

LINDA – Fieldnotes – April 18, 2007

Subject: Interview by Betina Jean-Louis and Kimberly Hearn
Location: Harlem Children's Zone, on 125th Street and Madison
Time: Approx 1:50-3:55

[I'm exhausted and hungry after what felt like a formal interview. Betina basically told me that she was initially skeptical about how I would fit into the project. That I was late only added to the awkwardness of having to sell myself to a project about which I know very little.]

I catch a bus going to the Harlem Children's Zone at 125th and Madison, which I have seen on my way to the airport. It is a huge, sparkly glass and metal building taking up half the city block, with glass walls at the street level looking into a gym. When I passed by the building a few days earlier on a bus to the airport, I noted that on the next block, just across Madison, there is a boarded up building. Nervous about my interview today, I did not notice much about the neighborhood.

I got lost initially after entering the building. Nobody was downstairs, so I got into an elevator and pressed 3. I had forgotten to check where Dr. Betina Jean-Louis' office was. Not the third floor—clearly the school, with colorful bulletin boards on the wall. I hit five, but the elevator went down, and a student and perhaps her mother got onto the elevator. The student gave me a small smile when she saw me in the elevator. Floor five looked more like offices. When I talked with the receptionist on the floor, initially she did not know who “Dr. Jean-Louis” (French pronunciation) was. She send me “through the glass doors,” where another receptionist awaited. Again, this person did not know Dr. Jean-Louis, so she went to get someone else. He introduced himself, a middle-aged light-skinned man with the surname of Smart [I can't remember his first name] and I told him who I was looking for. He sent me to the sixth floor. The receptionist called Dr. Jean-Louis to let her know I had arrived.

Betina came out, holding out her hand, and introduced herself by first name. She reminded me that we would also meet with Kimberly Hearn. She led me through a narrow corridor, with enclosed offices on one side and cubicles on the other. I was amazed at the sheer number of people working there, in addition to the other floors (how many floors in the building? 8?). This was an Institution that employed many, many people in service of doing good for the community.

Kimberly was seated in the office, in one of two chairs on the other side of a large desk. She greeted me when I came in. Betina has an office with a window. During the interview I kept getting distracted by the flocks of pigeons flying around. Betina was wearing a black button-down blouse with a pattern of small flowers and leaves. Kimberly, who seemed about my age, was wearing a dark-blue pinstripe dress with nylons and a sweater.

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[I sensed a weighty silence when I came in, a different feeling than when, say, Eckson and I showed up late to the conversation between Varenne and Yaowen.] I apologized for being late, probably at least 20 minutes, and Betina asked me how much I knew about Harlem Children's Zone. I told her not much, just from the press and the website.

She gave me a short overview, that the program started out as something else and was renamed as Harlem Children's Zone in 1991.

[Break for meeting and for class]