

**Queer Newark Oral History Project**

**Interviewee: Patreese Johnson**

**Interviewer: Whitney Strub**

**Date: October 12, 2015**

**Location: Rutgers University-Newark**

Whit Strub:            Alright, we are recording. It's October 12th 2015, Whitney Strub with Patreese Johnson and thank you for doing this with us.

Patreese Johnson:    Thank you for having me.

Whit Strub:            Oh, it's our pleasure. We're very excited. So maybe just to get the ball rolling, you could introduce yourself. When you were born, where you were born and talk a little bit about your family origins.

Patreese Johnson:    As you know my name Patreese. My family nickname for me is Pooh. I grew up with that name. I'm from Newark, New Jersey. I was born July 18th 1987 at University Hospital UMD. Don't know the time, don't know how much I weighed. But [laughs] growing up in Newark I grew up by Westside High off of South Orange Avenue and 14th ave. And that life was—I had a good childhood. I had a awesome childhood. The community is still the same as far as like elders watching out for the little ones that run around. We played a lot in my childhood, wasn't scared to walk outside as today you know kids definitely gotta be in before the light, the streetlights come on. It was just cool. [laughs] I don't know. I wish I was nine again. It was—I don't know.

My friends—I'm still friends with the girls I grew up now, Venice Brown, she's one of my best friends that I grew up with. Our grandmothers is best friends. There's about like three

grandmothers around the way that just was really close and their grandkids is like three generations. We all grew up together. You got my brothers, my siblings that's older than me and their cousins like—it's a big family on my block. And that's how most of the blocks in Newark was as growing up. Everybody still as today look out for each other whether they know you or not. The community has got worse as far as violence, drugs infesting the community, not no real support or direction for the youth that's coming up today as it kind of was when we was coming up. It was more stern, more strict. Grandmothers raise their grandkids, parents either was fiends or they worked too much so definitely the grandmothers was the ones to keep the family together growing up. That's all I could think of right now. Anymore questions?

Whit Strub: What about your deeper family origins, like how long has your family been in Newark? And when did your family come to Newark?

Patreese Johnson: Okay, my grandmother, she met my granddad from what I remember in New York. My family's originally from Staten Island. Only me and one of my other siblings was born here in Newark. They came here, I would say—you make me want to call my mom. It's been over like fifty years, it's been way over fifty years. Because before my grandmother passed away, she was already over here for over here forty years.

Whit Strub: Oh, okay.

Patreese Johnson: And she was like one of the first people or families that moved on my block. It was mostly migrated by whites and um, yeah I think it was just like whites. Italians if I'm not mistaken or something. And

after that then more African Americans started moving in and everybody else started moving up to like the Livingston section [laughs]. She came to Newark around the time I think after the riot, I think it was a little bit after the riot—

Whit Strub: Oh okay.

Patreese Johnson: —That they had in Newark when they had moved here. Either after or before, I'm not too really sure on years.

Whit Strub: Do you know what brought her there?

Patreese Johnson: My grandmother wanted a house, she wanted to raise a family. And Newark was affordable, I guess back in that time. When she moved over here she had six kids to take care of and—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —She definitely wanted a house so that was a start to own something. You had to own something back in the day for your family to have something once you passed on and my grandmother was strong on that, she left two houses to my family. And I guess work kind of brought my family over here, I never really asked. Now you got me wanting to ask my mom about my family history [laughs] but I definitely knew that that's what drove my grandmother over here. Bought some property, I guess a little bit tired of that New York life. And you know, settled down, got your family, other family members then got their family and my grandmother was really like the only child. She was the only child, she grew up with like cousins.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: So our cousins, well her cousins, they all lived in North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia. My grandmother was from Virginia from what I remember, as far back as I could go [laughs]. She's from Virginia. As far as like my siblings, my two—my oldest siblings if I'm not mistaken, two of them was born in Florida. Then my mom came back to Staten Island with my grandma and she wanted to have one of my other siblings in New York.

Whit Strub: Okay.

Patreese Johnson: And then me and my other brother, we was born over here. And, what else you want to ask me? [laughs]

Whit Strub: Well, so your childhood memories are very happy sounding.

Patreese Johnson: From what I remember, yeah. I'm just—I'm very close-knit with my family.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: They're very overprotective. I'm the baby out of the grandkids and my siblings so if there was anything bad, I ain't see it. All I remember is cookouts every summer, family reunions, block cookouts, playing with my friends, camps once I got to like a certain age. I don't—I remember it kinda going a little downhill I guess when you get older and you start hitting puberty. Even at the age of understanding of what's going on around you. For you know, you're a child, you speak when you're spoken to. I think when my brother had passed away in 99', he had got shot by a

officer, a ex-police officer. And you know the case was a little weird because I'm, at the time I'm eleven years old. I didn't understand why he got shot. I'm like, okay, if he's partying he's not bothering anybody. Well, why did he get shot and I guess that's a topic of what's going on right now with the Trayvon Martin case, Oscar Grant. And it's just my brother didn't get killed by a white cop, my brother got killed and murdered by a black cop who actually got away with it. You know the family couldn't do nothing about it but deal with it and mourn it on our own. And how my family mourn we really just don't really kind of like move on and not think about it.

Every once in a while you try to see if it's safe to just talk about it by starting with I miss such and such. And sometimes it got too rough because my grandmother was the grandmother like, she didn't show no emotion. She was very old school. It is what it is, we fought it very stern. She don't play with her kids. And we went as far as we could, we went about it in the right way. We went through the system and I guess in my grandmother lifetime, she saw a lot with the system failing African Americans at that time. You know during her time, with you know, it was the black African American movement, with Martin Luther King. You know, growing up picking cotton with her grandmother. So you have all of that and then coming to her and try to protect her family from, you know, what she grew up watching—it was kind of hard.

And then my brother, he was the baby boy of my siblings. And before that happened, was my cousin, he had got murdered inside the prison system. So that was my first, how do you say it? I guess understanding of death for a young age. I had to have been like six years old. Cause all your seeing is happy things, your family,

they're come together on Christmas. You know, those times and also seeing the times where we got a house but we're still struggling. Growing up you realize, yeah I got everything, my family was good but then you hit sixteen you like my family wasn't good that whole time. They was struggling paying bills and wondering why your mother was crying at the kitchen table trying to pay a bill. It's cause of the struggle which you understand once you get to a certain age.

Whit Strub:                   Yeah.

Patreese Johnson:       And growing up, like I said, I didn't really get to see a lot of that until my mom had moved. Due to family issues she wind up moving, not being able to take lifestyles of how my siblings was living. She took care of me, my two brothers and my sister when my biological mother passed away. And my biological mother passed away when I was two so I didn't really get to know her. I still have my dad in my life. And my mom, she used to try to always push him away. Like, why you push him away. That's my father, you know and he did drugs and so that was like one reason and another reason was you can't really take care of your child so what's the point of you being here. I come from a line of strong-minded women. [laughs] It's their way or no way. [laughs]. And but my dad, he always was there whenever he could partake in anything in my life. He definitely was one hundred percent there. He, he felt as a parent, knowing his lifestyle, like he didn't neglect the fact of knowing that I have an illness. Like, I'm sick. I'm not capable of taking care of my daughter so whoever is willing to do so like I'm very grateful. He was very grateful for me not going into the system. For all me and my siblings, we all got different fathers. And he was like, to the—up until his death, he always

reminded me I'm grateful for your mom. Like, she didn't have to take you and your brothers and sisters but she did and like your fine. And I'm comfortable with knowing that like up until right now on his death bed he was comfortable in knowing that I was okay with who I was with. Because as a parent no matter what you're doing, you're always going to be worried about your kid or if they're alright without you, or whatever the case may be.

And my dad, he got clean after, my dad got clean around—I graduated when I was thirteen. Yeah, I graduated when I was thirteen. My dad was clean for a year already by that time so he got to watch me graduate. I didn't have to worry about my dad not being there. He really never missed anything. You hear those stories all the time, about you know, their parents being an addict and they don't get to make it to graduation but I don't remember a birthday my dad didn't miss except for just now turning twenty-eight years old. That was the first birthday my dad ever missed in my twenty-eight years of living. And as an addict, like he still made it a point to say happy birthday or sent a card or he was there—came three days later. He still made—never missed a birthday. And growing up, that's all I remember. I don't—any other stories anybody else told me after that I'm like I don't remember that because that's not what my dad showed me. And I remember my mom making it more harder to be a kid than my dad making my child—life miserable. And my mom, she was a strict mom. School was a priority, she was really really hard about us on school. Me, personally, I don't really got nothing bad to say about my mom but I felt like she left a lot of responsibility on my sister. And my sister took on the responsibility of being a parent for me and my siblings when my [biological] mom passed away. So she didn't ask for it but at the same time it was kind of like forced on her even though

it may not have seemed like it because it was parental, you know, guidance in the household. Yet, my sister still took on that part to wake up in the morning, wash us up, make sure we got ready for school and was proper for school, birthday parties. She made cakes, she, you know, did most of the planning because my mom worked and—

Whit Strub: What did she do?

Patreese Johnson: My mom, she, for a while, from my recollection and going back, my mom was working for the government. I'm not exactly sure what she was doing but she was working for the government and she later on left them when I was about like eight years old. And, um, she finally left them and started working at like uhhh, the school—the school systems. That was like the worst, I had my mother as a substitute teacher. Oh my god, that was so embarrassing. Oh my god, you know kids is like so mean. [laughs] It's like don't be mean to my mother!

Whit Strub: [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: And she's like, "I'm not your mother, I'm Ms. Barronn!" I'm like. "What?" And that was like, oh my god, like why are you my teacher today? You called my teacher and did this. You did this [laughs] on purpose, you wanna know how I am in class. The was embarrassing, especially for a pre-teen. I was like twelve. I was like—yeah, I was like—no ten when she was in the system because I was like in the third grade. I was like in the third or fourth grade. It was terrible, like all my friends was like that your mother and then they were so disrespectful and I'm like y'all bad! But my mom be like my teacher today, you know, it was hard then but I enjoyed my mom also being in the system, in the education

department. But at the same time it's like now you really want to check up on me, she made school so boring. Like, she didn't make it fun. Because it was like you gotta get that right, if you don't get that right you going to be on punishment. Mom would spank you, like you gotta get that right because your—your supposed to studying and you playing. So my mom was really strict about that. Um. [pause] Uhhh, other than that like I said I really remember my sister doing the most, um, even to this day like when we bring it to date like she was always there for my brothers whenever they called. She never really had, uh, nobody to lean on if she needed help. Um, except for her husband. He always been there. My sister been working since the age of sixteen.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Um. And she still is working like crazy, I barely get to see her.  
And I admire her strength, like from a kid when they first ask you like who do you look up to, who—you know, who inspired you to be better. Like, it always was my sister my sister—I think I got like ten reports on my sister being my hero. And not realizing how much of a hero she's continuing to be like I inspired my sister to go back to school.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: And she's been excelling ever since.

Whit Strub: Oh, that's great.

Patreese Johnson: She started back in April—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: And it's like dag. If she could do it, I could do it. She workin' a full time job—

Whit Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Patreese Johnson: You know, and she's a full time parent with a husband, like, she a full time wife. And a full-time sister

Whit Strub: [Laughs]

Patreese Johnson: And like she doin' so much.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: She's being awesome at it like she deserve more than an award. What can you give a person that's just doing something so awesome, she's been on the dean list since she started. Like, I'm struggling to get a C [laughs]

Whit Strub: [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: It's so hard! Um, she continues to inspire me. Like, even though I inspired her to go back to school it's like you took on that charge once again to show me I could do something—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —when I feel like I'm down and out. And as a kid, that was my person I looked at. Like I want to be like my sister. I want to be

the like my sister and my sister's like I want you to be better than me. You know, like I want my kids to be better than me and she feel same way for all of my siblings to this day like she still try—and I'm like don't you get tired.

Whit Strub: [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: You know, like you hide your emotions. She's just like my grandmother. When you hide your emotions, we don't know how you're feeling today. Like, are you tired yet? And everybody put this pressure on her—

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: And she knows it it and she handled it with grace and it's like, dag, I want to handle it with grace like that. All this pressure on my shoulders—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: From going to school, from previously being incarcerated to coming home as a full adult not knowing resources or where to go or who to talk to because I'm such a Cancer. I'm—I stay in my shell. Um, you could shut me down real quick and I wont—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Ask for help. I'm that type a person and she knows that. Sometimes she'll pull it out, like you good? You know, what's going on with school or what's going on with work or are you struggling somewhere because I wont come out and say it so

she'll nitpick to see it. And I admire that she knows that about me cause I am like one of her kids, like, obviously, right. And I just admire that strength and she keeps me going because I — sometimes I do find myself not knowing how to correct some things with the system like fighting them like not knowing how to read certain materials hence the reason why I'm in college so I could know what I'm reading. And it may not be happening as fast as I want it to go but that fact that I came home, I've been doing so much, including with "Out in the Night." Like, that has set me also on another platform—

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: —Where it's like am I ready for this? I'm being presented in front of a lot of people admiring me for my strength and being so courageous but okay now what do we do with this, where do we go from here. And I guess that's the part of being an adult. Like, whereas people feel like I'm supposed to be an adult already, I feel like I'm like in the pre-adult phase—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —since I didn't have to worry about being an adult for like seven and a half years. And, um, reality's definitely sinking in for me—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: I think I'm handling it very well.

Whit Strub: You seem to be. [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: Yeah, we all—we—um, I have my days. Like I suffer from depression. I think I do very well for a person who suffer from depression and don't take no medication—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —um or not talking to a therapist which I need to do (laughs)

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Um, for the struggles of the world that are definitely like as a human being I weigh everything on my shoulders. I put everything on myself like I'm supposed to be doing something about this because it makes me angry and because I'm upset about what's going on, I'm supposed to be making change about it because it's upsetting me, it's moving me. Um, so I'm trying to take that in and also making actual realistic moves—

Whit Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —to make myself feel better as a human being also to take care of my community and those around me because I have thirteen nieces and one on the way so it's like I'm always constantly thinking about my nieces just as well as my sister used to always thinks about me. Like, my siblings we always had each other. Like we said, we had elders who just was like stay in the kids place but we had so many questions, you know. Growing up, I always asked my mom I really wanna know why the sky is blue. She like, well, you gotta be a scientist.

made

You know, or you gotta believe in god. And just know that he the sky blue because he knew you was going to enjoy watching that the sky was blue today. And I found myself asking a lot of those type of questions. I think all kids do. Well why is that? Well, why that person have a attitude? I started analyzing people at a very young age. And I still do it, I try not to because it drives me crazy. [laughs] You could really drive yourself crazy trying to figure out why everybody is the way they are. Yeah, and it goes back to their lives and how they grew up or how angry they are. And it's like that I should have been an angry kid growing up but my family did so well with shielding me from problems that I just recently learned about everything that was going on back when I was a kid. Like, I don't remember that. And they like well it was was happening you just, you know. It wasn't meant for you to know at that time because you was a kid and how do you deal with it now.

things

And that's what I say for a lot of youth. It's not good to keep from your children because when they get older and they find out about it and you wonder why they get angry. You know, we watched movies like that. We were like, well, why they getting angry? They're being childish about it but no. They're human, they have feelings and some things can affect the way they look at things now. Like, that was a lie. You told a lie. And because of that lie, now what am I going to do because this whole time I thought was true. It does affect the way people move on with their lives whether they 23 or 28 years old. It does affect. Personally, I don't mean to put it out there but I don't believe nothing my mother says sometimes.

Whit Strub:

Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: You know, like, because you lied so long and us finding out the truth. Like why did we have to dig, dig, dig, dig to find—for you to just say something and just let me have a choice of accepting it.

Whit Strub: Mmmm.

Patreese Johnson: So you deal with it from the family and then you've gotta deal with that from your community constantly lying.

Whit Strub: You mean, like, money issues or what—I mean...

Patreese Johnson: Whether it's money issues or whether it was the way, uh, you raise the individual. I say pretty much whether you raise the individual.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Because in our community they—a lot of parents don't want to take responsibility and sometimes society make parents take responsibility that they shouldn't be taking responsibility for. When they wanna blame it on, oh, well when they was younger they got abused or whatever the case may be. But did you try to get that child help. That's the question and when I asked, like, that did transpire, like my mom did provide counseling. Because we lost my mom so young, you had to understand, we had to understand why we lost our mom, why did she go, what happened. You know kids have so many questions about that. I didn't have to worry about that until my mom wanted to tell me what was wrong with her medical condition. Like, well, your mom, she had this, this, this, this, that and the third wrong with her and this is how we dealt with it and now you're at an age where you'll understand and I

think my mom. Like, my mom, she told me she had—I don't know if she'd be okay with this. I'll approve it later, alright.

Whit Strub: Sure.

Patreese Johnson: Had HIV. You know, and that's a big thing in our community especially at that time. And, um, I was like seven years old, probably eight years old when she finally told me she was diagnosed. And—it was like well why you telling me this. How am I supposed to emotionally interpret that.

Whit Strub: Sure.

Patreese Johnson: Or deal with it. I don't I want to deal with it right now. And, I don't. I act like it ain't happening. Nothing. So it's time to hit the doctor. Okay, well the doctor say you going to survive. That's my only—as long as you living, I'm fine. Um, some kids not like that. Some kids they'll get depressed and just oh my god, I'm losing my mom. It wasn't that type of situation. And at that time I was—it was me and my mom by ourself. And it was like well, you don't want me around my siblings and you want to tell me this. I can't see my grandmother, I barely know where my dad at and you tell me this so what's going to happen from here. And she had to tell me what HIV was, how you go about it, how you take care of yourself. So I had a lot of education about it at a very young age which was good cause—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —it definitely helped as I got older. Um, they say you gotta teach the kids at home first, right.

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: And um, it was really hard growing up with my mom. I think we all could say that. Um, she had her own issues, her view of how life should be or what you should be doing. Um, very old school. I think a lot of people that's over fifty are stuck in the old school sixty ways of how things need to be and some of em coming around where they're being more open-minded—

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: —To uh, like the LGBT coming out, there's a lot of, you know, talk about it and some older people is just like, no, that aint how it's supposed to be. Y'all aint supposed to come out. How many sixty year old lesbians we know who still wont come out because they're so used to it being a certain way, the judgement. Nobody—look, nobody going to survive sixty years with my love and nobody don't know nothing. I'm fine with that, we good. And y'ain't supposed to do it, you're just not supposed to do it. You're not supposed to let nobody know what you what your doing because that's not accepted in our society. And who is society to depict what should be accepted. That's my question, that's going to always be my question to this day. Who is society to pick who I should be. Why—why is that normal.

Whit Strub: Yeah, no. Absolutely. And I want to—I want to come back to that theme but can I one more family question first?

Patreese Johnson: Yup.

Whit Strub: Since we were talking about religion before, what was role of religion in your family? Were—were—do you come from a religious family or—

Patreese Johnson: Religion in my family, let me tell you my mother is Christian. Okay, we went to a Baptist church in East Orange. Uh, grew up in this church from I just—I probably. You would've thought I was born at this church. We went to church Monday through Sunday.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: I hated going to church cause everything was church, church, church, church, church school. Church, church, church, church, school. It was just too much and that's old school for you. That's—that's back in the nineties, eighties. Like ya' grandmother grow up on faith like you have some type of religion in your family. It's nobody that could say there was no religion in they family. It—that was the foundation growing up African American was you going to church on Sunday. And some parents is still like that. My mother made me go, you're going. You're going to church on Sunday. And I'm telling—me and my siblings, we couldn't stand it [laughs]. I slept in church up until I had a choice of not going no more. Um, I really got into my religion when I was thirteen years old.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Um, I became a candy striper cause I wanted to be a nurse. My mom kind of like forced me into doing that because I wanted to be a nurse so bad so she was like this is your practice. And I'm like I don't want to practice, I'm a kid! I want to play piano. I want to play the tambourine. I don't want to do that, like I don't want to

stand here and make sure everybody's alright. Who's going to make sure I'm alright, like, I was dramatic as a kid. [laughs] Um, I did it anyway. I definitely enjoyed it. Growing up in my church was awesome. I'm still friends with a lot of the girls that I went to church with when I was younger. Um, and as the church was and just as home, when you be too strict around the kids sometimes run away. And I could say everybody in my generation don't go to my church no more because they wont let up. They won't let up, they too judgmental, and a lot of my generation is gay. Um, yeah, most of us—most of everybody I grew up with in church is gay.

Whit Strub: Oh, yeah?

Patreese Johnson: You know, you kind of know it a little bit but you don't say nothing until you get older and it's just like you don't gotta say nothing cause we already knew that as kids. Like, one young man in my church, my mom just swore I was going to marry him. "That's going to be your husband." Like, you pickin' my husband for me and everything miss! Like I don't even know if I like boys or girls, I don't know. And girls wasn't even an option at that age because like you didn't see it. Like, I didn't see it in my family. But I'm just like how do you depicting who I'm going to be with at the same time you won't even let me talk to boys. Like, I can't talk to boys. There's no—there's no conversation about boys so that's impossible to have, right. And I'm like besides, this boy, he acts flamboyant. He act like me, you know. And I come home in 2013 so and yes, he's gay. And I'm like look my mom probably faint if she know. You know, like if she finds out and his mom don't—she support him one hundred percent. Like, I already see that their relationship has not changed over the years, like it did not waver not one bit. And it's like, even though me and my mom, we never

really had a stable relationship where it could waver so it's still shaky like you want me to do what you want me to do. We got those type of parents out here and I'm like I wanna do what I wanna do. I wanna do what makes me happy, that's the difference between just doing something and doing what actually makes you happy because you're going to be more successful.

So when it came to religion, um, I really want to speak about this. So when I caught my case, I came out when I was eighteen and I caught my case. And that's basically who told my mom I was a lesbian. It was in the newspapers. I didn't get the chance so that made it even worse because like dag my brother, he was so upset about me being a lesbian and he's a alcoholic that he felt the need to tell my dad because he blamed everything on my dad. And he just felt like, you know, my mom's death was my dad.

Everything just was my dad. And my dad was like, I know. I know. And my dad is a full blown Christian, okay. And he—he, since he been clean, he been in the church every Sunday and he said I may not accept your lifestyle because of my beliefs or whatever but you're still my daughter. And that is not going to change, that don't change your character. That don't change who you are. But when my mom found out, she had the bible out. And I'm looking at her like okay, when I stop going to church at 16, you stop going to the church. So I want to know why there's a Bible out. I was going to practice the the bible. I don't—I'm not comfortable with that because I told you I know who god is like, I accepted that religion totally.

By the time I was 16, I say my sister went on and converted to Islam. Then my siblings, my oldest brother, he don't have a religion at all. Recently, he just started going to Catholic churches,

which is—I don't care what religion you are as long as you got one, I'm fine with that. My second oldest brother, it took him a long time because he was just like, "I'm, um atheist. I'm atheist, I'm atheist." I'm like, shut up, you sound stupid. You got to believe at something. You cannot survive on this earth if you don't have some type of belief. Like I don't care if it's a chair. We just got to have some type of belief to keep your sanity. So he like I don't have it. Then his wife converted and it's like you don't got no choice now. So he started getting into his Quran. He converted to Islam and another one of my siblings converted to Islam. So right now, I'm like, me and my mom are the only Christians in the house. So I'm still Christian. I still believe in God.

Whit Strub: Does that cause any tension or is everybody cool with—

Patreese Johnson: No, it don't cause—in the beginning, when my sister did it, it was a lot of tension.

Whit Strub: Mmmm. Sure, sure.

Patreese Johnson: Like my grandma, she really didn't have nothing to say about it. My grandma was like, whatever will make y'all happy, I'm fine with it. I raised y'all to be Christians, you know, fine. As you get older, you make your own choices in life. And she was open to making your own choices in life just long as you know, don't come runnig to Nana when things get a little tough because Nana not going to be able to help you. And as I got older, I never—I felt like I couldn't be Muslim, like I'm open to all religions because you can't limit yourself with education. That's education.

I'm very open and I learn more about—by my sister being Muslim I learn more about her religion. And it makes me more aware of

my religion and my beliefs. Not so much of the religion part because it's a title, but my belief. And I had a cousin, she was a Buddhist. So I got to know [crosstalk]. That kind of creep me out a little bit. It was creepy. Buddhism, just don't practice it around me because I'm scary. And that's just like too much. It's like you calling on these—

Whit Strub: [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: —That I don't believe in. Like I just can't think of like—the Bible said, not to bring it up, but it's really there. [laughs] The Bible said you're not supposed to like cherish items and worship items and stuff like that. So I'm cool. Like if I can look up to the sky and believe that there's just something there, I feel like that's like a safe. But the thing and the tinging [of bells] and all the, nah. I can't—I'm uncomfortable sometimes when people start having you know seizures in a church and trying to figure out is this really the spirit or are you playing, you know.

So the religion part, I guess, is safe. I'm very open. I feel like a lot of people in society is close-minded about religion and because they're so close-minded about the religion that they want to force what they believe on everybody.

Whit Strub: Right, right. Sure.

Patreese Johnson: And I feel like that's what society is doing. You know, I have a group of people that's definitely pushing towards the LGBT communities. And I'm like, you're doing it all wrong. Like you're not supposed to do that. You're violating a lot of laws in the Bible right now by doing so.

Whit Strub: Hmm. Right.

Patreese Johnson: So we don't want to—we don't want to do that. I feel like society needs to stop pushing religion on people because some people really don't have a God. You have to be open-minded and accept them for that. Who are you to say they're supposed to-- I feel like you should because of your sanity, but if you don't, who am I to judge you or say you're wrong or you're going to go to hell? Like I don't go to church every day. I didn't meet God. I don't pay no tithes and the Bible says I'm supposed to do that. And half of these people that's throwing scriptures at us don't go to church every day, don't practice the Bible everyday. The only can give you one quote out of the Bible because they just found it and it's not fair. And society needs to really be careful when it comes to religion.

So what else you want to ask?

Whit Strub: No, that's great.

Patreese Johnson: [laughs]

Whit Strub: Let's talk then about growing up gay in Newark.

Patreese Johnson: Growing up gay in Newark. So my best friend, who is Venice, she just told me I was gay. I'm like no, no, that's nasty. You know, you're not supposed to do that. That's not cool.

Whit Strub: How old are we talking here?

Patreese Johnson: We goin' go through the age range from when I first had my first crush at ten probably. Had to have been like 10. It was a girl. I didn't know it was a girl. But when I found out it was a girl, I still didn't care.

Whit Strub: How did that work?

Patreese Johnson: I just didn't care. I just had a crush. I like her. Whoever that is, I like. [laughs]

Whit Strub: [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: I don't care. I like that person. I'm attracted to this person and I don't know why. I don't care. And I was ten. It was embarrassing a little bit but we was kids. So you don't take things too serious like that. So my friends, they was never judgmental. To this day, they just nod. This is just a whole bunch of goofballs. And I say when I got about like sixteen, at that point, I started experimenting with boys, whatever. And I figured out like it's a waste of time like I'm not getting like nothing out of it like no sexual like—I could be attracted but then I realized I'mmm attracted to all the cute boys that look like girls. Because then my friend, she takes me to the Village. And I'm like, "Oh, my God. Look at all these pretty people. They beautiful like—" You learn the difference from trans and I'm like I never saw this before. You don't get to see it. Now, you walk through Newark you going to see it. But I feel like that's because I'm gay and I'm cool with my sexuality and I'm open to what's new and what's different.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: That's the first step, right? And I'm like, "Okay." And later on, I think, I wind up breaking up with my boyfriend. I just really just started experimenting with girls, it was just like over from there. I'm very private. So nobody knows that. But by the time I was eighteen, I'm like, you know I'm grown. [34:41]. I don't care what nobody say. I don't care if anybody judge me. It's my life, I'm going to do what I want to do. And I came out. My brother, like I said, he told my dad. I told my siblings first. Well, one of my brothers, he just knew. He just like, "You're gay. I don't care

what you say, you talk to too many gay people. You're gay. You're a carpet-muncher blah, blah, blah."

So he used to try to like drop—I'm a keep it educated. He used to try to snitch on me or tell, tell—

Whit Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —My mom in codes like, "Oh, you're a carpet-muncher" and I'm looking at him like oh, you lucky she don't know what that means. [laughs] That's not cool. And every time he used to do that, I'll look at my mother like, see if she, you know, budged or heard or understood what he was saying. And she didn't. So that was the good part [laughs] and that lasted all the way up until my case. And she was like, "That's what he was trying to say [laughs] that whole time."

And I was like, yeah, mom. But her opinion didn't matter. Like I was at a point I was comfortable with who I am that I got a whole girlfriend right here, you think that I'm going to sit here and deny to you that I'm a lesbian? Like, no. This is my lifestyle. If it continues and you feel like it's a phase, we will see. Right now, I'm telling you I'm a lesbian and I'm out and everybody knows. Oh, it's just a phase. You know, like, okay, who cares? My dad loves me. That's all that matters.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: My sister loves me. She don't care so.

Whit Strub: What about like in high school. I mean, people—

Patreese Johnson: High school, nobody—I didn't come out in high school. All my friends came out in high school. I came out—I stopped going to

school when—well, first I was going to Our Lady of Good Counsel. And then--

Whit Strub: Sorry?

Patreese Johnson: Our Lady of Good Counsel in Newark. They don't longer exist. Um, my mom forced me to go to that school—

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: —Cause I wanted to go to Arts High cause I wanted to practice music and art and drama. She didn't care. She's just like, college. Like that's not a career. Your going to go to college, you're going to be serious. And she forced me to go there. Then I had a, you know, a lot of my peers, they was coming out a little bit but surely. I was just not really interested, like at that point I was experimenting with boys when I was in high school. Beside, you know, the judgment. I don't want to play that because I'm going to a Catholic school. So most of my friends are like Christian, Baptist. You know what I'm saying, they all come from families where it was very—how do you say it—it was a melting pot in my school.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Like really melting pot, for real, for real. You had all the nationalities there. So you had all different types of beliefs with kids growing up and how they parents telling them what's right and what's wrong. So you didn't know. Because I was aware of that I'm like, well, nobody got to know my business anyway. It's nobody's business what I do and who I like. And by the time I got to West Side, because I got myself kicked out of the school by not doing my work because I didn't want to be there no more. I should have stayed, but anywho, went to West Side. When I got to West

Side, I was a sophomore—no, I was a junior. At that time, a lot of kids that I was at school with when I was elementary, they came all the way out. I'm talking about whether they were an AG, a femme, they got the gay, they was proud.

And I was, "Okay, you know, the school..." I still see my attraction but I'm denying like, no, no, no. We're not doing that. And like I said, it took my best friend to take me to the Village to be like, alright, I think I like girls. I think I like girls. I don't know yet. I don't know. But I think I like girls. [laughs] They cute. It took that, um, hanging around a lot of her friends cause she was like girl, I know you gay. Like I just know. I can see it. Like every time you see one of my friends, it's just in ya' eyes. Like you're attracted to women. And it's okay. And it's took Venice telling me. I don't want nobody to think it's my fault you're gay or anything like that, but I'm telling you, if you are, it's okay. And it took my best friend to give the encouragement to just—not have to—I shouldn't have to say I'm a lesbian.

Whit Strub: Mmhmm.

Patreese Johnson: I think that's another problem within our community, too, right.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Who has to walk around and say they're heterosexual?

Whit Strub: Right, right.

Patreese Johnson: "I'm heterosexual." I'm so sure. Like, no, like that's not normal. There is nothing normal about that and we're not about to make that normal. I'm not coming out saying I'm a lesbian. You're going to see me with my girlfriend. You're going to see me holding her hand. Because, guess what, heterosexuals don't have

to tell nobody that they're heterosexual. They just come home, "Hi Mom, this is my boyfriend." Right?

Whit Strub: Right, it's a totally--

Patreese Johnson: No, it's going to be be, "Hi, mom, this is my girlfriend." And if you don't like it, oh well. If I'm in your house, I respect your house. You feel me, but you will respect whatever type of relationship I have because

Whit Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Patreese Johnson: You're not sleeping with me. You don't have to tell me you love me every day or tell me how pretty I am that you get from another person. So that's how I came out. I really don't pretty much care what people think. I came out when I was—I totally came out when I was eighteen because I was bisexual for like two years. So.

Whit Strub: Okay. For you, was there a gay scene in Newark or was it all the Village? Was it all in New York?

Patreese Johnson: Umm, back when we was coming up, it was something called The Globe. It was a club.

Whit Strub: Okay. Tell me about that a little, like...

Patreese Johnson: It was just so ghetto. [laughs] It was a place where teens could go. And you know be not necessarily be safe because you have—back when I was growing up, there were so many ignorant teens and so many old beefs and, you know, the gay community got they own issues of like not accepting each other for who they are. And that's a problem. Still an ongoing problem. Like some AGs can't be around other AGs. I just felt like that's insecurities. That's what make you still a woman. Lets not forget that, right. And um, so The Globe was our little hang out spot.

Whit Strub: Where was that?

Patreese Johnson: Everywhere. Wherever they had it at. It was somebody who promoted parties, gay parties, lesbian parties for teens. Cause that was like the only party scene teens could go to. The heterosexual teens, they went to the Boys and Girls Club. You couldn't get in no clubs at sixteen. But that was the only club that you could party with all age ranges, they gave you a band if you're over 21 and it was not always safe, but the only people you had to worry about was your peers and other LGBT community. You don't have to worry about nobody else outside your community attack you or hurt you or anything like that. You had to worry about your community attacking you or hurting you or something like that because we was young and kids and kids fight. And kids get into arguments and kids don't like what that girl got on or her girlfriend

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: or jealous. Average stuff. That goes on every day to this day. But that was our scene. Other than that, we always traveled to the Village up until 2007. All of us travel to the Village and when we got older—oh, another spot was Miss Theresa's. So once we got over age eighteen, then we could like really go with the big dogs and chill with them and [laughs] you know be with that crowd. And you know, what you don't see, you won't achieve so. You see people, older aggressors, lesbians in this club they, you know, work jobs, got cars, and you know it's like, I want that. I want that. I wanna be able to party on Saturdays. So you know, I kept me a job. I don't like to be broke, I'm sorry, but my best friends—it was hard for them. They're like, they wanted to party. So teenagers. I don't want the responsibility so I ain't going to go for

it. But you want to go to just party on the weekend? I'm tired of paying for you so anyway--

That's what best friends are for. But that was our scene like. We did Miss Theresa's. That's how I met Terrain, [...]. But that's how I met a lot of our friends now, that I have now. A lot of partying with Miss Theresa partying with them. It was a really safe environment. Once you get with the adults there's never really that much drama.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: It's less drama with the club which is awesome. I like that atmosphere. Other than that that was the only club we go to because we was only eighteen. And we just stayed to ourselves. Like that was—me and my best friend, it was just always me and my best friend. Like it was never no really big groups that we hung around. It was just me and her. We wanted to go to have fun. We want to go have parties. And when you go do those things you go in groups. You know, you go in twos. That was just like what we did. For the two years that I was out before I—the year I was out before I got incarcerated. The gay scene in Newark, we had the uh Broad and Market, it was like the G corner, the gay corner. So all of us after school used to always meet up down there. Like my freshman and sophomore years. Because everybody had to take the busses now from the schools. So that was like the meeting spot. And then it was just like it was crazy how the youth claimed that spot as the G corner.

So you can't say we can't make movements because everybody knew. Girl, if you ain't gay, don't go stand on that corner. [Laughing] like everybody knew that. And I just thought it was funny because a couple of me and my friends, we're like,

“remember the G corner? We used to call that the G corner!” and like, today, you’ll never know. Like teens, college students that walk down that way. They will never know like that’s where all the LGBT used to chill at.

Whit Strub: Yeah, but not anymore?

Patreese Johnson: No, no. That was my generation.

Whit Strub: Okay.

Patreese Johnson: [laughs] That died down a whole lot. After high school, there was no need to still go out there, stand down there unless, you know, freshman's and all them that followed up, but they didn't. It was probably more stuff they do by that time, when they got out of high school they probably had more parties to go to by that time that they can get into that they didn't have to stand on the corner and see who's who. Who's gay, who's not gay, but that's how you knew who was gay and who wasn't gay whether they wore a rainbow flag or not rainbow belt like you knew what a AG was, you know what I'm saying. You knew what a stud was. But you ain't know—if you liked femmes—you ain't know which ones was gay. Go to the G corner. You going to find out. That's how we commu— it's crazy, thinking about it now. Speaking it out like that's how we figured out who was who without everybody else knowing what was going on. Because I'm sure heterosexuals, they didn't know that that was the gay corner unless if they went to our high school. And they knew like who are my friends. She's gay, she know like you stand in that corner you're gay.

Whit Strub: Was it all four of the corners or one of the corners?

Patreese Johnson: It was just right in front of the eye glass store, right there on Broad and Market.

Whit Strub: Which corner? I'm trying to visualize.

Patreese Johnson: It's this side. We want to say this one side.

Whit Strub: Okay, so it's [unintelligible - 00:45:10].

Patreese Johnson: So it's on this side, not that side. This side.

Whit Strub: So that's what, the the north—

Patreese Johnson: Coming up this way. This side.

Whit Strub: Okay. The Rutgers side. [laughs]

Patreese Johnson: Yeah, the Rutgers side. I'm gonna say on this side on Broad and Market. It's crazy just to thinking about it like that. That's how we communicate with each other or knowing something. And most teens have a way of doing that, even today.

Whit Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Without parents having any idea what's going on, or who you meeting up with, without them really technically knowing. So that's cool. I'm glad this generation is very accepting to the LGBT community whereas it wasn't when I was growing up, too tough. Everybody had something to say about it but like because of society, they made sexuality a little bit comfortable, that's why they so uncomfortable with the LGBTQ because we recognize our sexuality. We're comfortable with it. So when it comes to sex like it's nothing. We feel whatever we like. Whereas, heterosexuals, they're so used to society saying, "No, you're not supposed to have threesomes. No, not at all. That's not good. You're supposed to be one man or woman. That's it."

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: Lesbians, we like, let's have orgies [laughs]! Let's just go all— let's have fun. So now, years later, society picked that up and now as they use sex so much, people is becoming more comfortable with they sexuality, even though you still want to knock down the LGBT community who's—okay, I get it. Y'all jealous. Y'all so jealous that we're so comfortable with doing what we want to do! It's so out-of-pocket, it's so rebellious that y'all can't take it. So y'all got to shut everything that we want down. That's not cool. More, like now, more heterosexuals are starting to be more open to it especially men like. Like you like women? Yes, you're my wife. Like let's go home now. You're going to go find us another woman. Like they're starting to be comfortable with the idea even though some men is not comfortable with it with if it's not including me, it don't need to be. It don't need to be happening or anything, but we still had that neglect when it comes to gay men.

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: You know like gay men just can't do it. Why is it acceptable for women to be sleeping with another woman but it's not acceptable for a gay man to sleep with another man?

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: Because you can't see yourself having a threesome, it's not pretty no more. But it might be a woman out there now that everyone's starting to get comfortable with their sexuality. That would be like I could do two men, that's fine. I'm with that. If they're with me, I'm with them. And you have some women with those dreams but because society says it's not supposed to be right, they'll never know if it can ever happen. They'll never approach the situation, and I feel like so many people are open-minded with their sexuality now that there's no room to be close-minded. There's no

room to say no or you can't do this or you can't do that. Because some people start to realize we only live one time.

We only live once and I want to live out whatever experience Imma have so I can be at the age where I can say okay, I have lived out all my bucket list. Or I actually found out where I'm supposed to be and what I want in life. I want two girlfriends. But society says that's not how it was supposed to be. Why I can't marry two women? I'm just saying. I don't cook, my girlfriend don't cook. So we need a woman that cooks. [laughs]

Whit Strub: [laughs] It's good to be practical.

Patreese Johnson: Yeah, I'm just saying. We both like extra women so it's just—I don't see what's the problem with that. But if you let society say it's not supposed to be like that.

Whit Strub: Right, right. Marriage has got to be monogamous even if it's same-sex couples, right.

Patreese Johnson: Yeah. And I just want to break everything. I don't like rules. And no matter where you go, there's just going to be rules. And I'm just going to tell you right now, I don't want to abide by none of them.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: Not when it come to my life and what I want as a lesbian, as a black woman, as an activist. All of the above that pertains to me. I break rules if you tell me I can't do it.

Whit Strub: Yeah. 2015 is a good time for that.

Patreese Johnson: It's happening, it's happening.

Whit Strub: Let me just shift. This is grimmer, but I have to ask. I mean, you're basically the same age as Sakia Gunn.

Patreese Johnson: Mmhmm.

Whit Strub: And I mean, she was hanging out on the same corner. Did you know her or were you...

Patreese Johnson: Yeah, I met her a week before she passed away. Venice had introduced me to her. Cause you know, I like to hear people sing. And my best friend can sing. All I know was my best friends, they sing. I want them to sing to me all the time. Like I was really big about that. She was like, "Come here, come meet this girl. She can dance, Pooh. She can sing." And I'm like, "What? What you know...?" That was our thing, dancing and singing. Growing up was our thing from kids. Like that's what the '80s babies lived on. It's everywhere. It's music and dance. So that was our—we used to go to the G corner, used to play the club music, you know, Jersey club music, and we'd be all down there dancing trying to learn a new dance. And then this girl, she could sing. So I was like, I want to hear her sing. So everybody surrounded her and she's just blowing. I'm like that girl could sing. And she introduced me to her and that was the last time I saw her.

Because a week later came down and you see all these balloons and we all found like why everybody crying, like what's going on. So I just happened to walk across the street and was like, "Oh my God. I just met this girl." And reality sunk in for a lot of us. For the LGBT community in Newark, *reality*—it was no more living dreaming life anymore, because regardless of how each household may have been for the LGBT community at that time. Like we still lived freely. Like we did—I say if any teen lived freely, it was it was the LGBT community in Newark. We literally lived on the

edge like we did what we wanted to do. A lot of people was rebellious and a lot of parents was accepting. Yeah, you want to go to a party. Yeah, because that was our community. That's how we're going to meet other people such as how we're going to feel comfortable with being around people such as ourselves and not care what everybody else think. It's being around people who's just as confident in their sexuality and that's what I need to be because I'm not comfortable yet.

And those was the start. And that was the one spot and one place where freshmens and sophomores cause that was around my time would come together on the G corner and be comfortable. Nobody would bother us. Not one person. Because they're looking at it like it's kids. They don't know what's going on. It's just a whole bunch of kids. I know that that was the community right there of youth that was LGBT and we ain't have really nowhere else to go at that time. That was it. And it was fine. It was awesome.  
[laughs]

Whit Strub: So how did Sakia's murder change that?

Patreese Johnson: Like I said that hit home. It was too close to home. I always been a kid that's been aware of my surroundings because of the type of neighborhood that I lived in. My brothers always spit out, "You're a girl, you're a girl. You can't just be leaving at night, 11:00 at night, 12:00 at night, you're a girl." Like people would attack you and I'm like, "Yeah. I don't see that." I might hear it on the news, but that's not our reality. So I was like, I don't see that. That ain't happening to none of my friends. I'm good. Everybody know who I am. I can walk these streets the way I want to walk these streets. Can't do that in New York though. And that was they point, right? Just do go out and be free the way you think you can,

because it's gonna be somebody is going to stop your little train short. And that's exactly what happened.

Even though what happened with Sakia Gunn, it was realistic to us. But it was like, okay, we definitely know we can't go in twos or fours, whatever. We got to go as a group, we got to make sure like this—we got to make sure we going to be all right. I ain't coming home without one of y'all. Like, me, personally, I wasn't going home without my best friend. Venice, if we ever be presented with that type of situation, nobody's leaving nobody. Why? Because growing up, when we have left this block our siblings always tell us, stick together, stick together. Don't separate. Don't let nobody bother y'all because you grew up in a hard neighborhood. And people like to nitpick. You'll be walking down the street minding your business somebody say something smart to you. Depending on your attitude, it might get ugly. And that was the awareness of Sakia Gunn's situation, right.

Also, it brought on a lot of anger for a lot of the teens. So it was like, okay, I'm not standing down. Not to say that Sakia stood down. Some of her friends did. We felt like they did, but that was our opinion. Who is to say they really didn't stand up? Who's to say they didn't fight back. With everybody looking like, if y'all helped her. If y'all wouldn't allowed him to get so close. It was more of y'all than him. There's no way that should have went down the way it went down. You keep that in mind. You don't have to think about it every day. But when you come up in a situation such as the NJ4 case, that pops up in your head.

It did for us that night. Us? Not us. No, this is not happening. But as you're thinking about it, you also become aware of your surroundings and what's going on at that moment, even though

you know what happened then. It's like, okay, what are we going to do? Because now we're scared. And we don't want to end up like her. We don't want nobody to end up like that. So we got to watch out for each other. That's it, that's all. No matter how scared we are right now, we got to stand firm. And like I said, I tell my nieces the same thing. Like if you ever find yourself in that type of situation as a woman and you're being violated like, I'm not telling you to run. If there's other options, use them. You see what I'm saying. If you don't have to respond and there's other options, definitely use them 100 percent. But if there isn't, you stand firm. You protect yourself by any means to the bitter end.

Because it's not going to always be somebody to help you. And that's the reality of it. I couldn't call my brothers and we obviously couldn't call the police if we thought about calling the cops. If we thought that situation was that serious, like, okay, he's fine, we're fine, let's go. Right. You know what I'm saying? Like just in case he changes mind and want to come again. We're kids. We're not thinking about the utmost worst. We're only thinking about ourselves. Like, I'm not letting him kill my best friend, I'm not leaving her, you got to roll in your mind, but it showed me in that situation how young minded I still was. Even though the judge sentenced me as an adult. Even though the world may say okay, you're an adult at 18. I was still a kid. I lived at home with my mom. My family was around. No matter how many times my sibling may go to jail, back and forth, whatever, but I always have my mom. I always have my sister. I always have my dad. I have my Nana. That was good. That foundation was always there. I'm spoiled. No matter where I'm from. I'm the baby. I'm spoiled. My family is very overprotective of me. I've never had to live a hard knock life. Granted, my siblings may have, but I didn't. And I didn't live that type of lifestyle as society may have depicted

that day in the courtroom. Not at all. That wasn't even me. I went to church every Sunday. Like I said, my mother didn't play that. We went to church. Other time, I will say, I don't want to go no more. And up to that time I went by myself. But yeah. Did I answer your question?

Whit Strub: No, I mean, this is fantastic. It's 3:13. We'll keep an eye on the clock cause I think blair [dorosh-walther, *Out of the Night* director] wants

Patreese Johnson: Yeah, she probably trying to figure out where I am...

Whit Strub: Yeah, we can check and see. I mean, we could go on forever. What about this? How do you want to talk about the case and the film? This is the more familiar story to people who are going to see the film. So I don't want you to have to rehash everything from the film, but maybe what else do you want to say about that? What was it like to be 18 years old, young, having this good time, and then suddenly... I mean, I really don't know how to ask the question I'm trying to ask because it's such a colossal shift in your life right

Patreese Johnson: Right, how to describe it, right.

Whit Strub: Yeah, I mean, what was it like for your life to suddenly change in this unexpected and just horrendous way?

Patreese Johnson: Traumatic. That's the only word that can describe me personally. How traumatic it was. Knowing that I was a teen that suffered from depression. Nobody had known that, I didn't really get no counseling on that. I was aware of what was wrong with me as an individual, that depression is not good. It don't take one incident to make you depressed. And when that transpired the unbelief in the history of like policemen with my family was never good. It

wasn't a good rapport. I didn't have a good rapport from the police growing up in Newark. The police was just – we watched them rob the drug dealers and it was like that day they wasn't even selling drugs. Catch them the day they doing it! It was like it's pointless and you realize like the police is really scared of the drug dealers and the killers, you know what I'm saying. So they aren't really doing real policing, they're just aggravating the situation. I feel like that's why Newark [is] the way it is now, because of all of that aggravation. You didn't make it any better. You didn't make your community trust the police. Like whereas now, you're trying to make your community do so. I will say you have a lot of work to do as the mayor of Newark because so many mayors failed us.

So when it comes to the policing of Newark, even back in '99 when my brother had passed away, so, I didn't trust the police. Even he screamed out, like, he attacked us he attacked us, or whatever the case may be. We know that all the witnesses they had wasn't there from when it first started. So for me, it was just like they don't want to listen. Give them a chance, I hear that playing out[?] like give them a chance but I didn't feel safe. I didn't feel safe at all as a kid, knowing how my family dealt with the police, and how they dealt with my family in Newark. It's like all the police is bad. No, they're not. Or maybe they will hear me out. Maybe this situation is totally different like we're not at fault here and then they're going to say, you know, just tell it. We thinking it's just a regular fight at the time, we didn't We didn't know he was stabbed or anything like that. We think it was just a regular fight, everybody got a little scratched and bruises, or whatever. Whatever, like we made it out safe, period.

So the whole time we was there they kept asking like, “Did y'all lock him up? Did y'all lock him up? Did y'all lock him up?”

Okay, we didn't call the police, but we knew some people that was there that was really on our side. Like, "Did y'all lock him up?" They're like, "No, he's in the hospital." "In the hospital, what's he doing in the hospital," whatever but, "Oh, you just tell us what we want to know, like what happened, and you can get to go home. And it's like, they basically scared us into making a statement. And then years later, I watched the Central Park Five on TV and see how they did it. "Oh my God, they did the same." I was angry because they did the same thing to us. Like they did the same exact tactic. They got the good cop. They got the bad cop. Like it was just why are you doing it to kids though? Like we're kids. But they're not trained to look at us as kids. They're trained to look at us as criminals.

So we were already criminalized, which I didn't realize until afterwards when being educated on being criminalized and I guess, the fact that I went through that... I wasn't really there going through it. I was really having an out-of-body experience because I was in shock. Like, I'm really locked up. This is some place I said I'll never be cause I never lived the life that would put me in a place like this or in a position like this. Like, what's going on. That's the question I had in my head the whole time like wondering when am I gonna feel safe now because up until the time he attacked us, until right now, I did not feel safe at all. Not in police custody. No nothing. And that's a problem also obviously with our society. It's not being able to feel safe by the people that are supposed to protect you.

And I'm just sitting here like, what if this was your daughter? Just think about, just play the whole scenario out. I am telling exactly you what happened. I'm not lying, I'm not anything like that. And you could tell that I was a nervous wreck. You could tell I was

telling the truth. There was no indication that I was lying or anything like that. Whether my story matched the others or whatever they would say or not, you could tell for a fact that I was not lying. And then all our stories matched up. We weren't even in the same room. We had no time to talk. No nothing.

All our stories matched up and y'all still came up with the whole total different story. How did that end up – and then to months later I find out that I'm found guilty of something that, to this day, I still don't know if I did or not. I don't know if I stabbed him or not. Yeah, I had a weapon. It isn't no need to lie about that. No, my weapon had no blood on it. It should have. I felt like it should have. I had on light colors. I had a white shirt. I had on blue pants. I should have blood on me. I had no blood on me. There was no blood on my hands. The way I see it, he was stabbed, I should have some blood on me. So now it's just like common sense. Whether I washed the knife off or not I want forensics because if he got stabbed, his blood should still be on that knife. Whether I washed it off or I didn't, whether I wiped it on my pants or I didn't, y'all have to prove that. They neglected to do that for fear of it might mess up the only evidence that they had which was the knife.

It showed me young like that nobody cares about what they do anymore even down to my lawyer. Like he didn't care if I was guilty or not. He just cared about the paycheck. Like to this day, I still don't believe he believed me, even meeting him at a screening [of the film], in the way he talked to me, in his nerves. Like I'm like you didn't really care about my life being thrown away. And I knew he was shocked with the evidence that Blair brought up in the film cause we all were, my lawyers, my attorney Karen was even like, where'd you find this at? Like we could've used this.

Like down to the radios and the police and they was laughing about it. This is a serious situation. This is somebody attacking, something that we know right now live, that the LGBT community is being under attack by heterosexuals, straight men, in the Village. How can you not believe our story? How can you not put together regardless of him being hurt, one it should not have been taken to the extent with the media the way it went. So that started out with the police. They the ones who called the journalists and the camera people, they called them, they had a story and they felt like, this was gonna make a good story and at that time I couldn't process like why me? Why my life had to be, knowing that it could have been anybody in that situation like why it just so happened we walked up at that time. And we looked that vulnerable and we looked like we was just gonna probably walk away and not say nothing to him and he was gonna feel good that he got to antagonize some lesbians.

And he was going to feel good about that. Because we walked away in defeat. But I will tell-- and we didn't do that that night. And I didn't look at it like that then, but as time went on, it was like oh we really did stand up for ourselves like in the midst of the fear and not knowing like what was going to happen from the time he attacked us up until the time we went upstate we lived in 100 percent fear. And I don't feel like... that's not human at all. I will never want to ever be in a position to feel like that again. And that's my fear *now*.

It's like I don't want to have that same old fear. I don't want nobody to dictate my life or have my life in their hands, like how I can avoid that? But knowing that that's the unavoidable. We can't avoid it. As humans, whether you went to prison or not, guess what, the government got your freedom in their hands. They can

do what they want with you. They're doing it now. I feel like they're doing population control. That's why so many cops is killing these young kids. And it's like we got to choose what type in the population. Why not them?

And it shows that our country is still racist. All the minorities, you know, in the prison system. And a lot of people you know I watched a lot of people get away with petty crimes and real big crimes. But our society got a whole lot of work to do to figure out what's right and what's wrong and how they gonna control, men, not necessarily only men, attacking women, straight, lesbian, gay, black, Hispanic, white. How can they control that? This has been going on forever since women wanted to declare *their* independence. Okay?

Whit Strub: Exactly.

Patreese Johnson: It's a long history of that and we are in that. I feel honored because I no longer want those chains, like I really don't. I don't want nobody to dictate what type of lesbian I should be. Or what type of lesbian I should date. My brother told me the other day, "You need to date that type of lesbian." Like, she's not even a lesbian! She's straight! You don't even know if she's gay, you're telling me what type of girl to talk to. But, and he made me realize that he'd be comfortable with it if I make him comfortable. Right?

Whit Strub: That's exactly it.

Patreese Johnson: And I think that's what society doin'. Like I accept that if you do it the way I need you do it, so I can accept it.

Whit Strub: Right, monogamous and married.

Patreese Johnson: Monogamous and married. But like I said, at the same time, like I said that men's perception of lesbians: two women, girly lookin', never like a A.G. Never that different. That's too different. That's just too much to digest. And like I said, my brother he's still growing. He hasn't really been around with me being a lesbian, anything like that – that's my oldest brother. I'm fine with that. Like I didn't get angry that he said that. It's me understanding why he said that. And knowing that, OK, my brother's a little uncomfortable with me datin' a stud. He don't care that I'm a lesbian. He don't feel like he can handle a stud coming up in his house looking *like* him. Maybe *acting* like him! But what he don't know is that my studs are very feminine. They get their nails and eyebrows done more than I do! So you really just don't know how girly they are. It's just they prefer baggy pants over tights.. You have to understand that and know that a human is still human being. They still have feelings. And right now, I realize like dang that's where our society is at right now. What's making them feel comfortable? What will make them feel comfortable and that's where the selfishness is comin' at. Like it's not about you. We got a whole society we think about. And individually, individuals are selfish.

I'm going to vote for this president because he agrees with what I'm not comfortable with. I'm not comfortable with seeing half our population cause they're coming so fast, men and men and holding hands and women and women are holding... Because that's not normal. That's not what I was seeing in my childhood, got to understand it wasn't accepted in my childhood. Now we got people like us that's up there that can make this happen for us. Just like some women was not accepted. Hey, we still kinda not are accepted as women with minds.

And some men in this world really do feel like women shouldn't be doing half of the things that they're doing. They shouldn't be in GOP running for president and women shouldn't be trying to be the best lawyer that they could be or the best doctor that they could be. Like men is doing women jobs now, right? They're being the best chefs ever. I can't cook. You understand, you know what I'm saying? Like, why are you saying that's wrong? Why are you telling a man he ain't supposed to be in the kitchen, he's gay. You understand? You're ain't gay because you're in the kitchen. You're not doing that. So this is like why do you get to choose what is normal, what is not normal? Like it's not fair. Like I'm been rattling my mind about this forever.

Whit Strub: Right. The patriarchy always gets mad.

Patreese Johnson: Yes, it's so contradicting.

Whit Strub: The maximum freedom, right?

Patreese Johnson: Right. It's so contradictive that - the maximum freedom to a certain extent, like I said. They're still not accepting two men walking down the street either. And that's where lesbians and gay men have a lot in common. It's that we're both, as an LGBT community, guess what? This woman married her woman, she *married* her, she is not walking down the street holding her wife's hand and saying, "This is my wife." She's scared. So okay, so what? Y'all done got passed gay marriage. That was a big thing when we had, uh-- Gay marriage this, gay marriage that. I don't believe in institutions. And I was sitting there like how can you fight for gay marriage when all these years, over decades of gay men says we want to use that, it's like the head picture on every news line when something happens to a gay man. Never a lesbian, you'll never hear about it, as far as they know, it's not no history

about it or nothing. Society, right? We probably know more than they do about women getting attacked and murdered and everything. The whole world actually know compared to Matthew Shepard. Everybody knows who Matthew Shepard is. [01:10:00] And right there, it shows you that two gay men can't walk down the street. Two lesbian women can't walk down the street. They might not get murdered because they was conscious enough not to do it, to walk down the street. So we done gave gay people gay marriage. Go ahead, go ahead, get married, but I was sitting there thinking like, that was suicide. They sent y'all on a suicide mission. You want to know why? Because they knew all them people that's homophobic out there, they gonna *notice* that you're gay now. They gonna know. Because you're going to be so proud and so out there, Yeah we're gonna eliminate y'all. That's how... that's my take on it. That's how I feel. I believe... population control, right. Let's pick who we want to eliminate. And with that saying like, as those who's in GOP, as those who went in and pushed that law for equal rights to have gay marriage, you all forgot about the damage that needed to be repaired before, which was the violence against the LGBT community. How can we be comfortable being married if we're not comfortable just being gay and lesbian walking down the street? They missed so much. I feel like that was their fear, it was more easier to deal with this than it was to deal with that because it was so broad. And that's pullin' a lot of people coattails.

Whit Strub: Yeah that is a really important point. Yeah I'm worried about time because I think eventually Blair's

Patreese Johnson: You asked me a real good question.

Whit Strub: Here's what I'd like you to talk if we can fit it in in time. I want to hear about what it was like to come back to Newark, but first, I mean, I was going to ask a couple of followup questions. I mean, so when the media was writing about your case in all of these sensationalized, dehumanized ways, I mean, were you reading that at the time, like the lesbian wolf pack

Patreese Johnson: Yeah I was reading that, yeah like my mom got every article.

Whit Strub: What was that like to read this depiction of yourself in the media?

Patreese Johnson: Devastating. I was so embarrassed. I was embarrassed. I was very embarrassed. And what helped me not to be so embarrassed was coming home, I had got bailed out, you know how I do a lot of walking... I know a lot of people just from being around different people and them introducing me to other people, and people I haven't seen in a long time, walking up to me like, "I know you didn't do that." They probably only met me one time, but it was Newark, my community in Newark. Random people walking up, to me like, "I know you didn't do that." Like I know you. Like that's not you. Like what's going on. Like they've seen their fear for me. And I could say it was my community, then when I needed them, when you know God said to me, like you know it's going to be okay regardless of what it is and I think I came to terms with OK, God, whatever you have written for me, I'm going to just do it. Like I don't know what this gonna bring. I know I'm scared. But it's good to know that somebody believed me. It's always good to know somebody believes you in the midst of something like that. It was like that, all the lies that they told about you in the newspaper and they saw through that. That meant a whole lot to me. Because that's when I realized... I used to read the newspaper every day. Every day I read the the newspaper, I watched the news

and it took me to be in the newspaper in that situation to be like, I can't believe nothin' that y'all write. I can't believe, y'all didn't even investigate. Y'all went off of face facts. Not even face facts. Like you cannot... like a picture. You see a picture. A picture tells a thousand stories. And that's what our situation was. It told a thousand stories. You could tell that story in so many different ways. And that's what the courtroom did.

And I was just happy enough to know that my community saw through the BS. From those who went through the system, for those who had judgment issues, I say the only people that I didn't really get that from was my church. Cause they was too worried about me being gay. I got locked up for being gay. You gonna tell me I shouldn't be gay? I'm still going to jail! Like that's how I was looking at it. Oh, you can't save me out of this by convincing me not to be gay. Cause if I go in there and tell them I'm not gay, they really gonna be like you're lying. It's just not realistic. I just thought it was so funny, how a community that a church probably would judge was more supportive than my own church that I grew up in. I thought that was crazy. It took a lot for me to process that. Like I said, I went through a lot of emotions during the time of when he attacked to when I went upstate. Because I felt like I'll do my life in segments. That segment of my life because it was so traumatizing, that I was like, this cannot be happening. I was still looking for what was real and couldn't determine what it was and had to face facts that people are ignorant and they do not take their jobs seriously. I felt like if my lawyer did take his job seriously, I shouldn't have got that much time. I wasn't sitting here saying I didn't deserve no time at all. [01:15:00] Because there's consequences to everything you do. You learn that growing up. I was fine with that. I'm saying like the first time offender, I still got my whole life ahead of me, five years supervision, no prison

time, like we had never been to prison, we don't even know what that look like. Like we heard of people going to jail but we, we don't live that type of lifestyle. Like you don't have a list of us having fights. Like this is not real. This cannot be happening.

It is a group of us and none of us have records. That blew my mind, like how did that not count. And letters, like none of that mattered. But coming home, when I finally did get released, coming home was weird, because I came home to no brother, no grandmother, a broken family. A community who's lost and I don't know what, I ain't never seen nothin' like this before. But I generally see that in New York, because I stayed in New York for like two months, three months. And then I came home because they wouldn't allow me to come straight home. Like I said, the system, like they always say, it's easy to go to jail, hard to come home. And it's so true. Because they did not want to let me out.

Coming home was like... it was refreshing but scary at the same time. Because you're seeing faces, they know you, they happy to see you, but you looking at them like, who are you. Because now all I know is the people I was locked away with. I don't really remember too many people from my childhood. Besides the fact everybody that was kids is grown now. Like y'all like 12 when I left, 13. Now you're like 22, 23. That's scary. You got kids and it was weird for me because like I'm trying to... I'm trying not to...I've grown into my adulthood so it's so much maturity there, but I don't want to look at y'all like kids right because I hate when my family do that to me so *that* was a struggle, my integrating back into Newark because I've still seeing so many like, you was like classmates. I'm still running into people that I haven't seen in years. A lot of my classmates from eighth grade, high school, I'm running into them every day. And they're like "You need a ride?"

Where you at? How you doing? What's going on? I heard, I know you ain't do that but you good." And it feels good to see them cause like in prison I believe with all the time you have there you think about your life. And you think about... you really don't remember names or no nothing. As time went on I forgot names obviously. But you remember the names as you was reminiscing and I remember everything and I always tell them you might not believe me but I thought about you when I was locked up. I had so much time to reminisce all my childhood. Like what I like, what I like doing, what was the fun part about it, trying to remember and keep those memories cause you lose it in there. You try not to think about the outside, they tell you don't because it's too much on the mind. Like too worried about what everybody else is doin how the world is still moving and you're not. And like I was scared to take the train when I first came home. Take the train? I'm not gonna take nobody's train. Come pick me up, like I'm scared. I don't want to get hit by a car. I don't know how to cross the street. It was very scary.

And also my heart broke when I came home because like I said, being in jail get your own community, I'm around women that just , you know you have issues, cause we ain't supposed to be around each other 24/7. But the group that I hung around, it's just like love, growth, whether you grew with your religion, whether you grew up with your education, like we just constantly helped each other build to mend ourselves, to prepare ourselves. Like we knew we got to prepare ourselves to going home because we're not staying here forever. And even some of the lifers, like they knew something that we ain't know, but they kept us like... you have a choice. You could do this or you could do that. If you do this, I don't mind helping you cause I made mistakes too. And I appreciate those lifers. And I'm happy that half of them home

now. But it was them who kept us young ones, because we were going out, they're helping us all like, they sent a big group of 16, 17, 18-year-olds went in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and then we was another group of 18, 19, and 16-year-olds that was going upstate in 2007. And then it was like another group that came up in like 2008 or nine, 16, 17, 18, 19-year-olds.

Whit Strub: Sixteen year olds tried as adults?

Patreese Johnson: Mm-hmm. And gettin' time too. The reality was like, what they did with us, we did with them. Like you ain't gonna be here forever. Hey, you actually got less time with us, and we come back we might see you, we might not. Depends. Cause we workin on getting out of here. We helped each other, prepared each other for coming home and now, as we're all home because they want to let us all go at the same time, which they shouldn't have did that, because now we bout to do something that y'all don't want us to do, which is get involved with our community better our community and also better ourselves. So the people that they gave all the time to, they didn't want to come home is actually the ones that's coming home being successful right now. And I'm proud of all of all the ladies. I really am.

And we realized that you could never be prepared coming home because of all the red tape, there's so much red tape. I realized that the system sets you up to go back and forth through revolving doors to keep that money flowin'. So they set you up. Once you get in the system, your life is set up and you may realize that... the smart ones realize they have a choice. The ones who lost, who came to the system lost and don't have that support system that tell them that there's something different, they lose it and they become that object of going through that revolving door. And that's how

the system keep they money, right? And what we realized that, by going through trial, seeing how the system messed us over, we want to get the system back.

So we gonna prove them wrong because they took everything from us. And that's what us, in prison, those that I met, like we fed ourselves that, like they really effed us over. You know what I'm saying? They really didn't want us to have a life. When we get out we gonna get everything you supposed to have. Everything that they took from us, told us that we can't have, we are going to go get it. The only thing we can't do is vote. That's the only thing they got on us right now. But education is unlimited. We can get that. That helped out a lot. I didn't get that from home. Whereas I got so much of that with them being in prison. And we still come home. And we all still support each other. Because we notice that we're not going to get it from nowhere else. So it was like, "Girl, call me if you got a problem. Call me when you're down," cause now we all traumatized. We all suffer PTSD and we all got to keep each other up. Like us going fall and some of my comrades did fall and they went back into the system. And some of them were not ready because some of them is so scared of change. And we realized that, but that's what these programs need to come in at. That's what these re-entry programs need to come in at.

And it's like some of them, them women is better off in New York than those who prolly come home in Jersey. I haven't really seen anybody come home that's a woman that actually changed her life unless she was an addict, right? In Newark. And that goes to show the difference from the re-entry programs in New York to re-entry programs that really don't exist that they say exist in Newark. It's not here. They can't possibly be here. If me as a felon walk into welfare, and you not want to give me not one dime, and I'm a

felony, convicted felon who's trying to come home and better themselves, I didn't come out *your* prison system, where I'm allowed to go *through* your re-entry program. So now I have to find another group. So I actually got to do everything step-by-step on my own, whereas *their* prison system already set them up for that. These dummies half of 'em don't even take the opportunity, they throw it away.

And what they did to me was I went to welfare. They told me I couldn't collect no food stamps cause I didn't have a job. However, I'm in school, full time. I don't pay for my school education. I get that from the government because I have no job. I have no type of state income coming in. Nobody is taking care of me, just my sister. She's trying. And it'd be nice to be able to help out with her kids. And me staying there because she was nice enough to even open her doors, to allow me to stay there. Nobody is obligated to take care of me.

So I tells the lady, I want to, you know, sign up for some type of housing, whatever, whatever. "Why would you want to do that? You live with your sister." Twenty eight years old, why would I want to live with my sister at 28 years old when you should have a program here for me to take, for me to get my own housing? Why should I have to go through a shelter? And then you tell me don't go through the shelter. But if I had that choice to go through the shelter, you're telling me you're still going to give it to me.

Then I went. I got the benefits for my health. I don't have a doctor. They cut me off my benefits. I went back. I recertified. They cut me off again because I'm working. So I got a job now. I'm in school. Now can I get health benefits? Wait, that's backwards as fuck. I'm sorry. Something is wrong with that. I

haven't seen the paper, right? I think I read something about that cause everybody is getting cut off their Medicaid right now. Everybody that I run into getting cut off their Medicaid. So now for like the City of Newark, you occupy Newark, I'm still stuck on this right cause I'm trying to figure it out. You occupy the gangsters in Newark, but you're cutting off Medicaid, you're cutting off food stamps, cutting off any type of benefit you could possibly get other than a back to work program. So you're forcing people out of Newark. Some of whom, those have been here forever. You're forcing them about because my mom only get 17 dollars in food stamps. Why? She's not working.

Whit Strub: For a week? For a...

Patreese Johnson: A month.

Whit Strub: Wow.

Patreese Johnson: A month. She went from fifty dollars to seventeen dollars.  
[01:25:00] What does she do with seven, you can't, that's one meat right there. One meat, that's it, that's that

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: One week, that's it. That's that. They are saying she get paid enough. How? Her rent like 300, her rent's like 300. Other utilities, well, there's cable, so y'all want everybody to go back to cave times. No cable. Basically, if you want anything extra, the government ain't paying for it. Whether it's cable, whether it's a telephone in your house, anything like that, the government is not giving it to you to pay it. So that's what they felt, I guess, with food stamps. Everybody was cashing in their food stamps. I guess they try to wean out all the bad people but at the same time, people's about to suffer. They about to suffer heavy. And I'm

about to suffer even more cause I can't, I can't get nothing. And it's like everybody's messed up not only the felons right now. The community itself is about to, I don't know his strategy but what I see so far is like you really can't miss that. You can't. I'm going through it and I know and then I'm witnessing everybody who's been on it getting' cut off. Something is up. But you occupy Newark. We should be occupying *you*. You understand what I'm saying?

Whit Strub: So you're not sold on Mayor Baraka.

Patreese Johnson: No, my friends tried. They tryin'. But what I feel like he is the one that's continuing Cory Booker's work. And I felt like Cory Booker thing was to break it down and rebuild it. And we're building while we're breaking at the same time. And like I said, if you watch the community, how they rebuilding it is going like this [makes gesture]. Think about it from Livingston on down. Take South Orange Avenue on down, from Broad and Market on up, it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller. They're gonna knock down all the projects. They ain't even putting everybody back in there that lived there, they only putting selective people back in there. So it says, well why, what are you trying to do with this community, but, like I said when you put a lion or a dog or a bear up against a wall, they gonna find another way around you, period. So you're going to find more drugs on the corner, I'm sorry. Because you're not really giving them work opportunity. You're not trying to show them how to get work opportunity. You want them to come out and get it. But like I said, you're talking to people, the people that you're trying to reach can't be reached because you're really not going out there in the community. Throwing a block party is not telling them that, hey, if you come

down to Essex County you get a job because guess what, I'm shutting this city down.

Whit Strub: Yeah.

Patreese Johnson: That's now what you're doing. You're not giving them the jobs. The ones that need it, you're not going to these drug dealers like yo, I'm gonna get you a job. Don't nobody wants to - I have to have some type of compassion for drug dealers, right. Cause I play devil's advocate a lot. I don't promote what they do, I don't care what they do, but the reasons of why they're doing it is because they cannot get a job. These are men that's out there with felonies, they cannot get a job. You tell them to go down to 990, when 990 take all day, to you will place them at orientation to find a job, and then you're not even letting them know that it ain't even 100 percent. You got men never had a job before. They want a hundred percent, baby. They don't want half assed. They don't want to do the whole shit, no. Cause you told them if they go to 990 they goin' get a job. They go to 990 they walk out without a job. All they do was paperwork. We got to fix something. That's backwards as hell. Look who you're talking to. Look what generation you're trying to reach. It's not going to work like that. Like you have to come guaranteed. If it's not guaranteed, it's not going to happen. Because as a felon coming home, I'm telling you, I want one hundred percent guaranteed. If you're not telling me, that's why I ain't been to 990. You're not telling me I'm getting a job there. But half of the jobs that you present is not felony friendly. And then on top of that, if he's out there selling drugs and he's making two thousand a day, what makes you think he want to make eight seventy-five. He don't. And then you want to raise everything up. Newark is getting expensive. I just paid \$3 for a Pepsi yesterday. I swear to God, two liter was \$3.

Whit Strub: That's a sign of the times.

Patreese Johnson: I swore. A two liter was three dollars. No, a three liter was three dollars. No, I can't deal with that. Not on my check basis. And I get eight seventy-five a week. I won't be able to survive. It's no surviving out here. And that's why I feel like that was Cory Booker's strategy. Make it hard for them to survive out here, they gonna move. And that solves our violent problem. Cause those violent people are not going to be able to survive out here because we got more police in we'll make it hard for them to stand out here on the streets. But you just made it worse. Cause now they bout to kill people for a territory! They bout to kill people for owing them money. They bout to, it's no more... I can't deal with this because now I'm struggling. You don't know that you made it worse. Who you sittin down with. You supposed to be sittin' down with people that's analyzing this whole thing, these choices that you make for your community in Newark. You just made, I feel like you made it a whole lot worse. It's getting more murders. Since this, I'm telling you, since the cutoff of welfare, I'm not going to lie. Cut off the welfare, I say murders go up. I did. Cut up now, doing the Medicaid. First it was the welfare, you cut out everybody off their food stamps. Only one who's not really not getting cut off is people with kids, but they went down.

I don't know if you remember Cory Booker. He got himself on welfare to see how they gets along. So you did this exercise and what happened. Cause I've never heard the results of it. I've never heard how he survived off of welfare. You're lying. You didn't do it. You didn't do it. You did it to fool everybody. Because they got to see it. You know what you're doing. You know what you're doing.

Whit Strub: He was very good at public relations.

Patreese Johnson: He was, with the people. He is really good with the people. He got what he wanted. But he also had a plan too. Because he can't look bad, right?

Whit Strub: To the Senate.

Patreese Johnson: He can't look bad. But on the outside looking in, what people see? Oh Newark getting better. They got more tourism. But the community is *not* getting better. That's what they *don't* see. And that's a problem. And occupying Newark [Mayor Baraka initiated "Occupy the Block in Newark] ain't gonna do anything. They need to occupy Iraq, you're doing it wrong. You don't occupy the gangsters and them if you ain't coming straight right with it,, and these are people that you watched grow up in your school. You understand? So you should know how to talk to them already. Throwing a block party is not doing it. Occupying Newark. They didn't even come down here. You ain't go up in that hood and occupy nothing cause I ain't seen nobody up there when I got up there. Y'all occupy downtown Newark, why? I want to know why? That's not where your problem at.

Whit Strub: Right.

Patreese Johnson: When everybody got together and they wanted to occupy Wall Street. Where they did it at? Wall Street. They play too much!

Whit Strub: So I have to interrupt and I apologize for this, Patreese. This is fantastic and I hate to stop you. But I think we're really pressed for time here cause then we've got to get over to the thing in 10 minutes. So, I mean as a sort of closing comment, what's your plan for the near future? What is... you're going to school?

Patreese Johnson: I'm still going to school. I'm working on my Liberal Arts degree [sneezes]. I want to own my own spa business. Surrounding, the theme of it basically for me was giving me the motivation of safe space. Mostly for our LGBT community but it's not only going to be open for the LGBT community. I want to also focus on women. And the kind of women, stresses [coughs] – hold up, my mouth is dry. I am still getting over a cold. Yeah, I'm still getting over a cold. Everything a little crazy. So with women, I feel like it's a lot of stresses in life now. Sometimes people don't indulge in things that actually keep them calm. Sometimes they don't realize what things keep them calm. So I want to create an atmosphere with fantasy. Meaning however you're feeling. Whatever you like. Whatever smells you like. I want to create aroma for that.

So my business, I don't want it to be big. If it could be big, yes, for the dreams that I have for it obviously is to make everybody comfortable. Whoever walks into my establishment, is to be comfortable and feel safe and the point, you can't feel safe and relieve stress at the same time, right. So I got to feel safe in order to relieve any type of stress. So that's what I want to create within my spa.

Whit Strub: And you want to stay in Newark?

Patreese Johnson: No. I actually want to move to California.

Whit Strub: Oh, okay.

Patreese Johnson: I can't do the cold weather anymore. So, but while I'm here, I do want to work for a lot of youth in Newark if I can. I feel like if I can't, like I'm starting with my family, too. If I can't help the youth and my family, how can I go in my community and help the youth of my community if those in my family I cannot help? Like

I say, you got to start off at home first before you go anywhere else. I'm not close minded going anywhere else helping anybody else cause it's still a life. But also I notice a lot of work need to be done here in Newark. Like I said, I make my [self] available to everybody. If they don't reach out, I don't know, because like I don't really know how to get in contact with you if I give you my card, only you know what you want me to do, I'm just here. So call. That's how like I've been trying to do a lot of networking with those who are in Newark that holds certain youth programs which, nobody hasn't gotten in contact with me yet. I don't know. That's the start of it. Like that's what I want to do. That's where my passion is at. That's where my focus is at. Hopefully, in five years, I'll go to California because I cannot do no more than five years of cold weather anymore.

Whit Strub: LA or San Francisco, or where?

Patreese Johnson: Most likely San Francisco. I think that's probably the the only place I probably can afford if I do it because of my savings, right. And what else I have, that I want to do? I guess, you know, I'm at a point in my life where, you know, still freshly home. I've only been home for two years, where I come up with something new that I want to do everyday. I'm that type of person who just want to help everybody, make sure everybody happy. I'm realizing that I can't do it by myself. I can't do everything. But the fact that I do want to do everything to help out my community, help out my family and to better my own self and my friends. That's definitely something I want to do. Other than that, I just want to be a physical therapist. That's it.

Whit Strub: That's awesome. That is really, really cool. And there is so much else that I would love to talk about and ask you but I think I'm

under obligation to call it to a close. Thank you so much for talking about this for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. It is really valuable.

Patreese Johnson: No problem. Thank you for having me.

Whit Strub: It is our pleasure.