

346

LINDA – Fieldnotes – Tuesday, November 13, 2007

Subject: initial meeting with John Nelson
Location: Varenne's office, hallway of Grace Dodge
Time: 4:50-5:05

Varenne asked me to meet John Nelson, a student in the department who is connected to Harlem churches and is highly "enthusiastic" about the project. We found Nelson talking with Bond in his office. Varenne asked Matthew, the program secretary, to send him into his office when finished.

126P

When John arrived at Varenne's office, he entered the outer room and began to set his canvas bag on the floor near the doorway to the inner office. I unsuccessfully tried to gesture him into the inner sanctum. He did, however, eventually lean on the doorway, poking his head and upper body almost into the inner office.

Nelson is about six feet tall, heavysset, with dark chocolate skin. He wears gold-rimmed wire glasses and has a short buzz cut. He carried a coat along with the bag.

Nelson expressed a great deal of enthusiasm about the project, calling it "revolution." He was formerly a pastor in Harlem and knows a lot of people through the Harlem United Methodists, or HUM. The church had a budget of about \$1 million, and ran a social service agency funded by the city with \$15. This included services for people who "cannot do for themselves," such as sending a nurse to their homes. He said that this approach of looking at such work as education is "new," clarifying when I asked that it is not about school learning. He talked a bit about hierarchy in the church, connections across the country and the world.

306

He and Varenne bantered a bit about the project. Varenne talked about not wanting to do "another version of 'the people are poor'" and here's what's wrong with them. Nelson made reference to Oscar Lewis and the culture of poverty. Varenne said that we do not only want help with access, we also want to have people working with us to write and disseminate—that is, not only targeting policymakers, but perhaps a range of outlets. Nelson said that he hopes this project will help his own research.

On the way out of Varenne's office I asked him if he was a student in the department and what his research interests are. He said he is interested in immigrant acculturation, and I told him we were interested in that as well. I asked him if he has picked an area, and he said the Caribbean to show where people start from. He had been interested in going to one of the boroughs to continue the research, but is now considering Central Harlem. I told him we have met people from the Caribbean and West Africa.

I have to excuse myself from him again to end the conversation. I promise again to email him later this week.