

Maxine Greene

Video 1

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Today is November 11, 2010. My name is Audrey Amrein-Beardsley. I'm an Associate Professor at Arizona State University and the fortunate host of a new show titled *Inside the Academy*. Today I have the honor of interviewing Dr. Maxine Greene, educational philosopher, teacher, lecturer, author, and social activist. Welcome to Inside the Academy. It's such a pleasure to honor you. The first part of the show is called "Becoming Maxine." We'll talk a little about your personal history and background. So where were you born?

MAXINE GREENE

I was born in New York City. I grew up in Brooklyn. Can't you tell? And you said "becoming," I'm an existentialist, and so I am still becoming.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You're still becoming.

MAXINE GREENE

You don't stop.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Always becoming Maxine. Tell us about your parents.

MAXINE GREENE

Neither one was an educator (1:00). My father was a, he always said he graduated from the third grade. So he was, he had a business called Artificial Pearls. He manufactured them and sold them. And my mother was his secretary before they got married. And after that, I think she became the kind of woman that I didn't want to be—very interested in clothes, and shoes, and playing Bridge. I didn't want to be like her. I respected her, but I was not the kind of woman I admired.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Did you have a brother and sister?

MAXINE GREENE

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And they were twins, is that correct?

MAXINE GREENE

You know, teachers I became very romantic about. A woman, a French teacher, who talked about the First World War (2:00) and her life in France—she seemed to be so motivated and so energetic. I wanted to be like her.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Is that how you got an interest in education?

MAXINE GREENE

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you went to Barnard College.

MAXINE GREENE

Barnard, yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And what was your major?

MAXINE GREENE

History.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

History. Tell us about your husband.

MAXINE GREENE

Pardon?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your husband.

MAXINE GREENE

My first or my second?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Both. Which one would you prefer to talk about?

MAXINE GREENE

He's laughing. My first husband was a doctor, a general doctor. We were not very wealthy. So I had to take care of his office. I had to learn how to take tests and all that stuff, and collect the money, which was sparse. But he was a nice guy, but I think he was in the Second War (3:00), World War II, he was a doctor there, and when he came home, I thought he was very dismissive of women, and I think. He said, "The only thing you were ever good at was school. So go back to school." I couldn't stand that, so we were divorced. And I married my second husband, couldn't care less about academics or art. He as a patent attorney and a wonderful poker player. I think he liked poker playing than most things. But he was a nice, easy guy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
How many children do you have?

MAXINE GREENE
I had two. I have one left. I had a very talented, a very pretty daughter, who died of cancer. My son remains. I (4:00) don't what he is. He's a nice guy, but he hasn't got a career or anything.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Well I talked to your sister, Jean Shinefield, and she says that you were always brilliant. You went to Barnard College, majored in history, you went to Columbia University, and you got straight A's. She when you graduated, though, you went to Europe instead of graduation. Is that right?

MAXINE GREENE
(nods)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Where did you go in Europe?

MAXINE GREENE
After Barnard?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Yes.

MAXINE GREENE
I remember looking for a job.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Looking for a job?

MAXINE GREENE
And I wanted to get a job in publishing—no luck. It was, you know, I sold at Altman's, and I did all the things unemployed women did. And then I, I sold books in Macy's book department. All the things. The first job I got (5:00), let's see, I went back to school because it was hopeless, and I had a daughter. What was it? I had to take her to school everyday from New York to Brooklyn. So I had to find a class that was between ten and two. So I rode everywhere. So the reason I'm a philosopher is because there was a philosophy class between ten and two.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Oh, you're kidding? That's how you became the philosopher.

MAXINE GREENE
I tried to become. It was hard because there were very few women in the field. And also I was an existentialist, and everybody, well it seemed, not everybody, but the dominant movement was

analytic, logical analytic, and that was not for me (6:00). So, it took a while, but I managed partly through writing and partly through speaking.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your sister says that about you. She says that all she ever remembers you doing is writing poetry and stories. So that is your favorite pastime, is that right? Is that why you worked in Macy's in the bookstore?

MAXINE GREENE

Pardon?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Is that why you worked at Macy's in the bookstore, your love of writing and your love of literature?

MAXINE GREENE

I think it was the only thing I could get.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your sister said of all your accomplishments, your biggest regret was that you didn't win the Outstanding Camp award.

MAXINE GREENE

I didn't?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Win the Outstanding Camp award at camp.

MAXINE GREENE

Oh, that's right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What happened at camp?

MAXINE GREENE

She won it. My younger sister. And then, trying to be very noble, I sent a telegram to my mother. I said, "Isn't it (7:00) wonderful? Jean won the award!" Meantime I was wishing to kill her.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You hold a PhD awarded in 1955 and an M.A. awarded in 1949 from New York University. What did you study for your dissertation?

MAXINE GREENE

At NYU?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

At NYU.

MAXINE GREENE

Literature and philosophy. I think I got the doctorate in both of those. I wasn't really an English major, but I was very interested in literature. So I forgot now won out, but I'm still interested in philosophy and literature, the relation between them. If I teach (8:00), I think literature feeds into philosophy. So philosophy has more body, more life if you're reading novels at the same time. Because novels raise questions that philosophy books don't.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you can apply those philosophies as you read. And your interests in arts, how did that come about?

MAXINE GREENE

In art?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes.

MAXINE GREENE

I knew nothing, and I never took real art courses, but my interest in art comes partly in museums and partly from literature, which is an art form. The whole idea of imagination and creative realities, alternative worlds are very important to me and still are important. And when I talk about wide awakesness (9:00), I want people to notice things that are in the world that they wouldn't notice if they didn't see paintings, if they didn't read novels. Like I look at that tree, and I see it better because I've seen paintings of trees. I've seen Manet and Monet. They don't look like that, but it makes me see what I wouldn't normally see. For example, I see their design of the branches, which the artist helps me see. So I like the idea that artists awaken me to the world.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And how might we apply your theory of wide awakesness in schools today, while teaching children?

MAXINE GREENE

I want to communicate to children the excitement of imagination of seeing new things, of seeing (10:00) possibility. What worries me about schools, are children go to school, they don't see the point. It's boring, you know, it's dull. But if you can make them see there is a point. If they can imagine possibility. And that takes imagination. Possibility for their own lives or their community. I have, during the Iraqi War, tried to keep students, if they weren't little kids, awake to the injustice, to brutalities, so that they would feel an obligation to at least to act to imagine something better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's great.

MAXINE GREENE

You know (11:00), imagination has to do with thinking things could be different. And when you read about these awful things that happen, like reading about how women are treated in Arab countries. You know, you imagine how things could be different there. You can't say, "Well that's the way things are." I don't want to accept it that way. I'd like to think how things might be, not how they are. I don't want to stick with it and take it for granted. Did you study philosophy when you were in college?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Did I take philosophy? I did. Well I have my PhD, so I took philosophy courses, but I did more of the research thing.

MAXINE GREENE

Philosophy can be very boring, but it can be very interesting if you ask impossible (12:00) questions, you know. Or unanswerable questions, like, why does my friend have cancer with so little chance of getting better? She's a good person. Why did that happen to her? Or, what can I do to change things? Those are the unanswerable questions.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So that's why when earlier you referred to the analytic notion that you rejected. You rejected that notion your entire life, is that right? And so that, correct me if I'm wrong, but that's how you see what might happen in our schools. We so overly concentrated on analytics, that we might do this wide awakesness idea and really wake up our children in terms of reality.

MAXINE GREENE

I can't remember, once I probably told people, it was the year after my daughter died, and I think I went to the movies, I didn't know what to do with myself, and I saw (13:00) a movie, where was it, in South America the mothers were marching with pictures of their disappeared children, you know, on the front. And I thought, you know, that's the human condition. Why do I pity myself? You know, that happens. It happened to them. It happened to me. So I can't go around the world going, "Oh, you poor thing. You deserve something better." But I always remember that. Do you remember that? The women walking with the pictures of the babies?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes, the children.

MAXINE GREENE

And that kind of thing still exists.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It does. Today being Veteran's Day, we stand witness to that quite a bit as well.

Tell us about the Lincoln Center Project in the Arts and Humanities.

MAXINE GREENE

It was, let's see (14:00), late Lincoln Center had just started trying to open itself to young people, to schools, and I went, I think I went down there, and somebody, I think they had Teachers College call me. He said, "Go to Lincoln Center and invent an institute." So I remember I went there, and what we invented was a series of workshops run by dancers, or musicians, or painters, and young people could be part of the workshops. Not that they became musicians. But they became, they found out what it meant to be really engaged in music, or engaged in dance, so they had them dancing and understanding (15:00) what was involved in, you know, in the body and the movement, and so. And still, we have a little budget project there now. But it's still going on.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes. We have Lincoln schools in Arizona, in the Valley.

MAXINE GREENE

I hope it keeps up. I wrote one book called, *Blue Guitar, Variations on a Blue Guitar*, and it's lectures I gave at Lincoln Center. It sort of says what it was about. And the Blue Guitar is a poem by Wallace Stevens, who says the man played on the blue guitar, and people asked him what he was doing. He said he wanted to play as the world was different. And they said, "We want things just the way they are." It's what imagination does (16:00). I love the idea of a blue guitar, and a lot of artists have used that image. Not from me, but from, you know.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You went from New York University, beginning your teaching in 1949, to Brooklyn College, with a short stint at Montclair State College, then on to Teachers College here in New York at Columbia. You have been here since 1965. What brought you to Teachers College?

MAXINE GREENE

What?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What brought you to Teachers College?

MAXINE GREENE

I was lucky enough to have published one or two articles which, so the editor of the Teachers College Record invited me to come to the college, and it wasn't easy because they hadn't hired many women in, you know, big jobs. And it took a while, (17:00) but that kept me there. Eventually that changed. I've been very fortunate. They've been very good to me at Teachers College. I could find out what I really love to do.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure. They gave you that academic freedom.

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Janet Miller based her dissertation on your work that spoke to curriculum theory and the study of literature, and calls herself one of the luckiest people in the world...

MAXINE GREENE

Oh, my goodness.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

To live in New York City, where she can see you. She notes that your greatest gift to the world is you humanity, your questioning of your own...

MAXINE GREENE

You make me cry.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I know. Your own purposes. What do you see as your main purpose in your life?

MAXINE GREENE

My main purpose was to move others to find themselves, you know, to find their potential, their possibility, to know who they could be. I think Janet has gone very (18:00) far. She's very well known in the profession. And I hope I helped her a little bit, you know, having the courage to be what she wanted to be. Because, like many of us, she came from a middle class family like I did, who didn't give a damn about the arts or anything like that. So you have to a kind of rebel to succeed in these worlds, and she was. She is a very gentle, sweet person; but if she didn't rebel against the ordinary, she wouldn't be Janet Miller.

Video 2

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I talked to David Berliner about you. He wanted me to ask you about the trip to the hip hop concert. He said you have a love for hip hop.

MAXINE GREENE

Me?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah. Poetry in action.

MAXINE GREENE

I want first, I want very much to understand the language of young people. And the fact that I like Mozart doesn't me in relation. A lot of students like hip hop; so eventually somebody asked me to write about it, and I wrote preface to a book on hip hop. And now I believe more that we have to open ourselves. That's a language that children appreciate. The other thing I always like about hip hop that, not only is it a language, but it's like walking away of being (1:00) like swagger, and they teach you how to understand that. But I don't really know hip hop. I don't do it. Do you?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I don't do it. I can try to dance to it. But that's about as close as I get.

MAXINE GREENE

Like I always remember sometime on television they had something with hip hop, and they had this old, and he had like a band around his head, and he was so proud of doing hip hop. It's a funny world, but you have to try to understand it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's an art in their own mind. I talked also with Jacqueline Ancess. She says that, that she is part of Maxine's Mafia. What is Maxine's Mafia? Do you have a following called Maxine's Mafia?

MAXINE GREENE

I hope I have some. But I remember there was something. I forget who it was, I think a professor at Teachers College. And we went out to make a, both of us had to make a speech at the same place, and he opened his attaché (2:00) case, and there was a gun in it. So I realized you never know who you're traveling with. He was a professor with a gun. His name was Yanni, I always remember that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She also says that you have a wonderful "crap detector."

MAXINE GREENE

A wonder what.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A "crap detector."

MAXINE GREENE

Oh.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is that?

MAXINE GREENE

I don't know.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You don't know? Okay. Michelle Fine, she talked about MOMA II: Museum of Maxine's Adorings. In her words, there is a book that embodies the radical chic MOMA II: Museum of Maxine's Adorings. Are you familiar with this book?

MAXINE GREENE

No.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay. Included within this are letters and notes from those you have touched. Or in Michelle Fine's words "from those for whom your words have been balm for the soul (3:00), inspiration for a different tomorrow, and the inspiration that circulates when the air is dead."

MAXINE GREENE

Really? That's great.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I chose this letter from the book to share about a woman whose life you touched. It says:

"Dear Maxine,

When you walked into the prison college room in 1999, I admit I was suspect. A fancy University of Columbia professor—a philosopher coming to talk to us. I knew that Michelle usually brought us good people, but well trust me, I had my doubts about you. But then you spoke. You read aloud from Tillie Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing.' And you asked us about the pain of losing our babies when we got locked up."

Do you remember this?

MAXINE GREENE

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

"And you told us about the pain of losing yours, and you cried. You didn't talk down to us. You just talked with us. You (4:00) even made an 'us,' like those salons you say you have in your living room, someday, maybe. John Dewey said 'democracy is community always in the making.' Or at least you told us that John Dewey said that."

MAXINE GREENE

John Dewey said that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

"So, Maxine, you entered our lives in that horrible little room in the middle of Hell, and you were like a midwife giving birth to a community in the making."

MAXINE GREENE

That's lovely.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Isn't that great?

"Now that I am out of Bedford, whenever I enter a room, I always feel out of place. I try to grab back in my memory to conjure you up, and then, with hesitation and enormous fear, I speak. If I speak what is rumbling in my belly and careen through my nerves, I connect up with the rumblings and the empty bellies of my other fellow women. And soon we all feel full and together, if just for a moment."

So she thanks you, with (5:00) the other people that wrote the letters in this book, for the impact that you've had on their lives.

MAXINE GREENE

I worry so much about that book because I was worried people would write eulogies. I hated that. I hated that thought. But it's not so embarrassing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's just such a testament to what you've done with you career.

MAXINE GREENE

I should be dead. I'd appreciate it more.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I also talked to Graeme Sullivan. When he was chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities at Teachers College, in the year when you celebrated your 90th birthday, three years ago. He renewed your teaching contract for 20 years. Do you remember that?

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He says you will never stop teaching. Tell us about your teaching.

MAXINE GREENE

I'm not the kind of teacher who wants to oppose a kind of authority on people. I suppose I'll never stop (6:00) trying to wake people up to ask questions, to have passion in the way they look at the world. I think he means that. I hope so. I wish he was at the college now. Did you meet him?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, just by electronic communication.

MAXINE GREENE

He went to Penn State I think.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure. Do you still have courses? Do you still teach courses?

MAXINE GREENE

Pardon?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you still teach courses?

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Are they here in your apartment?

MAXINE GREENE

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about those.

MAXINE GREENE

They sit on the floor in my living room.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

They sit on the floor here? And how many students do you teach?

MAXINE GREENE

I have 20. And then I have a small group, which I love. I have four people, just to share our experiences, so I'm very fortunate, very fortunate. Seungho helps with that. Without him, I probably couldn't do it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are the courses that you teach? Philosophy?

MAXINE GREENE

Aesthetics and Education (7:00), and the way in which art experiences can awaken, you know, awaken people. But as Seungho knows, we talk about a lot of other stuff, like the relation to others. He said before, he's interested in identity and how you create in an identity within a culture or in relation to other cultures. I've learned a lot from him. I hope he's learned something from me.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I'm sure he has. I think we all have.

MAXINE GREENE

Trouble is, he'll go and get a wonderful professorship, and I'll never see him again.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your high school of Arts, Imagination, and Inquiry.

MAXINE GREENE

I wish it were mine, but it isn't really. I started it, and we had a lot of meetings, and I think I contributed to their (8:00) curriculum and so on. The thing that sort of separated me from the school was somebody at Lincoln Center had a very sort of a rigid idea of curriculum. It was a

curriculum of capacity, she called it, and I couldn't deal with that. But at the same time, the idea that imagination lasted in this school. The other problem with the school for somebody like me was most of their teachers are from Teach for America, which is not quite what some of us believe in. But still it's better than an ordinary school. I wish I could take credit for it. I can't.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure.

MAXINE GREENE

But I was thinking this morning that they're talking about the new commissioner of education, and how it was always a (9:00) businessman, now it has to be a woman who is a businessman, a businesswoman. They think of education as a business, and you measure the results like you measure, I hate that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I agree. Tell us about your Sunday Salons.

MAXINE GREENE

I worry about that. I don't know if it's self-aggrandizement or not, but I started it, and it's really better than a lot of the book clubs because people feel very free, you know, and feel, they talk about their authentic responses to different novels, and I love them. I'm thinking of having another one, but, you know, getting, sometimes we get 40 people in here.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In your apartment?

MAXINE GREENE

They read, you know. Last time we had so many (10:00) we had to go to Teachers College and use a room there. But people want to talk about books and art, and they don't want to do it with an authority telling them what's right, I think. I might do it again. But then I worry people will think I'm trying to blow my own horn, and I don't want to do that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, you do not come off like that.

MAXINE GREENE

Anybody could do it, but I guess I'm more pushy than some.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about the Maxine Greene Foundation.

MAXINE GREENE

Oh, unfortunately we started a foundation only to discover you have to do so much that I couldn't do, the grants, and then we just didn't have enough money to give really meaningful grants. Once in a while, we gave a grant (11:00) early on to a musician who has a community work, a community program, and I just found out he got a MacArthur Award, which is very

important. So once in a while, something very good happens, but I don't have the foundation. If you have one, you have to have someone running it, you know, and taking care of the funds, and when I went looking for somebody to run it, they want 75,000 dollars a year, you know. So I couldn't do it, so I gave it up.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What were the purposes of the grants?

MAXINE GREENE

The purpose was to encourage young artists to do what they could do, but also to work in communities. Like in some places where there were Latin American children (12:00), where we could feed in Latin American art and artists. That what I was trying to do. Just open up the world to children who are ignored. But I didn't succeed.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Well you succeeded in many ways.

MAXINE GREENE

My next life I'll try again.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure. It's never too late in this life. What about experiential learning?

MAXINE GREENE

I think unfortunately, because of the testing movement, we value the ability to take a test. I would like more value placed on imagination and creativity, and I believe that if you can encourage imagination, a lot of children would do better because if you're freed (13:00) to look at the possibilities for alternative solutions to things, learning can be very interesting. It is to me right now, at my age. There's so much to know to learn. And I would hope that children could have that feeling, instead of that bored, dreary feeling of going to school.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And very reductionistic, in terms of what we select as the right answer.

MAXINE GREENE

Did you ever teach?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I did. I taught middle school mathematics and high school. Yeah.

MAXINE GREENE

It's very difficult.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's very difficult.

MAXINE GREENE

I think it's the most difficult job and the most wonderful job.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you had the opportunity to be a teacher today, would you be a teacher in a public school?

MAXINE GREENE

If they would let me be myself. You know, if there wasn't somebody to look over my curriculum.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Of which of your scholarly contributions are you most (14:00) proud? And why?

MAXINE GREENE

Books I wrote?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes.

MAXINE GREENE

In one way, I'm proudest of the last one, which is *The Dialect of Freedom*. But another way, the first one *Teacher as Stranger*, which somehow or another, opened the way for me to talk to people. And it was a first book, and the idea was, and now it seems sort of funny to me, *Teacher as Stranger*, was teacher who sees a new world when he comes into a classroom. It's like when I go to Paris, and I see something differently than someone who lives in Paris all the time. I like this idea of a stranger coming in and discovering something new. And a lot of people liked that book. It went into many editions. I was lucky with it. But I think probably (15:00) intellectually, the best one was *The Dialect of Freedom*. And I hope I write another one before I die.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What would that book be?

MAXINE GREENE

It would be more about art seriously, and imagination, and possibility, and trying to put it in a realistic frame. You know, try to acknowledge that the world doesn't exactly welcome that kind of thing. It's a consumer world. It's a money-haunted world. And how can you write in such a way that appeals to people. And then I would like very much to expose the effects of media on a lot of people. I don't like, every time I talk, I talk about American Idol, and what harm that does to people, to kids (16:00). You know, to be a celebrity on *American Idol*, or to dance with a star? I would like to expose those things, show that there's something better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Than that. Than what the media produces and promotes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Not only have you served as the president of the Philosophy of Education Society, and American Educational Studies Association, and the American Educational Research Association, in 1984, you were the first female president in 31 years, is that right?

MAXINE GREENE

Mmhmm.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You've served as the editor of *Teachers College Record* for seven years. You have achieved educator of the year awards.

MAXINE GREENE

I was very busy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You are. Medals of honor, scholarly and lifetime achievement awards, you have nine honorary degrees from universities across the country, and you were elected as a member of the National Academy of Education, hence why we are honoring you today with the *Inside the Academy* interview. What haven't you accomplished in your life that you would still like to achieve?

MAXINE GREENE

What haven't I accomplished?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That you still want to achieve?

MAXINE GREENE

I feel, even as I hear that, that I didn't accomplish much, you know, that accomplishment (1:00) would be opening up more and more people to the world, teaching, I think, I didn't ever teach in a poor public school. You know, I think I should have at some time in my life, that I was privileged that I taught in good schools. I never taught in a Harlem school, for example, and I should have to feel that I was really contributing. I've been there, but I realize, I think he said, Seungho, you went, you saw a lot of those schools. And he saw the difficulty, and every time he talked about it, I asked myself, "Could I have managed that?" You know, could I manage a school with unhappy children, or poor children, or children who didn't know why they were in school? And I don't know, if I had achieved (2:00) more, I would have known more, and maybe done more in schools like that. But I didn't.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So that's your *Teacher as Stranger* applying to your self, that you would like to have done that—be a stranger in that environment.

MAXINE GREENE

And I think I was, you know, to be public school teacher, to get the certification, to manage the bureaucracy, I think I was afraid of that. So I didn't do it. I should have done it. You were a teacher? You are a teacher?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I was a teacher.

MAXINE GREENE

In high school?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In middle school and high school. And now college. Yep. But also inner city as well.

MAXINE GREENE

Is it a hard school to teach in?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It was very difficult. Yes. But that's inspired me to... But enough about me. This is about you.

Also in celebration of your 90th birthday, Dr. James M. Giarelli at Rutgers University wrote of your ambition (3:00) as a young woman to have wanted to write a novel by the age of 20. He argues that you were ultimately successful, in that you have crafted your novel like literary critic, Leo Lerman, by writing your life's novel your whole life. If you could revise or rewrite a chapter in your life's novel, what would it be?

MAXINE GREENE

I probably would have waited longer to write a novel. I wrote novels before I was really ready to do it. But I know I always wished I would write a novel before I was 16. I realize now that I didn't know enough. I didn't know about sex. I didn't know about relationship. I wish I did. Like for example, I'm reading a book that got such high reputation. (4:00) It's called *Freedom*, you know, and I don't like it. I don't like novels that stay on the surface of things. I would have like to write like a Russian novel. I would like to be like a Dostoevsky, but I'm not. I'm a Jewish girl from New York.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Here is a series of introspective questions for you. The first one: Who most helped you become the person you are today?

MAXINE GREENE

I had to choose myself somehow. I'm trying to think. I had a teacher in high school who inspired me—a French teacher. But I don't think I could talk about anybody who really helped me (5:00). I wanted to rebel, and I needed rebellious friends. Like, for example, doesn't seem to connect, but among the happiest times of my life were during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, and going to demonstrations and organizing a demonstration. Those were my big moments,

strangely enough. I like being a part of a mass that had ideals I think. That doesn't exist now so much.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Not so much. Not like then.

MAXINE GREENE

I should have gone to Washington to hear, you know, John so and so, and, you know, the other day they had a big conference on against inanity. John, the one of the Daily Show.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

John Stewart? No.

MAXINE GREENE

Doesn't matter.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

John Stewart. (6:00) Yes, John Stewart.

MAXINE GREENE

Stewart, yeah. I would like to be a part of something big again.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you?

MAXINE GREENE

What inspired me?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you? Just you. What continues to inspire you?

MAXINE GREENE

I wanted to be a part of what was moving ahead, what was progressive. At the same time, I was, I used to go to a place called Highlander, Highlander down in Tennessee; and the man who started it was a very sort of wonderful man, who believed in bringing people together to sing together. He was being interviewed by Bill Maher one time, and Bill Maher said, "Who is your favorite poet?" He was this formal type man. He said, "Percy (7:00) Bysshe Shelley." Everybody was surprised. He said, "Why Shelley?" "Because he believed in freedom," he said. And that always moved me very much. I used to go with some of his people to work with groups who, like they wanted to have a school lunch program; and I got together, and I sometimes went with those. I like that kind of activity. Sounds sort of stupid, but anyways.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, it doesn't at all.

What do you find uninspiring?

MAXINE GREENE

What?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you find uninspiring? What doesn't inspire you? Uninspiring?

MAXINE GREENE

What don't I like?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah. Like what...

MAXINE GREENE

A lot of popular culture I don't like.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Popular culture.

MAXINE GREENE

Like, I don't understand how people can look at situation comedy on T on Teachers College, oh, Teachers College, I mean television (8:00). I like to acknowledge when stuff is dull and doesn't really touch the human condition, which sounds very elitist. At the same time, I wouldn't listen to a lot of what's on television. I look at the program, "Ah, who cares?" And I would like, as I said, I would like kids to understand it enough to be critical of what's on television—what they see all the time.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

As consumers.

MAXINE GREENE

Do you have children?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I do.

MAXINE GREENE

How many?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Two. Six and seven. Little ones.

MAXINE GREENE

But they're very, they look at television a lot.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Not so much. We, sometimes. Certain shows. Like Spongebob Squarepants, but that's...

What is your favorite word? (9:00)

MAXINE GREENE

What?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

MAXINE GREENE

My favorite work?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Word.

MAXINE GREENE

Word. Reflection, or passion, or both. Passion I think. Sounds like an opera.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession other than your own, would you have liked to attempt?

MAXINE GREENE

Would I not liked?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Would have liked. Something different. What would you have liked to be?

MAXINE GREENE

Oh. I would like to be a playwright or an actress.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Really?

MAXINE GREENE

I think so. Impossible. But I think that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Is it impossible?

What profession other than your own would you not liked to have attempt?

MAXINE GREENE

I wouldn't want to run a department store or be buyer. And I wouldn't want to be a scientist. I'm too dumb. (10:00) I wouldn't know how to be a physicist or anything like that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Don't sell yourself short. What is your favorite movie?

MAXINE GREENE

Oh, there are so many. Right now *The Lives of Others* and *Brokeback Mountain*.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Brokeback Mountain? Why those two?

MAXINE GREENE

Let me see. *Brokeback Mountain* was such a, sort of a wonderful expose of the killing effect of convention. (11:00) You know how people will give up who they really are to be accepted. I may not remember it all together; but I remember I thought it was wonderful. The lives of others, first of all, it raises a real question, how do you know others? How do you know the lives of others? And also, it's very, you know it's partly in a Nazi period, you know how people struggled against the, tried find what it was to be in good faith. I like that. I could think of others.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, I agree, that's an excellent movie.

What is your favorite book?

MAXINE GREENE

Oh, I can't say. I can say Moby Dick. I can say Ana Karenina. I could say Under the Volcano. I could say a lot of Hemingway. I used to love Hemingway. Now I know I'm not supposed to love Hemingway, but I. And Camus, The Stranger. So I have to say they're all my favorite.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Since we're in New York, what's your favorite Broadway?

MAXINE GREENE

I wish I could see more.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Oh, sure.

MAXINE GREENE

I'm trying. There are so many that were so important like the Shakespeare plays, or Equus, I remember, or the one now I want to see, the Pitman (12:00) artist, the theater called Red about, you know, the painter who painted all red. There are a lot of things, but I don't go as often as I'd like to. I'd have to hire a good van to take me. Do you go to theatre much?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Just here. Just in New York. But you're very fortunate to live here. It's a wonderful city.

If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

MAXINE GREENE

I should fight off those power men, you know. Be realistic, and don't be, don't have fantasies about how you can build a new world. I feel sorry for him in a way. But, maybe not, but he had such expectations (13:00). We all did, such hope. But this is a capitalist country. A money-mad country. A country covered, filled with fraud and dishonesty. So he has, how do you deal with all that? I loved his books. I loved the person who is behind those books. But it's too much. It's too much to deal with. I can't imagine wanting to be president. Can you?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I can't. No. That might be one career I would not have liked to attempt.

What are your thoughts about his educational policies?

MAXINE GREENE

I don't like them because he doesn't really support public schools. He, what do you call those again?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Charters?

MAXINE GREENE

Charters schools. He's very much for charter schools, and I think even though charter schools could be good schools, they can also be (14:00) dominated by business ethic, you know. Hedge fund people opening charter schools, and I don't trust them. So I wish, I would like a real support from public schools in the old tradition. Schools that are ready to educate every child no matter who. And schools that are aware of the public space. Aware of what it is to become a decent citizen. To become aware of democracy. I don't think that happens now.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Unless it's on the test.

MAXINE GREENE

That's right. Anyway. Am I finished?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Almost. We have three more questions. Are you doing okay? Okay?

MAXINE GREENE

Okay.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

MAXINE GREENE

(15:00) What?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

MAXINE GREENE

I'm trying to think. I was going to say Vanessa Redgrave, or Joan Didion, or something. Did you mean a writer or an artist?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Anybody. Dead or alive. That you'd like to have breakfast or lunch with.

MAXINE GREENE

Anybody. I can't think of his name. He's a well known African American thinker and philosopher. West. What's his first name?

Background:

Cornell West.

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Cornell West.

MAXINE GREENE

I'd like that kind of understandable philosophy. I wouldn't mind doing that. And then before she died, (16:00) and even today, I'm an enormous admirer of Hannah Arendt. I would like to know as much as she knew.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

MAXINE GREENE

At the Gate. I'd like him to say, "Here she comes. Watch out."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We have a rebel, right?

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah. In fact, I had a dream about that the other night. I'm not sure why. You know, the Gate, and the old man in the white dress. St. Peter.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

St. Peter. And what did he say?

MAXINE GREENE

I don't think he, he said, "You'll have to wait."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are your words of wisdom for graduate students aspiring to be people just like you? (17:00)

MAXINE GREENE

I guess I say whatever you do, be true to yourself. Let it come out of your own experience. And as your own experience connects with the culture, with the world's experience. And don't be afraid of being, of being, don't be afraid of being committed to a particular idea. Don't give it up because you want to make an impression at the college. There is still a lot to do. To have commitment rule education and not consumerism. I feel stupid. I have nothing more to say.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, no, that's perfect.

When asked to capture the essence of Maxine Greene, your friend, Janet Miller, wrote, "Maxine's is a life totally devoted (18:00) to questioning how we can fight the plagues of indifference, ignorance, and apathy, both the in schools and the streets where we live. Maxine is magnificent, and she never shies away from questioning her own commitments, her own construction of meanings in relation to others, her own understanding of the world. Maxine is a gift to the world." Your sister and Michelle Fine note that at the end of pretty much everything you do, you say or your whisper, "Was that okay?" Is that right?

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So, we're at the end of the interview. Was that okay?

MAXINE GREENE

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah. I think so too. It was so much, such a pleasure getting to meet you, and thank you so much for being our guest.

MAXINE GREENE

You were so nice, and I wish I was better. Thank you very much.