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Interview with Stuart Schaar
Interviewers: Douglas Medina

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DOUGLAS MEDINA: Today is Monday, March 17th, 2014. I am here with Professor Stuart Schaar. Let's start with you telling me about yourself. Where did you grow up?

STUART SCHAAR: I grew up in the Bronx, right near the Yankee Stadium. It was like growing up in Iowa, except that Manhattan was close by – 20 minutes by express train. I was always going to Manhattan, starting when I was 13, by myself. That educated me. It was absolutely fantastic.

And then, I had no choice; my family was very poor, therefore there was no other place to go but City University. It wasn't City University then – it was a series of colleges which were agglomerated later into the university. And the saving grace was it was free, completely free, and the student charges were so low that they were ludicrous.

I had a job as a bell captain in the Poconos, in a place that used to be a socialist camp [Tamiment]. That became a capitalist stronghold for weekenders coming up there. I met some wonderful people, including Woody Allen and his wife – his first wife who nobody knows – and some brilliant people, along with the bellhop staff who introduced me to high culture. In that way, I learnt all about classical music, which I literally never heard before. I grew up on Elvis Presley; it drove my parents crazy playing all of this music. I had a close friend, who is now a famous novelist, who used to feed me novels to read, and taught me classical music, and Woody Allen taught me modern jazz, so I had all kinds of benefits by virtue of being in this place.

I had Woody Allen's apartment for one summer when he and his wife were away at his place doing theater, and I had the best jazz collection in the world in his apartment. It was absolutely unbelievable. So, it was through contacts that this kid coming out of poverty becomes cultivated, and begins to see that there is a gigantic world out there.

In City College I took courses with a very conservative professor, who I didn't realize was conservative because he was teaching Greek and Roman history. I walked into his office one day

and he said to me, "You are going to Princeton." And I said, "Okay, what do I have to do?" He said, "Nothing, I am calling them up."

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: It was an old boys network., He called them up and said, "You have to take this guy." Of course, I had to do the normal exams, which I passed; they accepted me, and that changed my life.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: But I wasn't ready for it, in the sense that I learned how to discuss things and do things verbally at City College – but I never really learned how to write there the way my peers at Princeton were writing. The first seminar I took there, I got a B-; and my paper was just the first B- I got for a long time. And I learned how to write real fast, learned how to read fast.

You walked into a class, they gave you a bibliography about 400 pages and they say, go home and read, and you went home and you read, there was no choice. What Princeton did more than anything else was teach me how to deal with stress, so that anything I did afterwards was a piece of cake. It was very easy.

When I got out of there, I met some wonderful people at Princeton, including Eqbal Ahmad. who became Edward Said's best friend in New York City. I just completed the biography of Eqbal's, which is going to be published by University Press next year.

We had a great time, great intellectual discussions, just wonderful environment. I was one of five poor people at Princeton; everybody else was wealthy; the undergraduates called us graduates; the place where we lived – the Goon Castle – they were so alienated from us and so different. They were just beginning to take people from the working class – they weren't many, there were about five or six of us, but I didn't care because I had such brilliant friends, and it didn't really matter. And they were mainly freaks, outsiders, people from the third world, a Christian Scientist, an Irish guy – brilliant and wonderful.

So we caused some trouble at Princeton. I wet my feet in politics. We organized the kitchen help, which were mainly African-American women, and the university was so scared them that they voted against unionization. So what we did was tackle the problem of architecture on campus, because they wanted to build new buildings that were different to the Gothic architecture that was there.

And we wanted to participate in decisions and have students participate, so we organized the architect students, we organized the English majors, who organized everybody else and we won. From that point on they had to deal with us. They wanted to get rid of us, but we all had outside fellowships and very good grades, so they just screamed at us, so there was nothing they could do with us. We also broke one of the long-standing rules at Princeton Graduate School. Previously everybody had to eat with black gowns in imitation of Oxford University in Great Britain, and say grace before meals. We broke that down. We forced them to open a separate dining room with low ceilings where we could just sit and eat in peace: no grace, no gowns, anybody who wanted to do

that could do so. Well, it sounds innocuous but this was the beginning of the '60s – in the '50s, because I was there starting in 1958.

MEDINA: Let's pause for one moment – where did you go to high school?

SCHAAR: William Howard Taft. It was a jock school. It was so horrendous; I finished in two years by going to summer school. I couldn't stand it.

MEDINA: Where was it located?

SCHAAR: In the Bronx on – I think Walton Avenue near the Concourse, a 170 something Street.

MEDINA: And what year did you graduate?

SCHAAR: I graduated in 1954.

MEDINA: 1954.

SCHAAR: But I went to Jamaica High School in the summer just because my family rented a place to stay in the summer in Far Rockaway, and I spent every summer there. I learned how to dance on the board and I thought it was on television with the park. It was a scream. Jamaica was very interesting because I had two years running, two summers running, the best English teacher I ever had in my life. And I got a 98 on the English Regents, which shocked me because I was uncultivated, I had a Bronx accent, but she worked with me, and she was phenomenal, and she pushed me, and it was wonderful.

MEDINA: What were the demographics like in that high school in Taft, and in Jamaica for that matter, in terms of race, ethnicity background, and socio-economic background?

SCHAAR: Well, there is something you should know. I can realize this at the beginning. but fire drills at the school that I went to – First, public school, I went to PS 114, which is near the Yankee Stadium. It was run by a dictatorial principal, Miss Hutton. I will never forget her. She gave her staff total leeway to do whatever they wanted in the classroom, so in the third grade I had Miss Buckley, who was an earth mother, absolutely extraordinary, and she had us built a teepee in the middle of the classroom. She had the girls make the tools, Native American tools that we used, and she had the boys sew the costumes without saying a word of what she was up to. And we just did it. And I learnt how to sew in her class. And we were coming to class, changed into our Native American costumes, learned arithmetic using wampum, learnt the cosmology of Native Americans: we became Native Americans for a whole year. And it was so much fun that normally I was very late to school and I would come there at the last second. My mother was shocked because I would get ready a half hour before and would run to school, it was so exciting.

MEDINA: And this is third grade.

SCHAAR: Third grade. And then in the fifth and sixth grade, I had the hardest teacher in my entire life, including Princeton Graduate School. The woman, Miss Reiter, became the inspector of all public education in the Bronx after that. She was extraordinary; she had us work so hard, and

everybody in the class was brilliant, absolutely scintillating. I felt stupid in comparison to so many people who were there. It was a special class.

What they did was segregate us, and we didn't know this at the time until we went out for fire drills. What they did was have 40 classes for each grade. I was always in one one, two one, three one, four one, the one with the brightest students, then it went down to 40. And in fire drills we would line up by grade one, two, three, four, five through 40, and what I noticed is that starting in grade 25 to 30, everybody was black and Puerto Rican, whereas everybody from the one to 10 were all white.

MEDINA: Interesting.

SCHAAR: There might be one Chinese, there might be one light-skinned African-American, maybe a light skinned Puerto Rican. It wasn't bad, but it was total segregation, totally segregated. And they did it through IQ tests, which was slanted culturally in favor of middle class whites. I just squeezed by because I had no middle-class culture, whereas everybody around me was the sons of middle-class professionals. And as a result, I got an extraordinary education, and it was a progressive school with a dictatorial principal.

I remember one thing that happened when General MacArthur was fired by President Truman: there was his parade on the Ground Concourse in the Bronx Miss Hutton had the whole school come out because she loved MacArthur, gave each of us an American flag, and we were there waving the flag for MacArthur, I didn't know what was going on. All of us were out there – we just followed marching orders, but that's what she was like. She ran an incredible school.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: It was unbelievable.

MEDINA: It sounds like a formative experience for you for what was to come.

SCHAAR: It was incredible. Incredible.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: I met one of my second grade teachers, Miss Schweibel, I remember all their names, they were that good, on the subway when I visited my parents while I was in Princeton, so it must have '59 or '60. And she looks at me and she says, you are Stuart Schaar, and I had her in the third grade, so she said to me –

MEDINA: Remembered you.

SCHAAR: I always knew you would turn out to be good.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: It was that kind of thing.

MEDINA: Sure.

SCHAAR: It was just remarkable, and people knew you and really paid attention to you. So that was a great initiation and that saved me from my working-class background. And I really pulled myself up through education with the best teachers imaginable.

MEDINA: Right. What about home? Tell me about your parents. What did they do for a living?

SCHAAR: My mother was a peasant, and she thought like a medieval person. My father was an orphan. I wrote my childhood autobiography; I could send it to you.

MEDINA: That would be great.

SCHAAR: Hysterically funny. It's been published. But he was very smart and he only went through high school. His father was an anarchist who had killed a Polish general and had to flee, met my grandmother, and took her to America. So by virtue of his killing a general he saved my life, because I never would have made it through Poland with the Nazis and everything else going through.

MEDINA: Sure.

SCHAAR: And on my paternal side, religion didn't come into life at all. My mother was superstitious but had a great personality, and that brought me – that was extraordinary. We were very poor. They both worked in silk ribbons, got married the eve of the economic depression in 1929. Was thrown out of work, and my father was selling apples on the street like so many people during the Depression. Luckily my maternal grandfather owned this stable in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and what he did was sewed diamonds into his long coat when he left Poland. And with those diamonds he bought horses and carts and set up this stable. My grandmother had a grocery store, and I found out much later in life, she sold bootleg gin during the prohibition period, she was quite something. And took a lover in her store despite the fact that she had five children; it was a crazy, crazy combination.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: My grandfather saved my father by giving him a horse and a cart, and he peddled fruits and vegetables on the street using the cart and the horse. And then opened the fruit and vegetable store, which he hated, in the East Bronx, where I grew up. And then he hated it so much, he left the store with my mother – she hated every moment of it – and traded himself as a sheet metal worker in time for the Second World War. He was assigned to the Boston Navy Yard to build ships for the war effort, so we lived in Revere Beach, near Boston. Then came back to the Bronx in New York, and my entire extended family on my maternal mother side lived on the same block.

I was mothered with all kinds of love. Every time I walked in the street, my cousins would come and hug me and kiss me; my aunt would be there, and I would be able to go up and sit around and have fun at their house, and it socialized me. It was really wonderful. And I was probably one of the last people to grow up in an extended family, and there is nothing like it.

MEDINA: Sure.

SCHAAR: And now I live in North Africa, and I work on North Africa, I know it very well. I mean in the sense that I grew up in that kind of environment, so I could appreciate it greatly, and I know how it socializes you.

MEDINA: Absolutely. Speaking of socialization, was politics discussed at home with your parents, with your family?

SCHAAR: No, no. My political education really began at Princeton. And I was with Eqbal Ahmad all the time. He was brilliant. And you could never tell what he was going to come out with, what would come out of his mouth. He was original, totally original. And I had another friend who just passed away Mohammed Guessous, who was an absolutely brilliant sociologist. A thousand people showed up at his funeral. He was on the front page in all of the Moroccan newspapers; he was a politician at the end, and honest, and then making everything out of it because he was so honest in the society where so few people are honest. So I was lucky I had incredible friends, and they saw things in me which I didn't see.

MEDINA: They were your mentors.

SCHAAR: Okay. Yeah. He was one of the few, right.

MEDINA: Chronologically, what year did you enter City College and then transferred to Princeton?

SCHAAR: I entered in '54.

MEDINA: Okay.

SCHAAR: I went to a junior high school which was non-descriptive and horrible. Taft was the worst imaginable. I was always good in history, so that's about all I could do. And at the age of 17, I decided I am going to become a history professor. My family thought I was nuts, and I told my mother and father, you try to stop me, I will kill you, and they believed me, I was so crazy. And so independent, they left me alone.

MEDINA: Sure.

SCHAAR: But they didn't think there was going to be a future in that. I was the first person in my entire extended family to go on to college, and the first one in the entire family to go to graduate school.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: Yeah, wow.

MEDINA: So where did this interest in history come from?

SCHAAR: I was good at it, I could tell trees from forest. And at City College I had some of the best history professors ever. There was one, a woman who originated in Poland and alternately moved to Spain, and then when the Fascists came she moved to France; when the Germans came, she moved to America because there was no other place to go.

And she immediately became a full professor because she had done some of the best scholarly work on Dante. She worked on the Muslims in Sicily, and she let me do papers on that. And that was an introduction to Islamic studies. But what changed my life completely was going to free lectures in Cooper Union downtown. And I was there every Monday, Wednesday and Friday night. And one night, a famous professor from Princeton gave a lecture on the five pillars of Islam, which was the worst lecture I ever heard, and I said to myself, at 17, "If this famous man could give us bad lectures like that, whatever I do, if I go and do Middle East Studies, I will become famous and I could end up in a big city instead of the boondocks." Because all my friends in history were coming to do American and European history, and the competition was crazy. So, I decided then, at 17, that I would do Middle East Studies, and I took courses in City College on this. I did this paper on Islam in Sicily, with this incredible Polish professor. And before I knew, that's what I did for a living.

MEDINA: Wow. And what happens after Princeton then?

SCHAAR: I got three job offers. Things were quite good in those days. And I chose the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

MEDINA: And what year was that? What year did you receive your offer?

SCHAAR: I started in 1965. I didn't have my Ph.D. yet; I had to finish it when I was there. I entered the Comparative Tropical History program, which had $5 million a year from the Mellon Foundation to bring in the brightest graduate students from the country and around the world. I was teaching courses with the most eminent people imaginable, somebody like Philip Curtin who became the president of the American Historical Association and was a comparativist between the Caribbean and Africa. Brilliant guy, great teacher, and I learned how to teach by team teaching with him.

We did comparative plantation systems, we did comparative slavery worldwide, and I became a globalist as a result of being there. There was a guy named Jan Vansina there, who invented the methodology for doing oral history. He would take a bicycle in the Congo and learn different dialects of Swahili as he rode along, and wrote the best history of the Congo from oral history.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: Incredible stuff. And my students were wonderful students; all of them became famous professors. So it was a wonderful initiation. My problem was I hated cold weather. I would do anything to escape, so they gave me a lot of leaves. Then I landed a job after being in Wisconsin for two years with the American University Field Staff, which is a consortium of 12 universities.

They sent me to East Africa to write reports, which sold for a buck a piece back in the States at the 12 universities. And then, after being in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania writing reports about it, also the Middle East and North Africa, I came back and lectured in 10 different universities while living in San Francisco. And I would be on the road for the 10 days, come back for 10 days. I spent six weeks at Caltech teaching Islam to engineers; it was wild, absolutely incredible. And I learned how to teach that way after I would walk into a university, they would give me an assignment of 40 lectures in the week.

The first two universities I thought I was going to die, it was so much work, but I discovered I had an incredible memory. If I gave a lecture twice, I never forgot it. So I threw away all my notes and I was able to just spontaneously lecture and –

MEDINA: That's impressive.

SCHAAR: It was, I didn't know I had that ability. And my memory was stupendous. And if you are a historian, and if you have a great memory, it's wondrous.

MEDINA: Absolutely.

SCHAAR: So I discovered things as I went along, and I had a great time traveling through the country, seeing the country, lecturing in different places. I lectured at Southern University, piggy-backing from Tulane where I was assigned. And at Southern University it was about a month before it exploded in 1968 and the students took over, it was an experience.

I lectured on Frantz Fanon and education in Africa. After I finished my lecture on Frantz Fanon, the dean of Southern got so nervous. She stood up and said: "Folks, it isn't as bad as all that!" She said, "They're now sitting on buses next to us," and the students were enraged, enraged, and just blew up the place a month after I had left.

I had no… My input was not such as to lead to it, but I met the student revolutionaries and it was fascinating, really fascinating, all this before Brooklyn College.

MEDINA: At what point did you arrive at Brooklyn College?

SCHAAR: September 1968, when things were blowing up. Now, there is one thing that happened to me at Wisconsin which prepared me for the radicalization of Brooklyn College. I had a course with 150 students, graduate and undergraduate mixed, very smart students, really smart on nationalism in North Africa, in which I dealt with the Algerian revolution in great detail, which I am an expert of.

In the middle of the semester, the Americans start bombing Haiphong harbor, 1968. This place and everybody was concerned that we would enter the Third World War because there were Russian battle ships in Haiphong harbor. And if the American jets hit the Russian ships, God knows what would have happened.

There was an immediate reaction throughout the country of people who are against the war that heightened the anti-war movement, because we were all afraid simultaneously. I walked into class that day – I was still using notes – I took my notes and I flown them right across the room, and I said, today we are going to compare the Algerian Revolution with the Vietnamese Revolution spontaneously.

I had studied Vietnam because of the anti-war movement, and I knew it fairly well. I gave a spontaneous hour and 15 minute lecture concluding that the only future for Vietnam was a United Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh. 143 of my students stood up on their chairs and gave me a standing ovation for 15 minutes, and the back row was seven Army officers who were taking the course for counter insurgency purposes.

This program and this class was on the radio. It was beamed into three states. The radio station played that program, played that class, at least 50 times that semester. I received 500 letters from people who were listening. All but three were in favor of what I was saying –

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: They read every letter on the air at least four or five times. That saved my life, because it was all on radio, it was clear that people were behind me, if they ever tried to fire me and they would have – there would have been riots on the campus.

MEDINA: How did the administration respond?

SCHAAR: They called me in. First the chair called me in and asked what I was doing, because the seven Army officers had reported me. They said, don't fire him, just punish him, because we are learning too much. And once I heard that, I knew I was home free.

MEDINA: And of course you knew the officers would be there that day, and that they are here –

SCHAAR: They were always there. They were in my class, they were my students.

MEDINA: This was deliberate, this was conscious of course.

SCHAAR: Normal. And it's a public university, you have to teach who comes. It's like City University. And I said, listen to the program and you decide. It's a scholarly lecture. It was later published, so the lecture was published.

MEDINA: It was given in 1968.

SCHAAR: '67.

MEDINA: '67.

SCHAAR: Then the dean called me up, and I was an untenured assistant professor. My graduate students came up to me after the class and said it was good to know you.

MEDINA: Saying their goodbyes.

SCHAAR: That's right. The dean said to me, the Army officers complained. I said, there is academic freedom, isn't there? Listen to the program and you decide for yourself. It's a good thing it was recorded because it was very scholarly, and it was right to the point, and I compared the Algerian Revolution with the Vietnamese Revolution.

They didn't like the conclusion, but everything else was okay. And what I said came out to be true. That ultimately the only solution was a united communist Vietnam, and I saw it coming. So that was my baptism in fire before I came to Brooklyn College. The fact that –

MEDINA: But then didn't have any –

SCHAAR: That Brooklyn didn't know any of this.

MEDINA: Okay.

SCHAAR: And I wasn't about to divulge my radical credentials because the History department was basically controlled by very, very conservative people including Gertrude Himmelfarb, who was married to Irving Kristol, who is the arch neo-conservative of the time. And people like Abe Eisenstadt in American history, who was a good historian but very conservative, Hans Trefousse – they are all dead now, except for Himmelfarb, who is also very conservative. I would say a liberal, but liberals back then were interventionists who believed that the Vietnam war was a good thing, that we should pursue it.

MEDINA: What led you to come to Brooklyn College? What made you take under that –

SCHAAR: I couldn't stand -30 degree weather for three weeks because the environment was wonderful, and I couldn't stand the townspeople of Madison. The university was fantastic. I had a colleague who sublet my apartment for summer. I came back, he still was in the apartment; didn't want to leave because it was a great apartment. So I said to him one day, John, I am taking you to find an apartment. So we come to this house with a sign for rent on it -- a big Victorian house. We knocked on the door. The woman wouldn't open the door, just opened the screen, looked out and says yes, and my friend John, who looked like a Catholic priest without a collar said to her, you have the sign up, I would like to see the apartment. She looks at both of us and said, I would never think of it, so I turned to John and I said, John, imagine if we were black, it was just too crazy and everything was like that. It was upside down. So I – at that point I said I had to get out of here, and the job came out and they were desperate to get somebody in the Middle East, and here I was.

I came for the interview; they didn't let me perform, give a seminar, and I was very angry. So I went away and I called them up and I said, that was a horrible interview. I want to come back, and I want to give a class and then you could judge who I am and what I am, because I knew I was a very good teacher. So they made me come back the second time at my request. And I gave a class. Then something very funny happened. They offered me a position as an assistant professor. I take the train at Flatbush Avenue, I look at the faces on the people on the train after being in North Africa for a long time and the Midwest where everybody is corn-fed and healthy. And I see these people coming home from work exhausted, half-dead. I go upstairs and sincerely called up the chair and said, I can't take your job. He thought I was negotiating. It was coincidence, and weird, and I said to him, I can't take the job because I saw the people's faces on the subway and I didn't want to become what they, they have become. The next thing I know, they offered me an associate professorship and $8,000 more than I was making at Wisconsin. It was an offer that nobody could refuse, and with the promise of early tenure.

MEDINA: Wow. That's unheard of nowadays, right.

SCHAAR: No. It was a seller's market then.

MEDINA: Right. So you mentioned that in 1968, that's when all hell was breaking loose, not only at Brooklyn College, but throughout CUNY, throughout New York City. It was –

SCHAAR: But I was only used to this because Wisconsin was one of the major centers for the anti-war movement. And the students were mobilized, and half the faculty was mobilized, so this wasn't strange to me. I had already experienced this in a big way; it didn't take on racial overtones the way it did in City University because they didn't have the same constituency that the –

MEDINA: So what did you encounter when you got here?

SCHAAR: It was weird. You came to Brooklyn College, and it's in the middle of a black neighborhood, and very few black students, very few Puerto Rican students were on campus. Most of them were Jewish, some Brooklyn Italians. I went to City College, and I knew that all my peers there were white in the middle of Harlem, and it was as crazy as my public school in the sense that here I was in an all-white class, and the surrounding area were minorities everywhere. The whole educational system was geared in that direction, so I had grown up in it and it wasn't something that was strange. And when I came to Brooklyn College, it was the height of the anti-war movement. My classes were gigantic… I just attracted many, many students. It was on the Middle East. I began teaching global history, and it was hysterical because in the classroom, the left would sit on the left side of the classroom, and the right on the right side. And the right was so intimidated, they shut up. The left took over the classroom. And we had a ball, it would be incredible.

MEDINA: Which student groups were active at Brooklyn College? SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] –

SCHAAR: There was an SDS chapter. When I first came it wasn't very active, it was quiescent, and the real action came with the black and Puerto Rican students organizing for a redefinition of what the university should be, and calling for Open Admissions. That and City College were the two places where the demand was vociferous because of the population surrounding the campuses. You have the biggest Caribbean population in the United States in Flatbush, and those people were deprived and some of them were very well-educated. So that they could easily come to City College, Brooklyn College, they could get in, and they could do the work they were prepared for. And so a few of them were being accepted, and it was very impressive to see how the black and Puerto Rican students organized. The most impressive thing was that they just withdrew from the campus, and they set up separate trucks, and nobody knew what to do, had to bring them back in.

MEDINA: What do you mean? How did they do that?

SCHAAR: They withdrew from all classes; they set up their own classes with the black faculty, small numbers and the Puerto Rican faculty, and they made it clear they wanted an Africana Studies and a Puerto Rican Studies department to be able to deal with their legacy and their history.

We had to make choices. Would we support them or would we oppose them? A group of us who were in the anti-war movement and very active on campus decided to support them. There is somebody you should interview, his name is Hobart Spalding, we call him Hoby, he's still around. His specialty is Latin America and he had many of the Puerto Rican leaders in his classes, and he was very close to them. He was the equivalent of Bart Meyers, and I have his email, I can give it to you later.

MEDINA: That would be great.

SCHAAR: He's more important than Renate Bridenthal. They were married.

MEDINA: Okay.

SCHAAR: They got divorced, but they were married at that point. But he was the real activist with the Puerto Ricans. And so then all of us were in the anti-war movement; we gravitated towards the issue.

MEDINA: Were the faculty organized under a particular umbrella, or was it just a loose group of anti –

SCHAAR: We were organizers of the Anti-Vietnam War Coalition, and we became very good friends and trusted each other, which is very important, and Bart was one of our leaders. There was a woman named Nancy Romer, who is still active –

MEDINA: Sure, Nancy.

SCHAAR: Nancy doesn't give up. She is retiring next year.

MEDINA: Yes.

SCHAAR: She is phenomenal.

MEDINA: So how did you seek to support the student movement at the time?

SCHAAR: Well, something happened to me specifically. Vernon Lattin, no, it was Kneller who was the president of Brooklyn College. And there was a faculty meeting called 'over the crisis' and I stood up and called the president a liar before the assembled faculty.

MEDINA: Wow.

SCHAAR: This was six months after I got there. I had been promised early tenure and I was going to be a meteor rising up; that set me back about seven years. There were some things that he literally had lied about, and I called him on it, and of course he hated it. The amazing thing –

MEDINA: Do you remember what it was?

SCHAAR: Excuse me?

MEDINA: Do you remember what it was you said?

SCHAAR: I really don't. I remember the reaction, which was ferocious, and I was an untenured, associate professor. What saved me was being an associate professor, because it's harder to get rid of an associate professor than would be an assistant or a lecturer or… lecturer, they just wipe out.

MEDINA: Sure.

SCHAAR: But when you are an associate, you've already produced work; you are known as an academic. It's very hard to get rid of somebody if they want to do it because of politics.

MEDINA: Right. Did your colleagues support you?

SCHAAR: Half. I divided the department completely. Half hated my guts and the other half really supported me. I later was saved by luck and I guess my abilities. I had a colleague in the department named Peggy Brown who was a Medievalist, not very radical, but a decent person. She was very close to the dean of social sciences. One day she came up to me and she said, we want to use your talent, this is stupid that you are out in left field. So she introduced me to the dean of social sciences, whose name was Tom Birkenhead. And the campus was in an uproar, this is in the '70s. And he was smart; he wanted to bring left of center speakers on campus to more or less calm things down, because the majority of the students were left of center at that point, and the country, especially in the big cities, were left of center. Well, I happened to know everybody important on the left from my anti-war work and from being friends with Eqbal Ahmad who knew everybody.

So I brought to campus, he gave me an unlimited budget, and I brought people like Jay Lifton, who was the author of *Nazi Doctors* and *Hiroshima*, stuff like that, very smart. I brought Leonard Boudin, one of the great lawyers of the period, the Clarence Darrow of the time who was the lawyer in the Eqbal Ahmad case, the Harrisburg Seven case, and I was very close friends with him. I brought Richard Falk who was a radical professor at Princeton, and had a chair at the age of 27. He was one of the major leaders of the anti-war movement. I brought Noam Chomsky; it just went on and on and on. And we had lunches with all these dignitaries who were coming to speak. Presidential lunches. I would sit Noam Chomsky next to the president, and he was in modern languages, and being next to Chomsky was like being next to God. And the curious funny thing is that his wife loved me, and she told him, you give him tenure, or I'm going to divorce you. She became a great friend and a great supporter. And I learned that tenure is also political.

MEDINA: Oh yeah.

SCHAAR: They put me on faculty council and it is at that point that I joined the union. I became active in the union, joined the executive committee of the union.

MEDINA: What year was that?

SCHAAR: '70s. Now with all this I was supporting the creation of African-American Studies and also Puerto Rican Studies. I became good friends especially with the Puerto Rican professors. I was very close; Tony Nadal was very important and you should try to interview him.

MEDINA: Yes.

SCHAAR: He lives in Brooklyn. He's good.

MEDINA: What do you remember about the actual crisis and the resolution of the crisis around Open Admissions and the demands that the students made?

SCHAAR: It was students and faculty. They worked in tandem, and that gave them their strength. If it was only students they would have white-washed them, they would wipe them out.

MEDINA: And staff were active as well, SEEK staff, right?

SCHAAR: Yeah, I mean they called in the police. They would have done nasty things. But the fact that they were united with the faculty gave them their strength, and they had some support from the white faculty who were already organizing the anti-war movement. So there was a movement behind them but it was their work, it wasn't the anti-war people that created what they did create. It was their action that was responsible for transforming the university from an all lily-white place to what it is today, which is a mixed bag of people and representing what the neighborhood is all about.

MEDINA: Absolutely. Were there ever any official or unofficial meetings between faculty and students to practice strategy?

SCHAAR: All the time, all the time. I mean there were meeting after meeting after meeting after meeting, there was no end to meeting. We spent all our time in meetings. No, the significant achievement of the Blacks and Puerto Ricans was the unity in face of the rest of the community. What was going on inside, we had no idea. Bart may have known and Hoby may known, because they were very close to it. But as far as we were concerned outside they were united and the rest of the faculty only saw that unification. And that was very important. There was no way to break it. And therefore, they were going to get what they wanted. The moment there is that kind of unity, plus the unity of the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans together, that was major. And across lines within the community of the Caribbean with the Native American, African-Americans, that was important. They couldn't break it up. They tried everything possible, they couldn't. Now what happened is that some of the leaders of the black and Puerto Rican movement later became deans like Carlos Russell, who was at the center of everything. Is he still alive? I don't know.

MEDINA: I don't know.

SCHAAR: He is somebody very important to speak with if he is alive. He was an operator.

MEDINA: Now.

SCHAAR: And he used it to his advantage.

MEDINA: Right.

SCHAAR: Couple of people did that and were appointed to deanships and whatnot to calm things down.

MEDINA: Now, CUNY became a university system in 1961, right?

SCHAAR: Right.

MEDINA: And so was a fairly young university system. And here we have City College also in an upheaval, right, also with the very active student movement. Was there ever any cross-fertilization between the two movements that you can remember between faculty at City or Brooklyn, or was it sort of like a separate movement?

SCHAAR: I am sure that the Blacks and Puerto Ricans had connections with what was going on elsewhere. The anti-war faculty, no – in other words we didn't get involved at that level of discussion and movement, demonstrations, but we were hearing, you know, that this is citywide and significant. Actually what happened, you would have to speak with people like Russell and people like Tony Nadal; they could tell you exactly what they know.

MEDINA: Yeah. I'll reach out to them. So it seems like there was some success because we got Open Admissions in 1967 –

SCHAAR: It was totally successful.

MEDINA: Yeah.

SCHAAR: Not some. It was totally, totally successful.

MEDINA: What do you attribute the success to?

SCHAAR: Unity. Absolute unity and fear on the part of the City and university officials. They didn't know what to do. It came as a total surprise to them.

MEDINA: When you read about Open Admissions, there was a lot of support, but there was also a lot of people who did not support Open Admissions –

SCHAAR: A lot of people hated it.

MEDINA: Faculty in particular, yeah. Talk to me about that.

SCHAAR: My department was the center of the debate. People thought that the standards of the university would go down, and it was really racist. The real issue was that Brooklyn and City were Jewish bastions; it was the place for working-class and lower middle-class Jewish families to send their children so that they could become professionals. The dream of lower-class Jewish people was to have their children become lawyers, accountants, doctors, anything professional. My family wanted me to become a lawyer or an accountant; when I told them I want to be a history professor they thought I was mad, absolutely crazy. So it was the route to professionalism, and a lot of the faculty were products of City University before it was City University. And they wanted to keep the place as a Jewish bastion without ever arguing it because it would be too much to argue it. But this was really the bedrock of what was going on here.

MEDINA: Which is ironic considering that Jews were discriminated against?

SCHAAR: Doesn't matter.

MEDINA: At places.

SCHAAR: They got their place in the sun. It's like Israel; once you get what you want you then discriminate.

MEDINA: Right. So, standards and excellence, right, that was the main claim –

SCHAAR: It's what they use, they always use it. Standards becomes the hallmark of camouflage, because what you have to get down to is what's the real issue. They wanted to keep it as the Jewish Harvard. I am telling you, I tried to rent an apartment near Brooklyn College, I tell people I am a professor from Brooklyn College, it's like being a professor from Harvard. I get whatever I want, okay? Other people are shut out. That's weird, really weird.

MEDINA: Right. So what did the debates consist of in your department at the time?

SCHAAR: Standards. Always standards, and it camouflaged the real race and class issues. Because nobody could argue, we can't keep… you know, allow the Blacks in. They never would have been allowed, but standards and the whole idea that they didn't want remediation because a lot of the students came from lousy schools, bright but not prepared. So therefore you have to remember that when I went to City College, you needed a straight 90 average in high school, nothing was slanted. Either you had it or you didn't have it. Didn't matter what high school you came from; they didn't give special favors to lousy high schools and take the top 20 percent or so, nothing like that was there. So you had to have a 90 or above to get into the place, and the students were brilliant. That's what the faculty was used to, and that's what they wanted to continue. They didn't want to have to bring people up, they didn't want to have remediation, you have to be prepared when you got in.

MEDINA: Which gets to the core of the philosophical mission, right, of a public university? Is it to just skim from the top or to really open the gates to –

SCHAAR: They didn't think in those terms. They thought in terms, and they didn't care if you were Black or Puerto Rican, as long as you were in the 90 percentile. And they knew that you would only get 10 or 15 people so they could be generous at that level, do you follow? But there was a curve involved.

The people in the 90 percentile tier tended to be mainly Jewish in the city, and it was their university. They were proprietary over it and they wanted to keep it that way. And therefore standards became the hallmark of the discussion. And it became the hallmark because you could not be blatantly racist.

There is too much going on in the society. Martin Luther King was already an icon, you know, there was no way that you are going outright comment and say we don't want Blacks and Puerto Ricans here. So instead they set the bar very high as had been the case previously and –

MEDINA: As opposed with meritocracy, right?

SCHAAR: More than meritocracy. This was meritocracy by setting the bar at 90 percent; you got the best people and didn't matter where they came from, okay. But they knew that 80 percent would be New York Jewish, so it worked. There was no reality fix that the majority of the city were people of color, and it was going to be increasingly the case because the whites were fleeing like crazy. They all went to California; they all went to co-op city which is hysterical, co-op city was all white, then becomes mainly black and Puerto Rican, and the whites who were there died because they're escaping it, but they can't move anymore.
MEDINA: They got to Westchester.

SCHAAR: Oh, it's wild stuff.

MEDINA: So how did the faculty respond once open admissions succeeded, did any faculty leave in protest?

SCHAAR: They couldn't; we were getting paid well. The union was very good in those days and the salaries were very good down there; low, but at that point the pay schedule was very high, nobody was going to leave. But they tried to sabotage it, and the way they did this was they tried to diminish Open Admissions, they tried to diminish remedial work, and you couldn't have Open Admissions without remedial. It was absolutely necessary. But there were a couple of champions who were incredible. At Brooklyn College, Martha Bell, who passed away recently, heavyset woman, she was so heavy, it was tragic in a wheelchair, she couldn't even walk. I worked for her in the SEEK program in the sense that I took one or two SEEK classes all the time every semester and she would do anything for those kids. She was their defender, and she was a bulldog, I mean she – she's pretty much like Franklin Taylors in City College.

MEDINA: Sure, sure. I've interviewed her, actually.

SCHAAR: She is a great friend of mine, you know, forever. We were in the anti-war movement together. But Martha was something, and there were people like that who defended their programs and had contacts in the city administration that supported her and that was important, very important.

MEDINA: Absolutely.

SCHAAR: And the SEEK students, some of them got A's, you know. It was quite good and she stood behind them.

MEDINA: Now, she pointed out you needed resources right to support all these Open Admissions students. Let's fast forward to 1976, six short years after Open Admissions, they imposed tuition. Do you think that there is a connection between Open Admissions and the imposition of tuition six years later?

SCHAAR: I think it was following trends. It was more than conspiracy. The entire country was moving towards privatization. This was the early steps of it. In the '80s and '90s they became the major theme. So that it was almost written that privatization would happen. I couldn't have gone to school to college if it wasn't free, I was that poor. So I was one of the few people who really appreciated free education because I knew firsthand what it meant. My family was so poor then that if I had to pay tuition, I couldn't have gone to college. I would have had to work like a dog and maybe take courses one or two at night; Renate Bridenthal had to do that. And other people I know had to do that, but you had to be totally motivated and very smart to be able to accomplish something that way. I think it's a combination of many things. I don't think it was a conspiracy against Open Admissions. I think it was part of the American ideology that you don't give anybody a free lunch, and it was anti-socialist doctrine and this was socialist, this was. As long as it was – there may have been something as long as it was Jewish alone, you wanted it free. The moment that you begin mixing it, maybe, but I have no proof. I have no proof and it was never discussed.

MEDINA: Well, was in –

SCHAAR: People opposed the imposition of tuition on the principle that a lot of people are going to be shut out, everybody, Jewish, Black, Puerto Rican, didn't matter.

MEDINA: Right. Well, it was in the midst of the fiscal crises which essentially –

SCHAAR: Of course.

MEDINA: It was overall attack on the public sector, right.

SCHAAR: But it's part of privatization.

MEDINA: Well, many call neo-liberalization nowadays.

SCHAAR: Look. it's capitalism.

MEDINA: Exactly.

SCHAAR: Yeah. It went against capitalism.

MEDINA: Right. Now, what I find really interesting is that there didn't seem to be any serious mobilization to protect a free tuition CUNY. There was a movement in the '60s and the '70s to provide access, but here you have almost like a de-politicization or demobilization in the early '70s. What do you think about that?

SCHAAR: It's much larger than education. The whole country is demobilized after the Vietnam War.

MEDINA: Why is that?

SCHAAR: Kent State was critical. I remember the day that Kent State happened. There was a pall over the movement; people got frightened because until then, nobody had to pay the ultimate price of being killed. You did this – the civil rights movement, where people going to the South risked their lives, and people knew that if they'd join the civil rights movement they could die.
This had not been case in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. Kent State changed all of that. People began to understand that if you are going to join this movement, you could be killed. A lot of people didn't want to be killed, and they withdrew and they stepped back, and this was part of a winddown from the Vietnam War. There ultimately was not an anti-war movement. What existed was an Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and it had no staying power once the war winded down. It's what people don't understand. I write about this in Eqbal's book in great detail, and I've thought about it a great deal.

The atmosphere at the time was that the city is broke; the tuition being demanded is cheap. We all understood that it's in the inroads and once it's made it, it would expand, but since it was so reasonable in terms of cost, with the initial fees were ridiculous. They weren't what they are today, and even today they are cheap compared to private education, especially if you are resident of the city. I mean, I know from experience that even $3,500 a semester would make it impossible for me to go to college, but most people who lived in the middle class and were teaching had no idea what it meant. They were living middle-class lives right and getting decent salaries. So for them to

charge $1,000 at that point or $500 initially was peanuts, it was nothing. So they were smart in doing it gradually. If they had introduced $3,000 or $4,000 tuition initially there would have been an uproar. They didn't do it. They took a number of years and then they could argue inflation.

MEDINA: Right. Exactly.

SCHAAR: Yeah.

MEDINA: That's an interesting point you make about it was an Anti-Vietnam War movement, not an anti-war movement.

SCHAAR: No, exactly.

MEDINA: And in some ways I guess you can draw parallel to CUNY. The students were specifically demanding access to CUNY. There was no real argument for a broader agenda for higher education, public higher education.

SCHAAR: Because there is no class consciousness in America. They diluted it, diluted not deluded, they diluted it.

MEDINA: How?

SCHAAR: Until the Occupy movement began, arguing class was a dirty series of words, and you were attacked if you used class analysis. It was un-American. This was at the national level and the local level. And the moment you take class out of the equation and ultimately you take race out of the equation because it's too sensitive to discuss.

You denude any real discussion of what the forces are that are at play. If you don't argue race and class – I write for the British journal *Race & Class* so I am quite aware of what they do.

MEDINA: You say – you said that they diluted the concept of class. Who is they? Who is the agent here? Who are the agents?

SCHAAR: It's the American Dream.

MEDINA: The American Dream.

SCHAAR: It's only since Occupy that you could again put class on the agenda, and for me I just wrote a book on *The Birth of the Arab Citizen*, and I have a beautiful chapter on the Occupy movement and how it was affected by the Arab Spring by John Hammond, who is a sociologist at Hunter College. And it seems since Occupy that class is again back on the agenda, and people could begin to talk about it, and for me that is the still long-lasting effect of the Occupy movement.

MEDINA: Well, they talk about inequality, not necessarily class.

SCHAAR: No, but the idea of 99 percent and one percent is class, that's class.

MEDINA: Sure, sure.

SCHAAR: And that makes it permissible to talk about.

MEDINA: Right. But then again, it's a contested concept, right. I mean look at what Obama said during State of the Union address.

SCHAAR: It's all true, but you couldn't even talk about it before; Occupy opened up the terrain to begin to discuss it. And for me that's very important, seeing from a distance it's very significant.

MEDINA: Absolutely. But the same thing can't be said for the 1969, 1976 policies, right, I mean Open Admissions. That was a discussion about democracy, right, and access. And in '76, shutting down that access.

SCHAAR: Yes. Look, ultimately it worked. It didn't work the way, you know, the idealist wanted, but they did give access to a lot of people who were shut out before. And I know it from my students. I had one introductory class in European history, and I am discussing the French Revolution with the class. I have this one African-American guy who was streetwise, had gone to prison, he was out and he is trying to get educated.

And I give the class a document which they had to read in class of the women's march on Versailles, French market women carrying knives. And suddenly this guy wakes up, he hadn't said a word in class. And I asked the class, look, these women are going to be interrogated by the police; this is their testimony to the police. What should we expect in this document before you read it?

The guy raises his hands: "They are going to lie through their teeth." From that moment on, he participated in the class everyday and he got an A; before that he was out to lunch. It related to him, it dealt with his reality and he loved it. It was something that was meaningful for him that he could relate to directly. He loved those women, and from that point on that grabbed him, and therefore he was able to study the rest of it and make sense of it because it was his rather than somebody else's. And the trick is to get people, be grabbed by material so they participate because they were all smart in their own ways.

The issue is, how do you turn them on, how do you get them interested; and each constituency has a different set of interests that you have to provoke, and they are not the same. And that's the challenge of teaching in a mixed group, and not too many professors realize that. They think it's all how much you need and that you could do the same thing for everybody, you can't.
People have different needs, and if you are good teacher, you have to discover what those needs are and how to communicate that, and how to grab them so they get interested. And that's difficult for anybody who is a normal teacher without sensitivity, without a background of poverty, without knowing what it's all about. And most teachers come from the middle class have no idea what poverty is.

MEDINA: It's the epitome of what people say when they, well, mean when they say learning from history, right, that student was grabbed by that.

SCHAAR: It's more than learning from history. History never repeats itself. It's always different. What's significant is having a sensitivity to the needs of the people that you are dealing with, and

it's varied, it isn't homogenous. And the more different constituencies you have, the more difficult it is to teach.

So it was very challenging for most professors to have to deal with that kind of diversity. They didn't succeed the way they did with the students who had 90 averages. That was a piece of cake. You could throw anything at them. The challenge was to deal with students who didn't have that package, who didn't have the abilities that came out of decent educations.

MEDINA: That's where you earn your paycheck, right, teaching to students who are –

SCHAAR: Well, if you are attuned to it, it's easy. If you are not attuned to it, it's a nightmare, an absolute nightmare.

MEDINA: So what can we learn from '69 and '76, the imposition of tuition and the Open Admissions movement. Or how can we be sensitive to that history today?

SCHAAR: Well, I think the university is much better because of it. Diversity is the blessing of existence. You have people that, you have classes with diverse points of view. I will give you one concrete example; I will never forget this.

I had a lot of Hasidic students because Brooklyn College is right next to a Hasidic neighborhood, and they have to go there because their yeshivas were right there and therefore they couldn't move, they couldn't travel, so they came to Brooklyn College. In my class one semester was a very tall handsome Hasidic guy with a gigantic hat. The first week of class he comes to my office and tells me he belongs to the most conservative of conservative of the Hasidic sects and he wanted me to know. And he comes from Los Angeles but he had to come to Brooklyn because his yeshiva was in Brooklyn from the set, and the chief rabbi was there.

He turns out to be one of those brilliant students I've ever taught in my life, and I've taught brilliant people. I teach from documents; the issue was the 1948 war in Palestine.

I gave the class a document written by the American Jewish Committee, which explained the massacre in the place called Deir Yassin, which is notorious in which the entire village was wiped out or the people were forced to leave and it was violent. And the American Jewish Committee is trying to explain that it wasn't total massacre, but they explained everything else and it was horrible and was truthful. There is nothing like giving a document coming from the victors about the victims and they implicate themselves. And it's hard to find those documents and I dig like crazy, but I found it. I gave it to the class and another class where I assigned this, and an 85-year-old woman in class stands up and starts screaming, why did you do this to us, why did you give us this?

The class freaked; this guy with a big hat raises his hand and speaks for 10 minutes, and he says, I never realized how complicated the situation was and how awful it was. The classes and people like that, and it goes on and on and on. And since he was brilliant, it was incredibly thoughtful, and I couldn't have reached the class the way he did. We became friends.

He comes into my class a month later and says to me, I need your advice because I am in deep trouble. I said, what trouble? He said, in my yeshiva, the rabbi has called me to read with him. The way yeshivas work you wait for 10, 15 years before the rabbi called you to read anything. The

rabbi recognized he was a genius and wanted to have discussions with him. He is only there for two months. There are guys in the yeshivas who are there for 20 years who can't read with the rabbi because he doesn't call them. That's all they want to do, right. That's how you learn, all right. He said they are ready to kill me, I don't know what to do.

So we had a long discussion and I gave him advice, etc, that's unimportant but these are the fantastic parts of being a teacher, and this happened with Puerto Rican, with Haitian, with African-American students: once they confide in you and tell you, you know what their real problems are, then you begin you understand what's going on.

MEDINA: Right. Well, that's how you build trust.

SCHAAR: Of course.

MEDINA: Right.

SCHAAR: Yeah.

MEDINA: And what about the imposition of tuition. What do we learn from that?

SCHAAR: It's inevitable in America. There is no way to have a free system in post-World War II America, no way.

MEDINA: Why?

SCHAAR: Because the big universities are charging $50,000; therefore, asking for $7,000 sounds like peanuts, and the middle class which rules America thinks that's just, and they have no idea what poverty is.

MEDINA: Let me ask you some closing questions. It seems like there is this tension at CUNY, when you look at its history since 1847 between the idea of meritocracy, we talked about it a little bit, and democracy. Those two forces seem to be struggling, and I think that came to a head in 1969 the student movement seem to represent democratic access to education, and the imposition of tuition limited that democracy and brought back meritocracy.

SCHAAR: Democracy doesn't come automatically, even in the so-called democratic society. It has to be fought for all the time, and if you let down your guards even for five minutes, you could lose it. So then for me, democracy is a constant struggle, and in activist periods it's extended, and in less activist periods, it's taken away. And it depends on the activism of the moment, and there are periods of history where people just don't get involved, like now. In the '60s and '70s, people were involved and the whole society was participatory, and it was possible, I think, because of relative prosperity that people could go out and get jobs. They didn't care if they were arrested. They didn't care if they had a misdemeanor on their record because they knew they would get a job… that there were jobs. There are no jobs now. People are scared. There is less participation because people are scrounging to make ends meet, and these are very hard times for people who don't have the special skills needed in the hi-tech society, which means that a third of the population is going to be left behind and in very, very dire straits and nobody gives a shit about it, nobody cares.

And it's even worse because Congress does away with unemployment insurance; they do away with food stamps. I have a number of friends who live on the edge; one of them is poor, they just removed $12 from his food stamps. They just cut out Medicare because he makes too much money, and the amount of money he makes is so ludicrous. It's a miracle he is alive, and I just spotted him eating in McDonalds because he can't afford anything anymore. So people are living at the edge now. When you live at the edge you can't organize, you can't be activist.

MEDINA: Or can be a catalyst, right.

SCHAAR: No.

MEDINA: And the reason I say that is because when I think about the '60s and the '70s, at least at that time, there were some radical ideologies to draw from: Black Nationalism, Marxism broadly defined, Socialism, Communism. So people could – I have students –

SCHAAR: Those inconveniences, but the real issue was that people knew they will get jobs, even poor people. There was prosperity in the land and prosperity breeds activism. When you have belt tightening like now when people can't find jobs, they get scared. The worse thing is not having a regular income that allows you to survive, pay your rent, send your kids to school. These are very hard times and you see it all around you, you see people on the streets who never were there before. This is new, and this scares people, and everybody sees it. They say, I don't want to be that way. And on top of it we have a tradition of individualism, and when you see this kind of downturn taking place, the individual boots in and says, the only thing I am going to think about is me, me, me, me and not the society.

And this is more and more happening and this generation I've been teaching them, I've been teaching Americans in Morocco, so I am in touch. It's another breed of fish; it's not the same as I taught when I was here in the '60s, '70s. These are all individualists, very, very different. Some of them are altruistic but it doesn't translate into mass movements.

MEDINA: What about meritocracy, should we think – how should we think about meritocracy in higher education. Does it have a legitimate place as a concept in higher education and access to it?

SCHAAR: I think the crisis starting in 2008 put a halt to meritocracy in the sense that the downturn that ensued after that heightened individualism, and people began clawing together anyways. It's not the same place. But it's a bifurcation because the Occupy movement started as well. What we are finding is two Americas; almost the Kuhn definition of science and non-science, only this time it have's and have's not.

It's very curious because there are still young people who are idealistic. Problem is they can't find jobs, and since they can't find jobs they are desperate, and there is a limit to their activism. I know some of the young people who are doing unpaid internships because this is the only way you get ahead, you can't find a job. And not being able to find a job impacts on activism. When I was activist, I knew I could find a job any time.

MEDINA: Right. But the economy was changing from manufacturing to a service economy in the '60s into the '70s.

SCHAAR: We didn't feel that. You felt it in the '80s and '90s; you didn't feel it in the '60s and '70s. You really didn't, that's a myth. It was changing, but it wasn't noticeable yet until it happened, and China wasn't there yet. It's only in the '80s that you begin to feel this.

MEDINA: Under Reagan.

SCHAAR: Yeah. And it's not even Reagan, it's global. When the Chinese become the manufacturer of the world and then the Malaysians, the Bangladeshis, anyone who has cheap labor, you cannot beat with the cheap labor coming from Asia. Nobody could work for those wages except the Asians. I tried this up when I was in North Africa, I said could you replicate with the Asians, the students, they said, who could live like a Chinese?

MEDINA: Right. Global capitalism, right. Stuart, you've been very kind with your time and you've said so much to me, you've answered my questions. Is there anything else that you want to tell me that I haven't asked about in relation to this?

SCHAAR: I think that Open Admissions was a total necessity and was very late in coming. The old university played its role, it produced an elite of very special people but it neglected an underclass that was enormous. And then in the '60s that underclass rebelled and they found a voice. And happily, they found a voice because otherwise it would have been revolutionary in the worse way possible, because people have these ideologies that were fictive. I am an expert of Frantz Fanon. Frantz Fanon was the greatest liar in the world. He made things up and it was a whole part of this political struggle; he knew what he was doing, but his books are untruthful. What he says happened did not happen, okay. He was creating an ideal world because his object was to win over the French middle classes for the liberation of Algeria, and he would do anything to do so.

MEDINA: It's interesting because some students I talk to cite Frantz Fanon as one of the guiding intellectualities on how to organize.

SCHAAR: Of course, because he is brilliant. He knows when he's good.

MEDINA: Yeah.

SCHAAR: But half of it were lies. Women were not liberated; he has the best chapter imaginable of women's liberation in the Algerian struggle. It's total bullshit, okay. And people read him because they don't know anything about what happened, and he generalizes for the whole world, but it wasn't like that. It was a deep struggle, and it still is. And Algerian women are in worse places than other women in Tunisia, women right next door. We didn't have a revolution of that kind. So there is an ideological lack to be able to clarify where to go, and I think it symptomatic of where we are now. Marxism is no longer fashionable, and Marx had a program. He had a blueprint. It's out of fashion. The stuff that they put in its place is ludicrous; and Fanon is not Marx, all right. He had no pretention to be Marx. So it's a lack of clear thinking as well.

MEDINA: Thank you so much, Stuart.

[1:38:20]