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**Oral history interview with Frederick Weston,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Frederick Weston on August 31 and September 5, 2016. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Theodore Kerr for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Frederick Weston has reviewed the transcript. Corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

## Interview

THEODORE KERR: This is Theodore Kerr, interviewing Fred, Frederick Weston, Frederick Weston at his home in New York, New York, on August 31, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. Hi Fred.

FREDERICK WESTON: Hi Ted.

THEODORE KERR: To start, maybe share with me your earliest memory.

FREDERICK WESTON: Wow. Well, what immediately came to mind was my, the house I grew up in in Detroit. And it was a sharing experience, I guess. My mother had a friend, who also had a son, they were both single parents. And I guess I had outgrown an outfit that she bought me, a sweater, and matching pants. Anyway, I had another one that was more appropriate to my size, and so she wanted me to share my outfit with her girlfriend and her girlfriend's son. Then they took us out on the back porch to take pictures of us. And they also bought me a big sleeve of popcorn, and I had to share my popcorn too. Anyway, so there's pictures of it. And when I see the pictures, I'm like, I remember that. I remember.

Actually, he grew up on later on to be a bully. He was one of my bullies. And he was, he's smaller than I was, but he was bigger, bossier. And you can even see it on the photographs. That's kind of my earliest memory. I probably have a memory that goes back before that, but when you ask the question, it was the first thing that came to my mind.

THEODORE KERR: How old are you in that memory?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, I want to say it's preschool, so maybe three, four.

THEODORE KERR: Did you have siblings?

FREDERICK WESTON: No. I'm an only child. I remember an earlier memory. I remember my grandmother rubbing my legs when I was a baby. I think they were going to be [bowlegged –FW], most of the people older they get—and she would massage mine, she massaged my legs into perfection. But that's, you know, memory is a funny thing because I remember it, but then I don't. Because I think she did that, I watched her do that to another one of my cousins, and they reminded of the story that she that for me. So then it comes back to me like, well yes.

They bathed me in the kitchen sink when I came from my trip ride to Detroit when I met my aunts for the very first time. I had to be a baby-baby baby. And I kind of remember being bathed in the, everything being different, in a different space, a different place. And getting a bath in the tub, and being fussed over by all my aunts, because my mother had three sisters, and they were all in their teens.

THEODORE KERR: It sounds like a house of ladies.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was a house of feminine quality. My grandma, I like this, the way I like to tell this, my grandmother raised my mother and me.

THEODORE KERR: She lived with you?

FREDERICK WESTON: She lived with me. And my grandfather was there too, so we were really in, in my grandparent's home, Emma and Fred, my grandfather Fred. And my mother was their first child, Freda. And I got to be Frederick, I guess that was my, they kept working the name. And so yes, I was, my grandmother took, my grandmother raised my mother, she was only 21 when she had me. And so when I got older, I realized that she was, 20 is kind of a kid. So yeah, I like to say my grandparents raised me, and in fact I called my mother, my grandmother mother, my grandfather daddy, and I called my mother Freda. I've always called my mother by her first name. So that's when I kind of throw people off.

I think back, back in the '40s, when kids were born out of wedlock, sometimes they played it off like, you know, my grandmother had a surprise child 20 years later. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Was that something you were conscious of as a little kid?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh yeah, yeah. I was—that made different. That was one of the things that made me different. And then, yes, that definitely made me feel, I didn't even realize it until you go out and you start, you know, I didn't know that that was not normal until I, you know, started meeting other kids in the neighborhood, and it was like, that's, that's my mother but I called her Freda. Like how could, and they would gasp. You know, because they didn't have that right. You had to call your mother mommy, mom, but you didn't get to call her by her first name. And I thought that was really kind of special, I got to call my mother by her name. Which really, and in fact it makes it, what's that song and what's that story, the most beautiful, [singing] the most beautiful word I ever heard Maria. Well I think my mother, Freda, is the most beautiful sound that I ever heard. Because I knew it, for me that meant mother.

THEODORE KERR: So it, for you it wasn't like you were saying her first name, that was a term of, that was her—

FREDERICK WESTON: That was it, she was my mother. I mean, she was my mother, and then Freda.

THEODORE KERR: And then, as you were coming up in school, you said that was one of the things that made you different. Like, what other things are you thinking about when you say that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well I think because I was a bastard, you know, I loved that word. B-A-S-T-A-R-D. You know there's a star in bastard, so I was destined to be a star. Gosh, I'm so silly, I lost the question. What other things that made me so different?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh gosh. My blackness, I think I became aware of my color at some point, that I was Negro, colored, and that would make me different. I think people, my, the other city I grew up under had expectations for me, and so I knew I needed to behave, I mean well behaved because I was representing. And I wanted people to know that I had some upbringing. And that kind of made me different because women. Women and the feminine energy was so strong and prevalent in my life. And I think at some point, too early, I had kind of a preference for those kind of things, and that made me different.

But then the older I got, the more I realized that everybody's different. Everybody's different. And whether, you know, it makes you suffer or whether it makes you feel like you're better than everybody else, I don't know Ted.

THEODORE KERR: It's just the truth.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then I think I want to be special, I want to be different. That's the perfectionist in me. And I'm, I'm, you know, I want to be rise above, I want to be excellent, I want to be like Jesus.

THEODORE KERR: Was that something you were conscious of as a little kid, like your difference made you special.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And did that get you into trouble in school?

FREDERICK WESTON: Not until I got to be, like, and I didn't really get me in trouble, it didn't get me in trouble in school, it got, well I guess, because I think I used to talk in class. So they had to put me someplace. Yeah, I think I used to talk. I used to be easily distracted. The kids knew how to pull me in. But it was, it didn't get me into trouble, I will say that with qualifications of course, with air quotes around it. Until I got to be like a teenager—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Then it started to get me in trouble.

THEODORE KERR: And growing up where you were often the only black kid in your school, or in your class?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, no never. But I've always been, remarkably so, I've always been, my education was always, always kind of integrated.

THEODORE KERR: Hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The only part maybe was my church school upbringing. That was in fact, the church I went to, The Venerable AME Church in Detroit, Michigan had a nursery, and so every carving, you know, in the church nursery, and so that was even before I started going to elementary school. Because the time I got to my public school education, I was always in classes with, that were integrated.

THEODORE KERR: Huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then my bussing experience was when I got to junior high school, the

junior high school that I probably should have gone to was overcrowded, so I was bussed to another junior high school; which was even another experience to be integrated. And then I went to all city high school, so that made another integrated. Funny we're talking about race, integration, race. I think when I grew up in Detroit, and even my experience in my college education in upstate Michigan, I thought I was prepared for racism when I came to New York, and I found out that it was more racism, and sexism, that I could possibly handle. And it was really like, it took me a while. You know, I had to learn to live here in New York a while before I came to love and appreciate it.

THEODORE KERR: This is a good place to introduce one of the themes of your artwork, which is the figure of Sambo.

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: And he, he plays heavy into your work. But when you were a kid, was that, did you learn about Sambo in school, and was he someone that you were attracted to?

FREDERICK WESTON: At school and at home.

THEODORE KERR: You wanted, could you say the first few times you, you and Sambo.

FREDERICK WESTON: I think it was read to me in elementary school. I believe it was read to me in elementary school, and I also believe it was read to me at home, because I did get read to a lot at home. I had lots of books, lots of picture books, and my aunts had fun. I was the training baby. So Sambo was a story that I came, I grew up with. But then, I guess I was also in the part of my, of upbringing when the NAACP or whoever, all those people decided they didn't like the story, and they got it banned.

But I came back to it actually, we were doing a black history something at my day program, and the story came back to me. And it came back to me because I could never understand the story. It kind of didn't make sense. I mean, the moral's not to clear, and it ends really kind of strangely with a pancake supper. And then there were parts of the story that I never got. I think, when they would tell the story of Sambo, when they got to the part of the tigers running around the tree and turning into butter, I'm like, you know okay, this is enough. Don't tell kids mistruth.

THEODORE KERR: As a kid you thought about that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So that was my disconnect. Other than like, you know, it's about clothes, and going somewhere you didn't have any business. You know like, because you're so full of yourself. And you know, putting yourself out in the world, and that adventure, and then that you get into a situation, and how do you get out of the situation?

So Sambo would, Sambo and the tiger got to be like, how do I learn to survive? How do I learn to, how I learn to, when the fear's in my face and someone is threatening my life, can I use my wits, you know, to keep my life? And so I think that was what the story represented for me. Anyway, yeah, I loved the story. And it's rich, and then I find out the story, people didn't like the story for reasons that had nothing to do with the story, you know.

So that was, that got to be interesting for me. And then when I look at my pictures as a kid, and

being dark skinned, I knew what it kind of felt like to be identified as black. And first when I was, when I was young and playing in the alley as a child, if they called you black or they called you African, it was really a cause to fight. You know, because those were supposedly, they were pejoratives, they were putdowns. I'm not African. I don't know what I am. I'm American, I don't know what I am. But I'm not African. I'm not from the deep dark jungles, I'm not a savage, you know. And that was what they taught us about Africa.

And so for me, and then the idea of me black was, you know, that meant something that wasn't nice either. I was colored, I was Negro, I was black. I didn't get to black until James Brown made that fierce song. And I remember them singing it, I remember him singing it, performing it in the Playboy Club. There was a show, *Playboy After Dark* with Hugh Hefner and all the bunnies, and all the celebrities drinking cocktails in cute outfits. And James Brown was singing the song, and everybody in the room was singing the song, whether they were really, truly black in the flesh or not. But it was the song, was—

THEODORE KERR: And you were there at the time?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I remember watching it on TV.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't know. I might have been up too late. I don't know what year that was.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, you saw that with your family?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I think I saw that by myself.

THEODORE KERR: Like, you snuck to watch TV or something?

FREDERICK WESTON: No that, that would be, okay, now we're talking about the '60s, '69. I was a teenager then.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. And when I go back—

FREDERICK WESTON: But that black, when in the alley, no. No you didn't, no.

THEODORE KERR: And who was calling you that? Like white kids, or other—

FREDERICK WESTON: —no, it was other kids in the alley. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: So other kids of color, other black kids?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, maybe. Probably. [Laughs.] And those were just a shade lighter than me. It was enough to, you know, I'm not black, you black. I'm not black, you black.

THEODORE KERR: And did you like school?

FREDERICK WESTON: I loved school. I loved school.

THEODORE KERR: How come?

FREDERICK WESTON: My grandmother impressed on me when I was a kid that that was my job. Your job is go to school and to get an education. And that's your job, you know. And I have to go

out to work and make money, and you have to go to school and get an education, and that's kind of expected of you. So yeah, that was my job. And it was kind of fun to do my job, you know. Go to school, you show up. And you know, that's where my friends were. That's where my friends were, and the kids I was, you know, experiencing those different phases of life with.

THEODORE KERR: And did you have art classes?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes I did. We had art classes, actually had art class, we had, the end of, the year we had that class was also the year we had the literature class.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think my literature teacher and my art teacher conspired. Art was fun for me. Ruth Dell, her name was Ruth Dell. And they'd make things and I was a good copycat. I'd watch her intently, and then I could, I'd knock her off, you know. And I was pretty good at it. So, yeah, and then the literature class, I can't think of her first name. Conway, I think her name was Conway. I think I might have been reading ahead of the rest of the class, and so to keep me from being bored, she would get me colored crayons and I would make the, whatever the holiday blackboard, for the next holiday during that class while everybody was talking. And I'd answer the question if I knew the answer to the question that was answered. I was listening, but I also getting to, you know. I got to make a special, it's kind of like being a teacher's pet, you know, I guess. I got to color on the blackboard, and make the holiday blackboard.

THEODORE KERR: And still participate in discussion.

FREDERICK WESTON: And still participate in the discussion. And I was really so good at art 'till, I remember the parent teacher night, when I was, I was really, I was dragging my mother to go to the art room. Because my work was up on the wall, and I wanted her to see my work. And then the art teacher told my mother if I ever wanted to go to any art school, anywhere to come and find her. And I was like, wow. And my mother was determined, in fact she told me, artists don't make money baby, when I told her I wanted to be an artist. She was, that's in fact, that's not, that's, that's not a vocation. That's not a vocation. That's not a thing people do professionally.

THEODORE KERR: And did that sound true to you at the time?

FREDERICK WESTON: I bought into it, enough that I, that I never really learned how to draw.

THEODORE KERR: So when you said you were knocking the teacher. Were you knocking off her drawings?

FREDERICK WESTON: Whatever it was she would do. Whatever it was she would do. You know, you trace your hand to make the—

THEODORE KERR: Turkey.

FREDERICK WESTON: Turkey. You know. [Laughs.] All those things, and they were fun. They were fun. So that was kind of the, my family let me do that, they kind of encouraged me on the one hand, but it was like, you know. You know, here's something funny too. I was thinking the other day, because just happen to, people who saw, have you ever heard the joke, my mother made me a homosexual? And the response is, if I buy her the yarn will she make me one too? So it's the idea

like, I think people who have skill like sewing, or knitting, or drawing, everybody gets to like take advantage of that. It's not really something we're going to pay you for, but you're the one who does it. And we just like expect you, in fact a friend asked me the other day, would you like knock me off a sketch, and then I'm like, I can't draw. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But they think because you're creative.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, you know. And then I did, why would, if, if, and you're not going to pay me. [Laughs.] You're giving me this job, because now we're talking about this not fun for me. I labor at that. And you want me to do a job, and you're not going to pay me. Like roll it up and hand it me, and you know, it's like, here Picasso I need a flyer. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Great, to—

FREDERICK WESTON: I think on the one hand, because I think she reveres me and she respects me, but it's like, here Picasso, I need a flyer.

THEODORE KERR: It's like a valuing and a devaluing—

FREDERICK WESTON: At the same time! At the same time. So my mother sewed, and she was remarkable. And she did needlework, and she was remarkable. And my mother played piano, and she was remarkable. My mother had a, had a handwriting, which is going out to style, but mother's script was so fierce people would ask her to do like their wedding invitations, and stuff like that, which is calligraphy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, but it's like here, Freda. And it wasn't debated, you know. And again, you do that, but it's just your handwriting, it's of value but we're not going to pay you for it. I want to do it because, do it as a favor for me. And so they like, so the thing with the sweater. I'll buy her the yarn and she'll just make me a homosexual because she's good at it.

THEODORE KERR: See, your mom was, was talented and had all these vocations.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I watched her, copied her, but I wasn't, then though I think at some point there was kind of rivalry.

THEODORE KERR: Ahhh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, and she didn't want me to do those things, and she didn't want me to do them professionally. She wanted me to be a businessman and wear a suit.

THEODORE KERR: Did she have a vocation?

FREDERICK WESTON: Near the end, she got to be a hearing and sight tester.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But she did a lot of different things. My mother was, in fact, playing the piano in church was one of her things.

THEODORE KERR: And she got paid for it.



FREDERICK WESTON: She got paid for it. But I think my grandmother used to, like you know, fish. That was one of the things when she was a kid, the church paid us to show up. You know, knock on Mrs. Weston's door and see if Freda could come.

THEODORE KERR: And she wanted you to be a businessman.

FREDERICK WESTON: And wear a suit.

THEODORE KERR: And wear a suit. And do you think with, I'm guessing, does that have to do with gender? Was she worried about you in that way?

FREDERICK WESTON: See, you're going back to the part where my mother made me homosexual?

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: On the theme of clothing and sexual—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, I think my mother did make me a homosexual. I think she was trying so hard for me not to be, she really had a like, you know, the thing you don't want to create you wind up creating.

THEODORE KERR: Like the more she made that suit, the more you wanted to hear that sweater.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But I think it was also what it represented for her. She wanted me to be a businessman, and if she had to taught me how to sew, you know, whether me having to go through all the things I had to go through to learn how to sew myself. I think I could have, I would, I would be the designer that I never got to be.

THEODORE KERR: [inaudible]

FREDERICK WESTON: It was really part of being a businessman too, and this [inaudible].

THEODORE KERR: Okay, we're going to come back to that. Because I feel like we're getting to your later history, and that'll make more sense.

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: But let's get through your school a little bit. So you're taking art classes, you're really liking it.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: You're good at it. The teacher sees promise.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: You tell her your mom, she has a complex relationship to your artistry.

FREDERICK WESTON: I think, you know, I remember, here's another early memory. It was a kindergarten homework assignment. Tell us what you want to be when you grow up. And I must have been at home and saw Jacques d'Amboise, or some fabulous dancer on television, and they would have to be ballet, because I remember distinctly the whole thing with lifting the lady up in the air. And then when he comes back by himself, he's making these, you know, the jeté, is that what

you call it? When you turn around, you're turning around and leaping and leaping—

THEODORE KERR: Oh wow.

FREDERICK WESTON: —and leaping and leaping and leaping. It's so acrobatic, and I'm like, "Oh, I think I want to do that." So I came home and I asked, "What do you call a male ballet dancer?" And everybody said a male ballet dancer. I think there's a, danseur or whatever, it's a proper word for. But that was my response, and I think I made the kindergarten teacher gasp, because I decided, that's when I started to learn you can't always tell people your truth. You can't really tell them what it is that you dream of because you're going to make them gasp. And don't ever say that again, you know.

And I think there was something else. And again, that goes to the gender thing, you know. And I think my mother response would have been probably the same thing. I remember one time I was, I was sad and I, I had really kind of, I learned to sing. I had in fact, she put me in church in front of the kids to sing, so I liked to sing, you know. I liked to sing in choirs and things. And at one point I realized I had a really good first tenor voice, and I was, kept trying to see how I could stretch it. And I was singing with some woman on some record, and she yelled up to the room, "Stop singing like a woman!" I was traumatized. [Laughs.] That wasn't made up.

But I think a lot the gender stuff, I could, oh gosh Ted, this is really, really, really kind of deep. And Freda forgive me, if you were in you're right mind, maybe you'd understand, because I love you so much. And my mother was, you know, a lot of that. I realized that there were a couple of things that I could say to my mother that would distress her, it would distress her, and then she had response for it. One was, "Why don't I have a father like everybody else?" And two was, "I wish I were a girl." And "I wish I were a girl" was not because I wanted to be a girl, I wished I were a girl so she could understand me, because I knew at some point I wished I were a girl, she would understand my feelings. But because I'm a boy, you don't have any clue about where it is I'm coming from. And she had no idea response to even, so yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Saying it now, does that, does that still seem true to you?

FREDERICK WESTON: I wish I were a girl?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, in your relationship to how your mom knew you.

FREDERICK WESTON: I am a girl.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I'm not a woman. I'm sorry, you sure an interviewer Ted, because you're going to make me very silly. Because I love you so much. I, you know, yeah I'm a girl. I love the girls. I love playing with girls. I love playing with the girls because the girls didn't have, they were confined, they weren't supposed to get their clothes dirty, and so we had to sit there and use our imaginations, you know.

Boys were always physical, they were always trying to take you down. They, it keeps you dirty, you know, you know. And yeah, it was always that competition. And with girls, the competition is just like my imagination is better than yours. You know, boys, I'm bigger and tougher and stronger, you know. And girls like, I'm smarter, I'm smart enough to let you know that you're smarter and I. I love girls. I love girls.

And so I think that got to be a problem. So there's a certain age where you get segregated, you get sexually segregated. So, now I'm forced to be with boys, and boys were a problem, you know, because my first experience was having to give something I like to someone else who's going to come back and beat me up later on in my life, you know. And he got to eat the popcorn too, you know. I had to share my popcorn too. And so, it was like, you know, boys got to be tough. So then I think I became hyper vigilant around boys. I started watching boys, because that was necessary for me. Like the boys with the tigers in the jungle.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So I had to, you know, and they were always threatening my life. So I had to keep an eye out for the boys. The girls were fine, the girls were cool. The girls would always accept me because I knew how to sing and dance. And I could tell them what they were wearing.

THEODORE KERR: When did you start to look at clothes?

FREDERICK WESTON: My mother was, my mother was, my mother was, my mother, my mother, I'm trying to think of a nice word to call a clotheshorse. My mother looked good. My mother looked good. And I was her best accessory, you know. So she could make her clothes. She would buy my clothes, and so she would buy at a certain quality. And a certain, she would dress me like a boy, you know. But she could make her clothes, and she could sew exquisitely.

I've told this story half a million times. I watched my mother, fashion magazines were all around the space and that I shared, and I watched my mother copy a dress. I believe it was Dior couture. And she copied that dress, and then we went to Hudson's to the, to the fabric department and bought dotted Swiss. It's probably cotton, but dotted Swiss. And I think the dress was blue moon, white dotted Swiss. And she turned, she got pink with white dots on it, and it had, it had, it was a shirtwaist dress. Because the shirtwaist was back in style, it was style.

But it was, it was very much a sissy dress that had dotted Swiss and ruffles. And the ruffles would come across the bodice and go down to the waist, and then they would break at the waist to all these pleats and gathers, and she copied this dress. I watched her copy that dress, and I watched her go to the store and buy the fabric and match the, match the, she used to let me match her thread sometimes. She would give me a swatch and go let me buy her finishings. I watched her copy this couture dress, and then I watched her buy some roses. I'm like, "What is she doing? She bought all these roses." And she, she just deconstructed them and made a hat. So she had this pink hat made out of pink roses. And this pink dotted Swiss dress with these white little rough eyelet ruffles down the front that broke into these fabulous, when she walked. And stopped traffic on a Saturday morning.

Like power, that's power. That's power. That's power. That's power. And so, you know, she couldn't afford to buy the couture, but she knew how, she knew how to copy it. So I watched her copy it. And you know what's funny in my art and design history is almost like you know, the originally gets squashed, and I really like what I've really become, a really, really good copier, you know. In fact, I think that's why I like the copy machine, and the interest in photograph, because I've kind of learned to be a draftsman.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, you give me something to work with, I can blow it up, shrink it down, you know, trace it, cut it, paste it, and well I guess it's something that's appreciable. But if you

want me to sketch it and draw it, it's going, I'm going, I have to work at that. I really have to work at that.

THEODORE KERR: But I think also growing up, you saw the value of copy.

FREDERICK WESTON: The fashion, the fashion industry is like, oh, they would laugh at my outfits. And then the next season or two, they'd be doing them. But they had to laugh at me wearing them first. Like, Fred, what's wrong with you. Why is no collar on that shirt? What happened to the collar? It's just the collar band? What number is that? What style number is that now? Did you—[laughs]—oh Fred, what happened to the sleeves of your shirt? You know, and then it was like, and so it's almost like it was, it's almost like we have to, it's like when I presented their eyes weren't ready for it. But if they saw somebody do it, if somebody else were to do it in Paris or Italy, it's like, okay now, oh, Giorgio Armani I get it. The shirt doesn't have a collar.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Did you, did your mom date while you were growing up?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh yeah. Yes she did. And again, I think I had this, I think I had, there was a role I played in some of that. Because I think sometimes when we were together, if someone were to approach her, if she wasn't feeling it, I could read the signs and behave in a different way than if it was somebody that she really liked. So I think some of them she played, I mean, it's like, who is that? Is that your brother? No, that's my son. You ready for baggage? That's my son. Or you know, even the way the conversation would come up. If they were brave enough and they didn't care whether I was her son or not, you know, then we could have conversation. Keep talking.

THEODORE KERR: When did you leave the house with your mom?

FREDERICK WESTON: I was 17, and she got her first bachelorette apartment at 37. We both moved away from home at the same time.

THEODORE KERR: So you both moved away from your grandmother at the same time.

FREDERICK WESTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Grandparents both moved away. I went to college, and she a bachelorette apartment.

THEODORE KERR: And did she do it in reaction to you leaving?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think, I think it may be. It may be in some ways, yeah. I was old enough to go away, and she wanted me to go to school in Detroit. I found some place out, some place away, but at campus. I'm like, I think it was my, you know, I think I want that experience. And I found a school that really had, like, an open door policy. Would let anybody in, but you don't get off, if you don't a three point by your semester, we're going to keep your money and send them home.

THEODORE KERR: And were you young when you graduated? Is 16 young to graduate high school?

FREDERICK WESTON: No. No. I graduated from high school, I think I was 16 when I graduated from high school. But I didn't, I didn't go right into college. I didn't have any money. So I worked a year, and then I think enough money to get me started. And then I got scholarships and grants.

THEODORE KERR: And what's—

FREDERICK WESTON: And then I stayed for six years, because I had money to get me there for six

years. I was trying to finish with two Bachelors, but I came up a little short.

THEODORE KERR: What school did you go to?

FREDERICK WESTON: I went to Ferris State, it's now a University in Big Rapids, Michigan.

THEODORE KERR: And what, what did—

FREDERICK WESTON: Thirteen miles north of Grand Rapids.

THEODORE KERR: —what did you study?

FREDERICK WESTON: I studied, what do they call it, merchandising, marketing. I studied marketing, and I tried to get a bachelor's in advertising. Because I had taken up a lot of advertising classes, but I ran out of money, and I couldn't get the head of the advertising department to waive a class.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: He wouldn't do it. So I'm like, "Okay. I can't get that degree because I can't come back in September. I've stayed here six years playing big man on campus."

THEODORE KERR: You liked it, you liked being at school?

FREDERICK WESTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I got into the fraternity, and then there was another reason to stay in school.

THEODORE KERR: When you entered school, you would have been the age of other kids. But when you left school, were you the, were you among the older kids?

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay, I don't know, let me see. I was supposed to come out in '69, I came out in '71. And then I worked around, bounced around in Detroit a year or two, and then I moved to New York, I think in '73. So I think I was 26, twenty-something.

THEODORE KERR: When you graduated?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, by the time I came to New York. I graduated from college, I was twenty-something.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Your college years, so this is, this is the mid-60s, and you're in college.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yup.

THEODORE KERR: And is it rural? Like I can't—

FREDERICK WESTON: No, yup. Yup. Yup. Yup, kind of. The Hush Puppies plant was like the biggest thing, and most of the people worked, you know, you get the Hush Puppies plant or they worked for the college. [Laughs.] Yeah, it was kind of like a farm town. That's what was on the radio when hear, yeah, North Central Michigan.

THEODORE KERR: And what was it, you know, I know you now, and I can't—

FREDERICK WESTON: It was, the college was the best thing in the, in fact it was the only big rapids in the world. And the rapids really do move quite a bit. They have, I think the college was the biggest

thing in that town.

THEODORE KERR: So you were part of the central thing, and that felt good.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And I was on campus, you know, it was campus life. And being in a fraternity, I have an off-campus apartment, and cars, and girls, and partying, and, how to study and get good grades and be social. All of that, you know. Because the reason to go to school really is to get an education, but how do I squeeze all? And this I think that those college years are really, like, critical, you know. That's where people, that's where people to go to school to meet a husband or a wife. That's how a lot of that starts.

THEODORE KERR: Who do you mean? Say more.

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, some people go to school to meet their partners.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah. But for you, it was, why, like were you there to meet a partner?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I was there to, why was I there? I was there to get an education.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I really wanted to be, I wanted to be, I wanted to be, I wanted—. By that point, I think I wanted to be a fashion writer. I'd had enough advertising and marketing to realize and—and I thought I was strong enough where I wrote for the school paper. I thought my writing was strong enough that I might like to be a fashion writer. And so that was kind of how I set my sights with even the head of the, you know, the newspaper and yearbook said he didn't have any kind of ends. He didn't know anybody in that kind of business and so he really couldn't advise me. What I probably should have done was gone to Ann Arbor and grad school, you know. Because that was an opportunity that was kind afforded me, but I thought maybe I need to try and strike out.

And so, I went to, like I said, I went to Detroit. I started working for a model a—model agency. I worked for a college that was just—to kind of get some cash. I moved away from home. I got some roommates and moved away from home. I was trying to be grown, whatever that meant.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, self-supporting—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and I wasn't doing really a very good job at all. But I met some friends—well, this is an interesting time, so now, we're talking about '70, '69, '70, '71 and I met—through my fraternity, I met a group of friends who were gay—[laughs]—I was trying to think, how do I say this? Because people talk about fraternities anyway, but there was a subset—[laughs]—and there were—so, they were like from various campuses and so we would all go to the bar and celebrate the fact that we were—so we joked because there was like enough of us here to have a quorum, you know. But we were all from different campuses, but one of them would happen to be from Howard. And I use gay in the kind of—my sense of gay is maybe different from everybody else, but for intents and purposes—for all intents and purposes. So we would—part of our thing was integrating some of the bars in Detroit.

THEODORE KERR: By race or sexuality, when you say integrating?

FREDERICK WESTON: By race.

THEODORE KERR: By race.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then fashions were changing and we were kind of—really kind of be out there with the fashions. We can say, well, we work for a model agency, black model agency. And then one of my friends decided he [Claude Payne] wanted to be a fashion designer. And I'm like, "Well, let's do this." So I was really kind of his support and he really managed to come to New York and really kind of become one of—well, at the time, he was—he got a little renowned. We didn't have really great big, rich company, but he was recognized as one of the important black designers of our time, at that time. And that was what got—that got to be kind of how I got to be here. And so even just hanging out with him was enough of the fashion industry for me. Because again, you know, what'd you ask me when you came in? How do—how are you doing?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We didn't know how, but we were doing it anyway. We did not know how, but we were doing it anyway! So, we were living together. Okay, this is also the time. This is pre-AIDS when New York was *very, very* busy and we were fortunate enough to have a friend who could get us into a lot of the A-list clubs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so I was partying with the A-children, but I couldn't work. I couldn't get a job and yeah, that was kind of distressing. Anyway, yeah, that was when I learned how tough New York could be. How really tough New York can be. So, I think—I started to do a lot of stuff for him where he—okay, he gives—it's like the color copier came out and so, I was making invitations and announcements and things for him, so that gave me a chance to play with the color copy machine when it very first came out. Then I got into where—I got to enjoy like, trying to expand on what the copy machine could do. And then I realized there were some artists that really kind, you know, that was kind of their thing, like, Ray Johnson, and so I kind of fell into this—I was the free artist. I was Claude Payne's, you know, I need a flyer.

And here, I need some dresses cut out, and so I crawled on the floor. It was amazing. It was amazing. Like I said, we went to like—we went to the Tenth Floor—a lot of people don't know about the Tenth Floor. We went to the Tenth Floor—

THEODORE KERR: Do you want to say a little bit about the Tenth Floor?

FREDERICK WESTON: The Tenth Floor was a club. What was his name, Holleran? Holleran—the *Dancer from the Dance*.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, Andrew Holleran.

FREDERICK WESTON: Andrew Halloran. He refers to—The Tenth Floor. And it was *amazing*. It was so beautiful. New Yorkers were—I don't know genetically, I couldn't handle it, like I don't know, genetically, I think they were—there was so much drop-dead beauty walking the streets, it was *unbelievable*. And then celebrities weren't so shielded from everybody else. So, it was nothing to walk down the street and see some celebrity, you know. Because didn't crowd them, like the paparazzi didn't crowd them. They gave them their space. I mean, Roy Scheider used to be in the

supermarket with me. He like, that's the dude that was in *Jaws* and he's pushing the cart, you know, he's pushing the shopping cart, you know, here on Broadway.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You get on the elevator, there's Clarence Williams, III and Gloria sitting all the way in the back in the back seat, you know, Gloria Foster. Wonder where they're going? Oh, look out the window, there's John and Yoko crossing, you know, 72nd Street going near the Papaya King.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, hi, John and Yoko. I mean, it was like that—New York was like that. Apollonia, the model, Apollonia, walking down Broadway with the red hair going and the big red fox fur, go. Oh, my God, you know. But I mean, that was like that—that was like the thing and so that was kind of the *New Yorker*. I know this is—this is not—this place can't be real. I got off the—the first night I moved here, we were moving the truck—moving the furniture off my truck. The model Billy Blair was helping me move the furniture off the truck and having an intimate conversation about being late—[laughs]—with her woman thing and I'm like—when we couldn't fit all the furniture in, after she let my sofas went to her house and I'm like, this is the chick I'm seeing her in the *Interview* magazine—on the cover—in the *Interview* magazine and she's helping me take the furniture off the truck. Where am I? You know, I couldn't get a job. So it made me, I broke down—[laughs]—in fact, moved back to Detroit and broke down and came back to New York.

I've been here trying to struggle ever since. I've been here in the struggle ever since and I came to learn that this is just the way—this is just the way it is and this is where I need to be and if I want to do what it is I say I want to do, this is where I should do it. So, for me even to be able to say I am an artist and I am a designer now, I feel like I've earned the right. Maybe that hasn't been how I've made my fortune has yet to happen since I'm not done. God is not through with me yet, you know. And maybe some of that is still in front of me. I don't think my best days are behind me. I think some of my best days are probably in front of me. And—but my very best day is right now here with you, you know, and so, that's like—and that's—and that's really what New York is.

I have a—I want to show you before you leave, in my back room, I put some panels up and they're like this fake wood. The room I shared with my mother was a loft in the attic and that—that plaster board—

THEODORE KERR: Um-hmm [affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —that you make the walls out of. You know, it has that paper on the front—

THEODORE KERR: It had the white stuff or the brown stuff?

FREDERICK WESTON: That white stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: The white chalky stuff—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: —with the—with the paper on both sides. Well, the paper on the sides that



showed was like a knotty pine wood design.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, it was brown and beige. It was the knotty pine print on the wall and I used to stare at that wall at night and dream about living downtown.

THEODORE KERR: And it didn't matter what city or you had a city in mind?

FREDERICK WESTON: I knew it was going to be a city. I didn't want a house. I wanted to live in an apartment. I wanted to live in—I wanted to live in the Plaza, you know, that book—you know, Kate Thompson's book—

THEODORE KERR: Eloise?

FREDERICK WESTON: —had an effect on me. I wanted to live at the Plaza. I wanted to live in a hotel. Detroit had a fabulous hotel. It was a black hotel. It was called The Gotham. And I remember hearing my aunts and uncles talk about The Gotham. And so, in my head, that was where I wanted to live—I want to live in The Gotham. So, no, so I wanted to live in a hotel and I've done that.

THEODORE KERR: You did it?

FREDERICK WESTON: In New York City, yeah. I lived in hotels. I lived in The Breslin, you know.

THEODORE KERR: You did?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, so in a way—and I feel like in a great way, all of my dreams have come true. It's funny like, when your dream come true, that doesn't mean it's going to be, you know, sugary and you'll wake up and your dream is coming true, you're like, "Oh, I didn't know it was going to hurt." But it's what you asked for and you're where? So, to live in Midtown Manhattan, to be the originally Chelsea boy, you know, I've lived in Chelsea. I've lived in Clinton. That was the only time I lived on the East side. By Kips Bay, like 31st Street and Lexington.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And Lexington—you know. There's a—I lived in Clinton on 45th Street, but the other time when I first came to New York was in the upper West side, you know. But then I managed to find this neighborhood and I've lived really kind of in this neighborhood for the past 13 and 13, about 30 years—30 years or more. So, yeah, and I like New York because I think New York is haunted and I've come to learn that all those spirits are not meddlesome and bothersome. Some are here to support us. But I feel like every place you walk is some kind of hallowed ground.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: This complex—I found out the other day that the Alcohol Anonymous House was around the corner, the first New York City—

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

FREDERICK WESTON: —Alcoholics Anonymous House was like on—oh, back this way and the Underground Railroad house is on the other end—the one Underground Railroad house that's registered in Manhattan is at the other end of this property. And the Bayard Rustin house has now

become like a historic place that he used to live in this complex, you know. Just to think that the first Negro school, I think, was on Broadway and what, 26th Street—the first free Negro—I think that was a free Negro school was like, way back then. Things happened in Madison Square Park [laughter]. Sanford Brown—was that his name—got shot, was that where it was when the original Madison Square Garden was back this way where the park is. And I look out the window and I'd see that back that way, you know.

I'm like, "Oh, yeah. This is—I live in a dream land." [Laughs.] Yeah, I live in a dreamland and I realize that this is—it's solid. I can beat on it, but this—there's a bigger world, a greater world that I'm part of too and that's really what I think I have to be here to serve and that's maybe what—I think on some levels, me being special gave me some kind of sensitivity—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Some of that and when I learned how to deal with my own sensitivity and start to take responsibility—

THEODORE KERR: When did that start to happen?

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Next week. [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm in program. [Laughs.] I'm in the program, you know. I'm learning to deal with it now.

THEODORE KERR: Let's go back a little bit. I'm thinking about like, you were in college in Michigan during, what for many people was like this historic time in the United States when it comes to race, and I wonder like, was that something that you could feel when you were at college? Was it something that—

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, it was race, but it was everything because it was like the Kent State riots.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It was Woodstock.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It was—all of that was happening.

THEODORE KERR: And you all were talking about it or—

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I think, you know, I think race, but the Black Panther movement was probably happening. I think—okay, here's my race story about my college experience. I think when I got on campus, I knew two people. One was—his name was Johnny Clark. He was on the basketball team and the other one was Carolyn [Cheeks –FW]. I can't think of her last name, but she had been the president of the class just before mine, but they were upperclassmen and I felt like they were a little intimidating. And the black students on campus were a little intimidating because they were off—they lived off-campus and they had parties off-campus and that was supposed to be like a no, no.

But then—so I didn't want to do anything that was going to get me in trouble and I didn't really drink and smoke anyway. I was really kind of a goody, goody. In fact, that was my nickname. Goody was one of my nicknames. So, I stayed in the dorm and I studied with my roommates and my suite mates and I had grades. And on our campus, one of the few things—one of the few things they let the black kids do was kind of—black in culture was be a night at the roller skating rink we could play our own music. And so I would go to the roller skating party.

I felt like I could hold my own at the roller skating rink, so—[laughs]—so that was fun. Okay, so—okay, so there's a story that goes along with that. Not enough to talk about this thing. At my church, they decided they wanted to have a young adult group. And they grouped the two of us, one where the kids were in high school, and the other where the kids were in college. And the kids that were in high school were called—we decided that we wanted to call ourselves Alphas because we were the first youth group that they had had in an extended period of time. So we were the first, so we decided we wanted to call ourselves Alphas.

And then when we got to pick colors, we decided we wanted the color yellow and black. So they had these black T-shirts made that said "Alphas" across in yellow on the front and then we had our names embroidered on the sleeves. So, every shirt—I mean, the shirts were very personal like, so I get to my campus and when I'm going to the roller skating party and like, "What am I gonna wear to the roller skating party?" Oh, I cut out the sleeves on my Alpha's T-shirt and sweatshirt and I'll wear that to the roller skating party. Okay. Now—I had no idea there was an interest group of fellows who wanted to become members of Alpha Phi—Alpha fraternity.

And they were trying to get recognized by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, the national organization, and when they saw me with this T-shirt, they assumed that I was a member—I was already a member of the fraternity. So, they invited me to come to the group and so I did. Because I had grades because I had stayed—[laughs]—they also needed me because I had good grades. [Laughs.] So, I became part of this Alpha interest group that wind up starting our own chapter, so I'm a charter member of the fraternity and one of the reasons we started our fraternity was because there were no minority organizations on campus. Fraternity life was a big, big deal on the campus, but there were no black organizations, there were no black fraternities, there were no black student unions, no black anything.

And so, in a way, the college was forcing you to be illegal because you *had* to have your parties off-campus. You couldn't have one on campus because you weren't recognized by the campus. So it was imperative that we get this fraternity on campus. So, my fraternity is the first minority organization on that college campus. So, then later on we decided well, that everybody—there are like nine—I think they're nine big recognized black fraternities and sororities. So, then we went back—some of our members wanted to be in the ones that their folks were in. And so they had their own little groups, but they couldn't always get a room on the campus, so a lot of times people would get rooms on the campus—we'd get the room and we'd let them have the room.

And so then it got to be that was what the case was, we decided we wanted to have an NAACP chapter. We figured that was something that was black enough that anybody that wanted to (black, or minority or whatever, you know, all the colored people) could come and be a part of the NAACP and the president told us, "No." And so, they had a sit-in. Actually, we took over the student—[laughs]—we took over a building. And they called the National Guard, you know, but then we had a couple of things happen. Martin Luther King died and that was something, and it was several things that happened on our campus. So, our campus was one that was going through, you know, racial strife like, near the end of the game. Like in the 70s, the sixties—the later—in the late-60s, like the late '60s.

So, my blackness—my black awareness came from the fact that they don't even want us—they're forcing us to be illegal. You can't get a—you can't rent the dome room and have a dance. You can't rent a room to even have a meeting unless you're recognized by the campus, but then they won't let you be recognized by the campus. So, we kept fighting and struggling. So, now, I think they have lots of fraternities and sororities some of them a least have lost their charters from hazing or whatever, you know, but all of that eventually got to happen.

But that was like 50 years ago, so I got to really kind of celebrate that 50-year thing recently and to go back to the campus was really kind of like a blast and to see all these other—all these decades of brothers have come along since then it was really wonderful. So, yeah, I got to be I think we were talking about this earlier. Somebody—I was mentioning to somebody on TV and they were talking about, we're still in the era where there are black people who are having the first black experience—like, I'm the first black something or other and it's like 2016 and we're still having situations—I'm the first black on the cover of such and such a magazine, or I'm the first black to get a national product, you know, to face a national—I'm the first black to do this, that or the other and it's like, *really*. [Laughs.] You know and we—and it even goes to if we can elect Hillary, should be the first woman president. I'm like, *really*, so I was reading an editorial where somebody was talking about how we've come so far, so quick when things could be so—and they were saying it quickly happened. But with a lot of gay liberation and some of the things that have happened recently, feels like we've done this like, you know. But on the other hand if you look at it historically, those things—it's not that fast that we have still so much further to go. You know, and even when you make a step forward, there's someone still trying to push you back too.

I want to talk about the gay thing. I have a little trouble sometimes identifying as gay. I know a lot of people I feel like a lot of the people see me and they feel comfortable labeling me that. Sometimes it's cool and sometimes it's not, and I think maybe I'm one of the people who are responsible for the men who have sex with men category. You know, because I would resist like, checking the gay box. And then, what are—what are you and I would say, in my head, I'm bi-sexual, you know, but if you ask me what my practices are, they probably all have been homosexual—[laughs]—you know, so you tell me what box to check.

And, you know, eventually, so men who have sex with men, I think I'm maybe one of the people responsible because I think that came out of black guys not wanting to identify themselves necessarily as gay. And then we had that whole demonization where it was like the black guys on the down low were the ones who are giving all the women HIV. Wow! Yeah, so, like I'm seeing all this struggle. Amazingly—I'm jumping and skipping around, Ted, you have to reign me in.

THEODORE KERR: And you'd be—you're—I like your brain.

FREDERICK WESTON: The—it's strange. All the things with the labels and stuff. Yeah, my college was when I started to realize that I was black and it—but it was okay to be black. The gay thing, that's where I was going. When I started to hanging out downtown and I realized that I was—that men were attracted to me and I could probably get some—gain some sexual education and experience from that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And starting to read in things and like, okay, this is what this is called is gay—homosexual and maybe we shouldn't do this. I remember having that conversation with my playmate and—but when I would see it—when I was exposed to it in the world, it was kind of like what happens when the lights go off. What happens in the darkness and it wasn't just a

homosexual experience. I realized that it was pimps and prostitutes were part of—I guess they used to call it the life, the gay life. The life, the gay life and if you said, "the life," that was really like the gay life, but those were pimps and prostitutes and drug addicts and gamblers and all those people who came out and made their money through the black market—the black underground. The dark—they did it in the dark. And so that was like, when we call this—there's something gay about it because it's outlaw maybe. So, I came to feel like gay meant like, it was illegal and immoral, ungodly, you know—[laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON:—anything that was like, you know, and there's probably some more things that I'm forgetting. That was what gay was and we're trying to make—when the world in the daytime, the nine-to-five world doesn't let us, you know, make it and we have to do whatever it is we have to do in order to survive. That was what the gay life represented and it wasn't just about the homosexual experience. It was like, why do the mafia owners own the bars—[laughs]—because like, you know, it's all a part of the same thing. So, that was my identity and then coming to New York, everything seemed so free and open when I first got here that I thought, "Oh, this is what the gay life is and then—but when the lights come on and everybody goes home that maybe that's—maybe we call it something else. I don't know.

But anyway—but my being gay was part of me being forced to be like—to exist in this world where I had to learn when I came to New York, that you never—you get a hustle and you never give up whatever your hustle is. So learning to survive was how I came to my hustle. I learned that I could survive. I learned that if I can't get a job in the daytime, maybe there's someplace off the table, under the books, you know, something that I can do so that I won't—so that I can get something to eat. Keep—have some kind of shelter for myself and afford myself some running water. [Laughs.] Sit on a real toilet, you know, the other—flick a light somewhere. All those things that people take so much for granted, you know. So yeah, that was gay for me.

So, yeah—so then when it got to be like—then I came to New York and there was like the lesbians said, "We want to be lesbians. We don't want to be gay." And I'm like, "Well, something—there must be something wrong with being gay if the lesbians are dropping it." You know I loved girls. I am a lesbian—[laughs]—and we're not gay anymore. And then the bi's said, "We want to be bi." And everybody like, there's no such thing. [Laughs.] And it's like, yes we are—yes we are. And then trans turned like, "We're trans." Well, what does that mean? And boy, we're still working on that one. [Laughs.] Because now, we're talking about gender, sexual orientation, sex, you know, sexual expression, whoa. So—

THEODORE KERR: And also with your definition of survival—

FREDERICK WESTON: Whatever it is you have to do. Whatever is it you—I couldn't get a job. I went on a—oh gosh, I went on a job interview where I was really molested on my job interview, but I couldn't talk about it and I thought I was for sure—since that man had me—my pants off and had his hands on my balls and when I got erect, he said, "Don't feel bad about it." I was humiliated.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] That was scary—

FREDERICK WESTON: I got—I got rock hard. It was supposed to be a—it was an office job that I was going to have to wear underwear and I was going to have to model underwear, so he wanted me to take my clothes off so he could see if I could model underwear and then—and so I had that experience and I'm like—so when he didn't call me back, I was severed. I went and sat in his office.

I'm like, "I want to be seen." And then he's like, he would not see me again, but I watched somebody go in for the interview and take a long—really long time and they come out with a red face. And I'm like, well, I think he must do this to everyone. But I've been to jobs when I would go on jobs—I'm trying to get jobs through agencies and they had the thing where I didn't realize they would put, not "front office material"—I think it was like a code which meant you were black, you know, so I was not "front office material." They couldn't tell from my name. I would get in the door and from my education and resume, I could get in the door, but then they would tell me I'm not front office material.

It was going to be a job for—hypothetically, there's a job for designer and there's a job for the assistant designer. So, I applied for the job as a designer and they said, "You're not qualified." And so I said, "Well, can you switch my job to the assistant designer?" And he said, "But you're over-qualified." [Laughs.] You're over-qualified for that. [Laughs.] I can't, you know, I'm supposed to like, "Oh, God, where do I fit in? Where do I fit in?" And so I found these places where if you're gay and, you know, we just need somebody to hang out and make sure that everybody doesn't walk off with anything. We're not going to—we hardly pay you and you want to work from 11:00 in the morning—11 at night until 8 o'clock in the morning for \$3.00 an hour. If the person doesn't come in behind you, you have to cover their shift. You know, but I knew they had sandwiches and I knew if I could—I could at least eat and I get enough tips where I could afford to pay for the sandwich and I got some clothes on my butt and I do have a place, you know, I can call home. I can—I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

And so, it got to be like, "Okay, I can—I can do this." You know and so I learn how to be poor. You know, I learned that my needs were few and that could be poor and I could—I could transfer that into some kind of way to manifest the cornucopia that comes out of the sky because it's there for everybody. You know, and so I learned to acquire and I know that—I know that I can attract things and I can, you know, get stuff. I can get stuff, you know, and if I try real hard, I can get the really, really, good expensive stuff, but at this point, I don't even want that. You know, I want the people that wanted to have it, but I don't want it. I want to sell it to the people who want it—[laughs]—but I don't know that I want it. Anyway, yeah, so I'm having fun Ted, I really am having fun. Trying to learn who this person is and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and why I've had to—why I've gone through some of the things I've gone to and can I tell those—I'm learning how to—I'm learning about my narrative and when I'm telling the story and it sounds—if it's a bad story, I need to find the humor in it. If it's a sad story, I need to find the silver lining in it, or else my life has no purpose. I'm just—I'm just here to suffer and I don't believe that God would put me here just to suffer. Mother, father, everything, God—I don't believe I was put here to suffer. In fact, I believe I was sent here for a purpose and it's mine to feel—to figure out how I can best serve the planet and to make the world a better place for my having been here and put my hand on something and to heal it, rather than destroy it. Everything I put my hand to I want it to be better for me having touched it. You know, whether everything I put my hand to is—is dust.

THEODORE KERR: Do you think that's a little bit—

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I touched it.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Do you think that's a little bit the role of the artist? Like, do you think that's part of what—

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, I think—somebody said, "Art is propaganda." But, you know, you're right. Yeah. I think artist is propaganda. Somebody needs to tell—somebody needs to—propaganda sounds like a negative—such a negative thing, but I think like, some of us—some of us see stuff, you know. So, it's for me to tell you what I see and for me to try to figure out some medium to, you know, paint that picture or to make that image or to—or to create that thing to get some wood and some nails and some measurements and, you know, figure out the physics of something and to make that thing.

The best part is when you make it out of what seems to be nothing, you know.

THEODORE KERR: And when you say nothing, do you mean zero, or do you mean the disregarded or the discarded?

FREDERICK WESTON: Both. [Laughs.] Both because some of it truly is hocus-pocus. I believe in the happening.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, let's have a party! What if nobody comes? Well, it's still a party if nobody came. It didn't happen like we thought it was going to happen. We said, let's have a party and then the thing is to see what happens. And you got to be prepared for—you try to be prepared for the party you want to have and then you have the party you have.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think that was Ray Johnson too, the Happening, you know, all that crazy—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Also, around this neighborhood, right? Or not far from here.

FREDERICK WESTON: I think he's not far from here. I have to go look in my—

THEODORE KERR: Let's go back to your early days in New York, because I think your time in school prepared you in some ways for New York, but in a way, nothing could prepare you for it—what—

FREDERICK WESTON: I knew I could—I—going to—I went to Commerce High School for office machines and retailing. And so that office machine part was really at the beginning of the technology era. I mean, that's when the computer took up a big room and you needed to air cool it and then we had the cards, the punch cards and the wires and the boards. And so the idea to be able to think—to organize—even we had a class on filing, so the idea like, how to organize and accounting, bookkeeping. Oh, God, I used to have—in fact, I use that green accounting paper for a lot of my work, but I used to have nightmares about putting numbers in columns and then we used to have to do that rapid key things when you get a long list of figures and you're supposed to sit there and chchhchchchchchchc.[making the noise] and not make an error. You know, so I was kind of trained to be really kind of organized and to think like that.

And then the retailers like, how do you—I won a [Detroit –FW] Retailers Association contest—we had to make a merchandise [manual –FW] and I picked sweaters. So it's like, "What is a sweater? What is it made out of? What kind of it? What style of it?" And after you make the product, it's like, how do you sell it? [Laughs.] And how do you convince somebody to buy it? You know, so it was like, you start like, a sweater is made out of yarn and the yarn comes from this. So it's like I had to do that. So, that was fun for me. So, I know I have this kind of analytical mind, but then I got to New

York and it got to be like, I kept losing stuff. So that was me—because that was my greatest fear. So I manifested my greatest fear. What if you can't hold onto things? What if you can't provide for yourself? What if you can't keep a roof over your head?

THEODORE KERR: What do you mean, you started losing things?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, if you can't—

THEODORE KERR: Like, your physical things?

FREDERICK WESTON: My stuff—my stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Like, you'd lose your bags. You'd lose your shoes.

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I'd move into an apartment and then I get put out the apartment. I can't—I don't have room to take my stuff and then I go back and my stuff is gone, you know. [Laughs.] All your stuff is gone, so I moved—in fact, I moved—no, I'm not going to tell that story, but I—I will tell this story. I moved into one apartment. It was an SRO. I learned how to live in an SRO.

THEODORE KERR: What's SRO?

FREDERICK WESTON: Single room occupancy—people live in New York like they live nowhere else. They may have a room. The room might—if you're lucky, you have a sink in the room and a bed in the room and a refrigerator in the room, but it might not be any cooking. You might not be able to cook in the room, and you may not have a toilet in the room. You know, you may have to go down the hall and share a toilet, you know. So, I found a single room occupancy that had an enclosed closet that was big enough to go in and lay down and shut the door and take a nap. And it had its own bathroom with a sink and a tub and a commode. And it was—it was on the second floor, so it had really high ceilings. It was in an old ancient hotel. [Laughs.] It was probably on the historical registry for being a flophouse. It had to have been a flophouse back in the tin pan alley days.

Anyway, I digress. So, I told that man, I will give you my whole welfare check if you let me live here. He said, "Deal." So, then I had a job and he said, "I'll pay you \$3.00 an hour if you come here and sit over my counter at night." I'm like, "Deal."

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean, his counter?

FREDERICK WESTON: I was a concessionaire at an all-night porno theater.

THEODORE KERR: In Times Square.

FREDERICK WESTON: Times Square. Three dollars an hour, so I had a house. I had a roof, and I knew I could eat, and I knew I'd have some money and all the rest was like, let's see what you can create out of nothing. I had—I had pennies on my dresser. I had a dresser in the room and I made a vow that it's like as long as you come back with more than you left with. If you go out—if you come back with more than you left with, it's a good day. And I would take my pennies and I'd put them on—I'd throw my pennies on until it was like a mountain of pennies on this dresser. Just pennies. I'm saving pennies, and I'm looking at myself saving pennies. Anyway, I lived there long enough to fill up the closet with clothes and have too much stuff, and get a decent job—I go to FIT and take a class at FIT and graduate at the top of the class da-a-da-da-da—but that was a life that I created myself from nothing. You know, I didn't have anything to move into that room; I had lost everything. So I knew there was a part of my life I was saying goodbye to, but I was going to open this new



door, and I was going to open it in this space even if it cost me my whole welfare check. So of course he had to, like, you know, fudge it and he couldn't tell my welfare check—I'm taking his whole welfare check. So—but, we had our little arrangement and—

THEODORE KERR: When do you think this is? Roughly what year?

FREDERICK WESTON: Late seventies.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Late seventies.

THEODORE KERR: So after a while—

FREDERICK WESTON: And this is about the time that the—late seventies, early eighties, because I went to FIT in the eighties.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I went to FIT in the eighties. But I—that was—like I said—again, that was part of me living in that room, and at that part I've even had a couple of people come in and live with me in that room.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: When my friends got in situations, I'm like, "Hey, if you all don't mind sleeping in the bed with me, come on, come on, come on!"

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. How long was that life?

FREDERICK WESTON: 13 years. That was—at least—I know I was in that hotel for 13 years, mostly in that room. I did move into another room for a couple of years near the end of it. But I know I was at least in that room at least for ten years.

THEODORE KERR: Hearing that story, I can't help but smile. There seems something powerful about that. But is that how you feel about that time?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, it was like, "Okay, Fred, you can stand on your feet. You can fall down real hard and not have anything," and then it happened—it actually happened before, but before it was like, "Okay, wait—just a second—okay, is it happening again? You know you can handle it because you did it before!" You know, so, move in, do what you need to do, get a job wherever you can, do whatever it is you need to do, save the pennies, watch them mound up on the thing, you know, go buy an outfit, look different. Go to the Unique Boutique—[laughs]—go to the army/navy store, go—you know, go to the thrift shop, go wherever you need to go, create your own look. Do your own thing. Be your own person. And then it's like, okay, I will now—I want to go to school, so I arranged for whatever it is to get that—to make that happen, to get off the welfare roll to make that happen. And then go to FIT, do whatever it is you need to do, you know. In fact, I did really well, but again, I was so old, I think part of my not being able to get a job was because I was so much—I was twice the age of some of my classmates. Or, maybe not quite twice, but I was a lot older than my classmates. And maybe that was intimidating. You know, we want somebody to come in that we could boss around, and teach how to copy, and here you went in with all these original ideas. Anyway, yeah, so, yeah, I—you know, it's funny that when I look back on most of my times here,

even the stressful times, I'm glad they're behind me because they made me hurt a little bit, but now that I'm looking back on it I managed to get through, it's like, makes for a good story. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: At the time—

FREDERICK WESTON: Makes for a good story.

THEODORE KERR: At the time is that—like, I've only known you as a gregarious, happy person, but that's like—that's not the totality. So I'm wondering, what are the—what's going on in your head?

FREDERICK WESTON: I used to—I had a big issue with mental illness, whatever that is. Or, mental wellness. Because I break down, I used to break down, I used to break down annually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I thought that was safe.

THEODORE KERR: And what's a breakdown?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, you get so swept up in whatever the emotion is until you can no longer see. I mean, really you can't see. And then something happens. You—I—you lash out, you act out or something, and it's something that you can't take back. But it's almost like, "I can't stop myself; I can't stop myself; I'm not in the control of myself. My emotions have gotten away with me, and I need to put myself somewhere," you know. And I used to check myself in, until I realized that that was not safe for me anymore.

THEODORE KERR: The spaces where you check yourself in?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, I used to go Bellevue, sign myself in for 72 hours, whatever. I could hang.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then I got to the point where, I think, when people would call home and ask my mother what to do; they, like—she's like—[laughs]—I'm—maybe this is not true, but I really feel like at some points my mother, like, "Well, just take—just take him to Bellevue, it's okay." You know, "It won't be his—it's not his first time." I mean, nervous breakdowns—I almost—I think I should do "19th Nervous Breakdown" in karaoke. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But I'm saying, what I'm hearing is—

FREDERICK WESTON: It will probably bring new meaning.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But then—but then—so—but, like—but that's—but there's a stigma attached to that, to, you know. So I remember—I remember in church there was a girl who was—oh, she was so *bright*. You know, she was so *smart*. She was so *fragile*. And she had a nervous breakdown, and that's what they called it. Irma had it, a nervous breakdown. And so when she came back to church everybody was staring at her like, "What does a nervous breakdown look like?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And so, you know, and then, like, the idea, like, it's a mental

problem, "Oh—what is therapy? What is psychiatric—what is that? What is that?" you know, I think *everybody* needs a therapist. You know—[laughs]—and I do mean *everybody*. I think everybody needs a therapist. We haven't gotten to that point yet, you know. And so we did—we don't define what mental wellness is. I guess if you look sane and you act sane and you, you know—but some of us have—really, we got to cover it good; we got our covers down. [Laughs]. We are neurotic, psychotic, whatever, but we got our cover down, you know? So, yeah. So, anyway, that used to—so, yeah—and I said that when I start—when I have my own nervous breakdown I remember Irma, and I'm like, "Really, what must—what must we have put her through?" You know, if it wasn't for the nervous breakdown wasn't bad enough, the way people looked at her like this, you know, from a distance, you know. And that energy that—you're putting out that energy like, "I don't know who you are, I don't understand you," you know, and I have to look at you from across the room—[laughs]—but it's obvious I'm looking at you, but I can't do it up close. All of that energy. So, yeah, so I learned—I went to Bellevue one time, I was in Bellevue one time, and they gave me something to make me calm down, like, because I couldn't sleep and I was standing up, and whatever it is they gave me, they weren't watching me. And I fell on my face, and I bit through my lip, and I cracked my teeth and chipped my teeth. And I think they had me sign off—[laughs]—enough said. And they stitched me up and, you know, but I realized it's—I can't—that place is no longer safe for me. That place is no longer safe. And they did things to me too. Like, I could tell, and there's horror stories, where, like, I knew I was under the influence of something and I know that guy got me in the elevator that—I know he was kind of abusing me—[laughs]—the attendant, he, you know—I can't prove it because I was, you know, I was drugged. And I mean I know they had me strapped down to something and I'm like, "What did I actually do that I got to be strapped down to this table?" or, "Why am I in this padded room and peeing on myself because they won't let me get to the bathroom? What did I do?" And then they give you these awful drugs that make you come out and look, like, in a catatonic state. I remember one time—one time—where were we going? The Flamingo, it was a club called the Flamingo. And I had to have a time in Bellevue and I'd come out. And at this point my roommates could kind of endure my breakdowns. And I smuggled the clothes out and actually Claude made a silk blouse, like a hospital gown—[laughs].

THEODORE KERR: Wait, did you smuggle the hospital gown and clothes out?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then I think he wore the robe to the Flamingo—[laughs]—we were given the—we were given the mental ill—[laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Mental illness realness.

FREDERICK WESTON: —mental illness realness.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] That's the silver lining.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] The silver lining is that he made a fierce-ass raw silk blouse. And I don't know how much that blouse would have cost today—now, it would be really, really—

THEODORE KERR: Really.

FREDERICK WESTON: —expensive, but it was just the hospital, it was the hospital—It went with some hot pants, too. Like, some really cute hot pants. Anyway, we had—working with Claude

[Payne] and Butch [Lewis] and watching Claude become a designer was one of the most cherished parts of my life. It was very stressful. Like I said, we were living together, we were working together

THEODORE KERR: This is when you're in the hotel, or this is a different time?

FREDERICK WESTON: This is when I first moved to New York.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, this is, like, the first five, ten years.

FREDERICK WESTON: And Billy Blair was helping us move out from the truck, off of the truck.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And we moved into a one-bedroom apartment—

THEODORE KERR: Where?

FREDERICK WESTON:—but we had a whole house full of furniture. 88th and Amsterdam.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, and it was you and Floyd—

FREDERICK WESTON: Me and Claude—

THEODORE KERR: Claude.

FREDERICK WESTON:—and Butch, and Sandra, Claude's sister.

THEODORE KERR: Claude and Butch and you and Sandra.

FREDERICK WESTON: Claude's name—Butch's name is Rudolph.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And they all had jobs, and I didn't have a job, and they all had kind of cute jobs. Butch was working at Bonwit Teller, Sandy was working at Bendel's, Claude was working for some blouse company.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I was going out, getting molested on the job. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: You're like, "Where's the fairness?"

FREDERICK WESTON: And then—but then we're going to—the fairness was when we get to go to the Tenth Floor on the weekend, or The Loft. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Why? What made it fair?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, those clubs were *amazing*, oh, amazing, oh, the music was—the music was *amazing*, the acid was amazing.

THEODORE KERR: Are you a dancer?

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Do you dance? Is that what you—

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, I love to dance. I've told you, the first thing I wanted to be was a male ballet dancer.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, and then would you bring that to the Tenth Floor?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, I could dance my ass off. I did—in fact, I hurt myself in high school, in a dance contest, my senior year. It was—[laughs]—it had a dance contest; there must have been some kind of prize, but I was really kind of known as being a pretty good dancer; but I didn't have a partner.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: But I had practiced that step at home with the doorknob. Then I did a high kick and I tried to kick myself in the forehead, and then I would swing the leg back all the way and then go forward into a full split.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: Pow! In the middle of a bop.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, again, the dance contest happened, and I got a—finally got a partner just in time to dance to the—to start dancing, but I didn't warm up. And it was—it was The Valentinos' "Lookin' for a Love." I think The Valentinos—or was they the Isley Brothers—but it's called "Lookin' for a Love"—oh, it was a hot—hot song. And I did my split, kicked myself in the forehead, and then went back into the full split. Bam! And then when I tried to get up it's like, "Oh, you have a cramp." No, I didn't have a cramp; my muscle had pulled off from the bone.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: And my hands—[laughs]—they don't have a place. And so I had to walk around, and in fact I think my sciatica, because really kind of, you know, a reawakening—and now I'm not a dancer anymore. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But on the Tenth Floor—

FREDERICK WESTON: But at the 10th Floor, *oh my god*, on a quarter of a tab of acid—we were scared to take the whole tab. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You would share it. You'd share one tab.

FREDERICK WESTON: We'd share it. We'd share it.

THEODORE KERR: So, those were days of, like—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: They all had their cute jobs, you guys all had fun on the weekends, and then

you were designing and creating together as well?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, that was just prior to Claude—well, he came here—well, he didn't have—he finally—he decided he wanted to do his own thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Again.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And so we went and we went into production.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: He came here—he came here—but see—but by that point we had—we had the fashion editor of the *Detroit Free Press* and then, and she was one of Claude's—in fact, the model Billy Blair was one of her finds, too.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: She [inaudible]. And so all of that kind of culminated with—we can do this and, in fact, Claude's first line was in—it was in Bonwit Teller's, Bergdorf Goodman's, Bendel's, and Bloomingdale's, and we went in a window on the 34th Street side of Macy's.

THEODORE KERR: It's amazing.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, but then you got the make all that stuff and you got to wait for them to pay you—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON:—and in the meanwhile you're supposed to be making something else.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So—[laughs]—so, like I said, we didn't know how, but we kept doing it, but that was like, he did—he broke out—he was good. He was good. He—I think he had a—he had a good message, but then I'd like to try and be in business and then do all that together, and then finally we wound up in a split household, and that was kind of how I wound up in all these other places.

THEODORE KERR: And it was an—what was the split like?

FREDERICK WESTON: It was really kind of awful because, again, I got—I had all this stuff and I didn't know where I was going to go, and I wound up in a lovely loft on 31st Street, between Broadway and Fifth Avenue. And I spread myself out and really made it kind of nice, and I had another nervous breakdown incident—[laughs]—and wound up losing all of that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It's funny. I've been trying to, like, make a—like, a timeline of different places I've lived—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and I've got the files in the bedroom, like, you know, so when I find out, like, what year—because at this point some of the things I've done cyclically. It's like, I did that every year, but it couldn't have been that year because it just didn't happen that year. So what year was switching? Which nervous breakdown was which, and what did you lose that time, and—because there's been a couple incidents where I've lost basically everything that I own.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So I think that, and I work—I lived with an artist, the wonderful jazz recording artist Stephanie Crawford—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —who taught me a lot about chaos and disorder and nonchalance.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And, you know, the Lower East Side kind of home, like, vibe, where it doesn't have to be pretty and it doesn't have to be—this can be art and it doesn't have to be pretty.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, it can be chaotic. It can be, you know—and so I knew she liked wine and cheese, and I learned—she taught me how to expand and not be freaked out by—not to let chaos unnerve me.

THEODORE KERR: When did you meet her?

FREDERICK WESTON: I met her in Detroit before I moved to New York, and actually she wound up coming to join us in the city. There were lots of women who were a part of the model agency who were a crazy, group of friends who hung out in Detroit and got invited to the New York place, like, "Why are you all here? You should be in New York." And we were a crazy kind of crew. And we didn't have drag queens; we had transgender women.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Most of them weren't trying to drag. Most of them were living as a woman, but for—then it was set the bar for the drag queens. And they would set the bar very, very high, because they weren't playing. And in fact they—I watched three—I've watched three incredible individuals go through that transition. And to be—to get—I can't even—I'm getting a little choked up just to be able to say that they're some of my very best friends in life and I got to watch them make this transition. So I—when I talk about that stuff I'm talking about something that I know and people that I know and how they—how the world treated them and how they relate to the world and how they were able to make great successes, you know, sometimes unbeknownst to whomever, and sometimes the people did know but they didn't care. You know, and so now, when we get into—we're at a point where, like, it's kind of mainstream, you know, yeah, yeah. To get this—watch it—Caitlin Jenner and—

THEODORE KERR: Laverne Cox?

FREDERICK WESTON: —and Laverne Cox, but to have experienced a—Candis Cayne—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and Girlina, when they weren't little babes, and I had to watch them go in, like, two different down directions and—yeah. It's remarkable. So, yeah, so, I don't know—I don't know what label I'd choose to wear. I'm trying to—you know, I think there's some letters in the alphabet that I probably am. I like "funny." The kids used to say, "Are you funny?"

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, I'm funny. I'm funny. I was funny.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: Are you funny like that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Totally.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm funny, I'm funny. That's even better than being gay.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm funny that way. And I'm weird, and I'm—what's that song? "I don't belong here." But I do belong here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I totally belong—[laughs]—I'm a weirdo, but I belong here.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Is that the Radio Head song? ["Creep."]

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm a weirdo, but I belong here.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I belong here.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. When you came to New York, were you dating? Was that something you were thinking about doing?

FREDERICK WESTON: Dating. Oh, gosh. Dating, gosh. I don't know. I didn't date. It's like you hook up. It's more like hooking up.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You meet somebody, maybe meet them in a sexual kind of experience, and if you really like them, you try to make something out of it. For the most part, those were—many of



those were not worked out very well. Some of my very best friends, you know, to this day, people I met somewhere I probably shouldn't have been, or we probably shouldn't have been, and we had ulterior motives when we met. And I like—and I like—I like loving people, and I like dragging them around—I love making friends and dragging them—in fact, I had a silly wish that I would be in the—what is it, the book—Guinness Book of being the world's greatest lover. And in putting myself somewhere, like, on Facebook and having all these people, they're just—I'm one. I'm Freddy's lover. I'm Frederick's lover. I was one of Frederick's lovers, because I had lots, and lots, and lots of lovers, because I love—I love people.

THEODORE KERR: When you say that, are you talking about, like, physical relationships, spiritual relationships, or—

FREDERICK WESTON: Spiritually, *I love everyone*. Everyone is my lover, you know. Emotionally, I think I can get caught up, but I've learned I need to create safe spaces for myself, because they're emotional vampires and all they do is suck all your energy. Physically, I'm a hugger. You know me, I hug. I got the fierce hug. I got the fierce hug. In fact, people hug me and they're like, "Oh, Fred, oh, when I hug you," and then somebody even was—oh, it was embarrassing. They were talking about me hugging. It was a guy talking about me hugging people. "When Fred hugs me," it was embarrassing. It was—[laughs]—embarrassing. But he was—I know I have the power. I know that's part of my power. There's power in my touch, you know, and when I embrace someone, it's real. It's a spiritual—in fact there was a lady on TV. She said hugs, H-U-G-S, helps us grow spiritually. That's what hugs are for me. And I make a ritual of it, it's something special. And this, it's more intimate, and it's cleaner than the handshake or a kiss, you know? [Laughs.] It's safer. [Laughs]. And if—and if you're doing it right, it's the most wonderful experience—it's the most wonderful expression of love that the world has, you know. And it does it, it crosses sex, it crosses gender, it crosses. It crosses, it crosses. It just crosses. It just crosses. So, yeah, I'm a hugger, and that's kind of—I feel like that's one of my—I don't know, I'm—maybe I'm branding myself. I make a lot of decisions based on the fact that I know that I do this and nobody else does this, this is my thing, you know, my handwriting, my printing. It's my thing. My expression is my thing. I believe I am a happening, and to know me is to love me, you know. To not know me can be kind of confusing, because there's really everything that's going on in your head, but to try and get some—make, you know—you know, Fred—Fred—Ted, I had the—[laughs]—there's some transference.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] That's some transference.

FREDERICK WESTON: I had this thing where I was asking people to marry me, particularly guys, particularly heterosexual guys, and I would ask them to marry me. This is before the marriage thing happened, because after the marriage thing happened I had, like, well, you can't say that because it's, like, now it means something completely different. But the idea is, I like you and you seem attracted to me, let's be engaged. And that's the best kind of communication anyone—two people could have, to be engaged. I like you, you like me, we're not—we know we're not the same. I left them thinking of that poem that Maya Angelou does on TV.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, we're not the same.

THEODORE KERR: I know Mary, Marys, and Mary Jane—["Human Family," by Maya Angelou].

FREDERICK WESTON: Right. Thank you. But let's be engaged, you know? Let's be friends, and let's be friends and to, like, make it—you know, we're going to be friends, but no, we're going to be

*friends*. We're going to be a team. I'm going to be—I've got your back and you've got my back, you know. And let's be, let's learn, you know, what we like that's the same, and let's learn what we don't like that's the same, and so, like, that's—that was my—that was my way of asking someone to be something more and greater than a friend. And maybe I was asking them to be my lover, but let's be engaged. And we don't have to be married, and we don't have to share a ring, and we don't have to—we can share, but we don't have to share stuff. It doesn't have to be this physical thing. It can just be a commitment to—let's be committed to being friends. Let's be *totally* committed to being friends. And so now, I have to accept you and you have to accept me, and so now the learning is, like, you know, I'm giving you a chance to open up and disclose and you're giving me a safe space to open up and disclose. Because that's all life is about anyway, I've come to understand that life is all about disclosure.

THEODORE KERR: Huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, everything. How do you feel? You're asking me to disclose. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Wait, you dropped so many good things there. First, I want to know, when did you—when did you—when did you—when could you articulate this idea that, like, this idea of engagement was something that was important to you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Engagement.

THEODORE KERR: Like, not even the idea of marriage, because I think that idea of asking—

FREDERICK WESTON: I think, you know, I learned a lot from the—the—my fraternity taught me a lot.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I learned how to—a group of people can function together. We all don't have to like each other and we all don't have to, you know—but we're all in this together. We all wear the same colors. We all wear the same crest. We are representing this organization, so you know—and how do we get together and make—and create something? What are we—what are we trying to say, what are we trying to do, what do we want to feel, you know. And then you have a group of people who do that. So, like—and I love being in a group that lets me be me, and so my fraternity brothers really *always* let me be me. Sometimes they gave me some resistance, but for the most part they always let me be me. And because I was a founder they even gave me greater license, because I think that was, I had a position of reverence and because I was old. I was old, you know, you've been around since the beginning. In fact, there was a point when they were like, "What office do you want to hold this year?" [Laughs.] "What service position would you like this year?" Because, you know—and I—and I—and there was another—and our fraternity motto is, "First of all, servants of all, we shall transcend all." And so that's my thing, is about service. I'm here to serve—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —something. I'm here to serve somebody. It would be nice if I could serve you and you're going to pay me, you know, reward me, remunerate me for my service. But beyond that, I'm here to serve, you know. So—and then working with a group. So—and I love—I love opportunities to work with—I love relationships, you know. I'm into that. That's why I'm like—I'm the world's—I'm the world's greatest lover. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I like—I like other people. I like relationships. I like getting to know someone. I like it when—and when—again, I'm in—I'm in—I can—I feel I can trust you—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: —and I can trust you with my secrets, which no longer—so they're not secrets anymore, you know. And when did I come to that? I think I learned it in the fraternity, because then it's like it's not about whether I'm gay or straight.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I realized that my respect comes not from whether I'm gay or straight, but they know I'm—they know I'm capable, and they know that it can depend on me.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think that sexuality was a question—was your sexuality, like, an open conversation?

FREDERICK WESTON: No. In fact, there was a point where I got into a situation with one of my fraternity brothers, and it was like, really, I adored that man. But I said something that he read into—in a different way, and he walked out of my life.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: And actually, he walked out of my life, out of the fraternity, away from campus. He walked away. And it got to be, it was about the gay thing, because I had—I wanted to—I wanted to take him in and tell him that secret, but he was—I don't know where he stood, but when he told me that that wasn't anything he wanted to, that couldn't stop me adoring him, and that couldn't stop me loving him. But then, when I would ask him—when I made the mistake of asking him to sleep with me, he heard "have sex with me." And what I think I was really asking, "Would you lay here beside me and give me something that appropriates a hug? Because I'm really falling apart right at this moment and I need—I need somebody there for me." And he heard—he heard "come sleep with me" as me coming on to him in a sexual way and he walked out of my life. He walked—he walked out of my life. But I still—I still adore him. [Laughs.] I adore him. And then—and then it's like, now they're out of your life and you can't even make amends because you can't—and I can't fix it, because whatever it is, I wasn't totally responsible for the relationship being destroyed—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, so I have to make—but then, like, again, so I learned—and then, like, just to have all of these friends who were gay, and they were also in the fraternity, so we had, like, a double connection bond thing.

THEODORE KERR: And they were out gay?

FREDERICK WESTON: We were out gay to us.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We were out gay. I don't know if we were out necessarily to our chapters or

whatever, but—

THEODORE KERR: And how did you all communicate that to each other? Like, would you say—

FREDERICK WESTON: We knew each other from campuses.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We used to travel from campus to campus, and so we, you know—and then sometimes the gay brothers are the ones who are most famous, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, you know, "You know Brother so-and-so from such-and-such a chapter?"

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Anyway, that was how I got to meet Claude. He was a brother from another chapter and everybody, "Hey, do you know Claude Payne from Howard?" "No." But then when I saw Claude, the moment I saw him, he knocked me out. He was so fly. He was coming from a different direction and nobody was coming to it. I knew it was coming because I had seen it in the magazines. But here he was, he was in the room serving it. I'm like, oh my goodness. So I was attracted—I'm glad this is the Smithsonian, because people are going to have to go a long way to find this.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They'll have to dig to get these stories. This is rich.

THEODORE KERR: It's rich.

FREDERICK WESTON: I fell in love with—I adored Claude. He was—he was *amazing*. He was amazing. And he called his look the cartoon, because it was really, like, you know, I'm—I know what I'm wearing looks funny to you but I'm giving you attitude and you didn't break. You didn't smile, you had to, like, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Serious.

FREDERICK WESTON: —that was the attitude, yeah. So you—and they looked at you and they looked at your outfit, and they looked at you and you weren't smiling, it was like, oh, he means it—[laughs]. I mean this, you know. And we had, you know, the platform shoes, and six pairs of socks, and cut-off pants, and baseball caps worn cockeyed, and rhinestones and glitter and studs, all that happened. And yeah, we were funky. And so I was attracted to him, and I tried to make advances and he was appalled. In fact, he was going to pull up. He was going to pull up. I'm like, wait a minute. But wait a minute. First of all, we're in the same fraternity. And I don't even know if that other situation happened, but I didn't want that to happen again. I'm like, let me be clear, I think you are the best thing since. And we don't have to be boyfriend and girlfriend. I've just got, you know, let's—I wasn't saying it then, but let's be engaged. Because I know what it is—I think I'm the only one who truly understands what it is you are trying to do. And he heard that, and he got that. And so we got to be kind of really fast friends, and so we used to talk all the time. And then I was working at a hospital, and in the—we'd go to the lunch cafeteria, and then be—I could see the children. The children, they worked in different divisions of the hospital and the cafeteria. And then there was this

one particular guy that I hadn't seen before, and I noticed him, and he would wear really—he dressed in really, really beautiful sweaters every day, and I made a remark to Claude about this person. And so one day we were in the bar and who should we see but this person? And so, little did we know that that person had seen us and was trying to ask his little group of friends, "Who are they?" And his friends told him, "Oh, those are the doll children. You don't want to hang out with them."

THEODORE KERR: You all called each other the doll children?

FREDERICK WESTON: They called us the doll children. They called us the doll children.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, where can I plug this in? Is there someplace near? Right here?

FREDERICK WESTON: No. I think there's one back here, but I have a lot of stuff [looking for an electrical outlet].

FREDERICK WESTON: They called us the doll children.

THEODORE KERR: What do you think it meant?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, we were the dolls. [Laugh.]. We were the Detroit dolls. We weren't the New York Dolls, but we were—we were the dolls.

THEODORE KERR: Meaning you were playing dress-up? Meaning—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes, we did. That was our game. We had the—in fact, we had the game and our game was serious. Our game was serious. And it was a group of us. There were several of us. So, the game was Friday night and Saturday night at, I think it was—I don't remember what they called the bar then, Gagen's, Bookie's, whatever. But the club that we used to go to in Detroit, and the thing was, you were supposed to wear an outfit to turn it out. It didn't have to be—it could, you know, it was—you know, it didn't have to be—it didn't have to be all that, but you were supposed to *bring* something. You were supposed to bring some—bring some freshness and some newness. Bring something, some kind of originality to make us all gag. Every week, and twice on the—[laughs]—and twice on the weekends. Okay, so people would be, like, planning all week, what I'm going to wear Friday, I'm going to wear fur Friday, I'm going to wear, da da da da da da da. And so, when everybody would arrive—and then we—then we had come to New York and we had found whistles and sirens. Because they did that at the club, you'd take whistles and sirens in the club to make—people used to bring their own noisemakers and things—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: —to the club. You know, you'd make a joyful noise. So we had the thing with the whistles. So if I—if I came into the party and I was at the door, I'd start whistling, toot, toot, toot, toot, toot. And then they would whistle back, so now I'd know where everybody is—[laughs]—and so then you'd come through, bam! And if you were serving, everybody like, *aaahh*, you know, and carry on. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And if you weren't?

FREDERICK WESTON: Then you—it was—people were always glad to see you anyway, and everybody, well, you know, we're glad to see you. And you—and you worked all weekend for this. You worked all week, you know, and everybody was on point. We had it, you know. You know,

everybody was on point. That was all I did. That was why we were the doll children, because everybody was on point. Everybody knew they could bring something, you know. So, I mean, and then the fashion would change, and so we had a lot of new—that was kind of the peacock era, so if there was any—you would essentially be able to do anything, because men were wearing things that they hadn't worn in decades. So it was like, everything was fair game. There was a guy name Stanley Ramsey [ph.] and he went to the—Stanley Ramsey was beautiful, tall, light-skinned. He was a dancer. He—in fact, he was in theater. He had done *Jesus Christ Superstar*. He was Pontius Pilate—[laughs]—in some version of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. And so he would come in and he had on, like, pink silk pants and a pink silk shirt, and he would have gone to all the antique stores and bought all the rhinestone brooches he could find and pinned them to his outfit. And as he's dancing and the rhinestones are falling off with "Here. Here, Ted. This one fell off by you, this must be for you," you know. And so it was like, you know. And nobody had seen any dudes wearing that many rhinestones, and we knew it was just like, things were just starting to happen, you know. And so it was time for somebody, like, okay, I'm going to give—rhinestones are going to be big. I'm going to show them some rhinestones, and here I come and I've got all these rhinestone brooches. But it took me a while to go shop and find all these things, because they don't make them. Or we'd go to the Army surplus store and get some big old pants and cinch them in at the waist because they're too big, and then cinch them in, and you know.

THEODORE KERR: You always looked cute. [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Or cartoon.

THEODORE KERR: Or cartoon.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was the cartoon. We were dressing funny, and it was supposed to be humorous, but you know.

THEODORE KERR: But the boy at the hospital, he wanted to be friends?

FREDERICK WESTON: So he came and he wanted to meet us, and they didn't want him to—they didn't want him to meet us. But he wanted to meet us, and so we did and he finally ended up being Claude's friend. That's how we met Butch.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's Butch.

FREDERICK WESTON: That was Butch.

THEODORE KERR: And so—

FREDERICK WESTON: And they wound up going together. And then I wound up being kind of like the fifth wheel. But I've been a lot of people's fifth wheel. I realize that's maybe one of the callings too. I got a lot of people. I've gotten a lot of couples hooked up, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They all go, "You should meet so and so. You should meet so and so," and they wind up being a couple later.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Or when we're all out together. In fact, I think one of the things was one

when Butch, Claude and I were out together, it would be kind of different because we really had not seen guys. We could always go out. We'd just get on the floor, the three of us, and dance. What are they going to say? Three guys dancing together. You know, it's not like a couple.

THEODORE KERR: Right, it's some coverage.

FREDERICK WESTON: We were each other's beard.

[They laugh.]

And then a ton of people would come and join us, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then when we went out with Sandy, one of Claude's sisters, that even made it like—we used to go to Studio 54. We never had trouble getting in. Claude was in the front and I would be in the back, you know. He'd say, "To that one. Everybody between me and that one." And here we go. And then we get into Studio 54 and it's like damn, there's nobody in here, you know? They got all those people standing outside waiting to get in here and it's like they're thinking it's crowded in here, but there's nobody in here. *We* must be lucky—[laughs]—because we had no problem, and they got them all standing outside waiting to get in like it's crowded in here and it's *not*. But then we're in here an hour and apparently they want us to start the party. Let's get the party started, you know? So here we are, the four of us on the dance floor, and then after a while, you know, the DJ, you know, he's playing for us, and other people are coming in.

Anyway, yeah, New York and the clubs was just great. It was just so much fun to go and put on some something silly and go be a club kid, really.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. And to make happenings.

FREDERICK WESTON: And to make things happen. Go to the party and get the party started and, you know, don't be so inhibited tonight when the song is asking you to get up and dance. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: The whole world's conspiring.

FREDERICK WESTON: The song is asking you, just go up and—*you* start the party, you know?

THEODORE KERR: And then after the break, after you left—after the group wasn't together anymore?

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay, when we all split up?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Did that life continue for you?

FREDERICK WESTON: As best as it could, but it wasn't quite the same.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, by the time the garage happened, we weren't a family like that anymore.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We were still friends, and I'd see them, and then maybe at a point basically and Butch came to stay with me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then at that hotel with the high ceilings and walk-in closet. I had Butch stay with me for a while.

There was another friend, Joe Anthony. He came and stayed with me for a while, but he would go find another room in the hotel. So he would like be my neighbor.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Stephanie at one point came. She found another room and she was my neighbor. We had a friend from Detroit named Gregor. Gregor came and I actually moved out of a room and he moved in that room.

So there was kind of a core of us from Detroit that even though we weren't, you know, all together, we were kind of supportive. And, you know, the bottom's not going to completely fall out.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. It sounds like there was also some kind of homing device between ya'll.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then like I said we had lots of girls. At this point all of the guys are gone and many of the girls are still here, but I'm the only guy from the group still.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. What happened to Claude and Butch?

FREDERICK WESTON: They both succumbed. Butch died of the virus. I'm not sure what took Claude out.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It may or may not have been the virus because at that point we weren't friends, and Claude knew how to hold a secret, so. But he had cancer.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Claude's sister's still alive.

THEODORE KERR: Do you talk to her?

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, she's at Seventh-Day Adventist. She's working outside on the street. She said, "I'm outside your building."

THEODORE KERR: That's nice.

FREDERICK WESTON: She used to come up and get water and use the facilities, and [inaudible] leave her stool.

THEODORE KERR: That's nice. And then FIT seems like a moment of rebirth for you.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. When I first came to New York there was no men's wear design. And



over the years that finally happened. So when it was like—when I was on the welfare and I was convincing them to send me back to school for retraining, I convinced them that I had the wherewithal to be a designer and that they could invest in me being a designer, and I took the class at FIT. I finished at the top of the class. I graduated magnum cum laude, and I did a line of things for the wool bureau. It wasn't like they got the design contests now. You win the contest and we'll back you for a season.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But, yeah, I was an award-winning designer, but I never got to make a company of my own. I did work for other people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And that was challenging. But even those stories, I realize that where I am because I had those experiences.

I got to go to Europe. That was a dream that I had that I get to go to Europe, and one of my jobs did take me. We went to Milan and Florence and London and Paris.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

FREDERICK WESTON: And Paris.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember the experience?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And we stayed at nice hotels. It weren't like they—they traveled twice a year anyway. So it was my one time out. And I think I lost the job because when they told me I wasn't going to make the next trip I called my boss a racist. It did not go over well.

THEODORE KERR: But that's how you understood what was happening?

FREDERICK WESTON: That's the only way I could perceive it, you know. He never did really like me. I could never win him over. And even when I'd been, at that point, loyal, you know, and had worked for several seasons, I couldn't win him over.

In fact, he had hired somebody over me. He wasn't really over me. He hired somebody he liked better than me, and we were co, what was it, we were co-assistants. So really I'm training him to do the job. But then when it came time to make that trip he decided he wanted John to go on that trip, and I was fine with that. In fact, I had told John, like, "Barry doesn't like me very much, so we'll play good designer/bad designer. You be the good designer and I'll be the bad designer. I can take his stuff, you know."

But the point is that between the two of us we get the job done and we'd get an amazing job done, and we worked like that. And when the trip came to go to Europe and he took John, I'm like, "How can he take John and John just started? Well, he likes John." So when John came back he was able to share with me the information in a way that we were like able to really do something.

And then Levi Strauss hired John, and so John is now working in San Francisco, and he left so abruptly the ticket had his name on it, but he's not going to be able to make this trip. So, Fred, you make the trip.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So I'm like okay. I finally get to go to Europe. So when I came back, it was like, "Oh, that was the best thing because I got to watch them pick the fabrics. I got to watch them color the fabrics. I know kind of where his head is." And a lot can happen through this, and the next thing is just to make sure to get all the samples back on time, which I was able to do. But then something happened and he wound up to revealing to me at a time when I was in stress that I wasn't going to make the next trip. Somebody else is.

I was like, "Why am I not making the trip? There's no reason I shouldn't make that trip. I'm in the position to make that trip."

He was like, "No, it's not you."

"You're a racist." And I think I really hurt his feelings because he didn't perceive himself to be a racist. And maybe it wasn't the race. Maybe it was—he would tell me I'm not sophisticated. Well, how does one become a sophisticate unless you carry me around the world? [Laughs.] You know, you take me to Europe. That's how I get to be sophisticated, or, you know, we go shopping together. How do you—I can't, you know. In fact, I'm not sure sophistication that's something I want. I really like the idea that I'm really kind of plain and simple, you know? There's something to be said for that. I don't want to be *worldly*. I don't want to be jaded. I don't want to, you know, feel like I've seen everything and know everything and done everything, and therefore I'm all this authority, you know?

Anyway, yeah, he told me I wasn't sophisticated. And in fact, a little group of make a joke about that, we used to kind of play those little—those feelings would get hurt and now everybody would make a joke out of it, you know.

THEODORE KERR: It sounds like work, like getting work was hard, and then workplaces were hard.

FREDERICK WESTON: Work place situations were hard. Workplace situations were hard.

I did remember one time I went to one of the agencies and they said, "I know we're not supposed to ask you this, but are you gay?"

I said, "You say whatever it is you need to say to get me the interview." But it wound up being a company that was gay and were particularly looking for somebody that was gay.

And so I had the experience of working for a company called The Tinder Box, which was a retail store up on Amsterdam and like 72nd Street, which was into like—actually they sold old Levis, but they had the market. Nobody else was doing that. They sold, in fact—the jeans that you see now with all the holes in them, they would have never sold those. They could have been used and washed and soft, but if they had holes in them, no. We didn't do holes. We did worn and used, but we didn't do holes.

And he would buy jeans and then wash them and sell used jeans. So it was like a place where you went to get jeans, new and used, and they did custom leather. You could get a pair of black—what was his name? It won't come to me now. Handsome, I think it was Cupid with a big, thick mustache. He used to make custom-made leather pants. Gustavo. I think his name was Gustavo. [His name was Jorge –FW]. He used to make custom—you could get a pair of black, custom-made leather pants for about 80 bucks.

And they were cut jean style. And then they had like—it was kind of like—really kind of backing into kind of S&M leather man look. And then jeans, worn jeans. And then they sold like work shirts like DC shirts and the western yoke shirts, and Chambray shirts, and it was really kind of that—t-shirts. And then they had Claude come in and make really, really tight t-shirts. [Laughs.] It was good.

In fact, Claude wound up being his studio—The Tinder Box's first workroom wound up being Claude's first studio. As The Tinder Box was closing down and doing other things, Claude was able to take that workspace over and that was like his first workroom. It's interesting.

And then one of the stores ended up being his store. It was interesting how we were able to like maneuver and get things and support each other. But Claude wound up making the patterns for the really, really tight little body shirts. And so that was kind of like the t-shirt-jeans kind of ethic. And it was a big thing on the Upper Westside at the time that was, you know, the clone look. So you wore the jean shirt with the alligator shirt. And then the polos came out, and then there was that, you know, at the club they used to tie their plaid shirts around their waist. So it was like the precursor to the punk look thing.

It's interesting how like you can little things get—and I think that was really because the club was hot—[laughs]—and I need to take my shirt off, and how do I take it and wear it in some way that's kind of cute? It looks really good if I tie it and turn around and like wee! [Laughs.]

Or, you know, I take my sports jacket and I push the sleeves up in the summertime, you know? So I got a little sports jacket, but the sleeves are tszuj. How do you spell that word? Tszuj sleeves, you know?

And when I came—in fact, I love fashion. I think fashion is the only true democracy that exists.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because everybody gets up and they make a decision about how they want to present themselves, you know? And that's a choice you get to make. And even if it's a uniform or some ritualistic costume, everybody's got their little take on it and spin on it.

And it's supposed to say something. I mean, don't wear the beads. If you put on the beads, they probably mean something, you know? So everything is beginning a thing, like what do these things mean? What does my outfit mean, you know? So I like the idea that—and then our little group, the Dolls, used to say everything is a prop. So I got rooms full of props. [Laughs.] You know, I have lots of clothes and lots of accessories and, you know, so I have the props. And then the props get to be what you get to put together to make this fashion statement.

So, yeah, I love the idea of fashion and dressing. I think we're really about to have this thing where people are going to be dressing as a sign of rebellion.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think the young kids are really kind of really like—the guys are wearing girls' clothes. I think straight guys are going to be, you know, I think that's going to be something that we're going to see coming somewhere along the road.

THEODORE KERR: Like Will Smith's son.

FREDERICK WESTON: Like Will's—yes, like Jaden.

THEODORE KERR: Like Jaden.

FREDERICK WESTON: Like Jaden. Yeah, and in fact I think he's going to be one of the—[laughs]—because he's like, you know, I think his whole point like—it's just a prop!

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, you attach whatever meaning you choose to attach to it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, you can like color it however you think what it means, but it's just a skirt. And so I've had that experience too with the clothes because I had a dress that I used to wear.

THEODORE KERR: When?

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay. What year was that?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: '69? '70? '71? '71. I found an old dress in the attic and it was button front and had a great big wide skirt, and it was iridescent. It was orange, and kind of an amber, and kind of a green, striped, iridescent stripe. And I put studs where the buttons should be, and I would wear it open with a t-shirt, like a turtle neck shirt or something underneath and jeans and some crazy shoes.

In fact, we went to a club. We went to a club in Canada and they gave me the Canadian flag. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Like as a sign of like honor?

FREDERICK WESTON: So I'm like, "Oh, yeah, take this." I went into some club and we went in the club and of course we come in the back of the club [siren sound], and it was [siren sound]. So now I know where they are in the club, you know? So I know where to meet them on the dance floor. [Siren sound.] Dancing and carrying on and I'm twirling in this skirt.

And then when it came time for the drag show I just sat on the floor and put my skirt out so everybody is getting flashed by me. Everybody sitting on the skirt. [Laughs.]

Now I'm calling it a skirt. It was a dress. I was the man in the dress. The man in the orange and green dress.

THEODORE KERR: And no troubles?

FREDERICK WESTON: No. No. I think everybody kind of got it. It was like, you know, you know, "He's got clothes on underneath the dress. It's just like a prop. All it is is a prop, and it looks really good when he's turning around and he's throwing it and dancing to the music, and showing the girls how to wear a dress. [Laughs.] How to sell a dress. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: It sounds like—I mean, hearing your conversation about like what you and the Dolls would do in the club. You would bring art into the club, like your bodies and your—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, your outfit, your outfit. And then by the time it got to like we were doing, you know, doing custom-made jeans with the rhinestones and the studs and the pictures and the embroidery and stuff like that, and then it got to be everybody is really making their own signature.

THEODORE KERR: Right. But now I'm also thinking about work that you've done while working at a club, like while you were working coat check. You made work.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh. When I was working at the coat check at Stella's sometimes to bide my time—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I would have some kind of project going on. Once was the million-dollar business where I was trying to see how long it would take me for a million dollars to cross my hand, and I was writing the serial numbers of dollar bills, singles and dollar bills, and mark off the dollar bill and write down the serial number.

THEODORE KERR: While you were working coat check at Stella's, you would write down serial numbers because you wanted to know like—

FREDERICK WESTON: How long it would take me to—how much money—because it was a lot of money changing hands. Would I make a million dollars? I got several hundred thousand.

THEODORE KERR: It's fascinating because at the same time that you were like maybe, you know, not making a lot of money—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, but it was like a dollar at a time.

THEODORE KERR: —you were tracking the amount of money that flowed through you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: When was Stella's? When did you work there?

FREDERICK WESTON: That was the end of the '90s going into 2000.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, so I was always thought that was earlier. So it was—

FREDERICK WESTON: It was Tricks Bar first. Tricks Bar was the end of the mid '90s.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: the mid '90s going into 2000. So Stella's happened like—when Stella's happened—9/11 Stella's was definitely open, and it had maybe been open a year or two. Well, let me see.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, you got your microphone on.

FREDERICK WESTON: I know where my mic is.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, you're going to do that while you do that.

FREDERICK WESTON: One of the early ads is here.

And then there was a time when I was making dream catchers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I could do that. 1997 New Year's Eve.

THEODORE KERR: That's early Stella's. That was—wait, I maybe fast-forwarded us too much. I have a question. When did you start making—when did you consciously start making art? Like when did you know you were making art because you were an artist?

FREDERICK WESTON: I didn't I know I was making art until I went to Visual AIDS to get my friend Franz [Franz Renard Smith –FW] the photographer for his work in. They were like, "Well, who are you?"

THEODORE KERR: And when did you—

FREDERICK WESTON: And I'm like, "I'm doing stuff. I put stuff out on the street."

And they said, "We want to see it." And they said, "You're an artist." [Laughs.]

I'm like, "Oh, really? Okay."

And then so it's like, "Oh, cool," and it was right at the time when of the first books, like when one of the first like books of, you know, "what is Visual AIDS and who are its members." And opened up the book and Keith Haring was in there. And all these people were in there, and I'm like, "Oh, shit. I'm an artist." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: What year do you think that was?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, okay. I got the virus in '96? '95, '96? So this it would be like later than Stella's, maybe '97.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, so you—

FREDERICK WESTON: I was doing coat check then. I was doing coat check then.

THEODORE KERR: And then—so you hadn't really thought of yourself as an artist until after—

FREDERICK WESTON: I was doing, you know, what I was doing—I was doing whatever I needed to do for like Claude—making stuff and doing stuff and invitations, but there's a point to this. I was even putting stuff out on the street—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: you know, and that was kind of expression, and then it was—okay, here's a story.

I was working for a store, a really tiny store down near Houston and Broadway in that area. And I was supposed to be the art director. They were giving me a title because they weren't giving me any money. And they said, you know, I'm like, "Well, here's an idea. Let's decorate the store." They did knit wear. "Let's do a blue story, and we'll take all the blue knitwear and we'll put those on the

front, out in front, and then put all the other colors and things in the back in the stock so we create kind of like this big serious blue vibration."

And I said, "I'll collect stuff out of the bathroom and the bedroom, just containers, empty containers and stuff, and we'll line them all around the store so it's like a cityscape." When you look at it you just see all these shapes, but then when you realize that it's stuff, but it's all brought out, only get blue because we want to make this blue vibration.

And he said, "Oh, cool, cool, cool, because I don't have to spend any money."

So I had big bags, big garbage bags full of stuff that I had collected over time, and they're like, "We don't think we want to do that."

I'm like, "Shit!"

I'm sorry. I'm cursing, Smithsonian. [Laughs.]

I said, "What are you going to do with it?" I'm like, "Well, okay, make art out of it."

So the blue bathroom out on the street happened as a result of me having collected all of this stuff and not having the original place where I intended it to go was no longer available to me. So now I just have to put it out on the street. And I put it out on the street with the same way with the same kind of intention as I would in the store and we'll see what happens.

So it's all really trash. So in fact I would go for construction sites that had painted the backdrop blue, post no-bills, and paint it all blue, and I would write "Blue Bathroom Blues" on in chalk, and I would just line the stuff up on the street.

THEODORE KERR: In front of the blue wall?

FREDERICK WESTON: In front of the blue wall, and I'd take a picture with the Polaroid, click, click, click, so I got a, you know, proved that it was here, and we'll see how long it stays up before they sweep it up because it's really only trash anyway.

Okay, so this was—I don't know what year it was, but it was in June just before Gay Pride. And so I was working uptown, and so when I would come home I'd come past this little—it was a hotel, maybe 27th Street on the Eastside? One of those big condos or something. It was a hotel or a condo or something was going up. So I put it there. And I'm like, "Let's see how long this stays."

So there was one container that every time I walked past it'd seem like the wind would have caught it and it would fall down. So I'd prop it back up. So after I've walked past this couple of days, I'm like, "Well, you know, this one has stayed up—like this is several days now. In fact, Gay Pride is this weekend. I wonder if it's going to make it to Gay Pride?" And I said, "I'm really tired of propping this piece up. You know, if it falls down I'm going to just let it fall."

And then when I went back later on, I realized somebody else had propped it up. I'm like, "Oh, other people know this is a thing. Other people are recognizing that this is a thing, and they're even supporting it by, you know, keeping it clean and neat and propped up." And so I took my friend to see it.

I remember I met her. She had never marched in the parade. I took her to see it. I'm like, "Look, look, what I did." And by the time we walked back to 5th Avenue, one of my day program was up the

street. I was like, "Oh, let's go join them." And I pulled her in the street and she said that was the first time she had ever been to a gay march. She had never marched in the gay march, but to be in the street and then marching with the group and then feel all that energy was like one of the best thing to ever happen to her.

But that was like, "Okay, I'm making art, and other people are seeing this, and I don't have to be the one to prop it up every time. Somebody else is helping me do this."

THEODORE KERR: And was it still there during Pride?

FREDERICK WESTON: It was still there. Pride march and it was still there. So I got to show it to her.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then there was another case where I realized my work was—that I was doing something because I would make big pieces. I would do these—I mean I would do these copies. It was fashion illustrations and they would be like the first—like the headshot with an outfit, and I would take the formal wear, and I would cut them apart and put them together. So it was one kind of guy, but he had on all these different outfits. And then I'd make the 11x17 format, and then sometimes I would color them and color them in. But anyway I would make a big montage where it would be like groups of 12 and 16, you know, and I would mount them on something, and then roll it up and then my friends and I would go out and we would put the whole thing up. Well—

THEODORE KERR: Like on the street?

FREDERICK WESTON: Like on the street. Again, so it would be like a collage, these huge collage pieces on the street. And so I put one there, and I said I'll go back. I didn't have, you know, you had to go fast because you don't want to get arrested. So I put the piece up and I said, "I'll go back, sign it the next night." And the next night went back and it was gone.

THEODORE KERR: Uhhh. [Negative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Someone had rolled it up and carried it away, but at that time it was when people would used to take like Keith Haring's stuff out of the subway, too. So I'm like, "Somebody liked realizes this is kind out of that realm and there, you know, they're collecting it. It's like free art on the street." And that was really kind of what it was.

And so I did this one piece called *Homeless Shopping Network* where I would take a small Ziploc snack bag and I would put something in it that I figured a homeless person could use. And it could be anything of utility, some paperclips, things I wanted to get rid of because I probably had too much of it anyway. Some paperclips, some rubber bands, a condom, a stick of chewing gum, a subway token, a toothbrush, a new toothbrush, and things I found at the dollar store. I put them in the Ziploc bag and then we go to, again, another construction site and we stapled them up like an exhibit. So you passed next section there would be something, you passed the next section.

And so that was called *Homeless Shopping Network*. The idea is if you go and see something, take it, you know?

THEODORE KERR: And was it gone?

FREDERICK WESTON: And you could take it. Yeah, I'd see how long was that going to be up.



And so then I was doing a lot of things around—just off of the Madison Square Park, the Met Life building because they were under construction doing the new restaurants and stuff. And actually I got caught one night. And they said, "Oh, you're the artist!" And they let me finish. You know, the security guards came out and caught me. They said, "Oh, *you're* the artist." You know, because I'd go at like daybreak or something, particularly if I was working by myself because sometimes I didn't have a group of friends. I'd just go to do something.

"So you're the artist."

I'm like [gasping]. They're not going to arrest me. I'm not going to be like Michael Stewart. They're not going to call the cops and kill me, you know.

THEODORE KERR: That was conscious in your brain?

FREDERICK WESTON: That was conscious in my brain.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. And I'm like, oh, cool, cool.

And I think because it wasn't like necessarily graffiti.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, I wasn't spraying anything, I wasn't vandalizing it, it was like you could take it away, it was taped up, tacked up, you know, nothing that was necessarily permanent, and it could be easily removed, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] What period of your life was this?

FREDERICK WESTON: That was, oh gosh, I don't know, but that was AIDS epidemic time.

THEODORE KERR: Like early—like, I mean, like '80s, '90s?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, we're talking about maybe 2000s.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Yeah, yeah, so you're already living with the virus by then?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And you—yeah, yeah, yeah. That's interesting. So this was like—this was—

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, the *Blue Bathroom Blues*, all that stuff happened after.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, so this is long after you've been in New York? You've been in New York for decades and you've had tens of different groups of friends, you've gone to FIT, you've worked all over the place?

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, the portfolio, I made the portfolio out of collage, I'm like, "Nobody's getting this. Put it on the street."

THEODORE KERR: What do you mean?

FREDERICK WESTON: I was taking it to appointments and nobody was—nobody does this. What is this?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Everybody was trying to make pretty sketches and I'm like making crazy collage.

THEODORE KERR: Right. So I guess to give you a timeline a bit, FIT, you graduated top of class—

FREDERICK WESTON: That was '85.

THEODORE KERR: '85, and then you have—you're going through—it's a hard time finding a job, but you're finding all these interesting places to work at, whether they be the little shop on Hudson or whatever.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And then life changes. Does life—I mean, I'm making an assumption here. Does life change for you after you get the virus?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, my life was constantly changing. I think it changed for the better because after I got the virus I found Visual AIDS, I found communities that would support me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Stella's supported me till they closed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: My day program tries to support me, but they didn't know what to do with me, and sometimes the way they would support me would really be kind of hurtful. I put my work up a lot of places and then I go back, it was like, "These are not your walls."

THEODORE KERR: They say that to you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. They did that to me at Stella's with the Polaroids. I went back in one night and they said, "Fred, don't get mad. Don't be angry. Don't get mad. Don't be upset."

I'm like, "What?" And I open—I turned a corner and they said they took down all the Polaroids. And it was hundreds.

THEODORE KERR: Because you put up a wall of—

FREDERICK WESTON: I put—in fact, they had talked about it, but they said at that point the police were coming in and try to find people, and they wanted to see the pictures and da-da-da-da.

THEODORE KERR: Did that seem true to you?

FREDERICK WESTON: It seemed somewhat true, but then what was crazy, though, because they said, "We're taking them down because we want to paint the coat room." But I was like, "Well, why would you want to paint the coat room if I'm going to have coats in here tonight?"

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: "I think you're making up a story, and you're making up an alibi."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: So they had to paint the coatroom. I was like, "Well, how am I supposed to check coats in here if you paint the coatroom?"

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: And why couldn't you wait until I came to say 'take the pictures down?' That would have been fine."

THEODORE KERR: And did they—did you—were the photos still around or where they—

FREDERICK WESTON: No. They managed—some things got—I managed to salvage some. What you see is what I was able to salvage.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because a lot of it was original photographs, but then there were photocopies. I would photocopy photographs, put those up, and then when I got a new picture, you know, what is—10 Teds, I don't need 10 Teds. I'll cover one of the Teds with a new face.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So that would be how I'd put the new pictures.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: I hadn't literally—I had wallpapered the little coatroom.

THEODORE KERR: Making it look—

FREDERICK WESTON: It was spectacular.

THEODORE KERR: It was an installation.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was definitely a beautiful installation.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, I think we should talk about all this at the next—because we'll start a whole new three hours. But before we stop today, I think we should just like check in to see if there's anything we want to talk about what we've covered so far.

FREDERICK WESTON: No. It's funny. I mean, I wish I could tell it linearly, but, you know, I jump around, and it's fun.

THEODORE KERR: I think it's—I mean, I think it's better.

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, maybe it is better because I think I would—I'm wondering how many things I've said is like—well, when you leave I'm like "[gasping], you shouldn't have said that."

THEODORE KERR: But do you think you live your life linearly?

FREDERICK WESTON: I try to make it—I would like to be able to put it together linearly.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I think I need to look at it. In fact, that's some of my cluttering and hoarding is just that, it's like holding all these documents and documentation, and I'm trying to put it together in some kind of similar order so that it serves me, and then there's some kind of way to get through it, get into it, and at some point it's my memoirs. Maybe it's going to be essays, maybe it's going to be, I don't know, I don't know. It's happening.

THEODORE KERR: But do you want my opinion on how your timeline goes so far?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. This is what I think happens. You start a story and then it creates this beautiful world unto itself, so there's this big circle—

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm spinning a web?

THEODORE KERR: You're spinning a web, and then like we all need, you just need a witness or someone to help you then go back to the source again and then spin another one. So you do think linearly, but you also think in a network way.

FREDERICK WESTON: I multiply. I know I'm a multiplier. That's where copies—I think I love the copy machine.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, I start off with something and it's like topsy, it just—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That's why I think part of my ability is to make something from nothing because I could start with zero and then they'll be like, "Stop!" Like *Fantasia*.

THEODORE KERR: The singer or the movie?

FREDERICK WESTON: The movie, the Walt Disney movie.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, where he creates so much. And also I think that the reason why you might not be attracted to going in a straight line is because you're aware that things cycle through and cycle back.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, things definitely cycle through and cycle back, and, you know, and in a lot of times in order to illuminate I have to take—I digress.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm illuminating, but I'm digressing. And so sometimes I can say just like, "Where did we start? What was the original question?" You know, but I'm out here, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And maybe we should say—maybe we should conclude today's interview by talking about your mom a little bit. Do you want to say—

FREDERICK WESTON: Freda?

THEODORE KERR: —yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, gosh. My mother just turned 90 on the 13th of August.

THEODORE KERR: Happy birthday, Freda.

FREDERICK WESTON: Happy birthday, Freda. But my mother has Alzheimer's, and she has two—my two aunts take care of her on a daily basis. And I wish I could be mad at Freda, you know, because she can't do all those things that I know she was—my mother was a star. My mother was amazing in so many ways, and I know she had a lot of affect—she only had one—I'd say my mother's only issue, and I mean that literally and figuratively. I mean that in all the senses of the words. But my mother touched a lot of people. My mother learned from my grandmother, too, again, how to put your hands on something and have it be better for her having to putting her hands on it. My mother had—she was a creative force even if it was just moving the furniture around in the room, you know. She was quite something. So I miss her. I miss that part of her.

Yeah, so I think—yeah, I feel like—I've always felt like my little family tree is really kind of funny because it goes up. And then my mother did—she did marry. She had a husband. He had children and grandchildren, so she had that experience of being like a grandmother, and I know she treated those people very, very well. I probably have some half-brothers and sisters or something somewhere because my father never recognized me. I think I've only seen—I've only laid eyes on him twice in my lifetime, in his lifetime, our lifetimes, but he's gone now.

In fact, I was telling my—I got to the point where I told my therapist I think I want to get connection with my dad, and I came home—here's a good Smithsonian story, that is waiting. [Inaudible.] I call home and told my Aunt Verna, I said, "You know what I think I would really like to get in touch with my father. I think I could really handle some of that."

And she said, "Did no one tell you that your father is deceased?"

And I'm like, "No one told me."

She said, "Well, call your mother, but don't tell your mother I told you."

So I had to call my mother and I had to make up the conversation so my mother could tell me that my father was deceased, and he was deceased at such a point that wherever his new family is, they had realized he had an old family and they wanted to get him in the ground before all that surfaced. So, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: How old were you when you found out your dad had died?

FREDERICK WESTON: 50, 60. 50.

THEODORE KERR: And how long had he been dead by then?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, it had recently—it hadn't been a year. I'm sure it hadn't—it had been within like—

THEODORE KERR: I'm sorry.

FREDERICK WESTON: There's nothing to be sorry for. He made himself, you know, sometimes you can make yourself known by not being there. So he looms large, you know. And I have—his name is my middle name, so.

THEODORE KERR: And you have pictures of him?

FREDERICK WESTON: I have a couple pictures of him. My mother found a couple.

THEODORE KERR: So you knew what he looked like?

FREDERICK WESTON: I have pictures of him in my collage.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: I did a daddy piece with pieces of my father. He had a beautiful smile—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, really, really pretty teeth.

I found a picture of him where he looks really kind of geeky with his high-waisted pants and a short-sleeved shirt. I would like to bring that look back—[laughs]—with the pants over your navel and stitched in with a belt over your navel.

THEODORE KERR: But who can have a belly?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, in fact, it would look—some of the fat people need it. [Laughs.] It would look cute on the skinny people. They don't know where their waistline is anyway. If they think it's down—it's just a piece over your penis so your pants don't fall off. Hopefully, your penis is big enough to keep your pants up.

THEODORE KERR: Is that how we should end part one of the Smithsonian? Okay.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That should be how we end.

[END OF weston16\_1of2\_sd\_track02]

FREDERICK WESTON: None of it?

THEODORE KERR: None of it. I'm so sorry.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's okay. We'll start all over again! [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Oh my God, I'm so glad I looked.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm so glad you looked. I'm so glad you looked.

THEODORE KERR: I'm so sorry. I—yeah, okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: Are we recording now?

THEODORE KERR: Now we're recording.

FREDERICK WESTON: Do you have to do the intro again?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and then you'll talk about plaid.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'll talk about plaid.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So, it is Monday, September 6, 2016—

FREDERICK WESTON: 5th.

THEODORE KERR: September 5, 2016. I'm sitting with Fred Weston in his Chelsea apartment in New York. This is the second recording for the Smithsonian oral history project. Fred, when we sat down, you wanted to talk about plaid.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes. [Laughs.] We didn't know what day it was. What date it was. And so, then it got to be the end of summer, it's the beginning of fall and I told you why my comment was, "Well fall, you know fall is my plaid season and I'm mad for plaid."

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And the idea that, you know, when fabrics were being—when man discovered weaving, he probably made solid fabric first and then he probably figured out a way to make—to infuse some color to make stripes. And then he finally figured out if he changed the weft and the warp, he could make these lovely patterns. A plaid and infuse a lot of color in them. Plaid. So plaid, for me, represents a way to get a lot of colors in. When I'm working as a designer and I'm like "how many colors in my line" and "which fabrics are going to match" and with plaid, we can get, like, six colors in the plaid. So that's the reason I'm doing plaid. You do some kind of crazy—and plaids have really a more calming effect than prints—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —because you can work six or seven colors in a print but I think a plaid has kind of a different kind of gravity. And so I make all these storyboards about plaid with men in skirts, men in kilts and young schoolgirls in their plaid uniforms. I was looking at the *Ellen Show* today and when it went off, I noticed she had a logo with legs like black jeans with the, standing on a foot and a toe with the legs crossed, and saddle oxfords, and I was—I was recalling a pair of saddle oxford shoes that I had. My mother had me on a model shoot. One of her friends was a photographer. He shot most of my birthday parties, but he wanted to shoot children's portraits. And so he took me out a couple of times. One time we went in the studio and I was wearing—the outfit is awful, as I look back at it now, but it was my mother—they hooked it up. I didn't. Your mother dresses you funny. [Laughs.] I had on, like, a tweed suit jacket and a sport coat, a tweed sport coat with an overcoat that was kind of plaid, I mean check, and a hat. The pictures were in black and white, so I'm not sure what any of the colors were and I don't remember the outfit necessarily, but I do remember the shoes because they were my first pair of saddle oxfords and I was intent on getting them dirty because I realized even then that was the way the Ivy Leaguers wore their saddle oxfords: dirty. Anyways, school and school clothes and that whole collegiate look. When I was in

elementary school, the elementary schools and junior high schools and high schools all in Detroit all have their own school colors.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And there was a knitting mill that would knit you a varsity sweater with your name embroidered and your school colors. So I in—I don't know what grade—and I had a blue coat sweater, royal blue coat sweater with my name in blue and gold. Freddy with a "y" not a "ie"—[laughs]—embroidered on the thing and at some point I had to give that sweater up, but I had my name in the embroidery thing forever and ever and ever and ever, until I think I went to high school. I don't know when I lost that. Yeah, and there was this lovely girl, Sandra Teasdale, who I had a crush on and she—I don't know what class it was, but we would sit on the floor, and I'd sit next to her and I'd get caught up in the pattern and the colors of her plaid pleated skirt and her penny loafers. And I wanted a pair of penny loafers really really badly but I couldn't wear—my foot was too narrow and I could never get a pair to fit. [Laughs.] I just remembered, I went to the store, I think at one point the shoe guy said, "If you could kick it with a girl, you could go to the girl's department and they'd probably fit" and I bolted. I said, "I don't want girl's shoes." The penny loafers, you can't tell the difference, but I didn't want girl penny loafers—[laughs]—they had to be boy penny loafers. But anyway, my foot was too narrow, so I couldn't get loafers for the longest time, but I did have those black and white saddle oxfords. And I've worn a pair of saddle oxfords actually recently. I have a pair of black and white saddle oxfords that I changed the sole and put a ripple sole—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —on them. But the ripple sole is also about, this is like my own personal class of Detroit style, because all the bus drivers and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —postmen wore these ripple sole shoes and the ripple sole had a patent on it. So I would get the ripple sole—I went off and got the ripple sole and would have them installed on my shoes. Anyway, I had the pair of black saddle oxfords, black and white with the ripple soles and they looked so cool and I loved to cross my legs because, you know. You know, the golf shoes with the cleats on it?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Kind of like the street version of that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Do you mind if I move this clock down?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh yeah, we can move the clock.

THEODORE KERR: We can move the clock?

FREDERICK WESTON: —move the ticker. We were talking about spaces I have lived in too Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

FREDERICK WESTON: We'll do a transition to my transitions.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Do you want to talk about that again or you want to talk about—do you



want me to ask you a question?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I think, I think, you know, I think I came to New York to be a fashion writer. It was like, "well, what are you going to do when you get to New York?" I hadn't—we had figured out Claude was going to be a fashion designer, and everybody was going to do whatever. I thought I wanted to be, like, a fashion writer. I also could see some kind of photography in there, so when the Polaroid came out, that's why I think I gravitated to the Polaroid. I think somewhere in the back of my head, I wanted to be some combination of Antonio Lopez and Bill Cunningham with a little bit of—what's his name? The one who did the porno dudes? [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Larry Clark?

FREDERICK WESTON: Bob—is his name Bob? Of Finland. Tom.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, Tom of Finland.

FREDERICK WESTON: Tom of Finland. Yeah, I was really kind of influenced by Tom of Finland. Transitions? I wanted to be a fashion writer—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: —so, okay, so lately I've been this fashion articles for my day treatment program. We do one every three months. We try to spit one out every three months, sometimes we don't achieve it, but I usually come up with—it started off as social studies; me talking about fashion on the street and even at a level that people, poor people, could maybe understand and realize that they have fashion power. But I would come up with an "ism"—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and one of my "isms" was "vagabondism"—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —which is about, like, people who don't necessarily have a shelter, a permanent shelter over their house, but they are able to travel from place to place and in the bag, whatever it is you're carrying everything in gets to be kind of the most important thing. You're a vagabond. Vagabondism. [Laughs.] And my vagabondage. And part of that was, like, related to the fact that I lived in SROs—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —which are like—I felt like I was a roomer. They didn't feel like a house, it didn't feel like a home, it just felt like a room. You lived—your permanent shelter was just a room and maybe the room has a—hopefully the room has a sink. [Laughs.] Think about those old dressers with the big bowl and the pitcher—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —that was what they would have to wash in with. In lieu of the big bowl and the pitcher, there would be a sink in the room for you to do your washing and a toilet somewhere close by. But it was my idea of living in hotels that made me start to live that way—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —as a choice.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Vagabondism.

FREDERICK WESTON: Of vagabondism.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. And then I just, I'm really kind of prepared to move from space to space if I don't own anything but the clothes on my back and the papers in this bag. And it was also my connection with the homeless people on the street too. It was like, "how could people do that?" "How could you survive like that?" "Why would you want to live like that?" I realized a lot of them it's due to disease, mental disease, and alcoholism. But there's something kind of like, you know, "I don't really have a place to live, so the sky is my shelter and any place I hang my hat is home." Anyway, so I would bounce from place to place and I lived in these hotels and I lived in a wonderful hotel called the Senton. And the Senton Hotel had a big, bright neon light that used to shine in my window but it made me think of home because the house that I grew up in had a streetlight—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —just outside the window. The streetlamp was just outside my bedroom window. So, it had the big neon sign that said "Senton." And I was on the second floor and it was a wonderful room and I lived there and I was able to figure out what my hustle was, you know. I was able to be of service and I could always get some kind of job doing service.

THEODORE KERR: How would you describe what your hustle is?

FREDERICK WESTON: My hustle is the fact that I can make chaos and I can make order. I can organize things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm good behind the counter, you know. I like engaging people and I can probably sell something if I believe in it and I think it's going to help somebody. I think I can pretty much sell stuff. Yeah, being of service and then, so I did, like, where can I put myself so that I'll be of use?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And it's some—in a great way, my being of service has—[laughs]—served me—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, and sometimes it's just showing up being whatever that funky role is but making the most of it. You know, even if it's subservient, whatever.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Making the most of whatever your situation is and—[laughs]—thanking God for it, you know, and trying not to let other people's opinion about what it is that you're doing

demean you. You know, I was telling you earlier, we've been doing a lot of reading about self-image and self-esteem and [Abraham] Maslow's theory of needs—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and all that stuff and I'm like, you know, like, safety is the one that we—I think safety is the second level after all those physiological things; air, water—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —clothing, shelter, you know the idea. But safety, I feel like, is something I have to create—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and so I try to live as a safe person. That's not to say that I'm not without my fears. I go bravely out—I love the fact I have two pharmacies, drugstores, we used to call them drugstores, across the street that are open 24 hours a day. When I grew up in a neighborhood, I grew up on there was drugstore on the corner and it was open 24 hours a day, so I didn't feel bad about coming home late at night. I know the bus will stop there, I only had a little ways to walk into the block, so this idea of, like, wherever I am, I'm safe.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm going to be okay. And so, the idea of me feeling like I'm—if I can feel like I'm physically safe, then the next stage of my safety is my emotional wellness and I realized that the best way to do that is to speak from my "I" voice, to always try to speak my "I" voice in any and all situations. Sometimes it's really hard because I get to want to do the "we" thing or the "us" thing

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THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and I try not to do the "you," because I'm not a judge and I'm not a critic. You know, I do have my opinion, but I'm not here necessarily to judge. If you want some feedback, I'll be happy to give it to you—[laughs]—but I'm not here to judge, you know, really. I'm here to observe and to learn. Yeah, so, that's kind of what my hustle is and so, I wanted to be a fashion writer and I realized the word is something that my grandmother, you know, language and writing and handwriting and printing and all of those are my skills. English. English. Oh my God, we were having a conversation about someone the other day. You listen to the conversation, we speak in a way that we didn't use to write or taught to write; prepositions at the end of sentences, people forget to put "ly" at the end of words where it's supposed to be. [Laughs.] I don't know, anyway, it's weird, but then when I'm with a group of my fellows and we're talking like colored people talk and then that kind of broken English thing or I'm with my gay fellows and we're snapping and we're changing the gender and pronouns on things. Language can be very, very confusing. And then words have more meaning and then you try to translate it from one language to another and here we are in New York City where we have people from all over the world and we're trying to understand each other. [Laughs.] And none of us speaks our native language well and some of us are trying to do two and three and four and five and six and seven and eight. So, again, I think my appearance is what I get—the language that I think most people try to operate with and we try to look like the rest of the Romans. Anyway, so I would love to have a space where I could write and use my knowledge of menswear, and my love of clothes, and my ideas and ideals about beauty.

THEODORE KERR: And that happens a little bit at the day home, because you're writing?

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm writing articles, yes. So, vagabondism was one of my latest "isms" and it was just reflecting on my spaces and me feeling like, okay, it's okay to be a vagabond.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, maybe it is beautiful.

THEODORE KERR: Who can read these articles or where are they?

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm going to really try and get a web page and put them up. They're not online.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm going to really try and find a place to put those online myself at some point in the very near future.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and that's something Visual AIDS should help you with.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, even if they can put it on the blog, for example. Alex [Fiahlo] could work with you—

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: —to make them blog entries.

FREDERICK WESTON: And you know, I love to sing. I made some-when I had a music therapist at my day program, we made a couple of little CDs. I was working with a group of singers, Robert Brewster Chorale. We sing—we do not sing gospel, we sing spiritual.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] Yeah, I think what it is like a, you know you have a lot of talents and try and use them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And if you have to give it away sometime, that's okay.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, it's not in—yeah, what do they say in the rooms? Can't keep it unless you give it away?

THEODORE KERR: Right. And part of the hustle is—

FREDERICK WESTON: Part of the hustle is—

THEODORE KERR: —showing people what you've got so you can keep doing it.

FREDERICK WESTON: —and letting them have a little taste of it and maybe they'll pay me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So long as I've got a sandwich and, you know, a fresh diaper.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: A fresh adult diaper. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Totally.

FREDERICK WESTON: And a place to come home to. Well, this is my place to come home to and that gives me really kind of a sense of security and a sense of safety and in the -okay, so, safety. That was where I was. I tried to create safe spaces for other people and I tried to be a safe person for other people, you know, and that may be part of my armor.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I've tried to, like, you know, if we're going to have a conversation, I try to create a safe space for us to have that. And then I'm the physical too. I love to hug.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm a, you know—

THEODORE KERR: A hugger.

FREDERICK WESTON: —that's one of my brands. It's part of my brand.

THEODORE KERR: I think that people—I think we should talk about, like, the day home and what it is and when you started going.

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay. The line that they love to use—in fact, the director of the program used my line the other day and when she used it, someone said, "She's using your material, Fred." I say "I came here for the food and I stayed here for the show."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Again, when I got my diagnosis, I was living in a SRO, a single room occupancy.

THEODORE KERR: And what led to getting the diagnosis?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think I was saying in the last tape that I was working two jobs but neither one of them was on the books. They were both off the books. I was working in the shirt company.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I was working at Berkeley Shirt Company in the daytime, just like, a Friday in the office doing a little bit of this and that. They put me in the—they had me do sketches and things when it was that time of the year and then they, when it wasn't that time of year, they put me in the office to do bookkeeping and help with filing and office stuff like that.

THEODORE KERR: You want words?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, help me out—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: —where were we going?

THEODORE KERR: You're doing good. You were talking about how you were working two jobs—

FREDERICK WESTON: Two jobs.

THEODORE KERR: —at the point in which diagnosis.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh gosh. I'm trying not to repeat the stories that I told before.

THEODORE KERR: You're fine.

FREDERICK WESTON: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: You are totally fine.

FREDERICK WESTON: So I was working at the shirt company in the daytime and I was working at Stella's bar in the nighttime, and I got a rash and the doctor kept saying, "Why haven't you taken the test?" I was trying to explain to him I haven't taken the test because I'm having an active job search and I did not want the preexisting condition, that I suspect I probably had it but I'd love to work somewhere for three months and get health benefits before I find out for sure. At any rate, he kept insisting, so I went into—I realized at another period of my life I had Dr. Joseph Sonnabend as a doctor. I had a case of hepatitis B, and he helped me with that. So, seeing him on TV with Mathilde Krim and I decided, well, if anybody's going to give me my diagnosis, it's going to be he. [Laughs.] How's that for good English?

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: So proper.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] Well, I guess everybody says "him" now, so it was going to be him. So I looked him up. I found him and, actually, he still had my records from way back when, but he had had a hard time because he was losing his clientele. He was moving from office to office and office and office. So when I finally called him, he gave me my diagnosis and I followed him until he retired. Whatever hospital clinic he was in, I followed him until he retired. In the meanwhile, I needed to have my benefits taken care of and one of my dear friends helped put in, with a friend of Michael Slocum's, and she helped install the computer system at AIDS Services Center and so, because I had that kind of in, AIDS Services Center took my application over the phone and when I went in, my caseworker walked me around the corner to the Waverly Welfare Center to make sure that all of my entitlements were correct. And so now, you know, I had the income thing, I had the doctor thing; I needed to take care of the food thing. So I was going to GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] and eating lunch at GMHC. They had the meal program at GMHC, but you couldn't take the food out. You have to eat everything there. That was the way the system was set up. And so, one of my dear friends says, "Well how do you like it here at GMHC?" I'm like, "Well everything is cool except the food thing. They'll yell at you for carrying an apple or a cookie, you know." So he said, "You should be part of the program downstairs." So I'm like, "Oh that sounds interesting." Well, at the time, I was trying to

do all this stuff. I was trying to write, trying to find places to read poetry and, you know, try to meet fellows there who were interested in art or or fashion or whatever things I was interested in, but I realized that they were also—GMHC was really kind of in an identity crisis, because there were more people of color and there were more transgender people and there were more addicts and ex-incarcerated people and it was a—they were trying to figure out who they were.

THEODORE KERR: What year do you think this was? Or even a rough period.

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, it would have to be '95 or '96, I think I got my diagnosis in '95, '96 or '97

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —'98. And so, I realized there was an element that I'm like, well maybe it'd be fun to get away from some of these people, and so I signed up for the program downstairs, which was Village Care adult day treatment program. Their program was set up where you could take the food out, so what people were doing—again we're hustling—we'd go upstairs and we'd eat our lunch at GMHC and then we'd go downstairs and wrap up our lunch and take it home for dinner, and so now you had your lunch taken care of and you had your two meals. Two meals a day are better than one and it's a lot better than none, you know. And so, some of us had situations like the hotel situation where you weren't supposed to cook in the rooms anyways, so, you know, that helped.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That helped. And then the adult day treatment program, when I really got *really* involved in it, one of my pieces is *The Red Portraits* and they'd set up a little makeshift studio and I took pictures of the clients and the staff and that became one of my pieces. I started working with Lila Zeiger, who was my little Jewish mama, who had really come there to try to see if she could get the clients to write a book that she was planning on publishing. What wound up happening was she became, like, a therapist, you know. People who didn't know how to write, she would help them with their reading and writing. She could get a poem out of somebody who was really basically illiterate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: She could craft a beautiful poem from someone who did not know how to read and write. If they could just express themselves in words, she would craft it into really something quite exquisite. So, she got me writing again, and then there was a gentleman, Brett De Palma, who was kind of the recreations person. He would provide any kind of art supplies that I would ask for. And so, suddenly I was writing poems and making these little collage—I'd carry the—excuse me—I'd carry my scissors and things with me and while I'm sitting in the waiting rooms, I started making little collage eight-and-a-half-by-eleven, you know, pictures. So, I figured—I wrote this piece *Blue Bedroom Blues*. I worked with the kids from Stuyvesant through Visual AIDS and Stuyvesant and The Folk [Art] Museum with a group of students and they wrote poems back to me and one of them wrote, "Black Bedroom Ballads." Well, I wasn't using black; I hadn't gotten to my black period yet, but I lifted his title. I changed it to "Blue Bedroom Ballad." So then I was able to extend the scope of my theater piece, *Blue Bedroom Ballads. Blue Bathroom Blues. Blue Bedroom Ballads*. I kept expanding on it and expanding on it and finally it turned into, like, an hour of poetry and slides. I even told you how the blue things wound up—were supposed to be a window display and then it turned into street stuff and then it was, like, little slips of paper on collage. So that was

kind of this, like, evolution of things and an installation that I made at the bar Tricks has become, like, evolved into something that is maybe wound up being this video game—

THEODORE KERR: Oh wow.

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, that's coming out soon. So, I mean, I'm emerging, did I say that before?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm still—I'm just—I'm emerging. Things are happening. So, it's like the art door is opening itself to me and I have to, like, that's my platform.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I feel like my art doesn't *have* to sell. It's just has to—

THEODORE KERR: Right. Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know.

THEODORE KERR: I want to go back a little bit. So, your doctor said, "Why haven't you been tested?"

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And at that point, you specifically said because you were trying to get work.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: But before that moment, had you thought about, like when was the first time you'd heard about HIV?

FREDERICK WESTON: I heard about HIV from, I had friends, you know, my 10th Floor friends, my Fire Island friends would tell me Larry Kramer is making us crazy when we get off the ferry. He's passing us these flyers and da-da-da-da-da-da-da. And then little rags that would—you know, all the little gay rags that would come in over the newsstand while I'm sitting there, time between making those awful microwave sandwiches and just-add water drinks. [Laughs.] Just add hot water. I would read and so I was reading about what was happening, what they found, the discovery, and so, I remember when it was ARC [AIDS-related complex].

THEODORE KERR: So your first memories of HIV are, like, hearing people's stories and media?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And before that, had you seen in your friend circle or outside your friend circle people passing away of something that was—

FREDERICK WESTON: No, there wasn't anybody dying. Everybody was going to the health clinic to get, you know, they were unsafe and they'd get a bug and they'd go to the health clinic. The cruise at the health clinic was some of the best cruises—excuse me. [Laughs.] It's a good place to go meet and hook up and then we can't have sex for a week and maybe we might have a real relationship. [Laughs.] You can't have sex for a month. [Laughs.] Maybe something might really come of this. You



know, we're attracted to each other but we're no no no no. Anyway, yeah, yeah. It was like, it really wasn't a big deal. To get something was really not, like, such a big deal. You just went and had it taken care of.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, but nobody was telling anybody how to be safe and then when the virus happened, nobody was telling anybody how to be safe or where it came from. People say, "Oh, it's in the poppers," you know. No telling where it is. Can we get it from mosquitos? [Laughs.] Now I'm looking at Zika, you know. And then, like, the whole thing with meningitis, you know? Can I get it from sharing somebody's cigarette, you know, eating off of your spoon, drinking behind you, you know. People were afraid. They made life miserable for people because they didn't know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Not to say that you can't get things, because you can get things. You know, I was thinking about the meningitis thing. My grandmother used to tell us when we were kids, you know, you don't share. I mean, you share your things, but you don't drink behind other people, you don't, you know, use things behind other people.

THEODORE KERR: And then with HIV—

FREDERICK WESTON: And I didn't realize then that that was part of sex education. That health education was really part of sex education.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah. I guess with the HIV stuff, it's like, when did it become something—

FREDERICK WESTON: Like personal?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. When did it become something personal and had you thought about getting tested before?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well actually, one of my Fire Island friends, one had—there was a designer in Brazil, who came to visit, and he was staying with my Fire Island friends and he was one of the big headlines because he was a big designer in Brazil—"Brazilian Designer Designer Dies of AIDS." I don't know which, the *Daily News* or whatever, 'Markito' [Marcus Goncalves –FW] couldn't have gotten that headline if he had designed the fiercest collection out, he'd have never been on the front pages of anything, but that was what it was like. You know, it was good for the rags. And then my friend, went back to Detroit, and he ended up being in the rotogravure. They had him in this hospital room in silhouette in the front of his—in the window in front of his hospital room in silhouette talking about his escapades in New York and how he contracted the virus. And so that was early on and then, like, my friend, the photographer, he died of AIDS and that's how I found Visual AIDS. I was trying to get his work in their archives and they're like, "Who are you?" [Laughs.] And I showed them and they said, "We want you!" And my timing was good.

THEODORE KERR: Why?

FREDERICK WESTON: Because they were just really, that was one of their first, like, little books of who the artists were and I opened the book and I saw me in it, but when I saw who else was in it I'm like, "Oh my God, I'm in good company!" You know, something's happening here, you know. Yeah, so I got to take it kind of seriously and so—

THEODORE KERR: Your art?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, my art and being the, you know, a spokesperson, if that's what it is. Trying to be an educator, if that's what that is. But the fact that I could use my art and the fact that I could make my art—my idea was to make my art as extremely personal and intimate as possible. Things I should be ashamed of and I'm putting them in your face. I'm painting them blue and I'm putting them in your face. I'm telling you about all my bathroom situations. I'm telling you about all my funky bedroom situations. At the end of my poetry reading, when we do the Q&A, you should feel like you know enough about me to ask me any nasty question that you can come up with. And so the conversation is open and hopefully you'll get some dialogue because at that time, you couldn't—there were things we were not supposed to say. If they ask you the question, you could answer the question, but you couldn't pose the topics. There were topics you couldn't pose and there were things that—you couldn't demonstrate how to put a condom on a banana. So, yeah, it was that touchy period, you know, so I figured the best way in is for me to expose as much about myself as possible and it got to be therapy—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know? And so I feel like, at this point, I'm kind of—I should be ashamed—[laughs]—but I'm pretty shameless, you know? And I feel like, my best weapon is the fact that I'm—here's something I'm supposed to be ashamed, but here, you look at it! You look at it! All of it. All of it.

THEODORE KERR: Was HIV—

FREDERICK WESTON: My race, my sex, my color, my sexuality, my—

THEODORE KERR: Bowel movements?

FREDERICK WESTON: My bowel movements. My diapers. [Laughs.] My dirty diapers. [Laughs.] My sweat soaked sheets, you know. How many times did I have to change my bed linens tonight because I have fever and sweats? You know, will there ever be another person to share it with me again. Do I have the right? Do I have the honest responsibility that, AIDS is supposed to end with me. I'm not supposed to—I'm responsible for everybody else, even when they're not responsible for themselves, and not even responsible to me.

THEODORE KERR: Can you say more about that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, I really feel like, you know, you can't put me on a cross for being a homosexual when really, I'm an asexual. I don't know why I have sex. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, if I'm having sex by myself, is that really sex, Bill Clinton?

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh gosh.

THEODORE KERR: But these are things that came up because there's that ad campaign right? "HIV stops with me."

FREDERICK WESTON: "HIV stops with me." Yeah, who's responsible and I'm supposed to tell? I'm supposed to disclose? I'm supposed to tell you? And then I'm supposed to tell you, and then protect you, and then hopefully you won't walk away and have something happen to me and then try to come back at me. You know?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because you can tell? [Laughs.] You can tell them and they cannot even get it! You know? They can paint you like, you know, "you didn't tell me" and "you put me at risk." "You put me at risk." And that's enough to make me a criminal when you don't even have the virus and I do. I have it. And you don't.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I'm in jail, you know. And then I have this sex thing that follows me wherever I go. People know where I live.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I have to report where I live and all that. Just because you're an unsatisfied customer [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And think how unsatisfied I am? You think you're unsatisfied? Gosh. Anyway, yeah. So, and then there were the periods where I wasn't having sex just because I didn't want to catch it, or I didn't want to spread it, or didn't know how to spread it, or didn't want to get somebody else's strain.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So my work really got to be a way of me using that energy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So I'd find guys that were attractive and I'd try to get rid of clothes if I had too many clothes, I'd give them \$20. I know you're probably going to buy some drugs with it, but that's okay. Can we have this without you being high? You know? Can you get high afterwards? And sometimes they'd come back and then I'd have clothes. People had bags of clothes with people's names on it. Oh! One of my dearest ones, one of my dear, dearest ones had clothes and then finally at some point, it occurred to me they were going to bender every weekend and then come see me on Sunday and they'd come and eat whatever was to eat and bathe and put on a fresh outfit because I had plenty of them and go present themselves to their wives and families and girlfriends, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then they come and, you know, and it was like, "I haven't seen you since last week!" [Laughs.] You know? But I had, you know, they had clothes on standby and—

THEODORE KERR: So you're talking—these are the guys that were, some of them are in Polaroids?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, many of them.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And so they'd come to visit you in your hotel or in your room and then you'd be creative with them—

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: —that you were dressing them up, you were doing that thing that you wanted to do.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And then you'd take pictures and then they would go live their lives.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] They'd come back and be like—

FREDERICK WESTON: One day we went to Tricks Bar and there were, like, four guys with me and they had on—[laughs]—they were all so fly, you know? It was just a weeknight, we were hanging out at the bar, you know. But they see if they could get food away at Tricks Bar. That was one of the things at Tricks.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: If you had a drink, you were able to get whatever was to eat.

THEODORE KERR: Cooking.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: Like a stew or something?

FREDERICK WESTON: A big pot of some gumbo stew, soup, whatever.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Spaghetti.

THEODORE KERR: And who was going to Tricks?

FREDERICK WESTON: The guys. The guys from Port Authority.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The ones who were a little bit better off were, like, in *Black Inches* and *Latin Inches* [magazines]—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and they had done movies, you know, Latino Fan Club movies. So those were the stars, you know. They made some of the best presentations and they would come in and it was kind of like this sleazy joint that was jumping and it was, I mean, we had our share of

policemen, firemen—[laughs]—judges, lawyers, doctors, as well as the kids off Port Authority. Again, that's, like, Bruce Benderson's, that's Bruce Benderson's book, the Times Square world back then.

THEODORE KERR: How did you get into that world? When did you start?

FREDERICK WESTON: I had a fraternity brother come to visit me and we had been roommates. We had been frat brothers and roommates and I'd even spent time, spent the night over his house with other brothers and I think this was kind of his way of saying he knew I was in the life and he was in the life. Anyway, so I made a little graphic story about it, how he met this kid at Fascination—that used to be the pinball place at Times Square—because he was into those guys and the guy took him to the bar and so he called me up and said, "You have to see this," and he took me to the bar. And I'm like, "Where you got me?" [Laughs.] And, it was actually a place I had been before when somebody was like, "You should be a—maybe you should try hustling and you should go out and put one in the place." It was, like, the smell of the darkness and the smell of testosterone and beer and cigarette smoke was too much for me and I ran out. But this time I was in and I was in because I was with somebody—again, that safety factor. I'm in with my frat brother, and this kid and I was actually at that time I was working on a portfolio and I was really trying to make my work a little more "street." I wanted to do a look that was—so I thought if I studied those guys and how they stood and how they—here's a funny story. Andre Leon Talley came into the bar one night. [Laughs.] I think they were at a David Bowie concert, and they had come out for a breath of fresh air and whoever he was with took the limousine and they came. So he walks in, and of course he's one of my heroes, so I said to him, "Hello." I introduced myself and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I came here to watch the guys. I'm working on a portfolio." And there was a guy—they didn't have a coat check and sometimes it would be hot, so the guys had their winter coats on and they'd just throw them back over their shoulder. So he said, "Well what is that, off the shoulder?" I said, "You got it. That's absolutely it." So where do you know when you're macho and, you know, you're wearing all your gear and you get somewhere and it's too hot, you just take your jacket off and you just kind of throw it off your shoulder, but you're still wearing it, you know. [Laughs.] Anyway, yeah, we were laughing.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, that's like Aretha Franklin in her mink coat when she goes on stage.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] It's too hot, but I don't want to take it off because it might get cold. [Laughs.] So I wear it down like this because I'm thinking again, I think, clothes are clothes, you know. A shirt is always a shirt, but this was like, we're going to wear it different. We're going to tie it around our waist. We're going to wear it over our shoulder. We're going to wear it like a sling. You know, we're going to wear six of them at one time. You know, they all have to match. Or we're going to wear six of them and they all have to be different. I mean, it's like, you know, the things are the same, we're just trying different ways of wearing the same thing and trying to, you know, get some different expressions.

THEODORE KERR: But did this world captivate you? Because you became—you stayed in it for a long time. You made art there—

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —you worked there.

FREDERICK WESTON: I did. You know, the guys were—prostituting themselves sounds so cheap—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —but they were learning how to capitalize off of their fame and youth, and, you know, their good looks and, you know, "I'm in the magazine. You can look on page—[laughs]—63 and see what you're going to get." "I've been in a video. Go buy my videos." I don't know if that would get them any more money, but maybe they'll get him another \$150 for doing another video. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Your video that's popular. But they were gorgeous—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —they were still gorgeous. It wasn't like the kind of beauty that was in New York when I came the first time, like that was walking the streets, they were all models and actors and things like Studio 54. It was a different kind of beauty.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: What did Alexander McQueen say? It was a savage beauty.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? But it was beautiful nonetheless and it was like that—no, the end—it was something decadent.

THEODORE KERR: What period is this?

FREDERICK WESTON: The '90s.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Do you feel like your artwork was also helping to translate their beauty outside of porn?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. But again, I'm saying, that was the way I was using my sexual—getting to use my sexual energy. I would try to capture whatever it was I was seeing, you know. And it wasn't—I think a lot of them appreciated it, you know. Here, you hire me for \$20 and we going to do some awful sex and I'm probably not really into it, but I'm really just doing it for the money and because—[laughs]—because I'd like to get high later on this evening to forget about all of this shit, you know. And it's like, "Oh, you want to dress me *up*? Oh, it's not about me taking everything off, it's really about me putting stuff on. This is different." You know. So they were cooperative. I think I got a lot of good work done but then, again, other people's ideas and impressions and them voicing them and putting them into the universe, because they're like, "How are you hanging out with all these druggies? They're going to steal all your shit." And they hadn't, up to that point. [Laughs.] And then, eventually that stuff wound up happening, you know. And then the idea that you'd have to be having sex with all of them and I wasn't. I wouldn't have been able to get as much work out of it if I was having sex with them.

THEODORE KERR: Right, but there is still a sharing of sexual energy and creative energy.

FREDERICK WESTON: And all of them weren't from that—eventually I did it with some groups of friends and I did it with—I'd find guys on the street. You know, "You look like a dancer. Are you a dancer? Can I shoot you?" That was what it was. And the fact that I was giving away clothes too, really a no-lose situation. And a lot of times I'd let them have, you know, if they liked the image, it's a

Polaroid, if I don't have time to send it in and let them blow it up, we can go to the copy shop. We'd run around the copy shop tonight and make some big, beautiful copies of it and you can have those too, you know. So, it was fun. Again, I was working with Franz [Renard Smith –FW], he was a photographer. He had flown for American Airlines and he had been around the world. He was really trying to get into photography and so, I said, "Franz, why don't you take some pictures of the work that I've done for my portfolio?" Because it was easier for me, this was even before I started doing it, this was where the idea came from—I was working with Franz, he was the photographer, I was his stylist. He would go to the model agencies and those young models who had just come into the city and didn't have a lot of work—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —so it was like a collaboration. The model got some pictures, I got some pictures, Franz got some pictures, we all shared. None of us were getting paid necessarily, but we'll all have work for our portfolio. And so, Franz was the initiator of the fashion shoot. He was also the initiator of the House of Authority. Franz had really a lot of dysfunction in his family and I think he wanted to have this ideal family and so he created this—like the kids have houses for the balls, we didn't walk the balls necessarily, but we called it the House of Authority and it was a social support group. We were a psycho-social support group and we're interesting because we weren't all gay and we weren't all one race or the other and whenever we tried to split it, it would usually, you know, male and female, black and white, gay and straight. We made Franz a little family and I was the father and my friend Tommy [Gurganious –FW] was the mother and so we did a lot of—we'd get together once a month and spend the whole Saturday once a month. We'd devote a whole Saturday to each other once a month. And then we did picnics in the park and anyway, that was how I got to meet the wonderful lady who did the computer work, and I got to meet Michael Slocum because, you know, we had friends and friends of friends and so it got to be like this really kind of nice little community of folks.

THEODORE KERR: Under this umbrella of the House of Authority.

FREDERICK WESTON: Under this umbrella of the House of Authority.

THEODORE KERR: So he would bring these folks together in this kind of, like, chosen family.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was his idea and so, you know, after we got to be—after the group kind of gelled, we all just expanded. When he died, he had some caregivers.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] From that group?

FREDERICK WESTON: From that group. And so, it was his work I was trying to get into the archive, but I wasn't even sure how I was going to get it, so only part of the work that I had is the work that I have in my portfolio.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Slides and things that are mine and basically that's, you know, the clothes. We took clothes out into the World Trade Center in the basement when you could just roam around the World Trade Center in the basement without anybody, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And it looked like the catacombs down there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We shot pictures.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Were you successful in getting his stuff into the Visual AIDS registry?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, just mine.

THEODORE KERR: But, did he pass away from HIV?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And he was an artist?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: I don't—

FREDERICK WESTON: We don't have access to his work. His family took, you know, his family—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: —really have the bulk of your work.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The only part of the work that I have is the part that he did that I shared in the collaboration, but I don't have his work. In fact, some of the pieces about the Indians, he was shooting statues—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and he'd shoot them in the most intimate of ways when he was on his trip. So one was a, I don't know, it might have been the Indian that's in front of the Museum of Natural History.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But it's, he's just wearing, like, leaves. It's like a crotch shot and a back shot but I put them on this thing but I put all the other things about, it's one of my collages about Native Americans and Indians and that whole kind of theme.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I work kind of in themes.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, I don't know, I think I'm—like again, I said, my work is kind of crazy and it doesn't sell, but I think it definitely has an impact. I think when people look at it, it kind of registers.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.



FREDERICK WESTON: And then, I'm realizing now, too that also, like, the fashion world, that was something that I may have had a lot of influence in helping in the fashion world with the idea of shooting outfits with the Polaroid—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —making storyboards. I made a storyboard for—[laughs]—Barry and the kids kept referring to it whenever we see that, we get a little, like a meeting, and we try to come up with ideas. Somebody would also make reference to something that was on my wall in my cubicle to the point where he's like, "Take down all that. Take it down. Just take it down."

THEODORE KERR: Because it's overstimulation for people?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think it was overstimulation for him! [Laughs.] And the fact that they kept using me as a reference when he was one of those people, he was kind of difficult to work for, so he didn't necessarily understand the idea of a theme.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, how do we, what is the romance behind the clothes this season, and what are we trying to say? And he'd make obscure statements and we'd try to turn those obscure statements into something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We were successful. Sometimes we would just be like, just a mash up. And then, there was again, you know, like when you're working. It was a men's and women's collection, but we had to share everything. You know, you only buy one group of fabrics.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So the fabrics had to work for the men and it had to work for the women, so when you're doing prints and things like that, they'd have to be, you know, not so gender-identified that they couldn't be used for the men's and the ladies' and so, up until the point where I made that trip to Europe and got to see them pick out the prints, "Why are you picking out this fabric?" I got to understand, in any kind of way, to see into his head.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I guess I'm thinking now about those collages you said you made while you were in waiting rooms.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, those little things. First they started off with just different wild colors.

THEODORE KERR: And where would the—what were you using? Magazines in the waiting room?

FREDERICK WESTON: Used some graph paper.

THEODORE KERR: That you brought with you?

FREDERICK WESTON: I'd bring it with me and I have the Pritt Sticks and then I'd have some—

sometimes I would cut the pieces out and then try to plot them out.

THEODORE KERR: While you're sitting in a waiting room?

FREDERICK WESTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I would use my time while I'm just hanging out and then the first ones were multi-color, you know, just wild multi-colored things. I was trying to use up all those color references—[laughs]—that I had lying around. And then it got to be the, you know, again like I said, we were making images for the slide presentation.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, and tried to make, this is the poem I'm going to read and this is where the slide [snaps his fingers] should change. And so even to write the poems out and plan them as a script for all the cues for the slides, we've gotten more technology—it's almost like I'm always just like a step behind technology or a step in front of technology. This is something that technology will come and make easier and better, but I'm not quite there yet. We're doing this still the hard way. We're doing it with slides, and we're doing it with Polaroids, and we're doing it with, you know, cut and paste with hand, not Photoshop, you know. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] So that's kind of like, you know, even to the fact where I was making things with—that's why the coping machine got to be my friend, because that was the one tool that's usually in most offices so I needed to be able to expand, make that two things when ordinarily—so I learned how to make things look like they were suspended, you know, how you put things on the copy machine to make them dimensional.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I mean, the one takeaway that I get right now and, let's talk this through and you decide if it's fair, but it seems like, after your diagnosis and being introduced to Visual Aids, you had, like, a new creative reckoning.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It was like I had a platform, you know—

THEODORE KERR: And what was the platform?

FREDERICK WESTON: —most of it was the things I was trying to do for fashion that wasn't being appreciated as fashion. Because I was putting it on the street, because I was using it in a different kind of way, you know, using it as background for the poetry and things that I'm talking about the virus and things like that. So, my worlds kind of emerged—my worlds collided.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Which is interesting because, so HIV is the virus but AIDS is like this assemblage of things.

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE KERR: And in a way, it became an assemblage for you to bring your creative forces, your technical skill, and the things you wanted to say and art became this platform.

FREDERICK WESTON: Again, I went to high school for office machines and retailing. I learned how to use, like, the duplicator machines or the mimeograph machine. [Laughs.] So you're doing that basically for—if you want to put some art in it, how do you do it? You get the stylus and you make the drawing, you run it out the machine [imitates machine]. [Laughs.] You print whatever and the

duplicator machine used to rub the thing off and then I found out how to get different colors and I'd rub the colors off and make really multicolored flyers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Where everybody only knew how to do the black and white or the purple and white.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I knew where to get the green and the red. Anyway, so I was always like, my art was always used in something that you wouldn't think of as something necessarily something in the arts, particularly a fine artist would do, but if you want some art in your office, newsletter, how would you do it?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So that was, kind of, where I would come in.

THEODORE KERR: Also bringing creativity to unexpected places and neglected places.

FREDERICK WESTON: And neglected places.

THEODORE KERR: And what was the reception to, like, once you joined Visual AIDS, doing the slide shows and poetry readings, and starting to share the work in the publication or in exhibitions, what was the reception?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think it was, I would say it was good. Like, again, I wasn't necessarily selling work, but I was getting good conversation and I was getting a lot of recognition. I think I was really getting some really very good recognition—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —so, I mean, The Folk [Art] Museum had me there twice. I don't know if anybody got to do it twice. Yeah, so, I felt like I was being recognized, I felt like I was being used in the best possible way and that's really what I'm here for.

THEODORE KERR: So, 1996 was also the year that HAART [highly active antiretroviral therapy] came out, like the medication. Did you get on treatment right away?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Dr. Sonnabend put me on, I don't remember what, but I was also in some clinical trials.

THEODORE KERR: You were?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was in a couple of clinical trials.

THEODORE KERR: Around '96?

FREDERICK WESTON: '96, '97, '98, '99, 2000. There was also my own personal crack addiction—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON:—identification addiction thing was in there.

THEODORE KERR: After '96?

FREDERICK WESTON: After '96. Yeah I got—to the point where I was still—[laughs]—but he said if you keep going to the barbershop and you get a haircut. And my friends had already accused me of using and doing so I think I got to a point where I was using and doing.

THEODORE KERR: So being in the life—being in the life at Stella's and stuff like that you were around crack so eventually, of course, it was going to become something you would do. And did you know it was—did you feel it coming on as a problem right away?

FREDERICK WESTON: Did I feel it coming on as a problem right away? I had other problems that was why I got involved with it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I think it's when coping mechanisms become maladaptive. And it was just a way for me to hang out, you know. But again that was also you know by me starting to use this when some of the awful things happened people stealing stuff from me. You know losing things to, you know—me not being as careful and safe with the people I was hanging around with.

THEODORE KERR: How long was that period do you think?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, you know—I know when it was over, before 9/11 happened.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow what made you—how do you know that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I was going to a—I was going to an addiction class a group at the hospital some research study, and I had already stopped using. But because the study had some remuneration, I was in the study. And there was—I was crossing Sixth Avenue and I could see the airplane hanging out of the building and I said, well don't go vote, you don't have time to go to vote and go to your appointment. Skip the voting and go right to the appointment. But I'm watching the plane in the building. I'm thinking you know but it's not going to be—it's going to be a very different New York day. You know, we'll be alright. [Laughs.] It's only a plane hanging out of the World Trade Center. But one of my few times in the World Trade Center I had a friend that was a police officer and he got to take us up in the—one of those floors. That was cool looking out. And he said you know the building was meant to withstand the hit of an airplane and that registered. Because I thought that was all it was going to be. But by the time I came out of my drug appointment my drug research appointment the—I got to walk home and be in Times Square to watch the building fall down on the live feed and then to turn the corner and see up Sixth Avenue where they were both no longer there, when they were both there this morning when I looked up Sixth Avenue

THEODORE KERR: Phew.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah that's why I know it was over for me then. I had stopped doing it then but I was going to you know I was in a study.

THEODORE KERR: That seems like a short time.

FREDERICK WESTON: For me to be—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: —going through that?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah for an addiction that's like less than four years.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh well I just wanted to do it to write about it. I don't think I wanted to do it to you know. I didn't want to kill myself.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I was just curious. And I wanted to write about what, you know—when you're watching somebody do something it's like well what does that feel like exactly. And then there was all this kind of desperate living nothing too. Again I said I had friends who had you know they come and hang out with me but they had babies and girlfriends and families. And I think at one point I had one guy, and I think his family just was—it was just cool to know that he was with me. You don't know where he is but is he with you? He's with you okay, okay.

THEODORE KERR: Like they would call you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. You know.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And they knew he was off on a tear being crazy, doing shit you know. But he's with me—he's with me it's okay.

THEODORE KERR: It seems like 9/11 brought a lot of that stuff to a close.

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't know. I have to think about that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I have to think about that. I do know this, I think at some point me trying to I don't know, this sounds crazy but I'm going to involve myself in what you're involved with to be able to understand. But if I can bring myself out, and I can't bring you out I have to leave you behind, you know, it's not about me keeping—I'm not going to climb in the rabbit hole and try to bring you out of wonderland again. You know if you can't find your way out this time you—it won't be because of me, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And trying to break off that relationship and so many—I think some of it happened as the bar closed itself.

THEODORE KERR: When did that happen?

FREDERICK WESTON: When Tricks became Stella's and when Stella's no longer existed. I don't know that was—I don't know it seems so long ago. I don't know if that was—I don't know if he made it to 2010. I don't know if he made it that long.

THEODORE KERR: Huh. [Affirmative.] But it was well after 9/11?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact you know I was saying when 9/11 happened I think I lived in this neighborhood too because I feel like I'm free to venture out into the night and go anywhere pretty much in Manhattan. And when 9/11 happened, I said I'm going to go see—because I knew a couple of places that never closed. And I wonder if they're closed? And one of them was the main post office and it was closed. The main post office never closes you know.

THEODORE KERR: Huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact that's one of my favorite pieces of architecture. I used to have a mailbox when I didn't have an address. [Laughs.] I had a mailbox and a GPO [general post office]. But I went past there and the post office was closed and then the other thing was I would go up to Stella's bar and see if Stella's bar is closed because they would only close for eight hours during the day to clean up. And Stella's bar was open. And then the next place was, I'll see if Village Day Treatment is open and they were open the next day.

THEODORE KERR: And you were already hanging out there? That was already—

FREDERICK WESTON: I was already part of it—right I was already part of it, the day treatment program.

THEODORE KERR: Oh wow.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I was trying to keep as many—I realize at some point I know a lot of people were jumping from you know one day treatment program to the next. And I think there was some kind of understanding for me that part of it is in being in as many communities as you can belong to. So—I wound up dropping out of AIDS Service Center I wanted to do an art thing and they told me I couldn't do it. We don't want the installation, we want you to give us pictures for the wall. Well, I'm not giving you pictures for the wall, so bye! You know because I was going to the day treatment program I was going to AIDS Services Center so I didn't need both. And I really didn't need both. And then when I couldn't get the treatment that I thought I should be getting from AIDS Services Center I just kind of dropped them. And then I tried to keep my connection open with the bar because I realized that—in fact at one point I had talked the bar owner into letting me have Wednesday nights. Because Wednesday nights was kind of a dead night and I'm like, let me see if I can promote it and turn it into a party. And I did it to the point that my money ran out and I couldn't—but I couldn't get it you know going where—because people are fickle. [Laughs.] And then it was like maybe what I was doing was trying too hard too. Because I did—you know we did karaoke, you know I tried to get other people to do poetry and spoken word. And I had some friends that were singers and things and I tried to bring them in and you know, but it was really kind of hard where you're paying for the band and you're trying to give a little food and it was supposed to be a sober party too. So she would give us specials on drinks that weren't alcoholic, and so the downstairs portion was no smoking, this was before they even had the no smoking thing. We were trying to create a smoke-free environment and an alcohol-free environment. So if you wanted to smoke you just went upstairs or outside, if you wanted to drink you went upstairs to the bar and got a drink. But downstairs was not—we were not mixing drinks and serving drinks.

So I was trying to create this sober party on Wednesday nights and it worked. And so then I had to give all that up when the bar closed I had to, you know, so that idea of like what can you turn a

Wednesday night into what kind of venture can you turn Wednesday nights into. Yeah and then like you know and then so I don't know the one point I was going to, I'm trying to think of the name of the church.

THEODORE KERR: Judson?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, the black gay church, it's now out in Brooklyn. At one point they were meeting down in Zachary Jones and his Unity Fellowship, Unity Fellowship. Until one point I was going down—they were meeting in the Gay and Lesbian Center and it got to be like standing room only if you didn't get there early you weren't going to get a seat. And then—

THEODORE KERR: On Sunday mornings?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And then it got to be—they got so big that they needed—they would borrow space and I tried to follow but by the time they got way out in Brooklyn I, you know, lost interest. But I was trying to find communities and work with different communities. I think the more communities you're a part of the wider your sphere of influence is but also the wider your sphere of understanding is too because you're working with different people who are working together for whatever they're particular cause is.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So I don't have very many communities anymore but just the ones that I still have I hold dear.

THEODORE KERR: What are the communities you think you're part of now?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well definitely Visual AIDS, definitely the Day Treatment Program, Village Care has got my face on buses—[laughs]—which is strange. I don't know I'm not as—I'm not in as many right now—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —as I'd like to be. I'd really like to back into the fashion community some kind of way. But that's—if that's to happen, that will happen.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Do you ever walk past FIT?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well yeah, yeah, I feel like I'm an alumni but I also feel like they don't welcome their alumni's in unless you pay—[laughs]—contributing. You know their arms are so open wide but I still—yeah in fact I usually go when school starts I'll go find out what they're speakers are and I'll go watch the speakers. Like, thank you, I'm part of the FIT community because I do go to their speakers show; I go whenever it is I can afford to go to their speakers' bureau and I go watch their speakers because they're interesting. And I'm a member of Clutters Anonymous.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. So I go hang out with the cutters and hoarders a couple of nights a week. They're very special to me.

THEODORE KERR: Is that at the center?

FREDERICK WESTON: No.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: There's two different places one is uptown in Times Square and the other one at the Realization Center.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Can you say more about Clutters Anonymous?

FREDERICK WESTON: Clutters Anonymous? Clutters Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience with cluttering and hoarding and trying to not make it be a detriment to their lives, and to come out of that situation and to recognize it is a disease, you know. And that it's physical and emotional and spiritual as well. And we use the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous because we feel it works as well for those who have problems with clutter as it does for alcoholics. And yeah they're an amazing group of incredible people who you'd not expect but most of us share the shame of having too much stuff and other people's opinions about us that we have too much stuff. Or may not be the best homemakers and housekeepers as we might be. And again it's about stuff. I think Americans just have so much stuff. You know and they tell us we're not you know—what will make us better what will make us better—[laughs]—what will make us nicer people is stuff, more stuff. Anyway I think now—in fact my latest "ism" is minimalism. Because I think rich people are moving into this place where they realize that stuff doesn't make you happy. And actually they would like to have less stuff. They would like to have better stuff, but they would like to have less stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I think you have to have had the experience of having too much stuff or having enough stuff that should make you happy to get to the point where you realize that it doesn't make you happy and to divest yourself of stuff and try to figure out what makes you happy is something else beyond the material. But for people who never had stuff I understand why they want stuff. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know we get identities from stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do you see a connection between the Clutters Anonymous work that you do and your artwork?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes. In fact I try—some of my artwork directly address issue of stuff. And then the idea of like a collage necessarily is trying to squeeze, you know, a lot of images in a limited amount of space. Or try to squeeze as many ideas in a small amount of space, or taking things from desperate situations and putting them together in a context that wasn't necessarily the people—that people might not necessarily have thought of before. Or even like to the point where I find poses—poses in classic art, and poses in fashion art, and poses in illustration and it's the same pose. So I think all of that—I think a lot of things have meaning. Like I think gestures and things have meaning. Language is the way we use our bodies, not only the way we clothe our bodies, but the way we use our bodies. And that I think—and that's my mission and ministry to have a space where I'm able to talk about these things.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]



FREDERICK WESTON: And show them that—I want to have a place where we give away stuff you know. Where if you need a makeover up come and some kind of way we can arrange if you get a referral we can give you some stuff. Have people contribute what they have. Maybe even have clothing exchange.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I was trying to get a friend to back me in this idea before—once before. He said, "Well what would you put in the store?" I said, "It's going to be old clothes and new ideas."

[They laugh.]

And I'm still—that's really still what it is—old clothes and new ideas.

THEODORE KERR: I think one thing that's present in your installation in your collage, in your poetry, in your everyday interactions with humans, is this idea of accumulation. And then it's like accumulation and then sharing, accumulation and then sharing. And I'm wondering if that seems like a cycle to you or if that's something that's constant?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think it's constant. I think it's constant. I think it's constant. We've been jumping around I just had a flashback where I came for food and then stayed for the show, did I ever finish telling you that story?

THEODORE KERR: Go ahead.

FREDERICK WESTON: So I'd been at Village Care for so long now—till—when people ask me that story and I tell them about the food that I came for—I started coming to this program because I could take the food home. But then I realized that these were some of the people that I wanted to get away from, but higher power had thrown me right into the pot with them. That maybe I wasn't supposed to be away from them I was supposed to deal with them. And so I call that like the "show," that's the show. So I came to get the food and I stayed for the entertainment which is *really*, really, challenging. Because it's people who are mentally ill and a lot of people are still in the throes of their addiction and on top of the fact that we're all trying to live with this virus. And you know deal with the shame and stigma of the virus. And so that gets to be the show and I realize it's a challenging community, but I'm there. And in being there I get to use those people as my mirror. I get to see myself through those people. And that was why I started writing about this fashion thing from the street up, you know.

And you know even to the fact where I recognized the homeless people were really very well dressed these days.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know most of them have outfits—I mean not necessarily the sterling imaginative outfits but most of them are not dirty and filthy as they used to be.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I mean there are still the stinky ones that get on the train but you know you see—I see them out, lying out with new sneakers, better sneakers than I [have], you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And asking me for my food and sending them to a restaurant [Laughs.] And I do not give them my grub you know how it is. [Laughs.] I had to go to a program and work with people all day to get this meal and I'm not giving it to you. And there's a place around the corner where you can probably go get a meal but I know you're really out here because you're hustling for money.

My grandmother used to say, "Don't beg." She said, "You can sing a song or sell pencils or something but don't beg." And so I feel like some of my—even my art you know if I put it on the wall and it gets stolen I have to like let that go. I think it's—and it happens—it's happened enough times for me now. Yeah, that's a way of getting it out there and hopefully they—if they stole it I hope that they meant it and that they really love it and that they'll use it you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They loved it so much they couldn't share it and they had to have it you know. So yeah I'm like so. And that's kind of where I am. I just want to be able to be able to keep doing it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And to get to the point where I can use all of my new resources to make me a better person.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: More well. Able to afford gym you know trainer.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] When I worked at Visual AIDS—

FREDERICK WESTON: As a nutritionist.

THEODORE KERR: As a nutritionist.

FREDERICK WESTON: And a massage—

THEODORE KERR: Okay, now you sound like Oprah.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I could do Oprah.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'd give away cars so that, "You get a car and you get a car!"

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: When I worked at Visual AIDS you told me this thing that I thought—that I think a lot about and you talked about how your day program is your work. Or you think of it as a job.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's my job. It is my job. It is my job in fact in order to get the food I've got to show up you know. And it's—but then likes there's the causes the kind of program they are in order for them to serve me the food, they have to give me a couple of classes. And so we're doing—we're

talking about—and the people there really—like—I learned [about] Maslow I from Day Treatment Program I learned about Erikson in Day Treatment Program. I mean like I'm doing serious psychology classes.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah you're doing a Masters.

FREDERICK WESTON: Right you know. And that's part of our—that's part of our conversation. But the thing is I know like a lot of it goes schuss schuss it's going over somebody's head. I mean you don't realize the richness that this program offers. When I first started going to the program they used to have what they called complimentary alternative medicine as part of their program. And so there was a nutritionist on staff, and there was a chiropractor, and there was a massage therapist, there was an herbalist, there was a—oh, I'm forgetting. But they were like really—they were really doing all this Eastern medicine because at that point the Western medicine hadn't caught up yet. And so they were really these women were willing to put their hands on people who most folks would not put their hands on. And so when I would go home and describe this, well what are you do? I go to Day Treatment Program, and they say, well what do you do when you go there? And I was like we go to music therapy, we do art therapy, I get a massage, I get acupuncture, full-body acupuncture. And it's like damn that sounds like a spa. You know like how could you afford to live like that? You know. And I could afford to live like that because those people were smart when they set that program up, you know. And I'd avail myself of all the services that they have to offer. And I realize that that's what's keeping me well, you know. Subsequently we got to the place where because of the way the funding was, and insurance, those parts of the program were not funded.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And they couldn't afford to keep carrying them. So they got rid of the massage and the acupuncture, and the chiropractor. And so now we're just basically, you know, but we've got good medicine now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I miss all that, because really truly that was what was keeping me alive. But I think everybody should—that should be available to everybody.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It should be available to everybody. Everybody needs massages.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Everybody needs a therapist. Everybody needs to go talk to somebody.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That they don't know they're not connected to in any kind of way and that you can talk about anything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They need a person, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I mean it's interesting the same way that HIV opened up an awareness to this

art world HIV also opened up a different way of finding stability or health for you.

FREDERICK WESTON: I—in a strange kind of way my dreams—my dream—my dreams are always coming true. And I'll usually wind up landing in very good places. And I really feel like I was blessed to have like all of it. I mean GMHC at the right time, AIDS Services at the right time, Village Care at the right time, and Visual AIDS at the right time. Stella's bar at the right time, Tricks bar at the right time, all those clubs at the right time you. It may not be time for my design and my fashion and my art, but I'm in the right place at the right time. And even the places that I think like damn why am I here; this is like this is so below me. Like I have all these degrees and things and I know all this stuff. And I'm here with people who are acting crazy and you know just walking around the corner and smoking a reefer—[laughs]—to get right you know. And some—yeah and it's is a job because I realize that's what's keeping me alive, and though the program is not the same as it was before I still need that—I need that meal every day. I need that meal every day. And I need to go get it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't need it delivered to my door that's not going to make me a better person. And to be able to get up and wash my ass off—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —put on my outfit, serve the neighborhood, and go get my food at a—serve the neighborhood and come back, you know. And enjoy my life you know. Somebody's clocking me you know. Somebody's like its 9 o'clock and there he goes I don't know who he is—[laughs]—but I know my day's not going to be right if it's 9 o'clock and I don't see him you know. And it's like people go, I see your picture on the bus, I mean it makes me crazy, I'm glad I don't have to see them myself, you know. But I realize that's a point in a lot of people's lives. "I got on the train and I was feeling like shit, and I looked up and I saw your face and I felt so much better."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I know—I know that person.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It's not just a face and it's not a celebrity you know. It's somebody that I know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I know who that person is and I share them with my friend, "Look!" My little cousins got in the subway one day and they told their mother there's cousin Freddy and my cousin was like, "Cousin Freddy is not on this train." [Laughs.] And they said, "Yes he is right there!" And she says, "Cousin Freddy was on the train."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So you know yeah. I'm like wondering why God why does that happen, why does that happen. It was a fluke I wouldn't—you know the lady called me in the room to take a picture. You know they're taking pictures we want a picture. And I would say well it was one of my "yes" days.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I didn't read it I just signed it yes to the universe, yes, yes, yes. [Laughs.] Because I was looking at that little Spanish guy and I was like where did they get this guy? He's so cute and his face is all over the place and I didn't know that I was the next one in line. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: It's true we're talking about the Village Care ad.

FREDERICK WESTON: The Village Care ad, I'm redefining wellness.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: What's Janet Mock's title of her book?

THEODORE KERR: Oh, *Redefining Realness*.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. So she's the realness girl and I'm the wellness guy.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I love that connection. It's true though every time I see it I do feel like just I feel like we're connected. I feel like I'm getting to say, good morning to you it's really lovely. Yeah. This is a big question so we can take our time with it, but what has been the impact of HIV on your life?

FREDERICK WESTON: [pause] I learned that like life—life is a dream you know. But it's the dream I choose to have, and if I want it to be positive I have to be positive that has to come from the inside of me. HIV has taught me how to be adult to deal with the situation. I swear this apartment gives me some sense of stability, but I'd like—even at—I have some resentments even how all of that happened. But I'm happy where I'm now and I know that I can live here until I'm not here anymore. So that gives me—that was one of the fears that I had in my life that I wouldn't be a capable adult, capable of taking of myself. And because aging and the virus and all the physical things that have happened to me I realize I will never have children, you know. And even my sex life is going to be different, and complicated, and I'm hoping it can be fun to somebody else because it sure is funny, you know. And again I'll be doing a lot of—we'll be talking a lot about the bathroom and the bedroom because that's what has to happen for me now. I can't be too far away from the bathroom, you know.

There used to be a time where things would happen and I would say, "Lord why me?" Now things happen to me and I'm like, "Why not me? I'm the man for the job. Why not me." And so I've got to be like Beyoncé when the world sends me lemons I have to make lemonade you know.

THEODORE KERR: Lemon AIDS. [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Lemon AIDS. I got to make lemon AIDS. So lemon AIDS. [Laughs.] So that's yeah and then the virus really on the up thing—the uptick we're talking about—we've been talking and again Day Treatment Program, we've been talking about PTSD and the effects on the brain, and the virus, and the effects on the brain, and even the things even the way we've dealt with Ebola and Zika, and—and what's the other one?

THEODORE KERR: SARS?

FREDERICK WESTON: No the one we're talking about sharing—

THEODORE KERR: Oh meningitis.

FREDERICK WESTON: Meningitis and the way now that they're presenting the Hepatitis vaccines for the kids you know like all of that. None of that would be happening if it wasn't for AIDS and HIV. We wouldn't be anywhere close to any of that happening in the world. We've learned more about the immune system and how it works, and it's opened up areas with cancer research and stem cells and all of that stuff. I mean a lot of doors are opening up and we're getting the health system, and the way we take care of ourselves and the things we have learned about ourselves. Nutrition, exercise, all of that, has I think a lot of that has come as result of us having lived through this awful time where people dying of something that we don't—What is it that Prince says, "It's a big disease with a little name?"

THEODORE KERR: Who said that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Prince.

THEODORE KERR: Prince said that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yep. So yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So we were talking about disclosure.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I was saying but I think—the way—I've changed by outlook on life. I've changed my God; I changed what I believe God is as a result.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well say more.

FREDERICK WESTON: He got—he got to be a she.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And he got to be bigger and he not only is he is, he is not. I had some friends, who claimed to atheists, they were raised in the church but they were like, "God is not the cosmic puppeteer." And I'm like no he's not but if he was what's wrong with that?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know and so there whole thing is, God is not, God is not this, God is not that, and I'm like your only—your only perception of God is not what he is but what he is not. So God for me is and is not.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, you know there's like God is and is not. Mother, father, everything, God. And I internalize that you know. And then on top of that I'm a Christian because I was raised Christian and there's no way ever I'm not going to be a Christian. Yes, yes, yes, I love Jesus.

THEODORE KERR: How does this really link to disclosure for you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Because people can't bring themselves to tell their truths.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know—

THEODORE KERR: But aren't there lots of reasons like for HIV for example they're lots of reasons not to disclose.

FREDERICK WESTON: There are lots of reasons not to disclose but they're times when—but that would mean there are lots of times when I have to be dishonest about who it is I am or who I am I cannot reveal to the world. Which requires that I wear a mask you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I have so many masks—[laughs]—anyway and sometimes they're burdensome. And sometimes the fact that I am HIV positive gets to be a safety factor for me too, you know. The fact that I am HIV positive and if people know that they're going to have whatever opinion of me—that can come before me. And they can form whatever opinion of me that they choose to form based on that information before I even get there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So if they really were not going to receive me anyway they probably won't be in the audience, which is fine, because they shouldn't be you know. And the people who are willing to listen to me and accept me and receive me we can—we don't even have to go over that you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We can go past that and we can talk about something else we don't have to—that does not have to be the issue.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. Yeah I mean—yeah. There are some situations where I feel like I am not safe to disclose. But there's some situations where I feel like I'm not safe to say who I am anyway. And I will try to keep myself out of those situations. Hopefully, you know, the Lord God, higher power, will keep me out of those situations where I have to deny who I am, you know, out of necessity. And I try to live like that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] And I want other people to live like that. I don't want other people to have to live like that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That you're going to do me harm or do me dirt.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know because you're not able to except my reality.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-uh. Well it goes back to the thing you said about—

FREDERICK WESTON: Or maybe even your own reality.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Again because I'm just a mirror you know. I have my own—I have my life to—you know I have my life but you have your own life and your own orbit and you know. My AIDS being a problem for you is really *your* problem it's not my problem. My HIV status if it's a problem for you that's *your* problem it's not my problem. And so if I have to hide it from *you* in order to for you not to have a problem I'm not giving you the respect you need to be a full and complete individual, and you're not giving me that space either.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. So when people can't tell the truth I'm like well, I get it, you know. But if I'm not telling you because I'm afraid you can't handle it that's me cheating you out of an opportunity to handle it or not.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. Because if I tell you, you're going to handle it or not and it's—why am I afraid? If I'm afraid that you can't and that means that now you're going to treat me a certain way because you can't then now we're back to my fear again.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. But I don't know—I won't know unless I try. And the truth is in the trying.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The truth is in the reality of it all, you know. I don't know why I'm thinking about this now, but my mother one time we were talking about my sexuality and she's like I knew you, I knew. And I'm like, well how did you know? And she says well, I can't think of his name, but if you told me I'd remember. And I said okay I'm going to give you four names and—

[They laugh.]

—and she had the right one.

THEODORE KERR: About a boy you had a crush on?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah about the boy that I was playing with—the boy we were playing with. But she said I could never catch you! And I'm like oh wait all these years it wasn't us having a conversation about it you were trying to catch me. You wanted to catch me. You couldn't catch me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You couldn't catch me. Well. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: What do you wish?

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't know on some levels I think we—I knew how many steps you had to take to get up the stairs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]



FREDERICK WESTON: We could count. Here she comes! I had to go in the closet and change clothes and you pull up your clothes and umm she couldn't catch me. We were too good, we were not about to get caught!

[They laugh.]

But we could have had it—we could have talked about it. Anyway—

THEODORE KERR: When did you talk to her about your sexuality? When was?

FREDERICK WESTON: My mother and I had two disagreements in my life. One was when I went home to have my first nervous breakdown and tell everybody I was gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And she said don't tell anybody, which meant like don't tell the rest of the family.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm like okay. And which I knew meant that she was going to tell, that I wasn't supposed to tell—that she—that was hers to tell. But I wasn't supposed to tell. Again we're talking about this disclosure thing. I'm disclosing to you and you tell me, okay but you don't disclose anybody else I'll be the disclose—what is that the discloser—disclosee. I'll become the discloser. You were supposed to be the discloser. Anyway now it's like I'm going to be the one to tell, so don't you tell.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah I want to tell them. I want to be the one to break their face with that one. So I agreed, you know. Of course I did other things. I told all my friends. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I left the family to her. And then the second one was when I got my HIV diagnosis, and again she says don't tell anybody. But that conversation was over the phone. Sadly, enough that conversation was over the phone. And after having struggled with this she and I struggling with this for a week—I don't know if I said that in my last conversation. When I took the test she asked me what I thought, I said, "I'm probably HIV positive." She said, "Well I would prefer to think that you're not." And so I said, "Well, you pray from your end and I'll pray from mine." And so when it came back to that I was positive I told her and again she says, "Don't tell anybody," and I yelled at her over the phone. I said, "No!" I said, "This is not your disease, this is not Kenneth, my stepfather, this is not Kenneth's disease, this is my disease, and I tell whomever I want." And she freaked out. She went into hysterics and dropped the phone and my stepfather got on the phone and says, "If you can't talk to your mother any better than that I don't think you should call here anymore." That was him being angry.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But just a week earlier when I told him I took the test he called me son and cried with me over the phone.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact when I told him I had taken the test and I said, "Didn't Freda tell you?" And he says, "No." He says, "That's what's been wrong with her all week."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] She was worried. And did you have a sense of what the test was going to come back as?

FREDERICK WESTON: I thought it would probably be positive. I was ready to handle that. I mean I wasn't—I mean I had too many friends—I had too many friends who were struggling with the virus. I had too many friends who passed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. Like I said my friends passed early. Some of my dearest friends passed very early. And then Franz actually—there were two guys in the House of Authority who got their diagnosis and one was like trying to do everything right and the other one was like trying to get more drugs and alcohol.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: As if that was necessary.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And the one that was doing my drugs and alcohol ended up living longer than the one that was trying to do everything right.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah. Do you—you got tested by Doctor Joseph Sonnabend, and how—like when he told you how was it? Like did—

FREDERICK WESTON: I told him I want to be the first one cured and he looked at me like I was totally insane.

THEODORE KERR: Really.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I was totally insane.

THEODORE KERR: Did you mean it?

FREDERICK WESTON: I meant that. I'm going to be the first one cured. You know.

THEODORE KERR: And how do you feel about that now?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well I may not be the first one cured but I am redefining wellness. [Laughs.] So there.

THEODORE KERR: So there.

[They laugh.]

So there Doctor Joseph Sonnabend.

FREDERICK WESTON: There, how do you like me now?

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Do you think about the cure a lot?

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, I don't think we'll be cured. I think this is something that for those of us who have it you know we're basically incurable.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm seeing as far as like a cure with them able to put quotes around it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: We're incurable. I mean don't think they're going to be able to cure us. I think we may be able to live—they may be able to give us something where we don't have to go get medicated every day you know. Maybe able to stretch it out over periods of time. I'm not even sure if that's possible. But I think it's possible for people who don't have it—like the PrEP thing, I think it's possible you know some of those things might be very effective and efficient. And I think eventually they'll come up with something that they can give you an inoculation and then you won't—you can have all the dirty sex—dirty nasty sex you want to as well as a beautiful, clean, and pure, sex if you want to.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And not get the virus, you know. Because everybody don't get it with the dirty nasty sex some of us get it through the beautiful.

THEODORE KERR: Love making.

FREDERICK WESTON: And wonderful sex as well.

THEODORE KERR: There's Jason from VOCAL [Voices Of Community Activists & Leaders], has a quote I really love he says, "We could end the AIDS crisis tomorrow without a cure."

FREDERICK WESTON: We could if we started to learn to take care of each other, to take care of each other.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And change our attitudes about stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. Race and sex that's the big—that's the big cross. [Laughs.] It's race and sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-uh. Is gender included in that when you say that?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. Sex meaning gender. Sex meaning gender—sex basically meaning gender.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. What does it mean to be a man, what does it mean to be a woman, and what about all those people in between?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And what does it mean to be black? What does it mean to be white? And what about all those people in between? Because all of those people *are* in between? It's how we have to identify ourselves. I had this guy in one of the programs he always says, "I hate labels. [Laughs.] I hate labels." I'm like I don't hate them, you know. I think they serve us to some point. I think they can be detrimental. But it's just like if God made everything good and it takes man to take whatever God made and turn it into something awful and ugly.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, no matter *what* it is you know. But I think we'll get to the point where some of the drugs that we've been criminalizing and sending people away from, we'll be able to use them in the way they're supposed to be used, because I think some of that—some of those drugs are medicine.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't know. I just see—I just see a better world and I think some of it is going to happen through globalization.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know we realize we're all connected—I'm connected to that person in wherever.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know and it's not just the internet I'm really, truly, connected, spiritually, emotionally, to those other people in the world. I mean gosh. I don't know stuff. We would—I was listening to the news and they were talking about—oh what state is it. They have all the fracking and now they're having all these earthquakes [Oklahoma].

THEODORE KERR: Oh, is it North Dakota or no? Where the standoff is?

FREDERICK WESTON: No it's not North Dakota.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: But one of the states they have—they were fracking and—

THEODORE KERR: Oh okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: But they had earthquakes. They've always had earthquakes but now they're crazier than ever.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I'm like well why do we need that? Why do we—

THEODORE KERR: Why do we need the fracking?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, right.

FREDERICK WESTON: Why do we need that? What happened to the windmills?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I have a—I have a weird question. What do you think God thinks of HIV?

FREDERICK WESTON: What do I think God thinks of HIV? I don't know. I don't know. I think—I think God is saying you still don't know me, and you still don't see me, and you still don't get it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You're missing it, you missing the point.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You're missing the point. You open up those little bibles and those little things and you're using those to judge people it's not yours to judge. You're using those bibles and you're picking out those quotes and all those tiny little things that say they were laws that were supposed to help get through the desert. You're trying to beat people over the head with them now. You're interpreting them in ways that are mean and hateful and really the purpose of all this is supposed to be how we—I think God is love and when they stop letting God be love and make God—I mean God-fearing people are saying awful things to other people. Why do you go to church to learn to hate other people? That's not what religion is for. That's not, you know, what serving God is, you know. And I don't care who—I don't care who your deity or whatever it is that you're supposed to it if it's not making you a better person and serving humanity, I ain't with it, you know. I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't. I don't know, I don't believe God gives you the right to not let the girls get educated, I don't think God gives you the right to make the boys fight, you know, and we have them at war. I don't know. So HIV is just like just another little thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Maybe like you know I'm trying to get you all to figure out what sex is and how to be honest and open about what sex is and sexuality, you know. And so here, try this, add this spice and see if—[laughs]—you like the taste of that you know. And it's like, "I can't get it I'm not gay you know."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But we're all in the same—we're all having sex with each other we're all in the same—we're all in the same game.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah but we're not—

FREDERICK WESTON: If we're not in the same gang—we're all in the same game.

THEODORE KERR: But we're not and that's why HIV is more prevalent in some communities than others. It's not like black young people have sex differently than white young people.

FREDERICK WESTON: That's only because—that's only because we—we're making little pools. You know where the mosquitos get in the little pools?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You can open up the pool.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Eventually we're all in the same pool.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know we may not be—I may not make myself available to all the other things that are out there for me you know. And because I'm not having—I think probably my—my experience was because I was in an integrated sexual community, where black folks and white folks were having sex with each other. But now we're in those communities where okay now they've got it, but this is just black kids having sex with other black kids you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And they're not being any safer than anybody else, you know. I mean but eventually—all babies come from a man and a woman you know. But that's not—but that's limiting on what sex is really about.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know everybody that's had—everybody that's—what is the right word? Fornicating or—[laughs]—isn't doing so with the idea that we're going to have offspring.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I think people use sex not for creation but recreation.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. And we need to be real about that. And everybody should have a sex life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know. And we should recognize and make sure that everybody gets a sex life and my sex life should not be about you not having yours.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think that was what the whole gay men movement was about to begin with and maybe why that—it took such a turn and was so out there and you know really out

in your face. You know and all over the place is because we're—we're finally liberated ourselves to this idea like, you know, well what is—what is it, what is it? And let it be an experience and let's go experience. And it—and it just it—when they were having the Gay March I'm like wow look at all these people. And you've got the—you've got the people with the—the radical fairies and then you've got the—what is it the NAMBLA [North American Man/Boy Love Association].

THEODORE KERR: Um-um.

FREDERICK WESTON: [Laughs.] You know. And then you've got the, you know—and it's all—it's like what *is* my community? And how many communities would I be able to march with? You know if I had my choice I'd get to pick which communities I march with? And oh look I can march with da da da da I mean really I should be able to march with everybody in that—you know in contention. I should be able to find myself in every contingency. But I don't so I get to pick and choose and hopefully it's still more than one.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I should be able to relate and connect to more than—the NAMBLA folks I'm like well that's interesting, you know. There's something about that that's right, but there's something about that that's very wrong you know. And then we don't talk about the part where it's not—I think there's a part where we're talking about children and then we're talking about young men—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —who are sexual. They're just young men.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And there's another word for that but we never use that word. All of them are pedophiles but there's another word when they're—when the younger partner is of an age to have sex he's just not 21, 18, 19, 20, 21.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. When did—do you remember—were you having sex as a young person?

FREDERICK WESTON: I started kissing Gary Kirk White when I was 13.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In Reverend Tucker's backyard with June and Greg in a tent. One of the few times my mother let me sleep over. And then I messed around with Gary from the time we were 13, oh, to the time I was well into college. He went away to the—to the Navy. He joined the Navy. I went away to school and swore my allegiance to gay people, so I wouldn't have to be in the man's army.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact that was—I told the Draft Board I was gay in order to stay out of the draft. So I guess that was my first declaration. And I was in college and I didn't want—I didn't want that time interrupted. I was doing lovely, thank you, with my two lives. Because I had gay friends in fact I had a lovely set of gay friends in Detroit and—I'll tell you about my lovely friends at Detroit. Here's a community. I met—there was a group of—there was a club called the Chieftains. They had

three branches—three branches that I knew of, Chicago, Detroit, and New York, and they were all—I'm saying this in the kindest way they were all international bourgeois jet-set Negroes. You know young professional men, *really* good looking. But they would party in three different cities and they would travel—they would travel to other cities and parties. So we would go from—that was my introduction to come to New York was with some of the guys that were in the Chieftains in New York. And then some of my trips, I'd go home like on a weekend and say I was going home but I'd go to my friend's house and we'd go to Chicago for the weekend. [Laughs.] Anyway there was a group of kids in Detroit—gosh. You know it's like you meet one person and they introduce you to another person and they introduce to another person.

There was a guy who came to my college and he was determined he was going to get a boyfriend in my fraternity, and he picked me. We were in the same dormitory. So we got to be friends, and so we could talk about—I was aware that he was gay and he knew that I was gay as well. But he also knew I had this life on campus. Anyway, he had a crazy nervous breakdown, slashed his wrists—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —bled all over the dormitory. They came and got me because they knew he was my friend. And I found him over some—one of his other little friend's house and he'd slashed his wrists over somebody on the—wasn't even the varsity team, it was some boy on the other team that wasn't coming around. Anyway they wound up sending him home, but we were keeping communications. And he found a lovely boyfriend in Detroit, who had a four-family house.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And the four-family house had two apartments on the first floor, two apartments on the second floor, and they were all different gay couples in the houses. And they called the house the compound. Now when we party—when we partied, in fact my 25th birthday party was held at the compound in all four apartments. Okay, so, and I didn't know about—I didn't know about the surprise, but I got wind of it when I was walking in the house and I saw some kids who were friends from Ohio were walking in the house. And they went into one apartment and they were trying to get me into another apartment. But they—I saw my friends from Ohio go in down here and I went and knocked on the door and I opened up the door and when I did I saw the cake. [Laughs.] Anyway that party was all weekend long, it was in three apartments. I stayed all weekend, but people would go home, they would go to work, they'd come back and—

[They laugh.]

So that was—that was the—it was the Chieftains and the children in Detroit with the compound. And this was all through my friend Curtis, who I meet in college. So Curtis was like really, really, a crazy, crazy, artist. And I think I was his—actually I was his wardrobe mistress. Curtis used to—he got to where he wanted to sew and be a designer. He got to where he wanted to paint. So Curtis would make—if you had an apartment and you bought a sofa you'd tell Curtis what color your sofa was and what color your—you know your color combination was and he'd make you this really crazy outlandish sofa picture.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But then we—he got to where he was sewing and the clothes he would make I say he was Prince before Prince was Prince. I mean he would make lace—lace vests to the floor and with lace pants to match. He was Prince before Prince was Prince.



THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so and then he had this thing where he would—if we went to a party he would change. He would take a change of clothes.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And make another entrance. So I would be helping him change cloths to make his second entrance. Okay, so, yeah, I hung out with Curtis until I met Claude and then Claude and Curtis was like—they were—Curtis didn't like Claude because Claude would—know I'm really focused on Claude more than Curtis because Claude was trying to be a designer and Curtis was just like messing around—[laughs]—trying to be Curtis. Anyway so yeah that was like—so I had this really cool group of friends in Detroit. It was really solid because they had a place—a safe place to party, you know, we had a safe house to hang out in. And then it was also—but it was also the connection with the people in Chicago and the people in—in Detroit. So that was really—so my coming out was really cool. I had like I had really solid friends—and I think—I don't know what happened to all those friends after I left there, I left there.

So, I came okay so that was so—it was like at one point all of my all of my worlds were kind of colliding and then in fact just the period—just before—I wanted to show you—oh I had it. It's the invitation to the Yin Yang Social Club.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Where Butch, Claude, and I had that party in the, I guess it was the—we called it a loft. It was really a family's flat like the store was on the first floor and the family would live over it—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And it had three bedrooms, a huge kitchen, a huge bathroom, a huge living room, a huge dining room—[laughs]—and three nice sized bedrooms.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And we've moved in there and we painted the kitchen, and the living room, and the dining room, we painted the floors white, and we painted the ceiling, we painted everything white. We had a party we told everybody to wear white. We painted all these—we blew up all these balloons—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —white balloons. And it was really like a fashion party and we invited everybody. Well I was the one who had the most investment in invitees because I invested the—not only my straight friends but my gay friends so it was like really a wild party and there was acid in the punch.

[They laugh.]

And so we had like this really crazy party and the fashion editor of the paper was angry with us because she realized that we had a party and we had neglected to invite her and it was really like a big fashion party—I mean people going to the stores if you were buying a white outfit. You know I

told you we used to dress each other anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: We were going to the store and buying white outfits and it was like where are you going? It's like we're going to this dit dit dit. Well we'd already invited many of the—many of the boutique owners were invited to the party anyway so they were like—[laughs].

THEODORE KERR: They were ready.

FREDERICK WESTON: Everybody was getting these all-white outfits to wear to this party and we told everybody don't—it's not like—it's not dressed up, dressed down, it's dressed—just your best self, but it just has to be all white. So, there was a guy there. He had an all-white basketball outfit with a white basketball somebody was like all—like a bride. And it was like, you know, all these different kind of takes on "this is who I am, and this is my white outfit." So, it was really kind of out there. In fact, it was so out there, everybody's like, "You all don't need to be here. You need to be in New York." And so, eventually, that was what ended up happening. They all moved and left me at home—[laughs]—for a month, and then it was—I think it was Labor Day—it was Labor Day weekend that we—they had time off from work that they could come back to Detroit and bring me to New York and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —like Granny Clampett in the back of the U-Haul truck, riding with the stuff. And then, we finally got to 88th and Amsterdam, and they open up the door of the truck, and there's Billy Blair—[laughs]—helping them move the furniture off the truck.

THEODORE KERR: And Granny.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, here comes Granny off the truck, you know, starry-eyed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But they all—like I said, again, they all had work, I didn't—you know—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —anyway, yeah. I get New York now. I didn't get it then.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And like I can handle New York now. I couldn't handle it then, but I'm much better able to do so because I've established myself in so many communities. And I have a roof over my head, and too many clothes and—

THEODORE KERR: It's just—

FREDERICK WESTON: —many opportunities to make art and—

THEODORE KERR: The beginning of that story was about—I asked you about early sexual experiences.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, and I slipped?

THEODORE KERR: I don't know if you slipped. I don't believe in slippage. I think, finally—

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, I had—I kept kissing that boy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And then, it got to be basically him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I had some girlfriends and things—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I was experimenting mostly with him. We were experimenting—I don't think we were very good at sex; he would swear he came. I never came.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, this is the—this is the sad part of the whole story. I was having—I was engaged with other—with this one particular from the time I was 13 until I had my—I don't know. But it wasn't until I was 18 and came home from school on a break that I let somebody pick me up off the street.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And he was giving me a blow job, and I said I'd never come that way. And he says—he says—he says, "You're going to come. You are going to come tonight." And that was the first time I had an orgasm.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think I used to let people pick me up because I—"Oh, he's cute. Little young guy. Oh, his dick is reasonable."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And he's not going to—he doesn't come, so he's going to stay hard.

THEODORE KERR: That's what people thought about you?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, I was a sex object.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? I let them. We'd play. I would be—it was just playing. It was fun, but I didn't have—nobody ever took the time or made me comfortable enough to have an orgasm.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, and after I experienced that with them, I learned how to do it for myself—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —because I didn't—I didn't—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, you hadn't even before, by yourself?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, no. I had wet dreams, but I never—I never had—no.

THEODORE KERR: Because you were always treated as an object? Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I would just put myself in that kind of situation.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, like I said, we started kissing and everything from when I was 13.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? My mother, when she went to college, but it wasn't—she wasn't—but there was no money shot.

[They laugh.]

She just seen—she just seen the two of us trying to, like, make something out. We didn't know what we were doing.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: She wouldn't have seen any—I think she wanted to know if I was a top or a bottom. I think that was her concern.

THEODORE KERR: You think so?

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I think that's where her head was about the whole gay life thing was like, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Do you think that's what straight people think about gay sex?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think a lot of straight people think that about gay sex.

THEODORE KERR: But do you think that—

FREDERICK WESTON: There are a lot of straight people who will engage in gay sex, but as long as they're on the top, they don't know what they're doing is gay sex.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do you think that straight people can imagine that gay people don't always have anal sex?

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm not sure they do.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I think that's part of their fantasy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But then, I understand there's lots of anal sex in the straight—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: —in the hetero—in the heterosexual community as well. But see, we don't talk about that anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: We don't talk about that.

THEODORE KERR: Well, there's a whole school of thought that suggests that anal sex went up in the gay community after AIDS because pre-AIDS, there wasn't much talk of gay sex, so people just did what they did, and then AIDS came, and gay sex was understood as anal.

FREDERICK WESTON: "Oh, we could do that? Oh!"

THEODORE KERR: And that there was more social pressure to have anal sex because that's what gay sex was.

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, gosh.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's a tragedy.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Tragedy! That's a disco song.

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I think part of it is that there's so many different ways to express yourself.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I think someone says that the fact they have some sexual—here's the—okay, here's a big one for me—public displays of affection, and the ways fathers treat their sons.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I think if fathers treated their sons in a more intimate, and public displays of affection, and then a lot of the gay experience wouldn't be necessary.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: If I had a lot of this expression with my father, if he treated me a certain kind of way, I think I wouldn't be looking for hugs and kisses and that kind of attraction coming from another man because I would've gotten it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I would've gotten it already.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then I wouldn't—even the part that's coming from my mother, I'll be able to put that into perspective, no matter what sex I am, I'm able to put in perspective that I can [inaudible] tension that I can share with my parents. So, I know—I know what it is to—I know what it is for another man to say I love you. If I can't—if my father can't say it, I'm going to find some other man to say this to me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: If my brothers won't say it to me, I will go find somebody else—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —of the male persuasion to say this to me because I need it.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think it's then harder to recognize if you've never heard it? And so, people might have been saying it to you all along—

FREDERICK WESTON: No, no, no. I think if people say it, you get it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think people say it, you get it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: In fact, I used to say—Will Smith and Jaden—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm like, oh, Will, he just punks Jaden out all the time when they were so affectionate—when he was a little boy, they were so affectionate. They was almost like, Jaden's embarrassed because Will was just like—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —he's loving all over him, you know? And now that's grown to mature, he's still loving all over him. It's not like—you know? In fact, I think—you know, he's so—it's like he's so proud of his son wearing dresses.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? Because he couldn't do it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: He wouldn't do it.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: So, yeah. And so, I think, you know, so—and I think, and in fact, I think I got—that was one of the reasons the fraternity meant so much to me because that was the place to put some of that in context. And I used to tell my brothers "I love you" all the time. And in fact, when they were pledging, they used to call me mother, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I like, I was the dean of pledges. I was supposed to be protecting them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: The dean of pleasures was protecting?

FREDERICK WESTON: Dean of pledges.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, pledges. Oh. Oh, that's deep.

FREDERICK WESTON: They were pledging—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, there was usually one brother that's responsible for all the pledges.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You're supposed to—you're supposed to like, protect you. You know that you're going to get your ass beat—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and if you do what I can say, I can probably get you out without too much—the violence and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, without too much hazing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But you have to do what I tell you.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, they were calling me mother.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But then, the gay kids called me iron mother, too. That was another nickname.

THEODORE KERR: Iron mother?

FREDERICK WESTON: Iron mother.

THEODORE KERR: Why iron mother?

FREDERICK WESTON: I don't know why iron.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah? [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Iron mother. That was another nickname I had. When I told you about the—when the—the compound?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The house—they called it the compound? The kids would come from out of town and they would say, "Where you want to go?" They said, "The compound." They thought it was a club.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: And it was not the club. It was the after party. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It was the after party. And there would be one—if all four doors didn't open up, there would usually be one door open up on the weekend. Somebody was going to have, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —everybody's coming over after the bar.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And the bars would close at 2:00, so we're talking about 3:00, 4:00.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And except for the kids that had to go home for the—be on the broadcast, the gospel broadcast the next morning—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —we'd wave bye to the gospel girls early because they had to leave because they had to leave and prepare for singing the next day. They had to go church—[laughs]—I digress. But yeah, I was talking about the compound? And the fact that I had those—I had those—

THEODORE KERR: That love and affection of men?



FREDERICK WESTON: That love and affection.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And I could tell my gay friends, "I love you," and I could tell my—in fact, my fraternity brothers, man hey, "I love you, man!"

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And they—well what really makes the—with the exception of that one, I think they get it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They're not offended.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: I love them. I love them. I love you. I love your wife. I love your kids.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Like love was more fluid. Or love could be fluid.

FREDERICK WESTON: Love is fluid.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Love is—God is love.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Friend with God alright.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I like that you're—part of the thing about life is that you keep on finding yourself in groups of networked people together. Like the fraternity, with Butch and Claude, and then further, like with—like the—even the hotel living. Like, if you're all in single room occupancies, you're in a network together.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah—

THEODORE KERR: And then—

FREDERICK WESTON: —there were some kids—in fact, there were a—oh, there was a couple gay guys in the Breslin, and they were so cute.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I used to hang out with them. They were younger than me, but they were like—they were the ones in the pier kids.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, that was my pier experience, was through them.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I had to go down to the pier with them.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I wasn't a pier kid.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: But they were, and I'm like, I'll go hang out with you. I'm not doing anything. Let me go hang out with you—

THEODORE KERR: But you saw the pier life?

FREDERICK WESTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That was my—that—it was late—it was late in the whole pier life because I could've gone with my friend Tony and the Fire Island kids, because they did that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I didn't—I was—I was too busy trying to find a *job*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? This is a later period in my life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You found lots of community.

FREDERICK WESTON: I can—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm a group individual.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, ah. That's so true, yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm a group individual. I need the—I need the—and I like working with a group.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? But I'm always going to be—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —an independent person bringing my independence to the group.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? Interdependence.

THEODORE KERR: Interdependence. Wait, and how did you land in this apartment? Because we've talked a lot about housing.

FREDERICK WESTON: That—at one point, I was making enough money, where when they asked for the—when it came to fill out the application, that I had the money to fill out the application and put myself on the waiting list.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I didn't think I was ever going to get it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And in fact, there was a lady—there was a friend that lives across the street, and I remember, I had friend over here, Connie Brown, I think, convinced me to—

THEODORE KERR: To apply?

FREDERICK WESTON: —to apply, and it happened. And it happened kind of a—if it had to happen two months earlier, it would've been perfect because they wanted me to move out of the Breslin hotel. They were going to give me \$150,000 for my space—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, which is about the size of this living room.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I couldn't take it.

THEODORE KERR: Because you had nowhere to go?

FREDERICK WESTON: I had nowhere to go. And I knew \$150,000 was not going to be able to keep me in this neighborhood.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And because it was the welfare, I wasn't really supposed to get it anyway. It belonged to them.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I was on HASA [HIV/AIDS Services Administration, public assistance].

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: It would really—HASA's money—it would've been HASA's money. It wouldn't have been my money.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, I proceeded to stay there, and they harassed me. They harassed me. They broke into my portfolio and stole my work.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was awful. It was awful. But then, I finally moved. I got—they pulled my name out of the lottery, and this place was available to me. And I started looking at the apartments because you're supposed to like—they give you a list of apartments that you're supposed to go look, and you—

THEODORE KERR: Through HASA?

FREDERICK WESTON: No, through the complex.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

FREDERICK WESTON: After they pulled my name out of the lottery—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, so you—

FREDERICK WESTON: —they have an apartment for you, and you have to pick one. And so, I went to all the apartments that were—open to me, and after a while, it was like a—that process got to be too much. I'm like, I'm going to take whatever one. So, I would just say, "yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes" not knowing that I would wind up in this one, which I think is choice because all the ones I saw, none of them—none of them are as great as this one. And I didn't know what this one looked like until they had given me the key and I came here and I turned the knob and I walked in for the first time. I didn't know that it was going to be this kind of setup.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was like—and then I got—they gave me enough money—they couldn't give me \$150,000, but they gave me *just* enough money to move in here.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

FREDERICK WESTON: It was *just* enough money to move me in here. So, once I got in here, I'm like, well, that's cool. And then, I went back to HASA. This is—now, this is the personal part of the story. But you'd have to go to the Smithsonian to get this tea.

[They laugh.]

When all this was happening, I had an opportunity where the head of HASA was talking to a group.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so, I told them I had a situation where I had this apartment available to me, but I have to arrange to get the money for, and they said, "We can't help you get it, but we can help you keep it." So, I thought if I could get the apartment that they would still help me finance the apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I had it calculated how it was going to be—their portion was going to be much less than it was when I was at the hotel.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, and I could swing it. And then—here's a story. At one point, I was in the hotel, and then my worker came in and looked at my situation at the hotel. And because it was under development, the—it was almost like I read—I was reading an article in the newspaper this weekend about the situation over there at The Chelsea.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? So, the whole—all the hallways are all torn up because we're developing, but people are trying to maintain their lifestyle and living in these, you know, I got to walk through all this to get to my safe space. Well, it was the same thing over there. So, he came to my—he came up to see me in my room, and they had moved all my stuff out because they thought I had bed bugs, and then they had moved all the stuff back in. And I had to move it in—all on the weekend, and so, I was really living out of boxes. So, when he walked through all that madness and he finally got up to the room, he says, "How could you *live* like this?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm like, well, do you have any place—I had a smart answer but I can't remember what my smart answer was.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: But I'm like, do you have any place else for me? He says, no. I'm like, well, this is how I live, and I manage to do so with, you know, this is as much dignity as I can muster.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And so, when I finally got this space, he happened to be on vacation. Somebody else did all the paper work. They got an awful mover. The mover came in here, moved—got me up here, and broke my globe.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Took all of my packing stuff—and I think I even tipped him. Anyway—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know how they change the price on you once they see how much stuff you got?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, I went through all that—but anyway, they got me in here. And then, one day, he came up, and he sat right in that chair where you're chair, and—no, in fact, he even—before he got to that chair, when he—we realized he only had to come this, a couple blocks to get to my house, and so, I had to go down to the door to get him because I didn't know how to open up the door.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, I went and he walked in the lobby and he says, "How could *you* live like this?"

THEODORE KERR: [Gasps.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, it went from "How could you *live* like this?" to "How could *you* live like this?" I'm like, "Ooo." So, then when he came up here, he says, "We'll help you pay the rent, but we have to take a lean on your place." I said, "What does that mean?" He says, "Well, you can live here until you die. But when you live here and you die, the money goes to us." I said, "But you didn't tell me that before, so you can leave now. I'll do it all by myself, thank you." And I've had to do it all by myself, and it eats up all my social security, but—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —I learned how to hustle.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And so, it's not HASA? This is not HASA related?

FREDERICK WESTON: This is not HASA related at all. I get food stamps, and that's all they do for me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] How does that feel?

FREDERICK WESTON: It feels good.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah?

FREDERICK WESTON: It feels fine. That's what I'm saying—now I really got balls.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I don't have to worry about where I'm going to live.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, you did the hustle of all good hustles.

FREDERICK WESTON: I got the hustle of all good hustles. And then, in fact, if somebody hugged me—I was hugging somebody the other day, and they said, "I heard you live in luxury?" I'm like [scoffs]. It's that perception—

THEODORE KERR: Why?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think it's a nice apartment, but I don't think it's *luxury*.

THEODORE KERR: Right, right.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? It's a moderate apartment for moderate people. That's what they made it for, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Right, right. Right, you're not Bill Gates.

FREDERICK WESTON: This is not Bill Gates. No, I'm not Bill Gates, and a long way from Oprah and a lot of those rappers. But anyway, I'm happy.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: I couldn't be more thrilled.

THEODORE KERR: It's amazing.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's a little far west for me—[laughs]—8th Avenue is a little far west for me, but who knew that they were going to take the strip and move it from Christopher Street to the 8th Avenue? So, I'm right here—

THEODORE KERR: Right, it came to you. And then, the city moved more west by creating 10th Ave. for you [Laughs.]

[talking simultaneously]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and now they got the High Line over there.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Like, okay. All right. I love—I'm still in—I told you, I'm the original Chelsea boy. And I'm—like, I'm cool with it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I'm cool with it. I'm cool with it. So, this is my equity, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, it gets me—that worry is gone. Now, it's just worried about my legacy, and that's why you're here talking to me now. This is—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know? And all that that's happening for me, too.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] It really is.

FREDERICK WESTON: All that's happening for me, too. So, it just caused me to keep doing my work —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and going to those places where I'm showing up at those places, even

the places that think I'm supposed to be—I'm too good for, I'm not. And those people who are there, who think I think I'm too good for them—I don't, but if that's the way—we have to work our relationship like that, and so, give me—give me—give it to me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because you really don't know who I am until you've given an opportunity for me to disclose. You don't know that I had awful situations in my life, just as you do. You don't know anything about me. And everybody walking down the street has a story like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, everybody's gone through something awful. You know, everybody's gone through some kind of dysfunction. Nobody's life is perfect. Everybody has pain. Everybody has fear, you know? It's only a couple of emotions. We have a lot of ways to—I mean, it's only a couple of feelings. We have a lot of ways to describe those emotions. And you know, how we choose to serve that feeling back to the world, but you know, really, it's only love—fear, love, anger, pain.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, I can deal—I can handle it. I just have to figure out sometimes where I am, and how I got here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Typically, the anger thing, because like, why are you angry?

THEODORE KERR: How do you relate with anger? Like, how do you deal with your anger?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think—in fact, I have a little sketch that's like a little house that sits with four streets, with four streets around it and the street in the front, is love, acceptance. That's the front door. And the side doors are fear on one side, and pain on the other and the back door is anger.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? So, if I'm on—if I'm on anger, it's like, how did I get to the point I'm looking out the back of my house? And I would had to have come around the side on the fear side, or I had to come around on the pain side. So, what's the source of my anger? Am I angry because I'm in pain?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And is it emotional pain? Is it physical pain? What kind of pain is it? And if that's the source of my anger, then let me deal with the pain—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]



FREDERICK WESTON: —and figure out how to make the best—how to channel that anger in the best way so it gives me some healing, so I wind up facing back on love, at the front of the house.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And if it's fear, it's usually probably something that hasn't even happened yet, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: If it's pain, it's usually probably something that already happened.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: But if it's fear, it's something that probably hasn't happened yet. And sometimes, it's the fear of the pain—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —which has me just running around the house like a crazy dog chasing its tail, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? Just in a crazy cycle. So, yeah, I try to—my address is on Love Avenue, and if I keep looking out the front, you know, and I gaze out the window on the side—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know? Because that informs me. You know, and I try not to go out the back door.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But it's always at your back.

FREDERICK WESTON: I try to keep the anger at the back. Keep the anger behind me. Until I need it. Until I can make good use of all that energy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That's what I'm saying. Why do people go to church to learn how to hate people?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: There's all that energy. They're supposed to be spreading love, and they—you know? Yes, I believe white lives matter—[laughs]—but I don't believe in that Confederate flag, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I don't believe that you have to hate black people in order to love white people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And who are you white people?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because some of you white people were not in the white contingency, when I look back on—you know, you grew narrow on your ranks, and now you're including people that you hadn't included before, and see then, Britain dropped out of the Euro[pean Union]—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —because they were always—they were always the original white people to begin with, and they were the ones saying everybody in Europe was not white.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Do you think of Black Lives Matter in relation to HIV?

FREDERICK WESTON: I think black lives matter in relationship to these young people, post-traumatic stress.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, say more, say more.

FREDERICK WESTON: We were talking about post-traumatic stress, and I was saying, well, you know, I think everybody, when you get your diagnosis, that's post-traumatic stress. And I said, and many of us have lived through the World Trade Center, and we've lived through blackouts, and we've lived through [Hurricane] Sandy, and we've lived through some awful situations. And those are stressful. And my friend said, "I got one worse than that." And I'm like, "Yeah, what's that?" He says, "Four hundred years of slavery."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And we're still trying to deal with it, and we're not dealing with it very well.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, these are young people who are having their black experience. They're just having their black experience—they're awake.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Their blackness is being awakened—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —what it means to be black in America because that's a choice that they made. Because they're just—otherwise, they're from the islands. They're from whatever state they're from. Their—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

FREDERICK WESTON: —their skin color is dark, and some of them have mixed heritage that we don't even know about, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —but I choose to identify as black, and it's painful. And so, why does this happen this way, and why are things the way they are? And I'm not going to stand for the national anthem because I heard the third verse and I didn't like it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, we don't even know the second verse, but I heard the third verse —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And it got too deep for me, you know? So, I'm going to be on one knee, you know, until—because that's what the spirit that's moving in me tells me to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: The spirit that moves in me tells me to be on one knee. And then, I have—you know—and so, yeah. All that's happening. All that's happening. And I think it'll be a wonderful conversation, if we could just have it.

THEODORE KERR: What's the conversation?

FREDERICK WESTON: Ethnology and race.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And I—you know, I do the things. I do the things, and I [inaudible] white tops, black bottoms.

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean?

FREDERICK WESTON: White tops, black bottoms? You know, when you wear an outfit—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —usually, you put their white—you know, when you—when you want people to all dress alike—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and you don't have—we don't have money, so we tell everybody, "Wear a white shirt and a pair of black pair of pants."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, and that way, it'll be our uniform.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And it's kind of—signifies—it's a uniform.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Which is the new show at FIT, as a matter of fact, but it's a uniform. And even the tuxedo is like a white shirt—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, black proceedings. But then, I did—the white people always on top, and black is always on the bottom, so when you're talking about light and shade.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: White on top, black on the bottom, that's cool. But my negritude—in order for me to accept my blackness, I have to accept that black is a lot of awful things as well.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: It represents a lot of awful things as well, and I have to be aware of that when I take on the label—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —black. So, black means black magic, black market, black—you know, Black Sunday, black, black, black, black, black, black, black. So, all of that gets to be part of my blackness, and I have to be—I have to be accepting of that. It's the negative, but it's also strong. You know? You drop under a little drop of black in white, and white is no longer white. But then, it goes the other way, too. Drop a little white in a little black, and black is no longer black.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So—and that's—and the fact that we have identified ourselves as black, it's like, "What the? W-T-F."

[They laugh.]

Gosh. And then, we don't even know about the slavery, we're just finally finding out that some of the tribes were complicit, you know, in the slave trade, that we had black people in this country that owned slaves, and I mean—and until we start opening up the books and learning, but we have post-traumatic stress gets me to the point where I can't look at *12 Years A Slave* and appreciate it as a beautiful movie that it is. You know, and be able to separate the fiction from the reality, you know

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. WESTON: And that—yeah. That can't—that can't—and I can't appreciate. I—did you know that there were free people?

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: Did you even know that there were free people? And all of us were not slaves, as some of us were free people? You know, and then you need Henry Louis Gates in order to do your genealogy to inform you that your black people did not come from Africa. They came from Madagascar, from the Orient. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You're not that kind of black person. You're not a black African. You're a black—you know, you're an Asian who went through Madagascar. Your black—your black—your blackness came from Madagascar.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, when we do your genealogy, you're really Asian.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But you're just dark skinned, with—you know? So, I mean, yeah. Anyway, when people say—I love people like, you know, "Yeah, you're black. So, well, what kind of black are you? Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? Who's your momma, or daddy. You know, what do they do? What do you like to do? Where are you going? You know? Where have you been, and where are you going, you know? And then, white people's like, "Well, how white are you? Are you Irish?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: "Are you Catholic? Are you Jewish?" What are you? What kind of white are you? Are you—you know, are you—from one of those countries we don't even know about, but would you please point it out to me on the map so I will know—so I can find something about where people come from—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: So, yeah, I'm like, yeah, okay, white is okay, but—and then—and then—we were—there's a guy who was making a film, and he was going to do this character. A black character who wants to be white—that's the rawest way to put it out there; I don't know how he's going to frame the story. But we were having the discussion, and I was like, "You know, when I grew up"—again, my perception about gay is a little bit broader than other people's, but my idea about what race is broader than other people's because I went to school with the kids who were—they were white, but they weren't white enough to live in Grosse Pointe.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know, because they were Catholic or Jewish or whatever, and—or Polish, or Hungarian, or whatever. And some of them, when they came into this country, they changed their name because it was spelled some kind of crazy way and people couldn't pronounce it, so they Anglicized their name. You know? And now they—Donald Trump swears they were from Sweden when they're from Germany because Germans weren't popular at the time so they start telling a lie. You know? And so, when people say, "I'm white," I'm like, I can see that, you know? How white are you?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Where you'd come from? And I can learn something from people in the world and the thing—I can't—you know, that's like all Asians look alike. They're not. Some of them are Vietnamese. Some of them are Korean. Some of them are South Korean, Northern Korean.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: They're not. They don't all look the same, and they will until you start learning—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —what the difference is in the variety, and how to appreciate the variety. So, I'm like, you know—so, labels, you know, they're kind of cute, but then sometimes, they don't serve at all.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: They don't serve at all, and they only make life funky—need a tissue.

THEODORE KERR: Do you need me to get you one?

FREDERICK WESTON: I got one. Yeah, but I found the invitation to this—the—when I was in the back, I was going through things, and I found the Yin Yang Social Club group the invitation to the white party. I'm like, oh, you should pull that out—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: —and show it to Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's been on the copy machine. It's all handwritten in my script.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: My crazy print—I print better now, but—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what work are you making now? Talk to me about the art you're making now.

FREDERICK WESTON: Actually, I'm working on my clutter because when I don't have a specific project in mind, the work that I'm doing now out here is I want to do a thing on my favorite white shirts. I want to do 144 white shirts—I'd love to make an installation of 144 white shirts. It'd be all my old funky shirts and how they got to be raggedy and what they meant, the stories behind them.

THEODORE KERR: And both times that I've interviewed you, you've been wearing all white. Is that part of the process of the project?

FREDERICK WESTON: This is—this is actually—this is not white. This is the shade—

THEODORE KERR: That's true. It's eggshell?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah, eggshell. Cream. Ecrú.

THEODORE KERR: Look at you.

FREDERICK WESTON: Off white. It's my off. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Well, it's Labor Day, so there's that—

[They laugh.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know what's funny? Yesterday we were talking about—what's that bride store? Beckenstein's [Kleinfeld's]?

THEODORE KERR: I don't know.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's on 20th Street.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's the Bergdorf Goodman of bride's shops.

THEODORE KERR: Bride's—yeah, yeah, yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: It's the one where they do, you know, "Say Yes to the Dress."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And somebody said about white, "but the dress is not really white." I said, "Well, you know, they have 22 shades of white in there."

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: So you can always be telling the truth.

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, the brides—they, you know, everybody doesn't want pure white.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: And there's—you know, it's like, what variety. So, I'm talking about my shirts. Some of them are gray. Some of them are, you know. There's the warm—there's the warm tones, which start to lend themselves into khaki and brown. And then, there's the cool tones, which lend themselves into like, you know, gray—blue-gray, you know.

THEODORE KERR: And why 144?

FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, that's—my theory that everybody has 144 personalities, which is 12 times 12.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, say more. What do you mean?

FREDERICK WESTON: There are 12—we have 12 categories of our—I believe there are 12, I call them events. Social events, that represent life, work, and leisure. The life events—very formal, formal, semi-formal, and formal. The work events—dressy—I can't remember these; dressy—very formal, semi-formal, and formal. Dressy, business, athletic, outdoor. And then the leisure: casual, loungewear, house wear, intimate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so, I will say, if everybody had 12 personalities that they could separate, you know, which would represent their life, their work, and their leisure. And then, you have 12 situations which you have to show up for, which represent your life, your work, and your leisure. And you multiple them by themselves and you have 144 situations, and 144 different outfits. You pin it all—who do you feel that you are, and what are you bringing to the situation? And so, when I make the grid—in fact, when I was shooting the guys, I was trying to shoot them with as many different outfits as possible. And then, when I would plot them out, I'd plot them out as 144 different outfits. And the one on the lower left hand corner is very formal times very formal. And it's the most dressed up you'll ever be, for whatever that—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —it could be a wedding, it could be a funeral. You know, it's always changing, but it's the most dressed up that you'll ever be, and the most dressed up that your closet will produce.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And the one up in the corner is you—you probably with nothing on, because that's intimate-intimate. It's probably you by yourself, you know, doing your toilet or doing, you know, whatever the do is. But you don't—where clothes are not necessary—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and there's probably not a lot of audience—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —beyond yourself and your intimate partner. And then, so you plot that all out, and so, there's the clothes that you wear at home, and some of those you wear out onto the street. And then, some of those, you wear out into the big social events of your life because, you know, what you wear for your sports is in there somewhere, and what you wear for your outdoors is in there somewhere. And so, there's 144. It's my idea. And so, I wanted to do 144 shirts because I have over 144 shirts, but I think 144 would be—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know, it's like it just represent—and I don't have 144 black bottoms, but I have—I have enough. But I thought just doing the shirts would be fun, just to kind of present my fashion theory to the world.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] That's amazing. That's amazing. And how do you picture it?

FREDERICK WESTON: And so, again, it's the idea like, we have too many clothes, so you only need to dress—you only need 144 outfits, and you probably don't need a lot of clothes to make 144 different outfits if you know how to switch things up, but—

THEODORE KERR: And how do you see the shirts on view?



FREDERICK WESTON: Oh, I have a hanger that I designed. When I was working with Stella's bar, I designed a hanger because I was looking for a hanger that was narrow enough to squeeze a lot of coats in, but was sturdy enough to hold a big fur.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: But I'd love to have my hangers made, and to put all the shirts on hangers, and just to have them—ideally, it would be on one of those revolving racks, like you find in the cleaners—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That goes around and spins around [makes buzzing sounds].

THEODORE KERR: M Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Oh, right like the MoMA coat check.

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, one would check its stuff in the beginning?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And they would keep moving around like that. It would just be on a—

THEODORE KERR: Loop?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yeah. And it would present one in the front, and then it would switch to the next one. That would fun. I don't know, I've thought of a couple different ways. But just the idea of having 144 shirts. I was collecting—when I was working at Stella's bar, I let myself collect white tops and black bottoms because that was our uniform for the bar.

THEODORE KERR: To work at the bar?

FREDERICK WESTON: To work at the bar. In general, we wore a white top and black bottom. Because I was working in the coatroom, I could have a little more leave.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I wasn't—my outfits were a little more liberal, and a little bit more kooky.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: I had, you know, I could take some liberties.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: Because I was really only in the coatroom.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And that—because my—that was my role in the bar was really kind of like, you know, I was the flashy—I could be the flashy one—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know? And it's like, where the time they wouldn't let people—they wouldn't let the guys wear scarves into the bar because it was like they were wearing gang bandannas—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, yeah. Of course. Yeah, and colors. Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: And colors. They didn't want them—and I could wear mine.

THEODORE KERR: Do you think that's because they didn't see you as a threat?

FREDERICK WESTON: Because mine were—they weren't little bandannas. They were big scarves —

THEODORE KERR: Right. They were next level.

FREDERICK WESTON: They were next level.

THEODORE KERR: You know about Janelle Monáe, and how she used to only wear black and white?

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: I love that.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And it's because her mom was—

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Yes. She talked about the uniform—yes. I love her. I love her energy.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Me, too. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to —

FREDERICK WESTON: Anything that we haven't talked about? No, I'm just—I was refraining from using so many names today because if I start using names and I don't know remember everybody, I feel like I'm leaving somebody out. But I did—think I mentioned all of them.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: My primaries.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. Do you want to say any names now? Like, are you thinking of any names that you just—

FREDERICK WESTON: No, I mentioned—no, I think I named all the—I will mention one last group of friends that I have, which didn't have a name. I actually came from a party I was having with Bruce Benderson we were having—I was having Martin Luther King—when Martin Luther King became a holiday, we were trying to have Martin Luther King parties. The House of Authority was trying to like —so, Martin Luther King is a holiday. So, what does that look—what does that celebration look like?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And one of my series was the black and white, where I was writing all those words—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —that Martin represented, without using Martin Luther King's name?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: That was kind of like just wrapping paper or whatever, but you read those words and you automatically know who we're talking about. So, that was my Martin Luther King holiday. And then, we were having parties. And we were—they were yearly. And then, when I couldn't afford to have them anymore, Bruce Benderson and I had them—had it together. We had a couple together, down at his place. And inviting my friends, I invited my girlfriend, who used to sew with me when I was a kid, Quintell. And she brought a friend of hers from church, Edward. And of course, my friend Connie and Patrick were there. I met Connie through Patrick. Patrick invited me to the boat ride, and Connie and I were both his guests, but he had to work the boat, right, so we had to entertain each other by dancing like fools. And then, when we realized we lived so close to each other, we exchanged keys like in the first couple weeks or so, he's like my great friend. Anyways, Quintell had a place where she had breast cancer. And she was struggling, and we were trying to make sure she had proper nutrition. And so, I would take my food stamps, and Connie would cook every Sunday. We'd make a big meal every Sunday.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And then, so this group of people—Patrick, and Quintell, and my friend, Lisa, and Connie, and Edward, and Luis, and Darrell, and what's his—anyway, we would all—so, Sunday would be our day to eat. And surprisingly enough, we could get a lot off of the food stamp money, and Connie cooking because Connie wanted to cook, and he wanted to entertain so I'm like, Quintell, gets a meal every day, and we'll make enough food or everybody to take some food home. So, they would cook—it was like, a lot of people, but we were doing it on a weekly basis. And so, suddenly, we'd eat an early dinner, and we would go to—there was a club in the neighborhood we'd like to go—we'd like to go early to the club and start the party. We'd go in and nobody'd be there, so we'd start dancing, and after a while, the party would happen. And then, we would run home and we would watch *Six Feet Under*. But this eating thing wound up being like this dinner—then, everybody heard we were having dinner, and they wanted to come. Oh, Andy Bey was a remarkable jazz artist, and everybody should know who Andy Bey is. He was Connie's neighbor, and he would come eat with us. And so, we had this little family that would eat on Sundays, and it would—really came out of Connie's desire to cook—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and Quintell's need—

THEODORE KERR: —for food.

FREDERICK WESTON: —for food and good companionship—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —while she was going through what she was going through. So, that group—I think they deserve mentioned it—we're not as tight as we are any—oh, Augie, who lives across the street, who had me—help me—you know, yeah, we'd meet on Sunday, and Connie would make something big and wonderful, and we'd all sit around the table and we'd eat, and then we'd take food home.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And you know, that was kind of our—that was our Sunday—our Sunday—our Sunday little family. We're not—we're not—we don't get together anymore. It got to be too much.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

FREDERICK WESTON: Too expensive. And then, it was too many—the table wasn't—we didn't have enough leaves to put on the table, and if we did, we couldn't fit them in the apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: You know? And so—and then, some things happened—it was an old apartment, and things happened, and so we don't—that group doesn't meet anymore, but that group definitely—

THEODORE KERR: That's beautiful.

FREDERICK WESTON: —deserves mentioning.

THEODORE KERR: I really like that story because to me, the beginning—we think of the beginning of the AIDS crisis as being about communities showing up for each other, but it wasn't just at the beginning. Community—

FREDERICK WESTON: Always has to show up for each other. And sometimes, it's the only family people get. And so, if you—I mean, I feel sorry for the young people who are out there who can't find anybody else that's like them. Or the straight allies who can't embrace them. And I love like, our little artist communities—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —like the talent show—like what is it? Glee.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: If you can't find your place in the Glee club, you know, or if you can't find a sports team. There is a sport for every sissy—[laughs]—but if you can't find, I mean, be able to find some kind of way of expressing yourself that allows you to be yourself and you don't have to hide—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —or perpetrate, I feel sorry for them. And sometimes, it was the gym class. Sometimes, it was the art class.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so, when they start taking art and drama and theater out of the schools, they've—we've robbed the young people of their education—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —you know? I mean, there was a time—black folks that don't want to read, I don't get because there was a time where they didn't want—they wouldn't let you read. And now that you can read and won't read? I don't get it. I don't get it, you know? And then, if—you go out, like my grandmother said, your job is going to school—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —and getting an education.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And that—so I'm like, that's all I have to do? I'm going to try to be the best student I can be.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: And so, even now, whereas my job is to go to my Village Day treatment program, you know, I was going—I was going—at one point, I was going for seven days because I understood that the insurance companies were going to take it over, and that they weren't allowing people to come seven days. I said, well, I'm going to come here seven days so when they see me coming for seven days, and I'm expressing my need for being here seven days—and I'm showing what I'm doing on the seven days, maybe they'll give me seven days. But no, they gave me five—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —because that was all they were giving at the time. Some people got six—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: —so I'm happy for them. But some people, you know, they didn't realize what they had and where they were going, and they weren't paying attention, and so—and I was like, they only let—"my insurance company only lets me have one day," you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FREDERICK WESTON: "My insurance company only lets me have three days." I'm like, "Ooo, that's sad." You know?

THEODORE KERR: It's heavy.

FREDERICK WESTON: It is heavy.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Heavy, like your life being ruled by insurance—

FREDERICK WESTON: But I got five days—

THEODORE KERR: Good.

FREDERICK WESTON: —but I got five days, so I'm like, I'm good. I got a week. I've like—it is my job.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: I got a five-day job.

THEODORE KERR: Five-day work week.

FREDERICK WESTON: Five-day work week. I get two days off. You know?

THEODORE KERR: Right, right. So you can sleep in.

FREDERICK WESTON: Well, no. I need to get up and be doing something.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

FREDERICK WESTON: So, yeah. I have a wonderful. And thank you, Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Thank you.

FREDERICK WESTON: Thank you, Ted, and thank you, Smithsonian. I love all you people who are listening to my tape, wherever you are.

THEODORE KERR: And reading it.

FREDERICK WESTON: And reading it. And reading it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Okay. I love you. I'm glad we had this—okay, stop.

[END OF weston16\_2of2\_sd\_track02]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]