

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Jack Jacqua
Omega Boys Club-Alive & Free Oral History Project

Interview conducted by
Neil Henry
in 2013

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Jack Jacqua "Jack Jacqua: Omega Boys Club-Alive & Free Oral History Project" conducted by Neil Henry in 2013, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2016.

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Interview #1 October 9, 2013

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01-00:00:02

Henry:

Okay, today is Wednesday, October 9, 2013, and we are meeting in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley with Jack Jacqua, a co-founder of the Omega Boys Club. My name is Neil Henry. This is another in a series of interviews we are conducting with key people in connection with an oral history we are compiling of the club. The setting is an undergraduate media studies seminar I am teaching this semester, in which the students are preparing to conduct interviews with leading alumni of the club. The club is celebrating its twenty-sixth anniversary this year. It was founded in 1987 to help steer at-risk young people from Bay Area inner cities to college educations. It has been remarkably successful in this mission. More than 200 young people have gone on from the Omega Boys Club to earn college degrees, and more than 50 have earned graduate degrees. Many are living productive lives and engaging careers in numerous fields today, and the club itself has become a national model as a social service and education program. Mr. Jacqua grew up in Southern California and started his career as a public school teacher in San Francisco in the 1970s. Today, he spends most of his time in San Francisco, at juvenile hall, and in the court system, where he mentors and ministers to young people caught up in the criminal justice system. From your vantage, what are the key risk factors that determine whether a poor, disadvantaged, inner-city young person will fail in school or run afoul of the law?

01-00:01:29

Jacqua:

You want to give that to me again? You went a little fast there.

01-00:01:33

Henry:

From your vantage, what are the key risk factors that will determine whether a poor, disadvantaged, inner-city young person will fail in school or run afoul of the law?

01-00:01:46

Jacqua:

A young, inner-city, disadvantaged student—first of all, the education process. Going to school—I mean, what is going to school? What does it mean? Does it mean the same to a youngster that is coming from a neighborhood of poverty and environment of hopelessness? Going to public school, the fact of the matter is that there's no basic light on in most cases, in the sense of it's such a struggle to survive in the community, in the house, in the family. For young people, I mean, the youngsters, children, going to school is getting there. It's not safe in the neighborhoods. It's a matter of economic disparity. It's a matter of too much media stuff that indicates there is no value, particularly, of going to school, in the music, on the internet. Bad role models. They don't exist, role models. I don't know if that really answers the question, but it's so difficult for families and young people, and broken families, and violence that exceeds anything that this country has seen in the last—after crack, which kind of brought more violence to the front, anger and

pent-up emotions, and that was in the early eighties. Basically, to get young people to buy into school, higher education, if they're from poor neighborhoods, is extraordinarily difficult.

01-00:03:47

Henry:

But the Omega Club has been successful in turning around some lives. What has been instrumental in getting young people to see that they have potential and that they can lead fruitful and productive lives?

01-00:04:00

Jacqua:

You have to work with the individual. First of all, you have to keep it truthful. You have to tell it real. You have to challenge the young person on what's going on inside. You can look good, but you can feel bad. Live in a world of fashion and fakeness and fraudulence. We live in a kind of fake world, to tell you the truth. A material world. And so in order for one of the young people that I just mentioned, as they become teenagers, to really go forward in a life of education, to go to college, to get a degree, to become whatever they want to become, whether it's business professional or what, the fact of the matter is that they have to know their inner self. We don't learn that in public school, period. The inner self, what's really going on. Your anger, your fear, your pain. I mean, who are you? See, I could ask everybody in the class, and I bet I'd get some funny answers. I'd get some good ones, but I'd get some ones that are pretty screwed-up. But you're here, and you're doing something great, according to family and the culture. Going to college. Wow. But do you know who you are? So we challenge the youngsters to prepare them, not just to go academically, do the work, but to know themselves so they'll be able to go to school and understand they can do anything. They can become whoever they want to become, not just go because somebody wants them to go. We challenge their inner self. That's what we do.

01-00:05:46

Henry:

In your life mentoring and ministering to young people behind bars, what are the main gripes they have about their backgrounds and their lives and conditions in jail?

01-00:05:59

Jacqua:

A lot of them don't have any gripes, really. A lot of them actually are very satisfied with the condition they're in. They've been brainwashed well. But I have to say that one of the biggest myths that exists is a lot of these youngsters, and especially African American teenage males, that they somehow are slow, somehow really aren't very bright, somehow truthfully don't care, somehow they just can't keep up. And it's all a bunch of stuff, because I've found, in decades of work, that it's obvious to me that the smartest, the most incredibly bright and gifted young men—and this would probably extend to all cultures, but I have to speak on African American culture, because they're the ones filling up the jails and the prisons, the males. I have to say that they're the smartest people that I've ever met. Going back to what I said earlier, they haven't been challenged by the environment, the

society, the family, the schools, to succeed educationally, because what is it after they succeed? Hopelessness still? We're looking for answers, all of us. But it's to be challenged. So to answer the question, I think that some people are satisfied, and you have to wake them up. You've got to tell them the truth. You've got to be real. I've been able to do that. I think, throughout Omega, all of us have been able to do that. To go and to wake people up. Not placate them. Not give them some support in their pity party, feeling sorry for themselves. Not patronize anybody. I'm not worried about how you look. I want to know how you feel. I go right there. It turns out, really, they like that. Turns out, when you keep it real with people, in general, people want that and need that. If it hurts their feelings, so what? Because out here, right now in 2013, these young people are fighting to live, to stay alive. So if you hurt somebody's feelings in order for them to stay alive, it's great. That's what we do.

01-00:08:40

Henry:

You were talking earlier about Omega as it exists, and how the world views it as a place where kids are reformed and they're steered toward college educations, and it's got this apparatus that works. But you said that there's another untold story of Omega that's at work in the streets and behind prison walls. Can you elaborate on the untold story?

01-00:09:04

Jacqua:

It's about people getting the message, getting the support, getting the advocacy, getting the love, and going out—not going to college, but staying alive and staying free. Because not everybody goes to college. In the world that I come from, that we're talking about, just to stay out of jail, just to stay alive and to stay free, that is an incredible gift. That's worth two master's degrees to another part of the culture in America. And I'm sure in the world, but I can't personally go there. But I'm just saying, even at the smaller micro—the Bay, in the Bay—in California. Just to stay alive and free. To change. To go into recovery. To go into recovery. To go into a rebirth. To renew themselves. To learn about who they are and what they know they owe, an important part of Omega. So I use many of them as role models, as counselors, in that part of Omega, working in the streets and in the jails and in the prisons, and it's a beautiful situation. Many stay out, many don't. You never give up on anybody. You keep bringing them hope. You keep bringing them education. You keep bringing them knowledge, and you bring them love and opportunity to wake up before they die. A lot of walking dead in the society, especially in the barrios and the hoods. A lot of walking dead. And people, again, are walking dead and looking good. I don't know, off the record, but what the hell is the story about the woman, they just found her body in General Hospital yesterday? I don't know. We don't read those stories much, because I think this was somebody—this is not the class that we expect to be their body found in the back of a hospital. But then again, this lower class, so to speak, economically, that we're talking about, they know the rich people and the—well, if there are any middle-class people left—who buy the

cocaine, and who buy the ecstasy, and who buy the drugs. But we go on with our secrets and just try to stay alive and free. Stay out of incarceration, the biggest business in the state of California. Incarceration of human bodies. Incredible. Incredible. California has more people in prison, I believe—play with the figures and the conversations, but I believe it's something like more than any place its size in the world, right here in California. More young black males go to prison than they go to college. They go to the state pen instead of Penn State. But not by choice. But by, perhaps, what society truthfully wants. I don't know. That's another story.

01-00:12:35

Henry:

The story you alluded to about San Francisco General was about a woman who was admitted to the hospital for an infection, and she was given some medication that left her disoriented, and she disappeared from the hospital. Her family put up posters up and down the street, asking for information about her, because she vanished from the hospital. Then, last night, they found a body in a stairwell, in a fire escape stairwell, and people presume that it's her, that she was just neglected and died. She was middle-class. She was a middle-class woman.

01-00:13:06

Jacqua:

That was what I was alluding to, yeah. Because again, there's many posters in the neighborhoods that we work in relating to stopping the violence and all the other things that go on, but nobody much—the politicians the power brokers—pay much attention to these neighborhoods. They really don't. In the neighborhoods of poverty in this elitist city of San Francisco that we are based in, they don't even wash the streets. They don't even clean the streets. Two thousand thirteen, these so-called liberal politicians running the city, they don't even wash the streets. I don't know. That's where they come from. A lot of pain. A lot of hurt. They love going to funerals. Young people dying all the time. They're being shot for no reason. Shooting each other. Real war going on. Just went to a funeral Monday. Everybody goes to the funeral. Don't go to weddings, because there are none. We don't have weddings. We don't get married. We have baby's mamas after crack. Don't go to baptisms, family reunions. That's weak. Maybe sometimes a graduation. Sometimes a graduation. Once in a while, a graduation. When you have a funeral, the whole town, the whole neighborhood's there. Celebrating death. Hopelessness. That actually is the biggest problem, in my view, is hopelessness. Not drugs. I mean, that's a problem with the whole society, but these young people that I speak of, that we work with, that we educate, or re-educate, the main problem is hopelessness. This society has a great way of putting that message out there in many ways.

01-00:15:24

Henry:

Many of these at-risk young people come from broken homes, in which the father is either absent or nonexistent, and the mother is filled with pressures of trying to take care of the families. How is our society failing these families?

01-00:15:39

Jacqua:

Failing them by not telling the truth. The churches lie. They act like everything's okay. And let's get ready for another world. That's really most all churches, but we're talking about the inner city, communities we're talking about, that we're working with. The whole structure of the family is not there. It's not there. There are no mothers and fathers living together. Oh, occasionally there are. Maybe they're codependent on their drugs, on their own hopelessness. But virtually, you never see fathers. One of the places I go at juvenile hall—I'm at juvenile court every day, for years. Never see fathers. Or sometimes you see a father, and then there's no mother. Single parent. It's not healthy. It's not good. It's messed-up. But everybody acts like it's okay. Well, the mother can raise the kid. Yeah, she can. She can be a successful single parent. But again, the patronizing politicians and power brokers act like that's fine, that's just the way it is. Truthful, that is the way it is. Somebody got to care, and hopefully the young people, whether they go to college or they change their lifestyle, will discover that, and we will have more unions and more commitments. Strong mothers, strong fathers, strong children. Starts in the home. It starts inside of the person. Families are shot to hell. The economics is terrible, especially in this area. Like the middle-class is dissolving. In San Francisco, right now, there's a whole—if you're rich—and excuse me, but predominantly white—you've got a place to go, in one of the five hundred condos that they're building. But poor people, especially poor people of color, cannot live in the city, period, and have a hard time in this land of ours. Those are the people we deal with. People that I work with, people that I listen to and learn from about life. About life. I'm bored going to a party, or a cocktail party, whatever, reception with a bunch of adults, affluent. There's nothing to talk about. Even this morning, I was trying to talk to somebody I eat breakfast with sometime who's one of those people. Nice guy, though. Nice, good people. But I was trying to talk about the money situation in this country, trying to talk about the BART strike. He didn't want to even talk about those subjects. Wanted to talk about something else. About a new car somebody bought. We've got to be real, because the truth, I believe, will set us all free. And middle-class, if there are any left, and rich people, new, young, white people, they're only going to be happier if everybody is free. And I believe that.

01-00:19:05

Henry:

You spend a lot of your time behind bars. If a young person is behind bars, what options does he have? What pragmatic options does he have to turn his life around, or is the system just entirely hopeless?

01-00:19:18

Jacqua:

It's very difficult. First of all, I have to define—I don't know who's listening to this, but prison bars, I believe, is what Mr. Henry is talking about. That's a little joke. Because, actually, I have a good sense of humor. And even now, I see three or four of you enjoying it, but anyway. I just reached in my pocket, also for those people. I just happen to have a letter, I think. Somebody in prison, young man who's getting out soon, and he's feeling hopeless. You can

feel any way you want. That's up to you. It's up to the person. It's very difficult if you're young, and again, you're of color—and I'll say young white people, too. Caucasian. It's the same. But behind the bars, getting out to a society that has no jobs. But I always tell them that it's not about jobs, or it's not about school—although that is important, both of them, and people need to go to school and get higher education, and people need to work and get a job and support themselves or their babies or whatever. But it's what you do after school and what you do after work that gets these youngsters in trouble. It's their habits, it's the people they hang around, it's their lifestyle, it's their attitude, it's the places they go, it's the things that they do. That personal stuff from within. So in order to be a successful person in life and go to college or whatever they're going to do, that's one thing that we do. We teach Omega about being able to survive internally. Stop faking it. How do you feel about what you're doing?

But I don't know. This is not my intention. Happen to have a letter, because I read it last night, recent letter I got. Young man who's actually twenty-seven. He went to prison at twenty. I know him very well. In fact, one of the things we do is keep up with people. I put money on his books. We've communicated through letter and phone. I can't visit him, because I also work in San Quentin, so I can't actually visit him in another prison. But we communicate all the time. He's on his way to get out soon. He has all the opportunities that we give people. I mean, education and things, but we're not giving him—he's got to get his feet on the ground, and he says he'll be home soon, next year. He says, "In all honesty, things on the streets, it's all backwards. Everybody is on some selfish shit." I guess I can cuss. I don't know. I'll take the words out. He says, "Regardless of the seven-and-a-half years I've been down, nothing has changed. If anything, things have changed for the worst and not the best." This is his reality, a brilliant young man. I mean, seriously. A creative, brilliant talent from Oakland, California, which I originally met in the county jail. Says, "Things have changed for the worst. Life waits for no one, and that's fact. Lately, I've been drowned in my own thoughts. A lot has been on my mind. Bouncing out of this hellhole, things for me is ugly. My pockets are flat-broke. I don't got no car, house, money, clothes, females, nothing." Yeah, it's bad, and it sounds bad, and it is bad. Don't get me wrong. He says, "I can go and do what I used to do. Get some no-good hood rats that left me for dead during this time out. Come on, now." But anyway, I could go on. You don't want to hear this, you want to hear me, but you asked the question. This is just one very talented young man who's getting out. We'll help him, I'll help him, Omega will help him, but that's how he feels on a bad day. On a bad day, that's how he feels.

01-00:23:53

Henry:

After seven years, he doesn't feel very well-positioned to take advantage of—

01-00:23:58

Jacqua:

Well, because there's no rehabilitation in prison. The prisons are worse than ever, no matter what the politicians says. Anyway. But it's the hopelessness. Again, goes back to hopelessness. So what do I do? I write him back and tell him, "How can you write me this kind of a conversation? I appreciate your feelings. You're being real. This is what you're feeling. But what the hell's wrong with you? It's the way that you're feeling." I'll take a real hard stand when I write back. "Don't send me this crap. You told me that you've been changing." I know the value of him. I know his inner self. I do as well as anybody. What the hell is this? Want to go in a religious world? I'm not religious at all. I'm very spiritual. But if you want to go in a religious world, I could say, hallelujah, the devil got a hold of the boy. See what I'm talking about? That's what it is. The monster in him came out. We all got a monster. We've got to tame the beast. All of a sudden, for some reason, he's done a very good program in prison, but this was a bad day he wrote me. I guess that's love, right, when you can tell your true feelings? Who wants to read that from anybody? See. Hopelessness. But we've got some pills. Not real pills, but pills for your attitude. Spiritual medication. That's how one person feels who's ready to get out.

01-00:25:38

Henry:

Back in eighty-seven, you and Dr. Marshall and others were facing a crisis that you felt had to be grappled with, and you founded the Omega Boys Club. How have circumstances changed over the past twenty-six years? Are the problems different? Are they the same? Are they bigger? Are they smaller? Are they more intense?

01-00:25:58

Jacqua:

They're more intense. They're worse. On the street, of course, you're talking about. It's not any better. It's not any better at all. It's better for a certain class of society, I guess. It's not better for the youngsters that were at the beginning of what we were going to do. Instead of youngsters, as Dr. Marshall always says, going to jail rather than college—that's worse. At an overall level, it's worse. It's definitely worse. Things are not getting better on the lower end of this society. The violence, the I don't care, the so what, the can't tell me nothing, is there, and it's hot, and it's edgy, and it's frustrated. That's why we have so much violence in the hoods, in the barrios, of America, especially with young black males, African American males. It's nice to be open-minded and liberal and include always everybody and everything, but this problem is primarily one of African American. Hispanic males also have some different types of issues, but it is also basically the sense of hopelessness that drives the large amount of Hispanic males into the prison system as well. But it deals with some other issues. African American males are pretty much ready to be written off. Our president doesn't recognize anything at all about the inner city. It's sad, it's pathetic. His own hometown, supposedly, of Chicago, where the murder rate is off the charts. Last year was a thousand. Mostly young black males who are getting killed every day. We're talking about a war somewhere in another country. What the hell's going on in this country? No

politician—with maybe a few rare exceptions. Great lady right here, I believe, Barbara Lee, is an exception, but it's—nobody cares, sadly, so that means more that that youngster we're dealing with must care. Because, see, the society doesn't care. His outer family doesn't care. His inner family, for the most part, doesn't care. Kind of an unhealthy love exists. What's he to do? What's the young male growing up in the hood, I don't know, what's he to do? It's a question I would ask you all if I had to. What do you expect him to do?

01-00:29:04

Henry:

Got it?

01-00:29:05

Jacqua:

Yeah, I can do this, I think. [background conversation] But anyway, yeah, what is he to do? I don't make excuses for anybody. I think he needs to get off his ass and do something, but he can't do it unless he gets some education, and some hope, and some love, and some understanding. Do anything. A good example of Omega and the part Dr. Marshall plays, and the role of the college, and the miracle of 200 college graduates, most of those males and females came from the same kind of situation. So it all can be done. But it also can be done to wake up, to realize the greatness inside yourself, deal with your anger, fear, and pain, and just be alive and free. Get a job somewhere and raise your family, or just be yourself and be you and do you, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else. That's what we're supposed to be, right? Alive and free. That happens every day. People get sick and tired of going to prison. Sick and tired. Youngsters get sick and tired of going to juvenile hall. Get sick and tired. When you become sick and tired of being sick and tired, then you'll do something good. You against the world. Stop leaning on people. These young men lean on their mothers. Mother love is a little twisted, I feel. It's a little twisted. Not right for me to say. I never carried a kid with me for nine months. But with the population I'm talking about, sometimes the love is protection. It isn't real tough love. That's a problem. Many, many, many problems. Very complicated, but very simple.

01-00:30:55

Henry:

You mentioned Obama not doing very much about the inner cities—

01-00:30:59

Jacqua:

Nothing.

01-00:30:59

Henry:

—particularly in Chicago. There is a recurring theme in American political culture that says that the best way to deal with crime is to put criminals behind the bars and throw away the keys. That philosophy was behind the moves toward mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses over the past couple of decades. What roles have such harsh sentencing guidelines played in the makeup and ministering to the prison population? Have such sentencing laws made the problems worse?

01-00:31:28

Jacqua:

Well, yeah. It's definitely made it worse. I think the whole thing is we're not honest—again, this business of honesty—about drugs. I mean, the whole thing. People got to figure out, this is a class society. It's maybe okay to legalize marijuana. Maybe it is. But it's not okay for the hood and the youngsters in the hood, who become already addicted to hopelessness. They're going to smoke the marijuana anyway, but the fact of the matter, now they can do it legally, there will be more hopelessness. There's a lot of things politicians do. That was a very good question that Neil Henry asked, but now the whole thing is—there's a whole new wave of thought. Now we let everybody out. We won't figure out why people were selling drugs or using drugs. Yeah, you're right, they shouldn't have gone to prison the way they did, but now they're getting out with no job, with no income, with no family, with no house. And now we're feeling guilty as a society, so now we—and economics play a role, too—so now everybody's going out. Now a young person, one of these young men I'm talking about, can go to juvenile hall with a loaded gun, a loaded firearm. And I happen to know he's robbed a lot of folks, but I'm not a snitch. I'm the advocate for him. I'll let him know.

01-00:32:57

Henry:

He goes into juvenile hall with a loaded gun?

01-00:33:00

Jacqua:

Yeah, and gets out. A lot of folks think, somehow, that when you go to juvenile hall, that they're going to give you some punishment. But the fact of the matter, for years, if you get a kid stealing a car, there's no punishment. If you have a kid who's graffiti-ing up the whole neighborhood, there's no punishment. They don't even bring kids that steal cars, that do graffiti, to court anymore. If you just do a petty robbery, they don't even bring you to court. They bring you to court for a loaded gun, in most cases, unless it was used. But in most cases, the thing is dismissed. So yeah, we were all wrong locking everybody up, especially people of color. Overcrowded prisons. Now, in order to get back, we're doing something equally crazy. We're just letting everybody out. So now youngsters growing up, there's no consequence. What the hell is that? There's more gun play and the neighborhoods are worse with the young people. But still, with all of that, a rose does grow through the concrete. God bless Tupac Shakur. That was, to me, kind of a prophet. I really believe that. But anyway, he's somebody to learn from. There's a lot of people in this Bay Area to learn from in the past that never get brought up. Huey Newton. There were a lot of folks that nobody ever talks about. I mean, in my circle. Miracles happen every day. People change every day. You've got to get at them, and you've got to go at them, whether they're behind the walls, or whether they're struggling in high school and just trying to make it to school. You don't stop. You don't give up. You know why? Because young people that I'm speaking about are dying every day. They don't even get a sentence on the channel two news. That something? They don't even recognize it in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. They're just dying. You tell a lot of people that, and they look at you crazy, like I just made it up. I'm a drama queen. I'm trying to

put out something that's totally whacked. Well, they don't want to hear it anyway. But it's right three blocks away from where you are.

Hey, good example. Berkeley, California. I'm just saying, it's just a few blocks away. I didn't say go there and have a party. I just said recognize what's going on, and how you're going to deal with it in your life. How's that affect you? What are you going to do if you're walking down a street and there's a group of six, seven black teenagers walking down in front of you? That's another great question Mr. Henry should ask you someday. Because that's a great question. It used to be, well, if you decide to cross the street and be afraid, you must be some kind of weird racist. Today, if you don't walk across the street, you don't know what's going on. It's a trip, huh? They probably want your phone. They probably want your toys. I don't know. Which, by the way, is another thing. I don't know, I'm off the subject. I'm not off the subject, but. On Market Street, these kids are taking phones and stuff, in San Francisco, all the time. Coming over from the East Bay. Richmond, Pittsburg, Berkeley, Oakland. Get on the BART train. All these things in the media, and they come in, and they have it down good. They go, they steal a phone. That's the big thing. They can take it from a tourist. You see what I'm talking about with somebody? They find the right victim most of the time. They'll take the phone, and they can sell it on Market Street. They can take your iPhone—I don't know anything about technology, but I see that there's some in this room, and I recognize technology. I don't know a thing about it. They can take your phone, go to a certain corner. Somebody going to buy that phone hot. Just take a phone. As of last week, it's \$350. I don't know anything about it. Don't ask me questions about it. But they're getting \$300-350. Get back on the train. Cash money. So sometimes, you need to fear who you're around. But you also need to reach out, sometimes, to who's around you, and begin to understand who else you're walking down Market Street with. Which is good for your soul.

01-00:37:56

Henry:

Is there, in fact, one justice system for the poor and marginalized in American society and in the Bay Area, and another for the middle-class and the wealthy?

01-00:38:04

Jacqua:

Definitely.

01-00:38:05

Henry:

And what specific examples can you give?

01-00:38:08

Jacqua:

Just the whole sentencing. I mean, examples you can get is go and look at the population. County jail, I don't have the statistics here, but I would say it's amazing. San Francisco's got a population of about—which is going down. African American population of San Francisco is under 4 percent. Ten years ago, used to be about 10 percent. There was a major exodus of African Americans from San Francisco. In the county jail right now in San Francisco,

I honestly would say—well, and the female population, which I do a class in, did it yesterday, it continues to be probably 75 percent African American females locked up. What? Doesn't make sense. Like I said, there's 3.8 percent, the latest figure, of African American population in San Francisco. You go to the county jail where there's 100 females, 75 percent are African American. Something wrong with that picture. Male population, it's not that high, but I would say it's over 50 percent. Something's wrong here. Well, because other people get out. Other people know people. People with money—well, it still works. It works. It works in the court room. You buy your lawyer, and your lawyer has political connections, and you get out. Well, poor people can't buy their lawyer. They get whoever is given to them. The old joke is you didn't get Johnnie Cochran. I don't know if you know who Johnnie Cochran was. The guy represented O.J. Simpson. If you don't get Johnnie Cochran, you get Johnnie Smith, he's got some other bad habits of his own, but he'll go into court and pick up a paycheck, because he don't believe that you're telling the truth anyway, and you belong behind bars anyway. Isn't that where you're all going? So that's the way that goes. The system of injustice. Oh, well, yeah. It's just us. That's what they say, the judges, when they take off their robes. It's just us. They go to a party with the politicians. It's just us. So there is justice.

01-00:40:40

Henry:

How significant a role have firearms, and the easy availability of firearms, played in the devastation of the Bay Area's inner cities? How easy is it to get a gun?

01-00:40:51

Jacqua:

I don't know. It's very easy. There's more guns than there are drugs. But where they come from, good question. I should know. I've got an attitude. I act like I know everything. I'm around people that are in that line of work, carrying a firearm. But to answer the question, I have no idea. I know they don't grow on trees, and I also know that the politicians and the police, the DA's office, never brings up the question. So I kind of think maybe they're here on purpose. Maybe they're supposed to be here. Whoever brings them in. Because it's all right. We all have guns and we live in a neighborhood. Just don't bring it to other neighborhoods. God forbid you bring it to the Marina. We're going to have problems. Or God forbid you bring the firearm to the Sunset. Uh-oh. Pacific Heights. Oh, firearm, what? But keep them in Hunters Point, keep them in the Mission around Twenty-Fourth Street. Just distribute them. Kid can get a firearm anytime he wants. And honestly, truthfully, where he got them, I don't know. I don't know, and it's a damn good question ought to be raised. Ain't nobody raising the question. Scared, I guess. Feel there's way more important things. If a few middle-class white kids were being shot in the Marina, just say I'm sure that we'd have the National Guard in town, and hopefully we'll catch those that did the shooting, of course. But we can have two people a day shot in certain areas, and nobody cares. Like I say, it doesn't even get ten seconds on the channel two news.

01-00:42:42

Henry: Have you noticed violence subside with the fall in the crack trade, in the crack epidemic? Or is violence still as prominent as it ever was?

01-00:42:54

Jacqua: That was mis-put-together, I believe. The violence is there, sure. The crime of choice for teenagers, young men, used to be selling drugs. That's not the crime of choice anymore. There's no money in it. Crack is kind of on the back burner. Still exists, but. It's robbing now. Robbery is the number one crime. You see what I'm saying? A lot of these youngsters will rob for money, take iPhones for money. But here's an expression, hurt people—when you've got so much pain and hurt, hurt people hurt people. So I'm convinced they're not just robbing, taking some tourist's phone or some vulnerable person's phone. They might knock them down, they might punch them. That's what they really want to do, because they're so angry. That's scary. That's scary, but it's real. Hurt people hurt people. They hurt. So they don't care who they hurt. Nobody cares about them. I'm in pain, I hurt, so I don't care if you hurt. I don't care if you loss something that you've got and I don't have. I mean, it's not right. But that's what they feel. That's how they think. And yeah, they want the money. See, I don't believe everybody's stealing stuff for money. Nah. Well, money and hurt somebody, that's a good combo for them. And it's sick. I mean, it's wrong. I'm just giving you what it is, what's happening. What I just said to you all, that's the way I would speak to a youngster that just performed that act later today that I see. Same conversation.

01-00:44:41

Henry: Hurt people hurt people.

01-00:44:42

Jacqua: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what you're doing it for. Eff the money. I know you need the money. Yeah, that's right, easy money. That's easy money. See, America, though, sets it all up. Yeah, we have a right to carry our stuff out there. We have a right to do that. We do, we do. That's why you have to understand the total situation. Educate everybody. You've got to understand some people don't have these things. I know you've got to work for it, right? Okay. That's right. What's my opportunity to get a job? I'm not saying they don't want to work. I didn't say they don't want to go to school. But what's the point? Omega has, of course, proven that it can all be done and put together, and it's successful. The way I'm talking is the way we talk.

01-00:45:45

Henry: And you address the hurt?

01-00:45:47

Jacqua: Address the pain.

01-00:45:49

Henry: How best do you—

01-00:45:49

Jacqua:

Talk about the mothers. Yeah, your mother. Of course you love your mother. You always love your mother. Males love their mother in the black community. Love their mother. The mother is always number one, no matter what she's done. She's never been there. Love their mother. That's fine. I give you that at all times. You love her, she loves you. But now you've got to admit that she was not a good mother. She was a terrible mother. See, there's a difference. You love your mother—just an example here—but she was a horrible mother. Now you've got to deal with that, because no one's ever put you on the spot like that. You understand me? Your mom was a damn addict. Your mom wasn't home half the time. Your mama got boyfriends coming in and out the house. What kind of mother you got? I know you love her, though. That's the way I go at these guys. Nobody ever talked to them like that before. They appreciate it. Am I hurting their feelings? Fine. I don't care. I talk that way. I'm head-to-head with the worst young people there are. No one's ever touched me. We all scared in society. I'm not picking on you all. You all cool. Thank you. You all cool. Most of you, a couple of you, don't smile too much, but maybe you don't feel good, I don't know. For the most part, you've got a cool bunch of people here. You all all right. Don't get scared. It's good. It's good. It's all good, it's all good. It's all love.

01-00:47:25

Henry:

What roles do learning about American history and other types of learning, such as developing a sense of spirituality, play in helping lead at-risk young people to better and more fulfilling lives?

01-00:47:36

Jacqua:

Spirituality is the key. People scared of that when I say that, because everybody gets spirituality, religion mixed up. I think the whole thing is spiritual. I'll answer to spiritual. To begin to appreciate and acknowledge yourself. Once you know what you know you owe to others, you can appreciate other people and other cultures and other religions. Take a look at the environment and understand this life, whatever it is, we're dealing with this world and we're dealing with right now. Stop hating. Start understanding. The word "love" is kind of overdone. I think you have to understand yourself. People say you have to love yourself. I don't know. I'm not sure what that means. I think you have to understand yourself. If you really understand yourself, no matter who you are, you will love yourself. You will appreciate yourself. Once you love yourself, you can love others. First you've got to understand yourself. That's what these youngsters need to do. That's the classes we teach, whether it's outside or what we do inside the walls. Do it at San Quentin on Saturdays at prisons. A bunch of lifers. We've got a wonderful group, incredible group. People bring youngsters from all over the Bay Area that are on the edge and troubled. The same conversation, the same theme, the same message. Lifers who've committed themselves to working with youngsters, give them this message. The message is out there. Wake up, people. It's time. Seize the time. Stop just kicking it. Stop just laying back and letting the world go by. Someday you're going to be questioned like me,

maybe. Neil Henry going to come by and give you some questions. That might be scary. [laughter]

01-00:49:37

Henry: Is this a Scared Straight sort of program at San Quentin or is it—

01-00:49:40

Jacqua: No, it's not.

01-00:49:40

Henry: —just a counseling?

01-00:49:42

Jacqua: Just counseling. Tour of the prison. It's mainly counseling. Amazing men. Lifers. They really are the most amazing people I've ever met. I've been doing that for about twenty years. Unbelievable who's behind the walls, alluding to another question of earlier. It's unbelievable who's locked up. Yeah, and there's some bad people locked up, too. There's some horrible people. But there's also some incredible people. And sadly, most of them did some very bad things and had to be locked up to find out their own true self. That's what they had to do. They had to be locked up to find themselves. That's crazy, huh. But it wasn't that they weren't listening out here, but there weren't too many people keeping it real with them out here. So they did what they did. They were victims. Not right. Wrong. But now they know who they are. Lifers who get out of prison in the state of California recidivism rate is less than 5 percent. If you know what I mean, coming back, virtually never, ever happened. If you're down a certain amount of time—

01-00:51:01

Henry: But for everyone else, the recidivism rate is pretty high.

01-00:51:04

Jacqua: Oh, it's very high. Because they don't get any of this in prison, really, with a few exceptions. No programs that—you know.

01-00:51:17

Henry: This fellow who wrote you the letter and expressed his concern about being seven years incarcerated, and then his fears about adapting to a situation that's arguably gotten worse out in the streets, when you meet him, what sort of conversation are you going to have with him? What sort of advice are you going to give him?

01-00:51:40

Jacqua: That he knows better, because he actually knows better. What he's doing is giving up. What he's doing is having a major pity party. He's feeling sorry for himself. That's not good. It's not good. It's not healthy. It's not healthy for anybody, especially, though, for people incarcerated. He's young. This particular young man is extraordinary. He really is. He's run groups. He's run Omega groups inside the county jail. He was in a program in there for a while. He's an amazing, talented young man, who's always been in trouble. In fact,

his story—he had ten brothers and sisters. He grew up in Oakland. They were homeless most of the time. Mom and dad were together, but they were both doing heavy drugs. Crack. This kid had to live in cars. Grew up with all his brothers and sisters, all homeless. Imagine. Too proud to go in a soup line or a food line. That's how he grew up. He made money for the family, for his parents' drug habit, by running around when he's eight, nine years old, robbing and selling—being a runner for other drug guys. Been in jail most of his life, but he's amazing. He's one of the roses that came out the concrete. I guess he's in a relapse mode. I don't know, I just got this and I wanted to read it to a bunch of other young men last night in a group I did. I just would tell him, hey, what the hell—in worse words, you know—what the hell's wrong with you? I don't want to talk about this. What happened to you? I don't get it. Wake up. I don't want to hear all this stuff. I don't want to hear some sob story. Let's go. Wake up. Rise up. That's what I'd tell him. Blah, blah, blah, what the hell are you doing? Giving up already? Institutionalized. You've been telling me for seven years you can't stand being locked up. It's not you. Now you're saying just a whole other thing. The monster got a hold of him, his monster.

01-00:54:08

Henry:

Problem is, it's easy to be pessimistic if there's no job waiting for you, no place to live, no car. It's very easy to be pessimistic.

01-00:54:15

Jacqua:

You've got to create it. You've got to do it. You've got to go with it. Forget the material world. You've got to live. Stay alive and stay free. Do you hear that? You have to stay free. Free! Stay alive. Also, one thing that wasn't mentioned is a lot of these young men that I work with, Omega works with them, do suffer from something that isn't a moneymaker: post-traumatic syndrome disorder. They've seen way too much violence. They've seen their own cousins and their own brothers die in front of them for no reason. They see brains of the person they were with a minute ago, laying on the sidewalk after the gunshots. They see stuff that most of us, I'm sure, have never seen. Certainly wouldn't have seen as a youngster. Might have seen it somewhere else, in another country, on the nightly news. But they see this, and then they go and celebrate the death at the funeral, and just hope and pray, I suppose, that they won't be the next one. Hopelessness. They suffer from some real—and that's the great thing what we give them. Dr. Marshall has a great medical combination, and it all makes sense. It makes sense. It makes total sense. Makes total sense.

01-00:55:47

Henry:

How and why has Omega been successful? Is it because it provides a haven, a safe haven?

01-00:55:55

Jacqua:

It's been successful because we committed. We're all committed. We may have some different opinions on things, but we all are committed. Committed.

Consistent and committed. Consistent and committed. That's deep, that's important. Consistent and committed. People want to help people. They're there today and they're gone tomorrow. The programs here today—"Well, sorry, I ran out of funds, youngster. I won't be able to see you anymore. Hope you have a nice life. Bye." We're in kids' lives and we're out of kids' lives. But we are committed. We don't stop. Omega meetings with Dr. Marshall, and I do on Tuesday nights. Neil was there one evening. We've been doing it every Tuesday night for twenty-six years. I said every Tuesday night. Every Tuesday night for twenty-six years. Not bad, huh? No excuses. Two meetings I have at juvenile. Monday nights, Wednesday nights, I do in juvenile hall. In the twenty-six years, the meeting has gone on. I have always been there for twenty-six years. The meeting has gone on. The few times I haven't been there—by few, I mean five times. I know, it doesn't even sound right. People look at me funny when I tell them, if they ask. "That can't be true." It's true. Maybe gone five, six times. It was going to go on without me. I just happened to be committed. Then I got some control issues, too. I do, I have some control issues.

01-00:57:38

Henry: Control issues?

01-00:57:39

Jacqua: Yes. I have to be there. I'm saying two different things here. Now I'm contradicting myself, really. I feel I have to be there for it to run. However, I know one day I won't be there, and it will run without me, and I understand that. I do. But my heart has a hard time dealing with it. Because I have to control stuff. You know how that is, some of you. You know how it is.

01-00:58:10

Henry: Okay, we're going to change the tape now, and then I'm going to segue—

01-00:58:13

Jacqua: How long is this going here?

01-00:58:15

Henry: I'm going to segue into—

01-00:58:16

Jacqua: Have you tricked me into more than an hour?

01-00:58:18

Henry: Yeah. Just a little bit more. Just a little bit more.

01-00:58:22

Jacqua: I was thinking that for a while, but.

Audio File 2

02-00:00:00

Henry: —for a number of years, but it was restarted by a professor on my faculty at the J school, and some graduate students are working with them.

02-00:00:08

Student: We're ready.

02-00:00:09

Jacqua: Yeah, it's real good. The *San Quentin News*, you're talking about.

02-00:00:11

Henry: The *San Quentin News*, exactly.

02-00:00:12

Jacqua: It's real good, yeah. I noticed, for the last year, it's gotten really better.

02-00:00:18

Henry: So here are a few questions posed to you by students in this class. What is a first step toward recovery for an at-risk youth?

02-00:00:28

Jacqua: First step to recovery is ask for help when you need it, and be consistent. You have to check yourself. If you don't check yourself, you're going to wreck yourself, and find yourself by yourself. If you've fallen off what you're doing, then stop it. If you can't stop falling off yourself, then ask for help. Like any recovery program. You've got to do it yourself. But if you need help, if you can't do it yourself, then you've got to ask somebody for help.

02-00:01:21

Henry: How big of a problem is the challenge of keeping the kids motivated when a partner of theirs is backsliding, getting back into bad habits? Is it difficult to bring morale back up?

02-00:01:34

Jacqua: You mean in a group?

02-00:01:35

Henry: Yeah.

02-00:01:36

Jacqua: The group will do it. I mean, no. People make their own decisions. At some level, yeah, you need support. We need support groups. We have support groups. If you don't want to hear it—I mean, nobody going to beg you. I don't know what age it really is when you really pretty much have your own mind. I'm just trying to say maybe when you're a teenager. I know that'd be debatable, but I would say that—I mean, a teenager. Even younger than that. They know what they're doing. Know there's a right and wrong. Have to be corrected, of course. Guided, of course. Mentored, of course. It's like we have to understand, at some point, they're going to do what they're going to do. It's

probably teenage. I think some people still say, well, you can still control your teenager. I don't know. Every situation is different. But basically, you have to trust these young men we're talking about, which really probably are from, honestly, honestly, truthfully, fifteen to thirty. Eighteen means nothing to us. I'd say fifteen to thirty. It's okay to ask for help. We support everybody, and if you're doing wrong, we tell you you're doing wrong. But then if you go out and keep doing wrong, then you're doing wrong. I don't know. I can't stop you. That's called empowering somebody. And it works. Believe me, it works. I say I've got control issues. That's with my own self, but I'm talking about in other—you've got to—you understand me—do what you've got to do, and if you've got to go out and rob people, this guy comes out of jail and robs somebody, I mean, I'm not giving up on him. But he put his own damn self back there. He's doing it. Tell mothers all the time, "You can't stop your youngster going out, hanging out." You can give him penalties and punishments and tell him, "Don't do it," and all that, of course, of course, of course. Of course. To be honest with you, if it was a loving home, and the home was really strict, and the home had the good discipline and the cultural awareness and the love, the youngster wouldn't want to go out and hang all night with his friends. Whoops. I'm pretty opinionated, huh? Some people wouldn't want to hear that. But it's true.

02-00:04:23

Henry:

How are girls and women in the juvenile justice system treated differently from boys and men? Or are they treated the same?

02-00:04:34

Jacqua:

In a way, they're treated the same, but girls or women have—it's a different population. I love to work with girls and women. So much more forthcoming. They're into feelings. They cry, they get angry, which is great. They're into feelings. They're really beautiful, women in prison. I know that sounds crazy, too, to some people, but they really are. They're treated by groups like what I do differently because they give back way more, so you've got more to work with. You're not just guessing. They're very emotional. But females are part of the problem. I say, strong male, strong woman, strong child. All these damn baby's mamas running around. What the hell's wrong with them? What they need that they didn't get? This is all on the male. What's wrong with the mothers of these kids when they've got four different kids by four different men? What's the problem with men? There's so many problems.

02-00:05:50

Henry:

Well, maybe we can open it up around the table and ask for questions from the students.

02-00:05:56

Jacqua:

That might be fun for a few minutes.

02-00:06:00

Student:

Jack, I had a question for you. At what point do you stop mentoring a particular youth? When are you able to tell that they're taking care of themselves and making positive choices?

02-00:06:14

Jacqua:

Yeah, that's a good question. I'm always there, so to speak. We're always there. It's like family. I'm always there. But you're on your own now. You know what I'm saying. You can walk now. You're not crawling anymore. I don't want to be bothered. I'm not there to hold your hand. I'm not there to wake you up every day. You've got your feet on the ground. I'm there if you need me. You know what's right and wrong. You've been to our sessions, you've heard the conversations. Go ahead on and do what you've got to do.

02-00:06:47

Student:

So if they need help, they'll reach out?

02-00:06:48

Jacqua:

Yeah. Yeah, well, and they do. Don't have to reach out to me. They can reach out to anybody. You know what I'm saying, yeah. It's not a possessive thing. They can reach out to anybody. Yeah, basically, and if you screw up, I'm not going to give up on you. But when I see you, like in the county jail, I might get in your face, or I might not say anything, or I might just say, "What the hell's wrong with you?" Or I might just embrace the person. Maybe that's what they need. To hear that, "It's okay. You're not going a life sentence. You're struggling to be you." It's called empowerment. That's a very important word. Empowerment. Empower yourself. Stop leaning on people. I'll say it again. I don't know why I'm here, I'm saying it. Strong man, strong woman—or strong man, strong significant other, strong woman, strong significant other, strong children. Strong families, strong relationship. We're telling the truth. We're not scared of our anger. That's another thing. Youngsters get angry, intimidate adults. I'm never intimidated. I want kids to get angry. If I'm speaking to a group and they're all silent, all listening, no discipline problems, and I ask, "Does anybody want to say anything?" nobody wants to say anything, I get angry. Right at them. You know, "What the hell's wrong with you? What are you doing? I want an angry person. Is anybody angry in this room?" Is there anybody angry? Put it this way. I'm not running the class, but is there somebody here who actually thinks that a lot of what I'm saying is—"I don't get that guy. What the hell? Think he knows it all." Somebody think that? Come on. I know somebody's thinking it. Challenge me, it's good. I'll love you for that, whatever that's worth.

02-00:08:49

Henry:

Question? Yeah?

02-00:08:50

Student:

I have a question. You were talking about your job in counseling. I was just wondering, how do you balance the catharsis part of it, and how much is catharsis and how much is presenting the youngster with a reality? Because

you were talking about you want them to be angry, you want them to talk about their mothers, but at the same time, you don't want them to be having a pity party. So how do you balance these two?

02-00:09:17

Jacqua:

That's a good question. Just talk. It all works out in the counseling session. You've got to listen to people. I listen. It's hard to do for a lot of adults, to listen. Teachers never want to listen. See what I'm saying. Counselors don't want to listen. You get paid big bucks to be a therapist, just to listen, which is ridiculous. But I think we need to listen to each other. Nah, the pity party. Nah, you can still tell me about your mother, because once you get really talking about it, you get in touch with the anger you do have towards your mother, just as an example. If you're crying about what happened to you when you were little, yeah, that's not a pity party. You're getting the tears out. You're talking about all the bad things that happened in your house, and you're crying. No, but that's healthy. That's good. That's not a pity party. Pity party's when you're doing actions by the—feeling sorry for yourself. It happens, a lot of times. You have so many excuses. You did this because of this. “I didn't have oatmeal for breakfast, so I had to rob McDonald's.” I don't know. Oh, poor thing. There's a lot of people in this business, “Oh, poor baby. Oh, yeah.” Shut up. I don't want to hear that. “Poor baby.” You robbed somebody and you need to get punished for that. I know you didn't have any oatmeal for breakfast. So what? Anybody have oatmeal for breakfast here? No? Nobody mad? Who didn't eat breakfast here? Everybody have something to eat before they came here? Oh, one person. Good. You have one honest person in your class. That's good.

02-00:11:18

Henry:

Go on.

02-00:11:22

Student:

I just want to tell a story, and then maybe you can tell me what you think. But for me, the high school I went to, only 40 percent of our class went to a four-year university. For the rest of the 60 percent, our high school had a career technical program, so it would be like wood shop, automotive. For me, I found my thing in business. We would do little entrepreneurship projects. So for me, I think the perspective I take is that going to college is really a luxury. You have to work so hard for four years and put in so much before you even get a return, and the return you really usually want after graduating is a job, or making money to sustain yourself. For the Omega Boys Club, I know you guys send kids to college, but what about something like the career technical program, or just sending them to career technical schools? Because the kids who were in wood shop, were in automotive, they loved what they did. That was what kept them in school. It wasn't learning about math or science. It was going to wood shop and creating something. I guess—

02-00:12:53

Henry:

Does vocation education—

02-00:12:56

Jacqua: That's a good question.

02-00:13:00

Student: I guess, short-term return, it's like you take two years at a career technical school and get a job. Has Omega Boys Club looked into that?

02-00:13:10

Jacqua: That's a real good question. Yeah, college is not for everybody. It's not an end-all. It really isn't. For those that want to pursue their education—especially with our program, more females have actually done it than males. The reason I'm stuttering a little is because there is a little difference between the approach I have and the approach Dr. Marshall has. So with a lot of the groups and people I work with, networking, we do push a lot of folks to go to the Job Corps, which is real good, and other technical kinds of things. Like you say, job training for construction, or there's some job training programs—Conservation Corps. Yeah, for sure. For sure. A lot of people don't have the real—they're very smart. They don't have the real academic skills to go through all the college and SATs and all that. These guys just got out of prison. Like this guy here is brilliant, really. He really is, who wrote me the letter. I don't know really what he is going to do, to be honest with you, because he doesn't have anything. It's difficult. It's going to be hard for him. Probably try to get a job without a trade school. But yeah, they go to trade school, yeah, yeah, for sure. Some males, yeah, for sure. Yeah, for sure, for sure. Because not everybody goes to college. No, no. In fact, Omega, we learned that early on. We sent a bunch of people on a college tour, and it was crazy, because six out of the eight that we sent initially weren't really—

02-00:15:07

Henry: Prepared?

02-00:15:08

Jacqua: Prepared in any way, shape, or form. College is not just the end-all. Today, it's to stay alive and free, especially the population that we deal with. By the way, there is one question I'm thinking that somebody—the majority of the class is Asian. I'm just thinking, because I haven't mentioned—I mentioned Spanish and black. There were Asians in trouble, too, but the fact of the matter is, San Francisco has a very large Chinese-American population, Chinese population. There's very few kids ever come to juvenile hall. It's a good thing. That's something, really, that somebody could look into someday. Well, why is that? You made me think of it.

02-00:15:55

Student: I have a comment about that, because I actually have an interest in it. I think when we say Asian, there's a separation. There's different groups, I guess, that struggle, and I think what you might be referring to is, I guess, Chinese-Americans may have a larger population that go to college, but there's a large portion of Asians that are Chinese that don't go to college, just because of family structures and immigration. The different type of people that

immigrate. Certain groups, with Asians, they came to America to get away from government oppression, or something was going on, and maybe the people who emigrated from China, they were looking for a better education. They already came from a good enough social class, where they won't fall into gang violence.

02-00:17:03

Jacqua:

But, you know, how come Chinese? That's a good answer, but Chinese kids, specifically. There used to be Vietnamese kids from time to time in juvenile hall. At one time, there was a flux of Cambodian kids in juvenile hall at one time, like ten, twelve years ago, in the Tenderloin. But I would say, right now, today, if I went and got the house list of the ones that are—kids residing in juvenile hall—to be very honest with you, truthfully, I know it pretty good, about ninety kids that are in custody—I go overnight—there may not be any Asian children. Is that because they're not doing any of this crime? I have my opinions, too. But why is that, though? It's a very good question, I think. It's good. But is that real? Is something else politically going on or what?

02-00:18:04

Student:

I have a little question, I'm sorry. The Omega Boys narrative is comparing going to jail with going to college, or going to tech school. There's always an element of leaving where you are right now, as in the place you are right now is not good. So do you fear maybe this narrative could cause the alumni to want to leave their hometowns? Because we have read that a lot of people who have gone to college didn't want to come back, because they feel like they're more comfortable there, or because they don't like their history back home. So is there a potential threat to the neighborhood where, even though Omega Boy has turned out so many good alumni, they may not stay here, and then that would actually cause a deterioration of the neighborhood?

02-00:19:01

Jacqua:

That's a good question. Most kids, though, that go away to college, whoever they are—if they're middle-class, if they're upper-class and white—they all—I think the percentage is—I don't have any percentages to give. My just living understanding is way more than 50 percent from cities leave home and go live somewhere else. I don't think it's normal—that's not the right word. I don't think it's happening too frequently these days. I don't know how many of you live out of the area. If you're coming from other places. You go to Harvard or whatever. I don't know. But they don't go back home. They make their career and their life in another place. So yeah, it does damage—it's a good point. If they all came home and then reached out, but then capitalism gets a hold of them, and then all of a sudden they think they're too good for the neighborhood. Now they've got a ticket out, supposedly. Now they have a ticket out. It's not like they don't want to reach back, but a lot of times, they're scared, so they just go on to other things. What they're looking for materially isn't in the neighborhoods they came from.

02-00:20:20

Henry:

As a rule, do you encourage them to come back to help out?

02-00:20:24

Jacqua:

Oh, I do. I do all the time, but that doesn't, I don't think, happen nearly as much as it should. No. There's a sense of you become college-educated, and now you the woman, you the man. That's the way it kind of goes. If you're interested in social services or something like working with people, you still—it's about the job and the dollar and your relationship with that other person. I don't know, all these factors. America is pretty good at separating people.

02-00:21:02

Student:

Do you feel like maybe the Omega Boys could, in some way, act as a conveyer belt? They churn out the good students and they leave, and then the new troubled youngsters come in, but when they become good, they leave again.

02-00:21:15

Jacqua:

That's a real good concept. It's good. Some come back. But it's a great concept. Yeah, that's good. That's good for future thought. That's a cool question. Never heard it before. But that's good.

02-00:21:31

Student:

I have a question.

02-00:21:32

Jacqua:

Should ask Dr. Marshall that question. Yeah, go.

02-00:21:34

Student:

You talked a lot about tough love and telling these kids—being real with them. Is it different for the younger group? I don't know how young these kids are, but do you approach them in a different way, as opposed to the older kids, or the individuals who are already in prison, who are in their twenties, late twenties?

02-00:21:55

Jacqua:

I would say, from fifteen to thirty, I approach people pretty much the same way. They're out there doing the same crime, hanging on the same corner, smoking the same stuff. You feel me? Popping the same pills, using the same language. They're all the same in the sense that they're all feeling hopeless. So yeah, I pretty much approach them the same way. Teenagers, though, they want to be approached. But see, they have trust as an issue. They don't trust. They don't trust themselves. They don't trust anybody. I don't know, God gave me something, I don't know what. Appreciate it, thank you, mother God. Somehow, I've always been able to communicate on terms—they need tough love. That's what they really need, is tough love. They need to be spoken to with reality, but then again, not everybody can be trusted. They don't trust everybody. Somehow, it's the language, the message, the experience. Pretty much, people trust me. Funny thing, I think about those, it's kind of weird. I'm saying this for myself, I guess.

Neil Henry will like this, somehow, I'm sure. In the late sixties, when I was here in Berkeley, because I came up from LA, by way of New York, LA, and then came up—that's another long story. But anyway, I was in Berkeley in the late sixties, early seventies. I sold fruits and vegetables. An old couple that sold fruits, mainly, but there was vegetables, too. Little stand outside the gate. I was helping them out. I needed some money. I didn't have any money. I was broke, really, so I was helping them out. They gave me five, ten dollars a day. That sounds really crazy, like I'm some real old person. But anyway, I just needed something just to eat, because I was trying to change America, and came to Berkeley to do it. I had a colorful history before that. I won't go into it, but anyway, the situation was there was, I recall, five or six little middle school, early teenage kids. Robbed them and robbed another guy next to us that had a little ice cream stand in those days. Everybody wanted to call. There was no police right there. They just robbed, took the money, or took some of the ice cream. I remember I just went out, started talking to them. Whatever I was saying to them. I can't believe this. I'm thinking of it now because I'm here in Berkeley, but they gave the money back. Or they gave the ice cream back. I remember that. I thought at the time, damn, that was a good job. What was I doing? Why were they listening to me? They don't know me. I'm an older white guy that's come out of here, some hippie stupid so-and-so. I wasn't a hippie, by the way. That's probably what they thought. Why did they listen to me? Then I trip. What I just said a few minutes before that. I think back. Somebody that had no relation with them could do something like that today? I don't think so. Kids steal something, you want to go and talk to this group of young hoodlums or young gangsters. "Come over here. You know you shouldn't do this." They wouldn't listen to anybody. Wouldn't listen to me either, unless they knew me. I couldn't go to another city and have something happen, like in a Wal-Mart or something—sorry, I used the wrong word. Target. I don't think I could get very far, even though I'm good. That was amazing, what happened. In Berkeley. See, I'm connecting. I'm trying to do closure. Not necessarily of the group, but of whatever I'm doing here today. I'm trying to do a closure, like, oh, that's the reason I came, to be reminded of that little story of how great I was when I was so young. Wasn't that a nice story? It was a nice story. That old man and woman, they got their something back. I don't know what they took. Couldn't have taken any vegetables. They must have taken some—

02-00:26:25

Henry:

So did a lightbulb go off in your head to say, huh, I may have a future in this? Because I was instrumental in changing—

02-00:26:33

Jacqua:

No. I've just always been able to talk to people on the street and stuff. It's harder to talk to you all, seriously. I mean, I'm serious. It's all love, but some of you are feeding in on—but some of you aren't. But you know, that's the way my life is, everywhere I go. Talking to groups, going to jail, talking to schools. There's always a few people that connect. That's all I care about.

However, I hate this, “If you touch one life, oh, you can go and do that and touch one life.” Man, if I ever hear that again by somebody, I’ll—all I can do is touch one life, then I’m weak, I need to get out of the profession, I need to go sell vegetables. That’s terrible. If you’re a teacher and you’re teaching in a class, and all you can do is touch one life, you’re very weak. If you’re in baseball and you’re not even hitting a hundred—see what I’m saying? Wouldn’t make any big-league roster with one. No. I’m in it to win it. Logically, in here, if this made any difference today—I mean, I know this is something for some archives or something, but if this made any difference to anybody in here today—I mean, it probably hit home—he can tell me, maybe, later on. Maybe four or five of you really felt this. That’s what I think. And the other three, six—I have nobody in my head, so don’t get scared. Fourteen. I don’t know which five. I can tell a couple of you, for sure. Anyway. So what is it? I was never good at math. That’s why I didn’t go to college. But anyway, fourteen and five, so what’s my point? Is it nine of you—you’re just here. You get an A. Nobody really fell out. You put up with this.

02-00:28:24

Henry:

You’re batting 350. That would put you in the hall of fame.

02-00:28:27

Jacqua:

That’s what I’m talking about. Maybe even this might motivate somebody here, for real, that’s on the same page. Because I don’t know any of you. I don’t know. Of course, of course I can say this, and no disrespect of any kind, but I don’t see a whole lot of males in here, for starters. My brother here, this is a young male, but I don’t know what cultural—what is your culture?

02-00:29:01

Student:

Mexican-American.

02-00:29:01

Jacqua:

Mexican-American. So there’s one person here—I guess I’m {inaudible}—who—in this what I call genocidal behavior, that it’s mainly black males and Hispanic males that are getting locked up in the system. I don’t know, anyway. So where are the others? Why aren’t they in this class? I don’t know. Maybe they’re outside playing football or soccer. I don’t know. But it’s great to be here, though.

02-00:29:29

Henry:

Just one more question.

02-00:29:31

Jacqua:

Yeah, it’s about time.

02-00:29:36

Henry:

The conditions of this interview, which was magnificent, and I thank you for coming, was that I didn’t ask anything about you or your life because you felt it was irrelevant. But I’m going to ask one question about you.

02-00:29:48

Jacqua: One question. Was I hatched or was I—

02-00:29:52

Henry: [laughter] What keeps you going? It's thirty, forty years you've been doing this. What keeps you going? Is it the small joys, the larger joys, the spiritual satisfaction?

02-00:30:04

Jacqua: No, I think it's the commitment, and it's a spiritual commitment, but it's more a commitment to change something. Reach one, teach one. What you know you owe. I want to help folks for real. I give up the material world. I give up a whole lot of things. Honestly, with young people, or people incarcerated, like I say, if you're a college graduate—no disrespect, but let me put it this way. There's a lot of people, my peers, I can't stand them. Or even people in the business, adults. They're so damn boring. They're boring. They have no interest. I don't want to be around them. If it's a Saturday night or—and this is true, years ago. If I got nothing, I'll just go talk to the people that are locked up. I don't need to go out and try to get high and find somebody and what else we do, and try to get known and act crazy. I'm committed to doing something good. Spiritual connection. I call it spiritual, but don't get scared. Spiritual. It's spiritual, that's all. I'm just me. That's it. No big deal. It's no big deal, seriously. I mean, yeah, I've got an ego. I've got an attitude, but it's still no big deal. You can have an ego and attitude, too. And help people, and love people, and embrace people, and understand people, and get along with people. But in order to get along with people, you've got to get along with yourself. In order to understand other cultures, you've got to understand your own culture. It's not all about you. There's no big Is or little yous. We all one. That's how I believe. We all one. I don't know, I really didn't want to come here today, seriously. This guy, unbelievable. He calls me ten times a day for six months, like I can't get rid of the guy. [laughter] So he's got good energy, real good. Good salesperson, and a good teacher, I'm sure. I mean, good professor. I didn't want to come. This really screwed up my schedule. But a few wiser people that I listen to once in a while said, “Oh, you need to come. It's Bancroft Library and Berkeley.” Oh my God. So I made it. It really wasn't easy. I have a schedule in the morning. I'm in court. I feel like I missed something today, which I probably haven't. Anyway, but I came. I'm doing a pity party now. Does anybody recognize it? [laughter] So feel sorry for me, please.

02-00:33:04

Henry: We're certainly glad you came, Jack. Thanks a lot. [applause]

02-00:33:13

Jacqua: And what can I tell you? Thank you.

[End of Interview]