometimes, yes, sometimes we have big arguments about race. Sometimes we do. But I found it interesting that they were so focused on that. That it almost seemed like an investment of, how could someone who's conservative, or from a conservative party, like be willing to, or like want to pursue and date someone that doesn't look like them? Which I found really interesting, you know, in its own respects. And other things, too. Like I remember dating other -- I had like other multiracial boyfriends, some that were black/white, some that were Asian/white, and it was interesting because sometimes people would just assume that you were supposed to be together. Like, "Oh, you're such a good match." But really, you know, it's because, "Oh, because you guys are both biracial." Or people would ask, if they were also ambiguous, "Are you guys brother and sister or related?"

Like they didn't know we were dating. You know, that kind of thing. Like, no we're not all related to each other. We don't all look alike. But that would come, interestingly enough, also mostly from white friends as well that would kind of, I think, put their own anxieties and project it onto, you know, my own relationships. Because it usually seemed like they thought it was more appropriate for me to not, not date someone who was also WASPy, or not date someone who, you know, was from a very different background. So there was this own kind of like color-matching that I feel like was sometimes going on. And interestingly enough, sometimes -- yeah, sometimes my black friends and I would talk about it. I'm not going to lie, even my husband now, like, you know, he'll make fun of himself and will still make fun of himself as being like the whitest white person ever, you know, from -- being from Kansas, and his grandfather used to head Wonder Bread, so his nickname was Wonder Bread for a while in my --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That sounds like (a character out of Ralph Ellison).

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's awesome.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I know. So anyway, we didn't know for a while, but my friends and I nicknamed him Wonder Bread. You know, now he knows and he acknowledges it. He's like, "Yeah." But they -- it was interesting, because they didn't really seem to have as much of an assumption that, was he ultimately going to accept me because, you know, I was --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Your black friends?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah, like my black and my Asian friends, and Latino friends, yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was really only my white friends that seemed like very anxious about it and would try to do these pseudo intervention things of --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: How do you think that is? Is it because your friends, your friends -- I'm just going to put a cluster of your non-white friends. It seems like you have a different discussion -- a kind of different discussion and dynamic. This is what you're kind of setting up here. And...

JASMINE MITCHELL: And I also have to say, though, too, most of my white friends don't have very many other non-white friends. So that's also a big dynamic. So I often feel like when I'm in their like wedding parties and such, I'll go to the wedding and there's like maybe, you know, one, like, Chinese American there. And then like that's it. So they don't -- but will really think that they do, you know, like have this very diverse set of friends. Whereas most of my black and Asian and Latino friends also have white friends and also have black friends and also -- like they have -- and might be closer to -- like if they're black, they might be closer to the other black friends, and especially my Asian friends tend to be closer to other Asian friends, but have a much more diverse group. And I think that's because, also, you know, where we went to college, how they grew up too, and also where we went to boarding school. Some based on personality. And also because, you know, if you're a minority and it's not a very big school and there's not a ton of other minorities to be able to all group together, you're going to eventually want to branch out, you know, and meet other people. [2:55:00] Yeah. So, yeah, so that's just a subset. I'm sorry, I cut you off there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: No, no, no, I was just curious. I mean, it seems you -- it just seemed like you were making a little bit more of a -- and it's not so much a negative connotation. I don't mean that. I think -- I'm wondering -- and I think you've said it. You were equating, like, experience, world experience, and I'm wondering how it also kind of coincides with the idea of the bubble in Park Slope versus being out in the world more in that sense. That seems...

JASMINE MITCHELL: Hmm. Yeah, I think -- I think that actually really does go inside, because what's interesting, most of my friends who had moved to Park Slope are the same set of white friends that I'm talking about. That -- you know, it was a cheaper neighborhood, but I think also has some of that bubble that allows, I think, some of them -- and I'm not -- I'm not meaning to like throw them under the bus, necessarily, you know. It's not malicious, and they're very nice people, and a lot of them will sometimes call me on the phone, or their husband will call me on the phone if they're working and say, “What do you think about this racial issue?” or “I heard about this incident, and what's your opinion?” So I get to be, like, their racial expert. Which I actually don't

mind, because...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: At least they're asking.

JASMINE MITCHELL: At least they're asking, yeah. Like some of my friends are like, "Jasmine, that must be so annoying." Like some of my other multiracial friends are like, "I'm so sick of that." I'm like, "You know, I actually don't mind, because they're asking." And when people ask, like, "Where are you from?" yeah, sometimes it's kind of annoying, but I don't really mind. I try to take it as an opportunity to have some kind of dialogue or talk about it. But I definitely do see that. And even my white friends who grew up in Park Slope with me, some who were pretty WASPy, some who were Jewish, they seem to have a very -- and many have moved out -- seem to have a very different worldview than my friends who became transplants later --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- there. And you know, even this one Cuban American friend that I have, that I met up with at this wedding a couple weeks ago. We were also kind of joking about that, too, that the people who have moved in have this very different worldview, where I felt like Park Slope -- you know, I said it was fluid, but it wasn't all like, ooh, you know, yay, like everyone's happy together. Yeah, sometimes there was tension, but people talked about it. It was there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And you knew it was there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Whereas the Park Slope that seems now, it seems like this, we'll talk about it in this kind of structure. When it's not in this kind of structure, and it's not in this PC kind of structure, we don't want to talk about it, because it makes everyone uncomfortable.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and it's not -- it's not cocktail party kind of talk that you're supposed to do, you know. Or sometimes I can even tell when, you know, I make some kind of joke and then people don't know if they're supposed to, like, laugh, or if they're supposed to not say anything, or -- yeah, they just don't know, you know. So

they're just like, hmm, what are we supposed to do?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So I do feel like that is pretty different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I just want to say, you know the artist Adrian Piper?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, I love her. Yeah. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. She would go -- she would leave the room and she would leave that --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. I actually teach that, that exercise. I taught that in my African American studies class, and students loved it. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Really?

JASMINE MITCHELL: They really -- because I would assign that article, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," and then would, you know, talk a little bit about Adrian Piper as an artist, and then would actually have them do their own calling cards and say, OK -- they loved the calling cards thing, like when I would show them the slides. They're like, "Oh man! Oh snap! Oh no! I can't believe she did that!" And I'd say, "OK, now do your own calling cards, you know, of what you wish you could say to people." And the student responses were actually really interesting, too. And I think much more diverse than I think many certain kinds of educators would assume. Because the diversity actually really that there is within Brooklyn itself. And even though, like at York College, I would say most of my students were -- actually at York and Brooklyn. Most of my students were black or Latino, but you often forget -- and this is -- but I also see sometimes in Park Slope, too, that I have to explain to people, I'm like, "Not all black are the same. Like, some are African American. Some are from Jamaica. Some are from Nigeria." We have very different experiences then because of that. Very, very different experiences because of that. So it was very interesting to get some of those student responses, actually, coming from those calling cards, when they would do their own calling cards.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What was that? What was -- what were some of them?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, you know, some would talk about being -- [3:00:00] actually, some would talk about being, you know, from different cultures. So where they

were grouped into being from black, but maybe their dad was from Panama and their mom was African American, and of trying to navigate those kind of groups and boundaries of how people respond to them. You know, some about gender. Like, just because I wear short-shorts doesn't mean I want you to, you know, grab my butt. All kinds of different things. So the responses were really interesting, but I think especially the ones where someone on the street might just see them as like, oh, that's just a black person, but where they were really able to go into the diversity within the black community in New York City to talk about the differences. You know, and some of the best debates, I thought, were where we did talk about those differences. Where, you know, some of the Caribbean students, and I had some black British students too, which was very interesting, Nigerian students, African American students, Panamanian students, would, you know, really get into debates with each other about what it means to be black. And those, those differences, too, where some of the Nigerian students or Caribbean students would say, "Oh yeah, my parents don't like the African American so much because they're uneducated," or like, "They're violent and dirty." And I do have to say, actually, most of my black friends that I grew up with in New York City and friends with here, coincidence, somehow, are mostly Nigerian, actually.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, really? OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. So I actually felt like that was also kind of a thing that some of us had, of, you know, people will see us and assume one thing, but actually, like, we have this other thing going on at home. You know, so even though some of my black friends in the city weren't multiracial, sometimes did kind of bond over the navigating this -- where they're like, "People just assume I'm African American because I'm black, but actually this is what I'm doing back at home." Or one of my friends, she just got married, and they had one half of the wedding -- her husband is half African American, half black Honduran, and her family is from Nigeria. So they had their marriage in the church, and then -- it was actually really interesting going to their wedding, and that's where my husband said he felt very white, because almost everyone was black. And there were a good number of Jewish, because she went to Brandeis, so she had a good number of Jewish friends there. But all the music was -- it would be like hip-hop, and

then he'd come on there -- and actually I did feel bad for him, because then everyone was like, "Come on!" because he was just kind of standing there, and then he started, like, dancing. And actually, most groups -- I feel bad. In most weddings, people will say, "Oh, he's a good dancer," because at least he'll dance. And then he was dancing, and then everyone just kind of looked at him. And I was like, "It's OK, you can keep dancing." He's like, "No, I'm just going to sit down. I feel really embarrassed, because everyone's staring at me." And was like -- (inaudible) was like, oh. That was not the experience I wanted you to have. Then Nigerian music would come on, so all the Nigerians would get up and everyone else would sit down. And then salsa music would come on, and then like, you know, people from Honduras would come up, and then everyone else would sit down. You know, so even within that wedding, you did see this microcosm of black diversity within the city, even though she was from the Bronx and he's from Queens, but you know, there were definite differences.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Even, even among that. That I think does get lost, especially in places like Park Slope, I think, because it doesn't seem like there's that kind of awareness. I'm not saying everyone's like that in Park Slope, but just this, like, "Oh, well, they're black" or "They're Latino," whereas I felt like, growing up, you had also this understanding that some of the black people were speaking Spanish because they weren't African American, they were Puerto Rican or Dominican or Cuban or whatever. And you kind of -- that just became part of your worldview. Whereas I feel like, with a lot of my friends in Park Slope, I really have to explain that, you know, and say, "Well, like, you know, that restaurant there" -- they're like, "Oh, there's a lot of black people who eat in that restaurant." I'm like, "Well, they're mostly Haitian, because it's a Haitian restaurant." Or, you know, those kind of differences that I think -- it's great that I think Park Slope does have this celebration of diversity, but I do feel like so much of the celebration of diversity is like, "Yay, we're all the same. We all live in harmony together." We actually don't feel that way, that that's what's actually happening, that it's really more about everyone becoming the same kind of, like, progressive thing of like, "I eat organic food" and like, "I have some impressive job" and like, "I vote Democrat, and

I do this," and like kind of check all these boxes, but without actually really wanting to engage with people who are different than --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- than they might be. And that's not to group everyone together. There's like a certain subset of what some of my friends are like in [3:05:00] Park Slope. But it does seem like a trend in a lot of the neighborhood. And even like, I worked as a waitress, actually, at this restaurant called Bogota on Fifth Avenue.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: That's owned by -- actually, two multiracial guys, actually. He's half Costa Rican, half Greek, and his partner's like half Colombian, half Palestinian. And when they opened up the restaurant, it was kind of like a Pan-Latin restaurant, focused on Colombian food, but we would get people from all over. And actually like a lot of Latino families who were really excited to have a restaurant like that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Ooh.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- in the neighborhood again. And people, people would come all the way from Queens --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, really?

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- too. Yeah, because it was like also a Colombian focus. They were excited, and it was a little more like upscale. But also people from like the Fifth Avenue neighborhood would come, because it was something that -- it was different, but it was recognizable. And, you know, was fancier.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was more expensive. But it had some kind of bond with what Fifth Avenue used to be. Because now -- Fifth Avenue, I think, is what has changed the most for me when I go to Park Slope.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: (inaudible) Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, because Fifth Avenue, Park Slope, I remember as being like overwhelming Latino.

END OF AUDIO FILE

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. So we're just going to restart it again. This is part two. We took a brief break. I'm back with Jasmine Mitchell. Jasmine, is there anything that you felt like I should have asked you that I didn't?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, that's a good question. I don't think so. I can say, though, actually, one thing we didn't talk about was how my views of Brooklyn, especially Park Slope, like changed, depending on -- actually when -- once leaving the neighborhood. So, you know, I guess like any teenager does, one thing I remember is I really wanted to get out. So it was actually my idea to go to boarding school. I was researching boarding schools. I was really excited about it. Because, you know, at the time, it was hard. I lived in one of those railroad apartments, so it had basically no privacy, and would often use the bathroom as my private space, because no one was going to bother me there. If you just close the door, people assume you're sick or, you know, who knows. They don't want to know. But to get to the bathroom or the kitchen, you had to go through my room. So I just hated that. Just hated that. You know, and then eventually my parents put in a door, but it didn't matter, because, like...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You still had to get to the kitchen or the bathroom.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You still had to get to the kitchen or bathroom, and like no one knocked. It didn't matter. You just like swung it open. So by the time I got to boarding school, it was more privacy than I had ever had. And so everyone was like, “Oh my gosh, we have to share the bathroom.” I was like, this is great. I get my own space. You know, and I can eat whatever I want, and it's not always going to be spaghetti. This is fantastic. But, you know, I think sometimes it's interesting seeing how your perspective of your neighborhood change once you leave. So I did start to appreciate my neighborhood much more, you know, after, after leaving, for just having -- being able to have the opportunity, at least, to interact with people that were, you know, very different from each other. And I think once I started to interact with people who had not had that opportunity, I realized, oh, wow. You know, there was something very beneficial, I think, to being in that neighborhood and being able to have, you know, that kind of experience. And before, we were talking just now about being in a different country and then seeing someone that looks like you. You know, and I can't say that I ever met

people that were like exactly multiracial like my brother and I, but at least I felt like there were all different kinds of shades, and like different colors, and all different kinds of phenotypes in Park Slope. So that it wasn't, you know, beep, beep, beep, beep, this person doesn't belong here. You know, I think I felt that the most, actually, when I lived in Argentina, in like 2001. So this is before all these tourists started to come to Argentina. And...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It was just recovering.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. Or I was actually there right when we had like six presidents in a month, like, you know, that kind of thing, and it was really chaotic. And a really interesting time to be there, and that's its own other story. But definitely feeling really different there in a way that I never felt different, because, one, people were very confused that I was an American. They just kind of -- like they didn't understand. And most people would think I was Brazilian. And then I also realized I was becoming very sexualized, because people assumed I was Brazilian and had their own stereotypes about Brazilian women. And so often did feel very isolated. So I would get a lot of attention, like just walking down the street or going to nightclubs, where I did find it difficult sometimes, because I wasn't necessarily trying to bring that attention on myself. I didn't really want it. I especially didn't want that male attention, necessarily. But -- it's like other women would say, “Oh, you know, you think” -- almost like early experiences I have. Like, you know, “You think you're special” or “You think you're that.” I'm like, no, it's actually really not great to be really exotified. You know, like I don't want that. Trust me, you wouldn't really want to trade places with me there. And it was also kind of experience because sometimes I would rarely see a black person there or some -- I don't know if they were [05:00] Argentine. Sometimes I would meet some Nigerians there, since they're from Mali. And I would talk with them in the park, and sometimes if I saw someone in the street, I would actually follow them, because I just wanted to know where they were going. And I think it was just this desperate need to see someone that looked -- not even -- not even necessarily like me, but like people that I knew. Like people that I was related to, like some of my friends that I had in New York. So by the time I got to Brazil, you know, I thought it was like this racial paradise and I was so excited. I was

like, "Everyone looks like me," and I learned, you know, very quickly, that it was actually not a racial paradise at all.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where did you live in Brazil?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I lived -- so when I was in Argentina, I traveled for like three months by myself, and then I ended up getting a job right after college in Sao Paulo.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, nice.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. And that was really interesting in itself, because I was one of the first two black teachers that the American School had hired.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh. When you were there -- when were you there?

JASMINE MITCHELL: In 2003.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Nah, we would have just left. Lashaunda was there in, in Sao Paulo. She spent a lot of time in Sao Paulo.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Was she a teacher?

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: She was -- she wasn't a teacher, but she was doing -- she moved in those circles because she, she was a professor and she had like -- I recall that she had a lot of different -- she wasn't a professor yet. She was still studying. She was working on her Lusophonic literary course --

JASMINE MITCHELL: OK.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- and blah, blah, blah, Ph.D. The Andover one.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The Andover friend.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: I mean, that was isolating in itself, that experience, too. Because I thought -- I was so excited to go to Brazil. And you know, it is very interesting, like how your ideas of race change when you, you know, move outside. So that definitely had a big effect. And because I had become racialized differently, too. So I remember, there, you know, the first day there, they thought that I was one of the cleaning staff, even though I was one of the teachers. Because they weren't -- the students weren't used to having someone that looked like me. And there were a lot of really racialized statements

that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You mean the one about --

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- were said --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- the kitchen?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, and it actually was interesting. Like even though -- most of my students actually weren't American. Most of my students were actually Brazilian or from elsewhere in Latin America.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like Mexico or Argentina, and it was actually much harder to deal with them than it was for my American students. Well, because, one, I think American students, there's a certain idea of you can't be that disrespectful to the teacher.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, you just don't do that. Whereas I think, at least the Brazilian mentality of like, we're paying for -- we're paying for this.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So, like, you give me this, and I give you that. So much more entitled even than the wealthy American students, which, you know, is hard to believe, but it was much worse.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Actually, like much, much, much worse.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: The Pan-Am school or something or...?

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was the American School in Sao Paulo. Graded. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And, you know, so that was an interesting experience, too, and the neighborhood that we lived in was [Morumbi], which is this -- it's interesting because it's very upper-class neighborhood, very wealthy neighborhood, that's basically across the street from a favela. So, you know, the other teachers would be horrified that I would walk home from school and that I would take the bus. They just, you know, just like couldn't get over it, because they were like, “That's terrible,” like, “Something bad's going to happen.” But, you know, it was also isolating in a way because it was this -- like

one of the residents in our apartment building would call -- always call me "That Spanish girl." you know, "That Spanish girl, that Spanish girl." And she would accuse me of stealing, like, all the time. So, I mean, that was really messed-up. Like there was one point where the school actually came to our apartment because -- and it still makes me angry when I think about it. She came into our apartment that I was sharing with two other American teachers, and the school came in because they own the apartment, because one of the women, who called me "that Spanish girl," accused me of stealing. And she was just causing all kinds of trouble, like, in there. But it made me so angry that, like, they didn't even ask --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right, they just came in and searched your apartment.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, if they could come in the -- they just came in, you know, and started -- and then it was over some stupid mat, like gym mat, that she said that I stole. And guess what? Like we had the same gym mat, and they gave it back to her because there is one like sports store that's in the neighborhood that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They took your mat and gave it to her?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It still makes me really angry. And it made my roommates really angry too, because it was...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They entered for a gym mat? I thought you were talking about jewels.

JASMINE MITCHELL: No. No, but then we were -- but then we were really upset, because we were like, "What are they going to say next? Like, we stole their computer?" Like, you know, they could kind of say anything.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And they would make up all kinds of, you know, things about how we were having, like, wild men come to the apartment and such. And we were like, "No, we have the one other African American male teacher that comes here and hangs out sometimes." Like this is not [10:00] anything wild coming on.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: No Sodom and Gomorrah here.

JASMINE MITCHELL: No. But -- so that, that kind of racialization, then, definitely -- and those experiences -- definitely make you think of your own neighborhood, right,

differently, right, and in some ways, like, appreciate some of the dynamics in your own neighborhood a little bit more. And some -- I'm not saying -- I don't like saying, like, Brazil, the U.S., you know, one is better or worse, right. They're just different from each other.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Just slow racial ideas?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. I mean, I think there's like both a rhetoric of like anti-blackness in both countries. Like that -- you know, they have that in common.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But the way that it's grappled with is, is different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It's still -- it's 1950s in Brazil, I always kind of thought, in a weird way.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. I mean, it's changing a lot, I think.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I haven't been back in about -- in about four years, so.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Like there's -- when I was there, they just started affirmative action. So even the media that you see, like you do see more like black actors on television, and so I think there are some things that are --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: They were always OK with black entertainers.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But not on telenovelas, and they can't be beautiful. You know, so they can be musicians, they can be soccer players, they can be the beautiful samba mulatta dancers, but they can't be actress, celebrities, or models, necessarily.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So there's that whole kind of dynamic. So that is -- that always interested me, like, being in these different places, and then coming back to Park Slope and thinking about my experiences there, or even just my experiences generally, like in New York. And how your own sense of self, but how your own performance, really, also changes, right, depending on -- you know, depending on your dynamic and where you are and what's comfortable, what's not comfortable. Like what's going to be awkward. I remember I did a home stay in Rio, because I was part of this government program where they -- it was great -- where they paid you to learn Portuguese. It was fantastic. So --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What program was that?

JASMINE MITCHELL: It was the Foreign Language and Area Studies Program.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: [gasps] I didn't get that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So I did that one summer. And my host family, the -- her -- she was an elderly lady, really nice, and her sister came over and they started talking about, you know, like, you know, Afro Brazilians this, Afro Brazilians that, and like how she would feel so uncomfortable, like, having Afro Brazilians in her home, even though they seemed fine having maids that, you know, are part Brazilian. That's different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And it became this awkward moment where I was like, "Well, actually, like, my mother's black." Like I didn't know what to say. I was like, gosh, I'm living in this home, and then I know I'm going to be here for a couple more weeks. Like, do I say something, do I not? I was like, fine, I'm just going to say something. And then she was like, "Well, no, that's different. Because you see, African Americans are clean and they're educated and they're so different than Afro Brazilians. You don't understand. Like, we don't mean you, because you have, you know, you know, Obama, and like, you know, all these like great people that are much better than" -- you know. So it was like this different kind of racialization of blackness, really, right, that was occurring there. And in some ways, I actually sometimes feel that that happens here in New York as well, and, you know, somewhat in Park Slope, with this certain kinds of blackness that is acceptable, right. So I feel like for some of my friends, it's -- I can be part of an acceptable blackness because I went to the same kinds of schools as them. You know, played sports that are stereotypically not black, like ice hockey, and I did long-distance running and cross-country and, you know, things like that. So seem like just them and seem like, you know, the right kind of blackness, rather than the kind of blackness that I think many people really don't really want to see or feel very separate from, right, or distant from. So I do think sometimes, you know, I do feel that negotiation. And you know, yeah, I do have to say, too, like my mother's side of the family, you know, they were middle-class African Americans in Philadelphia. Everyone on my -- differently than my dad's side of the family. Everyone on my mother's side of the family went to college, which is very different than my dad's white side of the family, where most

people don't go to college. Most people don't -- all my dad's family lives within probably 15 minutes of each other. [15:00]

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. So it's just the kind of place, like, you just don't really leave. So I think that's something he feels very proud of. And sometimes I get a little snide with him a little. He gets kind of protective of his family. Because sometimes it's just true. Like when we got married, since they were kind of resistant to things that were different. You know, like my aunt's very picky about food. So he gets very protective of that, but sometimes I can tell -- my brother and I talk about this -- that somebody seems a little bit embarrassed of them as well, which is kind of interesting to view. Or sometimes we'll go to a restaurant and, you know, everyone's ordering, you know, like scrapple and, you know, that kind of thing. And that's just what they have. And then dad will want, like, some, like, egg-white thing, no salt. Like really -- yeah, I understand, he has health concerns. And --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But they're in New York. That's what --

JASMINE MITCHELL: But it's very New York. And we're like, "Dad, just order like -- just order the egg whites with toast. You're making it really complicated." You know, and then he'll kind of give them some lecture about, like, you know, everyone should be doing this. And my brother and I will just kind of shake our head, because we're like, you don't -- they don't understand. So sometimes there is that, like, race and class dynamic that I feel, you know, in my own family. Or everyone in my, my dad's side of the family -- I mean, honestly, most people don't understand like what you do if you're -- what a Ph.D. is or what a dissertation is. They don't. But even more so with them, because they keep on asking about like "that paper," and when am I going to finish that paper, and like how long am I in school. And, you know, "That's great" or -- you know. Just a very different milieu. You know, a very, very different milieu. And so it's also interesting going to Pennsylvania, and then going to see my mom's side of the family, where they're a little more spread out. My grandparents lived in West Philly, and then they ended up moving -- keeping the house in West Philly, but ended up moving to a smaller apartment in Center City. And then everyone else is in, like, Baltimore or North

Carolina, and my parents are in New York and other people are in New Jersey. But the kind of conversations that you have, you know, can be a little different just based on the milieu, and so much of it is, yes, again, also based on class and opportunities and what people are doing. And then I feel in some ways like Brooklyn is, at least for me, a little bit of -- you know, it's different from both places. But a little bit of a bridge, right, of the two, because in Brooklyn, you're constantly navigating different groups. And just like when we go see either side of the family, we definitely fit in. It's not like, you know, we're outsiders. We fit in. But the kind of language that I might use, or the way that I might describe certain things, might be different --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, from one side of the family. Some of that is based, I think, a little bit on racial lingo that you use, or slang that you use, and a lot of it based on class and based on geographical area. You know, rural versus city. That, I think, also occurs, you know, depending on where you are in Brooklyn, too. Just the kind of speech and language patterns that you might use and the way that you talk about things are very dependent on that context.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. All right. Your family's name, your mom and your dad's name, you didn't say them. And you said your brother's name is Ben.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah. My brother's name is Ben. My father's name is Bill. And my mother's name is Janise.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. OK. Well, we might have to try and co-opt them into this whole.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, they might actually be -- they might actually be, be, be interested in that and see, yeah. My mom loves -- my mom actually loves history and, you know, oral histories and -- one of my big regrets is not doing -- my grandmother had asked for years for me to like take an oral history class so I could do an oral history of her. And actually, her -- my mother's side, their family history is fascinating. Like just incredibly fascinating.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Where are they from?

JASMINE MITCHELL: They're from North Carolina.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But just really interesting. So they're very aware, actually, as well, of the multiracial, like, background that they have in their family. I mean, they consider themselves black because that's just what you call yourselves. You know, different contexts, and that's also how they self-identify, but my grandmother's like, "Yeah, we're related to Jefferson Davis." And my grandfather always talks about -- when he, you know, hears about some of my, like, research, looking -- interest in mixed-race issues -- he's like, "Oh yeah," like, you know, he's like, "My father was a mulatto," and we'll kind of talk about that. And it's very interesting hearing about their transition, especially here from North Carolina to moving to Philadelphia. And, [20:00] you know, my grandmother was one of the first black nurses in that hospital. So very pioneering, and I have the utmost respect for them. You know, really hard workers. But it's actually great. We actually had a couple of family historians who actually were able to get records all the way to right after the -- actually, no, I'm wrong -- right before the Civil War. I think like 1850. Which is amazing.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, to be able to get slave records from that. And so that's actually interesting, too, because my mother's side of the family is much more willing and very open about talking about family history than my dad's side of the family. You know, some of that's upbringing, too. Like my grandmother, you know, she grew up poor, whereas my grandparents, they didn't necessarily grow up wealthy, but my grandmother's father was a preacher. He owned land. And then when my grandmother died very young, they -- the family was dispersed. Some were sent to Philadelphia, some were sent to relatives and aunts and uncles, because he just couldn't handle like seven children. But very open about talking about that, whereas my grandmother -- you know, it will come in bits and pieces, but it sounds like she had a hard upbringing. You know, she, she had it hard. She had the opportunity, for example, to go to college. Actually, both my grandparents went to college, too, and she respects them a lot, too. And they've passed, but she would always ask, like, she's like, "You know, I don't know how they managed to get to college and pay for it." I was like, "Well, they all slept in the same

room, and like they -- one sibling would send money back so the other one could go to college, and they would kind of pick which one was going to go to college and which one wasn't and was going to work." Whereas she just really didn't have that option. She said she was one of the top students in her class, and the guidance counselor called her in and said she might qualify for a scholarship to Lafayette College. So she was really excited and told her parents, and she said her, you know, step-father basically told her, like, "Fuck you." Like, "Who do you think you are?"

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like, "You're going to stay here and you're going to work."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: "You know, because you have work to do and you need to support the family." So -- and she's really intelligent, too, but just that kind of -- I think not talking about things, and also -- you know, she identifies as white, but even the small American Indian side, she doesn't really want to talk about that. She was like, "Yeah, I know, but like, you know, everyone" -- you know, "I remember being in school, like everyone would make fun of you." Or people would play Cowboys and Indians or watch Westerns. Even my aunt talks about this, and say, like, "Oh, why you trying to kill the good guys?" You know, so that family history, no one really wants to talk about, whereas my mother's side, they're much more, like, "Please talk about it and share that."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Can you say their name-- because you --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, sure.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: So your grandparents, I gather, are your mother's side, and your grandmother is your father's side?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yes.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yes, yes, I'm sorry. So my grandparents on my mother's side are Margaret and James [Reader]. And then on my father's side, Patricia Mitchell, who's still alive and she lives in Bucks County, and my grandfather was also Bill Mitchell. But by that time, when I was growing up, they had already separated and he was living in Central Pennsylvania.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. Williamsport, you said?

JASMINE MITCHELL: About an hour, maybe an hour-and-a-half north of Williamsport. So it was really -- like there was dirt roads. Like -- and it was actually great in some ways growing up, and I think this did influence, too, kind of worldview. We'd just go out -- because he had, you know, a bunch of acres, so we would just like go out, running around the property, and there were chickens, and you would go pick apples, and there were deer around, and -- you know, people kind of joke about -- or sometimes these are the kind of jokes that I make. He had like three different freezers, because he used to hunt a lot. So when we were hunting, it wasn't like just for fun. Part of it was fun, but it was also because you were going to eat that. So he had all these freezers to store the deer meat that was going to like, you know, keep him through the winter.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: He had the duck.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Nope. Once he hit a bear with his Suburban, so then his response is to like, get the bear, skin it, and like eat bear meat. You know. So that is kind of different than like, you know, some other people who were growing up in Brooklyn. Like, you know, also having that background and spending part of the summer there.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Like, "What'd you eat for lunch?" "Oh, my dad made bear stew."

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, no, I never ate that. I think that actually influenced -- I became a vegetarian for a while and I think it was from those kind of traumatic experiences, where you see this beautiful white deer, and then the white deer doesn't come to the apple trees anymore, and then you're eating deer. You know, like -- some people react differently to that. Or even on my dad's side of the family now, my uncle still hunts with, you know, one of those very high-tech, like, bow and arrows, you know, and went bear hunting in Maine, and like stood up in the trees for a couple of days to hunt his bear, and brings it back and you eat it. And my cousin, Nick, you know, trades venison meat for [25:00] pie. Like, you know, they're like -- so -- and this is also diff-- you know, different to explain to people, you know, here in Brooklyn, which is very urban. And I admit, like I don't feel part of that. Like I can -- I get that they're related,

but I'm not hunting for bear and I'm not trading venison meat and --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, for -- yeah, or like...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But if they pack up some venison sausage for you, you'll take it?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I don't really eat it. But... They do bring it. They do bring it, and then they're like, "Oh, where'd you get these pies from?" They're like, "Oh, I had -- yeah, I killed a deer, so like I had a lot of extra meat, so then like my friend's wife, like, you know, said she was going to make some pies and we trade it." And then I had to explain that to some of my friends, who are like, "What?" And even -- and that's what I mean like a different kind of whiteness, too, than like my -- like some of my white friends who live in Park Slope. Because that's not what their family is doing.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: No.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, so. That's not what their family is doing. So that kind of -- and that's what I'm saying. Like, you know, it's class and race together, and almost being racialized, actually, a different kind of whiteness.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, of where it becomes like this working-class whiteness where I feel like -- so I (inaudible) those who have a certain kind of white privilege, right, you know, want to really disassociate themselves from. So whenever I kind of joke about this -- and yeah, it is kind of funny -- they just kind of laugh and also look slightly horrified, you know, and don't know if they're supposed to laugh or not. I'm like, "No, it's OK, it's kind of funny." Like -- or t's very different. And it's OK, you can laugh about that difference. That's fine. You know, so that is a different kind of experience than, you know, what I think some other like multiracial families have, you know, in the city, just from my dad's background being, yeah, you know, a little different from, you know, someone who was white and grew up in Brooklyn in itself. So he comes from kind of a different lens, and because of that, I think I came with a different lens, because we would spend -- you know, a lot of family visits, see my grandfather and also my grandmother's side, and spend part of our summers there with all three relatives, and my

family would just kind of -- or my parents would just kind of ship us off for like a week or two weeks. So, you know, we had the living with my grandmother in Bucks County and being really excited to actually be in the suburbs, because it was so different than being in the city. And we were really excited that there was a pool. We were really excited. There was a community pool that was clean, where, like, I wasn't worried about, you know, like someone, like, taking off your bathing suit. You know, all that kind of stuff that I grew up in the city with. And being able to do things like that, and having a backyard was really exciting. And then having -- West Philly, they would put all the cousins together. Which was actually -- which was fun and miserable at the same time. It was kind of a, you know, bonding experience. And that's actually, too, where sometimes I did feel different in that neighborhood, I think, being in West Philly. And sometimes where -- since my cousins would make me feel different and other people in the neighborhood would make me feel different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, really?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, so -- because West Philly is mostly -- at least that neighborhood, Cobbs Creek, was mostly African American. And I did have one friend growing up there that I would see during the summers, [Donica], who was half African American and half Nicaraguan.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And she'd always been on that block, you know, for a long time. So -- she was also, actually, very light-skinned as well. So we would hang out -- not just because, you know -- it's different, but close family friends. But people would sometimes come in the block, and there was -- everyone knew us on the block, and then my grandparents, you know, were very protective, because West Philly, like, going through a transition, too, and it -- you know, some blocks were kind of dicey. Some blocks were not so good to be on.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So you knew you had progressed when first you weren't allowed to -- first you had to be in the backyard, then you could go to the stoop. Then you could go within like two houses. Then you could go down the whole block. Then the big deal, I

remember, when we were allowed to cross the street to go to the library, and we felt, like, super excited. You know, it was like, da, da, da, da, da! And here we go. We are -- we are -- we made it. You know, and then -- and then we were able to start going to the roller skating rink and some of the neighborhoods. And, yeah, sometimes like some -- especially interesting -- like, girls would come up and be like, "Oh, who are you? You think you're all that."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, or like, "You're some grade-A white girl." And then that feeling of difference, and looking over at my cousins and being like, oh, OK, I guess I do look different than most of the people here on this block. And sometimes my cousins coming to my defense, and then sometimes [30:00] some of my black cousins -- I remember one time I was really upset because my -- one of my cousins, she was a year older than me, she was kind playing -- you know, she was just joking, but she was like, "Did you know that you're adopted?" And I was like, "Really?" And I believed her and was like, "Mom, am I adopted?" She's like, "No, you're not adopted."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, I just -- I was very confused and upset. You know, like, "I can't believe no one told me I was adopted," you know. So sometimes, like, there would be those kind of mean things. And even one of my cousins now -- you know, I feel like most of the time, we can be the same, and sometimes, though, I have to say, like still the meanest thing that I think -- one of the meanest things that someone has ever said to me is we got into this huge fight, and the thing that -- and I'm not a person who usually yells. I don't yell at family or friends. And the thing that set me off was she was talking about me and my brother and relationship with our parents. And she said, you know, "It's like you guys are in Imitation of Life." You know, that like 1959 film. It was kind of just like tragic mulatto film where she tries to pass for white and can't recognize her own mother. And that just, like, set me off. You know, just so mad. So, you know, she later apologized kind of, and she's like, "Oh, that's not really what I meant." And I was like, "Yeah, but..." I talked with one of my other cousins about it later, because we have similar issues sometimes with this cousin, who can be quite mean. And she was like,

"Yeah, but" --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: She's just mean.

JASMINE MITCHELL: She -- I mean, you know, we love her, but she can be -- she can be mean. Like she can -- she knows where to -- where your sore points are, you know, and will go for the jugular.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So, you know, I was like, "Yeah." My other cousin and I were talking. She was like, "Yeah, you know, out of all the films, all examples, she chose that one." So it wasn't completely innocent. You know, there's -- she chose that one for a reason, you know, even if she finds like, "Oh, you know, that's not really what I meant." I'm like, "Yeah, but you chose that for a reason."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Like you could have chosen something, something else. So, you know, sometimes there, there's that dynamic. And she's actually the same one that I remember being really young and she wanted to cut off my hair because -- yes, actually now I'm thinking about it. Like sometimes this was really happening in Philly, but it seems so different than in Brooklyn, because that just wasn't happening --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right, right, right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- there. Because, you know, I didn't realize it, and I didn't care, and I didn't really want it, that I had good hair. And my grandmother would get -- I remember when I was 11, I cut it into, like, one of those bobs, because I was so tired of it taking forever to wash, and she started like almost crying because she was so upset. Because she was like, "You don't understand." Because hair was such a big deal. And it's still something I try to explain to my husband. I'm like, "It's a big deal. You don't understand, it's a really big deal. People and their hair." And this particular cousin, I remember there was one night she tried to cut it off, because --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: While you were sleeping?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. But it was like when you were young. I think she was like seven. So it's like -- but you're already realizing those kind of, you know, colors and differences --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- within where I was -- you know, not wanting to be -- but like the prettier one, or the good one. Not that you want to be, necessarily, but just, you know, within the colors and within African American community itself. But that, see -- but that was always different, too, because I didn't actually have that in Park Slope, or at least I don't remember that. And I don't know if it was just because I was blissfully unaware of it or if it was just because I felt like Park Slope had so many, like, black and Puerto Rican and white and Asian American, and just everyone, that it wasn't -- I'm not going to say there wasn't tension, but -- and there wasn't a hierarchy. Sometimes there definitely was. But it didn't seem as intense, necessarily, I think, because there was so much diversity within the neighborhood, even. Like you could walk a couple blocks and it would seem different. Yeah. So sometimes when I would come back from, you know, from West Philly or from, you know, visiting, you know, my grandfather, kind of like in rural Pennsylvania, and then you come back to Brooklyn and you're like, oh, wow, this is different.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, like this isn't -- Park Slope isn't the whole world.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, it's, it's a very certain sector, and most of the world actually isn't like this.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. So, wait, she tried to cut it off, but she didn't cut it off?

JASMINE MITCHELL: She didn't cut it off.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. Dull scissors?

JASMINE MITCHELL: She didn't cut it off. No, I can't quite remember. Like, we were seven or something. I think like I woke up or, you know, something like that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's the same cousin that did the, the story comment? The movie comment?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh. Oh yeah, so she has some deep-seated animosities.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. No, not animosity, it's just -- and she's actually an actress and stuff. And she's beautiful, you know, herself, but. She's also very dark, you know, as well, so I think sometimes there is that -- you know, I don't know. We've actually never really talked about it. And sometimes I feel [35:00] a little bit -- as we're older, when I would talk with her, because she'll often talk to me, you know, "As a black woman..." or "People don't understand" or "As a black woman..." or like, "Jasmine, you just couldn't possibly understand." Or, you know, like, "People treat you this way" or "You become very sexualized. It's so hard." I'm like, "Yeah, you know, sometimes that happens to me, too." I'm not saying, like, our -- and there is a difference. Like I'm not saying our experience is actually exactly the same, because we do look different from each other.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But I do kind of, you know, have some chaffing at this idea of like I -- that I can't be included of what it -- what it's like to be a black woman or have, you know, that experience. Because I do consider myself to be part of that group, but it might be just a different experience than what she might have. And actually, a lot of the time, she'll talk about something, like, "Yeah, well, that happens to me, too." Or, "That happens to me, too. Yes, that happens to me, too."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, or things where it feels -- like she had dated a Swedish guy for years, who's great. She messed up that one. You know, sometimes it's a little awkward, because then I remember talking with her a few years ago, and it was like right before I got engaged to my husband. And she said, "You know, I just would never date a white guy again." You know, and that's kind of awkward, because my father's white and in a serious relationship with --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Maybe you mean a Swedish guy, but...

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Or, you know, like... Yeah, and not to say that there aren't differences. You know, I feel like there are some parts of some of my experiences that my father just cannot understand.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and just -- (inaudible) that is a gap, I think, between us, because sometimes I think he really wants to understand and doesn't realize that he's just not going to get it. And I think my husband sometimes has that, too. And my husband actually even more so, because I think -- he, you know, sees more of it now, but things that are, you know, super racist, I think he has a hard time believing is actually true. Because, you know, there's also -- in this way, sometimes, I think he actually sees race, I think, more than some of my other friends in Park Slope. But sometimes there is an investment of not wanting to believe that that still happens.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yes.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, of like, "That doesn't happen." Or like, "You must have" -- or -- oh yeah. The great thing that I love about some of my white friends, especially in Park Slope (inaudible), of like, "You're being really sensitive." I'm like, "Well, I have a reason to be sensitive." Like, if you had the same experiences or the same kind of fears or same kind of anxieties, you might be really sensitive as well.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But you don't experience that, and you don't have to. And your child, who's also white, probably likely won't have to experience that either, and you, most likely, and most of your circle, won't ever have to either. And I think my husband sometimes -- especially, I think, on like political issues -- we argue a lot about like political issues, I think, especially when it comes to race. So it gets very contentious. But I think he also -- it's interesting. Like since we've started dating and married, he's actually the one who often notices commercials or movies and ads and bring it up with me and say, "Oh, did you see that?" or "Oh, wow, that was really messed-up" or "We should write an article about that. You should see what was coming on there." You know, or -- even his conversations with some of his friends, sometimes he realizes like -- I think -- or at least from talking with him, I think -- I don't want to speak for him, but it seems like sometimes he sees race differently now, too, and is able to see it through a different set of eyes from some of his friends. Like he was talking -- like one of his friends who -- they went to Harvard -- like didn't know that lynching actually meant that you killed them. And how you're a Harvard graduate and don't know that is really

upsetting. And my sister-in-law, who -- his, his brother's wife, like, doesn't understand that either. Like things like that. I was like, "But you grew up in New Jersey. All of you did." Like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. Well, it is a hidden history, though.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, hidden history, and I'm like, wow, like what, what did your parents have to do, or like what did your community have to do to not have you learn that? You know, I find that really scary in itself. And so it's interesting for him. He's just like -- he gets very incredulous about it. He's like, "How -- you know, how is that possible?" Or I know there's another time he said they were in -- where were they? Oh, they were in Tennessee, and they were like at some arcade and playing some game, and you get these tickets. So he didn't want the tickets, so he went up to some little black girl and said, "Do you want my tickets?" And then his friends kind of joked, they're like, "Oh, I bet you gave, like, you know, the little black girl tickets because she's black." And he's like, "Well, [40:00] no, I just gave her because, well, most of the people in here are black, and, well, I just -- I don't know. I just gave her some tick-- you know, I gave the little girl tickets."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right, right, right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And he was just like, "Why, why did you even -- why did you even say that? You know, big deal." So it's interesting to see him, I think, with him being in a relationship with me. And he says -- and he said, he was like, "You're saying that because of, like, the relationship I'm in. Like, that's why you're saying that, you know."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: To negotiate the idea --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, to negotiate that. So it's interesting also being in a relationship with someone and seeing him kind of negotiate that, or -- like, yeah, sometimes people say really messed-up stuff. Like it's amazing what people will say. Like one of his friends, they kind of joke about it's a status symbol to have an Asian girlfriend. So -- like for a white guy to have an Asian girlfriend. You know, so they were kind of joking about that. And they said, "Well, you know, even though maybe you would have an Asian fetish, you don't have an Asian girlfriend, but at least Jasmine looks Asian." And he was like, "What? Like, what does that even mean? And why would you

say that?" Like it's just bizarre. You know, so I think it's, it's been interesting for me to hear, sometimes, his reactions when he comes back and like tells me about some experience to how he's having to kind of negotiate this different terrain. Even in a city that is like New York and very cosmopolitan.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, because (inaudible) live in New York that will make those kind of comments, where they don't see that actually as inappropriate.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Or don't understand like why that's inappropriate to, you know, to say or do. So even within city like New York, and Park Slope and the Village -- and actually, a lot of his friends who say some of this stuff live in the Upper West Side. So even within these like supposedly very progressive factions, there is, I think, this discomfort with difference. You know, there's discomfort with difference, definitely.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Acceptable ranges of difference.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, acceptable -- yeah, exactly, like acceptable ranges of difference. You know, and sometimes when I talk to him, I'm like, well -- because I remember early on in our relationship, he said, you know, "I don't understand. Like you're always wanting to go to some like black film, or like black celebration, or like this or that, and why can't you do something different? What about an Asian celebration?" And I said, "That's fine. Like if you want to go to one, if you want to go to some Asian film festival, that's awesome." Like, I'm not opposed to that. I've gone to some. But, yeah, like maybe I am more interested in going to -- or have a certain proclivity to wanting to go to an African American film festival, or going to music events, because maybe that's part of how I grew up, and that's OK. And you do things that you don't even realize where everyone's like you.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, and that's just acceptable. But it's when someone that seems different, or of a different color, it's all the same place, then it becomes, oh, you know, you know, "I don't know about that." You know, and you see some of those tensions. Like even some of my friends that -- I have a couple of friends that moved to

East Harlem maybe about seven years ago. And -- I mean, that's a different neighborhood, but I was working in East Harlem at the time. And it was interesting hearing some of their reactions, because they said, "Yeah, you know, it was really upsetting, like some guy came up to me and spit on me." And I said, "Yeah, that's really wrong, but you have to understand why that might be happening." This is like white transplants who had moved in. Because that's wrong. I'm not justifying that. Like, it's wrong. You shouldn't be doing that. But I'm just saying when people who look like you start moving to some of those neighborhoods, they know they're gone. You know. Which is what I felt like happened in certain areas of Park Slope. I mean, Park Slope is a little different because it wasn't necessarily, like -- it wasn't Spanish Harlem, or never had that reputation, but Fifth Avenue kind of was.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, I think --

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, Fifth Avenue Park Slope was --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It was black and Latino.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, like Fifth Avenue kind of was. And yeah, you start seeing certain kind of people, and you realize, oh, you know, the jig is up. And even when I was living in Fort Greene, like when I would see more and more -- like at one point, it was strange. It became the most number of French people were living in Fort Greene in the city.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, really?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, it was bizarre.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I didn't notice that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Because I had -- one of my French friends, he had some, like, French, you know, French friends from Paris coming to visit and said, "Hey, will you take them out?" And they were really excited to come to Fort Greene and really excited to come to Brooklyn. I thought maybe they wouldn't. It's funny, I couldn't even get some of my, you know, American friends to come to certain areas, right, but they were really excited. They were like, "Oh yeah." They're like, "Because we know about Brooklyn and we know about Fort Greene." [45:00] They already knew about it, even though they lived in Paris, and they were really excited to come. And I thought it was interesting, like

just, you know, (inaudible) year after year, you would see more people move in, and you're like, oh. It's over. It's over. It's over. You know, and it's hard to say what to do about that, because it's not that people shouldn't be allowed to move in and -- but I do think it's a shame when I think there's not very much of an investment in the community and of not trying to get to know people. Or it becomes kind of like a weigh station.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Well, a lot of families are moving there, and again, it's a lot of interracial families that I see moving there. And people buy.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Which I think is a -- I think --

JASMINE MITCHELL: That's a big difference.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: What's different from Park Slope is that Park Slope seems to have been a rental revolution.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And people started branching out into Bed-Stuy, Clinton Hill, and Fort Greene, buying.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You know. Which is getting harder and harder, because you've got to drop --

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: -- 1.2 million for a house at Franklin and Dean.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Wow. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: That's still kind of hoodish.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was actually interesting when my -- when my parents were being forced out of Park Slope, they actually really wanted to move to Fort Greene. That was where they really wanted to move to. But they couldn't qualify for some of the affordable housing units or like the -- some of them, like the wait list was too long. They're like, “We need to move right now. Like, we don't have any heat. Like, we just need to move within like the next couple of months.” And the place that -- one of the places they did look at -- my mother, being smart, asked to see behind the carpet, and there was this huge hole in the middle of the floor that I think they were trying to hide

with this carpet. You know, but they were still nervous about certain areas of Fort Greene, because certain areas -- because my brother was not yet a teenager.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So they were, you know, still a little bit concerned, so -- and it was also -- I mean, let's be honest. I tell my parents, they're like, "Oh, you know, we, we should have moved to, you know, Park Slope, or we should have bought in Park Slope. We should have bought in Fort Greene." I always tell my parents, "Let's be honest. You still couldn't afford it. So like you say that you should have, but you still couldn't have afforded it. It was still too expensive." But I do think you're right, and I think that's a huge difference with, like, Fort Greene versus Park Slope, was that almost everyone I knew who moved out of Park Slope were almost all renters. So very few people got to stay. And it did really change, because I remember when -- I guess I was like 11 when I started going to junior high on the Upper West Side. Probably like 11 to like maybe 2001 or something. No one knew where Park Slope was. Like even -- no one knew. They were confused. Like even the people in the city, when I would talk to other kids, like who went to junior high with me, I would say, "I live in Park Slope" and they were like, "Where's that?" and I would try to explain. Or other kids who went to Andover with me, like some of the Park Avenue -- you know, the rich Park Avenue crowd, and then also the other scholarship students, who were often from, like, Bed-Stuy or some were from Midwood or Canarsie. They didn't know where that was either. You know, no one knew where that was. And then by 2003, everyone knew where Park Slope was.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: It was brownstone Brooklyn.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, because it was this -- you know, it went from, like, having to explain exactly where it was -- "It's on the F train, like on this stop, and actually it's a great neighborhood" -- to it being, you know, this hot spot from where -- I think when my parents left, I guess in -- I think it was like '98, it was $700. We had the whole floor, like in our railroad apartment. To -- I mean, I don't even know what it's like now, you know. Just crazy. And even Fort Greene, when I was -- let's see. I left there in 2007 and we were paying $1800 for a two-bedroom.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, that's a bargain.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, it was a bargain. Oh, we actually got that, too -- this is also the thing about Brooklyn. We got that a little bit -- I was like, "There's no way we're going to get this apartment." Because I went with my roommate. I said, "I don't even know where we're looking." And this is my roommate who's from San Diego, but her grandmother had grown up in Brooklyn. This is when I was looking at Fourth Avenue. My parents were like, "You cannot move there." I was like, "Really, it's fine. It's fine." But -- so we went to look at this Fort Greene place, and there were all these people at the open house, and all these, like, white, young professional couples. And I told my roommate, I was like, "There's no way we're going to get this apartment. I can't even afford this." And the landlord went up to my roommate and said, "Is your friend from Brooklyn?" And she said, "Yeah." And she goes, "Yeah, I think I recognize her. I think she played softball." So it turned out, like I think -- I don't know if -- I think we were in the same softball league. Like we were never on the same team, but like in the same league that like played, you know, against each other. And she's like, "Yeah, I think I kind of recognize her." So she actually -- [50:00] she gave us that apartment.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah. She wanted Brooklyn.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, she gave us that apartment. And I was like, "I can't afford this, really." So she lowered the rent $100 too.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I was like, wow. I mean, she was crazy. She really was. She was a terrible landlord. She was like letting mold grow and she was really crazy.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Ooh.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And I knew, like when there was a problem, I would just -- I knew where she lived, so I would just go to her house and I'd wait outside and just wait for her to come back, or her brother to come back. She was horrible. But anyway, but it is kind of weird. Like, there was this kind of weird Brooklyn connection --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- there, where there were all these people and I was like, "We're not going to get it. I can't even afford this," and she lowered the rent, you know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- for that, which I don't think would happen now.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And now -- I was there, I think, last month, and my husband and I were just looking at real estate. That's kind of like our hobby, and looking at what we can't afford. We're like, "Oh, that's nice. We can't afford that. Oh, that's nice. We can't afford that." And there was a real estate company right next door to where I used to live in Fort Greene. And he was like, "Yeah, you know, there's an opening there. Like, it's really nice." I was like, "Yeah, how much is it for a one-bedroom?" And he's like, "Yeah about -- like at least -- at least what you're going to pay for in Fort Greene now is $1,800." And I was just stupefied. I was like, wow, that's what I was paying for a two-bedroom, you know, just --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Wow.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- a couple of years ago.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: There's more -- there's some that cost more than that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh yeah, I believe that. That's why he said -- that's why he said, "That's probably what you're going to start at, is $1,800."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: He didn't even say, like, "That's going to be your average." He just said, "That's probably what you're going to start at."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: You're probably looking at $3,500.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. He's like, "You're going to start at $1,800."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Three thousand -- because $3,800 is the average in New York City. So 25 to 3,000 for a one-bedroom.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Oh gosh, yeah. I can't believe -- yeah, our rent has -- it's amazing our rent hasn't grown up. Because, yeah, it's actually cheaper -- because people ask, like, why you even moved. And I really would like to move, because it's too cramped in here for the two of us, but at the same time, we're paying less than most of our friends in Brooklyn right now to be in the West Village.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So, um. That's -- it's -- like we know we need to move. There's all

these things that are always wrong with the apartment. Like the super never fixes anything. They tell us to fix it.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But it's also hard to move when you live in the West Village for less than what most of my friends are paying in Park Slope and Boerum Hill. And maybe they have a little bit more space, but it's not that much more.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right. Studios are not cheap either out there.

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, no, no. They're, they're expensive, yeah. And you know, even, even Fort Greene, just like you were saying -- like in Clinton Hill, I have some other friends that have moved out there, and so I've even asked them about it. I was like, "Yeah, maybe I should try to move back to Fort Greene or Clinton Hill," and they were like, "No. You're not going to like it. You're not going to like it." Maybe I would. I still go there. But they're like, "You don't understand." They're like, "It's all these, like, kids that are in co-ops and..."

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Is Clinton Hill that bad?

JASMINE MITCHELL: I don't know. I haven't really spent enough time there. Just walking around --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, the model lives there. Who's that model? The Ugandan model. Alek Wek.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Oh, she lives there. Yeah. I don't know enough -- I know when --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: But she's lived there for years, before the wave.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Before the wave.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Yeah, yeah.

JASMINE MITCHELL: When I started -- I guess like 2007, I started to go to some -- being forced to go to some parties in Clinton Hill, even though I didn't want to, and I was just like, oh man, is this going to happen to this neighborhood, too? Where you'd see these guys in these T-shirts that were talking about, like -- you know, like white guys with like big Jewish afros -- about how they were fighting the man, and how they're not going to work a corporate job. And really, you know that their parents are paying for their apartment.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Like trustafarians.

JASMINE MITCHELL: They were like trustafarians. So they had fun, like, making art and, like, being, like, rebellious and -- I remember they were getting kind of like anti on me, you know, buying into the establishment. And I was just like, you know, like, just shut up.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Grow up.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You don't even know what you're talking about, so. But I don't know if that's happened there. But I guess I get -- you know, I guess I was part of the wave of gentrification in some ways, like in Fort Greene, even for the -- I guess it was only like four years that I lived there. But I get even a little bit nostalgic about that as well, about that period. Because I was still working -- like I was working -- I worked in New Jersey, at a nonprofit in Newark for a while. I was also teaching SAT classes, waitressing to be able to pay the rent. Then I worked at the Museum of the City of New York, and like still waitressing to pay the rent. But I did like -- I felt like I really met people in the neighborhood, much -- not how like it was in Park Slope, but I liked being able to go to certain bars, and it seemed like a very diverse crowd. I liked being, actually, around other young black professionals, and not feeling bad about it, or being self-exclusionary, or being, you know, around [55:00] people that were, you know, artists and musicians and educators. And, you know, everyone kind of had their own like little thing going on. And you'd run into people, and maybe like -- who did we sometimes see in the neighborhood? What's that journalist? Oh, Touré. See him come around sometimes. Yeah, and now when I go and see my friends in Fort Greene, I'm not saying that's completely absent, but felt like you have to look kind of hard to look for it. And maybe I'm not looking hard enough. But, you know, just a little nostalgic for, for that as well. And even for the Fort Greene that I would go and visit when I was growing up. I remember my parents sometimes would take me to -- oh, Spike Lee had that studio there and that little store for 40 Acres and a Mule. So -- and BAM. They'd even kind of take me to those, you know, those places. So I think in some ways, actually, my parents, like, even though they never talked about, like, "You have to identify as this, as that," they tried really hard to expose us, my brother and I, to lots of different kinds of cultural

experiences and artistic experiences, I think especially, you know, since my dad was already in the arts. So we went to see a lot of Alvin Ailey, and I took flamenco lessons, and my brother and I took lessons at Ballet Hispanico, and did a lot of things at BAM. We went to, you know, a lot of theater. So I think my parents also definitely put some effort into trying to, you know, navigate that. Which seems different than also some of the other multiracial friends that I have, especially with black/white multiracial. The group in the suburbs where they just had a very different experience than, than what I had. And it actually seems much more of a prescribed, like, this is how you should identify, than what I did. And I remember asking my mother a couple years ago -- because it all seemed like they were in Jack and Jill. And I was like, "Mom, why was I not in Jack and Jill?" Like, you know, it seems like all the other, you know, students that -- well. Upper-middle class black students, and I didn't understand it was more of a class dynamic with Jack and Jill -- I was like, "They all went to -- they all went to Jack and Jill." And she was like, "Jasmine, they would not have wanted us. You don't understand. And we didn't really want to go there either. There's nothing wrong with that. But... we also didn't really need that." She was like, "We had black friends in the neighborhood, and you had your family, and you were able to interact. Like, you didn't need a group to talk about that and become future leaders, because that was already happening" --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- "you know, within that, so we didn't need that." And she's like, "And they didn't really want" -- you know, and she even admits sometimes, too, like she didn't always feel entirely comfortable to attend these groups, because she was married to a white man as well.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So sometimes she'll, she'll talk about that, you know, a little bit as well. And say, "Yeah, you know, it was a little different." And it is -- you know, I do remember definitely having those memories, even within Park Slope, too, where -- you know, people asking my mother if she was babysitting, and knowing that that was really offensive, but not quite understanding why it was so offensive --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- at the time, and my mother getting very upset and saying, "No, these -- no, these are my children." You know, with that. And even now with, you know, with my husband who's white, of trying to -- if we ever have children, and he really wants to have kids, of trying to explain that his relationship as -- with his children might be different than what some of his friends might have. We were just talking about -- and he didn't believe it at first, and I was like, "No, just look at this article." Like there was that Wal-Mart incident a couple weeks ago, where a white father was in the Wal-Mart with his two black/white biracial daughters, and the security guard, like --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: No!

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- was really suspicious and stopped them, and then the police came to his house because they were worried that he had, like, abducted them. So, so I said, "You know, that still happens. Like -- and I'm not saying that's going to happen, but I think you should, like, be aware that that happens, because" -- we never had anything, you know, as extreme like that, but, you know, we definitely had incidents where I remember growing up, too -- like there's a reason why my parents didn't really like traveling to the South. I remember definitely going to North Carolina and -- and not even just to the South. You know, certain areas outside New York, and you'd notice everyone else is getting served and getting a menu, except for our family. And realizing, oh, our family [1:00:00] is -- our family is different than other families here. And, you know, my father getting very upset and walking out. You don't quite -- sometimes it takes a while to like put all the pieces together, but realizing, oh, like, we're being treated differently because we don't look like everyone else, and we're being treated differently in a bad way.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, because of that. And sometimes, too, even being treated differently, which seems like a good way -- it's not always a good way -- of like, oh -- you know, this emphasis on like how, you know, beautiful and different children look. Like I remember -- even now, actually, to be honest, that happens. When people ask where you're from, and they'll say, "Oh, that's a really good look" or "You look very exotic, and that's really good." Of that kind of difference that's being, you know, loaded.

One of my favorites is when people will comment on that I speak English very well. That's always my favorite. I'm like, "Yup." I'm like, "Because that's my native language." They're like, "Yeah, you speak so well. I'm really impressed." I'm like, "I know, because it's my first language." And then I just realize, no, there's no point in even engaging with this. Like -- because that's my first language. And it happens in the U.S., but also, you know, it happens definitely a lot abroad. People don't understand why I'm Amer-- that I'm American, and I have to really explain, and they still don't understand often. And sometimes, especially in Brazil, would get upset because they would think sometimes that I was a snobby Brazilian that didn't want to admit that I was Brazilian, so wanted to be Americanized. And, you know, other incidents too, yeah, where you realize -- that's what I was saying in terms of being -- not only people saying that your black is like the first thing, but then of being able to turn -- sense that difference and turn that difference into something negative. Like one of my -- first time I was called a nigger was actually Nicaragua, like of all places. It was actually kind of scary. Because we were in this very, kind of upper-class bar with all the Nicaraguans and a bunch of Americans, and these Nicaraguan guys were trying to hit on some of my American friends. And I was like, "Just please go away, go away, go away, go away." And then they start going to like, "Oh, you know, you think you're better than us. Like you think you're all that. Like, you know, you think because you're American -- you're not even American. Like, where are you from? You're from Colombia" or "You're from Cuba" or "You're from that." I was like, "No, no, I'm American, I'm American, I'm American." I'm like, "Just leave us alone. We're American." Not that that should actually like give you an exemption card, but just, you know, I was getting angry that they didn't see me as American. And then finally I think they put it together, and they were like, "Oh, I get it." And they were like, "You're a nigger." And then they just start screaming that. Just -- and like getting really in my face. And it's one of those words, you know, that does sound like this visceral, like, reaction. You know, where I really thought I was going to get into a fight, like I was going to strangle him or punch him. And then I realized, like, this is a really bad situation. I'm in this bar. Like, who are they going to believe? And then outside -- we were in Managua -- it's all these guys with machine guns. Because it's, you know, it's

Nicaragua, and Managua. And I was like, "This is really probably one of the worst places to get into a big bar fight." You know, and then I also felt kind of upset because, you know, I understand maybe they just didn't want to cause trouble, but like none of my American friends kind of said anything about it. You know, and just let me get really upset about it. So that's -- and that's where I see those differences of like, oh, we're all the same, but actually we're not really the same.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And we're going to scoot over here right now.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, we're going to scoot -- we're going to -- yeah, we're going to scoot over here right now. Exactly.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Or just pretend -- just pretend that you're something else.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, pretend you're something else. Yeah, and that -- and that is something that I think definitely, you know, happens, like, along with other minority groups, you know, as well. I've talked about this a lot with some of -- especially with some of my Asian American friends. Like, yeah, well, you know, we can be in solidarity, but at the end of the day, sometimes I feel like there are differences and...

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And actually, sometimes I feel like those workshops are -- you know, I've gone to some workshops like that to talk about race, and also sometimes just my friends. Sometimes I feel like those actually really brutally honest conversations are great, where it's hurtful --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- but I was just like, "You know, at the end of the day, I feel like, you know, you throw -- you throw me under the bus." You know. And they're like, "Yeah, you know, that, that's hurtful, but maybe there is some truth to that." Right, so. (inaudible) like not -- when we say people of color, there are differences too. (inaudible) There was like even a hierarchy within that. So, you know, so that incident was kind of upsetting, too. So I also feel that way -- you know, in some respects, that like there's this idea of like, oh, we're all the same, until difference gets called out in [1:05:00] a bad way that might also impede on, like, the privilege that --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know, someone might have or inhabit. Or potentially harm that privilege, right, where, "Oh, I don't want to get too involved there. You know, with that." You know, and in Argentina sometimes -- I never had anything like that happen, but some things like where some man would be really way too sexually suggestive and want to touch and such, and usually what I found was interesting -- and you know, I don't mean to make a generalizing statement there, but it was often my -- some of my other friends of color who were also there in the program that would also step in and say, "This is wrong." Whereas like my white friends, nowhere to be seen. You know. They like you because maybe you'll get into the club, because you look different, and so that becomes cool. Which is also very different for guys, too. Like the -- you know, there's a whole different gender dynamic there, so, you know. Guys of color get treated differently.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: But then, you know, the end of the day, don't really want to be here. So, you know, and so in some ways, that also, I think, translates -- not to be completely negative, because I think some people are really progressive and are well-intentioned and are really committed -- in some ways, I think, translates in some ways to like Park Slope. In some ways of -- like I wonder how many -- and I'm not saying like you have to stay in a neighborhood forever. You know, of course not. Like people can -- people are free to move around. But this idea of being able to be in this cool neighborhood that people think are diverse, but in the day, don't really want to trouble themselves with something that's inconvenient or uncomfortable or threatens their own sense of self.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know, in that respect. And again, I'm making an overgeneralizing statement. It's really not everyone. But I do feel like there's this really progressive but conservative dynamic in Park Slope right now, which feels -- and again, I might have rose-colored glasses, but feels very different than when I was growing up. And, you know, I do -- people -- it wasn't not like -- especially growing up, like the school children would make fun of each other. It wasn't like they wouldn't make fun of each other.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: And actually going back to the black Irish thing, her -- it was -- at least I thought it was kind of cool. But people thought that I could be really tough, because no one wants to fight with you, because if you're black and you're Irish, that means you're really tough and no one should mess with you. And you're probably going to be a little bit crazy. You know, like don't mess with you. So. You know, so it's not like no one, like, made comments or made fun of each other, but I also felt, though, that people would stick up with each other, or stick up for each other, if they saw something was wrong, or, you know, something was going on, and would kind of put themselves on the line, you know, a little bit more.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I wonder if that's an urban sensibility.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, it might be.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Because people from suburbia don't do that.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I think a lot of that is true. You know, like my dad didn't have -- I mean, now I'm just like, wow, something bad really could have happened, but he never thought twice when he would kind of jump in and interrupt a fight. But he didn't grow up in an urban area, but I think became --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- you know --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Urbanized.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- acclimated to that. Yeah, urbanized to that. So I think, you know, some of that is, yeah, definitely an urban sensibility. But I also didn't -- for the most part, you know, even though there were some -- you know, like this was a Puerto Rican area, this was an Irish area, I'm not saying everyone stuck up for each other, but it did seem like people were willing to stick up for each other more, even if they weren't from the same like ethnic or racial backgrounds. You know, of like, well, that's just -- that's just wrong. You have to --

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: -- stop that. So maybe willing to go outside, you know, of their own group a little bit more. But I do think you're right. I do think that a lot of it does

have to do with, like, urban sensibility, and we're all in this neighborhood together. And I think that was part of it, too. Like there was more of a sense of, like, this is our neighborhood, so we have a stake in making it better. You know, so whether that be, like, we know that, you know, that guy is beating up his wife. Like, you know. There's a stake in making that better. You know, and if he's doing that in public, like not letting him do that.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: You know.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: To -- you know, if kids were like messing around in the neighborhood, you know -- well, I was kind of a goody two-shoes, so I don't ever think that I had my parents called. But, you know, people would -- yeah, would call your parents or, you know, tell you not to do that, or, "What are you doing?" You know, so a little bit of that, I think, affinity, and in some ways like a little bit of that toughness [1:10:00] in the sense of being willing to get into other people's business. And that's what I mean a little bit in terms of Park Slope now seems a little bit like more individualistic in the sense of like it's OK if it's this kind of community, but if it's like over there, I don't really want to involve myself. And I don't think, actually, that's just Park Slope. I think that's actually like a lot of neighborhoods in general. They start to lose some of that social fiber.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Right.

JASMINE MITCHELL: That kept them together.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: OK. Anything else?

JASMINE MITCHELL: No, we've probably gabbed for a long time.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: And now you have to go on to a phone call, don't you?

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah, I'm getting on a phone call for -- actually, this kid in El Salvador. That's -- yeah, that's starting this new social venture project, which is exciting.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Oh, fun.

JASMINE MITCHELL: So yeah, so I'm kind of (inaudible) other volunteers and mentors. [I guess we're starting that. Yeah, so it's fun.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: So, thank you.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. No, thank you. Yeah.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: I' m just going to formally end the interview so that the transcriber knows that it's the end.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Sounds perfect.

JEANMARIE THEOBALDS: Thanks.

JASMINE MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. Thank you for coming out and --

END OF INTERVIEW