

TRANSCRIPT - MERVIN JENKINS

Interviewee: MERVIN JENKINS

Interviewer: KIERAN TAYLOR

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Mervin Jenkins: Where are you, baby?

KWT: So, is the interview team ready for this? Okay. Well, I'll turn it right over to you, but... yeah, I'll just turn it right to you to take it away.

Male Voice: Good morning, sir.

Mervin Jenkins: Good morning!

Male Voice: Could you tell us your whole name?

Mervin Jenkins: Mervin Jenkins, Mervin Antonio Jenkins, AKA Spec the Spectacular.

Male Voice: Yes, sir. From...

Mervin Jenkins: Eutawville, South Carolina.

Male Voice: Eutawville, South Carolina. I guess we're just going to ask you some general questions, starting out from childhood and working our way up to your career to today.

Mervin Jenkins: All right.

Male Voice: Can you tell us about your childhood, life as a child?

Mervin Jenkins: So, I grew up, um, in the very big town of Eutawville, South Carolina, which is in Orangeburg County. I say very big town, because Eutawville, to this

day, doesn't have a stoplight. So, it's very, very big.

Male Voice: How do you think that upbringing in Eutawville has impacted or affected your life today?

Mervin Jenkins: So, I'll tell you, I cut the questions short, obviously. The upbringing in Eutawville basically — and we'll come back to that question, if you don't mind. I grew up first-born to Mary and Melvin Jenkins. My mom, she retired as a schoolteacher. My dad still works as a local mechanic there in Orangeburg County, auto mechanic.

And I grew up really enjoying the early days, you know, not knowing that the family wasn't well-off financially, I mean, by no means rich. But above poverty, so sort of middle-class, I guess, maybe lower-middle-class, but I didn't recognize that as a kid. My parents definitely did a great job of making me concentrate on best things in life and the most important things. So, a very good childhood, good memories, man.

Male Voice: So, what about these young days sparked your interest in music and education, also?

Mervin Jenkins: Great question. So, I said my dad was an auto mechanic. I used to spend a lot of time with him down at the garage, and one thing I learned really quick is I didn't want to do that for a living. The greasy tools and changing oil and this goes on and on, especially overhauling an engine, and it sort of created the first, I guess, kind of resentment between my dad and I, because that was his plan, for me to take over the garage one day, I'm sure. And we would get in little spouts about it. You know, I'd rather be on the basketball court shooting around with the boys versus being down there watching him as I got older. And I just knew that it had to be something different.

I didn't really know what it was until about 1983. I'm in my dad's garage and Run DMC, "Sucker MC's" comes on the radio and I just heard that song and, obviously, rap was going on well before that, but that was the first one to really catch my attention and I said, yeah, I think I can do that and I want to do that. And it sort of just went from there, man.

Male Voice: So, would you say that music or education is your — which one are you more passionate about, music or education?

Mervin Jenkins: At this juncture in my life, education, for sure. You ask me that question twenty years ago, I'm sure the answer would have been different, but certainly education at this point.

Male Voice: Sure. So, we've done our research on you.

Mervin Jenkins: [laughs] That's scary.

Male Voice: Yeah. And we want to know if you can tell us more about the story. We saw you mentioned in one of your previous interviews a story of a homeless man and how he impacted your life, what he said. Can you tell us that story?

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah, sure. So, as an undergrad student at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, historically black university, I would frequent the Five Points area of Columbia, South Carolina. Anybody here from Columbia? Know Columbia really well? Five Points? If you know anything, you know Five Points, you know, especially at your age. You go down there and have a good time. So, I would have been... around your age at that time and I'd hang out in Five Points and almost every time I went down, there was a guy there. And, you know, looking back on it, I remember interviewing on NPR, and I said that the guy was homeless. But I'm really not sure. You know, I saw him on the

streets all the time.

So, he saw me this one day and he stopped me and he said, "Dread." Now, I'm bald-headed now, but you guys got to imagine back then, I had been growing dreadlocks. As a matter of fact, I just cut them maybe five or six years ago, and they were down to my waist when I cut them. But I had no choice. I was going bald. So, end of that story. But anyway, this guy had dreads, and he happened to be bald in the middle with long dreads coming down the side. And he stopped me and he's always called me Baby Dread once I got to know him.

And he said, "Baby Dread," he said, "Let me ask you a question, man. You always up and down the streets there. I see you with your boys. You know, what's... what's life for you? What's ahead, you know? What are you going to do?" And he started asking questions that I really wasn't thinking about, didn't even take time to reflect on, and long story short too late, he was basically asking me, am I aware of my surroundings as far as the people I was rolling with. And why he identified me as somebody to pull from the group and have that conversation with, I don't know, but it triggered something in me and it was enough to make me go back to campus.

At the time, I was getting high every week with the boys and I'd never drunk much in college but smoked the ass of marijuana. So, I was getting high and all that other stuff, and I went back and just kind of said to my group that I was rolling with like, look, fellas, there's a whole lot more to life than what we're doing right now, and why don't we try to flip it up a little bit? Maybe on the weekends, we go to your house. You live in Florida. Meet your parents. You guys come down to Eutawville and meet mine. We go to New York to yours and next weekend, next month. And they just kind of looked at me

like, really, dude? And I bounced. I left the group, never looked back.

And at my age now, I'm looking at some of the guys that were in that room when I walked out, and we're talking about at least twenty guys. I probably wouldn't trade places with fifteen of them, without even thinking, off the top of the head. Life just didn't turn out too well, but they stayed on that same trajectory. And, you know, it is what it is, man.

Male Voice: So, what about that transition, you know, I mean, you're obviously seeing those guys every day and you're making life changes. Was that transition, I guess, to a more successful path, was it a tough transition?

Mervin Jenkins: It was probably one of the toughest things I've done to this day, man, to be quite frank with you. Peer pressure is a beast, man. You know, we think it's something that just affects young people, but peer pressure even now as an adult, you deal with that for the rest of your life. And I remember... I'll give you a perfect example.

I got arrested for shoplifting a pack of Black & Milds in Columbia, South Carolina, the little Black & Milds cigars? Didn't have to do it. You know, the mom had sent me my weekly allowance. I had like a hundred dollars' cash in my pocket, another check for a hundred dollars or maybe even more. And I decided with buddies that I was going to do the cool thing, and instead of paying for a box of cigars, I was going to steal it. So, I got arrested, taken down — it was Forest Acres, South Carolina — and ended up getting pushed from the local jail cell down to County.

And when I was going down to County, if you can imagine — and I'm in college at the time. So, what's going through my head is a couple of things. One, oh, my dad's going to kill me, because he's telling me all my life never go to jail. You know, he always

bragged about the fact his mom had ten kids and nobody never got arrested. And then, I'm also thinking, wow, I'm in school to be a teacher. In order to get a license, I got to have a clean record. So, that's two, three years' worth of college gone down the drain. And I'm in line. They got us all like handcuffed or whatever.

And the lady who is doing intake, she's reading off the offenses that the folks have committed. So, she's like, "Mr. Graham, we got you for armed larceny. Go to the back." So, they'd go back into this big cell. "Mr. Rice, we got you for assault and battery. Go back to the cell." Then she goes, "Mr. Jenkins, we got you for..." And she looked at the paper and she looked at me. She smiled and said, "Come here." So, I walk up to the window, and she goes, "I'm going to do you a favor. I won't even read what we got you for. You just go in the back." So, she was trying to, you know, keep me from getting back there and being Jones and, who knows, beat up on by the guys who had some of the hard crime.

So, I go in the back, and nervous as hell, I get back there in the big pen. It's about as big as this room, thirty guys all just, you know, it was a crazy three-day experience, but I get back there and this guy, who I didn't know but he knew me from music, he runs up and he's like, "Yo, Spec! What's up, man? What you doing back here?" I was like, "Yo, what you doing back here?" He said, "Man, you know, I was fighting these kids on the USC campus, man. Yo, brother," he tells this story. Then he comes back and he goes, "What happened to you?" I said, "Man, I was driving on twenty-six. I had two kilos of coke on me, son. They got me."

You know, but it was peer pressure, man. You know, I wasn't going to tell the guy, "Hey, I stole some Black & Milds," after he told that war story, you know? So, peer

pressure is real. We still deal with it. It's one of the things that I'm passionate about talking to young people about, because for them, it's really, really hard, man. It's one thing when you haven't fully developed and you're dealing with people coming at you with sometimes the right thing, most times the wrong thing. How do you interact? How do you deal? So, anyway, I got off topic there, but, obviously, I love telling that story.

Female Voice: So, my questions are more focused around your musical career. So, I'm just going to start with, you know, you told us the story about the garage and, you know, hearing the music or hearing the rap with your dad. But was that what sparked your inspiration to want to become a hip-hop artist?

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah, it was something about Run DMC. When that song came across the radio, I can almost like yesterday hear the disc jockey introducing the song, saying it's a brand-new hit, and the beat, [beats rhythm] and then the guys coming in, "Two years ago, a friend of mine, asked me to say some MC rhymes, so I — ." And then he goes on and on. But anyway, I fell in love at that moment. That's — that was it for me. That was it. Yeah, absolutely.

Female Voice: So, how did you start your journey into becoming a hip-hop artist after you figured out like, hey, this is something I'm really interested in? How did you get started on that?

Mervin Jenkins: So, there's an art in hip-hop called freestyle. And some people really do it and some sort of don't do it and some don't do it at all but they say they're doing it. And what the freestyle is basically, with or without a beat, the music is playing, and you're rhyiming in real time. So, in other words, I'm rhyiming about what I'm seeing happening right now, just coming off the top of the dome. There's a few different terms

for it. It happened for me by accident, but it ended up being one of my biggest strong suits in the music business.

So, I'm in middle school, and a cousin of mine from New York City had gotten kicked out of school in New York, came down South. He pretty much introduced the whole middle-school campus to marijuana. I mean, remember, Eutawville, South Carolina, we probably hadn't seen — most of us hadn't seen drugs at that point. But he came down, and he brought these things with him, but he also brought breakdancing and hip-hop music. And, again, it was new. Back then, the girls enjoyed singing it. I knew the girls got excited. The boys were passionate about it. And at that time, I had a little introduction myself, so I decided I was going to give it a shot.

And I never forget. My cousin came to me and said, "Yo, man, we're doing these battles in the bathroom at lunch. I want you to join me tomorrow for a battle." And I'm like, yeah. You know, I've seen the battles, you know. They open the bathroom doors. You got one guy in the corner doing the beatbox, two guys squaring off rhyming against one another. So, I go home and write this rhyme thinking I'm going to show up tomorrow and me and my cousin, who was pretty famous for doing it, were going to battle two other people.

Well, I get to the bathroom and the crowd is there. It's lunchtime. And he's like, "All right, you ready, man? You're going to go against me." And I just went, "Oh, snap," and literally forgot everything I wrote. Like, I got nervous, and everything I wrote just went out the window. So, the guy starts beatboxing and the crowd is looking at me like, okay, okay, okay. So, I just started rhyming, and I rhymed about the shoes he had on and — of course, I'm talking bad about it — and it happened to connect. And the crowd went

crazy. He didn't get a chance to rap that day. And that sort of launched my career as the freestyle MC and just never stopped.

Female Voice: So, I have to ask, why the nickname Spectac, and what gave you that kind of inspiration to —.

Mervin Jenkins: That's just the short of it. There's not a lot of rappers, even to this day, that have mastered the art of freestyle. And it's a very difficult thing to do. I mean, you got rappers that are excellent writers. They write songs really, really well. But if they came in here right now and you told them to freestyle about what they're seeing here in the room, they'd probably be like, "Yo, yo, mic check. I'm sitting down in a class. I remember when I didn't pass. Yo, yo," and they'll sound just like verses of a real freestyle MC, which I'll give a demonstration hopefully when this wraps up today.

Female Voice: Okay, so, what would you say is the ultimate message you are trying to say with your music and your lyrics?

Mervin Jenkins: It's changed over the years. You know, I went from... I don't know where I started, even. I think it's safe to say I started more just I want you guys to know I'm an MC, the braggadocious, you know, I'll do this and I'll do that to you, to a more conscious... De La Soul. I'm calling some of the old groups from my era. A Tribe Called Quest, those guys, they came about what you can call a native tongue. Queen Latifah and those guys are more positive, sort of influence vibe in the rap music.

And near the end of my career in it, it became just more of a mixture of have a good time and here are some things to think about. So, I sort of always walked that fine line, never really got into the gangster stuff, you know — I'm-a rob you, shoot you, blahsey-blah. It wasn't the life I was living. And, you know, never got into what was

referred to as the booty music, the Down-South shake-it-up kind of music. I just... stayed in the middle.

Female Voice: How does, if at all, being a former principal translate into being a rapper? How do the two like balance each other out?

Mervin Jenkins: It's weird thinking that there's a balance. I mean, when I came up doing this, people wouldn't even put education and hip-hop in the same sentence. And now, we've gotten to a point where I got a good friend, 9th Wonder. 9th is a traveling professor at... Harvard he does a class. North Carolina Central is where he started doing the class, but he does a hip-hop class at these big universities.

You know, 9th was a guy that I introduced him to my manager at the time. My manager had a connection with Jay Z. Unbeknownst to us, Jay Z was a fan of 9th's music. The introduction happened, and now the guy has toured the world, has his own record label signed under a major label, and he is adamant about bringing hip-hop music and fusing it with academics and has done really well with it.

For me, working as a school principal, for the most part, it was just the fact that young kids, experience working in school with majority black and brown students, that wasn't my career, but it was for one point. I started teaching here in Charleston at Alice Birney Middle, majority African-American student population at the time when I was there. I went to Chapel Hill, North Carolina at the high school in Chapel Hill, where it was majority white.

And then to transition back to Horton Middle School in Chatham County, North Carolina, again, majority African-American, for black and brown students that really had this passion for the music, hip-hop specifically, it just sent a very strong message to those

guys, because, honestly, growing up, the guys that were involved in hip-hop music, either they made it in the game or they ended up saying, "Well, music didn't work out. I'm-a sell drugs." Or vice versa. And do some other things that probably weren't the right thing to be doing. And it never had a happy ending for an old guy in hip-hop for quite some time.

And that started to change over the last several years. I mean, you really got hip-hop music as growing up, as I like to say. So, a lot of the guys now that did it are doctors and lawyers and the list goes on and on. So, yeah.

Female Voice: How do you feel about today's current rap music?

Mervin Jenkins: Mm, mm, mm. I knew that was coming. So, when I started doing it, my dad would always come around and go, "Boy, what the hell are you doing? That ain't no real music. You need to listen to James Brown and Otis Redding." You know, and I got that for a long time, you know.

And for a while, I started doing it with the younger generation. My son is involved with the music scene now. He's actually living between Atlanta and L.A., and he's touring with a guy by the name of Young Thug. I'm not sure if you guys are familiar with Young Thug, but that's his entourage and he's with those guys. You know, supposedly the guy makes ninety-thousand dollars a show, and when you're doing several shows a month, that's not a bad living. You know, I think it's their time.

You know, I fought that for a very long time. I used to do these songs, that ain't real hip-hop and all this other stuff. And the reality is, we aged out. You know, we still have our demographics that likes the Golden Age of hip-hop, the 90s era and so forth. But it's a new generation. And I just respect the fact that we've had our turn. You know, that's kind of where I'm at right now.

Female Voice: Do you currently have a favorite current rap artist, and then, who is your favorite of all time?

Mervin Jenkins: I can't give you a favorite all-time. I mean, I was a huge fan, obviously, Run DMC. It kind of came in spells for me, so Run DMC... A Tribe Called Quest, Pete Rock & CL Smooth... Common, and, obviously, a few other folks, Mos Def and so forth. But right now... I'm going to — I like Drake a lot. I like Drake a lot. I... what's his name. You guys help me out here. I'm embarrassed I don't even know this, but I know it, can't remember. West Coast guy with Dr. Dre. Young Buck, come on.

Male Voice: [00:21:01]

Mervin Jenkins: No, no, Young Buck. God!

Male Voice: [00:21:08]

Mervin Jenkins: I almost want to put the tape on Pause. This is bad, man. Yeah... God! Thank you, thank you, thank you. I would have never — that name was so far away from me just now. Kendrick Lamar. You know. And it's not necessarily buying an album and listening to the music. It's more about the message that they bring with the music. You know, they still — and Kendrick Lamar does a better job of it than Drake, but, you know, when you start talking the positive stuff, the sales usually don't go as well. And that's one of the reasons why we get the music we get, as far as I'm concerned, you know? People chase the money. They don't chase it for the passion, you know.

Female Voice: So, this is my last question before I pass it on, and it's if you could do a collab song with any hip-hop artist from any time period, who would it be and why?

Mervin Jenkins: I've done it. Big Daddy Kane. Big Daddy Kane was the Jay Z of my era. He was what Jay Z is today for that time. And when I got to record with Big

Daddy Kane, it was — I left him out as one of my influences, actually. He was a great influence and probably who I most coined my style after, if you look back and go over all of the artists I've encountered. But, yeah, recording with Big Daddy Kane was a milestone for me and just one of those things that you'll always remember. So, there it is. Yeah. Thank you.

Male Voice: I've listened to a lot of your music on YouTube.

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah.

Male Voice: And it seems like you rap with a purpose.

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah.

Male Voice: I wanted to ask you that that is not a common theme that we see a lot, a lot of times in rap. So, I wanted to know, what exactly inspired you to take up this thing?

Mervin Jenkins: Well, first of all, Rice, I think most artists rap with a purpose. Sometimes the purpose is, as I stated earlier, I want to get paid. You know, but there is a purpose behind it and all of the music, I would think. But are you trying to pass along a positive message would be the question. And it's hard, man. I mean, you know, if you're in the club and it's the booty-shake club, you don't necessarily want to hear a song about, you know, police killings or anything like that. You know, you want to hear turn up, you know, do this, do that, smoke out. That's just the way it is, you know.

And, fortunately or unfortunately, hip-hop music ties right into that pipeline, man. I mean, you can't even get a McDonald's commercial nowadays without a hip-hop beat behind it. So, personally, I just, it's what I'm passionate about. I think if you do something that a young person, especially, can listen to and be influenced to go out and do

something bigger and better, then you're making a difference, man. And, you know, who doesn't want to leave the world just a little better than they found it? That's kind of my motto in life right now, you know, leaving here and being able to say I did a few things, made a few tweaks that's going to make it a whole lot better for the young folks coming up.

Male Voice: You mentioned how rap has changed, but you didn't really give your own opinion on it, so I want to know, do you think it's a change for the better or for the worse?

Mervin Jenkins: I really don't have an answer for that one. So, here's the thing. I have to put it in perspective. When I was coming up, rap music wasn't played on the majority of radio stations. Today you can't go to a country station without hearing a country rap song coming on. You know, I came up in the time when there was probably one station in your area that you can hear a rap song on. So, with that in mind, and being in the Bible Belt, usually those rap songs were pretty clean-cut.

Now, was there bad, negative rap out there? Absolutely. There was gangsta rap before I even knew it was gangsta rap, you know? It didn't start on the West Coast. They were doing it on the East Coast, too. But it was there. It just didn't — I mean, we didn't have the social connections that we have now. A person like Sir Mix-a-Lot - do your research guys and girls. He had a big hit, "My Posse's On Broadway." This guy became a platinum-selling artist on one coast. We didn't know about him over here until years later, but that's just the way it worked back then.

So, back to your question, I think the negative element, if you want to call it that, of hip-hop was always there. It just didn't get the attention that it's getting now. I mean,

obviously, again, being more connected, people being into the stuff they're into, it's a whole lot easier to put it out there. So, I think it's the same. I just think the way we go about putting it out, marketing, advertising, etc., etc. is a whole lot different now. Yeah.

Male Voice: How do you feel rap themes and educational themes contradict each other, if there is a contradiction?

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah, the contradiction lies in what we believe it to be. We've always looked at education as this great thing that elevates us to the next level. I happen to agree with that. But we've always stereotyped rap and hip-hop, the culture of hip-hop as this negative thing. You know, oh, these guys and girls are from the projects, don't have a good chance of succeeding in life, probably going to have tons of children and won't take care of them, etc., the list goes on and on. That's been tagged to hip-hop music, unfortunately.

And I've always, knowing how passionate folks were about the music, and, I mean, even white kids. At Chapel Hill High School, where it was majority white, I had kids, two I can think of right now, two white boys that are still in the music business right now. One is living over in Korea and has a big career as a Korean hip-hop artist, you know, and another is right still in Chapel Hill, but he produces and engineers for some of the biggest cats that come out of that area as far as music is concerned.

So, you know, you sort of, when you think about the two, I like to, in my own world, say that some great things have happened when I think about education and hip-hop coexisting. Great things have happened, and I'm continuing to make it happen. Even going out now, when I speak with young folks, I talk about the fact that, guess what, if you can take hip-hop music and tweak it in a way where kids can attach to it in class and

learn something, then go for it.

A perfect example, when I was at Alice Birney, I taught art history. And I started making comparisons with some of the hip-hop artists at the time that were still big, and the kids ate it up, man and were able to connect with the work. So, I'm trying to remember this, but I think I did a comparison of the Renaissance artists Michelangelo, and I compared him to Tupac Shakur. And I talked about the fact that Michelangelo, like Tupac, loved the nightlife. This guy partied all the time. Like Tupac, Michelangelo died very young in life. I mean, he didn't live to be an old man, just like Tupac Shakur, you know.

And then make the comparisons of Biggie Smalls and Leonardo da Vinci, you know, and just being a man of many styles and flavor. It was always something to connect with the students. You got to want to do it, man. You know, I mean, somebody else can take what I just said and put a negative spin on it and run with it, but I've always had that approach of let's make it positive, let's make it good for the youth.

Male Voice: It's clear that one of your main goals is to educate or throughout or through teaching. So, how do you feel you have been successful at that goal?

Mervin Jenkins: You know, I tell teachers all the time, you really don't know. I mean, right now, you guys got a teacher that you're working with, and at the end of the day, you know, what are you going to do? That's going to determine the success, you know? When you guys can shoot a text message or get on Facebook or whatever, Instagram, and shoot a message back and say, "Hey, Professor, I just want to say, man, thanks for doing that musical study we did that semester. Believe it or not, I'm married to somebody now who is big into jazz music, and it was kind of cool being able to have a

conversation."

You know, when you send a message like that back, then you got us going, wow, I never would have thought, but way to go. You know, it's little small things like that.

You know, I didn't make my first trip overseas until I was forty years old. And you know what inspired me? I just told you I was teaching art at Alice Birney. I was teaching art history. So, I'm talking about the Renaissance Period like I lived it, and I enjoy that period of music, art, and etc., etc., that period in time. But I never had gone to Europe. Well, one day, I'm at home in Atlanta, Georgia, and I get an email on Facebook. And it's my boy Brandon from middle school that I taught. And he's now in the Navy.

And Brandon is like, "Hey, Mr. Jenkins, I don't know if you remember me, man, but I just wanted to say thank you, man. I'm out here stationed in Rome," or wherever he was in Italy," and I had a chance to go by the Sistine Chapel, man. And it was just like you described it to us in school, man." So, I'm sitting there with my wife laughing, going, "You know, the irony of this, I've never been to the Sistine Chapel, you know?" And she was like, "Well, you know what? Fortieth birthday is coming up. Let's go." And we did.

You know, and, again, I was inspired by him, you know? But that was a reflection of putting some good out in the world. Here's a man now serving his country, and he took a minute to go back fifteen, twenty years and say, "Let me find Mr. Jenkins on Facebook and send him an email, because I can't believe I'm in the Sistine Chapel, man, as much as he talked about that." That's when you know you've made a difference, you know?

And sometimes, you just don't find out. I don't think it's in our cards to really get a big pat on the back, "Hey, man, great job," you know? When you're in education, you don't go in looking for that. You know, you just go in, you do the job. If somebody comes

back and says, "Hey, man, I appreciate what you did," great. If not, just keep planting the seeds and, you know, don't look back.

Male Voice: Thank you.

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah.

Female Voice: I did have one final question, and this is kind of just a random one that I just remembered. We were spit-balling and talking about the questions we wanted to ask you and one of the biggest ones was, when you were a principal or even now as an educator, do you ever have students come up and try to rap-battle you?

Mervin Jenkins: So, that's a funny one. I guess I will know that my time is really up the day that this doesn't work in my favor. Every time I speak to a group of students, high-school students, particularly, I walk in and I say, "Hey, I'm Mervin Jenkins. I used to be a school principal," dah, dah, dah, and they're all sitting like this, you know. Yeah. And then I go, "And I also rap." And then they kind of go... and they start laughing.
[exaggerated laugh]

And I'm like, "Yeah. I bet some of you rap, right here in the audience. I tell you what. I'm going to rap later on, and anybody here that wants to go after me, feel free to do so." And by that time, some of the boys and girls are like hitting their favorite rapper in the audience, like, "Yeah, you're going to get him, man. You're going to get him. You're going to get him." And then I rhyme at the end. And then I look at that person and go, "You ready?" They're like, "No, I'm good." And that's how you know you still got it.

[Audience laughs]

Mervin Jenkins: So, that day that the young man or young lady gets up and gets up and says, "Yeah, I got you," and grabs the mic and knock me out of the box, then I'll

know it's time to bow down and gracefully exit. But until then, we're rocking and rolling.
Thank you.

Female Voice: Well, that's all the questions that we had, so I think we're going to open it up to everyone else and let them ask anything that they need to ask you.

Mervin Jenkins: Talk to me, folks.

KWT: Yeah, shout it out. I don't know if the mic will get back to you.

Male Voice: Sorry. [00:33:51] a rapper over there. What's his name?

Mervin Jenkins: It's Ryan Miyami, but what does he go by? That's a great question, man. Let me get back to you on that one. I have to go on — I'm not even on Facebook anymore. Good God. Yeah, I have to look it up for you, but, yeah, his real name is Ryan Miyami, and he's from Chapel Hill. But it's he and one other guy. They got a little duo thing going on and getting a lot of tour spin over in that side of the world.

Male Voice: Is he Korean?

Mervin Jenkins: No, no, no, no. He's a white boy from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Yeah, he just graduated high school, decided he wasn't going to college. He was going to jump straight into the music, and that's what he did, you know. I'm sure his mom and dad are probably looking at me sideways, like you started this, Mr. Jenkins, but, you know, the guy had a passion and he went for it. And my thing is, if you're going to do it, do it while you're young. Yeah.

KWT: Other questions out there?

Mervin Jenkins: Don't hold back, folks. Questions are questions. You know, if it's floating, ask the question.

KWT: You told me a great story about a student, an encounter with a student at

the Cat's Cradle.

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah.

KWT: Do you remember?

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, the Cat's Cradle is a popular venue in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, all genres of music, more rock music, but they do a hip-hop thing every now then. They push a lot of groups out of Chapel Hill, North Carolina through the Cat's Cradle. And one year, when I was assistant principal at the high school, I was asked to open up for KRS-One. And he's one of the original motivational, positive, black power, however you want to put it.

And I go to the show and I'm onstage doing my freestyle set and the way it works — I'll do it today, as a matter of fact — I'll get one person and ask them to just, when the music drops, move around and point at anybody or anything they want to. So, I get this one guy to do that, and as he's going through the crowd, keep in mind, I'm performing, so half of the crowd is my students. Like, they just snuck in. They shouldn't even have been there, but it was like, oh, Mr. Jenkins is performing tonight, yo. We're going.

So, as the guy is walking around pulling people out, somebody up front is smoking a joint and he grabs the joint, my point person, and like passes it over to me while I'm in mid freestyle. So, I'm thinking quick, going I can't puff on a dang joint, assistant — so, I literally, as he's passing me the joint, I go, "Me smoke that, dude, come on, be sensible. Half of the crowd knows I'm a high-school assistant principal." And the crowd just went crazy and he kind of like took the joint and eased out of the scenery.

And I laughed with KRS-One backstage and said, "You know what? For three seconds, smoking weed wasn't cool." You know, like that's — but that's the art of the

freestyle, man. And you got to be careful freestyling. I mean, sometimes you slip and say the wrong thing. I had quite the story with that one. Yeah, I can't even share that one. I'll tell you that one off the books a little later. All right. Questions, questions.

Mervin Jenkins: Yes?

Male Voice: Do you feel like growing up in this area made it more difficult to — .

Mervin Jenkins: Hell, yeah! Yes, yes, yes, yes! Great question. Bible Belt, for one. I had a friend who used to promote music for some of the big labels up North. Keep in mind, when I came out doing hip-hop music, South Carolina, North Carolina, we didn't have a sound. And when I say we didn't have a sound, this is what I mean. New York, you had the New York rappers. You know who they were. West Coast, you had N.W.A. and all the groups that sort of fell in that category, which we call gangsta rap. Down South, Miami, you had Luke from 2 Live Crew, booty-popping, you know, Down South music. We didn't have a sound.

And the promoter said to me one day — I'll never forget this. He said, "Merv... the record industry doesn't want the Carolinas to have a sound." In other words, we don't want you to have a popular group come out of the Carolinas. And I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you guys are the sampling ground for everything. They can take any genre of music, bring it to the Carolinas, and you guys will give a good feedback on yes or no, this can fly or it can't fly."

In other words, you couldn't take a New York record, go to the West Coast back then, and play it in the West Coast to try to get a response on if it's good or not, because they were just going to say, "No, that's not good, man. This is our music." And vice versa. You couldn't take a West Coast record, an N.W.A. record and go to New York, for

the most part, and play it and have people go, "You like this?" "Nah, man. That's whack!" And same down South. But the Carolinas was open ground.

But because it was that, it definitely made it difficult for somebody coming out of the Carolinas to make it happen. And quite frankly, if you think about it, we haven't had a platinum-selling artist born and raised in the Carolinas to this day. Now, North Carolina, you got your boy J. Cole that came out of Fayetteville there, under Jay Z now. But other than that, you know, your Petey Pablo quick thing that went, take your shirt off, hit it around like a helicopter, I mean, you know, that was five minutes of fame. But just that consistent this is our artist, yeah, man, great question.

Female Voice: I had one. Was there a moment where, during your music career, where you kind of stepped back and was like, I made it, kind of thing? Was there like one big like this-is-it moment for you?

Mervin Jenkins: Working with 9th Wonder. That was a hard pill to swallow when it didn't just go over the top like I wanted it to. I had a friend in Chapel Hill that said to me, "I got a producer, Spec, I want you to meet." And he took me to an apartment in Raleigh. A few guys were staying there. And upstairs was this guy, and he was making beats and, you know, he was living paycheck to paycheck. And it was 9th Wonder. And at the time, he wasn't the 9th Wonder that, if you do the research, we all know and love today.

And I said to him, after hearing his music, I went, "Dude, you are the next Pete Rock of production," which was the best compliment you could probably give somebody in hip-hop, and he went, "Aw, no. I don't think so, man." I said, "Yo, I know a few people. Let me get your tape, and let's talk." And I got his music or a CD and I gave it to

my manager. My manager had a connection to Jay Z. Come to find out, Jay Z was a fan of his music.

He didn't notice, but my boy was like, well, my manager, his connect said, "Yo, I'm doing *The Black Album* with Jay Z and don't you guys know 9th Wonder?" And we're like, "Yeah." He said, "Well, every time Jay Z goes into the booth, he plays his music as inspiration, man." I was like, "Really?" He was like, "Yeah. Like, can we make this happen?"

So, a week later, my manager and I fly to New York. Jay Z and Beyoncé are in the studio. They meet for the first time, and the rest was history. Two days later, he was recording on Jay Z's *Black Album*, the song came out, the royalties from that song alone changed his life, and now, like I said, I mean, he's working around the country and around the world doing stuff, you know. So, yeah. Good, good stuff, man. Good stuff.

KWT: What can you tell us about —

[00:42:10 Audio loss]

Mervin Jenkins: Hold that — hold that thought. Don't.

Male Voice: You were talking about how there was like different sounds for different parts of the country, West Coast, New York. What were some of the differences that picked up through each [00:42:25]?

Mervin Jenkins: New York was all about lyricism. So... I'm trying to dig back in the crates here. You'd hear a rapper like... Nas, for example, you know, when you think New York. And Nas is truly a lyricist. Like, you know he's passionate about connecting the words and how to put it together and make it work. I mean... Pete Rock & CL Smooth, you know, one of my favorites, you know. CL Smooth, you know, "I reminisce

for a spell, or should I say a payback, twenty-three years ago to keep it on track, a birth of a child on the eighth of October, a toast, but my granddaddy came sober, count all the fingers and toes, now I suppose you hope the little black boy grows, grows." Lyricism, connecting the words.

You go to the West Coast, and think about Tupac. As big as Tupac was, his music hits you here. You know. But it didn't really get lyrical as far as connecting words and — it was, you know, you listen to a song like "Dear Mama," you know, "Even though you was a black queen, mama, never really ever seen no drama." It was just a cadence he had, a delivery that, again, it didn't focus on the lyricism, but it hit you here in the heart. And that was the difference.

When you went down South, if anybody is familiar with Luke from 2 Live Crew, I mean, these were the guys that took it all the way to the Supreme Court with their album *Banned in the U.S.A.*, because the government came in and said that this music is too raunchy. And if you know Luke, his music was simply about... get naked and let's have some fun. Go listen to any of his music right now, and that's what it's about. You know, everything — I can't even repeat the lyrics from the songs, because it was that raunchy.

But, man! You talk about sound good in a club? When you're in a club, hot Miami dancing and that song comes — any one of his records come on, the dance floor went crazy. And that was their sound.

But, again, based on where you were from, if you went with that Down South up to New York, people would look at you like, "Man, come on, man. What — that's whack!" You know, and eventually it all became a good melting pot, because other

places, you had Chicago eventually come in with their sound. You had New Orleans come in, Master P and the Hot Boyz and those guys. Different places started bringing their sound to the table. Texas came in with their sound. So, eventually, it sort of all came together. And it's not as... definitive as it once was, but it still exists to some degree.

Yeah, great question.

KWT: This is kind of a continuation of that question. Is there anything you can say about a Lowcountry or a Charleston sound?

Mervin Jenkins: Yeah. So... the Geechee, the Geechee sound. One of the big problems in hip-hop for us coming out of the South was, for a long time, because we were the testing ground — and this is my theory — we never defined a South Carolina or a Lowcountry, for that matter, hip-hop sound. We spent our time trying to either mimic the New York rappers or the Up North rappers, trying to mimic the West Coast rappers, trying to mimic the Down South rappers. We never developed our own sound. And looking back, that probably could have been the biggest reason for missing the boat, outside of what I said about the whole testing-ground theory, is record labels wanted the next thing. They wanted the next hot thing.

So, if I'm here in South Carolina and I'm doing a record and I sound just like Q-Tip from A Tribe Called Quest, which I was compared to quite often in those days, it doesn't do any good to take it to somebody and say, "Hey, sign this guy, because he's like — ." And a matter of fact, that happened. That happened. I'm friends with the comedian Chris Rock. Chris Rock took my demo to Russell Simmons, Russell Simmons that owns Def Jam. And this was, I mean, I was probably barely twenty-something years old back then. But his response was, "Russell played it. He thought you had skills. But he was like,

'He sounds just like Q-Tip. We already got a Q-Tip.'

So, looking back, maybe if I had added a little — like added a little Geechee dialect to it, you know, but, honestly, back then, that was considered embarrassing in the rap game, because people would automatically go, "Oh, that dude is from down South. He can't rap. Down South folks ain't got no skills." So, I avoided that and tried to sound like up North. You know, so I don't think we ever got our taste of the pie.

Now, there were some great groups that were making things happen in the Lowcountry. One of the ones that I worked directly with was called The Flavor MCs or they went by the name Flavor. And The Flavor... what you guys probably would know them for, if you're into South Carolina history, they're logo was a Confederate flag in the African colors, red, black, and green. And it had some sign, "The past is the past, The Flavor is the future." That was sort of their whole marketing strategy.

And some young girl wore the tee shirt to some high school in Summerville, got suspended. It made national news. That was their claim to fame. The tee shirt blew up. The group didn't blow up as big as the tee shirt, but the tee shirt issue, I think, ended up going to the Supreme Court or something, like it was really, really big. And that was the guys behind that, The Flavor.

And the same thing, I mean, these guys had Geechee accents, most of them. Some were very close friends and family of mine. And it was three MCs. They got a major recording record dealer, probably the first hip-hop group to get a major deal. Dick Griffey, or whoever the guy was back then that signed them, and it just didn't take off completely. They got the deal. We all felt like, oh, this is it, man. It's about to happen. But it didn't just skyrocket to what we see some of the stars experiencing today. Yeah.

But that was my personal little experience there, Kieran.

Male Voice: If somebody asked you to define hip-hop, how would you respond?

Mervin Jenkins: hip-hop is a culture. You know... just think about it that way.

When you say hip-hop, it's the way you speak. It's that slang. It's that swag. It's dancing, different forms of dancing, breakdancing being one of the biggest. It's DJing, the art of DJing, getting up on the ones and twos and cutting and scratching. It's the MCing element of it, the rapping side of it. The artwork, graffiti artwork. Like, it's a culture. It's really, truly the B-boy, B-girl culture is what it is. That's how I describe it.

Mervin Jenkins: Yes.

Male Voice: So, nowadays in 2017, you'll have people from like New York City, Charlotte, North Carolina, or like Atlanta, Georgia all listening to a bunch of West Coast rappers, but that definitely wouldn't be the case back in the 90s. So, do you think there was a special like event or a time that kind of shaped that transition?

Mervin Jenkins: You know, I remember getting a phone call the night that Biggie Smalls was murdered. You know, that whole West Coast/East Coast beef, Tupac and Biggie Smalls. And... while a lot of negative publicity came out of that, it made both coasts pay close attention to what the other was doing. And at first, it was more of a feuding, we don't like you, don't bring your music here. But I think eventually, we — you heard the saying: Time heals everything. I think eventually, people just really started to appreciate the fact that we had two very talented artists that lost their lives. Instead of continuing to carry on that brutal back and forth, what can we do to honor these men but also keep the culture of the music going?

And I, you know, again, that's my perspective, but I think it was during that time

and place and era that things just started to change a little bit for the better. Even though that was probably some of the most heightened-tension time, eventually, when the dust all settled, there was a little rules coming out of the concrete from all that. So. Great question. Thank you. Anybody else?

Mervin Jenkins: Come one time. Going two times. Going three times. Anybody else on the floor want to say anything right now? [Speaks fast like an auctioneer] Look to the left. Look to my right. And we are sold. All right. Here's what we're going to do. I am going to find a nice instrumental. We're going to do two parts to this, since we got a little time. The first is going to be something that's written, and I need to connect. Come on.

And then, after the written, we will... look at the little freestyle piece. Just give me a second. Let me go to Music, Albums, and Piece. [mutters to self]

Um, Playlist.

[Instrumental music track plays]

Yeah, that works. [Stops music] All right. So... this first one I'm going to do for you guys, this is something that I wrote. I don't know exactly what year it was, but President Bush was president and, well, Bush was the president. President Bush was president. And my sister, who was in the Reserve at the time, I think she was doing her second tour over in Iraq with the Army Reserves. She's a full-time nurse now, but this was trying times, and I remember where I was at with my sister being over there, my little sister, and is she going to be okay. And out of the frustration, the concern, the fear, I wrote this song, and I think I got the — this wasn't the beat that it went with, but I think it works with this.

[Instrumental music track plays]

And it's called "War of the World," by the way. Yeah. All right.

"I ain't vote for Bush. I ain't vote for Bush. I ain't vote. I ain't vote for Bush. I ain't vote for Bush. I ain't vote. Nope, I didn't vote, yo.

I ain't vote for Bush, but we got him. I ain't pull a gun on King, but we shot him. The whole world is rock bottom. It gets about as ghetto as Harlem. 10:00 news, Showtime at the Apollo. Watch, follow my lead, harder to breathe, ozone layer falling into the seas. Till the birds in the skies, to the lands and trees, what's worse, we got it for free.

I guess it's harder for me to see my folks, beautiful folks, some strung out with dope and getting life on Death Row, some in denial, some saying it's not so, some still praying while preaching the gospel. And every takeover now is extremely hostile. And peace is about as rare as summers in Moscow. I guess that the way of the world. It's the way of the world. The world's at war.

And, yo, that Twin Tower thing must have shook your block. If you was West Coast, it shook your block. Took firefighters and cops, young dreams brought to a stop, had a war brought right to our docks, the great American melting pot. New York, you forgot, Ground Zero, home to thousands of heroes and heroines, both women and men. As I watch Channel 10, we still bringing them in. But we're still sending men to war.

Many die for their country, others lose a limb, come home and go hungry. On the street, eight million stories to weep, eight million reasons I can't sleep. It's like War of the World. I'm Orson Welles. Little kids seem lost themselves. They was born in a heaven tossed to Hell. Of course it's real. In Third World countries, kids starving for meals. And

it's not like it's part of the deal. This part is for real. I'm—a hold faith and keep God as my shield. It's not like it's part of the deal. This part if for real. I'm—a hold faith and keep God."

And that was "War of the Worlds" for me, folks.

[Applause]

Mervin Jenkins: And that's an old record. We're going back to the... to the Iraq War, so a long time ago, but, again, that's going back to what I was passionate about, what inspired me to write. They were — at a certain age, the real-life events sort of kick in, you know. I'm sure if I was fifteen, the rhyme might not have been like that, but where I was in my life and what was happening around me, that's what was important.

So, for this next track, and I got to find a good track for this one... I'm going to give you guys a little sample of the freestyle, a little short and sweet, if I can find the beat that I'm looking for. Actually, I think I know where it's at.

Yep. Oh, not available. That doesn't help.

All right. So, I have to go back to... my little plethora of things to rap to. Here it is.

All right. So... are you going to help me out with this one?

Female Voice: I can.

Mervin Jenkins: All right, here's the rules of engagement. First, I need to find the beat. Let's go — you know what? Let's go with... my boy Nas. All right. Word up. All right. That is a tough one. So, when the beat starts, give me a few seconds to nod my head and get my rhythm and then I'm going to go like this.

Female Voice: Okay.

Mervin Jenkins: And when I do that, I need you — you're going to need a little room, because you're going to have to move around the room. But I want you, when I give the signal, to just move and whoever — I got a little mic cord here, so I can move with you a little bit. And I need to get my volume up a little bit.

KWT: Do we need another mic for anything?

Mervin Jenkins: No, I don't think so. This should be good. But I want you to just move and grab anybody, point at anything, I mean, anything, anything, and I'm just going to follow with the rhyme, okay? But let me get my...

[Beat track plays]

Mervin Jenkins: All right. One two, one two? This is the freestyle part of it. I'm going to stand up for this one.

[Beat track continues]

Mervin Jenkins: All right. I'm ready. Let's go.

All right. It's Spectac, y'all. Check it out. Yo. Grab the pen. I don't know where to begin. Freestyle raps that just never end. A cap on the table, last name Rice. When I pick up the mic, they like to say I'm nice. Yo. I grab the microphone. Yo, I got to do it. My wife just flew back from London. That's in Europe. You all know how the flows get tight. When I grab the mic and the flows ignite, the name's Spec. Dark black, do it exact. Yo, soldier, I hope there's water in that. If not, it could be trouble. That's a fact. When I come through, roll through, no holding back. Spectac. I'm nice with mine, like to rhyme. Do yourself a favor, dawg, take your time.

Place the order, prepare for a slaughter. Old-school camera, new-school camcorder, a jean jacket, I knock it back and forth like a tennis racket. Other MCs, they

can't hack it. Spectac. I'm not invisible. I'm not looking through the window but I still see the Citadel. Nice big flows, the rhymes on point, MCs in the game like that's my joint. I don't quit. This is it. Watch me spit. Real rap drawl, y'all, this is it. Best in the game, Spectac, you know the name. I came with the flame, still get busy. Is that a pair of scissors? Don't ask, who is he? Good for cutting. Yo, you ain't saying nothing. When I grab the microphone, it's like E.F. Hutton.

Why? Because everybody's listening. If I get your car keys, then you're probably missing 'em. As far as I'm concerned, yo, you got to have vision. Mm. Hop in the car, then go for a drive. It's not ninety-five. I'm staying alive. I got the iPhone, but your carrier, that's not the new one. When it comes to rhyme, I just got to do one. I'm nice with mine, and that's a fact. I love to tell my folks that I'm—a be right back. That's the Nas instrumental. Man, I'm large. And I love to see him dressed up in camouflage. Um, up in the woods, I'm bumping the jungle. I'm a Flash Gordon fan fighting Ming from Mongo. You can stop now.

Don't skip my classes. I see that dude smiling while rocking his glasses. He got the water in the palm tree on his cup. It's Spectac. Pass the mic. I'm—a blow it up. Yo, I'm a rapper, not a rhymer, and when they ask where Spectac's from, tell them South Carolina, -lina, -lina, -lina, -lina... [fades out]

[Applause and cheers]

Mervin Jenkins: And that, my friend, is the art of the freestyle, true freestyle. All right. Look-um.

Female Voice: I have a question.

Mervin Jenkins: Yes.

Female Voice: Earlier you said that your cousin from New York introduced you to the music.

Mervin Jenkins: Yes.

Female Voice: I am wondering, where these words, where are they coming from? Who, you know, where the words are coming books, movies?

Mervin Jenkins: So, I want to make sure I got the question right. Basically, everything that's happening with hip-hop right now, you're saying where is it coming from?

Female Voice: When you were a teenager.

Mervin Jenkins: Oh, okay.

Female Voice: I am wondering the stories that you have in your mind. Who put those things there?

Mervin Jenkins: That's a very good question. Now, I believe that we all got a little rhythm in us, you know. The funny thing, because I can rap, people automatically assume I can dance, too. My wife laughs, because whenever somebody mentions me dancing, she goes, "Man, you know dang well you can't dance." And I can't. I don't have the rhythm on the dance floor. But where that came from, that knack to put words together, I don't know.

Maybe my mom. My mom, she still writes poems to this day. And somehow, I think that rubbed off on me, you know. But for me, the poetry writing turned into rhyming, because there was a time where I tried writing poetry, but I only did it because I saw my mom doing it. Oh, that's cool. Roses are red, violets are blue, guess what, baby, I love you. Okay, you know. And all of a sudden, while that was happening, while I was

going through that phase, I was introduced to this music. And it's like, wow, I'm still rhyming, but I'm doing it to a beat, and it's not just my mama saying good job. It's these pretty girls I want to talk to. I'm going to give this a try. And that sort of started something.

And, again, as you grow older, it takes on new meaning and the reason you do it, what you're passionate about, it just — it's the butterfly effect, you know? It transforms and transforms and it keeps happening until you can no longer do it. My transformation now is I still do it, but I do it for younger people, and I do it to basically tell a story and send a message. So, again, twenty years ago, that wasn't the reason I was doing it. But, anyway, I hope I answered your question. Yeah. Whew. Anybody? Before we sign off.

KWT: When you go home to Eutawville, are you Spectac the rapper, or are you Mervin Jenkins, an educator?

Mervin Jenkins: Mervin Jenkins. Now, the funny thing is, believe it or not, for a long time in South Carolina, you could literally go to Columbia, and if anybody was involved with hip-hop, you could say, "Yo, you know Spectac?" And it would be — now, that won't happen now, so don't try it now. They'll come back, "Who?" But, I mean, up until about ten years ago, the name just stayed in the circuit.

My favorite story was 9th Wonder went over to... it probably was London, but he was overseas doing a show. And when he gets on the plane, there's a group of high-school students that are getting on the plane to fly back to the States to do a — visit New York or whatever they were doing. And he said they recognized him and they went, "9th Wonder!" So, as they're talking to him, they all go, "Yo, is it true, Spectac is a high-school principal?" You know, it was relevant for them, because they were in high school,

and these are all kids from Europe, you know? And he's like, "Yeah, man."

And he was so excited. When he got back to the States, he called me from the airport, like, "Yo, I'm with these young high-school kids, man, and they were asking about you, you know." Like, wow, you know. So, you just never know. And another extraordinary moment from London, my wife never got into my music. She's real big on — or used to be — Tupac was her man. You know, that was her thing: Tupac. I sounded nothing like Tupac, so she wanted nothing to do with my music.

We go overseas on that fortieth-birthday trip, and I had a fan from — he's a good friend now — from Facebook who lived in London and Paris but always bought my music, man. And every time something came out, he wanted to know when it was coming out. And when I got to London, it hit me. I said, "Whoa. My man Bautiste lives here. Let me give him a buzz." I was like, "Bautiste, man, it's Spec. Sorry to call you last-minute. I'm in London. I'm only here for the day." He was like, "Yo! Where are you right now?" I said, "Oh, the wife and I are about to get on this double-decker tour bus and do a tour." He said, "I'm coming! I'm coming on tour with — ."

And dude shows up, hops on the tour bus with us, and it was kind of weird, because he just like looking at me for like the first twenty minutes. And finally, he looked at my wife and he said, "You don't understand. I learned to speak English listening to his music." Like, he had been following me for years, man. And that was just a humbling moment, and it was also the moment my wife kind of went, "Wow. I didn't think your music was touching people like that." So, anyway, man, great stories, great times. Live your life, folks. It's real. Live your life.

Anybody else? I'm about to run to Hardee's and get me one of them good biscuits,

because I'm hungry. Kerry, man, Maria, thank you guys both for doing this. Anytime I get a chance to speak with young people, and you guys are — y'all got your hands full, man, over the next few years. And I'm going to tell everybody right now, I appreciate your service. Whenever I travel, I say that to soldiers.

I don't get as many first-class seats as I used to get, but if I saw somebody in uniform and I was traveling and I had a first-class seat, they got my seat. I mean, you know, I hate the idea of having to fight, but I also like the idea of being ready to do it if it comes down to it. Hopefully you guys will have a career where there's all peace and we can just push through this thing and move on and become old and gray like myself, but I do thank you for where you're at right now, what you're doing, putting yourselves out there like that. I mean, there's really nothing else to say about it.

My sister, like I said, she did Reserve, two tours overseas. I think the third time she went, she volunteered, wanted to go back, and it's just something about that, man. So, thank you, men and women, for doing what you do. And thank you for having me here today.

KWT: Thank you, Mervin.

[Applause]

End of recording.

Edited MI 5/18/17