

LINDA – Fieldnotes – April 20, 2007

Subject: Meeting with Valerie Kinloch, Damon, Phillip, and Khaleeq

Location: Valerie Kinloch's office, Teachers College

Time: Approx 4:40-5:20

[This was very much a group conversation, with people coming in and out. I write as if turn-taking was orderly, but it was not. I did not take notes; I felt it seemed aggressive except in direct response to being offered resources (a book title) and future plans (the presentation on Monday). Without notes, I am unsure of the order of conversational topics. I also did not catch much of their language; most of this is my own phrasing except when in quotes. Since I did not take notes, the accuracy of these phrases are subject to the vagaries of memory.]

I sent an email last week to Phillip and Khaleeq, the young men working with Valerie on her Harlem project. I received a reply from Khaleeq last night, and replied today. I forwarded the message to Valerie and asked if she could introduce us, maybe at the tail end of one of her meetings. She called almost immediately and invited me to come over to her office. She told me she had been "on them" to reply.

I hear voices and laughter before I knock on the door, which is ajar. Valerie is sitting behind her desk and three young men are sitting around her conference table. The empty chair has its back to Valerie. Valerie comes to greet me, and the young men grow quiet. Phillip gets off his cell phone and Valerie thanks him. She puts her arm around me and introduces me, then introduces each young man. Phillip gets up, shakes my hand and greets me. Khaleeq also shakes my hand. Damon, sitting near the door, takes my hand very briefly, looking down as he says, "Nice to meet you."

Damon wants to know what I want to know, he mumbles something that I don't hear. Phillip instructs me not to pay attention to Damon, he's talking to himself.

I take the chair and drag it next to Phillip. I say I want to know more about Harlem, not knowing anything, being an outsider wanting to do research. I describe the project as a project on education in Harlem, not just in schools, but the learning that happens all the time. I also told Valerie that I just came back from talking with people at Harlem Children's Zone, who were concerned about exploitative research.

Damon is new to the group. He hesitates, says he has too much to say, can talk for a long time. I say something to the effect that I want to hear it.

Valerie gets us started, asking Damon if he grew up in Harlem. He assents, tells us 121<sup>st</sup> and Lenox.

He gives a history of Harlem  
Starts with making money "illegally or legally"

037P

040P

041P

042P

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First the Italians in the 20s  
Then African Americans moving in  
More recently, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans opening shops, doing well  
[He says something to the effect that he doesn't begrudge them]  
During the nineties, drugs  
Now lots of new buildings  
Lots of people leaving for the Bronx  
He adds, Brooklyn, Queens

Phillip starts saying something about poverty, gentrification, and struggle, reading statistics out of a book. How few people in Harlem own rather than rent, how most of these renters are African Americans. "Show Linda the cover," Valerie tells him. *Listening to Harlem*, written by a Columbia professor. Phillip praises the book. When I complain that a library search does not bring up much on Harlem, and that a library search at Columbia does not bring up a book written by a Columbia professor, Valerie mentions that there is another book. She then announces something to the effect of getting back to the topic at hand.

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Valerie mentions an interview with Veronica [?], a white person who has moved into Harlem. Phillip jumps in, and talks about how she didn't even know what gentrification is. That she lived in gentrified housing. I add, that she's part of this gentrification. Valerie tells Damon and I [I think that Valerie, Phillip, and Khaleeq interviewed Veronica together] that Veronica claimed that poor people would not be impacted by the new renovations, since poor people's housing is "protected" [she gestures the quotes with her arms].

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Valerie asks Phillip how he feels about his community. This doesn't produce much of a response, and she tries again by asking where are the spaces they hang out, mentioning one place in particular. Damon and Phillip talk at the same time, Phillip saying something about how you can no longer hang out at that place. Damon says something about his neighborhood. He says he lives in the oldest brownstone in Harlem, and Valerie responds, "Oh really?" Phillip and Damon get into a discussion of how nobody wants to go to his block, nobody hangs out there.

Valerie points to the poster on top of the table, a piece of cardboard made out of a flattened brown box, with a pie chart depicting what looks like answers to a survey. Something like, "What do you like about the changes in Harlem," but I didn't get a close look at what the categories were [housing was one]. She tells me that Phillip just did a presentation on perceptions of a changing Harlem, and asks him how has his neighborhood changed. He and Damon talk about people having to leave and new people coming in. Valerie and I ask who, and Valerie specifies in racial terms, referring to Dominican and Puerto Rican mentioned earlier, when you are talking about people having to move out, do you mean African Americans? Expressions of agreement, that African Americans are having to leave the neighborhood, and "all kinds" of people are moving in, "people of all ethnicities."

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I can't remember who also expresses frustration with people [African Americans] not doing anything, sitting back, not like what they are doing in the room. That everyone else is making money off of Harlem.

Valerie invites me to attend a class in which they are giving a presentation, a class at Teachers College in Arts and Humanities. I ask in the direction of the young men, and Phillip says, "You're invited," as if I did not have to ask them. Valerie asks Damon if he will be there. Valerie tells them it may not take the entire 1hr 40 min, and Phillip tells Damon that people will ask questions. I chime in that if people get into it they won't want to stop. Phillip says that this will be a class of teachers, and some live in Harlem. He explains that "it's like we're the teachers, and they're the students."

At some point Phillip explains to me that they have a speech class [I assume he and Khaleeq, and I'm not sure if the poster was prepared for that class.] Phillip's phone rings sometime during the conversation. He announces, "it's my brother," and talks briefly before returning to the conversation, which has gone on with him on the phone.

Damon asks me, then Valerie and me, what we think of what he has said. I tell him, these are the issues I've heard about from my conversations with other people: gentrification and drugs. I add, in talking with older people, I also hear hip-hop. As I say this I turn slightly toward Phillip. Phillip says Khaleeq's got a whole speech on that. Khaleeq nods. Damon says he's got a lot more to say, and I tell him I hope we can have a chance to meet again. Valerie says again that this is the first time she's meeting Damon, and she wants to see him again. He looks down, shyly. I say to Khaleeq that I'd also like to hear his "speech," referring to his thoughts on hip-hop.

Valerie says several times that she has a meeting at 5. There is some movement up. Damon wants to show her his prom, and the girl he's thinking about taking to the prom. Valerie tells them that they should do a walk-through of Damon's neighborhood. Damon says something about his neighborhood being someplace people don't want to be, describing it as a church, a mortuary, another mortuary, another church, and so on, gesturing with his hands to show which building is next to which. He jokes that he doesn't know whether he's going to get saved or die.

Meanwhile, Valerie is explaining that they tape the walk-throughs and that she could show me some of these tapes. Phillip opens a cardboard box on Valerie's desk that is labeled "Professor Valerie Kinloch," asking if these are the tapes. It's not; it's a huge stack of papers, and Valerie says it's a dissertation. I tell her I've just been asked to serve on a defense. Damon and Khaleeq head toward the computer at her desk, and Phillip joins them. Valerie heads towards me as I tell her that it's for a professor who's out of town. She complains about this dissertation, which just arrived and is being defended next week [I think]. She has been asked to be a third reader, whereas I am a fifth.

Damon eventually pulls up a picture of the girl after some admonishing from Valerie about being late for her meeting. At the same time, Phillip, Khaleeq, and Valerie discuss helping Khaleeq with rehearsing his speech for Monday. Valerie says she really wants to

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hear the speech (whether over the phone or in person) before he gives it. She asks what time he starts school, and he responds, 8:15. Both Valerie and Phillip reply with a version of a groan, with Phillip saying, "You're on your own then." Damon asks Valerie if he should take the girl to the prom. He closes the window as he asks, so that when she looks at the computer more closely, the picture is gone. Valerie tells Khaleeq that she doesn't live too far, maybe on Saturday they can get together. "You know where I live." She names a street in the 200s, and Khaleeq says that's far. It's not that far, she tells him.

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Eventually we all head out of her office. Valerie goes back for the dissertation as the young men head toward the door of the outer office. I thank her for inviting me and she tells me that this was an impromptu meeting.

Valerie then chats briefly with someone headed toward the same meeting, who has an office in her cluster, confirming the location of the meeting. Phillip and Khaleeq have headed to the elevator. Damon lags behind, and again says to me that it was nice to meet me. I repeat this, and tell him I hope I see him Monday. In getting something out of his pocket [a phone?] he drops change all over the floor. Phillip and Khaleeq are already in the elevator. I bend to start picking up coins, and Valerie does too, asking if we can keep anything we pick up. She rags on Phillip and Khaleeq, saying some friends they are, not helping Damon pick up his coins. Phillip protests that they are holding the door. Valerie reminds Khaleeq to call her. I tell them, see you Monday.

I walk Valerie to her meeting, which is on the other side of Teachers College at Grace Dodge. Valerie laughingly tells me that they have a lot to say, that they got quiet when she told them I was coming over. I shrug and say that they don't know me. I thank her for getting us started. She tells me that this was the first time she met Damon. When she got a call saying that there was someone really interested in the Harlem project, he had heard all this about it, Phillip went like this (head turns to side, hand hiding face, as if embarrassed).

I tell her that I can immediately see what we are interested in: teaching one another how to give presentations. She tells me that she wants them to know that people are interested in the project. I ask if they are comfortable being taped, and she emphatically says yes. She tells me she has a tape of them explaining their project to ??.

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On our way to the classroom, we meet more colleagues going to the same meeting. Valerie stands outside, hand on the door, telling me about the class she is teaching at Heritage, training students to be ethnographers of their neighborhoods. I tell her I'm writing for funding for a third year, and that I'd also like to get funding to train someone. So if someone really catches fire with it, and could stand to work with me, maybe I can pay them. She lights up and says she is thinking of a few students. I ask if she is paying Phillip and Khaleeq, and she says yes, she started out asking them for small things, and when the Spencer grant came through, it was either buy herself out or pay them, and she decided on them.

*The conversation started out formal with awkward silences and pauses. Valerie drew out Damon and Phillip; Khaleeq did not say much. Once conversation got going, Phillip, Khaleeq, and Valerie seem to have a very easy manner with one another, teasing and scolding and supporting one another. I hope to draw on this, to speak again with all three. I wish I had asked questions specifically about their project, but I assume I will hear about it on Monday.*

*Multiple moments of education*

- *Valerie educating Phillip and the others on how to behave with me, and presumably, with other adults/university people/strangers*
- *Phillip educating Damon on how to talk to a class of TC students*
- *Valerie, Phillip, and Khaleeq inducting Damon into the group*
- *Everyone educating one another on the value of their work together*