

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**IMANI HENRY**

**Interviewer:** Kamryn Wolf

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**Location of Interview:** Imani Henry's Apartment, Brooklyn, New York

**Transcribed by** Natalie Walters

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Kamryn Wolf: Hello, my name is Kamryn Wolf and I will be having a conversation with Imani Henry for the New City York Trans Oral History Project. In collaboration with the New York Public Libraries Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is March 8<sup>th</sup> 2019 and this is being recorded at Imani Henry's Fought but Apartment. Thank you so much Imani for taking the time. In your hectic life, you were running around your apartment getting fliers and talking to copy machines, but you so generously cut up some oranges and made some tea and we are settling down here. I guess just an intro if you could share for our listeners so they know who they are meeting today kind of a constellation of different identities that you would like to share.

Imani Henry: So I..., I am one identity that feels most important to me I live in Flatbush, I am Caribbean of Caribbean heritages and Caribbean decent my people come from Jamaica, I am the first to be born in the United States from either side of my family, I am the Guinea pig, they are working class people, very much aspiring to be middle class and I have definitely lived that middle class lifestyle. But they are workers! And even more so you know like my mother is self-trained as an accountant like and because we ran kind of like a family business with my sister and myself were a part of like the secretarial/maintenance back in the day when we were like ten. I think it is so cool because I also have like friends who were also maybe like you know at the nail salon you know or like Bodegas. And we all can talk about like migrant folks like that, who were put to work early on, with very little pay or acknowledgement of that. And we were apart of that. We were cleaning things, we were answering phones, we were making copies as children. I don't even know if we were making copies. Was there copy machines? I don't know they were gigantic! [laughter] So anyway, umm as an... I think the other piece of it I really identified as an activist I really frankly if anything, you know not in a hottie way but definitely strive to be revolutionary and a freedom fighter and definitely feel that that is my aspiration in the world to be fighting for you know my peoples whatever that might be. Whether it is queer peoples, queer people of color, tenants of homeowners, if it is to fight and free the political prisoners, if it is the staff of imperialist war. If it is to fight police brutality. Like those are identities that I am very much connected to me have spent more than my adult life in struggle for justice. I did make a very conscious decision to share that story of becoming a revolutionary understanding it was nothing more important than to fight for liberation and freedom at that moment.

Wolf: So, tell me what's... if you are able to dig back in time what's your earliest memory of you doing activist work?

Henry: I tell this because that's what people do. I am turning 50 this year.

Wolf: Congratulations

Henry: Thank you! Just... you know another identity I do think I identify as a survivor and I am also a social worker. You know I think, also I should say that but it's not like that identity is not as important to me, because in my 40s I graduated in 2013. So, I've been doing this work for over 20 years as a consultant, a direct service worker and again without a power professional. Being. I have been a director and I have been an administrator and I didn't have master's degrees. There

was a time I just did the work. I had mentors until they died like Keith Kyler. I worked at housing works back in the day. It was like I shared a desk with my supervisor. We were one, a couple floors, maybe one other building. We were fighting to have day treatment centers and all kinds of stuff. We could have our entire staff meeting in a hall of a church. We were maybe a couple hundred of people if that. Or maybe less. Literally they were building desks. (Laughter) But he was a mentor of mine and he was he was my boss, but he was a mentor of mine until he died. But people don't know if Keith Kyler was one of the founders of Housing Work. Which is now I think the largest people of color lead aids organization in the United States. I forget what their standing is in New York City. But the point of the matter is when it was tiny and not like small. I guess there is work in Haiti, there is stuff in Albany. They're reaching all over five pearls they're huge. Anyways but the point of that is I didn't know until he died that he was a social worker. I didn't know he had an MSW. Back in time, I grew up in the time where that wasn't so important. So anyway, I would probably identify more with my survivorship first before the social worker to put that in context because I grew up during baby stealers. You know they'd come into your household. You know my household was traumatic, but you know social workers come in and we'd say nothing is going on here. I included. I was running away to other people's houses. I was literally fighting for my life, but when the social worker came, I showed up at my house when I was 11 years old, looking at one of my cousins. I don't care I am one of the small ones. I knew at 11 years old I never seen this man in my life. I don't know. Them even talking to an 11-year-old was a piece. But again, I don't know that man and that was just kind of the social worker saying "there is nothing wrong in this household" you know kind of thing. Anyway, the point of the matter you asked me the first time as an organizer or activist I think I was in the seventh grade. I don't know what is that? How old? 11 or 12 I am a social worker I should know.

Wolf: Like 12-13

Henry: I was probably 12. And I have talked about this before we didn't have school busses. There were other neighborhoods, we were the black and brown and white working class and there were young people you know one of the problems were...

Wolf: This was in Boston, right?

Henry: This is in Boston. Four or five neighborhoods had to sort of like... and I say this like if all of Flatbush, east Flatbush, Crown Heights, Pros quick Heights and Parks Low met at Bark Leaves to get on six school busses of school children going to school. It was hundreds of students forced on six MTA busses. I say this about working class white people because people came with their hockey bags and their hockey sticks and you were lucky to get a seat. If not, you had a hockey stick in your eye. We already had... the joke was I was a Latin academy, so you know the joke is especially the younger grades. Our book bags and books were bigger than ourselves. You know it was almost like we were turtles you could push us over. It was true. The bags were heavy. Or if you didn't get on the six busses it was from my house was a bus to the train to a trolley and then a 20-minute walk. At like seven in the morning. It was miles from my house. That was the journey I made at 12 years old to get to school. If I didn't take the bus what happened was, I thought it was slick and I was like I am going to get a seat today. So, I got up at the front of the bus and was

like I am first I am going to be the first on the bus. What happened was that everybody behind me surged forward and I was a young person, they're much bigger and its seventh grade to twelfth grade. So, I am the youngest part of the continent. The bus driver got scared and didn't open the doors, so everyone surged forward and this was a time back in the day there was a whole stampede and people died in Cincinnati.

Wolf: This is the early eighties.

Henry: Yes, early eighties. And people literally, we all heard it on the news it was a concert thing, it was general seating and so in that time period it was like oh my goodness. People got trampled on. I felt my body; I felt the surge of people behind me and there was a moment that I thought my feet were literally being pushed from under me and I could have literally gone underneath the bus but fortunately the bus driver opened the door. So, I totally understood about what that moment was. When you could be trampled, and people died. People didn't know they were walking on top. They didn't know that the people in front of them had been pushed down and they were just jumping until afterwards. So anyways, I could have died. Again, that was in my head 'oh my god' I could get trampled. I took out a piece of paper on the bus, just a spiral notebook because we had many of them and just wrote 'we want school busses, put your name' and I passed it on the bus and everyone was like 'fuck yes' and then I went in the school and was like let's do this and I had people some were friends, some were people I didn't even know and everyone sort of pledge to get signatures and put it out to all of their classes and do that. Then the next step was then the young people's parents got involved and they held the principle accountable and the whole deal was that some people in our school, in the richer whiter neighborhoods had school busses that black and brown more working class white people did not have school busses. And there was a whole other scandal, that he had made this was a backroom deal. The point of the matter is that we won and got school busses. And that was the very first time in my life where I was like we can do this! Look at this we can do this! It was like my dear friend Christine Lewis with Domestic Workers United said "When you struggle, you win". That was an eye-opening moment. I am twelve and we can get school busses. So it was kind of awesome and I think that and just to be clear my politics just like everybody's, my family is born again Christian, I do a lot of writing and performance about the Caribbean spirituality and I joke and I think your audience would understand this when I was growing up I loved James Dobson focus. This was a person that called for people to go to Matthew Shepard's funeral and protest in completely. But when I was growing up, he was great. He gave great advice. He was good with young people. My parents were more to the right than James Dobson. My mom for sure has changed much more and is in a different place in her life now. But it was deep. I am very honest about that I saw that I grew up in a cult, a Christian cult. I could go down the list and it is deep too because people think of cults and Satan and all this other stuff. It actually isn't true what is true in the US more Christian base or sex or organization like almost 141 groups have been identified as cults. Christians lead the way in cult like behavior. It was eye opening because it was hard to say to people that I grew up, I was a kid. It is so funny my therapist used me as a case study.

Wolf: Your therapist when you were little?

Henry: No no, I was a grown adult she's my mentor, she is my people.

Wolf: What is her name?

Henry: I'd rather not share. I tried to get her an award that was all buffed and all shiny and she was like is not something I want. And it was a moment like 'oh my god, I don't even know you' and I wanted to give her a reward like from radical social workers I imbedded her name and they said she sound amazing and she was like "No".

Wolf: But she used you as a case study?

Henry: With my permission obviously. It was because of the level of psychological abuse through religion. IT was a perfect example what people think of. And again, I lived through all kinds of abuse as a child and all kinds of violence when I was an adult. I do think and we talk about this in the work of healing and the work of supporting other people. Psychological abuse can be the hardest thing to heal from. It really is because that's really so bone deep in you. Again, if you lived through war, sexual violence or domestic violence. If you have lived constantly in life and death situations and that is the piece of it where she was like 'woah'. So, I can say proudly now I grew up in a cult. I am out as a survivor; with digression I don't want to trigger others and I also think that is unethical, but I am very proud. I am also in a place of my own recovery now and I have been doing this work since I was 20. It is great people were there for me, and I feel now like not only obligated to but just to be like 'yeah, you do heal, your life will get better trust me' and those folks have definitely been there to help me. What was the question you asked me earlier?

Wolf: I forget what the question was, but it is making me think about, I am kind of curious how your kind of migrant, Caribbean, born again Christian parents and family kind of responded to you kind of sending around that petition.

Henry: Oh, my parents, my mom in particular was like 'you're going to get kicked out of school'. It was an exam school. I had to take the PSAT to get in. If people understand it was girl's Latin back in the day and then there was boy's Latin which was basically rich peoples private school. They were only... again I also went to English High which is the first public school in the United States and that's where the poor people go.

Wolf: What was it called again?

Henry: English High, to my knowledge is the first public school in the United States for like regular people. Latin school was the first school. And still to this day Boston Latin school is in turmoil around race and it's in turmoil in so many ways. It really is still in sense leadism and Latin academy probably has some of that. Let me tell you something back when I don't when this all exist. The three exams schools were Latin Boston which was the hardest for black and brown people to get into because they were just like 'nah, you don't come here'. So, it became white and east Asian in particularly. It was really like that was the people of color. Whereas, Latin Academy was very black and brown and white too actually migrant. And there was Boston Tech which was a more

technical school. I think a little more like science and technical. And that was thoroughly people of color. So, these were the three exam schools and it really was sort of like this hierarchy and all this stuff and I left that. I went to a school within a school called the Frenway project. That saved my life, because English was its on this and like English, I loved it but I definitely got in fist fights and I won so that was okay for me. I got jumped at school. Somebody brought, well I didn't know why this person hated me, I only knew that they did. I didn't understand. I am going to say this person's name Tanya hated my guts. I don't know why she hated me, and she brought four or five of her cousins to jump and the got in and jumped me. I whooped Tanya's ass. She is much bigger than me and we became friends. It was so crazy. I earned respect in her eyes and we became friends. We weren't close friends, but we were cool after I whooped her ass. It was 'Hi, how are you. Oh, blah blah blah'. It was so bizarre. So, the school within school. Again, I went to school with like the Knight brothers and I wasn't close with them but I just want to say John has always a fucking sweetheart. He was always so sweet. And again, he turned out to be gay. Who would've thought? But even when their song, I don't know what was their first song? I know this is not your generation. I don't remember their first song that came out. It was a big big big big hit. To this day. We were in school and they were running around, and they screamed 'we are on the radio' It was so awesome. I mean again one of the things about Boston it was the generation of new edition. I have been in the same room of them when they were first starting out. I am trying to think the bull dogs because we were the English High Bulldogs and I don't think I've ever met him, but we were all Boston was like 'an OG an OG'. We were we just like these are our people. It was a heavy time. English High we are a migrant school. WE did the pledge of allegiance in at least five different languages maybe even more than that. WE had a huge Haitian. When baby doc was proposed Haitian students had a separate assembly and people were cheering. It was beautiful. I just happened to be in the hallway because you know I wasn't in class. I saw these kids and it was a moment and it was a rally for Haitian students. We had a huge Haitian group. English was a second language program to begin with. You could speak Vietnamese; you could speak your language at school. There was a multitude for all of us there was a whole bunch of us who dropped out of exam school. There was a broad level of folks who might have a mental development delays to folks who were at an exam school but couldn't hack it. A lot of us had serious emotional issues. It was a beautiful family. To be honest I like we were 100 to 200 kids at the most. But the whole school... like my graduation which was wild wild wild. Our graduation at English High happened at Matthew's arena which is Northeast. We were close to something like 2000 people maybe even more. It couldn't have been 5000 that's too much.

Wolf: That's a big school.

Henry: Just our graduation class we had to be in an arena that they had hockey games in for the college. We were a riot. There were people that got on the stage and their families rush in and take all the pictures. Especially black and brown families were just in the front like 'I don't care who you are my kid is up there'. People liked the dances on stage. We I think we sang the school song. I myself got up on the stage and was rocking it on. And other people joined me and then our principal and teachers came and were like 'I am going to sing next to you' People got their diplomas and left. Like if one us, families would just be like 'we're out! We are going to dinner'. It was chaotic and wild. Literally, I met somebody later after graduation, who said 'oh you

graduated? I just went to a graduation the other day and it was wild. People were doing this and that. [laughter] I said, 'oh well what graduation did you go to?' They were like 'English High' and I was like 'that's us!!!' they were like 'oh my god, I have never seen anything like it'. It was no end. No one could stop us. Again, teachers came over and sat by the loud kids. I was on chairs.

Wolf: So, it is kind of amazing. So, you know all of these different stories of the bussing challenges, and the family home life challenges, and the fights within the school that you managed to graduate still. It is a joyous event.

Henry: Yeah it was a joyous event.

Wolf: Yeah it was a joyous event. I had to find my political way. So here I am at 12, I probably did activism in school that was probably more liberal I helped, when I graduated from college. And college I think most people get more politicized in college. I went to, it is now UMass at Lowell. And it was Lowell when I was there and so to this day even in business settings, I say I went to Lowell and they are like 'oh a drinking school. It is a party school'. I'll share, when I got there in the admissions office someone had etched the 'n-word go home'. That was my first day and I was going for an admission thing and someone had done that. They had chased during the Iranian hostage thing; they had chased Iranian student. An Iranian student had got chased by an angry mob of white students. I dated someone who was on the basketball team, who had got dragged at the back of a car by like you know white racist. I literally would be on college campus and someone literally would drive by and just call me the n-word. That woke me up about racism. I was still. and this was a beautiful thing. I was still the black person. I was respectability politics. I need to have a multinational team. There were black students that were like 'no we just want black people and were over here and we do that'. We'd work together but they'd just side eye me like 'What you doing? You want to meet with the administration or shut down the administration?'. I was not the radical at that time. I am proud of that at times because I really do feel like I appreciate my own political journey. People now are just like oh my god. I am seen. You know? I am this radical social work movement. Equality for Flatbush is a small organization but people think we are much bigger. We do have a 1500 base; we do a social media and I don't know how big it is. We have eight social media apps and I met people all the time that say we follow you on Facebook, on Instagram and twitter and they have come to a demonstration. They have come to demonstration and we ask how did you hear about this? I just assume that they're on our email list and they tell me 'no, I am on your Facebook'. I am just like holy! I should just bring a clipboard to them so they can sign up to be in our inner circle. They are so reliable it is amazing. But the point of the matter is on that college campus was my first arrest and police brutality. I was at that time cisgender female appearing and I was a queer it was my identity. [phone rings]

Henry: Let me just check this to make sure. What time are we at?

Wolf: It is 4:09

Henry: What were we talking about?

Wolf: You were talking about appreciating your own political journey from someone who is respectability politics and someone who was radicalized and your first arrest.

Henry: So, my first arrest, was at a college party. Which I believe I was the only black person. Let's just be real, I was at a different place in my life. It was sort of a known thing that the 'towny' cops of Lowell raided parties basically to get beer for themselves. This is a working-class school it is now a part of the UMass system; it is part of the public-school system. There were some more affluent folks, but most people came from the Meramec Valley or Boston. It really was a community school. It was not elites and again the tuition was very low, and it was affordable college option for families or people that had the financial aid money to do that. My parents didn't get financial aid to do that. We were business owners so we could never qualify for that. But we could pay for it. I think they took out loans. So back to being arrested, so the time the cops came and arrested the party we were at and they told everybody to leave. So, we are all leaving. We are just going to leave. We are not going to resist anything. What happened was a white male student who had left his keys in the house for his truck. So typical thing, he has one cop saying move your truck get out of here and he was like well my keys are in there. I'd gladly leave but my keys are in there. I left my keys on the table in there somewhere. He is getting pissed about you can't go back in but move your truck. Two separate cops 'you don't understand' like typical stuff, completely irrational. He cannot leave without his keys and you won't let him get his keys. He got in the bed of his pickup truck and just sat there because he didn't know what else to do so he got out of the way. The cops were livid. They went ape shit on him. He was sitting on the lip of the truck, he wasn't inside. They pulled him headfirst and pulled him to the ground and started to hit him. I instantly started yelling 'police brutality, police brutality'. Alone too I must add. Then the other thing, I was leaning up against a cop, shouting and another cop turned his back and I was shouting. He turned his back to the beating so that he was not a witness to the beating, but I am leaning against his arm. He is not arresting me, he is not saying anything, he's not in my face. He is just sort of I am just a barrier so you can't go over there, and I am turning my back so I can't see anything. Out of nowhere, I think his last name was Rodriguez or something. He was notoriously known for violence I found out later. Came up behind me and was ready to arrest me and he said give me your arm. In fact, with my back turned he put one arm in cuffs. Even the other policeman was surprised. He put my hand in cuffs and said, 'give me your other hand' and I was like no I don't want you to take my other hand. What did I do? So, I gave him my other hand and even the other cop was sort of like no no let me take her. What is happening? I am not in the fray of this. I am far away yelling, I have not thrown rocks, I did not throw a bottle. I am leaning up against another cop. I finally gave him my other hand and I am just asking. You can't see this because it is radio. But he grabbed both hands and pulled up. Again, I want to be clear I was probably under 120 pounds, maybe at that time in my life. I might have been 116 pounds if that. I have always been thin. I got middle age and people consider me thick or just say I am fat. I lived a life of being very very thin to the point where people teased me the other way. Jamaican people say 'yamagda, yamagda' and I have chicken legs. So, I wasn't a big person especially at that time in my life. He pulled up my hands and my wrist above my body that it fractured my wrist. These are metals cuffs but fractured and later I found a chip. To this day I have a little different feeling in my wrist. So anyways, the bigger issue is me and all the people that lived in the house, were arrested and it was so interesting to be in the wagon with them.

They were clear. I didn't know them. I just want to a party at their house. They are were like 'well we are all residents here. Why did you get arrested? Probably because you're black'. It was probably an act of solidarity, but it sounded fucked up. I was just like oh no. So, then the other person the young person who was beaten of the cop. We just assumed he had a concussion and he did. I don't even know if he got medical attention. Again, my parents are in Boston and I can't remember if they came over or whatever. But it was interesting, and this is why lawyers in my life hate Law and Order. I love Law and Order it was my thing. I love cops shows. I have done a whole play that I am an anti-cop activist that loves cop shows. Maybe it is like know your enemy, but I like shows that show how evil they are. Again, Law and Order, SVU are different things and maybe my own survivorship it was my favorite show. But when SVU came it was like I can clearly have solidarity with this show even though it was hard to see Ice T be a cop. Because a lot of this show, it showed different cases that really was special. People were special victims. It is not so much that I was rooting for the cops but there was a sense of this is actual justice that we don't get to see ever. Particularly women that people bled and died for orders of protection and restraining orders and that is what they were called in Boston. People bled for this to happen. We had a fight, we gave our lives, how many people lost their lives for cops let the person back in, just walk around the block, we don't see this as domestic violence, you guys are queer, or they just had a fight. Men will be men.

Wolf: Well the rates of domestic violence for police officers are even higher than our own population.

Henry: So that is my favorite statist. I have a hashtag 'cops are monsters. I talk about them being sociopaths which is different than a psychopath and I call them that too. Sociopath is about that they know right and wrong, but they lack impulse control and absolutely right. Cops have more domestic violence and sexual assault within their family than NFL players. Because people equate football with impulse which is true too. Of course, we could talk about football players but thanksgiving and Christmas are high domestic violence times and again a lot of those is about the expectations that capitalism brings particularly on women, to provide an amazing Christ like thing. But it is also like people are drinking, people are watching football. They have long-term people coming and who gets beaten the fuck up? A lot of women, children. My therapist uses to say a lot 'gay pride is also a huge break up moment too.' and it's right. I know so myself. So, when I cop watch it is the most dangerous cop watching experience I have had. The cops are dangerously violent during pride. We had to hide out kind of thing, we had to turn our shirts inside out to get back to home base because I almost got arrested three times. With all due respect I am a part of the east Flatbush cop watch team. We have solidarity cop watchers all over the country. People saved my ass and I won't ever cop watch at pride again.

Wolf: What was the first Gay Pride that you went to?

Henry: I will tell this story. I at 8 years old came to grasp that I was a girl. Before 8 I didn't have that language to describe myself. In elementary school my best friends, the people I played with were all boys. That was my world and that doesn't mean I wasn't in a dress. It didn't matter. I have written about this it is a short story called Bits and Pieces and I also call it my first butch-

fem moment too. Someone called boys against girls and it was a shocking moment and it probably happened before, but it was a realization moment. I was like what would my parents say. I am probably a girl. I know that they think of me as a girl and I know that the Christian brainwashing was like do the right thing. I went to my parents and they would want me to go on the girl side. I always play with boys and I had to go to the girl's side. As soon as I got there, the girls were like 'who the fuck are you? You know what let's make you a spy why don't you go over to the boys side and see what they are saying'. It wasn't like a come back and tell us, just go over there. We don't know you'. So, I got in the huddle and it was my first realization I am a spy and for a good amount in children's years it may have been ten minutes or one minute but for me it was a long time. I am in the huddle with my peoples and someone all the sudden looked up and was like 'oh shit' this is not my birth name but 'Imani is here. Oh shit [laughter] we didn't even realize'. And I say in all seriousness we fall on the floor and it was laughing and joking and rolling on the floor. I probably disassociated my body and I say at the end of the story I don't know what side to go on. I don't know what game we played or what happened. It was this moment of 'oh it's over' I no longer have a natural place. Even though when I was 5 or 6 or 7 years old my best friends were girls and my school friends were boys. Amazing story that I am still shocked with is a Haitian girl. I should say I grew up with segregation. I am one of those kids on the school busses that really went through a gauntlet of violence, school fights, the n-word on the wall, adults fighting us, throwing rocks at us. When I went to school out in Rosendale. There was another person her name was Nadaje, she was my neighbor she lived up the street. She was Creole speaking, she could have been French speaking I don't know. But we were inseparable. Literally would have conversations where I'd speak in English and she'd speak in I guess either French or Creole I don't know, and we would [mimic exchanges in conversations]. Literally teachers came over and said, 'do you understand each other?' But we ate lunch together, we sat together, we were inseparable in school. We were safety nets. I think it is beautiful that we did not speak each other's language, but we were friends. We understood. I don't know how we did it. We went to high school together later and we laughed about it. But we were friends, we were solid and even the teachers were like 'this is phenomenal look at them. They understand each other' Anyways.

Wolf: Yeah it seems like in some many seems like you have these in-depth connection with these peoples ways. It doesn't matter if you speak their language, it doesn't matter if you are the only person in a party shouting police brutality. You see the humanity and you act on it.

Henry: I do talk about it how I got my arm fractured over a white guy I didn't even know. And he is white. I think that is also important too because white people think we as black people are hunted down and killed for centuries and that is how it has been. But I also think it is important that the police know that we are clear that we are targets. There is a white woman here that was raped in New York City and we all want justice for Amanda. I think that is the piece of it. If we say abolish the police, you are the sentence of slave catching. That is how police force started in the United States. In the England the police force is an armed body of men. It was the SURFS and the Lord of the Manner who had an armed body of men who hold them and put them in check, and it is always about class. In the united states it is always about race. I think for people to dissect it more it has always been sexist; it has always been anti-gay and racist and I think classist. It is ageist, ableist. Who is getting shut down? Actually, tomorrow is the sixth anniversary of Kimani

Grey's murder here in Flatbush where there was actually a rebellion of young people in the streets. In this neighborhood since 2012 we have had six either murders or shootings and one person survived. Or Ken Livingstone died in police custody. The Sandra Bland is the Ken Livingston of Texas. They denied her medical attention and that is how she died. If it wasn't for the women in that cell for her, who pleaded for her life and took her of her as a stranger to their life. Thank god they were there with her. It was six hours and she was going through incredible pain and there was medical attention right downstairs and they denied her and allowed her to die in that cell. And it wasn't like they didn't know they just were like 'we don't give a fuck'. They don't care. Anyways, I wish more white people understood that they are not the target of police violence in most cases, but it doesn't say there might become a moment where they might become or watch someone be the target. Again, the Rodney King and I slide to that. Rodney King is what changed my life and to my knowledge I thought it was a white person that took that video. I could be wrong; we were focused on his beating. For the first time without social media even in fact the internet was unique in school. I think the school was trying it out gave us accounts and didn't know what to do, I'll call you. I didn't use that. But here was the first time that the entire world saw this beating from Tokyo, Alaska, to North Carolina to London, everyone had seen this video of this man being beaten by four cops. And then, I think the other piece of this is when everything is said and done is even the history of police violence black people talk about, we want it on TV. Until the civil rights movement you saw images of black people and what did you see? The images that you probably saw were white people in black face and then you probably saw images of black people being chased by dogs. The famous picture of a black man whose hands in the mouth of a police dog and people being disrespected during the protest at lunch counters. That was the first time of that generation of that time that black people so themselves on tv. That is what Jackie Robinson, Mohamed Ali, you know all these iconic people that broke through the racial barrier that was there, even Ray Charles all of that. Back to Isa Ray saying 'I am rooting for everyone black' that was the energy. So I say this because you know, it was a clear cut and dry kind of thing and now white people are like he got beaten up by cops, four cops were beating him with clubs. That is real you can't deny it we all have seen it. So, when the verdict came down the police officer they were let go and free they were not guilty. I remember watching that video, I think it came on at 11 o'clock news and my phone lit up and my house phone lit up. The most radical freshman on campus Deena, was like 'What are we going to do?' and I said we have got to march. Again, my sister is pretty Christian and my cousin who is pretty Christian, I called them and we organized a demonstration. A city-wide march that we were going to march after this. I was in the middle of finals. I went to Emerson college and I was in scene class where I am building sets. And my professor was so cool. I told him I have an interview; I have to call in at this time to the radio station and he said you can use my phone. Mind you Emerson college was racist. So anyway, he allowed me to do this interview over the air. It started at Emerson College and we would march everywhere and I think long story short. It was a moment for me. Here I am about to graduate from one of the most sort of prestigious communications college. That is what it does it is not a department. So many famous people and internships were badass. I was an acting student so that was not my experience and especially as a black person. I was directing and writing shows by then because I couldn't get into other plays. I wasn't a big singer/dancer then. So anyway, I say that I am not a triple threat. I was an actor who can move well and who can sing but when you say one, two three I fall apart. I have been kicked out of musicals before. They kept

moving me to the back to the point where they just took me out and said you're great as an actor but you can't move. [laughter]

Henry: Freestyle, house dancing those are like 'YASS'. But you say 1,2,3 they're like he might fall. So anyways, there wasn't even a lot of shows. I went through so much struggle there. We had a white man, who ran and won to be the head of the Black Student Organization called Ebony. We didn't run against him. So, I lead a coup and got him kicked out. That's who I was in college the point of the matter was in my own radicalization of who I was becoming and people would call me and say 'yo we gotta do something'. That was who I was at that time in my life. It was that moment and the Gulf War I have to say that politicized me. I had a friend that was a part of the first going away troops to Saudi Arabia and I gave him his going away party at my house to the military. Six or seven months he was already in Saudi Arabia. It was deep, it changed my life. I became an activist in a movement as that. But Rodney King was a moment in my life that I thought 'Oh my god, I am graduating from this school and it doesn't matter' because the police are not going to be like 'what is your degree and where did you go school?' They see that I am just a young black person and it doesn't matter. I love when black women just want to testify. That is why say her name came about. I just want to say even in my neighborhood, am I correct is it the majority? No, it is not the majority but we have at least three black women murdered by police in Flatbush. It is now that the men are at a higher rate, but they weren't at a point in time. In 2012-2013 it was two women. So, I think that it is important to acknowledge women of color violence at the hands of police. Women in general but women of color specifically. We have Latina moms her child had just gotten out of jail and if you are right of jail in a known neighborhood on parole the cops want to fuck with you all the time. They were driving and a cop stopped them, and they say a cop plant something somewhere and mom was seven or eight months pregnant and there is video of the cops pushing her and her rolling down the street. In Flatbush we have had pregnant women put in headlocks for having barbecues in front of their own house. We had a black woman who it was safety check for an order of protection, and they ended up breaking her 11 year old son's leg because he held up a camera. He was 11. He was old enough and he just filmed, because this was a moment for him, and he looked up to police officers. They yelled at the grandmother and mom came running down the stairs in her robe and they flipped her nipple ring and she is a woman. That is sexual assault. This is Flatbush on a safety check on someone who is known to have an order of protection and you go in and violate them sexual and you break an 11-year old's leg. That is what we are living under. It is so important; the murders might be majority men but police violence in this neighborhood at one point was majority female or butch identified folks. Lesbian attacks. Again, a masculine person who I believe uses the pronoun she. They were looking for a black man and she said I am not one move on, and they roughed her. It was a rookie cop. She was on Woodrove Avenue. Everyone knows that is a checkers spot. When we publicized the case, people were like 'the checkers spot? They were playing checkers?' Everybody knew this was the spot. Again, the neighborhood rose up and in fact a friend of mine who is also masculine who uses they pronouns took a video. Particularly they were a white skin, Latinx person, haven't lived in the neighborhood long but knows a lot and tagged us in that video. Then we got in touch with the family members this was the first time we ever bailed someone out of jail.

Wolf: We being?

Henry: Equality watch, we cop watched, we talked to every single business owner we looked at every single camera angle. It really was the video was badass. This was Tish Marinara and multiple occasions this is a Shero in our neighborhood. They stood up to the cops, they recorded and for that reason they are being kicked and punched. It was simple she said, 'I am not a man move on' and the block said 'she is not a man move on. You are looking for a black man and this is not a black man. Aren't we done here?' The cops just escalated to where it was punching and taking someone in. But again, it is just because we live here and we don't respect you. You kill and murder our people so why do you think we have to be respectful to you? I am just going to answer the question I am not a man move on. That is all they said, they went back to playing chess. So anyway, to wrap up this thing, it was really what happened during Rodney King we marched for hours. I am so proud, it was the first organization that I ever organized in my whole life and the first demonstration I organized with my sister and my cousin and we marched from school to school we didn't go to BC but my sister brought people down from BC. That was too far. My cousin was at BU, so we joined other schools and we kept marching and at one point we were walking against traffic and walking over cars. I got people at Spellman and LA was having a rebellion, people everywhere. People here in New York City, I think Macy's got fucked up. I wasn't there but I am proud of them I have eyewitness accounts of people like 'smash, boom'. It was beautiful all of this was happening. To wrap up this story we were blocked by cops in the street they will not let us go. We heard that Erested was in town, so this was when you didn't not have to get elected, I think. I could be wrong. But it was earlier in his career. He was progressive and popular. So were going to go. So, we marched up to federal plaza and we kept getting blocked everywhere and so we were locking arms we wouldn't move and we pushed against the cops. So, we get to Federal Plaza and there is this huge line of cops and it was a beautiful moment. So Haitian on the other side, that were already at the plaza reached over and started yelling 'I am a student, I demand to be with them' and Asian folks on our side demanded to be with them. People just linked arms across the police and started rocking back and forth. We were fearless. We grabbed arms and a black cop, and a woman cop looked at each other and said 'I think we got to let them go'. They broke apart and we all streamed in and started cheering it was great. Again, we marched all day. When I graduated our racist racist horrible, head dean he on the fucking stage. At that moment I had a Malcolm X moment I have officially changed my name. Imani is not my birth name; it is legally my name now but at that point I started going by Imani. I started going to the mosque, I had an X on my hat. We were protesting this graduation and homie(dean) was like 'I am proud to say the march started her at Emerson College' and people cheered 'Mother fucker! You hate black people'. We had been in meetings with him and now he's taking credit for shit. The point of the matter at that moment and building that demonstration that it didn't matter but I said in my own head that I am going to be revolutionary. Activism I understand you. Like I said I can still be killed by the police. Rodney King if those mother fuckers can all get off. The whole country went off, they burned down stuff in LA. It was unimaginable. Did you not see the fucking video? To be in the BLM movement, to move here in 93 and to be with Patrick Dorsman, Sean Bell. Actually, as a movement in the anti-police violence movement, New York helped coin the phrase of racial profiling. It wasn't this known phrase. We talked about the fact that he was racially profiled. It was an anti-gang movement that profiles

black and brown people in our neighborhood, and we started using that language and talked about it and made it acceptable to use it. What I love about the BLM and being an older person running in the streets with them and I am proud, I was there in Ferguson, Charlotte, and Baltimore. Even just a day trip or a couple weeks. Charlotte I was there for a lot. Ferguson, I think I was there multiple trips.

Wolf: I think I remember you taking multiple trips.

Henry: I do make multiple trips to Ferguson. I went to standing rock. I went to Standing Rock. I don't say this to beat my chest or anything. I am proud that I could go. I am proud that that movement created a moment that we could rebel. And even with Trump, my people that work with freedom, migrants, that are court involved because again under Obama that is what being kicked out of the country. We had so many deportations out of Flatbush. On the corner of Flatbush and Church (stops what time is it?) and meet people and I don't have fliers and it's so bad. But the point of the matter is that it is the same thing and people act like it is a new thing. Like 'I'm woke' like white people are all about it and we have been fighting it forever. Like slavery. Just understand, we are trying to be clear. This is an untold fact that people went back and killed masters to Africa with those ships. There are folks that purposely (interrupts self) I even did a play about this just even the fact that this is more courageous to live the note passage or to throw yourself overboard and just die. Who is more courageous? I am glad that I am here in the world. Again, my people slavery. Jamaica had broke slaves. Like 'you the bad slaves we are sending you to Jamaica'. It is true for other places in the world it (Jamaica) was a place like bootcamp to break people's spirit and out of spite we ran away and raged 100 year war. That is why the Jamaican flag has the crest is an Indigenous person and an African person. Because that is our heritage. The Indigenous people were there, and the African people were brought there as slaves. This is true for Seminal folks and Teminal people. We are all in boat distance to each other and there is a lot of respects that people talk about. But the Seminals do the same thing folks went into the swamps of Florida, black people, indigenous people we all went to wage at war. There were two and hundred years each. Maybe one being 98 and one was 100. We had women generals, we had granny. She is a national hero. I have done plays, there is auntie, there are other African revolutionaries. The whole play was spent just to do that. Even this research we did it was a big up to Flatbush when I moved here. I love Flatbush. I would give my life for Flatbush for Brooklyn. I know that as a trans person. I want to say there was a time in my life were people wanted to protect Imani. I started doing security work and I was in demonstrations to the point where when some shit was going down people would come get me. I am proud of that. I do think people think trans people started stonewalling and the Compton cafeteria movement. That is my people that is where I come from. I am also a Maroon, that is also where I come from. I am of Harriet Tubman's descent that is my life. Why do think you need to protect it. I am not saying that someone shouldn't protect it that is fine. But the truth of the matter is that I am not that person. So, I started doing security. I coordinated security; I was the head of security in places for national demonstrations. To this day people will come up to me and say 'Imani, we think this person is a cop'. I am just like wow I cop watch and cop watch almost everyday of my life. ICE has been on my block. And I say this more again not in this hottie way, but I feel like again I am a decedent. This is another chapter, like the black lives matter movement was an upsurge in the anti-police

spiral.

Wolf: On the up hand it is long linearage.

Henry: Exactly I hope there is rising and more upticks in the movement. It is true it up flows all the time, that is the struggle. I just feel privilege that I am living through it. That there is a younger generation that is taking up the gauntlet and doing it their own god damn way. Again, what I was going to say is that my generation coined racial profiling. Their generation is coining abolishing police, abolishing prisons, abolish ICE. It is breathtaking to me. It is breathtaking. I will talk about R. Kelly for a second. I am of the generation of his first trial and he got off and I put it on social media, and he got arrested again. As a survivor there are young black women who lead this charge, relentless. Who have helped shut down? He got cancelled in different cities. The show went on and they were the only people out there and they were yelling and screaming at him. Like BLM activists. Which is typical. People still do demonstrations all the time. Swipe it forward to when people say 'get a job' this is my mother fucking job. Whether I am paid or not this is my job to fight injustice. So, I got a job. Even something like the police are all upset because a sticker on their door during the BLM saying 'Stand with the protectors, not with the protestors'. People are like are you kidding me? Don't you think we have better things to do but if you would stop murdering black people the demonstrations would stop. We had to build a counter demonstration because fucking cops went out there to say I can breathe. Cops went and had a demonstration in New York City in City Park. They could do that; it was cops and other blue lives matter. They had shirts that said, 'I can breathe'. How monstrous is that? To mock the last words of Eric Garner. How monstrous is that? How completely inhumane, it's like aren't you ashamed? I am proud that under those circumstances I got there to Ferguson the day after the National Guard held guns to people's heads and tear gassed everyone and people literally left. I think Rosa Clemente and some other people that were down there doing Eyewitness accounts I think Lumumba, Bandle was there they were laying on the ground. Rosa told the story that there was a black man that she had to hold down and he wanted to stand up. She is a mother, she is older, and she held him down and said 'this is not the time, they have guns to our head. You need to live another day'. Look at Charlotte, they framed an activist when they shot another black activist and framed him for his murder at a protest. That is what we are living under. I am proud. I am still sometimes up in front and sometimes I am way far behind. But I am proud to be taking the streets. Sometimes I can't take the streets because you know I say go be crazy. Peoples Monday they are going to have a demonstration on Sunday for Stephen Clarke. Peoples Monday is the longest running BLM. It happens every Sunday on the dot. They are somewhere in the city doing something political in the name of people. People I would never have heard of. People in Guatemala, some young child died 15 years ago, a trans women. They do research and we are going to tell the story. It is five facts that they yell out or read. Whether it be a vigil or Trayvon Martin and anti- LGBTQ bashing or someone who died from police violence. Whoever the perpetrator is they are going to call out the facts. They honor people's lives every week. They are fearless. They get in the street they don't care. We were up in Harlem I got into the street too and it was so beautiful. Even here in Flatbush when we do Sandra Bland demonstrations, we always take the streets. It is led by all these forces' White accountability, Empower Assemblies that I work with. E for F. It is Sandra Bland it is me, so I am more into helping root stuff. It is so

deep to me. I am watching cops' men, push themselves against women, like chest to chest knocking them over. The women are fearless, holding them and it is like 'stop, stop there are people all over the street watching you brutalize black women in the name of a black woman who died in police custody. Is this a good look?' and they stopped, and they let us go and they take a lane of traffic. On one of the busiest streets in Brooklyn on Flatbush Avenue and we take the goddamn street! Two years in a row! So proud! So proud! Alright I should probably wrap this up any other final question? Because I probably need to go do this thing.

Wolf: I guess maybe to conclude two different ways of asking a similar question. One as someone who is fifty years old.

Henry: In August!

Wolf: Yes, because you are a Virgo I remember. How do you understand your roll now as a movement elder, as a trans elder, a black elder in movements for justice, freedom and liberation? What would you tell young black folks, young queer folks, young trans folks, young working-class folks, young migrants who want to get involved but don't know how or maybe feel afraid of being a newbie on that journey that you were talking about?

Wolf: So one thing that I want to make clear that I am not probably not seen as an elder in black movements there are definitely people in their 60s and 70s. I am definitely middle generation and older than other folks so people perceive me as much younger. In trans movement people see me as the uncle. I have always been older in trans movements. Their life expectancy isn't that long. We don't make it to 80s or 70s. A lot of people die in their 60s, a lot of people die in their early 70s. I am just proud. I am happy to be 50 right now. I feel like I got some years left. But regardless, I am 50 and my energy is a lot younger than 5. People freak out when I saw that I am 50. It's a whole discussion. I say things sometimes and people are like you know as a forty something blah blah blah. I was in a sort of healing circle of black organizers and it was great. I had raised something and acknowledging my age and privilege of that and after I was finished the whole little circle went 'okay, okay that is nice. You're 50?!'. That was the topic for two minutes, we need to see ID. I said did you not hear the other things that I said. They said no we tuned that out what did you say? So, that happens too. I am happy about that and I flip over my dreads and you see the grey it is a whole other thing. Anyways, also a part of it is that I have earned respect and it tells me so much about what ageism is about in this country because I am demanding respect. I am a middle-aged man and have said to people 'well you don't need to treat me that way. Don't be ageist, don't be adultist' The anti-ageist adults. Again, this is at the heart of BLM high school students, that got bared into their school and their parents were called. They did this march and I was so fucking proud of them. We had teachers running up saying 'They're going to end our careers' and I was like step off. So, we organized a barrier, so you can't get to them. This was leadership up front. You can't talk to them. Talk to us we will relay a message. We don't know you; we aren't going to let you hinder them. So, what happened was we demanded respect to get respect. Even something like marching all day. We had union square all day. The young people came up and said, 'we are marching until we get arrested'. So, we cancelled our demonstration and went with them. It doesn't matter what we put out on social

media the young people are here. They walked out of school and we are proud of that. It was the National School walkout day. They were so righteous. They were seniors and they were like 'fuck this' and I am like wow. We took the streets with them and I don't even think we put it on social media. If people text us we say, 'yeah we are in the street, oh we are in Time Square now'. The short part of that is this understanding that when they were like 'Imani, Imani should we take a bridge?' I said well you know; I don't know I have taken a bridge when there are more people but if you want to take a bridge that is your call. You guys decide that, but we are only 200 people. They were like that is a good point. It is different than saying 'you don't know what the fuck you are talking about. I have been doing this'. So, I guess to answer your question, again please I have probably been ageist and adultist many times in my life and I work on that shit to. I think part of why I mention my age because I do want people to know that I am not. I am not going to perpetrate some sort of crime for vanity sake for 30, I am not 20. Nobody thinks I am 20 but I am not a younger person, I am older. That is just real. I am not worried about being shot down in the street. When I am in political mode yes, when I am in cop watch mode no, my day to day life no. Not like a teenager is or a 20-year-old is. I am not dealing with that. The moral of the long-winded story thing I just did is that I really do think that it is important, and I say this all of the time; for younger people, newer activist to really understand they got this. Again, here is a perfect example, I watched the Macy day parade when the folks protested inside of it and I think they all got arrested and I was on jail support for them. They organized that. It was the first action they have ever organized in their life; with strangers they didn't know over Facebook. Which they were all like 'I don't know if this is the best thing to do'. They created a Facebook thread and organized they did this direct action. A righteous direct action during the Macy day parade. It was amazing that they did this. They were calling lawyers because they were getting arrested. I think that is the piece of it, everything is an experiment. There is a moment that we meet anybody in our life for the first time, where are making stuff up as we go along every single time. I think maybe because I have been in the struggle for maybe 30 years. I have never been a tenant organizer. I had tenant leaders in buildings that I lived in and I supported their work, but I was not a tenant leader and now here I am helping to build tenant leadership and power and I have never done that before. I have built scaffolding for stages that is not lame. It is not my forte. I have been a production manager for people you hire. That is the beauty of being a production manager. I don't know how to build a set but someone else does let me hire them. I think that is the other piece of it. For younger people to truly understand and own their own power and own that it is their right and their turn. They don't have to ask anybody for ambition. Just do it! If you have people around you that you want to consult with and plan together that is beautiful. I have so many folks that because they have been in college they are like these sponges. No! Revolutions are run by young people. Name a revolution that isn't led by young people. That is true, it is their job. IT is developmentally on task for young people to rebel, to question authority, to figure out new innovative ways, to think outside of the box. That is what they are supposed to do. That is developmentally on task. I get worried when people say, 'I can't do this.' That is a red flag for me. I am like okay let's talk about this. Why do you feel like you can't do these things in your life versus people who are like we are going to do it! It is okay to plan and figure it out. You can come talk to me; you can talk to some person. I sometimes say here are these other people to talk to. They are not of this generation and they have done it and done a certain way and I give resources. Here are these other people that know how to build this. I have never declined a flag call, but I

have younger people that paste up on a street post equality for Flatbush. I don't do it; they are young white people. That is badass go do that. I take pictures and you literally see the traffic light or the streetlight. Yeah! They climbed up there. I can't do it, but you can do it. So anyways, my thing is that I hope at some point in time that there will be a revolution in this country. I don't think it will be in my lifetime but I want to hope and believe that there will be a generation that carries that forward. I think that everything is an experiment. We get more and more progressive as time goes on. People feel their own power. I even just say if you show up to a rally, if you show up to an event it happened. That is the piece of it. If you don't show up, then the news says oh it didn't happen. We can barely get media as it is. But if you show up then you are there. That is an act of solidarity, just show up. Just be there. Trust me as an organizer 'oh my god you are here? Alright!' I think people can be whoever and do whatever they want, and we should fight for that.

Wolf: Well, thank you so much Imani.

Henry: Thank you!

Wolf: For being here and for generosity of spirit and home and food.

Henry: I am so late to get to go do flyerling.