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Interviewee: Anthony Riveccio
Interviewer: Mark Naison
Date of Interview: December 4, 2015

Mark Naison (MN): 2015 And today we're here with Anthony Riveccio who is a business leader, an educator, and longtime resident of the neighborhoods [unclear] Fordham. Anthony, could you please spell your name for us.

Anthony Riveccio (AR): First name's Anthony: A-N-T-H-O-N-Y. Last name's Riveccio: R-I-V-I-E-C-C-I-O.

MN: And what year were you born?

AR: 1960.

MN: Okay, we always start off with family. How did your family end up coming to the Bronx and to which neighborhood did they move?

AR: My family came to the Bronx in 1972—Actually, I came from my mother, I'm the oldest of three in my family, got divorced, my mother came back—to her mother who was living in the area and that area at the time was called Morris Heights section, more specifically 1 Avenue, University

MN: Right. Now, where were you living before you moved to the Bronx?

AR: I was born in Brooklyn. And my—as far as I can remember from the age of nine on, various parts of Brooklyn. [Inaudible].

MN: Right, now tell us a little bit about your father and mother and how you identify yourself in—I guess we'd call a mixed culture, mixed race family.

AR: Oh! My mother and father—my mother's Puerto Rican, okay, who was born in San Juan. My father is Sicilian, he's of course Italian. And the best way that I'd describe the integration I guess, is I joke around and I've told people since the day I was born that my mother's Puerto Rican, my father's Italian so that makes me a born again [inaudible] I know nothing and unless you educate me, I know nothing. I take people from—all people [inaudible]

MN: But, so, you moved to—what are your first memories of the Bronx in 1972?

AR: Yes, my mother wanted to, well—we of course needed a place to sleep and that's where we slept we slept on—an apartment on Tremont and Mar Place specifically. And my mother wanted to make sure that we had—me and my sister's had a very good, well-rounded form of public education. So, during the day we were bussed. We were bussed from Morris Heights all the way to Riverdale. My mother made arrangements for us to go to [inaudible] junior high school and high school there. But, when those—when the education part of our day was over, we, of course, had to come back to the South Bronx and night so, to answer your question,

while we remember—what I remember most vividly is—and of course, I didn't understand [inaudible] was maybe twice a week, three times a week you would run up to the roof of the building around 10, 11, o'clock at night, depending on the night of the week you would see a building burn.

MN: And this was fairly close?

AR: It became closer.

MN: Now, what level of education did your mother reach? I ask this because how did she know how to maneuver the system to get you into such good schools?

AR: That is a very good question 'cause I have to add to that that my mother—my mother learned system. There were some systems that she learned and didn't want to be part of. Most vivid example of that is the public welfare system. During that time many people in the streets were on public welfare. My mother knew how to maneuver the system but just for [inaudible] out of her own pride to not take part in the system. To this day, many people are surprised about that because she had three kids during that time. Her education level was as per—high school education. She took no college at all. She actually didn't start a college program for herself until she first [inaudible] her children.

MN: So what—was she working when you were going to school?

AR: She started herself as a proud professional in the public school system. She was a proud professional for ten years before they offered her a [inaudible]. Teacher and she worked herself through the last five to ten years of the system of which she's now retired, as a full-fledged teacher.

MN: Okay, now, you're in Morris Heights and Tremont Avenue, what was the racial composition in the neighborhood when you arrived there in [inaudible]? Were there still significant numbers of white families left in Morris Heights?

AR: I would say so. During that period of time, if you look at people at those basic elements—you know, white, black, Puerto Rican, I would say you had still a very significant forty to fifty percent majority in those areas. You had a much rising Hispanic level during that time. And it's been my forty-year experience that blacks as a whole have always slightly increased or decreased over the years, but have always been at a steady 20 to 25 percent number.

MN: Now, was there racial tension on the streets in Morris Heights? You could feel it?

AR: Yes.

MN: How would it manifest itself at that particular point—you're 12 years old?

AR: They almost did everything that you could do. And I would say in Morris Heights although it was not very prevalent, it became more prevalent in the Bronx the more you go up [inaudible].

MN: Right. Now, when you say that—did you—was that there were people openly hostile to other groups of people on the street?

AR: You had in my opinion what was a very diverse bowl of water that just was percolating and it was percolating from [inaudible] elements. You had white Irish, white Italian that were very upset that many of their friends were moving out, seeing the neighborhood deteriorate. They felt they had nowhere to go in that time. Some, of course, they felt thoroughly. And you had some of the blacks that felt the same way. And then of course you had a rising Hispanic culture that we're just learning [inaudible] elements. That led to a lot of problems within the streets itself. I would say during that time there very much [inaudible] led to gangs—not the gangs that we know today.

MN: Right. So, there were gangs in Morris Heights?

AR: Yes.

MN: Could you—did they have names?

AR: Oh, sure! I was in one myself. The most—some of the more famous ones in this area during that time is—you might know some of them such as The Fordham Baldies, The Savage Skulls. I was in a local neighborhood game during that time called The Devil's Disciples.

MN: The Devil's Disciples. Did you have jackets?

AR: Yes, during that time it was basically dungaree jackets. This way and then in the back you would wear what were called your colors.

MN: Right, do you have any pictures of yourself in the gang colors?

AR: Thank God, not on me, no.

MN: But you have them somewhere?

AR: I do have them, yes.

MN: I think [inaudible] to the Bronx African American History Project collection. So, did you feel that you needed to be in a gang for protection?

AR: Yes. Yes. Wasn't the only reason. When I—when my mother brought us back where we had other family living there I also was introduced to my cousin—cousin Jose, he's a few years older than me. So, he sort of led me through the neighborhood. He was not a good boy. So he was—I was following him, I wound up following him into a lot of trouble. Including sadly where he was part of a hold-up or [inaudible]. And, sadly, he's still in jail today.

MN: Wow. Now, were these gangs armed with serious weaponry or mainly just knives and zip knives or did people have automatic weapons?

AR: Oh, no, no, no. I would say your average mode of defense was either a bat or your fists, one of those.

MN: Right. Now, what were the stores like in the neighborhood? Were there places that you go to shop or eat, or was the business district being decimated?

AR: It was really a combination of both. In Morris Heights?

MN: Right, yeah. [Inaudible] Morris Heights.

AR: Yes, okay. It was a combination of both. You had—which I did not know much of at that time—well more established Irish and Italian stores there in Morris Heights—that, as with the residence who were leaving. And then you also had a growing type of commerce, which was catering to the new [inaudible].

MN: Right. Now, what kind of food did your mother cook?

AR: Oh, boy. No, no. Well, my mother loved my father very much. My mother is a great cook, of course. My mother cooks very good Latin food, but in the home she always wanted to please my father, so, she turned out to be a very good Italian cook. Very good.

MN: Did she have time to cook while you were all going to school or did you all sort of scrap together your own meals?

AR: Good question. In the late 60's, early 70's were a much more simpler society, my father, God bless his heart, made enough money where my mother was a stay-at-home mother. So, she would handle the food.

MN: Right. But when you went to the Bronx, when she was working? How'd you eat then?

AR: My mother made a point that after work, she would come home, cook, have a home

cooked meal, of course, you had to be home by a certain time to eat it, and that was every night.

MN: Right. Wow. Now, were you a good student in school?

AR: When I was there.

MN: Oh, okay.

AR: When I was there.

MN: Did you catch Hell from kids in your neighborhood for being a good student and going to those schools out of the neighborhood or people didn't care that much?

AR: I would say people really didn't care that much. Although, I would say I was maybe in somewhat of a unique situation. I went to high school at John F. Kennedy. It was during the mid-seventies when schools were still becoming integrated. I was a good student when I was there, but as the years went on—I had one year, 1977, I became the John F. Kennedy hooky champ because I was probably there twice a month. Between not going to school and then, like yourself, I was an athlete in high school. So, of course, what kept me connected to the school was the sports and [inaudible].

MN: And, what were your sports?

AR: I had several—anywhere from the mind to the feet. I played football for John F. Kennedy. I was also one of their chess champions.

MN: Oh, wow.

AR: Also very avid bowler as well.

MN: Okay. Musically, what sort of music did you listen to in your house? What did your mother like?

AR: My mother, to this day, is very much in love with all types of Latin music. My father, who's no longer with us, I think was just very basic. Basic. If I had to give it a name, I would say, he would always listen to doo-wop music. I shouldn't say he would listen to basic [inaudible]. And my sisters and I, we would change our music everyday depending on what was happening then.

MN: Right. Were you aware of hip-hop when it was first starting? Was this something—

AR: Oh, very much so.

MN: And how did that—what did you hear about it? Did you attend any outdoor parties or [inaudible]?

AR: Yes, oh, yes. Being such a bad boy during that time, we went to a lot of parties. I fell in love with, what was known then and what we know now as house music. During house music, I fell in love with a few singers. One of them might have been mentioned before by the name of Kurtis Blow. Also, another group by the name of the [inaudible] Gang. And some others such as [inaudible] and [inaudible] where I fell in love with their music so much, I actually became a DJ during my college years just to put some money in my pocket. I did not play clubs in the Bronx, I played clubs in Manhattan. In the early eighties DJs used to have contests against each other. So, I would have those contests—those battles [inaudible] here in the Bronx and would DJ in a club and go to a club in Manhattan. The club I used to DJ in was a club on the West side of Manhattan, called Club Pegasus.

MN: And what neighborhood was that?

AR: That was on the Upper West Side, not too far from—and I'm trying to remember the name of that famous club that was there—I believe it was called Sweet Waters.

MN: I used to go there. That was a Jazz club.

AR: That is correct.

MN: On Columbus Avenue.

AR: That's correct.

MN: Now, when you were playing hooky what were you doing?

AR: You know, no, no, no, no, no, I'm going to tell you, but first I'm going to wind up embarrassing myself. These guys are going to be like, "he did that?" Of course, now it was over forty years ago so this was bad forty years ago. But, if I didn't go to school because I decided to hang out at McDonald's with my friends and all we did was just have some [inaudible]. Sitting there chitchatting, we weren't in school. You know, that was considered a major—forty years ago. So, yeah, it was a lot of that. Or, you know, maybe going to the local movies or something like that.

MN: Right. So, did you have visions of yourself going to college when you were in high school?

AR: Absolutely not. I was following my cousin as I indicated before.

MN: Cousin Jose.

AR: Cousin Jose. Who was brought up in that neighborhood, so the neighborhood at that time really got ahold of us. People selling drugs or [inaudible] things they shouldn't [inaudible]. And I knew I would survive, but I did not think I would survive traditionally. And of course, in my day the traditional thing to do was to go to [inaudible] high school, high school, and then [inaudible] to college. I joke around and tell people, you know, that was what they now—well, I don't know what they call it now but in my day it was called the non-traditional thing.

MN: Now, what were the major drugs in Morris Heights when you got there? Was there a serious heroin problem at that time or was it more other drugs? It was pre-crack, I know.

AR: Yeah, yeah. It was marijuana. It was opium. It was—when I use the word marijuana and again, I know it's different today, but they had what were, in my day, called specialty types of marijuana. I know there's different types of specialty types today and they're all [inaudible]. I might need your number. So, yeah, a lot of people were into that.

MN: Were there any buildings that burned that were really close to where you were living or that came close?

AR: Oh, yes. Yes. Actually right on Tremont Avenue and Loring Place and to this day, to this day, there's still a little bodega right across the street that I went to forty years ago. The building across—that burned down—from me is now a parking lot.

MN: So, that neighborhood was pretty hard it?

AR: It was very hard hit.

MN: Now, what did you think when you saw these fires? I mean, you know, what was crossing your mind? How did you make sense of it?

AR: Well, for the first year or two, not understanding really what was going on and I think we were seeing these fires from as far as maybe 165th. We didn't understand it. We would just look at it in amazement and on occasion even joke around about it. I remember my biggest joke which almost—I know is going to come back to haunt me was I said one day, "Oh, when the fires get closer, we'll come up here one night, we'll put on some marshmallows and we'll do this," and then I went up to the roof one day to see the building across the street from me burn. And I thought about it, I thought about what I said. I quite wild, what did I do? What I did was, I joined the Navy. And where I signed up was right at that post on Fordham Road.

MN: Right on Fordham Road? So, this was while you were still in high school?

AR: Yes.

MN: Part of your response to this was to find a way to get out?

AR: That is correct. My way to get out was the U.S Navy.

MN: And how old were you when you—

AR: Seventeen.

MN: You were seventeen when—how many year commitment was it?

AR: Four.

MN: Wow. And where did you go? What parts of the world?

AR: Oh, Lord. Well, there's--I can share some—a lot of that with you, but some parts I can't. I did service for four years. I left in the third class [inaudible]. I spent most of my first two years there in areas such as Chicago and the Carolinas. But around 1980, I received orders—you guys may or may not have learned this in—we had hostages in Iran. So, all areas of Gulf services had instructions, in case we had problems getting the hostages out. There was not a military option on the table, but military was well ready if there were. In 1981, there was an option. And there were some things that were public, and to this day, there are some things that are not public. So, I was on standby in a submarine.

MN: In a submarine? You've been in a submarine?

AR: Oh, yeah. I was one of several young men that if the orders went through to go get the hostages that's what my job was to do.

MN: Now, were you trained to be in a submarine? Did you choose that?

AR: Oh, I apologize. I thought you were asking if I was trained to kill.

MN: No, no.

AR: Were you trained in a submarine? No, you don't get any training for a submarine.

MN: They assign you or you have to volunteer?

AR: Well, first and foremost they assign you based on what they believe is in need for that. As far as training, I guess the best way for me to describe it to you is if you passed Betsy, you pass.

Betsy was a big barn that was probably, if I had to equate it to a football, I'd say it would be thirty yards. And this was a barn full of smoke, full of all types of smoke. And you first went in there with a gasmask and gage [inaudible], stay in there for a while and again, you gage [inaudible] and then when you have to go back in without the mask, well, the five minutes, you're either back out or they come in to get you. I was lucky enough to get out, which meant I passed! I passed. Which meant I was privileged to be on a submarine.

MN: Did you get extra pay for being in a submarine?

AR: A few cents. Absolutely. Military personnel should always get three times more [inaudible].

MN: Now, what year did you go into the Navy?

AR: 1977.

MN: Now, were you in the Bronx during the blackout?

AR: Yes. I actually finished training, from training going back into active duty was a full year.

MN: Okay, so you were in the Bronx during the blackout. What was your experience of the blackout in the Bronx? So, I can tell stories about what it was like in Manhattan.

AR: Yeah, I can't speak too much about it from an overall perspective, I can talk about from a direct neighborhood perspective.

MN: Yeah, sure, directly in your neighborhood.

AR: I would say a lot of people went to the merchant strips, the commerce strips and they wanted to do [inaudible] things. They stole from the stores or they tried to protect their home. The Bronx in those days was still a very new combination of buildings and private homes. And there still was a very predominant clusters of private homes, so especially people that had their home they were protecting it.

MN: Right. But there was some looting in your neighborhood?

AR: A great variety of looting in our neighborhood.

MN: Right. Now did anybody go up to Fordham Road and loot that you knew?

AR: During the time I lived there, Fordham Road was looked at as a [inaudible]. It was actually looked at as a [inaudible]. I don't know if you guys have ever seen any of the old pictures there during my time there, they had a little one time [inaudible] and that's not [inaudible] paradise. And that's just—you know, I tell people my experiences with Fordham and I'll try to make it

brief—were both love and hate all in the same day. On Saturday if you were any manchild on Saturday morning you were in trouble because they had this wonderful store called Alexander's. And that meant that mom was going to drag you. You were in charge of carrying all the packages, and it didn't matter whether you went—started at the bottom or the top. My mother was one of those that she did both, so you were trapped in four hours of doing that. Now, after you got over that, the rest of Fordham, during my time, was a wonderful experience. What I mean by that is you had arcade games, you had movie homes there, you had neighborhood children just playing in what was considered a very friendly environment there. You even had some—a couple of Irish bars in the neighborhood as well. But, it was just—you know, it was shopping and then other types of entertainment after that. So, it was considered a place to go have fun for the day, even if you wanted to shop on your own individually. Saturday morning that was, "Oh! Yeah, leave me alone," but she'd come get you anyway, it didn't matter.

MN: Now, you returned from the Navy in 1981. And where was your mother living at that point? Did she move out of Morris Heights by then?

AR: She did. She did. I left the Navy and I decided to stay on my own. I stayed in Brooklyn for a little over a year. My sister got in touch with me and I found out our mother was very ill. When she told me where, she gave me the address, and during those times I was riding a bike. As I'm getting the instructions—and most of my instructions were just stay on The Grand Concourse and go north. I only knew of Fordham Road by taking a bus with the family going to Alexander's. As I'm driving my bike and I'm now passing Alexander's in 1981, and during my day the difference between—and I really hate using these terms, so I apologize—between a low income family and a middle class family was your placement on Fordham Road. Fordham Road was considered the invisible boundary. So, I'm driving the bike passed Fordham Road, and I'm like "What is my mother doing her?" I've got these instructions over here, and I'm like, "What is my mother doing over in this area?" So, she was living off of Kingsbridge Road.

MN: Right. How close to the Concourse was it?

AR: One block.

MN: Was it west of the Concourse or east of the Concourse?

AR: West.

MN: Not too far from The Armory?

AR: No. About one block.

MN: Right. So, that neighborhood was predominantly Irish at that point?

AR: That neighborhood was at that time about 75% Irish.

MN: Right. So, did you get your apartment near her?

AR: Well, she got the—no, no. I stayed with my mother. I actually stayed with her to take care of her, she was bedridden. So, I spent two years staying with her. During those two years, my sisters—they were very insistent upon me wanting to stay. I didn't want to stay and my mother wanted, "You gotta go to college! You gotta go to college! You gotta go to college!" So, of course, Herbert H. Lehman was right across the street from me and I said, "Well, let me go over there and take a look over there and see what they're talking about," and five years later I graduated.

MN: Right. Now, what was the racial atmosphere in 1981 in Kingsbridge Road a block from Grand Concourse?

AR: I'm going to share two stories with you. One of them will be on Kingsbridge Road, the other one which I think I spoke of before will be on 204th street. The one on Kingsbridge Road: In 1983, I went shopping on Kingsbridge Road, I had to get some things for the home, for the family. We were—my mother wasn't working, she was bedridden. My sisters had part time jobs. We were really floating bad with money, trying to make everything work. It was during Christmas, and no one really spoke about what we were going to do for Christmas because we didn't quite—money was very tight. All of a sudden right next to Kingsbridge Avenue, I hear, "Come get your free toys!" And I'm looking and I see this tall black man, and this tall black man played for the New York Yankees. His name was David Winfield and next to him was a man that did not have on this costume, did not have on this costume but if you know him, he looks like Santa Claus. This gentleman is a politician in the area. He was the councilman there during that time. His name at that time was Councilman Jose Rivera. He's now Assemblyman Jose Rivera. What the councilman did, at that time, was he arranged through David Winfield and the Yankees to have a large giveaway of toys at the community yard. All I know is if I get on this line, which is half a block long, I can get a toy. So, that's what my sisters and I did. What amazed me was the line had all types of people, Irish, Italian, Hispanic, Black, from all cultures. It made me realize right then and there, how much the Bronx and that section was beginning to evolve because during that same period of time on 204th Street in Norwood—which is an I also area I know very well—there was a very famous movie house called The Mosholu which was given in the 1920's and in the 1970's they changed it from The Mosholu to the Bainbridge Theater. The predominant reason for that was it was once a two-story house that held two movies, but the Bainbridge held four. So, they showed a movie there called *Fort Apache the Bronx*.

MN: Paul Newman.

AR: Paul Newman. There were so many Irish and Italians that were so upset that that movie

was being shown there, they started a riot. Sadly, to this day, and it's really sad, to this day no one got injured, but what did get killed was the movie house. The movie house got destroyed.

MN: What age were the Irish and Italian people? Were they mostly teenagers and young men or—?

AR: They were of all generations. At that time we had a lot of Irish and Italians and of course Jews living there. You know, three, four, five generations was the norm.

MN: So, they gathered outside the theater?

AR: They gathered outside and for the young blacks that were inside, they went inside and got them too. Again, no one died.

MN: But they were beating people up.

AR: They were beating people up. During that area it was actually very normal because prior to 1980 that commerce area—which is really eight blocks long—used to have about 23, 24 Irish bars in that area. If you go there today, there's only one that's been there ever since then.

MN: This is pretty near Montefiore Hospital. What is the name of that park up there, The Oval?

AR: There's two parks in the area. The most predominant one is Williamsbridge Oval. So, what I remember as far as the local fights is there used to be—well, there's couple, at the time, there were a couple of well known pizzerias. One pizzeria sat on 204th and Bainbridge there and if you sat down right at the window you could see all four sections of the block. Now, looking out the window you have always can see this wonderful bar called the Green Otto Bar. It would have on average about twice a week that if you were sitting there at two o'clock in the morning—in those days the pizzeria would still be a very crowded place. So, at two, three, four in the normal. But if you're sitting there at two in the morning, you're having a pizza, it was normal if all of a sudden somebody got thrown out of the bar. If they got up, they were getting punched back down again. And some of 'em were punching until the blood just came right up and hit the glass, hit the glass. Eventually, eventually, somebody would call the cops. Of course, in those days the cops were much more responsible, so, they'd be there in a minute. Then it would depend at that point who was fighting. If it was a white guy and a black guy, the cops would immediately go to the black guy and either harass him or in some cases they'd arrest him because it was presumed that he was the one that started the fight. If it was two white people—Irish, Italian—the cop would actually try to talk both of them into calming down. What I found the most funniest of them all—now, I'm watching two guys literally just [punching noise] swinging to death, they'd shake hands and then maybe ten minutes later go buy beer and if you hung around long enough, maybe an hour later they'd throw themselves out the bar

again and do it all over again. But the blood in between was unbelievable because, like I said, there were no guns or anything like that. Fists.

MN: Now, how did you maneuver this world? Who did people think you were? Did you get—any of these Irish people give you a hard time?

AR: Yeah. But I think it's really—what I always try to do is not put yourself in any situations that warrant those things? But there was one.

AR- Yeah, but I think it's really, well, what I always try to do is not put yourself in any situations that weren't those things. But there was one. When I finally graduated from college (inaudible) "well, now it's the time to get out of mom's house, right, I mean, mom's well, the girls are fine, I got my degree, I'm gonna get the hell out of here, right", so I decided to stay in the neighborhood and then that's when I really found out that you- that nobody really wanted to be in the neighborhood because I must've hit every building and the Supers in those days (inaudible). You had to be one of two things: you either had to be Irish or Italian (inaudible). And then, of course, you had to know someone (inaudible). If one of those two things weren't happening, you just- you weren't getting an apartment. So I remember walking down main blocks and after, that's when I realized all of a sudden, I would look at some of the names on the wall (inaudible) Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many, many of the Supers told me "You know anybody who's in the building?" "No" "You have to find a way to get a connection to get in". And they were very frank about it. The money at one point, up until the 1990s, (inaudible).

MN- So those neighborhoods were (inaudible) heavily Irish and Italian (inaudible).

AR- I would say, if I was an Irishman, I would say that the 90s were considered the last of Irish, right.

MN- Now, when all of this was going on, what was your awareness of Fordham University?

AR- When I was going to Riverdale, for Junior High School and High School, (inaudible) to the South Bronx. South Bronx was a very dangerous place, so I either hung out with my cousin. Now my cousin wanted to hang out on the streets so if I said to my cousin, "Let's go to the after school center" "No, I'd rather hang out in the streets." But there were some days I didn't want to do that either, so I would go to this after school center, which was a church, the name of the church was called "Holy Spirit School/Church", which is actually still there. I can't tell you the specific activities that I did there, but I remember (inaudible) volleyball, just a little bit of everything. But what I do remember is- it was a flag and a logo on the wall and the name of the logo- the name of the logo had six initials, and those six initials stood for the North Bronx (inaudible). And if you're not familiar with that organization, that organization was created in 1974 through some cultural institutions here in the Bronx, most predominately by Fordham University itself. It's still around today, you said it, Border's is still (inaudible).

MN- It's from 196th, it used to be on Grand Concourse.

AR- It still is. It's still there. And you know, of course, I didn't know all that, and all I knew is that that's where I was hanging out. But I come to find out (inaudible), that when the organization was created, and it was run daily through the residents of the neighborhood, believe it or not, a lot of those residents were Irish, a lot of those residents were Italian. These were what I guess you would call, in those days, people of white descendents (inaudible). And they helped to run an organization that started in Morris Heights in 1974, it hit Fordham Road, Kingsbridge Road in the mid-80s, went up to Norwood, and further parts of Norwood in the late-80s, and when that organization tried to do that, what it still does today, is assist people in different ways, in different ways (inaudible), whether in social service areas, in housing, or justice causes, and this organization has become so powerful in the last forty years that they would become, in time, a political force (inaudible), depending on the issue there, (inaudible). But they have (inaudible) the last forty years involved in many political causes that have helped the Bronx (inaudible).

MN- Now, did you ever go on the Fordham campus in the 70s and 80s? Did you ever find yourself in there?

AR- Once or twice. The second one is the funniest little story that I'm gonna say (inaudible) the statute of limitations is run out here (inaudible). I had a bunch of friends on Belmont and one of my friends had a party (inaudible). I don't know if Fordham still has it today but fifteen years ago, and of course before then, they had ATM machines on this campus that the public can access, they were accessible to the public. Now, I'm gonna tell you something very shocking (inaudible), the reason why I can say it to you that they were accessible to the public is because when the Fordham guard told me "No." at 11:45 at night, I took out the ATM book from the bank and showed him right on there, exactly where it said "Fordham University". And I said to him, because I was drunk, even if he didn't let me in, I'm gonna make a public stink about it. I got him to agree because it's a quarter to twelve at night (inaudible) so I said, "okay, fine". So, we get on campus, long story short, and my friend gets arrested. So, (inaudible) for a couple of hours.

MN- Okay, now, did you have any trouble getting on campus this time?

AR- Yeah.

MN- They didn't immediately open up when you mentioned my name?

AR- No, I didn't have an opportunity to tell them- I came from the Fordham Prep side, I mentioned your name, I mentioned the Project, it was like talking to a hole in the head, but that's okay, I'm used to that. And even after them verifying- I still had to show them identification, which was fine. But that was the process.

MN- They didn't call me and have me scream at them.

AR- No, what happened- what I did show them, which I think helped, was our series of emails.

MN- Right, okay good. So, when did you start your doing business activities in the community?
Right after college?

AR- I graduated from college in 1989 and got my Masters, and I graduated with an economics degree, but I also graduated with (inaudible) in science. I should also say that while I was in my junior and senior year, I was (inaudible), so that's what led me into politics first. I worked for the Bronx Democratic Party, (inaudible), I ran a couple of political campaigns, which was very exciting during that time. Well, the best campaign that I can mention that I assisted in during that time, the first campaign, (inaudible), ran as a councilman in 19-

MN- So that was Carl- (inaudible) doing political campaigns-

AR- I was his Campaign Manager in 1991. And then in 1992, you know, politics in those days didn't pay that much money, and it still doesn't pay that much money, (inaudible), but I found out that I gotta go out and get a real job (inaudible), so what does somebody with a finance (inaudible)- moves to Wall Street. So, I worked for Chase Bank before it was called J.P. Morgan or anything, Chase or whatever, (inaudible), I worked in their investment division for about ten years and (inaudible) very much, which myself, and three other individuals, decided (inaudible) on our own, which we've done now for fifteen years both financial advisors in two offices, one in Brooklyn, and the other one is located here in the Bronx (inaudible), small staffs, each place has about four or five (inaudible).

MN- Now, how did you get involved in the local community board and the local political (inaudible)?

AR- That's a good question. I've been a local community board member now for about twelve, thirteen years, and that's sort of like (inaudible), in a good way I should put, it brought me back into community politics life, right, it's something that I wasn't involved in prior. If you have lived here for as long as I have, (inaudible), imagine living (inaudible) Mosholu Parkway (inaudible), so I tell these stories (inaudible) that I try not to say my name (inaudible), for a walk in the park, for me, is something I feel like there's times I need to (inaudible) my day balanced. So, when I start to see things that (inaudible) neighborhood, I want to know what (inaudible) 311. When they first came out, with one system when the try to sell it as a major success and this was the person that created it and so on and so forth (inaudible), and I said, well I don't need a computer to fix this problem, I need somebody to get on the phone to fix this problem. So that got me involved in my local community board and (inaudible) local community board and I actually do, now, today, what I did twenty five years ago, now I still run political campaigns for the Bronx Political Party. So, this is the same person that gave me that (inaudible) thirty-five

years ago, I ran his political campaign as well. (inaudible). I don't know how much you guys know about politics but I would say the Bronx Political Party, which between council people, (inaudible), congress people, (inaudible), I've assisted a variety- about twenty of them probably.

MN- Okay, now, one question that I need to ask, because one of my former students wrote a dissertation about it, what was your perception of crack when it hit the neighborhood you were living in? Did it hit your neighborhood?

AR- It hit very hard. It hit it very hard. Again, I was on Kingsbridge Road, we saw the crack two blocks away, off the Grand Concourse predominately, where, today, there's still a little issue in the neighborhood, that area being 196th, 197th Street (inaudible)-

MN- On the East side-

AR- Right. And maybe the best example I can give you as far as how I- sort of, visually, is I watched a young lady that I knew just about all my life- she was a very nice young lady- she was a plump young lady- (inaudible) about women's sizes, I'll try to do this- if I was to say she was a size ten, very happy with her weight, she took the drugs because she got addicted to the drugs- but crack, of course, one of its effects is that (inaudible), and when (inaudible), but crack was, in those days, was cooked cocaine. (inaudible) bread, you just take a couple of slices off and sell them in slices (inaudible). Now, whether- because you're slicing it off, you now have the opportunity if you want to be a bad guy (inaudible), you now have the opportunity to put things in it. Why would somebody do that? Well, to be (inaudible). If I'm selling drugs, you know one of the things about drugs is its weight count, and if I'm gonna sell it- cocaine, that you'd say (inaudible), well, if I decide to slice it, and then cook it, and in the process of cooking it, it expands and grows, well now I have more to sell, and it didn't cost me anything more to buy.

MN- So you basically provide baking soda?

AR- Correct, well, there are other elements but today, of course, it's even worse. So I would say cooked cocaine- pure cocaine, never really hit our neighborhood in that form, unless you had one or two good neighborhood connections going- crack cocaine, where I would watch friends who were maybe a size 10 go to a size 3, and because they became so addicted, I watched a very good friend of mine, not just lose all that weight, but, what was very popular at the time, that they would take these activities (inaudible) is oral sex. They would ask if you would wanna go (inaudible) for five, ten dollars and then they would take that five, ten dollars (inaudible) slice of cocaine for five or ten dollars would grow in size, and that was (inaudible).

MN- Do you have questions (inaudible), open it up to the students. So did you have a sense that this neighborhood was going to remain stable and viable because of the coalition?

AR- I did. I did, if it wasn't for- well, I have a big, a very big (inaudible), because you have an organization that is still there, most of its purpose is still there, yes it's evolved over the decades, but it's still there, still helps people, and yeah, if it wasn't there at that time, I'm not sure where the Bronx really would have wound up.

MN- The coalition tried to deal with the crack issue- you have some experience-

AR- I did, I do. There are books already written about it, the biggest, or I should say, the most popular that I could tell you more about that is a book called *South Bronx Rising*, it also happens to be published by Fordham University. In that same area, there's a smaller church by the name of Our Lady of the Refuge Church. The Father there, I've always known him as Fr. Jennings, but (inaudible), what's it now, it's Archbishop- (inaudible), yeah it is Archbishop, at first I thought it was Cardinal, but I know it's Archbishop, and he's actually still staying there which is a shock. But yeah, so over those forty years that he's been there as a Bishop, he has had vigils, he has had protests, and shockingly, shockingly he's had wonderful mixed results. In the forty years, there have been times that he's actually been able to step (inaudible), there have been times that the bad (inaudible) have told him "go to Hell". But, what has shocked me through all of it is that he has never created a hysteria where (inaudible). And that, to me, has always been a shock. Fr. Jennings, (inaudible), he will take that protest right to your front door, so he doesn't hold anything back. To my surprise, no one's killed him yet. So that to me is probably the biggest- I've thought that many times, I say "one day I'm (inaudible) make me sad, I'm gonna hear something". And, you know, it's always been a mixed fight. That area became very (inaudible) crack cocaine. And over the course of the last 30 years, it's become better, worse, I would say over the last fifteen years, it has become slightly worse. What has now happened is, in the last fifteen years, multiple gangs have now worked that area, and now I believe it was seven years ago, they actually had to have the FBI go in there and try to get a lot of the stuff out of there. And today, I understand that these newer gangs today, much younger gangs today-

MN- Now, are these ethnic gangs or associated with immigrant groups, or are they Crips and Bloods?

AR- No, no, these are the former, as you have indicated-

MN- Do they have like, MS 13, or DDP, Dominicans Don't Play-

AR- They're similar in that nature.

MN- Now, what about- what are some of the new immigrant groups coming to your neighborhood? Are there new populations coming into the Bronx that weren't there 30 years ago?

AR- Oh, absolutely. Of course, you've heard me mention Hispanic, you always had a continuing influx of Blacks, but now, in the last 10, 15 years, very much Bangladesh, very much Muslim, very much Jamaican, very much Caribbean, African. I would venture to even say that in isolated bunches you even had Asians.

MN- I know there's a really good Korean restaurant on 205th Street-

AR- Yes.

MN- Which, I have to take these guys out to eat so they'll have a choice of the ethnic cuisines- a great Vietnamese restaurant on Jerome Avenue near 196th Street.

AR- That's correct.

MN- It's fantastic. And all very inexpensive.

AR- Inexpensive, that's very true as well.

MN- So you guys are going to have a treat somewhere along the line. So, do you still enjoy living in the Bronx?

AR- I do, I do. The reason why I made a face is what's worrying me currently. And what's worrying me currently has nothing to do with race. What's worrying me currently is if you remember what I said early, I said what I call the hidden treasures of this neighborhood is its open space, and its greenery. And I'm really, really under the sad belief that this neighborhood is now going to be threatened with that. There have been many discussions- not discussions- many actions, recent gentrification happening within all the five boroughs, and in the Southern part of the Bronx, it's now becoming a very progressive developers movement. And I've said to people that- as late as last night- gentrification might have a racial- gentrification is an economic tool. It might have an unfortunate result, but it's an economic tool.

MN- So, you see the possibility of market-rate, luxury construction coming to your neighborhood, as it's come to mine?

AR- Correct.

MN- Okay, I don't know if you know Park Slope, but 4th Avenue used to be this whole commercial district- you know, body shops, garages, hardware stores, now it's one ugly, luxury condo development after another for like, two miles. And so, you think the same thing could happen in Norwood and Kingsbridge?

AR- Yeah, and we're actually seeing it, in the same place that you indicated about that Korean, that Asian restaurant. If you go one block North, you will see that there is a row of private homes- two of which have recently been sold, and are currently being developed for these modernized housing. I'm not against market-rate housing, I'm actually an economist that believes that the market shall be free and bear itself, and of course, there are tools to correct it. But, I also believe, as an economist, that there's a place for everything, and this is where I believe that Urban Planning and City Planning needs to take predominance over this. You just can't have buildings everywhere- buildings of the buildings like what we're talking about.

MN- I mean, because then the rents go up in the rest of the neighborhood, and people can be forced into lower Westchester or the Hudson Valley.

AR- Correct. I think it's gonna hit the Bronx very, very predominate and I've even gone as far to calling it- here in the Bronx only- "Regentrification", because when people talk to me about gentrification, the one comment I always hear from people is "Oh, it's gonna make the neighborhood more wealthy". And I look at them and I say, "Well, where have you been? We've been wealthy before."

MN- Yeah, the Grand Concourse was an upper middle class suburb.

AR- Right, now in the last twenty, twenty-five years, that economic climate has changed, and of course, not for the better. My worry now comes in, well, now you've got twenty-five years worth of people that do not have those benefits that people had prior, and now you want to put in market-rate housing. And you don't care where these people come from as long as you fill up these buildings, right? Well, it obviously can't come from the people in the neighborhood, because they were paying this. Right, but now you build this thing here, and now you want them to pay that. So what does that mean? That means these people have to go. That's the undesirable effect. But don't get me wrong, if you have the money, of course, they'll take you in.

MN- And then of course, the same thing happens with the stores. They'll bring in artisanal food shops- my pet peeve. Artisanal food and the artisanal dogs- shih tzus.

AR- Right.

MN- Okay, well, this was a really, very valuable overview. Any-

Damien Strecker (DS)- Yeah I'll throw in a question, if you don't mind. You know, a lot of these interviews, people talk about different cultural institutions- like the church, a school, you mentioned some of those yourself, and local government too. Would you say- you've been intimately involved in a lot of local government stuff, would you say you have a good faith in local government? Is there hope in local government for you, or, I don't know, what are your

thoughts on the response of local governments to some of the activism you've done, and some of the politics you've done, it's been positive overall would you say?

AR- What a loaded question. Yeah, because there's like, four different answers for that. First, let me slightly correct you. My standard joke is that I tell people "I don't- my job is to put them in office. I don't work with (inaudible), that's just my job." That's my favorite joke. But, the reality of what you're asking me, and I'm not sure where you're going so I'm going to answer it this way, when you look at- you know, when you take classes, especially in college, whether it's political science or economics, you almost start to look at things in a black/white type of mentality. Now, that doesn't mean that either structure is wrong. It just means that you have a problem and you might have two different solutions to solve that problem, and, of course, everyone's entitled to their opinion. Based on my beliefs, personal beliefs, beliefs I've learned in college through classes, I'm of the belief that the least government does, the better. That doesn't mean that I'm a conservative, doesn't mean I'm a republican. What it does mean is that our democratic system of government, in my eyes- in my humble opinion, is the sweetest, best, corrupt system of government. So, in saying that, and in recognizing that, you have to recognize one thing before you can recognize anything else- because if you don't recognize it, then you get a headache. And what that is is that, this money is going to be gone. There's gonna be a portion of theft and thievery because we live in an open democracy. We choose to do that. You don't have to live in that if you don't want to, you can go to (inaudible), you can go wherever you want. But this is what was created before you, and by the time you try to change it, you'll be dead. So, this is what we've decided to live on. Now, you can create tools in the government to try to make this bigger or worse, yes, you can do that, but that's gonna be there, that's not gonna change. So, what you have to understand is that for every dollar that goes through the system, fifteen cents of it is going to be gone. So you've got eighty-five cents left, what're you going to do with it? Well, you hope to use it for the best of what you believe our problems are in our government. I put it that way because we all have our individual beliefs on what those things are. What I do know is this and now I put on my economist's hat is that, based on our local level and based on our societal level at the time, you can't spend all this money. Reason why you can't spend it is because just like your mother taught you when you were young, "you have to save in the (inaudible) for future use." Right, your mommy taught you that. Right? You don't need Ronald Reagan or anybody to teach you that, your mother taught you that, right? It's common sense, it doesn't change, it still hasn't changed. So, that's where I believe least government is the best, because we would love the government to take care of all of our problems just like mommy and daddy tried their best to take care of all of their problems, too. It's good to have most of our mothers and fathers have succeeded, if our government succeeds to do it the same way, two things will happen. One, we'll be broke. Number two, you'll be paying seventy percent in taxes. So, you try to find a medium. As of today the government says that medium is anywhere from 20-40 cents of your tax dollars, to pay for all of the things we believe as a nation, is important to us. That answer that? I guess I've been hanging out with these politicians too long-

MN- Okay, why don't the last question- what did you think of the deal to bring ice hockey to the Kingsbridge Armory? Which is close to you.

AR- Oh my Lord. Alright, now I can't answer that question without telling you the whole story, and I'm going to include Fordham University in that story, going to make it a little interesting. The Kingsbridge Armory officially closed down in the late 1970s. Before 1970s it was known as a personnel apparatus for service people-

MN- Have you passed by this armory? It is enormous. It's beautiful, one of the largest armories in the world.

AR- Yeah, it really is. Since then, the community and the city have been trying to figure out what to do with it. What they did in the 80s was they just closed it down, it was just closed. And then in the 90s, they reopened it and turned it into a women's shelter. That lasted, I believe, until the early 2000s, I think they closed that down in 2001. Since then, there have been a variety of different proposals to- for that block, a commercial development. It's gone from anywhere from vegetables to the hockey proposal that's now on the table. I'm already making faces, right? He hockey proposal that is being run by Mr. Mark Messier from the New York Rangers has a couple of holes in it. The biggest hole it has in it is that he doesn't have the money. Big dream, no money.

MN- Really?

AR- Yeah. Right now- well, because his, what he thought were once his partners, are now no longer his partners. He thought he had five partners to join him in this venture, now he only has two. So he's trying to get the rest of the money from foreign places, which now the community has a variety of different problems with that, a whole wide range of different problems with that. So here we are, thirty-five years after its original purpose of being closed down, and of course, fifteen years after it was closed down as a women's shelter, that just sits there waiting to be developed. The people that have the power to make these decisions are our local borough president and our local mayor. And of course, whoever makes that decision has to have the money to fund it. The other bigger concern is, and I hope I'm wrong in saying this, I really do, I hope I'm wrong in saying this, I don't believe there is an appetite for ice hockey in the Bronx. I could be wrong-

MN- Do any of you play hockey? No.

AR- And like I said, I could be wrong and I hope I'm wrong. It was positioned to the community that it would be a place to learn hockey and get exercise and things of that nature. What I come to find out, even before they opened it was I'm not sure if that's what its original purpose was in the first place, and I'll give you an example. I found out, through my own research, that they were hoping to have it almost open by this time next year, because I know, because one of the

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Interviewer: Mark Naison
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people- one of the organizations that has a contract to use it a few times a week is the Brooklyn Islanders. That's gonna be their practice facility. Now, let me emphasize something when I say this, when you purchased that property for a practice facility, that facility is now closed. That facility is now closed to the public. So, while the Brooklyn Islanders are using that facility, no other person in the community can. Brooklyn Islanders weren't the only ones who had a contract- there's also hockey organizations up in Westchester County that have made arrangements for this already. So, in our opinion, not even knowing if the neighborhood itself has an appetite for hockey, we're finding out that the Kingsbridge Armory might even be closed two, three days a week just to satisfy those contracts-

MN- Wow. If you ask, how many people on Fordham Road, the person in the street, do you plan to play ice hockey-. So this could be a facility that almost no one in the community uses.

AR- It's one of the big topics of the neighborhood right now.

MN- And then they'll build high rises for hockey players.

AR- You know what, and I- do I have it with me, it's funny you say that because last week, it came to our attention that there are two developers that want to build three twelve-story buildings right next to the armory on Jerome Avenue. You may or may not be aware of Jerome and Kingsbridge where the Social Security office is?

MN- Oh, sure.

AR- It's no longer there. They've torn it down. They've also torn down the Irish bar that was next to there, they've also taken care of the parking lot on that whole avenue.

MN- You say they're planning to build high rises?

AR- Right there.

MN- And has the community board approved it?

AR- Not yet, but we're getting a lot of pressure now from the borough president-

MN- The borough president is a total gentrification, whatever. So you're going to build high rises and the next thing is a new prep school which has a hockey program for all the families moving in. Do any of those private schools, Fieldston, Riverdale, or Horace Mann have hockey?

AR- Teams.

MN- They do.

AR- Teams.

MN- Well, this is a good, disturbing way to end the interview.

AR- I'm sorry-

MN- No, it's good, it gives me something else to organize around. Maybe one of my Urban Studies students will do a senior thesis on the emerging hockey culture. Hockey and gentrification in the Bronx- could be a new senior thesis, Morgan (laughter). We go from white men at Fordham and color blindness to hockey, white men and hockey, it's the perfect transition.

AR- You guys may or may not know this Post Office down on 161st Street and Grand Concourse, that will no longer be there because it's just recently been purchased and the developer is gonna build a very famous fruit store. And I understand the fruit store is famous from another country. That's what they were gonna put-

MN- A fruit store?

AR- Yeah, a fruit stand store.

MN- Is this a- is this gonna be kind of like a Whole Foods?

AR- Yeah, right.

MN- Oh, just what the Bronx needs.

AR- And they were gonna, that's the developer that put up a- it was the other proposal besides the ice hockey.

MN- Okay.

AR- So that was actually why he was able to get the Post Office at 161st Street, because when that came open, he was denied the armory-

MN- Right, okay. Folks, should we wind it up? Thank you very, very much, this was absolutely wonderful and illuminating.

AR- Oh, it was my pleasure.