SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE

RASHEEDAH PHILLIPS

Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures

Transcript of a Research Interview
Conducted by

Roger Eardley-Pryor

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

on

11 September 2017

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated by the Chemical Heritage Foundation in partnership with PennFuture, PennEnvironment, the Energy Coordinating Agency, Citizens Climate Lobby, and Planet Philadelphia on G-Town Radio. The series, titled "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures," documents the personal perspectives of Philadelphia citizens interested in impacts on their city from energy use and climate change. The series records individual histories and then asks participants to imagine the future of Philadelphia, particularly with regard to energy production and use.

The "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" project is made possible, in part, through funding from Philadelphia's Climate and Urban Systems Partnership.

http://www.cuspproject.org/

Climate & Urban Systems Partnership

THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History
Release Form for Research Interview

Title of the Research Study: "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures"
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You, **Rasheedah Phillips**, are asked to participate in an interview with **Roger Eardley-Pryor**, representing the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF), on **September 11, 2017.** If you participate, your oral history interview will be made part of CHF's collections and will be available for educational, non-commercial use. This document is intended to inform you fully of what you are being asked to do and of your rights as an oral history participant. If you choose to participate, your recorded oral history interview will be transcribed and used in an educational workshop exploring storytelling, future visioning, and deliberation; possibly included in a local Philadelphia radio show and podcast featured on G-Town radio; and stored on a public website documenting the project, which will remain online as a model for local educators to host classroom workshops envisioning Philadelphia's energy futures.

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If you choose to participate, this interview will be recorded within the period of time previously agreed upon by you and Roger Eardley-Pryor. Should Roger Eardley-Pryor feel that more time is needed to

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Support for this Oral History Project

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" uses a narrative approach that encourages deliberation, storytelling, and creativity to imagine a future where Philadelphia uses, produces, and relies on renewable energy. The project is made possible by through the Climate & Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP).

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the creation of this oral history before or during the recording of the interview, or about the processing of the transcript, please contact the Director of the Institute for Research at the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

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Agreement

After you have read the information contained within this release form, and Roger Eardley-Pryor offered to answer any questions or concerns about this document or the interview, please consider whether you would like to sign this agreement. If you are interested in participating in this research interview and consent to the process as described above, please sign below.

(Signature)_____
Rasheedah Phillips

(Date) 9/11/17

(Signature)_____
Roger Eardley-Pryor

(Date) 9/11/17

INTERVIEWEE

Rasheedah Phillips was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1984. She moved to Philadelphia at fourteen years old, the same year she became a mother. Four years later, Rasheedah graduated with honors from Abraham Lincoln High School in Northeast Philadelphia. She earned scholarships to Temple University where, in three years, she graduated Summa Cum Laude while working as a full-time parent and part-time employee. In 2008, Rasheedah earned her Juris Doctor degree from Temple University Beasley School of Law. As an expert in subsidized housing law, she works as a managing attorney at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia. In 2011, Rasheedah created The AfroFuturist Affair, a grassroots organization dedicated to celebrating and promoting Afrofuturistic culture, art, and literature. Inspired by Afrofuturism, quantum physics, and African traditions of spatial-temporal consciousness, she established the Community Futures Lab, a collaborative art, ethnographic, and community outreach project focused on the Sharswood-Blumberg community of North Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER

Roger Eardley-Pryor is a historian of contemporary science, technology, and the environment. His work explores ways that twentieth and twenty-first-century scientists and engineers, culture-makers, and political actors have imagined, confronted, or cohered with nature at various scales, from the atomic to the planetary. Before earning his Ph.D. in 2014 from the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), Roger was a National Science Foundation graduate fellow at UCSB's Center for Nanotechnology in Society. After earning his Ph.D., Roger taught courses at Portland State University, at Linfield College in Oregon, and at Washington State University in Vancouver, Washington. In Philadelphia, Roger accepted a postdoctoral research fellowship in the Center for Oral History at the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF). Roger co-designed, earned funding for, and managed this place-based oral history project titled "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures."

PROJECT

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is an oral history and public education project about energy, climate change, and the future of Philadelphia. The project uses a narrative approach that encourages deliberation, storytelling, and creativity. It asks the following questions: As climate change reconditions our lives, city, and planet, how do Philadelphia citizens imagine using and producing energy in the year 2067, or 2140, or 2312? And how might the personal histories of these citizens shape the ways they imagine Philadelphia's energy futures?

The project consists of oral history interviews with a small but diverse set of Philadelphia citizens. The oral history interviewees were selected in collaboration with the project's partners: the Chemical Heritage Foundation, PennFuture, PennEnvironment, Energy

Coordinating Agency, Citizens Climate Lobby, and Planet Philadelphia on G-Town Radio.[1] The majority of each oral history interview records a participant's personal history. Next, interviewees share their visions of energy use and production in Philadelphia by imagining three time periods in the future. The future time periods are the year 2067, fifty years from the present; the year 2140, nearly one hundred twenty five years from the present; and the year 2312, nearly three hundred years from the present.[2] Content from the oral history interviews then served as the basis for further storytelling, future visioning, and deliberation in a public educational workshop held at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in October 2017.

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is based on the idea that discussing visions of the future can help individuals and groups construct and articulate meaningful stories about the current challenges they confront, identify potential solutions to those challenges, and reflect on how these might influence themselves and their community as a whole. Research on ways to enhance societal capacity for governing complex energy transitions reveals that narrative and storytelling helps facilitate improved engagement and decision-making among mixed groups. Stories and narratives enable the incorporation of contributions from different groups of people to build collective frames of reference. In light of our need to transition to renewable energy sources, narratives offer communication strategies and practices that can help promote broader engagement and participation in energy choices, more diverse kinds of policy information and input, and greater capacity to imagine and invent new energy futures.[3]

Imagining and discussing Philadelphia's energy futures allows city residents to imagine—and inhabit, in their minds—multiple, alternative visions of the future that may result from choices made today. Energy plays a powerful role in any city's techno-economic systems, yet energy use and production is also inseparable from a city's social systems and environmental relationships. When Philadelphians imagine renewable and distributed ways of using and producing sustainable energy in the future, they are not just imagining new techno-economic systems. They are also re-imagining the ways social relations and political power works in their lives. And they are re-imagining interrelationships to our local, regional, and global environments.

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" was funded, in part, by Philadelphia's Climate and Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP). The CUSP approach to climate change education emphasizes local, relevant, and solutions-focused methodologies. The oral history interviews and public education workshop for "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" takes place in Philadelphia with local Philadelphians. The project is relevant in wake of the recent failures by Philadelphia's energy industry and the city's environmental activists to find any

[1] On 1 February 2018, as a result of the merger with the Life Sciences Foundation, the Chemical Heritage Foundation changed our name to the Science History Institute.

[2] The years 2140 and 2312 were selected to complement Kim Stanley Robinson's science fiction novels. See Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (New York: Orbit, 2017); and Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312* (New York: Orbit, 2013).

[3] Clark A. Miller, Jason O'Leary, Elizabeth Graffy, Ellen B. Stechel, Gary Dirks, "Narrative Futures and the Governance of Energy Transitions," *Futures* 70 (2015): 65-74; Rob VanWynsberghe, Janet Moore, James Tansey, and Jeff Carmichael "Towards Community Engagement*:* Six Steps to Expert Learning for Future Scenario Development," *Futures* 35 (2003): 203-219; Jana-Axinja Paschen and Ray Ison, "Narrative Research in Climate Change Adaptation: Exploring a Complementary Paradigm for Research and Governance," *Research Policy* 43:6 (2014): 1083-1092.

compromise on a vision and framework for Philadelphia's energy future.[4] Collaboration to achieve Philadelphia's systemic energy transition to renewable sources must be broad-based and inclusive. This project seeks to produce and re-produce, on a small and manageable scale, efforts to build a shared vision of that renewable energy future, from the bottom up, with local Philadelphians. "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is solutions-focused in that formulating and sharing visions of the future can help individuals and groups make meaning of contemporary challenges they confront; it can help determine possible solutions to those challenges; and it can help individuals and groups consider ways that certain solutions might impact their lives and their community as a whole.

[4] Katie Colaneri, "Philadelphia Fails to Find Common Ground on 'Energy Hub,'" *StateImpact Pennsylvania*, March 11, 2016: https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2016/03/11/philadelphia-fails-to-find-common-ground-on-energy-hub/. See also the minutes of the meeting of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Board Committee from January 28, 2016, http://www.dvrpc.org/Committees/Board/2016-01.pdf, accessed February 25, 2017; "Philadelphia Energy Vision Working Group," *Raab Associates, Ltd.*, last updated January 13, 2016, http://www.raabassociates.org/main/projects.asp?proj=134&state=Services (accessed February 25, 2017).

INTERVIEWEE: **Rasheedah Phillips**

INTERVIEWER: **Roger Eardley-Pryor**

LOCATION: **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

DATE: **11 September 2017**

EARDLEY-PRYOR: All right. It looks like we are recording. This is Roger Eardley-Pryor with the Chemical Heritage Foundation. Today is September 11, 2017, and we are conducting an oral history—oral future—interview with Ms. Rasheedah Phillips. Rasheedah, can you tell me when you were born?

PHILLIPS: April 6, 1984.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: April 6, '84? And where were you born?

PHILLIPS: I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, about forty-five minutes from Philadelphia.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? The family you were born into?

PHILLIPS: Sure. I was born to a young mother—my mom had me when she was fourteen—and so was born to a teen parent. Didn't really know my father growing up. We lived with my grandmother and grandfather, and my mother's brother and sister, for my early years. And then my mom got married eventually, and we moved out, and it was myself, my mother, and, at the time, one brother growing up. And then eventually, I got two more little brothers. So I have three younger brothers. I am the oldest. A lot of my \ immediate family still lives in New Jersey, but my mother and younger brothers all now live in Atlanta, so. . . .

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What brought them down to Atlanta?

PHILLIPS: Well first, we moved to Philly, and we were the first people—my mom and myself, and my younger brothers, were the first people from my family to sort of leave New Jersey. Then we lived in Philly for a while, a few years, and then my mom got hurt and is

essentially disabled. She had a stroke, and some other things happened, and so had to stop working. And then my grandmother actually moved to Virginia a while back—she retired and moved to Virginia—and so my mom moved and was closer to her in Virginia. Then eventually moved to Atlanta because it was just cheaper for her to live down there. And we have—some of our other family is from Georgia, so she kind of wanted to be closer to her father's family.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Family networks?

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Nice. When did you move from Trenton to Philly?

PHILLIPS: We moved here when I was fourteen. Actually—yeah, when I was fourteen.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So you spent your childhood, really, in Trenton.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. I spent my childhood kind of in Trenton, and Princeton. We lived in Princeton, New Jersey, for a while. But yeah, between Trenton and Princeton, and then, yeah, we moved to Pennsylvania when I was fourteen. Actually we moved to Pennsylvania a little bit earlier than that. We lived in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, which is right next to Trenton—it's like two minutes from Trenton—and then moved to Philly when I was fourteen. So I lived in Pennsylvania for a couple of years, and then moved to Philadelphia.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about some of your memories of childhood.

PHILLIPS: Any specific memories, or just any—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Whatever comes to mind. Something you enjoyed, something that was impactful. Those sort of things.

PHILLIPS: I think my earlier memories from childhood are good. Not much before I turned maybe seven or eight. I was an only child for a while. I have always been a reader; I've always loved books. That's just always been my thing. I was the type of child that would be in the house reading over, like, being outside or being at the playground. I've always enjoyed science fiction, I think from the time I was in—even back in kindergarten, I can remember reading little

sci-fi stories and being interested in that, and writing my own stories. So I was always a writer, always interested in writing plays, and theater, and sci-fi, and all of that stuff.

And then I guess maybe around the time that I turned seven or eight is—my mom had my brother, my—the brother that's right underneath me. And at that time, we kind of started moving around a lot. We moved to Princeton around that time, which was a really difficult experience for me. I think that was probably the first time I ever experienced racism, and classism, and those sorts of things, and that kind of informed me in a lot of ways, and informed a lot of my experiences after that point. Because maybe around the time I was nine or ten, <**T: 05 min**> my mom and stepdad got divorced, and I moved back to Trenton, which was also a difficult experience, because I had been coming from this particular education system. By the time—you know, when I had lived in Princeton, I went to very good schools. And so coming back to Trenton, which, in a lot of ways, the school system and the place itself is like Philadelphia, but much smaller, more compressed, there is a lot—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you mean by that?

PHILLIPS: Just in terms of things like poverty, violence, the symptoms of poverty, there is a lot of similarities between Trenton and Philadelphia. But Trenton being way smaller than Philadelphia, it's like you feel it a little bit more. Things are a lot closer together, and so things feel compounded, or at least they felt that way to me as a child, and looking back and thinking about that, and integrating that into my experience now.

So I don't have great memories that time and experience in my childhood. I returned to Trenton after Princeton, and Trenton had a lot of violence—still to this day a very violent place—just because there is a lot of gangs there. Like I said, a lot of poverty, which compounds a lot of these issues, housing crisis—things like that. Although I have always had, for the most part, a stable living situation. Because my mother was, at a point, a single mom having to take care of, at the time, two kids, and then eventually four kids, she was never home. So I was often home by myself. I often say I raised myself for a while. I was definitely a latchkey kid. I also got into [. . .] all sorts of just bad things around that time in my life, and then I think—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Like around when you are ten, eleven?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, around the time I was ten and eleven. I had experiences of sexual violence and all sorts of things happening. I ran away. I got put in a boot camp. All sorts of things happening. And then we moved to Philadelphia. And the reason we moved to Philadelphia is because—it was actually kind of by chance. My aunt had gotten into a really bad accident, a car accident, in Philadelphia, and so my mom, in coming up to visit her, kind of saw—and she was in the northeast, and so saw the northeast, and was like, "Oh, this looks like a nice place to live and buy a house." So my mom bought her first house in Philadelphia, and that was part of the

reason why we moved. But as soon as I moved to Philadelphia when I was fourteen, I got pregnant, so then that was a whole other saga of life.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Before we move into that saga, that's . . . can we revisit some of the other stuff?

PHILLIPS: Sure.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I'm fascinated, too, about—that you've always been a writer and storyteller. Do you remember some of the stories that—

PHILLIPS: Oh, yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: —you used to write about?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. I—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And were they influenced by a lot of what you were seeing in Trenton particularly?

PHILLIPS: Well, when I was younger, no. Well, a little bit. I mean, when I was really young, like five or six, a lot of what I was writing was modeled off of the stuff that I was reading. So, like, there was this play—I think it was *The Red Hen* or *The Sky is Fall*—the play with—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Like *Chicken Little*?

PHILLIPS: I think it was *Chicken Little*. I loved that play so much, and I would just write my own version of it, and then put on productions for my family in the living room and stuff. So that kind of stuff. When I got a little bit older, like maybe seven, or eight, or nine, I started reading stories like Christopher Pike, who was a sci-fi writer, and also stories like *My Teacher is an Alien*. I can't remember all of them. Bruce Coville books. I really like Roald Dahl. Stuff like that that we were reading in class, but I would write my own stories that were modeled off of that. So the *My Teacher is an Alien* series, I wrote my own *My Teacher is an Alien* series where I was turned into a Barbie. Like those kind of stories. It was just—yeah, they were cool.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Who was introducing you to some of those stories?

PHILLIPS: Teachers, school. We read a lot of stuff in school that I can recall. But also, my mom was really supportive of the fact that I loved to read, so she would buy me books. Every time I went to Wal-Mart or something like that, I would get a book, or if I would go to visit my aunt, she would take me somewhere and get a book. Barnes & Nobles, like that would be some of my favorite trips, of just going to visit my aunt, going <**T: 10 min**> to Barnes & Nobles, getting to pick out a book, her buying me a rice pudding because that was my favorite dessert, and sitting in a corner under a blanket reading my book and eating rice pudding. That was the best time.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: That was the happy space?

PHILLIPS: That was happy space. When I became a teenager, my writing became darker, and was more so modeled off of what was happening around me, and also books that I was reading. So I started for—maybe when I was thirteen or fourteen, reading urban novels, and there was this really popular novel out at the time called *Fly Girl* by a Philly author named [Omar Tyree]. But *Fly Girl* was when the urban novel first kind of emerged as a thing. It was one of the first ones that I remember—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you mean by "urban novel?"

PHILLIPS: Novels written by, usually, African-American people, black people, that are about the urban experience. Some type of fiction, novel, that's like a murder mystery, but set in the hood. You know, it's about the urban experience. And that novel in particular, *Fly Girl*, was a story about this teenager, and you sort of went through her life, and her growing up, and just the influence—and it was also based in the eighties, and it was in Philly, and so you kind of just got this sense of what was happening for this person in the eighties. It was a really, really great novel. But that influenced my writing, and influenced me to—and I wrote this story when I was fourteen, I think, about this girl getting pregnant who lived in Trenton. And then I got pregnant a couple of months later.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: You hadn't yet become pregnant then?

PHILLIPS: [Not] when I wrote that. So it was very almost—for me, it felt a little prophetic. And looking back, it reaffirms this notion of being able to write something into existence,

whether it's bad or good, because that very much mirrored what would become my own experiences.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you moved back to Trenton, and especially around the time you turned around ten, and those years right afterwards, what was going on in that world that drew you into those experiences? Were you searching for something else, or did that just happen to be around you, and you fell into it?

PHILLIPS: I think it just happened to be around me, and I fell into it. I guess that my mom is young—she had me at a very young age—my aunt and uncle were young, and so just my influences, I just had a bunch of younger people in my life. It's not like my mom was thirty. She was literally in her twenties, and just also growing up, and she was never home. She worked three jobs to try to take care of me and my brothers. And so the people who were watching me was my aunt and my uncle, who were sixteen and seventeen, and they were also getting into their own stuff. [. . .] You know, there was just a lot of things around me. And also, like I said, there was a lot of gang violence, and pretty much everyone I knew was in a gang. So that was also a lot of the things that were going on around me.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you became pregnant at fourteen, you said?

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What were your thoughts? Or what were your feelings? What was going on for you then?

PHILLIPS: So many things. A lot of things. It was really crazy stuff when I look back. Part of it was this interesting pressure of me being seen as the person who has to make it and break the family cycle, and be the first person to go to college. Because I was the first person in my family to go to college. And that had always been the expectation for me. And so to disappoint that was a really big deal for me. But also, I feel like I also rebelled against that, in a way. And so what also played a role in me becoming pregnant was this rebellion that I wasn't fully conscious of and didn't really understand what I was doing, to be honest. [. . .] <**T: 15 min**>

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Well, the expectations you talked about were set for you. Where were those expectations coming from for you?

PHILLIPS: Definitely my mom and my grandmother. Yeah. Definitely those two. And I think just in general from my family. I mean, I had a lot of experiences that my mother didn't get to have. When I was fourteen, I actually—when I was maybe three or four weeks pregnant and I didn't know it, my mom had worked really, really hard to get me into this program where I was able to travel to a different country, to five different countries. It was called . . . something, but I was some type of student ambassador, and you had to pay a shitload of money. It was like my mom had to raise five thousand dollars or something to send me, to pay for the plane tickets and stuff, and she just really completely went in. She got me an article in the newspaper so people could donate, and it was really amazing. But anyway, so I had been sent on that trip, and I got to visit London, France, Belgium. I stayed with a family in Germany. It was just this really amazing experience.

I was always smart. I always had good grades. They wanted to skip me, and when I was kindergarten, I could read early. You know, it was just all of these things. Like you are the person who is going to get us out of whatever. And not like my family was just down and out. I mean, we have always been low income, but not poor. Like I said, I always had a roof over my head, whether it was with my mom or with my grandmother. My grandmother was a teacher. But she also had my mom at a young age. She had my mom at seventeen, and my aunt was also a young mother. And so it was just this family cycle that it was expected that I was not going to fall into that cycle, but I did. So that's kind of where the pressure was.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Talk to me about being pregnant at fourteen. I mean, what was going through your mind about what you wanted at that point. Was it like, well, this is just normal?

PHILLIPS: No. It was terrible. It was a really scary experience, because I also had expectations for myself. It's not like I didn't want to go to college. I enjoyed school. I enjoyed writing. I had aspirations. But at the same time, even with my aspirations, I think they were limited in a lot of ways, because I didn't know, for example, that I could grow up and be an author, or be—I knew I needed to go to college, but I didn't think of myself as someone who could grow up and be a sci-fi writer, or be able to publish, you know?

I didn't understand what it meant to be pregnant, and it was a really terrifying and horrible experience, because when it happened, I had just moved to a new city. I was starting high school. It was all of these life changes happening at one time, and so it was really terrifying. I was switching schools, also. I was going from this school district out in Morrisville, which is one of the best school districts in the state, to Philadelphia, which is a whole different ballgame. I was also a very high-risk pregnancy, so I had a very difficult pregnancy. I was hospitalized a couple of times. My child actually was born premature, two months premature. So it was just a really difficult experience for me, on top of just the pressures and the stereotypes of walking around with a belly, and how people look at you, and how people treat you, how people talk to you. My teachers literally telling me I'm going to drop out, I'm not going to make it. Just really bad stuff. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Somehow, you got through all that. What was it—

PHILLIPS: I did not easily get through it. I struggled. I got very depressed after I had my child. I'll back up and just say that when I first got pregnant, I <**T: 20 min**> originally intended to give my child up for adoption. But my mom, who at the time worked in social services, and worked in Trenton at the Department of Human Services—they call it "DYFS" out in Trenton, but here, it's known as "DHS." And she worked with foster youth, and worked at a youth home, and was like, "You are not giving your child up for adoption. That's not an option." I didn't feel like I wanted to experience an abortion. I just didn't want to go through that. So I decided to keep the child, but did not know what that meant, or what that would bring, and sort of watching my mom struggle to raise me and my brothers, it became extremely scary.

[. . .] Somehow, I got through the school year. I took the summer and got myself together, and then I just came back ready to go. And—fortunately—I spent part of my tenth grade year at this one school, and then we moved, and I got transferred to another high school, and that also helped, because the high school I was at was just not good.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What was the first school?

PHILLIPS: So the first school was Northeast High School. And then I switched to Lincoln High School, both in the Northeast.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What was different about Lincoln?

PHILLIPS: So Northeast had a lot of racial tension issues. There was a lot of race wars there, kind of. Not anything that I was caught up in, but just a lot of racial tension. Also, my child's father, who I was not in a relationship with, went to the school, and so when I started there as a ninth grader pregnant by some boy that I am not even really involved in, and who was involved with other people, then there was rumors and just other things that made it really difficult for me to just be normal. So going to a different school just was like a fresh start for me, and I just did so much better academically. And also, like I said, at the Northeast High School, when I first started there, the teachers were terrible, terrible, just the way that they talked to me. And it's funny. One of the teachers who had said something to me like "You are not going to make it," or "You are going to drop out" emailed me years later and was like, "I apologize for that, and I'm very proud of you." Although it's bullshit that you ever just would—you know? But, yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: You also talked about—as a child, you said around eight or so, when moving back to Trenton, was it?

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where you—it was some of the first experience you had of racism. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. So I was saying that moving to Princeton was some of my first experiences of racism, where I was told <**T: 25 min**> things by other kids like "Oh, black people can't read." It was the first time I heard something like that, and other things. So that was kind of my first experience of racism there.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How did that influence you and the path that you took?

PHILLIPS: I think it made me just very aware at an early age of what racism is, and how it manifests itself, and in a way that—because living in Trenton, I was around 98 percent black people, and people of color. And then going from there to a place that was 98 percent white people just really made me aware of myself and my place. I think that became compounded when I moved back to Trenton, because a lot of the—just the cultural nuances, things like how you talk, I got teased for stuff like that. Like, "Oh, you talk like a white person," or "Oh, you act like a white person," or just asserting yourself as intelligent is seen—in that cultural context, in a culture where now I can understand what that means. I can understand what it means for someone to think that you talk white, and just how that sort of thing is ingrained and indoctrinated in an oppressed community.

But at the time, I of course didn't understand what that meant, and I didn't understand what it meant to talk white, or just things like that, or just a lot of other racial messaging that I got around my lips being too big, or my nose being too wide. Just these things. Because also, my family, my mother's sister and brother, my mom and her siblings have different fathers. And so my mother's siblings' father is mixed with white, and so they have—so there is white in the family, in that sense. And so my aunt and my uncle used to tease me and say my lips are too big, or my hair is too nappy, or these sorts of things; these experiences that, again, make me sort of aware at a young age, although it would take me many years to understand what it all meant, and to undo some of that oppressive messaging for myself, and how it affected my own self-esteem. At the time, yeah, it definitely did something to me.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When was the time where you were able to start working through some of that? Not just in an emotional sense, but really kind of mixing the emotions with that sort of broader cultural sort of knowledge? Like the sort of informed "this is how to understand why this is happening, or why I was teased in these ways that shouldn't be there?"

PHILLIPS: Right. It took me going to college, honestly, to start to undo a lot of that racial messaging. So I went to Temple University for undergrad, and law school, but in undergrad, I was able to take a lot of African-American studies courses, and that's where it happened. That's where I was un-indoctrinated, and where I began to understand all of this stuff. I have that experience to thank.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Before getting to Temple, from being in early high school, starting high school, being a new mom, how did you get through all of that? I mean, what was going on as the drive for you?

PHILLIPS: A lot of my drive, to be honest, was wanting to undo the cycle. I watched my mom, I watched her struggle. I watched her have three more children and have to struggle to feed us, and then for me to add my own child into the mix, and to still be young and still have to rely on my mother. I didn't want that for myself, and I didn't want that for my child. I didn't want my child to have to grow up wondering where I'm at, and how come—regardless of the fact that my mom had to work, I didn't understand at the time, or I didn't understand why she wasn't there for me when I needed her. I am only just now—maybe a couple of years ago—getting to a place where I am like, OK, this is what happened. But I knew then that I didn't want that for my child. I knew then that I didn't want my child to have the childhood that I had, and to have to experience the things that I had to experience.

I wanted to be able to teach my child and steer them. <**T: 30 min**> I wanted to start a new tradition for my own family where education was valued and important. And not that it wasn't valued for my mother; she just didn't have the opportunities, and I had to grow up hearing her say, "I wanted to be a nurse," or "I wanted to be a doctor," and she never had an opportunity to be able to do that. So I wanted my child to have whatever choices and possibilities there were. I didn't want my child to have to be limited, and to not have to go through what I went through, where I thought I can't be something, or I can't be a writer, or I can't be a creator. I never wanted my child to have to think or ask that. So that was my main motivation. Yeah. That was my main motivation.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What role did the art and visioning of storytelling play for you in that time in high school?

PHILLIPS: It didn't.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Why?

PHILLIPS: I say this all the time. I really put aside any creative stuff, and I really just focused in and saw high school and raising my child as a twenty-four hour job. And I really threw myself into that, and—which is why I think I was able to get through it, and get scholarships and get out. I was not creative during those times in my life. I would say, though, that I had teachers and people in my life in high school who recognized that I had talent and creativity, and pushed me in a lot of ways to bring that out in different ways. And so my English teacher, for example, when I was in eleventh or twelfth grade, eleventh grade, was like, "Oh, you can write. Wow!" And would have me doing some creative stuff, or just really pushed me to just show that, or bring that out. And so I found different ways to be creative in high school through my work, but I wasn't writing stories or doing anything specific at that time.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When did that come back?

PHILLIPS: It didn't come back until after law school, and I started here actually. Yeah. It didn't come back—sorry, one second. Sorry. Sorry. Go ahead. What was you saying?

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When the creativity came back, I mean, it was really focused on getting through Temple, and then getting through Temple Law School, that was—

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: —and being a full-time mom?

PHILLIPS: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So I really didn't have an opportunity to start writing my own stories and getting back into my creative side until after I got through law school and literally started working here. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Why law school? What program were you doing?

PHILLIPS: I majored in criminal justice in undergrad. So, why law school? The reason why law school is because when I was in high school, I had a teacher who—so I'll back up a little bit. I wasn't even really thinking about college seriously in high school after I had my child, because I was thinking I needed to work, I needed—I don't know what I'm going to do. I need to work. Maybe I can go to college, but how am I going to afford it? And then I had to take the PSATs. We had to take it, I think, for whatever reason, the practice SATs. And my score was really good. Some teacher who was a counselor also at Lincoln was like, "Actually, your scores

are great. You should think about college," and just started kind of mentoring me from there. So it was kind of just by chance that these—I did well on this test and somebody noticed me.

The counselor, his name was Mr. Franklin and he had a son who went to Temple Law School, and did his undergrad in two or three years. Went straight through, and then went to law school, and his picture was in this book, in a Temple Law publication or whatever. And he showed me that, and I was like, wow, that's amazing, and that really kind of sparked me. You know, it's just funny to think about that—like those little things is what kind of pushes you to do something that you might not have otherwise have done.

So I started thinking about law school because I was like, well, what else am I going to do? How else am I going to be able to take care of my child? What's a job that I can do, or a career that's going to guarantee me that I am able to take care of my child, and not have to work three jobs to do it? And so <**T: 35 min**> really, I just thought law school is one of the few choices. I didn't want to be a social worker because my mom was a social worker, and it didn't seem like it was going to put me in that position that I wanted to be in. Again, I wasn't thinking that I could be some type of artist or creator; I just didn't think it was possible for me. And I didn't think I had any other talents or any other things, so I was like, oh, law school—anybody can probably do law school. And I was also very much influenced by *X-Files* and *Law & Order*, and I'm just thinking that I'm going to be able to get a law degree and open the X Files. That was kind of my thinking, as silly as it was.

So yeah, that's what influenced me to go to law school. I mean, it's interesting, because when I got into undergrad, started going to Temple, started taking all of these really interesting classes in African-American studies, and sociology, and philosophy, and Greek—you know, all of these really cool classes. I am like, oh, there is actually way more things I could do or think about doing with myself, and way more things that I am interested in than this weird law path. But at the time, because I had been successful in high school in spite of being a teen parent, and I had applied for all of these scholarships, and gotten them, and graduated with a pretty good GPA, there was some spotlight on me. So the *Philadelphia Inquirer* did a couple of stories [about] me. They kind of followed me through high school and through college. And then because of that series of stories, I had a lot of people tuned into my story, writing to me, cheering me on. People sometimes sent me money, all of these things. And so I felt this immense pressure to go to law school, because I was like, people are going to be really disappointed in me if I don't do what I said I'm going to do, even though I didn't want to go to law school anymore. So that's how I ended up in law school.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Wow. When you look back on that, do you think you would do it differently?

PHILLIPS: No.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Why?

PHILLIPS: I don't think I should do it differently if I had a chance. Because I'm here where I am, and I think my life is not perfect, but it has come full circle in a way that feels necessary, and feels like it shouldn't have happened any other way. I mean, of course everybody—there is things I could change. I mean, obviously, my child growing up with a young mother, even though I was pretty cool and did OK, it's not the best circumstances ever for a child, obviously. But somehow, we did it, and my kid's in college now, so I can't think of anything I should change. I consider myself a light expert in time travel, so my imagination of what would happen if I were to go back into time and undo something is not this crazy thing. I don't think I would rip spacetime. It might just open up another parallel universe that's already in existence where something else different has happened. I am content with that universe staying there, and I will just live this one out.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: This is a good one for now?

PHILLIPS: Yes.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I like it. Tell me about where you work now. What's the name of it?

PHILLIPS: So I work at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And what kind of work do you do for them here?

PHILLIPS: I am currently the managing attorney of the housing unit, and I run a staff of currently nine people, which is five attorneys, four paralegals. And we represent, provide legal advice, to low-income Philadelphians who are facing issues with their rental housing, as well as work on the national, state, and local level on policy issues involving affordable housing and other things.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I'm struck by—that your mother was a very young mother when she had you, and you felt a lot of pressures not to do that, and then that happened. And your mother worked in social services, and initially, you were like, "I am not going to—I don't want to do that. I am going to do something different." And yet, the work you are doing, although it is very much your own path, is similar in some ways. What's going on with that?

PHILLIPS: I have reflected on that. I have reflected on that recently, because I was in Atlanta visiting my mom, and she was saying about how she volunteers at a domestic violence hotline, and I am like, "Mom, we actually do the same stuff. We are very interested in the same things." And I hadn't reflected on that before, because <**T: 40 min**> I just have not had a close relationship with my mother, for a lot of reasons. But now I am in a place where I can reflect and be like, you know what? We are very similar in our paths and our interests, and she obviously had a huge influence on me, unconsciously, in how she cares for people, and how it's just natural for her to care for people. She was always the person who took somebody's kid in if they are out on the street or whatever. Even if she wasn't home all—she always has had a huge heart, and has been charitable in the ways that she can be. Totally, it aligns in a lot of different ways. And I see from my own child that spirit as well, so, yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where—maybe rephrase this. There seems to be a sense of justice and making the world a better place, for others around you and for yourself. Where do you think that comes from?

PHILLIPS: I ask myself that often. I think in part, it comes from my own experiences of, like I said, things coming very full circle for me, in a way that I am very conscious of how, as I was coming through high school and through college, the people who helped me, the people who believed in me, believed that I had something to offer. And I feel very compelled to keep that going, and to return that, and to believe in people who sometimes, there is no one else believing in them, or believing them, or willing to not judge them, and to just help and be helpful. So I have had people like that in my life, and I feel compelled to be that person as well.

I think I get a sense of justice from just being a mother. I think there is a natural sense of justice that just comes from having a child and wanting the world to be a better place for your child. And then otherwise, I think—I don't know. I think I am just born that way. I think I just have a spirit of I can't not help and do my part. I just can't see it any other way.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Before we move into visioning the future, tell me about the return of art and creativity and storytelling, and especially this aspect of time travel. How did that come back into your life, and become a part of it?

PHILLIPS: A lot of ways. So I think everything sort of happened synchronistically for me. So I, in law school—so I guess I have always been interested in time travel, and in storytelling, and things like that. But I think in part, what happened in me going to college, and also gaining this awareness of self and this identity of self as affirming my identity as a black woman in a world that is hostile to my existence, I became aware of what I was ingesting, media-wise. So when I was in college and when I was taking these classes, I became aware that the time travel stuff that I loved was very problematic, actually, or like, *The Matrix* is very problematic. My favorite movie in the whole entire world is very problematic in a lot of ways. So I started to become

aware of this thing that I had loved all of my life being problematic, and having these nuances that I had never needed to be aware of. And so I rejected science fiction for a long time during that time, and just didn't deal with it, and didn't really, like I said, want to engage in this creative way, because I really was taking on a more realistic—like, what is the world? What does it mean to me? What does it mean to my existence? That was what I was thinking about, and so I was actually into philosophy a lot more at that time than anything, and existentialism, and all of those sorts of things.

But then I went to law school, and met a friend, and she gave me a copy of—she just kind of knew about my background and what I was interested in before, and handed me a copy of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. And that was it. That was like a rebirth of sorts <**T: 45 min**> for me to understand, one, that there are other black people in the world who are interested in science fiction, contrary to all of the things that I have been told all of my life about it being weird, about it being white, about it being this and that. Two, that it is possible for a black woman to be a protagonist in a science fiction novel, and that black people, it is possible for us to survive in the future. Contrary to what media, television science fiction has told me all of my life, it is possible for us to survive in the future. And Octavia Butler's gave me all of that, and it was about time travel, and it was everything that I could ever dream of.

And so from there, I read all of her work, and then I was—and it's so interesting. I say this all the time when I talk about this—that the Internet was around? It's not like there was no Internet but nothing prompted me to ever look up other black science fiction creators, because it was so set in my mind that this was not for us. And that is profound to me that I didn't even search for it because I already figured it was foreclosed to us as a possibility. So anyway, I got more into her work. I was still in law school, so I—there was just no way I could start doing anything creative until I got out of law school. But I started reading more of her work, and then from there found other black science fiction writers, and then just happened upon this whole community of black science fiction creators, not just writers but people who create art, all of these things.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where was this community? In Philly?

PHILLIPS: No, online. There is this web site called BlackScienceFictionSociety.com, which is like the Facebook of black science fiction. And so I joined that web site, found all of these folks. And also in Philly, which is another part of the story. [. . .] So when I got out of law school—and like I said, I had come across Octavia Butler, I was really excited about getting back into science fiction. I was graduating law school, I had my job set up for me, so I felt like I had a little bit more space to engage in creative stuff, and leisure reading, and things like that. And so I started—this is stupid, but I started taking writing classes at community college right after I graduated law school and started working—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: You just couldn't get enough of school. [laughter]

PHILLIPS: I couldn't! I couldn't. And also started going to science fiction conventions, Philcon and all of this other stuff. And that made me even more aware of my feeling out of place in traditional science fiction worlds and spaces. I would go to these Philcons and these conventions and be pretty much the only black person in the room, or these writing workshops and just, they would totally rip my story apart because it wasn't written in these traditional ways, or I didn't have these traditional characters. So it was very, very discouraging for me, and I stopped going to those things. But I started writing my own work. And eventually, it led me to want a platform to share my own work, because I didn't feel that there was a community here that I could be involved in where I could share this work—even though there was this amazing spoken word community here, which I started going to their events, and all of these other sort of different underground arts communities. But I didn't feel I had—they weren't exactly a right fit for the work I wanted to share with people.

So I started my own thing. I started my organization, the Afrofuturist Affair, which started off as one event, basically just a stage and a platform for other—I had met other black science fiction creators and Afrofuturists here in Philadelphia once, and it's like sometimes you need a language for things before things can come together. Even though people exist in their separate silos and pockets, and we are all doing the same thing, but if you don't have that common language to come together around, you are not doing anything. And so I feel like Afrofuturism was that common language. It was prior to me starting my organization, and it was kind of an underground term—not "underground." More so it existed in the world of academia more so than anything. There weren't many Afrofuturism-themed events, but it was more a tool of analysis for people to say, <**T: 50 min**> "Oh, this person makes this genre of music." But I saw it more as a practice, and something you could live, and something that could activate people, and something that should not have just been exclusive to people who had Internet access and access to an academic institution.

And so I started the Afrofuturist Affair not only to provide a platform for my own work and for other folks, but to bridge this divide between this notion of Afrofuturism which I see as super-expansive, of—at its most basic, it's black people surviving into the future, again, and positively. Like creating—having agency in this future. Not just surviving in it, thriving in it, having agency in this future, which, for the people I was serving at Community Legal Services, that is the i-- that's like the holy grail of ideals that people need to be working with in order to not just get out of their current situation, but again, to be able to survive into the future. And so I started thinking about ways to connect Afrofuturism and that world and that language to what I was doing as an attorney, and it's taken me many years. I am just now getting to the point where I have found sort of a comfortable place with the Community Futures Lab project, of how I bridge those two things. But that's been the work for the past couple years, of that. So. . .

I have to run downstairs and get my partner. I'll bring her up.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: OK. I'll pause it right now.

PHILLIPS: Yes.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: All right, we are back. All right. So we have brought together the work world and the visioning world with Community Futures Lab. Can you tell me just a little bit about what that is for you, before we make our own vision of the future?

PHILLIPS: Sure, yeah. So Community Futures Lab was is, actually, a project that my partner and I started. So my partner and I have a art collective called Black Quantum Futurism, which is sort of an interdisciplinary art practice that includes my writing, her writing, and she is also a musician, and some other stuff, but . . . . And so Community Futures Lab came out of that, and it is a project that is focused in the Sharswood neighborhood of north Philadelphia, which last year went through a massive eminent domain process where thirteen hundred properties were taken through eminent domain, and through that process, about one hundred or so families were displaced. Technically, the term is they were "relocated." And then another four hundred or so families were relocated—I say "displaced," but they say "relocated"—to other parts of the city as they destroyed two housing project towers and a bunch of low-rises in that area. And so I, through my position at Community Legal Services, represented a lot of those folks in making sure that they were relocated safely, and also would have the opportunity to come back to the neighborhood once it was redeveloped. But beyond that, I also live in the community, about ten blocks from Sharswood, and was also very much tuned in to the narrative that was playing out around why this was happening, why people were being displaced, and a lot of the narrative was very negative. Basically, this poverty narrative of people being to blame for their circumstances, and this narrative around essentially people being violent animals in that area, and that they essentially needed to erase and start over. And that obviously is one side of the story, and not the side of the story of the people who actually live there.

And so the Community Future Labs was, one, an attempt to give people an opportunity to tell their own stories and their own narratives about that community: a community that many people had lived in all their lives, or many decades; a community that has a lot of really amazing art and music history; a community that presently has a lot of really amazing artists and musicians; <**T: 55 min**> a community of people who really care about their neighborhood and care about where they live, and care about their neighbors. But so much of that narrative was missing and absent from what was being told about that community. And so the Community Futures Lab was an attempt to allow people to tell their own stories, and to envision what they wanted to see come to that community, and not just have to deal with and live with what is given to them, or forced upon them. And part of that also came out of, again, me observing how everything was playing out from my perspective, as an attorney, but also my perspective as a nearby community member. And just, it was just really terrible, and people expressing—it wasn't just me seeing this and saying, "Oh, I need to do something," but people just literally verbalizing how villainized and victimized they felt by these narratives, and …. So anyway, so it was, in part, that.

And we developed this idea of oral futures as a way to have people speak into existence and envision the futures that they want to see for themselves and their communities, and to create how they can have a role in creating that future. And so to that end, we opened a physical space for a year, and included a series of housing futures workshops where we presented different topics around people's housing rights and other legal rights connected to housing, as well as collected these oral history and oral futures through art making events, so that it wasn't just gathering these stories through interviews, but also gathering stories through things that people make, through writing, through photos, through things that people contributed to the project. And the other part of it was to document the redevelopment as a way to hold the relevant authorities and the city accountable for what they said that they were going to do, and to have proof if they do or if they don't. As well as to build what we call a "quantum time capsule," which is essentially the project archives, but archives that are accessible to the community perpetually. Not something that's locked away at a university or online, necessarily, or places that people can't access, but it's also a living archive that people can add to at any point, take from, all of those things.

So that's the idea behind the Community Futures Lab. We no longer have the physical space because we only had it for a year, and only had funding to do it for a year. However, through the relationships that we built with the community through this project, we are still operating a modified version of it out of the offices of the local neighborhood advisory council.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: It looks amazing.

PHILLIPS: Thanks. Thank you.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about what oral futures are.

PHILLIPS: So "oral futures" as we define it is essentially sort of excavating future memory: people's future memories, memories that haven't played out yet, but exist in the realm of possibility. We see it—so again, our practice around Black Quantum Futurism sort of sees time as quantum, in a sense, in that it does not just work linearly. It's not something that just moves forward into the future. Sometimes, it moves backwards; sometimes, it moves cyclically. And so taking that into account in the different ways that we view time, and people's subjective experiences of time, we thought it was important to bring this future dimension into these interviews and not have people just be focused on history and past, which is equally important, but we see sort of the past as informing the future, and as operating sort of on the same—in the same domain as the future and as the present. And so we wanted to just make sure that we had all of those different dimensions represented, because the project in many, many ways is about time and temporality, and how people <**T: 60 min**> experience time, and you can't get at that with just focusing on the past.

And we also wanted to think about—part of it is sort of an ethnography on how communities form time, how communities create time together, how individual temporality and individual time build up into communal time. So we needed the oral futures to be able to answer some of those questions, or think about some of those questions. We really needed to interrogate people's visions of the future, and to understand how those visions get activated, and not just put away somewhere and whatever, for posterity or whatever.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I have heard some of these ideas, just mostly through the web site, through the Black Quantum Futurism, the Afrofuturist Affair web site, and reading articles here and there about the Community's Futures Lab. And that is absolutely the idea behind this existing project on Energy Futures.

PHILLIPS: Awesome.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So maybe this is a time that we can try to activate the visions of your future for Philadelphia, especially in terms of energy use.

PHILLIPS: Sure.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Does that sound good? To make that transition, I'll ask a couple of abstract questions. The first one is what are some of the things that you value most, and that you love?

PHILLIPS: Things that I value? I think being involved with the Community Futures Lab project over the past year or two has really increased my notion of the value of community. I feel like prior to that project, I thought of community in this very abstract way, in this very fluid way—which I still do, and which I still think is necessary. But having my own structured, dedicated community that I return to and find myself committed to, and getting to know those—I am literally energized when I go to a community meeting. Like after a community meeting—it doesn't even have to be—like it could be a meeting where people were just yelling at each other for an hour, and it's amazing. It's amazing to me, and I feel so good after I leave those meetings. So the value of community, it's invaluable. I mean, it's—so that's one of the things that I'm valuing more and more that I can't say three years ago that I felt that way. Like I didn't know my neighbors; I didn't know anybody from my neighborhood, really, even though I was a homeowner. I am a homeowner in my community.

Other things that I value? I value justice and fairness. I value comfort, and whatever that means to people for themselves, but I know what it means for me. I value—are you talking about principles, or kind of just whatever?

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Whatever. Things that you love. Things that you value. I mean, those are for you to figure out what to tell me.

PHILLIPS: I love science, and science fiction. I love thinking about things I love. Yeah. I love the pursuit of truth, which is also something that is not fixed or defined, which makes it sometimes feel futile, but I still value the pursuit. Yeah, I think that's it.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. What are some of the things that you fear? Things that are most scary to you?

PHILLIPS: I also fear science. I fear government. I fear things like the effects of cognitive dissonance, and how that affects other people, if that makes sense.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are you thinking when you say that?

PHILLIPS: <**T: 65 min**> I think I just fear that things like racism, for example, and the effects of racism are not a matter of rationalization or a matter of just explaining something to someone and trying to reason with people. I fear that reason is never going to help people who have convinced or who are convinced that things like racism is OK, or what—I just fear people whose minds can't be changed, and I think that's more people than we want to believe at times.

I fear the thermodynamic arrow of time.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What is that? Tell me what that means.

PHILLIPS: Just the process that—the scientific process that says that time is linear, or attempts to confirm the linearity of time, and that everything is spiraling into chaos, and that there is no—we can't get back to order. I don't believe that, but I fear that is the belief, and so that informs our reality and how we think we can move through reality.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So fearing the idea of entropy and the heat-death of the universe?

PHILLIPS: Yes.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And that being a mythic narrative that holds people back?

PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes. Exactly.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are things that make you hopeful?

PHILLIPS: Children. My child. Community. Elders. Yeah. I think those things.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: People?

PHILLIPS: People. My job.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Those are great things.

PHILLIPS: People. Good people. Good people make me hopeful. And imagination and creativity makes me feel hope that people are creative and people will be able to find a way forward with that creativity.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you think of the word "energy," what comes to mind?

PHILLIPS: Power. Work. Action. Molecules bouncing around, quickly.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And if someone was to say, "How do you use energy in your life?" how would you answer that?

PHILLIPS: In every way possible. I use it to live, to eat, to see, to work, to move. I use it metaphorically to represent my level of—I don't know. I use it in so many ways, honestly. It's not—yeah. I don't just use it in sort of the physical sense, but there is this energy that kind of means "spirit," I guess, in a sense, or maybe that's a—I don't know if that comes close to what I mean, but it comes close enough. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Let's move forward into the three visioning sections here. The first one is fifty years in the future. So this is the year 2067. Of course, all sorts of visions about what climate change—how rapidly it might be moving, but fifty years in the future is not too far off, right? And fifty years in the past was socially a very different time, but also a really amazing time: 1967. Movie tickets cost $1.25, but the social scene in the United States was just electric, right? So fifty years from now, how do you see Philadelphia, and what's the energy story in Philadelphia?

PHILLIPS: Fifty years from now, I mean, there is two sort of visions in my mind. One is a natural progression from where we are today, which is that <**T: 70 min**> we have succeeded somewhat in having better sources of energy; we are not so wasteful; the environment is not so polluted; we have clean water. There is no lead in our water. That's my hopeful vision, and I say it's a "natural progression" because of the work that I am engaged in, and my colleagues and knowing what they are working on, and then also sort of the government that we have today, the mayor that we have today, who is sort of concerned about these things, and dedicated to working on them, and . . . . So if we have these folks, these kind of folks around, I think we'll be OK.

The other vision is not so good, but honestly, it's not too far off from where we are now. I sort of see things—Philadelphia as more segregated, more air pollution, energy costs are through the roof and no one can afford it, and so poverty is deeper. I could see us going there, too, especially with our federal government, and who knows what havoc they are going to wreak in the next couple years that will spin us off of whatever success we've been able to gain in the past couple years. So I—both of those visions are equally possible in my mind.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: They are in a quantum moment there, aren't they?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, they are, of superposition, where it could collapse on one or the other. But I don't see a world dramatically different either way, either improved or not improved. I don't see it as dramatically different. I don't see flying cars; I don't see those sorts of things happening. Not fifty years, at least.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: In this fifty-year future, where are the energy sources coming from? If now, most of the energy is coming from either coal or from natural gas, which are still fossil fuels and still putting carbon into the atmosphere that's generating climate change, and making it faster and longer—where is the energy coming from in either of these futures that you are foreseeing?

PHILLIPS: In the fifty-year future, the same sources. I would like to say that we've gotten smarter, but I just don't think that's enough time for us to get that much smarter. Although I feel

like more change happens now in a shorter period of time, it's still—physical change can happen, but attitudes and people don't change that much, honestly. No I don't see that we've progressed that much, and that we are using radically different things than we use now --

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Pretty similar?

PHILLIPS: —at least not fifty years, yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Well, let's move forward, then, and see how things might change into the year 2140. So about one hundred twenty-three, almost one hundred twenty-five years in the future. One hundred and twenty-three years in the past was the year 1894, all right? So coal had just become more of a dominant energy source; oil still wasn't really in the picture; natural gas was certainly not in the picture, at least in terms of our energy use. Long before cars became common, before paved roads were a deep commonality, in the United States, at least. So if we are going to take from now and leap to the year 2140 in Philadelphia, what does Philadelphia feel like? What does it look like?

PHILLIPS: So I think in the year 2140, I believe that at that point, quantum technology will be more of a thing, will be more common. And I think along with quantum technology, hopefully, our perspective on the world has shifted from us being mostly binary thinkers and doers and—into quantum thinkers and more of a quantum outlook on the world. And when you have a quantum outlook on the world, your possibilities open up immensely. And so I would think that with quantum technology, we will have better opportunities to have other types of energy sources, because someone will have discovered something in quantum.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And that—imagine one for me. What is that energy source like?

PHILLIPS: I don't know. I mean, I—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: <**T: 75 min**> Does it look like a big shiny metal thing? Is it in somebody's house, or is it something—

PHILLIPS: No.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What is it?

PHILLIPS: I think when we talk quantum, we are talking smaller. So I'm hoping it is not—I don't think it's a big, shiny thing. I don't think it's a big thing with smoke coming out of it. I think it's more quantum: it's something small, it's something you are doing at some atomic level that may not have any emissions, or have any visible output, but it's working at the quantum level. Yeah. I don't know. Yeah. I could see that.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Are they in people's—does everyone have them? Or is it in a centralized system?

PHILLIPS: Huh! Good question. Well, the communist in me believes that it's something more central and communal. But I could also see—no. I think in this quantum world one hundred twenty-three years from now, I think we are communal. We are more—we have realized that the individualized, bootstrapping model of life and existence and everything that we do is—doesn't work, and we are more back into communal living. So yeah, maybe it's something that's more centralized, not in people's homes, because it's not necessary. But then again, if the climate is as messed up as it probably will be, it may be something where we're in pods, and we have our own energy sources. But I don't want that future. I like the idea of communal—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: This is your future. You—

PHILLIPS: —Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How are people moving around?

PHILLIPS: Not cars. Not cars, not flying cars. I am very much—sort of thinking about *Kindred*, for example, Octavia Butler's novel where the protagonist travels back in time into the antebellum South as a black woman, and she understands that the technology that she brings into the past from the future is not going to work for her. Like it's not—there is no way you can walk around as a black woman who is supposed to be a slave with some technology that wouldn't make sense for all different sorts of reasons. And not because you are going to break the fabric of spacetime, but because you'll die.

So I think in terms of that, just that relying on technology that is not far future technology but that is past technology, but it's relative in terms of its technological ability or whatever. I say all that to say that I think a reversion back to more past ways of living and communal living is my vision of the future. Not a shiny post-apocalyptic silver jumpsuit future where we're riding around in whatever. Like we're walking, we're using our bodies as

technology, but not in a way that strains or taxes us. Because I always think about how did my ancestors walk from the fucking South—like how did that happen—and I can't even walk two blocks without getting winded? So just thinking about how we adapt ourselves to get back to a point where we can walk long distances and it works out, and that's our main way of—or these sorts of things. I don't see cars necessarily, but maybe something with wheels. But not cars.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. OK. What about food energy?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, I guess I would give the same answer. I think at a point, it's going to be necessary to go back, and to think about the old ways of doing things, and seeing technology as relative. But also, I occasionally read historical stuff, and things weren't that great back then either, in terms of food and stuff. I was reading this one thing about <**T: 80 min**> how during the French Revolution, there was this theory or this correlation between the bread being poisoned and moldy, and it having some LSD-type effect that potentially was why everybody went crazy during the French Revolution. So just things like that worry me.

I mean, we can't clone food. I don't want that future where we're cloning food, or where we're GMOs. I don't know about all that stuff too much, but I don't want that future. I don't want a future of fast food restaurants. And even now, for myself, I think about how difficult it is to cook every night, and things like that, and how more and more, I'm relying on UberEATS, which is just not good. That's not a future I want. That's not a future I'm happy about moving into. More, I guess, growing our own food. More understanding of how food works and impacts our bodies, and the importance of that, because I feel like that's something I never really learned too well. I mean, everybody's had a health class, but besides the food pyramid, I really don't know too much about food, to be honest, except what I like to eat, and what tastes good. So I think a future where we are just as knowledgeable about food as anything else, and the different impacts it has on our bodies, and so that we can eat for energy, and eat to be able to do, and not just eat for pleasure or for taste, which is where I'm at in my life. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Is Philadelphia getting bigger or smaller? Or is it the same?

PHILLIPS: In the future? Maybe smaller, as people run away from cities. I think it—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: People will flee Philadelphia?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. I see that. But then again, I sort of see Philly as—I mean, they call it a "sanctuary city." It has its issues, but I do see that something about it feels a little free for me. And if we are in a sort of post-apocalyptic future that I hope we don't go into, I see Philly as

continuing to have that status, where it's a sanctuary in amongst other places. I think that energy is here, that freedom spirit is here, and I think that will last.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So three hundred years into the future, about—we are going to go to the year 2312—that same amount of time in the past was the year 1722. So Philadelphia still existed—it already was around then—but it was only about forty years old, and there was a whole lot that was going to happen in terms of oppression, in terms of colonization, in terms of science and technology, and communal development that happens in that three hundred-year period. So if we take from Philadelphia today and move forward three hundred years, what's Philadelphia like, and what's the energy in Philly then, in the year 2312?

PHILLIPS: Three hundred years from now, I don't know if there is a Philly. I don't know if there is an America.

[. . .]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So three hundred years in the future, there may not be a Philadelphia? There may not be a United States?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. Mother Nature has more than likely reclaimed her ground. Yeah. So Philadelphia is just grass and wild animals roaming around. That's one future. The other future, part of my science fiction brain <**T: 85 min**> is like, actually, nothing at all has changed. We are actually in some weird static present that continues to look the same way it is, and actually, no one dies, and we are just here forever, and stuck with each other, replaying the same timeline again and again. But that's some weird conspiracy path.

So, yeah. So it's either Mother Nature has reclaimed us, or we are sort of stuck in the same present moment. And also, in this three hundred years from now, time is defined differently, so we may not even be in the year 20-something. Maybe we have reset because everything is out of control, and people have realized that time doesn't actually exist in the way that we thought it did. So time is not a thing in this future. Yeah. We might be stuck in the present moment, and so everything kind of looks the same, and nothing has really changed so much. Yeah. It's not very hopeful, but that's what I'm getting from three hundred years from now.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I see it. Do you have anything else to add about the visions of the future, and what you think Philadelphia's future will be, especially in terms of energy and climate change?

PHILLIPS: I hope that the future will bring clarity and understanding around how environmental racism—what it is and how it is—and how climate change and other environmental issues especially impact communities of color, who already are impacted by so many things. And so when we think about things like health and happiness, and stability, and housing, we very, very rarely think about how the environment plays a role in that. And so I—for the future—see more awareness around these things, and this conversation being a part of these other conversations and these other movements and actions around health, housing, safety, the ability to exist comfortably.

I see a future where that conversation is on par with these other conversations, and it—and a part of them, because I think we can no longer afford to silo these issues. We are seeing our abject failure of what happens when we silo these issues: they just get worse and worse. And sort of excluding people of color, black people, from these conversations, whether intentionally or not, is a mistake, because we are literally dying from environmental issues, and we don't think of them as our issues, generally speaking. Of course, I can't speak for everything, but we just don't think of them as our issues. We think of environment as something out there, and not something here that we are in and around us. And so I see a future where that conversation is different, and people understand the importance of environment, because it is all we have, almost literally.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Awesome. Thank you so much for your time today.

PHILLIPS: Yeah! Of course. It was fun.

[END OF AUDIO, FILE 1.1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]