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Interview with Henry Arce Interviewer: Douglas Medina

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Douglas Medina: So today is Wednesday, February 26th, I am here with Henry Arce. Please go ahead.

Henry Arce: Arce.

Douglas: Arce, Arce yeah.

Henry: Soft E.

Douglas: Arce, now you are going to make me talk Spanish.

Henry: No, you don't worry. It's just that I insist, I hate people saying Arce, you understand –

Douglas: Yeah, that's not the way –

Henry: Arce, no, no, it's Arce –

Douglas: Arce.

Henry: It's like the E in bed, Arce. That's it.

Douglas: Arce, there you go. I am here with Henry Arce. So let's start off with you telling me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?

Henry: Well, I grew up in East Harlem. Born there, well, born in Harlem Hospital, grew up on 119th Street. Also important thing, one of the most important things is that my parents taught me how to read in

Spanish before I even started school. So, I thought that was an important facet of where and how I got to be where I am now and that I was able to translate or transfer the reading skills from Spanish to English relatively easy.

So much so that even though I didn't speak English, I mean the first English word that I learned was *look* – in and of itself has had a life lasting impact on me, looking was so important, seeing is so important as well as listening and everything else but that was my first English word that I learned.

But, you know, my family had its difficulties and when I was growing up they – I was a year and half when my younger brother passed away. He was nine months old; he was the second child between my mother and father. My father had three older boys from a previous relationship and my mother had an older daughter from a previous relationship. When they ultimately met and then I was born, then my younger brother Georgie was born.

And it's, you know it's difficult to talk about those times because you know, a lot of that occurred when like I said [I was] a year and half and he was nine months and so like whatever emotional pieces we are going through there of connecting with a young brother, sibling and anything that goes on with any family.

At that point you know you have very few words for those emotions; you don't even know what those emotions are and never mind and being able to describe what they are. But these, there was some sense of loss that I felt in my early years because he was no longer there. And my sister did not really come into the picture until a little later because she had been left in Puerto Rico by my mother.

Douglas: I see.

Henry: So you know –

Douglas: And both your parents are Puerto Rican?

Henry: Yeah, yeah they're both. My mother from Vega Baja and my father from Rincon. But it's – the impact. It was that I had three older brothers, a younger brother and sister and yeah at the same time I was growing up like an only child.

Yeah, so these, and then when my brother passed away my mother was put in an institution at Bellevue because I mean you could just imagine what it is to lose a child at nine months. She had a hard time. I was sent to Puerto Rico to be with my grandparents, came back [and] ultimately we got to together.

My father tried to bring his older sons, two of his older sons to come live with us but that didn't quite work out, they were sent back, by this time we were all in school. There were resentments.

His first wife committed suicide, questions forever will never be answered as to you know whether the relationship between him and my mother and had anything to do with all that. I mean it was like, you know, so these are things that just were impacting all of us I think as we were growing up.

Douglas: Multiple layers, issues.

Henry: Yeah. Oh yes, layer upon layer –

Douglas: Issues sounds like.

Henry: Layer upon layer. I just remember; the best thing that I remember is being happy; there was some happiness there too. I remember that that level of happiness, of wanting to smile and joy and then being confronted with realities that we have to deal with. So that's how I started up.

Douglas: I see.

Henry: And fortunately,[because of] what my parents did I was very interested in the written word and I insisted on looking over my father's shoulder when he was reading the paper or my mother's as she was reading.

And ultimately they started to read it to me and as they were reading, I am starting to mouth it and ultimately I started recognizing these symbols and for what they are – words and particular words and that they have meaning. That these are things that have meanings and people can communicate, whoa.

So that was a very good thing because that really set me up for being able to appreciate reading, loving reading and transferring that skill, like I said from Spanish to English was not that difficult. But they both

my mother (more so you know) was instilling in me this thing: you got to get education, you got to go to school, you got to do the education thing.

She wanted me to be a lawyer, a doctor you know and everything else, you know along the way. You know we find our own experiences that [they] either support or they don't but I did want to go to college but in high school I came upon this organization called Aspira and they helped to mold and guide me towards the whole, again, continuing the same thing that my mother was saying about education.

The saying, education is the ladder; but a ladder to excellence, to try to get out of the, – again out of the what? You know it was poverty but no, who recognizes that as child? You don't recognize [it] I am not being taught right or what, you don't recognize it, you insist, I got to go through this and I do it and we do it.

But you know, they instilled in us a quest to look at our identity as Puertorriqueños. You know to of course, excel in education. To have a sense of community; that we are not just by ourselves but we are part of this overall broad construct.

And then how to understand what this democracy was all about, that is the democracy of groups, it's not really about individuals, it's more about how groups work and how they don't work and how there is power in numbers and then there's power in knowledge. The pen can be mightier than the sword.

Of course this clashed as we were getting older and thinking wait a minute we're being toyed with, we're being abused, we're not seen as anything other than maintenance people and door men and not cops, oh, we have a couple of bodegas [corner stores] which is cool you know, all the little business. Wow you know this.

But my mother was like not into- she didn't want to see me going into the worker experience. She wanted me to go into like the middle class and you know blue [white] collar –

Douglas: The professional.

Henry: The professional, white-collar kind. And from her perspective everything else didn't make sense. Everything else just didn't make sense.

Douglas: What did your parents do for a living?

Henry: Well, my mother had been a seamstress. She –when the head start program first began – she became a family assistant and worked with a lot of families, which ultimately was like a big blessing in my development. And she worked as a bookkeeper; she worked for a couple of furniture stores that also became another fact of my experience.

My dad had been a longshoreman, had been a cab driver up until the time that he left and went to Puerto Rico and ultimately became over there basically the same thing.

Douglas: Right. When did they both come to the States?

Henry: My mother was born in '26 and I think when she came here she was about 18, 19 maybe, 20 maybe, about that point so '36, '44. My father similarly, he was born in '25 and I think he was here before her. He had been work at a luncheonette before he was longshoreman.

And, that's how they met through a luncheonette on 103rd Street and Lexington Avenue. And you know I look at the odds, my old man was like, you know, tall for Puerto Rican, as I am. I followed in that. My mother was like 5' 3" I'm sure she looked at him and was like, oh my God.

Now, she had left Puerto Rico and a relationship and marriage there in which she had a daughter. But before her husband, her first husband was you know a farmer and living on a farm is just not one of the most attractive things to almost anyone, unless you happen to be totally surrounded by farmers and that's what, that's all you may know.

But her father used to build houses, so there was some experience outside of the farming experience. There were you know histories, if you will, of people abusing the young folk and stuff like that.

Douglas: Yeah, sure.

Henry: So I think she wanted to leave it for a variety of reasons not just because she just couldn't stand the farm anymore, that farm life you know. Living from dawn to dusk and never having any respite and she was a young woman, she was a young girl.

Douglas: Sure.

Henry: I mean we see anybody, you see anybody here at the school, –19 oh she is a kid –you know. But that’s what she was you know. She wanted to get away. She thought she could get a job of her own and she came here. My dad apparently felt the same way. His parents passed away from tuberculosis. During that time there was a whole wave of tuberculosis infections and deaths.

So I never got the chance to meet them. They were gone before I saw him. And he was one of 10 and he had to bring up his brothers and sisters. So you know he was like (they’re just dead set on working) got to work, got to work, got to work, got to work, got to work and of course nice to have a woman by your side. He already had a relationship there and then when I guess went and met my mother.

I don’t know how they met, that’s all cloudy. That’s all part of that “cloud”– but it was a cloud that now, as cloudy as it is, nevertheless affects people.

Douglas: Absolutely.

Henry: And you know ultimately they wound up getting divorced. They got married after I was, well, way after I was born. And that lasted for about two years and then they finally got divorced. They each went their own way.

My dad used to visit me every week and then it became a phone call and then it became every two weeks and then before you knew and I just didn’t know where he was at. And so that affected me, you know, I thought we had something going on you know. This is my dad you know and everybody looks up to their dad and you think you’re doing the right thing and you’re trying to be good and everything else and then you can see what had happened.

And what happened, I finally found it through his brother. He took me to this one rooming house where he was staying at and it was like such a shock, I mean to see him there. I mean he didn’t look disheveled or anything, he was living in this one room apartment until I guess whatever.

Douglas: How long had it been since you had seen him last?

Henry: Well, I lost count; I lost him for about I don’t know six, eight maybe a year, six months or a year. And but you know prior to he leaving. . .

Our house was where all his brothers and his sisters who came from Puerto Rico had a place, that was the place to live.

Douglas: I see.

Henry: So, it was always like something is going on in the house. Who's coming tomorrow? I don't know but let's go we're having a good, old time you know. My aunt got married in my house, in our apartment you know that kind of thing your cousins, uncles and what not and –

Douglas: Extended family.

Henry: Extended family. Then at that point everybody was coming together so –

Douglas: So it sounds like both your parents were working class. Your dad was a cab driver, your mom a seamstress. And they encouraged you to seek an education.

Henry: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Douglas: And that was a formative experience for you to read over the shoulder and to hear your mom say “education, become a professional.”

Henry: Yeah, yeah.

Douglas: So what high school did you end up attending?

Henry: I went to James Monroe High School. We had – we moved out of East Harlem in 1960 and my mother tried to buy a house by this time they had been separated. I didn't know everything. It's relative, right? Money, and money at that time it was two mortgages, one for \$189 and other for \$19 a month and we couldn't make it.

After three and half years we had to sell the house because she couldn't afford it. She was by herself. She had developed a relationship with this guy and they seemed to be making out okay and they went and they bought the house and everything else. But it didn't work.

Douglas: Didn't work.

Henry: It didn't work. So ultimately [she] had to give up the house and move back to Harlem and then to East Harlem again and then it was just she and myself, my sister. Unfortunately, given the experiences that she

had She is fours older than I am and she ran away from home. My mother took her, took her went to court and declared her and –

Douglas: Emancipated.

Henry: And unable to support and not able to supervise and then they sent her to Upstate Hudson in New York State School for girls and she was there, which was a big, heartbreaking move for myself because she was my only real sibling who was there. I mean my older brothers had come for a little while but then they went back to Puerto Rico. It didn't work out.

My younger brother passed away and so my sister was my heroine, she was my, you know, and I felt responsible for her running away.

Douglas: Sure, yeah, yeah. Si, si.

Henry: Those traumas and so ...

Douglas: So how old were you when you entered Monroe High School? This was 17?

Henry: 13. 13, when I entered [I was] 13.

Douglas: Okay.

Henry: I was 13, 14 years old yeah. I got out at 17 from Monroe. I had been – they had wanted to send me – they have you know schools that come in and give you little introductions about their programs and they tried.

And so Food and Maritime trades had come and I had, we had an assembly and I saw this guy cutting up this big piece of meat and I said, “Yeah wow that's pretty cool,” I thought they're you know cooking and maybe a butcher, that's why I might have wanted that.

Then I said I want to go for the Maritime Trade. “Oh no, no, no, you got to go to an academic high school to prepare you for going to college, that was my mom. So I went to James Monroe and-

Douglas: And that was 1960.

Henry: That was in 1963. I graduated in 1966. And there is where I had my introduction to Aspira and the whole positive of identity, education, understanding democracies, understanding how groups can work

together, how to organize groups, how to be an organizer. At the same time, you got to keep your mind on the books. So it's tough. And I was like where are the girls?

Douglas: Right, right, right.

Henry: Where are the girls, right.? And there were girls at Aspira.

Douglas: What was the experience like in high school in terms of the demographics, the racial and class makeup of the students?

Henry: We had a very nice one, I thought a very good mix of Latinos, of Italians, Irish, German, blacks, We had a good mix at Monroe High School. It wasn't a school that was "all minority." At that point there were a lot of things going on there that were very supportive. I mean I joined the choir. I love to sing and it has the second largest auditorium in the city –

Douglas: Oh wow!

Henry: Monroe, second to Carnegie Hall. It's huge. It was huge. So we put up productions you know. That was another facet of my growing up. I had an artistic bend. I tried tap dancing when I was younger and everything else. But again all these things require money.

Douglas: It's true.

Henry: And after a while the money is not there. So that only went but so far. But at least in high school, you know, I could sing. There was chorus. We had a fantastic teacher. It was just phenomenal. At the same time that's when I found Aspira and you know I joined them and I was a part of the Key Club too. The Key Club, the Aspira, this other one that is affiliated with the Catholic Church I can't recall right now but –

Douglas: And they were integrated in James Monroe High School and they were part of it. I see.

Henry: Oh yeah.

Douglas: And what about academics? Was it a rigorous academic program?

Henry: Very, very. I wasn't good at math at that time but I loved English and languages. So I took Italian and then unfortunately, I got a teacher who was a little bit too emotional. And, I ultimately ended up

switching to Spanish instead of Italian because it just got to be too- She was too, yeah she would cry at the drop of a dime. You know she would be singing a song, “all of you sing this song” and she would start crying and I said “oh,”. I still find Italian to be one of my favorite languages but I shifted back to Spanish because I wanted to graduate.

Douglas: Sure, sure, yeah.

Henry: Social studies, World History almost every area I like. I like to write. I like to read. I loved the English classes, Math wasn't, I mean ultimately I guess what I wanted to become was a math teacher. This is how the world goes around and I'm bilingual.

Douglas: Sure. Bilingual, oh wow.

Henry: In English and Spanish. So I had to learn the whole vocabulary in Spanish.

Douglas: Sure, sure.

Henry: Don't ask me about it. I am only substituting now.

Douglas: *Addicion, multiplicacion.....*

Henry: Oh yeah, yeah you know. So anyway, the academics were very – there were more, before I went to Monroe, my mother wanted me to consider going to Stuyvesant, not Monroe, nor Columbus nor Food and Maritime Trade but Stuyvesant.

And so from Junior High School, we had to put in the application for it [high school] and we put it in and oh, you got take a test. So, I went to right here at 15th Street, took the test and I was just stunned by how much I didn't understand, at least how much I had never even been exposed to.

Was I supposed to have gotten this? Was this something, did I miss a class? No we weren't taught, so, yeah while it was rigorous it wasn't as rigorous as other schools that were preparing kids to go to Stuyvesant. That were preparing kids to go to Bronx Science, that were preparing kids to go to Brooklyn Tech –

Douglas: The top schools.

Henry: You know it just wasn't happening and we were not being prepared. So but we got, I thought a fairly decent education regardless of the lack of rigor that would have perhaps prepared me to go on to Stuyvesant or whatever the case may have been. Which would have been presumably a better route to college.

But things played out different you know because what happened was that I went to Monroe, I did fairly good there, I mean I was a Gentleman's C you know or maybe B-. So, I demonstrated some capacity. But again our income was low and, I was going to go to Puerto Rico to go to the University of Puerto Rico. When it came time to apply, my mother had a cousin who used to teach at the University of Puerto Rico so we kind of felt like we may have an in there.

And then suddenly out of nowhere I got a call from City College saying: There's a new program at City College called the Pre-baccalaureate Program and it seems you might meet what they are looking for. They want students who have demonstrated potential and are coming from a lower income experience. At that time that also meant being Black and Puerto Rican.

Douglas: Working class. Were there a lot of working class students at Monroe?

Henry: Yeah.

Douglas: You mentioned it was diverse in terms of the race but what about class?

Henry: It was working class. The majority was working class, everybody there was working class. I am sure there were poorer people, I am sure there were perhaps even more rich folks. But for the most part, the majorities were working class. The whole neighborhood around Monroe, at that time [was working].

Douglas: What was the neighborhood again?

Henry: In the Bronx in Boynton Avenue off of West Chester Avenue on the number 6 train.

Douglas: Boynton, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, I live in Parkchester – so that there.

Henry: Oh okay. So yeah, yeah. And well, that was a working class neighborhood at the time, yeah.

Douglas: Sure. Well, I still live there.

Henry: Yeah well, I use to live there too. So, they told me about this program and I applied and they accepted me.

Douglas: But it was your senior year.

Henry: It was a – huh –

Douglas: Your senior year at Monroe into the Pre-baccalaureate Program.

Henry: Yeah, into the Pre-baccalaureate Program at City College and I was fortunate that here – if I had gone, if I had let's say I had gone to a more rigorous school and had passed the test to go into Stuyvesant I probably would not have been eligible to be in the Pre-baccalaureate Program because presumably my grades would have been higher and my promise would have been way beyond what my grades were.

And so the Pre-baccalaureate Program provided a stipend, provided counseling, provided remedial programs to bring up my academics. They provided a dormitory and it was still free.

Douglas: Sure.

Henry: And even when they started tuition we were still you know our tuition was paid through the Pre-baccalaureate Program ultimately became known as SEEK.

Douglas: SEEK, that was a precursor.

Henry: The SEEK Program. Yeah that was the precursor. It was in 1975 and in 19 –

Douglas: Yeah. '65.

Henry: '65, yeah '65 and –

Douglas: You graduate in '66.

Henry: Right. And at that point it was still called the Pre-baccalaureate Program and then in '67 it became the SEEK Program.

Douglas: So that's how you got into City College. Did you ever consider going to any other college or once you got into the Pre-baccalaureate Program you remember you said that?

Henry: Well, that's it. I was just about getting ready to pack my bags to go to Puerto Rico, actually to UPR and everything was moving in that direction. That was the option until this came about.

I'm not, I can't recall if I applied to other schools I may have but it seemed that this was the way to go given our economic situation. We didn't have money to pay for tuition and it was a program that was tuition free. And second of all you would be given a stipend and you'd get counseling and you would get support systems.

Douglas: Now, this is interesting. Do you think you would have gotten into City if you had just applied without the Pre-baccalaureate Program?

Henry: No, no.

Douglas: Interesting yeah right.

Henry: Yeah.

Douglas: So what was it like? Here you are at City College, 1966, you are done with high school. Tell me about the experience your first semester.

Henry: A little bit lonely believe it or not because you are in the middle of Harlem and the whole school was practically all white, all the students, all the staff, very few if any. I mean we studied it too, at the time, once we got involved with City College, North and City College South, which was Baruch college.

I think Latinos and Blacks and minorities represented maybe like 3.0 of the entire school population, back then. We were very - we had a higher percentage in the evening but we were very few, very, very few. It was all white. I mean three percent in the middle of Harlem were students.

So, that ultimately became one of the demands, the five non-negotiable demands. To represent the percentage of students who are exiting the high schools. If that [graduate] can happen then let's address why ... There should be a collaboration between the City University and its different components with the local high school students to ensure that there is a more positive, progressive movement.

That the teachings at the college (because they were preparing the teachers) and we're being failed like crazy. Something has to be done

with the teaching profession and preparing of teachers. It ought to include you know Puerto Rican history. It ought to include maybe a year of Spanish. It ought to include African-American history. So that hopefully they would become better teachers for our kids, right?

Douglas: We're sort of jumping ahead and the first semester you felt lonely. When did you become –

Henry: Actually I tore a ligament in my ankle and I had drop out the first semester.. I was running over a lacrosse cross ball. What was I doing playing lacrosse? I tore ligament in my ankle and I had to drop out. I just couldn't, I couldn't do the crutches - up and down, North and South Campus. It was just impossible. So that happened my first year.

Douglas: Wow. And so you were out the entire year or just a semester.

Henry: Just a semester and I went back in spring semester.

Douglas: '67.

Henry: In '67 after I recovered and then I was working for Kraft Foods, working in their mailroom and they loved me and said oh don't go. Why? You know we'll miss you. You got the whole thing and the whole place. You know we used to get cheese like crazy. I mean you got blocks of cheese and hey, this is for the staff . Don't go, don't go. I got to and I had to go back to college.

Douglas: You knew you needed to get an education, yeah. So you became reintegrated into the college experience. Tell me about that. At what point, let me be more specific. At what point did you become politicized and start to think wait a minute there aren't many Blacks and Puerto Ricans around here, what's up?

Henry: Well, you know there were some that I knew from high school who actually went there as regular students, others who came in with me through the Pre-baccalaureate Program. So we had a little cliquish thing going on and we were able to bond. And I remember one kid an Italian kid asking, "What are you doing here?"

I said, "Well, while you are being smart and getting you're A's I was being stupid getting my C's but guess what I am being paid to be here. I don't know about you." So, this is funny because of how all these things turn out. But little by little, it became a facet of discussion. . –

The Poet Laureate of Puerto Rico, Diana Ramírez de Arellano was her name. And I took a course with her and there were other students who had been trying to get a Spanish student group going and it wasn't quite moving and you know she was like "ustedes tienen que entender!" You know this isn't something to just be sneezed at. You got to dig in here. She was pushing education and everything, plus you know she was poet so her head was sharp. She was boom. She was Diana de Arrelano. The Poet Laureate of Puerto Rico that turned me on. I said wow this is unbelievable.

And she had, she wouldn't ease up on us, she was like if anything we had to speak better. None of this "lunche" what is this "lunche?" why are talking about the "coat" you know she said no "esto es un abrigo" Come on then you got to really love your language, you got to, get in to it.

Douglas: No Spanglish allowed.

Henry: No, no and talking about it and saying how do you say closet in Spanish. I will say "closet", sit down, sit down, sit down but I learned the word without armario you know.. So she was one of our major, she was a major.

There were other Latinos, I mean you could count them one hand there were one or two others who were like either a counselor with the SEEK Program or whatever. They were Latino. But we were far and few between in terms of staff and like I said she was the Poet Laureate of Puerto Rico. She ran her show. Nobody messed with her.

I think she was tenured and everything. She was like don't mess with her.

Douglas: So you started taking classes with her in '67 or '68.

Henry: '67, '68 and throughout those years you know. I was taking initially some remedial courses, I remember taking a remedial math course with this Italian teacher who was like, you see those commercials for the Bunny Rabbit with the energizer you know -

Douglas: Yeah, sure.

Henry: He was that, he would be running back and forth, teaching us that there were 26 tenses you know like we learned in Spanish. Well, they

exist in English too except that you know English people don't really, they don't really speak like: "I would have had that opportunity if I had done" you know they don't speak that way.

We speak that way in Spanish [foreign language 0:35:58] you know but that's a plural perfect for you know he really got me to learn more about grammar and what it means and I felt really just blown away by it. I said you know these are things that we weren't taught. You know you don't miss it unless you now see something and say, "Oh, duh." Why wasn't I taught that, I don't know?

Douglas: Nice, yeah. So what did you want to major in?

Henry: In History and Sociology.

Douglas: In Sociology.

Henry: Again going from the Aspira experience, I was looking forward to being a social worker or something like that and even though my mother wanted me to become a lawyer. And I guess there is youth blindness that occurs at, you know, 18, 19 years old, where you think you know everything and you don't.

And so you know I got drawn into both the drug culture and the hanging out and stuff like that and trying to address some of the things that we saw. And around that time we were talking about Malcolm X and we were talking about so many other leaders of the black movement and to the point where you know I even pledged for a black fraternity.

Phi Beta Sigma because I just felt a bond with folks who were like me and although you know we weren't, I wasn't black but I grew up with blacks in East Harlem and the Bronx I would put Vaseline on my elbows and shit, I think as if my elbows got ashy. I didn't get ashy but, you know.

Douglas: Like to blend that.

Henry: But it was all part of growing, my experience and for a longest time I was you know with a lot of black folk and feeling that this was as much my reality as any and I kind of thought that we were all together blacks and Latinos and Puerto Ricans and –

Douglas: Were there any political organizations that you remember that you wanted to join or you were curious about Black or Puerto Rican groups?

Henry: There were some you know the Students for Democratic Society, SDS and others. They tried to recruit, they were really radicalized. But we didn't want to join them. We wanted to have something, of our own. That relates more specifically to what I experienced.

They were talking about Columbia University, right. They were talking about Kent State. I mean we saw this going on. It's not as if we were blind to this but ultimately around that time we had some visitors from the Black Power Movement who were telling us to become aware of the contradictions.

You have a country that tells you this and then does that and then you say but you did that – they say, “oh no, no, we didn't do that,” We are the nation of, you know we're the grand melting pot, everybody is accepted here, oh really! It's not happening, you know.

So we kind of thought that while we could relate to some of the awareness issues that the white political groups were developing, I mean there were also fewer conservative students who were on campus. I joined the ROTC when I got there.

Douglas: Oh wow.

Henry: Yeah, oh yeah because me and John Wayne we're going to win the war. You know it's how I grew up. I grew up thinking that I was part of this country and it was a blow to my head to learn that I – as an American, I am part of this country but at the same time I am not. I am not seen as that –

Douglas: So when did you have that realization? Was there a light bulb or switch?

Henry: Well, to a degree. It was during this time and I remembered being in a presentation line, these rifles that we would train with and all that kind of good stuff and I use to pride myself with spit shining my shoes, all the buttons were spotless.

And this student captain was coming up and down and looked at me and said, "Oh look at you, you don't even, how can you call that a spit shine" and I said, "Yeah, I call it that. It's better than yours."

"Oh no what are you? You are not smart."

I said, "You know what, take your shit and shove it. I can't deal with you." If you can't recognize this effort, how am I going to go (and given what you look like, show me that you got it. Where are your shoes? What about those buttons? You are totally like stunned. But at the same time, I just said that, that's it. I left and I left ROTC.

Douglas: Do you think he targeted you because of your background, your racial background or he was just being –

Henry: I don't know. I thought he was just stupid. I don't even want to give him that amount of credence – that he thought it was because of my background it might have been, I am not your average looking white boy you know. So El Trigeno... –

Douglas: So that's when you began to realize something is going on here.

Henry: Right. Something is going on here, yeah. And like I said Rapp Brown and H. Rapp Brown came by and he was talking about the contradictions. Just think about it. We paused for a moment, you could think about these contradictions and just see once you become aware of them, all right now what, now what?

And ultimately it came down to here we are in Harlem surrounded by 98 percent blacks and here we are 99 percent you know 97 percent white [students at City College], Does that sound right?

Douglas: There is dissonance in that.

Henry: There's dissonance. There is something that's not right so I started looking at that.

Douglas: What about at home, did your mom talk about politics, did you ever have political discussions?

Henry: Some, some, yeah, she was cautious. In Puerto Rico they had big political discussions about the independence of Puerto Rico whether it's a statehood or whether it's a colony and she didn't want me to get too heavy in that. But ultimately when I did get involved politically at

school and we started up this organization called PRISA, Puerto Ricans Involved in Student Action.

Douglas: What year was that?

Henry: And '69, '68, '69. And there was the ONYX Society, a Black Student Society called ONYX and I wanted us to become an Azabache, which is the black stone too that we use to ward off evil right and you are familiar Azabache.

But, the Puerto Rican Students say no, no, it's like we are copying ONYX I said okay, okay and fine, what do you want to do? And we came up with PRISA (Puerto Ricans Involved in Students Action); I said okay and then they made me president.

Douglas: Wow. What was your goal, what was your mission in PRISA?

Henry: Well, to address these inequalities what we saw as a contradiction – we have a free college and why aren't more poor kids coming here? And that this is something that needs to be looked at. Why aren't there more Latino and Black teachers, counselors, deans, professors? Then you open up a whole discussion.

And our point was to say “hey that something is going wrong? If we are first of all in this *contradictory thing* of 98 percent, 97 percent white in an all black neighborhood – what the hell does that mean? Our kids are being failed in the schools. [They] can't make it. So is that a setup? Are you all not teaching us?

Maybe the teachers need to be taught better. So that would become another point of contention – that the teachers weren't really being prepared to address the makeup of our high schools, elementary schools, middle schools and junior high schools.

Douglas: So who was part of PRISA, was it mostly SEEK students or?

Henry: Primarily, primarily SEEK and I mean Iris Morales was like the first Pre-baccalaureate student back in '65 and have you met her?

Douglas: No.

Henry: Iris Morales you probably want to reach out to her and Eduardo Cruz. He's an attorney, now. Eduardo spent some time in jail, came out, cleared his record and went to law school and became an attorney.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: Charles –

Douglas: Powell.

Henry: Yeah Powell, I mean –

Douglas: So it wasn't just Puerto Rican Students?

Henry: Oh no, I am just mentioning people who were there during the time. There were quite a few almost all Puerto Ricans who were like Eduardo Cruz, oh man the names when you get a little older you – Iris Morales –

Douglas: But it was mostly Puerto Rican students for the most part?

Henry: Yeah, for the most part. Yeah, we accepted you know anybody who was Latino and we said we are not going to be discriminating – it is just, we want people to be concerned about issues of Puerto Rican culture, identity, issues that affect us as a community here, issues that affect us as a community there.

So, there was a little split there between those who saw Puerto Rican Independence as the only viable way to getting out of where Puerto Rico was at. And others who felt, oh that we should consider being an attachment to the United States in some form or the other.

So my take on it was there's room in here for everybody, those who are into the arts let's do some artwork, those who are into politics let's have some symposiums. Those who are into socialism, let's have a discussion, those who are into this democracy that we presumably [have] let's have a discussion on that. I was opened,

Douglas: It was pluralistic.

Henry: That was my desire to force them despite like I said some of my colleagues [who would] say oh fuck this and when [it came to] Puerto Rican independence. So, I said right it will happen, but we are living here, we're living here.

You know I was born here, you were born here too, some were born in Puerto Rico but when I go over there and "los boricuas me dicen, hey, este un Nuyorqueño, habla espanol.... " There is a clash, those

clashes, true honest. And when you look at the reality of what was happening in Puerto Rico – the black Puerto Ricans weren't being respected – except in the music.

You had your dark skin Puerto Ricans who are like but you know when I went there [there were] a couple of eye openers – one was when I went to Puerto Rico at a certain time about [when I was]17 or 18, I noticed that everybody is fucking Puerto Rican here.

All the cops, the doctors, the lawyers – and the titin—tatan—tichin...the owners of the factories and everything, everybody – that means we can do anything. I mean here you are really maintenance and cab driver, yeah bodegero but over there everybody.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah. That's your dad.

Henry: Yes. But that was really reinforcing you know. But at the same time what you notice is that la mayoría de los que estaban adelantados [Spanish nobles] eran light skin Puerto Ricans. Porque estaban sufriendo mas...Moreno. We had our own racial issues within the Puerto Rican community here and there.

Douglas: So I mean one of the things that as you study the history of CUNY that becomes clear when you look in depth is that there were several ideologies you could draw from; Marxism, Socialism, Nationalism. At what point would you say you were guided by a particular ideology?

Henry: Oh, to tell you the truth I got to a point when I was approached to take part in a more radical program. And they approached me with a whole idea – hey we can get to the best herb ever.

I liked to smoke. I was doing different things. (I never got into anything that threw me into a whole you know addiction thing, thank God) I tried this, I tried that, I tried this, I tried LSD, , hey.

Douglas: Who wasn't at the time?

Henry: Who wasn't, right. But you know that little sales pitch almost cracked me right in the middle and I say no, wait a minute I'm being used by the system and now they are going to use me too? No, sorry, I am not going down that road, and I just cannot fall; I have to depend on me.

I wasn't going to get radicalized to the Marxist or Socialist, as far as I was concerned they had their big problems, themselves.

Douglas: And this radical group was associated with Marxism?

Henry: Yeah, yeah, well two Socialist movements, yeah, yeah. They were involved with radical actions in Puerto Rico. Some called them Los Macheteros some called them Independistas of one sort or another. One of my student's friends and a friend from el Barrio was William Morales who is in Cuba right now.

Absent Tanes {?} who had been part of the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (English: "Armed Forces of National Liberation"))

I could have gone that route but I felt that (maybe it's the artistic thing about me – I kind of see things from a different perspective and that's a possibility – I don't close off. But I am not going to hurt somebody, I didn't want to hurt nobody. I'll talk to you and we could argue, we could feud and hopefully you have an argument and I have a better one, perhaps and I could take a loss in a debate. I don't know everything but I am not going to act like I know everything and act like this is the only way to do things.

So again the Black Power Movement was going on, everybody was telling [me] we should get guns and I said, eh, you know. Maybe I am a coward, I don't know. But I wasn't prepared to make that kind of commitment, that kind of subjugation as far as I was concerned.

It wasn't commitment – it was like you are subjugating yourself to somebody else, who, may not even want to wear your shoes but they're going to act like they are the head of this and they are the head of that and, "Oh, my brothers" and you know what, sorry. I didn't buy into it, I just couldn't. There was something in me that said this is not working for me, now.

Douglas: Right. And it was a very powerful draw at the time and people were getting pulled, young people who were in colleges were getting pulled in one direction or another –

Henry: Sure, sure.

Douglas: And I'm interested in that too. Were you attuned to what was going on not only in New York City but in the world and the United States? –

Henry: Oh, sure.

Douglas: In your case in Puerto Rico the Nationalist Movement, the liberation and –

Henry: And of course, we were all, it was happening here. The movement from Puerto Rico had already had footholds here, the Young Lords and everybody else had footholds her. If you study their history you will know that back in the 1890s and before and then subsequently at the start of the 20th Century they used to meet in New York, the Independistas,

You know we have a history; we just weren't being taught that history – only the American history whatever they wanted us to know. Which and again became another one of these contradictions that open your eyes to see what was going on. Like I said John Wayne was, the man.

Douglas: So at what point did you, I am sorry continue –

Henry: I looked inside [myself] I wasn't going to do that, I wasn't going to subject myself to a power military or something like that group to take people out or to provide and an incendiary device there. And no, no, and I don't believe in that.

I mean it may be the only way but as far as I have seen so far it's not the only way. There are many things that one can do to try, and if there isn't, I am not going to hurt somebody. So I mean have I hurt people? Yeah I have hurt people, their feelings and everything else but I haven't taken any life, I haven't, I haven't –

Douglas: Not physically, yeah.

Henry: Physically killed anyone or by mistake, by accident, no, oh oops, it wasn't supposed to go off at that time, what the fuck, are you crazy?

Douglas: Right, right. And the American version of that movement was the Underground? [Weather Underground Organization (WUO)]

Henry: Exactly. They went underground – SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] I related to the reality that they were raising a point, about what the country was doing in Vietnam. I mean, all you have to do is read a little bit from Eisenhower to say “hey this Military Industrial Complex – it's going to be a mother.”

And if you don't watch out for it, it's going to get us – where are we at now. The Military Industrial Complex is running the whole scene. I mean it's not make believe, it's not make believe, Halliburton? Halliburton?

Douglas: So let me ask you, let's switch to –

Henry: Sure.

Douglas: Specifically, talk about Open Admissions. At what point did, I would imagine PRISA became involved in the, what became known as the Open Admissions movement. Originally that's not, there was no mention of Open Admissions in the five demands, this is an interesting point I think.

Henry: It wasn't, it wasn't one of our demands, no?

Douglas: I wasn't, it was something different in fact –

Henry: It was the – it was CUNY's response to our takeover.

Douglas: Right. So let's go back, let's start there. When did you become involved with this movement for the five demands and how?

Henry: Well, that was in '69 where we got together, mostly in the SEEK dormitory which was located in the Alamac Hotel on 71st and Broadway. We had students there from all of the major senior colleges in CUNY and we started having meetings.

We were following Fanon's – Frantz Fanon's teachings of creating organizations and groups, which was not too far, believe it or not, from Antonia Pantojas' [ideas] of Aspira – having groups and having rules of engagement within groups and how to interact and how to organize.

And then Fanon was like hey, you have a cell, each person of the cell has their own cell, nobody knows who else's in the other cells and each person in that subset has another subset. We tried to create an organization like that. There would be a committee of 10 we called it.

And each of us would have our own individual cells and then each of our cell members would have their own but I didn't know who was in their cells, they didn't know who was in mine. For protection, to be able to provide plausible deniability, right.

And so we started with, let's attack CUNY at City College. There's plenty of things, there the whole you know enrollment issue, the whole lack of education of our histories, of our lives, the teaching of teachers that perpetuates rather than improves education, the whole issue of studying the rest of the world as a whole function.

So our five demands, basically, had to do with what we started to do: plan activities, actions to start at one point, raise the volume, start another point, raise the volume, start another point, raise the volume.

We tried to encourage and wake up students who were coming there, who were not at all interested in any political stuff as well as those who were interested in cultural activities, to celebrate the you know the November 19th and those who were to become architects.

So it was to raise awareness, to raise consciousness.

Henry: It had to get that way and it did become that way.

Douglas: So at what point did I mean, it was PRISA and ONYX who started this and then at one point it became the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union right that lead the charge. And then within that there was a committee of 10 is that correct?

Henry: Well, the committee of 10 came forth from the ONYX and PRISA and all that planning that we did to takeover the college. Then we actually went ahead and plotted out when do we actually go and takeover the college?

And I think at some point Black and Puerto Rican students started to fester up and then we took over the college and closed it down at 7:30 in the morning one morning and I am inside the college with my little Volkswagen going, a little Volkswagen bug you know.

We got into the whole action of taking over the college. We called it the Harlem University. And we started having teach-ins and stuff like that right on campus; we had people who were supporting us including my mother. And when –

Douglas: Did you tell your mom what you were doing, planning?

Henry: Yeah, yeah, yeah. She is like you're crazy, she wanted me to stay with education first. Education first, I said "well yeah, but we're being screwed. So we have our own –"

Douglas: This is education, then actually –

Henry: This is education, actually exactly, exactly. So we got word that police would come in and arrest us at 12 midnight one day after we were there about a week.

And so I called my mother I said well, “Listen, I want to let you know we’re going to probably be arrested tonight,” stuff like that so she went ahead [and] she called all those parents through the head start program.

And before 12 noon – before 12 midnight she had about 45 parents out there and you know they told the police if you’re going to attack you are going to have to go through us.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: It brought a lot of Latinos and blacks who were perhaps sometimes a little edgy with each other, into recognizing that it wasn’t just a black thing, it wasn’t just black power. Here we have an opportunity to really learn from each other and appreciate each other for who we are rather than the color of our skin.

In fact one of the nearby schools arranged to have trips of their students to come to visit Harlem University and so they contacted us and they brought their kids and it had been snowing and some of the kids started throwing snowballs at the light skin Puerto Ricans and you know call them “whities” and stuff like that.

They don’t know shit, I mean they’re just and little kids but they are learning what Malcolm was trying to tell a lot of the people in the movement. You can’t teach black to hate white without teaching dark to hate light. In the black movement, in black culture there has been this schism between light skin black and dark skin blacks for eons.

The light skin blacks would get the better jobs or they would work inside the house or whatever the case should be whereas the dark skin where out in the field. But there was that schism notwithstanding and there were those who could pass and some you found out later on what, I didn’t even know he was black, you know.

So, they were throwing that [snowballs] and, I lost it, I was so pissed because that was one of the things we wanted to share, that it is not

about the skin color, it's about your brain, it's about your heart. Where are you? You're out of your mind. And –

Douglas: It's about solidarity.

Henry: Yeah, yeah. And so I, Felipe Luciano was there and he introduced me to come up and said, "I got to speak," and he said "Oh brother, Arse, I say come on up brother Henry."

And at that time he was a member of the Lost Poets or something just before he became a Young Lord.

I said "look I am not going to let myself be used by the system nor I am going to be let myself be used by the movement you know. And if you are going to bring young kids here to this school, to Harlem University and teach them something, teach them that it's not about the color. Puerto Rican we come in all colors, you can't say that oh I know what a Puerto Rican looks like, I am sorry, you don't. We are all colors.

So if you are going to start saying black, you know, you're blowing it. And everybody clapped and going "Oh yeah. Right on brother Arse." You know, I came down and I hugged one of my high school students that was among my colleagues and he was my roommate too at the time. And we just cried in each other's arms you know, Richard Rhodes was his name or is his name. He is still with us.

And he understood what I was talking about you know you can't teach little kids that it's all about color and that's what they were, the teachers who are bringing them you know to the point where they will start throwing snow balls at all the light skinned people who were there thinking that they were all white. And you still had whites who were part of the movement too, progressive whites.

Douglas: Sure. SDS was a very supportive organization from the very beginning.

Henry: Yeah, yeah.

Douglas: You know it's interesting you mentioned contradictions before and this is one of them, right. The struggle was based on the fact that there was discrimination against blacks and Puerto Ricans. But the struggle in some ways needed to transcend that reality, right –

Henry: Physical state.

Douglas: To include everyone and to have a movement of solidarity. So –

Henry: Again, Malcolm said it best.

Douglas: So were there any other organizations like the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, even Aspira who supported the strike?

Henry: Yeah.

Douglas: How did it involve each one?

Henry: That's it. I went to a meeting of the Puerto Rican Educators Association. They were having a convention. I went to the hotel, here I am dressed up like a rabble-rouser, my beret, my beard and everything else. I went up and I spoke and some of them were upset "Hey, this is what we're doing"

It's not for me, it's for those who are coming behind me. These are our people that we're talking about, we got to support it [Harlem University] and we got a lot of support from them. There were some who didn't want to –

Douglas: During the strike you went to the convention.

Henry: Yeah, yeah. I was – I went to there, I went to Hunter, I went to Baruch and Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College –

Douglas: And Brooklyn had its own movement, right.

Henry: Right. But, we spurred each other on, to try and to continue but you know this goes back to the, what we weren't taught. They didn't teach us (and ASPIRA either to a degree) – passing the baton. We didn't prepare for the fact that we were not going to be there forever. College administration do that, we didn't know that.

They knew that we were either going to graduate or not graduate and we were going to be gone within four years more or less. And we didn't think, we didn't think. Those who had come before us hadn't thought because there was nobody there to tell us to get. They tried but yeah well, we can't get nobody to listen to us and so they didn't know how to pass the baton. We didn't know either.

Douglas: So then what was the spark? There were other students in the past, right, what mean 1969, '70s was –

Henry: Well, it was happening all over the country.

Douglas: That's it.

Henry: I mean Colombia University closed down and 1969. I was there. I worked at Colombia University in the summer program that they had it called College Discovery in the summer of '68 and summer of '69 and that's when boom they blew up.

We got to the same point after those many demonstrations, the letter campaign, the demonstration, the takeover of the administration building and then [we] planned for the takeover of the entire college. And what made sense was to takeover south campus because it was enclosed. The rest of the campus was not. So we did that, we closed it down.

And so the spark was, just the timing, it was the whole thing was going on across the country, the war, not only Malcolm but also Martin Luther King was happening throughout this whole thing. We saw it happening, it was taking place before us and we were right in the middle of it. It's hard to say what one thing lead to this or the other –

Douglas: It was combination.

Henry: We just knew. It was combination but we just knew that if we were going to make anything happen we had to really stop it. We had to stop the regular workings of the college to the extent that then the mayor and everybody else would say, "Oh wait a minute we can't have them shutting down the school, but we did."

Douglas: So were there any members from the Young Lords or the Black Panther Party in the movement, were there any students who were in the movement occupying with you, striking?

Henry: They came in support. They weren't part of our group. They came in support. We had our queen mother B I forget her. You know everybody got in this movement and I don't know who and all these people were – some of the leading Black Panther people came; we had meetings with them and stuff like that.

And again they kept on raising the contradiction, they kept on saying keep on raising the contradiction, face the contradictions. It is the only way to wake our people up. You know because our people buy into so much of this bullshit that the only thing that's going to work is to clash [smash] that bullshit up and say this is what's happening, not what you're saying. This is what's happen.

Well, how do we know that? Look at the results, never mind what was being and said, look at the results.

Douglas: You know I am interested in the following question and I've asked some folks before about this. You were really smart, strategically smart in creating those cells, I mean at the time COINTELPRO (COUNTER INTELlIGENCE PROgram) was going on right, I mean there was a lot of infiltration. In retrospect do you think that there were individuals who actually did infiltrate the movement?

Henry: Yes, yes.

Douglas: How did you manage that?

Henry: When we found out.

Douglas: Actually, but you didn't know at the time this was having an effect.

Henry: Didn't know at the time. No, we were infiltrated. Ultimately I was surprised by one guy that I –

Douglas: You, I am sorry, you were what?

Henry: I was surprised by one guy –

Douglas: Oh surprised.

Henry: I think, I was surprised by one guy in particular that I didn't know until later on when I was out of college. And we just recently became friends on Facebook, but, yeah he had been a part of the infiltration.

Douglas: Working with the FBI?

Henry: Huh?

Douglas: Working with the FBI?

Henry: Either, no, he was with the NYPD. I just know that at one point, I got a letter from AT&T saying that for last X number of months your phone was subject to a subpoena from the Feds to try to track down whatever – whoever I might have known.

And again like I said one of my friends ,William Nevis went to the whole FALN Movement and got trained and he used to – he and I used to get high all the time and then well no, no, I am not drinking anymore or I am not smoking anymore, or I am not doing that anymore, it's just like I am just starting up anything.

You are right but yeah, oh yeah, yeah, oh right, right and then well some and we saw that and [he] blew himself up and he didn't learn that lesson too well.

Douglas: Oh man, wow.

Henry: But he and Dulcia [were] back on, you know they got together. She got involved and she wound up being incarcerated for like 75 years and then she would visit, she was released about 10, 12 years ago. And those are the routes I didn't want to go and again maybe I was a coward at the time but I didn't think that that was where I wanted to be.

You know sometimes I look back and I say well you know maybe I should have and I don't know. I thought that the movement was using people as well as the system was using people and I didn't want to be used by anybody. Of course, I probably had been but I mean you know. That's the way it is.

Douglas: Right, right. So besides the community groups, your mom, the parents that supported the idea of the five demands – What about the staff and faculty, do you remember having or?

Henry: Also, many of those staff in the SEEK program were Latino and Black and they all supported, even the white members supported us. They came and supported us. They came to the meetings, they provided classes, they provided whatever support that an academic can provide.

Because we were fighting for them too, we wanted them to get you know recognition in the college. We wanted more minority professors and what not, the teaching of you know black history,

Puerto Rican history, Asian-American. Part of our demands was to develop a Department of World Studies. And what we got was the Department of –

Douglas: Black and Puerto Rican Studies.

Henry: Black and Puerto Rican Studies and Asian Studies too. They had both, all three. We wanted, the number of graduating and the ratio to be representative of the entering class [to be the same] as the exiting class of the high schools. Ultimately, that's what the City University determined. After all that, that that's how they were going to respond, to have Open Admissions and hopefully close this, shut us up.

And they opened up the Maria del Hostos Community College at the same time. And so they felt – I think they took actions to mollify us and most of what was going on.

But you look now and while we didn't pass the torch, the baton, you look at the ethnic makeup of the student body now within CUNY and it's night and day baby and the kids don't know. They think it's just hey well I studied and I got in. People studied and didn't get in before you know.

Douglas: Exactly.

Henry: So but we are way over 50 percent and –

Douglas: And way over, yeah.

Henry: Way over at City College the sum is like 75 percent minority. I think, I another world – it's now more than Americans and Boricuas – you have people from all over the world. You know because this is the world's center –

Douglas: It's not Puerto Ricans, its Latin-Americans here.

Henry: Exactly, exactly.

Douglas: But you know that –

Henry: And Asians, lots of Asians too.

Douglas: Oh lots of Asians and there is a distinction between the senior colleges and the community colleges. You could see the –

Henry: The makeup.

Douglas: The diversity, the distinction that exists. So who didn't support Open Admissions or the idea of the *five demands*? Do you remember?

Henry: Oh well, there was a kid who ran, [when] I ran for president at the school, student president just before the takeover. And they had a Cuban who was running against me from you know the other side who didn't believe in the *five demands* or anything like that you know. And so when it came to a vote I think he won but then we took over the college anyways, so he didn't have much to run on you know and much to do but –

Douglas: So there were students in the student body.

Henry: There were students who definitely who were their students and they wanted their education and that's what they came to City College for. They didn't come for politics, they didn't come for takeovers, they didn't come for pass or fail grade, they want to get their GPA up and that they were serious and I can't blame them.

We were in college. That's a primary goal of a college, for students who want to go to college, it's to learn. Like I said you know it had North Campus, it had South Campus, North Campus was like all the sciences, south campus were social sciences. And so they were those who disagreed, who didn't want to have any policy.

Douglas: Why, what was their reasoning for not agreeing to the *five demands*?

Henry: Because you know what am I doing? We're not teachers, we're not the ones, how can we make up a school, how can we create a school of third world studies? How can we demand that the school of education include in the requirements for a teacher to study Puerto Rican history, black history and a year of Spanish?

Who the hell are we? You just barely got here by the skin of you teeth I mean, what the hell you know?

Douglas: Who are you to demand anything?

Henry: Exactly, exactly. I mean to demand more, why aren't more black and Puerto Rican people studying to the point of being a doctorate so that they could be a professor here? How is that [not their] fault? It's like

the other side of the contradiction, they don't – they are not even looking at the contradiction.

They are just looking at a path to get what they wanted to get and yeah I can't take that away from them. That's a legitimate perspective that's why I am not concerned.

Douglas: What about faculty and staff? They, not everyone agreed?

Henry: No, not everybody agreed, yeah.

Douglas: So that was the reason they cited for not agreeing to the *five demands*.

Henry: Oh but again because we were a bunch of rabble-rousers, how are we going to talk about you know, but we are doctors. I mean after all, we've studied. We have all these letters after our names. What's the matter with you? What letters do you have after your name?

Douglas: But ironically that's what you were seeking right, you were seeking more education, more access.

Henry: Precisely, precisely. So there were some there who bought into it stock and barrel. That's their life, they want to become a dean. They want to become a Professor you know the Assistant Professors they want to become Associate Professors.

The Associate wants to become Professors and ultimately there was a whole career ladder you know for educators at City College and yeah they wanted Buell Gallagher's job.

They wanted to be a part of the faculty senate and have power, yield that power, wield it and make this institution grow and become the lang, gding, gdong and gding. So long as we don't have these blacks and Puerto Ricans here maybe we could do that you know.

Douglas: I see.

Henry: So some of them were racist but I think we are just blinded, like the horses that have those blinders.

Douglas: Generation, yeah.

Henry: And just looking at what's going on and they didn't want to – they didn't even notice this, never noticed the ludicrousness of being in Harlem.

Douglas: Well, they claim that, some of them claim that excellence and quality would suffer if you had a program like Open Admissions.

Henry: Well, that's why they, that's why they started fighting that. But they were fighting, if you will in my humble opinion almost like a stray dog because Open Admissions wasn't what we were looking for, we weren't looking for that. They had a program and plan already done, this is not something that just, "Oh wait a minute, you know what we should do Open Admissions." They had already planned to do this as part –

Douglas: And go ahead.

Henry: As part of the plan to institute tuition too. You know we just helped them speed it up. Then and – they were hoping to put it into effect in 1975.

Douglas: 1975, Bowker was one of the main architects.

Henry: Yeah, yeah.

Douglas: So what happened I mean ultimately you won, right? Would you say you won or succeeded?

Henry: I think we did. I mean from that movement, from that takeover came all these HEOP programs (Higher Education Opportunity Program), across the nation. All, there were none before. Check it out. And that helped expand the exposure of college, the opportunity of college, for so many kids around the country who were not, being trapped or expected to even get into college, and they did.

We have this going on, part of that has lead to where we are at now. I mean could we have done better I think we probably could have but you know –

Douglas: In what ways?

Henry: Like I said learning how to pass the baton –

Douglas: That's big, yeah.

Henry: That was our biggest fault. When I graduated, my director at the SEEK Program, his name is Washington I think asked "And so Henry, what

do you think now that you're graduating?" I said, "I now know that I know nothing. I know nothing."

There is so much here, there was so much at City College that I could have taken advantage of. I got to a point in my senior year and I said, "I am in a freaking university." I got courses here to take but I have to do what you're not, let me explore but that you know I miss that.

I mean I took advantage to some degree, I took playwriting, I took magazine writing, I took journalism courses I was trying to become a journalist at the time. I had switched from sociology; I took the modern German mind.

I said to myself you know these philosophers man and mathematicians and these they're all fucking German, what the hell, what is in the potatoes? Is it the potatoes in Germany or what's going on? I don't get it. I mean Herman Hesse, Goethe,. All these bad boys, Kaffka, Einstein –

Douglas: Hegel.

Henry: Hegel, come on. So, I studied them and that started opening my mind even further. I was so happy at that point that I had decided not to go too radical or you know go the conservative route and took my own because aww, man. Not for nothing but I feel like I've learned a lot on my own.

Douglas: Sure.

Henry: With the support of a lot of people, of course but also I myself have tried to drive myself to do this. I am trying to right now. I write poetry. I write prose, try to unite. I talk to kids.

Douglas: And when did you graduate and with what degree?

Henry: June of '73.

Douglas: June '73 and what major did you declare?

Henry: They never included, they left me as a liberal arts major. I had been going for mass communication, broadcast journalism with a minor in Puerto Rican studies.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: You look at my transcript you see all these Puerto Rican studies courses that I took and you know aced them. I invented a word “embrismo.”

Douglas: “Embrismo?”

Henry: The counterpart to machismo – I was doing paper on whether machismo was the same as male chauvinism.

And so as I looked at one I also saw that people were about female chauvinism, male chauvinism and then machismo, wait a minute there is something, was the female –

Douglas: Counterpart.

Henry: Counterpart. And I looked at my own family my mother and my father and saw that and you know and many of our homes the person who really ran the show was the mom “habla a tu pai” Mom still runs the show. I mean the man wore the pants, but the woman was the one who is really calming this situation.

So I said you know and I grew up with a bunch of strong women, my mother, my sister. I mean my mother, my mother once took a gun to my aunt’s husband who was trying to beat her and she had a gun, “hey, ven aca” ... and he took off, he never – he never tried that shit again.

And so I always, I never saw a woman as being weak. You know, if anything, the weaker sex? I am afraid you know you got that logic.

Douglas: Yeah, exactly. Right.

Henry: Because it doesn’t really function that well but –

Douglas: Or just the fact that they bear children and carry the pain. They got us there, right.

Henry: This is also an additional discussion about if people are coming out this way – who is reading, and who is raising them? I mean like can we talk to women a little bit here. Hey what are you doing?

Douglas: Right, right.

Henry: So I mean I am a very open-minded I think, I tried to have an open mind and not to prejudge things anymore as I probably did. [I'm] no saint by any extent.

But I feel I am a human being before anything else and even before I am a human being, I am a part of these life lessons you know. We all have this.

Douglas: Absolutely.

Henry: Then, I am a human being. And not even man yet you know then I am a man, and then I am a Puerto Rican.

Douglas: Right. You know it sounds like it was a formative experience in many ways –

Henry: Oh so.

Douglas: Multiple ways for you between '68 and '73. Now, what role did you play directly in making it a success? What became known as Open Admissions?

Henry: Well, I wouldn't say I played a role in Open Admissions only as so far as being a part of the spark with regards to the demand on having the ratio of students who were exiting be similar to the ratio of students who are entering.

And in that regard I think it was one of the sparks that started, "Oh wait a minute, Oh wait, wait, hold on a second, I got it Open Admissions, here it is." It's basically what they're saying; they want to be able to have an entry. So in that I feel that I had a role.

Douglas: Were you part of the negotiation team?

Henry: And for the first, for the first couple of days, weeks, I thought that they, my fellow committee members weren't as open as I thought I was,. They were going back into their predispositions – talking about the *five demands*.

Oh come on you're about taking over the entire school. We're going to and if this happens, let's make this work and others with "oh man, you're just yielding. When you call five non-negotiable demands negotiable, guess what, you are negotiating you know."

Douglas: Right. Which you did have the upper hand, you got the attention that means some big success right.

Henry: Oh no question.

Douglas: How did you get selected to be part of the negotiation team? How, what was the process for selecting people to be part of the negotiation team?

Henry: The meeting's back at the hotel where, we had planned the takeover. We had a committee of 10.

Douglas: What was the criteria for the committee for being –

Henry: Just a level of involvement you know, your level of discussion, who you were. I turned out to be somewhat of a charismatic person, I have a little charisma. I am a little taller than the average Puerto Rican.

And I guess you know people saw me. I was the President of PRISA. I was already a part of the leadership of one of the student groups you know. And I mean we had done quite a bit.

Douglas: It took a lot of work to get to that.

Henry: It took a lot of work.

Douglas: And trust.

Henry: True. Did you know about Charlie Palmieri?

Douglas: No. Tell me.

Henry: So he used Conga's in the student's center.

Douglas: Okay.

Henry: Student Center.

Douglas: In the Student Center?

Henry: Finley student center was also where the Art, and the Music department were. So after a while we're playing and one of the music teachers came and said, "We can't hear what we're doing inside." I say well why don't you have a class on music, on Latin music?

"Oh, we don't have that"

“Well look we’re playing it, and this is music, this is earth music, this is the stuff that we grew up with, if you want to check it out historically we go back to Africa. This is home of the African drum.” He says “we don’t have anybody,” and I said, “We’ll get you somebody we got Charlie Palmieri.”

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: And he was the first Latin jazz, Latin music instructor at City College.

Douglas: City College. That’s great. I didn’t know that story actually.

Henry: See, little something for you.

Douglas: That’s great. Thank you. That’s awesome, I’m a salsero too.

Henry: Oh good, god, good, good.

Douglas: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Henry: Well, he was a bad boy. I mean he came in, the first day he gave out cards to everybody you know and I put on Conga and sometimes Goro and he read this he says what is this Conga and sometimes Goro? What is the salsa I don’t understand. I was nervous I was like shy, I was shy about singing out loud but I like to play Congas and I was so honored to have been –

Douglas: Do you still play now?

Henry: Huh.

Douglas: Do you play conga now?

Henry: Yeah, I have my conga at home and I just had it fixed. I had one of the – the congeros Olatunji that go back to 1964; he was at the world fair in Queens. One of the groups that played at the world’s fair was Olatunji.

Olatunji was African, he had his own group. Well guess what, later on this had to be in late ‘60s or the early ‘70s when I met up with one of his drummers and he gave me the drum that he had made because he had just made a new one.

And his, the new one that he had made, the head was no bigger than this and it was, shooooo, down and it was like high, high like the high like the high notes. And the other one that he had was more of a

bahul. So I took it you know, then wound up playing with them. They used to have an empty apartment in the Bronx, the people from Olatunji would go there and practice.

They use to have heat lamps to heat up the skins, oh this was major and then would start playing and say you're playing one beat –

Douglas: Serious.

Henry: That's all you are going to play. God don't mess this up, cause if you mess this up. And then you know before you knew we have like 6 or 7 drums going, 6 and I'm just one beat, boom.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah.

Henry: But that's like –

Douglas: Drum circles. Have you ever – I am sure you've been to Central Park in the summer time right.

Henry: Oh yeah, yeah, I was out there.

Douglas: Oh man.

Henry: I was out there.

Douglas: We've got to talk beyond this. I never picked up an instrument, in my life I've always been working at school and that's one of the things that I don't want to say I regret but I never had the opportunity to pick up [an instrument]. And now in my old age I want to, you know what, I want to make time. So we've got to talk.

Henry: God, good, good. I want to buy myself a pair of timbales for my wife buddy. I always thought that that was the instrument for me the timbales but –

Douglas: Did you ever meet Tito Puente?

Henry: Of course.

Douglas: Yeah.

Henry: Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri, Charlie Palmieri, Willie Bobo, Gato Babieri, Mongo Santamaria I saw them all like this, right here. This is

where they were playing, out here dancing and they played right here, right here. Mongo went to three suites in one night.

He, I am talking about was totally drenched, totally drenched but oh forget about it, Hector Lavoe, Willie Colon all these guys I use to see, I went through a period of my life where I was just into music and going to all these dances and parties.

Douglas: Were you at the Cheetah Club, that famous night, were you there?

Henry: Yes.

Douglas: You were there!

Henry: Yes.

Douglas: Oh Henry man.

Henry: Yes. Where I didn't go was Palladium. I never got to the Palladium but Gato Barbieri and then its Village Gate, was it Village Gate ...SOBs...Gato Barbieri...

Douglas: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know I take salsa classes with Eddie Torres. You know Eddie & Maria Torres, they are still teaching.

Henry: Oh yeah.

Douglas: He is 65 and he's still teaching and he still dances like 19 year old, man. The man, has got moves. I learn all my salsa from him and Maria.

Henry: Really.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah.

Henry: You know I am 65 too and I am still dancing and I still like to dance.

Douglas: Yeah. But you know the '60s and '70s weren't just about you know movement –

Henry: No.

Douglas: It was about music, it was about different –

Henry: Cultural developments.

Douglas: Sentiments. Exactly.

Henry: And total, totally and especially the music. Music was outrageous.

Douglas: And you know and then '76 comes on board right. I mean things really hit the fan. The proverbial shit hits the fan in New York City right. I mean it was a major attack on the public sector and CUNY was part of that right. Did you stay, what happened to you after you left City College, when you graduated in '73?

Henry: I was unemployed. I went to Austin, Texas for a job with Carrascolendas, which was like a Spanish version of Sesame Street. And I had a whole cultural clash there. I mean people were riding around in trucks with rifles and guns and shooting and people were taking LSD like crazy and smoking.

I was staying with this guy, El Leon speaking Spanish. This was at the University of Texas in Austin and they were producing this show. And so I am staying at his place because he had broken up with his wife and on top of his refrigerator he had like a pound of herb. People are just getting high here man, I just couldn't deal with it.

I was there for four days and that was my sole entry into the world of broadcast journalism, because I wasn't sure that was going to be put on the air. And I was going to be you know maybe just in the background at first and then maybe get a role in the show.

And then I got a job with the Experimental of Bilingual Institute finally and this was in January of 1974. So from June of '73 to that point I really had not been employed except for those –

Douglas: Wow. So you came back here.

Henry: Yeah, I came back to New York. And then I worked for The Experimental Bilingual Institute on 104th Street Lexington and 3rd. That was a program to prepare adults to go into college. They had articulation agreements with City College, with Bronx Community, Hunter, lower Manhattan Community Colleges and I was an Admissions Counselor.

And I tried to teach oral English to Spanish dominant people to help them prepare to speak English. And then I went to work for City University of New York at Hostos Community College. I was the assistant to the dean of students. From there I went to the Department of Education.

Douglas: So I am sorry, when were you at Hostos?

Henry: '77 through '79.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: And then I went to the Department of Education and then I went to the Transit Authority, the New York City Transit Authority, then I went to the Human Resources Administration, then I went to School Construction Authority. And all that while I never joined the pension plan.

Douglas: Oh no.

Henry: I would have been tier one if that means anything to you.

Douglas: Wow. No, it doesn't. I mean that –

Henry: Would have been, would have been. But it wasn't so –

Douglas: Wow. So you've always been in the public sector. I mean it seems –

Henry: Primarily. After that I – after the human resource I went to school construction, school construction I went to the board of Ed that's what it was then, then I went to the Children's Aid Society, nonprofit, just down the block here 22nd Street. And by this point I had been directing programs and everything else and I was the director of their Community School Division.

So I had six, it grew to nine different community schools throughout the Bronx and Manhattan. And up in Manhattan Washington Heights, East Harlem and the Bronx. And we had a falling out because on 9/11 of 2001 I woke up with an earache, a bad one and I called them and I said I am going to go see the doctor. I had a couple meetings that my assistant director could take care of.

And then my wife and I went to have breakfast and when we were leaving this woman came and said, "Is there TV here, is there TV here,"

I say, "Well no,"

"Oh no there is no TV. Oh my God and two planes just went into the World Trade Center."

I said, "What?"

We had heard that a plane had once hit the Empire State Building you know small plane and then when we got in the car, we turned it on and it says another one just went into the Pentagon and I said, "Oh fuck." So I was fortunate that I had that earache because I usually arrive at World Trade Center on the path training at 8:30, 8:29, 8:28 –

Douglas: Then right around 8:45.

Henry: Right and the first, and the first one here. You know so who knows what would have happened. But they wanted me to have come in no matter what. The governor declared a state of emergency saying no cars on the road, they shut down the trains, what the fuck was I supposed to do? I couldn't come in that next day. This was a Tuesday and Wednesday –

Douglas: Yeah, yeah.

Henry: Ultimately, I came in on Thursday, they were all like "oh you should have been here" because they pride themselves, in that the community schools would be places where people who needed, counseling and support [could come]

People worked at the World Trade Center and had died you know and then I should have been there to coordinate and ensure and everything. I was there until 2002 and then we parted ways but it left a big sour you know.

Douglas: Yeah, I know.

Henry: My first thought was about calling my kids, my wife's kids, collecting them, come on out here. I thought the shit was hitting the fan. And literally, and me I saying, "Oh shit, this is fucked, we're been attacked." And their thought was I should have been in New York. So anyway then I went to work for the Educational Law Center in New York, in New Jersey rather.

They were suing the New Jersey the Department of Education for like 25 years at the time and they ultimately won it was called the Abbott versus Burke decision. Burke was the commissioner of the Department of Education at the time, Abbott was the first name on the list of students who were part of a class action.

And they got the state to allocate billions of dollars to renovate existing schools, build new schools especially in high poverty areas and to create educational reform because it didn't make a difference if you have a brand new school and you're still teaching the same way. If you are failing the kids, you are going to continue failing them in the new school.

So we have to have school reform. So I worked for them for like two and half years under a Ford grant and then the grant was cut and they dismissed me.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: And from there on I went into teaching. I went into teaching first as a substitute, then I joined here the New York City because I wasn't accepted in New Jersey for their alternative teacher program but here in New York the New York City Teaching Fellows Program.

I knew people the people who ran it because I used to work for the chancellor when I was at the Board of Ed. And so please come on they knew my background, "Oh yeah you will be a great teacher," and it's really nice and I love teaching.

Douglas: And that's what you're doing now.

Henry: Well, now I had to retire. I developed lymphoma in 2010, no, 2009 and I went through treatments and that kicked my ass. Kicked my ass. And then I finished the school year teaching. The school was just fantastic with me. They all supported me. My principal said, "Don't worry about it. Don't tell me about no lesson plan I don't want to hear about."

And then the following year I had to take off for the entire year because [when] I went to get my own stem cells harvested and they said let's give you a PET scan I want to make sure you are already in remission and I wasn't. So, I have fallen back into it, it was active again, I was like stage four and they found me a donor, a bone marrow donor who was a perfect match.

Douglas: Wow.

Henry: 10 out of 10 you know protein based determinates and I had the - I was born again on July 26th 2010.

Douglas: Wow, congratulations.

Henry: Thank you.

Douglas: That's beautiful.

Henry: So this July I'll be four.

Douglas: Wow. That's a good work.

Henry: But I had to retire because I tried to go back to school and apparently one of the kids had a sibling who had gotten RSV which is infant disease a new born disease, not disease but illness which is Respiratory Syncytial Virus.

And apparently I already had my both ears infected had my sinusitis and when this kid came in that grabbed me and put me in the hospital all over again. I want to teach but I can't deal with elementary school kids anymore.

Douglas: It's hard, yeah.

Henry: Parents don't keep their kids home when they are sick, they just send them out here.

Douglas: Yeah, I know, I know.

Henry: I substitute at the high school and the middle school. Once in a while I might accept the elementary school but it depends upon you know where is at.

Douglas: Sure, sure. Henry, it seems like you are fighter in many ways –

Henry: Many ways, yeah.

Douglas: I mean your life, I mean your family background, your school background, your professional background, your personal health background, you are here man. You are fighting.

Henry: I am a survivor.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah, that's beautiful, man.

Henry: I am, I am fighting. I am fighting. I agree. I got two sets of kids 43 and 35 and 19 and 17, two marriages, two wives. And we're still good friends with both.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah.

Henry: I am, hopefully with my second but [she's] friends with my first wife too. We just tried to speak to her and see if she could help find Dave Valentin. So if they could hit [up] my sister who lives not too far from him – you know Dave Valentin?

Douglas: No.

Henry: Flavio... [unclear]

Douglas: Oh yeah.

Henry: He's been very ill and is in need of care. So David Galarza has been trying to work with him. You may know Lala Torres.

Douglas: Yeah, yeah.

Henry: Well, Lala's his cousin. So I am trying to see if I can – my sister needs a tenant downstairs, she lives up there in the same place maybe something could come together.

Douglas: Right, right. I see, I see.

Henry: Anyway, I can, I try to help.

Douglas: Yeah, I have, just have a few more questions if it's okay.

Henry: Sure, sure.

Douglas: So you really weren't at CUNY in '76 when tuition was imposed?

Henry: No.

Douglas: But did you stay in touch with the movement with people who were active or did you feel like you disconnected from CUNY?

Henry: Well, I had been trying to get SEEK alumni to establish a scholarship as one way to help those who were going to school. I knew, it benefited me to have a stipend, I was trying to see if we could find a way to help the students who were coming in the SEEK program with the scholarship.

But ultimately and a lot of people came to the meetings and then nobody else showed up and they weren't working and to try to reach out to corporations. So I started my own. The Henry Arce Scholarship

Award at City College and every year I would give a student that was selected by the councilors who came from a broken home a \$200 check.

So I did, I still, I don't know how long I can do this but as long as I can I will do it. I no longer do it [because] I can't afford it anymore. But it got to the point that they continued it in my name at City College.

Douglas: It's great.

Henry: Again, for someone who's coming from a broken home and for me it wasn't like the worst thing possible but it was a major distraction for me. And when my parents broke up and everything else that I had to go through – and if anybody could still go to college and survive through all that – they deserve a little help. And that's what I did for a good 17, 18 years and they've continued it you know since then.

Douglas: That's great. So that's been your main connection.

Henry: Staying in touch, that's been it, that was because I was living a life I was trying to maintain you know.

Douglas: Sure, sure. What did you think when you heard about the imposition of tuition?

Henry: It didn't surprise me. It kind of felt then like a slap in the face because you know now that we were coming in larger numbers. Now all of a sudden you got to charge. So I thought the imposition of tuition was their way of saying well, you may have gotten Open Admissions but now people are going to have to start paying and it never felt –

Douglas: Do you think there was a connection between the two there, Open Admissions and the imposition of tuition? What was the connection in your mind?

Henry: It ran from a racist kind of experience, retribution kind of thing because I don't think they really wanted to have Open Admissions in GP even though they had made a plan for it. But they never expected to be pushed into it.

What I dislike was how they went about it and then ultimately they got to the point where they were sending all the students who were not doing as well into community colleges and trying to beef up their senior colleges and raise the entry requirements.

I thought, trying to go back in time, at this point 75 percent of the kids [come from diverse backgrounds] there so its okay and I think we're starting to reach a better point. But I'm still critical of the preparations that our kids get in the school system right now. I think teachers really can be better prepared. I think that people forget that. Nobody talks about the school boards and the school districts.

Because many of them didn't go to college themselves they negate the teachings that teachers have to go through then they come into the classroom "Oh no, no, that's not what we are doing, we're doing this."

But what do you mean? I just learned from my professor just yesterday that this is the best way to teach math and you say "no, you want us to go through everyday math" That still doesn't prepare our students. The reality is people search for power rather than for what betterment it is.

I don't see no reason why people can't coordinated between the Board of Ed and the Board of Higher Ed. It shouldn't be these two freaking monstrosities. They should be working together to prepare all young students (some will still go to vocational) but doesn't mean that all these power plays the Unions ...

Douglas: But the union was actually very supportive of Open Admissions.

Henry: Oh yeah, yeah, I know.

Douglas: I went to the archives to look at The Clarion because the PSC as it exists today was established in '72 and they were trying to save Open Admissions because that was immediately under attack as soon as it was implemented.

Henry: Instantly.

Douglas: Yeah. So you see people like -

Henry: It was something for people to fight against rather than something that was more consistent with what we were trying to look for which was like the school of third world studies to have this coordination between the high schools and the seniors and the colleges.

You know, it was their answer, you know, Open Admissions and everybody was fighting that because they are fighting the wrong elephant. -- the elephant in room is the fact that the kids are not

being prepared. And that still is problematic. They are still dropping out of school, not getting up and trying to go to college. I mean this is just still happening.

Douglas: Yeah, exactly. Well, someone I spoke to, they speculated that it was almost deliberate that they had Open Admissions. Let every one in, that way they will be sure to fail because there wouldn't be enough resources and then we'll have an excuse to shut it down right.

Henry: Right.

Douglas: Here is a big question, I ask everyone. In many ways you challenged the idea of meritocracy through Open Admissions or what became Open Admissions, right? Because in a sense you were saying forget standards, I don't want to know about SAT's or GPA's, everyone deserves an education and we'll do our best to provide resources, like the SEEK program, that's what they did, right?

You wouldn't have been able to get into City without SEEK, right? So that challenged meritocracy. Do you think we still see those debates today at CUNY the debate about meritocracy versus democracy? That's what you guys were representing democracy, a democratic movement? What we see at CUNY today in terms of that struggle, that tension meritocracy and democracy?

Henry: I would like to say more but I think that I haven't been close enough to the struggles within, I know that there are struggles at Hostos. I know that there are struggles at City College. I know that there are struggles at all the universities. They're all, everybody is now fighting for and to achieve a standard of merit.

They are trying. They saw that the struggles, the education development wasn't occurring either as fast or as well as they anticipated by just simply opening the doors. They had to be more involved and they weren't prepared to really provide the more, the more it really cost more money it had to – you had to change your focus.

And some teachers they wanted to teach, I don't want to teach remedial stuff, I am here, I went to college on my own. Yes, so it's either fail and or you are in. I mean after all I am a freaking doctor.

Douglas: And you know, after all, at that time CUNY, and City College specifically, was an elite institution –

Henry: Totally.

Douglas: It was public, publicly funded but it was still an elite institution.

Henry: No question about.

Douglas: Right.

Henry: No question about it.

Douglas: So you were fighting for access in some ways to get these resources, right.

Henry: True.

Douglas: And remember also that economy was changing from a manufacturing to a service economy– so, a Bachelor’s degree was the credential everyone needed.

Henry: Exactly, exactly.

Douglas: And Puerto Rican and blacks didn’t have access to it right.

Henry: Right.

Douglas: So, how do you reconcile that? Are those two things separate the idea of education as a necessary tool for having an educated citizenry and access to the labor market, right? It seems to serve two purposes, are that are diametrically opposed.

Henry: I don’t think that they are diametrically opposed; they are trying to provide the workforce for the society. That’s what they’ve been doing all along; that’s not a change. That continues to be what we are supposed to be trying to do.

But are they maintaining Open Admission? No. They are not. They don’t see it, they don’t want it. Look at and what’s happening with the political experience right now. How smart do you think the people are, who were involved with that New Jersey shut down of the bridge?

How freaking smart they all, many of them have degrees, many of them are attorneys, the chairman is a freaking attorney, right? But

they create monsters like the PA, Port Authority. It's about who you know, not about what you know.

Douglas: Or it's about power.

Henry: And power.

Douglas: And you guys were exercising power back then and you did it really well because you organized, you strategized, right.

Henry: Again, the fault was we didn't pass the baton, so that the current students could be as active or at least that there would be some level of activity. Right now what I hear from the teachers, "These kids don't want anything, they don't care."

Douglas: So what advice would you give students, to the college students today for raising consciousness and for taking action? What advice would you have for them?

Henry: Same as before: become aware of the contradictions and build the bridge between your college and your local schools. Build the bridge; go beyond the administrations of both the college and of the individual schools, and build a bridge somehow with the kids who are in school and the kids in your college. That's more important. That's I think what's going to make it or break it.

Douglas: Well, if I remember correctly Brownsville was still going on and I know there was some communication between what you were doing at City College and the Brownsville situation. You remember in '68, '69.

Henry: Yeah.

Douglas: Yeah. Decentralization movement, there was some connections, there was sort of –

Henry: There was a move – that was presumed to have been a movement to try to give power to the local community through schools and through the school boards except that it was taken over by the political parties and it became the stepping stones to [gain] power rather than let's make this the best schools system possible.

And so it was a shame because experimenting community power development didn't go anywhere. I mean we also had the community

development corporations that were in all the boroughs and stuff like that during that time too.

I just got blown away recently last year finally after I don't know how many freaking years you find out that he was ripping us off.

Douglas: And corruption is almost built into the system, right.

Henry: So, like they do it. So –

Douglas: And in some ways it doesn't even matter what race you are because you got corruption no matter what racial background you are from, right?

Henry: You got it, you got it, you got it.

Douglas: Henry, you've shared so much with me. Is there anything else you want to share with me that we haven't talked about?

Henry: I don't know. The most important thing for me now is try to stay in touch with this life force that, it's the only real consistency that we have. You know, this movement from spring to fall to winter to summer that we experience here. I mean it's the experience to whatever degree it is in other parts of the world, this is all together.

We aren't that far apart, I think that, I am meeting people from all over the world now through Facebook, through my writings. I meeting people from Jordan, Bangladesh, from India, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, England, Germany and here; Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, California, Austin, Texas, different part, Washington, Canada. You know we're all trying to bridge something, you know let this world be.

I mean it's *going to be* whether we like it or not. Yeah, you can only you fight the whip so much, at some point you got to recognize what it is.

Douglas: Yeah, exactly.

Henry: And let us treasure that all right. We are part of it. We are not apart from it, We are a part of it.

Douglas: And we are part of nature and we are destroying nature right. I mean, you are reminding me of a saying that's stuck with me at some point, I

don't know when I heard it but it goes something like: we're spiritual beings having a human experience.

Henry: Exactly.

Douglas: And that's what really holds us together right.

Henry: Yeah, yeah.

Douglas: Our spiritual being.

Henry: Yeah. And that's more important as we – as I go forth we'll see you know. Every place I go, I learn. I learn.

Douglas: Yeah.

Henry: Well.

Douglas: Well, listen is there anyone else you think I should talk to about this?

Henry: Oh yeah Iris Morales.

Douglas: Yeah.

Henry: Find Iris. Iris Morales is good.

Douglas: Do you have her contact info by any chance?

Henry: Let me see if I have Iris' number.

Douglas: I would love to reach out to her.

Henry: You know Lala right, you mentioned she was the person you were –

Douglas: I haven't met her, no.

Henry: No, I don't have Iris.

Douglas: Okay. No, I will do some research see if I can –

Henry: You should be able to find her, she is an attorney.

Douglas: Iris Morales. Okay.

Henry: Lives in the West side, 110th something like that.

Douglas: The West Side.

Henry: But I can't, I don't know why.

Douglas: No problem.

Henry: Lala, let me see if I have Lala.

Douglas: Is it okay if I mention your name when I reach out to her.

Henry: Sure.

Douglas: Great.

Henry: We get to start and search. I have her name but I don't have, nothing on her, shit. I have to – you have –

Douglas: No problem.

Henry: You have to cross your resources –

Douglas: Yeah, I will.

Henry: And research for that is all part of that.

Douglas: Yeah. Thank you so much.

Henry: It's all part of the dissertation.

Douglas: For the process.

Henry: And cool.

Douglas: Thank you man. It's been a real pleasure.

[End of recorded material 2:07:50]