

Unfinished Conversations – Liverpool

Interviewee: Patrick Graham

Interviewer: Maxine Brown

Director of Photography: Darren Brady

Date of interview: Friday 9th May 2025

Location of interview: Caribbean Centre Liverpool, 1 Amberley St, Liverpool L8 1YJ, United Kingdom

Total length of recording: 28 minutes 44 Seconds

00:00:00 [External footage of Patrick at Granby Market]

00:00:07 [Footage switches to exterior setting with Patrick on the Basketball court of the Caribbean Centre]

00:00:07 Patrick Graham

My name is Patrick Graham. Well, I've been born and raised in Liverpool, so I've always lived in and around Liverpool 8 my whole life. I'm from West Indian heritage, Jamaican parents who came here in the early 60s, well the beginning of the 60s, 1961 to be exact. So, I'm like second generation Windrush.

Schooled in Liverpool, educated in Liverpool and I've done various jobs. Most of my employment's been working, helping people, from an immigration advisor, helping people apply and settle in this country, challenging home office refusal decisions. I'm also an artist. I've been a creative artist for quite some time over 20 years, a writer, actor, poet. I've even done some short film making, documentary making and so on and encourage other people to do that. Workshop facilitator. I've done and still do work in schools teaching Black diasporian history, creative writing, all the... all manner of things. I run a writing group for local writers at the moments where, when I say run I facilitate the group, and everyone takes turns in taking over sessions and we explore ourselves, our history, our culture, the future, you know what I mean, everything through creative writing, stories, poetry.

00:01:35 Patrick Graham

Okay, my family connection to Liverpool is basically coming here, I'd say 1961, emigrated... migrated from Jamaica and you know came here to work, yeah, worked here ever since. I've still got, you know, a majority of family in Jamaica. A lot of family in throughout the Americas as well.

So yeah, that's basically my main family connection, you know what I mean. I'm one of seven siblings, well yeah one of seven children, six other siblings and many, many nephews and nieces, great nephews, great nieces.

When they came, me mum, in particular her uncle was here and other family members, so she came to join them. And ironically just a hundred yards over my shoulder was the house where they came. And a lot of people came from our family and other families who stayed in that house using the Parnier system until they saved up money to get a deposit for the house themselves and worked and, you know, it was just literally a hundred yards behind where I'm sitting now.

00:02:49 Maxine Brown

Has transatlantic slavery impacted on your family's life history?

00:02:55 Patrick Graham

Well yeah, it's impacted in many ways. You know one of the examples which, you know, I found out about a few years back is, you know, only 10 years ago 2015. I've been working for... since the 80s, and... between the 80s and 2015 any taxes I've paid and anybody in England has contributed towards paying off the compensation that was given to the slave owners. So that's a massive impact, the fact that I am paying for slavery and I'm paying compensation. Not to the victims who were clearly victims of being enslaved but to the people who enslaved them. And what hurts as well is when you hear people say 'oh it was this amount of time ago and it's this and put the past behind us' and I say 'Well no because I personally have been paying off these people'. You know so these companies that existed in 1833/ 1834 when they were compensated still exist 180 years later.

So, it's not a thing of the past, this is very much our present. So... and that's quite painful and that's just a financial aspect which is one of the lesser things even though it's quite painful. But the emotional aspect still exists because the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade is basically embodied into every fiber of society. From the difficulty black people have in finding employment. The difficulty black people have in housing. The difficulty black people have in everyday society, in the political makeup, the economical makeup, the lack of generational wealth that's passed on due to that lack of being able to purchase houses on the same level playing field as our white counterparts. Not just into this country but it's particularly in America as well. That was a massive issue, you know what I mean. You know any Americans listening to this will know all about redlining and the way property values were treated and how they're unable to pass on generational wealth.

So, there's all these different things that still exist today that, what people know as... it's a very contentious statement, but it's a very true and real statement but what people call white privilege. People who are unaware of it, who are benefiting from it, not deliberately or knowingly but they're benefiting from it just by the mere fact of how they look. And people like myself fall victim to it because of how I look and my ancestry and so on. So it affects me in many ways. And as much as people think it's something of 180 years ago plus, that was abolished over 200... when they say when Britain abolished it in... in England but it was still going on in the colonies till the 1830s from a British point of view and in many other countries, European countries and South American countries right up till the 1860s and the discrimination that existed in this country to this date. The discrimination in law in America that existed right up until the Civil Rights Acts of the... the 1960s so there's all these different things you know. There's many books have been written on it and many books will unfortunately continue to be written on it. So yeah, it's a massive effect and but I'm here. I exist. I can still fight. We're still fighting, and we will keep fighting and we will make things better if not for my generation, certainly my sons and future generations coming after us.

00:06:27 Maxine Brown

Do you remember learning about slavery in school or as a young child?

00:06:32 Patrick Graham

In school... I would actually have to say no we learned nothing about slavery. We were fed many negative images in textbooks of how black people supposedly lived in in Africa and it was the typical mud huts, bone through the nose type of images.

My first knowledge of slavery was as a young child in 1976 or 77 and correct me if I'm wrong of watching the program called Roots the novel of Alex Haley. That was my first introduction. Very painful introduction, at that as to slavery because at that point, you know, the way history is taught in our schools you never even actually thought about where you come from, and it wasn't something that was prevalent in my family. Coming from parents and talking about parts of history and culture and so on and it was almost as if, we appeared out of nowhere and were enslaved. That was the impression I had as a youngster, you know I mean. I think I was eight or nine years old when Roots come out and it was... it was a painful, really painful and traumatic watch to know that my ancestors went through that.

00:07:46 Maxine Brown

So, what do you think are some of the key legacies of transatlantic slavery and how have they shaped the world that we live in today?

00:07:55 Patrick Graham

Well, it shaped the world politically, still shapes it politically. It shaped the world economically, still shapes it economically because the term transatlantic slave trade was a period in history, and it was preceded by colonialism and conquering and then it was followed by the continuation of colonialism and empire. Then it was continued by a new term, from a British point of view, called commonwealth and other countries use terms like dependent territories. So, they've constantly rephrased what it is but ultimately people are still enslaved, not physically in the way the transatlantic slavery operated, but they're enslaved mentally. Which is the most dangerous of slavery because most people who are mentally enslaved don't know so it makes it difficult for them to challenge it. Almost impossible for them to challenge it. And certainly economic slave trade is... is very vibrant, you know the whole of Africa is still under economic slavery and that's... that's a massive impact on today's global society.

Many leaders in Africa have tried to challenge it have been taken out. And as I speak now there's a great leader who's at the forefront Ibrahim Traore from Burkina... Burkino Faso who's... who's leading that new 21st century attack and challenge and fight back against this economic slavery that's got a serious detrimental and deadly stranglehold on... on... on just on every African country all 50, 52 plus of them and, and other countries around the world.

00:09:45 Maxine Brown

So, you know when we talk about your family, and it wasn't really brought up in your family. After watching Roots did you feel that your family started talking about slavery? Then talked about things that had happened in Jamaica when they were younger or things what they heard.

00:10:02 Patrick Graham

I'm talking about like slavery from a family point of view and maybe this is typical of Jamaicans who came to England during the... I can't necessarily speak for the 40s, 50s, but from what I understand it is typical of them. But certainly, my family coming in the 50s stroke 60s when mine came. It's very common for them to not talk about even their own childhoods. They will give you some little things but in general it's almost like when you did raise, you know, 'What was this like?' and 'What was that like growing up in Jamaica?' You could tell by the lack of response and sometimes the meagre response it was a painful experience for them to articulate to you. And as a youngster you didn't really press it too much. You didn't, maybe at the time, you didn't notice that at nine, ten, eleven, early teens but as you got older you started to realize this is clearly a painful experience whatever they encountered in in Jamaica.

You know, visiting there as a teenager in the 80s and witnessing some of... some of the way people lived. Some of the way my own family lived and some of the... the areas and the disparity and... you know. In Kingston, in particular the capital, I could be standing and looking one way and think 'oh this is quite a modern well built-up city' and turn round and it looks like I'm back in the 1800s. It's... you know it's... it's just... deprivation is just all around. It's visible. So, it's... it's really hard and some of the experiences that they went through is, you know, typical of my family and other families. You know, the youngsters, because when we grew up in... in England, being born here, we have a different experience obviously from what our parents came and faced.

The racism... we grew up facing that racism but mounted a different type of challenge for you and so yeah, it's difficult for them to... to explain that and still is but as time's gone on there's been a lot of people who have been capturing some of the stories. Whereas some of the elders have got, you know, near their end of day so to speak... have been more willing to share some of them stories and... and capture them and being documented in... in the local museum and local historians because our stories are for us to tell. Especially if we want them to be told with sincerity, with truth and honesty and to be recorded and respected with dignity because these are not easy stories to tell.

00:12:43 Maxine Brown

In... in what ways do you think transatlantic slavery has shaped the city of Liverpool?

00:12:49 Patrick Graham

Well, the transatlantic slavery and shape and Liverpool it's not even a question of shaping Liverpool it shaped the United Kingdom. But the transatlantic slavery built Liverpool. Built it brick by brick. You know. And everywhere around where you look there's remnants of that financial gain that was made from the transatlantic slave trade.

In the early 1700s, the beginning of the 18th century, Liverpool was a tiny fishing village and within less than a hundred years it grew to the second city of Britain, of empire and with a population only exceeded by London. The capital banks were held here so every fiber of Liverpool, its institutions, its financial institutions, its educational institutions, were born out of slavery or the money that came of slavery. Even if they were established a few decades after slavery was abolished within the United Kingdom and its colonies. The money that was made from that, the families that benefited from that, who still benefited from it now and still exist now. The whole fabric and the whole everything about Liverpool was built about that, you know, the most of the

Lord Mayors, the early Mayors were slave traders or had something to do with the slave economy. Even if they didn't traffic human cargo, they traded in cotton and tobacco and slave produced products or they made things for the ships that took them from giving people clothes, making boots, making chains, making ropes.

We have an area called the rope walks where ropes were made and stretched out in the streets so every... everything that was to do... the instruments of torture the chains, the shackles, were made in this city so Liverpool wasn't shaped by transatlantic slave trade it was built by it. Even though it had existed for some time... hundreds of years, but it was to become a city and what we know today it was built by it.

00:14:53 Maxine Brown

So, what does it mean to you to live in a city that has been shaped by slavery. What feelings and emotions and experiences when thinking about Liverpool history.

00:15:00 Patrick Graham

Yeah, growing up and being born in a city like Liverpool which is not only shaped, formed, created, built as I would say by slavery. There's mixed emotions, there is bits of anger there but it's a controlled anger and you know it's not an anger which is physical or violent it's an anger of emotion. And also, there's...there's some happiness as well because going into certain establishments that I know were built off the back of slavery and I can walk into them to this day and be welcomed into them and greeted into them.

You know places like even the town hall which come through, you know even though it's being rebuilt off the fires, it's come through the money and the legacy of slavery. It's adorned with pictures of people of slavery. Walking into many buildings and establishments brings a sense of well... almost... if the people who created these establishments could see me now, they would be tossing and turning in the grave and to me that brings about a feeling of well we've come a long way. That's a positive thing. Things have changed and I can go into establishments which before I'd only be welcomed into as a servant or be standing outside to be sold and auctioned. So, to be able to tread in places like that with... with... with my dignity intact is a good feeling. So, it's not all about feeling anger and... and... and bitterness is also feeling of happiness. A feeling of progress, of success, of you know... that the challenges have been made to... to bring about that change and... and even living in houses which were once occupied by people who have lived off the wealth of slavery. So yeah, it's mixed emotions but you know we're here, we exist, and you know we've got to and we're entitled to exist anywhere and we do.

00:16:56 Maxine Brown

Are there any stories or memories or traditions related to slavery that have been passed down by your family to you.

00:17:07 Patrick Graham

Memories or traditions of slavery passed down. It's, it's really hard. The most, I think the easiest thing I could reconcile that with is maybe food because some of the food that we eat, or I used to eat even as a child growing up, from even down to your chicken foot and ox tail and cow foot and

pigs' foot and all of them. They were foods which were discarded by the slave masters in the houses and... and most slaves didn't get the opportunity to eat meat. They were fed certain pulses and... and whatever and... and, you know, so when them foods were discarded in the kitchens, they used them and learned to cook with them. So, in some ways, even unknowingly, my parents passed them things down to me, you know I mean, in the foods that we ate.

The... the spices that were used because at the end of slavery and indentured slaves would come over from India and brought a lot of spices with them. That became and is known as a Jamaican way of cooking and... and so on. But a lot of them spices came from, from India, you know I mean, some of the you know. In my ancestry, I've got Indian in my ancestry which is something on a visual you would never know unless I say it, you know what I mean. You know my father had a really powerful Indian name Amrit, you know I mean, and Indians who met him in liverpool were like quite impressed with that and used to ask 'How did you get that name?' but that's something again part of our history he didn't tell us about. He didn't talk about. We found out that when I was a big grown man before I knew of any of that family background.

00:18:44 Maxine Brown

Are there any individuals, heroes, communities that you think would be forgotten in the history of slavery?

00:18:53 Patrick Graham

Heroes, forgotten from the legacy of slavery? There'd be many because there's so many people within Africa, within the Caribbean who fought against slavery. There's... there's...there's the names that we've all heard of like Nanny Maroon, Cudjo and Chelaney. All these different types of people going back to the slave times who fought against slavery. But there'll be so many people, who would like, what you could call maybe second in command or... or generals who served under them who would be forgotten.

History has taught us to forget. We're taught to forget. You know in Africa people like to always talk about how African sold slaves and Africans done this and no one's denying that that happened. But the background to that, it's not a question of they just openly sold them. It's almost like open threats and veil threats that 'Well if you don't sell them to me. I will sell you.' You know what I mean, and... and that's... that's a lot of the background to people selling slavery. It wasn't, yeah there was tribalism, there was people who had the differences, but they didn't realize in the many cases what they were selling them into.

So that watered down argument 'oh Africans sold each other and this and that' as if to say well the people who were buying them were not at fault and they didn't take them by force as well is a massive myth in many ways you know what I mean. There's a lot of heroes from them times, kings and queens in Africa who fought against... against that and it's only nowadays some of them are being recognized but they're still not taught in any proper way.

Even in schools in Africa. A lot of African nations are still taught on the french colonial educational systems, Portuguese colonial educational systems, British colonial education systems and them languages are still classed as the official languages of many countries. Even though these countries have their own languages and many other languages within them in some cases, dozens, even hundreds in some cases so... it's something that's been miseducated out of us in a sense. So,

there's many heroes who have been forgotten and will never be remembered because they have been literally wiped out of history's, history's minds.

00:21:25 Maxine Brown

Is there any local heroes to you that you've known like in your lifetime.

00:21:31 Patrick Graham

In my lifetime there's people who... there's people you know, may rest in peace, like Eric Lynch who was a champion and a pioneer one of the pioneers of teaching history in Liverpool. You've got again, rest in peace, Dorothy Kuya, who was one of the founder members of... of getting the International Slavery Museum set up in Liverpool and... and there's people like that who taught a lot.

There's... there's you know there's some elders who were integral in making black history a real thing as a teenager and introducing you to it. Like what I'm grateful for is the education system in this country is it gave me the ability to read and write. And with that ability when I left school after they taught me after leaving school, I was then able to educate myself by reading books. A lot of speakers came up from London in different places. Came to Liverpool and done lectures in the Caribbean centre in different places in the old place called the embassy and the Methodist Centre and different places. There's... there's people who are living legends who are still about Professor Steven Small who actually works out of Berkeley in America and... and he you know he... he was someone who was integral as a youth in introducing me and teaching me about black history. My own brother you know was integral through he's of the Rastafarian faith and through music you know we learned a lot of black history through music and reggae music and so on. So, there's just so many things and there's people who are about now and the Caribbean Centre, Herbie Higgins who again rest in peace who you know is a pioneer of... of facilitating things like that.

00:23:16 Maxine Brown

So, I'm going to go... go on freedom, so what does freedom mean to you?

00:23:22 Patrick Graham

Freedom means to me not just to necessarily walk down the street, but freedom means the freedom to... to think freely. The freedom to have not just equality but to have equity... equitable life you know what I mean because it's alright saying we have the freedom to all go to the same school and all be educated. But do we have the freedom to receive an equal, equitable education? Do we have the freedom to not be stereotyped? Do we have the freedom to not be... not be given equal opportunities in employment? No, we don't. We don't have that full freedom. So, until all that's happened and until the economic slavery of people in Africa and people around the world the... the wars that are fought by proxy. The destabilizing of governments by proxy. The deliberate and the deliberate creation of... of... of destitution and poor so that you can exploit workforces around the world to provide the wealth with it...with it... with it... the west with its wealth. Until all that is abolished. There is no freedom. Because the fact I can walk and do this and that that's not being free alone. People around the world need to be free for me to truly feel free.

00:24:34 Maxine Brown

Can you describe freedom in three words?

00:24:39 Patrick Graham

Freedom in three words to describe it hmm and the build up to thinking of them words is a long process. But I would say empathy. I would say humanity. And I would say fairness. And it would be, although I've described them in them three words, just to add a but into that it would be for people to look up the true meaning of them three... three words to see how that takes in what freedom really is.

00:25:18 Maxine Brown

Can I ask you this question about... do you have any stories or memories of traditions that relate to resistance?

00:25:25 Patrick Graham

Stories that relate to resistance? Well. Wow. One story is my birth. I explain to young people when I see them and who may say they're not involved in politics, they're not political. And I say well the fact you're black you were born political. Yeah. So that... and then that becomes almost just by your skin color becomes an act of resistance against the establishments that... that exist. But resistance is just growing up in a community. Resistance is educating myself... educating myself to see the wrongs in the world and to be able to then pass on that information and education. To paraphrase Emperor Sollassé 'for someone to be educated and not share that education renders that knowledge and education useless' you know what I mean. So resistance is to be educated and to share knowledge because knowledge is power you know mean. So that is... that is resistance. Resistance to have marched on the street. We resisted in the 81 uprisings as... as... as young black people against oppression and... and racial oppression from the police, housing oppression from the establishment. Which the police are at the forefront of upholding that and... and so-called rule. But it's, you know, all these different things as resistance, you know, the main sharing knowledge now and still resisted it in that way you know I mean and you know. So, resistance unfortunately is an ongoing process which I hope will soon be a dying process.

00:26:59 Maxine Brown

Right is there anything that I haven't asked that you would like to add?

00:27:04 Patrick Graham

I'd mentioned earlier on at the beginning of just talking about myself as a writer, as a poet and that. A lot of the things I write are political; they are historical because there... there as a way of not approaching someone and trying to lecture them on history they're to put it together in an artistic form through poetry, through literature and different forms.

So, I'm a writer myself. I write short stories. You know some of them things they put hints of history in them. They might just be a happy-go-lucky children's story but there's little incidents of...of history underline them. So their little catalysts for people to think 'Ooo, what's that about?' and maybe go out and... and google it. Today we have the power of something the size... smaller

than my hand that holds all the information in the world you know I mean. You don't have to have a book these days you can google things. And although I still cherish books and I encourage young people to read because I always say a book cannot crash like your computer can crash.

So yeah, that's me. I'm constantly trying to educate and reveal things you know. I have a logo, as you can see it's called Black Out Productions which is based on a redacted document. There's a statement under that which I have blacked out. And because I'm a historian and writer and someone who reveals the truth my logo is a contradiction to what I do that is hidden and blacked out. And it's a statement basically saying be truthful, be honest and tell governments to stop hiding our true history, our true dignity and our pride from us.

END OF TRANSCRIPT