NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

RENEÉ IMPERATO

Interviewer: Matthew Dicken and Andy Torres

Date of Interview: April 29, 2017

Location of Interview: SAGE Midtown, New York

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nypl.org/interviews/renee-imperato-ydy67r

Transcript URL:

Transcribed by Colette Arrand (professional)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #009

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Matthew Dicken: Hello. My name is Matthew Dicken and I'm here with —

Andy Torres: Andy Torres.

Dicken: And we'll be having a conversation with —

Reneé Imperato: Reneé Imperato.

Dicken: For the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. Today is April 29, 2017, and we're recording at SAGE, in Midtown Manhattan. Could you tell us your name, and if you like, your age.

Imperato: My name is Reneé Imperato, I'm 68 years old.

Dicken: And what are your gender pronouns?

Imperato: My gender pronouns are she/her, and I always say they/them/their simply because they're not male, so I can use them as well.

Dicken: But we prefer she/her?

Imperato: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Dicken: [Laughter]. How would you describe your gender?

Imperato: I am a trans woman. I never, even when I knew nothing of us, I could never, ever, like, be like a man. I mean, I was probably first like sort of gender non-conforming, even though I didn't know what that was. Or, that wasn't even the word for it. Um, I couldn't — oh, even when I actually even thought I was male, I detested male bonding.

Dicken: Mm.

Imperato: And if ever I was around a group of men and the bonding started, Reneé evacuated the area. Because to me, the least harmful thing that you can say about male bonding is it's boring. Boring, and boring.

Torres: Sorry, can you elaborate on that a little bit more about male bonding, and you say the least harmful thing?

Imperato: Yeah, what I mean, well, what I mean to say is it's boring to me.

Torres: Okay.
**Imperato:** It’s, you know, the same, I mean, even when I even used to challenge them, I used to tell these grown, adult men, what are you, sixteen? What are you talking about? And then finally I just got tired of doing that. And reflecting on pre-that is, you know, like the term I use, oppressed, really. And that I just, you don’t understand. My inner-self, inside me, refused to allow me to even, like, go along with it. It was like, impossible for me to even make believe or say something, you know? It’s just not in my makeup. It’s just not there, you know why? Because I’m not a man, number one. And besides some other things. So yes, she/her.

**Dicken:** [Laughter]. And I happen to know you were born in New York. If you could talk some more specifically where?

**Imperato:** Actually —

**Dicken:** No, am I wrong?

**Imperato:** No, you’re absolutely correct. In fact, seventeen blocks north of here.

**Dicken:** Wow.

**Imperato:** 44th Street. Uh, my mother had a wig, uh, my mother made wigs and toupees for the theater, and she had a store, uh, on 44th Street, between 5th Avenue and Broadway, and we played stickball, you know? The manhole cover in front of The Belasco Theatre was home plate. Mm.

**Torres:** How has it changed over the years?

**Imperato:** What did you say?

**Torres:** How has it changed over the years.

**Imperato:** Oh, it’s become very — New York has lost its edge. It’s, I hate to say it, it’s not as interesting, uh, as it was, even fifteen, twenty years ago. Which in the depth of history is nothing, fifteen years. And the rapidity of the change. And the worst thing about New York is the diminishing diversity. I don’t just mean LGBTQ, I mean, people of color, people who are, you know what I mean? Um, I think, and that to me is, uh, it’s like ethnic cleansing. It’s like ethnic cleansing. So that’s really how it’s changed. And also, actually I know some people even used to say, you’re the only person I know who is from Times Square. But back in the day, um, when I was young, there were so many SRO hotels, single room occupancies, probably actually Times Square was probably in some ways, in some ways, uh, the most integrated neighborhood, because you had, like, workers and workers of color who worked in hotels, but they still lived in the area. They still lived in those single room occupancy hotels like, you know, oh, the King Edward or the Hotel 123, or the Iroquois, or, I could just rattle off names. Century. And, uh, I’m kind of glad about the youth that I did have. Not the fights, but you know? You know? Because oppression for me began when I was wearing shorts. You get beaten up when I was a kid if you wore shorts. Not in Times Square, but in my mother’s apartment in Brooklyn.
[Phone rings].

**Dicken:** It's okay. What was Times Square like when you were growing up?

**Imperato:** It was what people called Damon Runyon's Broadway. The Broadway of the illustrator Reginald Marsh, if you might be familiar with, um. The Madison Square Garden was at 50th and 8th, uh, my father used to take me to prizefights, you know? Boxing matches. When I say my father, uh, you know, maybe my mother had a lot of — I had more than one father in some ways. Well, they were uncles. My mother was, uh, established her own business in 1936, which for a woman to have their own business in that period of time was revolutionary, practically. And she was the companion of many colorful characters, such as Slimboy Smitty, you know, Ruby Bill, all these people who had kind of like these kind of street names, you know. You know. Jay Jimmy, and I can still picture them now, you know? With their Borsalinos and, uh, the bookies and the tailors and all the really rich characters that abounded in the city. And most of my family was either from Hell's Kitchen, or actually from Greenwich Village, the West Village. Which, back in time, there was many working class people still lived in the Village. Many of them Italian-American, which is what I am.

**Torres:** So your mom had a lot of companion characters. What were your mom, or, what was your mom like?

**Imperato:** My mother, for her generation, was, well, in some ways carried the chains of the patriarchy. My biological father, um, just to show how much biology doesn't mean shit, was actually a fascist. Um, and he actually, from what my stepfather told me, my real father is my stepfather, he'd go into Jewish stores during World War II and do like, sieg heil, beat my mother. My mother did all the work, uh, and um, even when I'm disowned, I don't even like using the name, but just to refer that technically, still my real, legal name is Dorsey. Even that's a phony name. Imperato is actually the most accurate name I have. That's my mother's maiden name. Dorsey was the name of the man who inseminated my mother, I think. Um, perhaps, maybe. And, uh, he was actually not a Dorsey. He played the cornet. He was a musician. And so what he did was he went to court in 1932 to change his name to Dorsey because he tried to play all the people that he was a second cousin of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, who were big band leaders back then, right? So if you think about it, there was nothing real about the name. Now that doesn't mean that it can't be. I just, I'm disowning that person, and even though my mother kept that name, I decided to give it new life. And, um, and so that's why I, uh, I used the name. And, uhh, you know, my mother dumped him sometime before I was actually even born, and, um, he was a gambler and had a lot of heart attacks. He actually died at a race track in Michigan. He was cheering some horse, and boom. And that was exactly one month after JFK was assassinated. I was twelve. Thirteen, maybe. Fourteen. I was fourteen, yes.

**Dicken:** And you heard about it at the time? About the heart attack and his passing?

**Imperato:** Yeah, I actually, you know it's funny, I was at school and my mother called, and then they took me out of my class and said your father died. And you want to know something? I can
actually never even remember meeting the person in person. He would call every New Year's Eve to say Happy New Year, and I would hear this voice, and you know, it really didn't mean much to me.

Dicken: Sure.

Imperato: Now, my stepfather was my real father, and complete opposite of the one who inseminated my mother. However, you know, I think because of traditions, we went to the funeral, which was in, uh, Jackson, Michigan. And it was the first time I ever saw him was, uh, laying down in this plywood coffin. No money. And, uh, meant nothing to me. Not a quarter of a tear did I care. And I really didn't know as much about the person as I did later, but I knew enough. And then I — my mother gave me some of his clothes to wear because — [laughter] — saved her shopping for clothes, you know? That's all gone.

Dicken: Is that coffin a good description of your childhood and family background?

Imperato: Yeah, yeah. That's good.

Dicken: [Laughter]. Um, did you have any nicknames in your youth? Or did those come about later on?

Imperato: Uh, the nicknames I had were not endearing. The F word, and I don't mean “fuck.” Um, so, I mean, I got into fights like almost every day. If I could just sum up my childhood, the irony of this person being [inaudible], I was beaten, um, almost every day because Italian-American Catholic kids who never went to church, where they would have seen me as the one in the choir and altar boy, thought I was Jewish, so they beat me up every day until one day they found out I wasn't. And then I was the greatest person in the world, and I thought there was something weird about this way of thinking. So, um, but my favorite probably nickname was one that was given to me by kids, little kids call me Fancypants. [Laughter].

Dicken: Fancypants.

Imperato: Yeah.

Dicken: How old were you when you got that name?

Imperato: Older! Like in my 40s.

Dicken: [Laughter].

Torres: [Laughter].

Imperato: [Laughter]. Neighbors, you know? Obviously they were not traditional, you know, Wal-Mart trousers, I can tell you that. Well it might have been these! Ha!
Dicken: Can you tell us about what you're wearing today?

Torres: [Laughter].

Imperato: Um, yeah, what am I wearing? I'm wearing, um, you know what, I'm actually wearing, I'm wearing, of course these pants, and they have a little sexy slit in it. And actually the fishnets underneath I got in Patricia Field in, like, 1994 or '95.

Dicken: Wow.

Imperato: Talk about preservation.

Torres: Yeah.

Dicken: Of fishnets.

Imperato: I know. I handle my clothes carefully. That doesn't mean they don't disappear after awhile, but — and one day these will — but I'm just going to let them fall off rather than do anything else.

Torres: Okay. Um, what's a moment you're proud of, going past gender.

Imperato: Proud of. That's, gee, I'm proud to be in the movement, I'm proud to have my history of probably the most I'm proud of is my contribution to fighting bigotry, racism, which, you know, I started in Vietnam, um, that's really where I became an anti-racist person was in the Vietnam War. Uh, to the point where, when I was younger I almost didn't trust a lot of white people I didn't know, because I knew all about the backstabbing and, you know, they talked behind people's backs, something I didn't do. And, uh, you see a world that uh that people who are the victims of racism don't always see, you know? And you know, I mean, I was in the war, came home. One of the first things I did, after I got out of the service in September '71, was actually march with actually this Jewish war veterans, Black Panthers, Worker's World, and we marched on — oh what was the name? Oh, you think it's War on Fascism. You know, what we marched? We marched against a Nazi Ku-Klux Klan rally in Trenton, New Jersey on Halloween Eve, 1971. And I got arrested.

Dicken: Right after you got back.

Imperato: Well, this fascist walked by and talked about us burning in the ovens or being gassed in the showers, and that particular fascist had a cast on, and, uh, I said something like yeah, well, before you're through, you're going to need a lot more than a cast. And then I said, you fucking fascist. And, like, half a dozen cops jumped all over me, and I was arrested for saying the word fuck. And I went to the [inaudible] you know, and they had the trial date, and I went to the ACLU. I was actually a member of the ACLU then. Then. And I went to the ACLU in Newark, you know, to defend me against this public obscenity charge, and, uh, they refused to take my case because they said it's not a free speech issue, it's an issue of obscenity. And I took
my ACLU card in front of them and said, done with you! And then I got another lawyer who
defended me, and the judge, I'll never forget, the judge said, I can understand, you know, that
you're, you know, the volatile emotion of the moment, but that still the obscenity can't be
condoned. And I remember, you know, I was so honest and so, um, what's the word? I was going
to say improvisational, spontaneous! And I said, um, let's see, there was these people talking
about the annihilation of entire races of people, but that's not dramatic, that's not volatile. My
saying one obscenity is. And he said, $100 fine. And I mean, $100 fine in 1971 is like $500, you
know? And that's my story of, uh, getting out of the service and resigning from the American
Civil Liberties Union.

Dicken: Wow. What were you seeing in Vietnam that you credit with making you an anti-racist
person?

Imperato: Pardon?

Dicken: What were you seeing in Vietnam that you credit with making you an anti-racist
person? You said—

Imperato: Genocide. I saw — listen, I wasn't James Bond or, you know, some Angelina Jolie,
you know, spy. I was a courier for military intelligence, which in my branch of the military is
called OSI, Office of Special Investigations. And you saw a war and a world that no one else
much knew, especially here, and just to say that in Vietnam there were more than one reality.
There were people in the bush, there were people in Saigon, there were people who were like,
on vacation in the military, owned restaurants or housed at brothels, you know? So there were
many different realities. Mine was kind of like multiple realities, you know. I could be in Siagon
which is now of course Ho Chi Minh City, or you know, I could be couriering up to Bien Hoa or
Phu Bai, or all these places that, you know, I either flew into or you know, got around in. And
then after that, I, you know, after I came back, the job I really wanted was driving a taxi, because
I had belonged to an organization at the end of my time in the military, which was about
unionizing the military called American Serviceman's Union. So what I wanted to do was
organize. Actually, I was married, and my wife was actually at one point a Black Panther, and I
wanted to fight. I wanted to fight bigotry, I wanted to fight homophobia, I wanted to fight
racism, sexism, misogyny. I wanted to fight all of it, and I still do. And I still will. So that's how I
got a job driving a taxi, which learned to meeting all kinds of people, it sort of awakened certain
senses inside of me, meaning, you know, some of the fabulous street women that I became one
of later on. I wasn't doing sex work then. But started going, I actually started working my taxi
outside infamous clubs —

Dicken: Right.

Imperato: There was no trans, you never really heard transgender then. I mean, it was
legitimate, but mostly the word was drag queens. And when I say drag queens I'm not talking
about someone who performs once a month like Imperial Court, you know, or people who have
their own hairdresser and costume designer, they do actually have that, you know? We had
Woolworths'
Torres: [Laughter].

Dicken: [Laughter].

Imperato: You know, yeah, it's like Dorian Corey, one of the greatest drag queens of all time said, yes, relating to those who have money, because class of course is everything. And Dorian Corey said yeah, we know those who can only acquire. They bought the most beautiful gowns. They bought the most beautiful wigs. And then there was us. They were the acquirers. We were the creators. Never forget that line. As she would often say, if you shoot an arrow and it goes real far, hooray for you. So I started working the Gilded Grape, the G.G. Knickerbocker, the [inaudible] Lounge, the infamous 220 Club, all of which you started to know because people would get in your cab. You've got to remember I'm in my early 20s, and they would take me to these places and then I would like oh yeah, this is cool, I think I'll hang out here and get rides. And before that, I mean, you know, I mean, God, sex was like, you've got to understand, you know, you're in your early, mid-20s, it's the 70s, driving a taxi at night, pre-plague, and then finally at the 220 Club, which was right across from where the Film Forum is now, 220 West Houston. Building is still there, I've actually got pictures of it, um, amazingly, because — and um, the irony of course is, as I pointed out to Yasmin, is that, uh, when Paris Is Burning opened in New York, it opened in the Film Forum, literally right across from where the 220 was. The irony was the 220 kind of closed right around the late 80s. But I had the fondest memories ever, and some of the fondest people ever, many of whom are in Leslie Feinberg's books, you know? I met there, and who worked there too, you know? And we had all kind, you know, you've got to understand. See, I try to tell some people that I identified as a drag queen forever. You know, this idea that somehow if you're a drag queen you're someone that puts on some makeup and lip synchs once — this is, first of all, I can tell you drag queens who identified as drag queens, they wore female clothes day in, day out, 24/7, 365 days a year for 30 years.

Dicken: Right.

Imperato: And I don't want to hear from somebody how it's derogatory. I don't want to hear that, because it was the trans women of color at Stonewall that led that rebellion. Why would I want to now assign this as something derogatory when I know the people who gave their lives to defend that?

Dicken: Yeah, that naming of drag queens, yeah.

Imperato: So, uh, Leslie Feinberg always felt that way, if you read Leslie's work. Um, and uh, there's a great thing about bathroom access with drag queens. And um, but we had lots of challenges. We had people come into that club, and I can tell you this just another thing. If you had some of these — you don't even hear it that much, you actually heard it later, in later generations, and I mean, one time I remember, I remember one person said a drag queen is not a woman. And somebody said that to me, and I think it was the late 90s, you know, maybe the early 2000s. and I said you know what? I'm just reporting history for you, I'm giving you a message, that if you went into the 220 Club and told, I'm not going to mention names.
Dicken: Sure.

Imperato: Or first names. Stormy, Jackie, Monique, Mercedes, told them they weren’t a woman? You were going to the emergency room at St. Vincent’s, you’re not going to be smacked. And in fact, I could say this, you could even, you know, be in danger of your life, you know? And don’t be like one of these you know, asterisk ones, remember the ones with the asterisk next to the T? Oh, I’ve talked to some of them and I think my god, they’d be beaten. They’d be, I mean, I’m sorry, and I’m not saying I want them to be. I’m just saying you can’t be talking like that to people, to sit and just debate something when people have lived their entire lives like that. You know, we were outlaws. Listen, let me tell you something. I was in the trans community in 1974. I never put on a dress until 1989. And you know what? I wasn’t the only one. I mean, I was a lover of trans women, drag queens, for 15 years, while I was married, after I was married, and um, sometimes certain things start to feel different and you start doing pink, really start loving, like, I feel naked unless my nails are painted, I just am. And uh, you know, I mean, I just couldn’t stop once I started. Um, and that was late 80s, like ’90. And I remember, you know, I remember saying my God, I’m in my late 30s, you know, almost 40, why did I wait so long? Well, how the fuck did I know? Right? And now of course I look back and I see people at 75 doing it and I think, well shit. Maybe I shouldn’t complain so much about when I awakened, you know? But I mean, we had, you know what the thing is, the media, when there’s a gay bashing or a trans bashing, they actually get a lot of publicity. But when you fight back, when you bash back the bashers, it’s nowhere. Because to report that is to violate the cliché-ridden, stereotypified image of what we are. So I’ll give you one story. It was a Tuesday night, at the 220. I’m not going to give full names. Blonde Frankie worked the door downstairs. You walked up the stairs to the second floor is where the 220 was. And um, you kind of like, you worked the door, you basically authorized someone to either not come in or come in. And that Tuesday night, they came over from Hell’s Angels headquarters, which is still on 3rd Street, between 1st and 2nd, and they got in, Blonde Frankie shouldn’t have let them in. I’m not going to tell you what happened to Blonde Frankie for doing that. Um, I mean, he’s okay, but his employment was discontinued. When they got upstairs, they proceeded to target, to literally beat the crap out of every drag queen in the club.

Dicken: The Hell’s Angels?

Imperato: The Hell’s Angels. And I mean, there was fights. It wasn’t like people just stood there and took it, but. And, uh, they got out. I always felt bad because I only had one night off a week and it was Tuesday. So I found out about it the next day. I will tell you this, I don’t know who did it. I don’t know. But I will say that a three car caravan, the next night, went to Hell’s Angels headquarters, 339 East 3rd Street, north side of the street in the middle of the block, knocked on the door, whoever it was opened the door and they were told, you come to our club again and we’re coming back, and we’re going to burn this building to the fucking ground. They never came back. The media never tells that story. Because it’s the limp wrist image that they want to sustain. And by the way, I’ve seen this a million times. I’ve seen it in Sheraton Square, I’ve seen cis bigots get their asses fucking kicked, sliced, and diced. Ain’t nothing about that. You
know, you might start breaking the mold, you know? And I actually worked at the 220 for quite a bit a period of time, and, uh, what happened was, you know where the basketball courts are?

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: So, uh, me and Pedro, there’s a McDonalds there. It’s been there quite awhile. And suddenly we saw a ruckus across the hall, and there was, uh, we looked out and there were these white racists beating black basketball players with stickball bats. And me and the DJ in the 220 ran over, and we were outnumbered, but instead — what the funny thing is, so now it was not six against one, it was six against three, that was already like, too much evening out. And um, but the word got back, and um —

Dicken: Got back to 220.

Imperato: Got back to the 220, and you know, my boss who is no longer here, I loved Sally, that was Sally’s club, see. I was in the House of Sally. And I think Sally was trying to convince me to say oh, I’ll just call the police next time, but I was like, fuck them and all that. but I still had the relationship with the 220 after that, but I actually didn’t really work every night. I’d fill in, you know, when somebody didn’t show up, but I wasn’t a regular worker there anymore. That’s okay.

Dicken: What were you doing for work when you were there?

Imperato: I worked either the door or I waited tables most of the time. Served drinks, you know? I loved, you know what, even to this day it was probably my favorite job ever. I mean, we were shot at, people shoot through the front door, you know? I mean, you know, it’s not like it is now, you know? Look, even now, I go outside, I think maybe I’m never coming home again, you know? Maybe I’m going to be killed. And um, I just wanted to say this as a disabled transgender person, a topic that’s barely discussed, um, when the 1997 kind of rolled around, um, and I started becoming compromised physically, that was the worst thing. The worst thing about it was not specifically being in the wheel chair most of the time, or on crutches. It was, I don’t really have much of an ability to defend myself, because before that, I’m telling you, I’ll tell you, I have it now in my purse. I have a big purse in my closet that I used to carry, and inside I used to have an axe.

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: I only never actually had to use it. Displaying it was impressionable.

Torres: [Laughter]. I would imagine.

Dicken: [Laughter].

Imperato: But I mean, there was other ways we used to like, the wig, you have a wig, and you used to buy the straight edge razor blades —
Dicken: Wow.

Imperato: And stick it in the webbing.

Dicken: Wow.

Imperato: Right?

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: By the way, and you had to be careful how you took off your wig. You had to take it —

Torres: Yeah.

Imperato: By what you call the lace underneath, and roll it back. Because you could get a bigot, I've seen it. You fucking freak! My hand! too pennies in a sock? [Sounds imitating a weapon swinging]. Oh yeah, there was a lot of them like that. And don't forget the heels that you could use. Oh god, are you kidding? I mean, you know, you take the street queens, working class street queens, oh, you know you have to fight. You went outside your door, taxi, coin, and you didn't have no cell phones. So you had plenty of coins for phone calls, you know? So you know, it really was a different world. And um, I have no regrets about living it. The irony now is that because my upper body now has been compromised, um, I even have less ability to defend myself than when I first got in the wheelchair, and I now sort of modified my appearance. By the way, that doesn't mean that I was outing suits on, don't get me wrong. But just to say my appearance was more gender non-conforming, even though people use the same pronoun, you know what I mean? Um, because you know, I just didn't want to be killed. And I can cry sometimes that I did that, you know? It makes me feel bad that I did it, because that's when you start to enter the jail cell the size of your body. And I kind of lived in that limbo from '98, maybe until after my father died in '06, '08, '10, you know, around there. Don't get me wrong, I was still doing activities, but um, I was — there was even trans women, I'm just saying, in the Hudson Valley I knew, and I lived upstate and I kind of lived, not like a hermit. That's completely wrong. But I just sort of lived my life. I didn't contribute much to a movement or, I mean, I did some stuff. Don't get me wrong now. And in fact, I'm going by the standards of what I'm doing now, which is like every day, but for most people I was probably doing too much, you know? And then, and now my feeling is, live free or die. And whenever I'm going to die, I'm going to die, but I'm going to die free. This is free. I'm not going to die in jail. And that, I can't tell you, that even though I know there's that risk, I want to feel as free as this. You can't put a price on that. So in that sense, I've probably never been happier in my life.

Dicken: Than? Go ahead.

Imperato: And never been more happier to contribute to all the things that are happening now, our revolution, which as one cis person recognized at that Black Lives Matter conference in
Cleveland last year, where the older, antiquated forces are being overturned in the anti-police brutality movement, anti-racist movement, and um, you know, most people don't know that the leadership of Black Lives Matter is queer women of color and trans women of color, people don't even know that. And gee, I just feel so, like, you know what it is? I can't resolve every social contradiction in the world, but little, tiny bits of difference I feel I can make. And that makes me free. I don't care what the fuck people say or think. Just don't try to kill me. Anything else, roll it off my fucking back. And I think that that's some of the greatest challenge, and believe me, I understand it. I don't think it's easy to get to this point, you know? In fact, there was a word that we used earlier today, and that was, we're fighting ourselves, it was another —

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: Where we are embattled with ourself.

Torres: [Inaudible].

Imperato: We fight inside. There's two of us, but one is not real. The other one is. And —

Dicken: Yeah, you meant the jail of your body. Yeah.

Imperato: Yes. That's exactly what you are. And when I reflect on way in the past, that you could live, personally, a fraudulent life, and when I look back on it, It was just like, um, I stopped being in drag when I became a drag queen. I was in drag before. [Laughter].

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: It's, uh, and I think there's a lot of people who really, you know, do feel that way. And um, but, I was lucky to be guided by, you know, by people like Leslie Feinberg or even Amani Henry, and, you know, all the authors that we even mentioned, some of whom I know better than others, and I like to think that, I always want to learn, and I always want our community to know our history. And, uh, I'm in a closed trans femme group. Which, the last one is Monday. I'm actually not going to it because it's May Day, and I'm going to Union Square because I'm a worker and I celebrate worker's holidays. Trans people are workers. And there was this white trans woman, who —

Dicken: In your group.

Imperato: Oh, I don't like her at all. Ignorant. Is aware of the white privilege and doesn't mind it. A lot of us, we have white privilege, but we don't want it. We don't like it, you know? And we try our best to not take advantage of white privilege. In other words, if I'm standing at the corner of 27th Street and 7th Avenue, and I'm looking for a taxi, and on the corner of 28th Street and 7th Avenue is an African American couple of people hailing a taxi, and I see an empty taxi come down 7th Avenue. They hail the taxi, and the taxi passes them to pick me up? I'm never getting in that fucking cab. And I'll curse the cab driver out. That's what you can do. Now, I
might still benefit from white supremacy because maybe they're around the corner and I didn't see them.

**Dicken:** You don't see them, yeah.

**Imperato:** So even involuntarily, that's how pervasive racism is, you know? But you know, if anything, I try to tell this person, you should read about Stonewall. I come from a little town, that's got nothing to do with me. It's got nothing to do with you? Really? You're sitting here in The Center, which would not exist without Stonewall, in a group, you're in a dress, talking in this group which would not exist because of Stonewall, but you have nothing to do with it? You know what I wanted to do, I mean, obviously I can't, but oh. Oh! My goodness. And you know what, the fight against racism and bigotry is applicable in every community, including this one.

**Dicken:** Yeah.

**Imperato:** And maybe I try to fight it harder in my community than anywhere else, you know? And that's why I always will illustrate the history of the Stonewall Rebellion. And what got me about this girl was kind of like even outing down, [mocking] drag, and I thought, you haven't been on one picket line, you haven't been on one march, you haven't carried one fucking sign, but you like the benefits of us doing it, don't you? I wanted to say, I ain't going to be your bitch, you know? So, but that is rare. Even white racist trans women that I know of don't actually denigrate Stonewall itself, because maybe they're not that stupid, you know? But talk about disheartening, you know? Anyway. Where are we at right now?

**Dicken:** We've got about four minutes left. Our memory on the recorder was short, but we can, I want to — I mean, that metaphor of the taxi and racism I feel like is so apt to your story, because you've seen that from so many sides, right.

**Imperato:** From both sides, yes. Yeah.

**Dicken:** I guess I just wanted to open at the end, maybe Andy if you have a question too, but for any words that you have about that, or about how the movements that you're a part of now, the communities that you have now, are dealing with, or how they're representing trans folks, how trans folks are —

**Imperato:** Let me just say this. Leslie Feinberg, who I met in 1972 in Worker's World party, right? And I will say this, this is a socialist, revolutionary, communist party. That's what it is. Leslie died that way, Leslie was always that way and will want to be remembered that way. I spoke at her memorial, and I will say this: That, um, the party I'm in, and I'm not trying to promote my — I'm just reporting history.

**Dicken:** Yeah.

**Imperato:** Was really the first party in the early 70s to support trans rights. When there were other political organizations that expelled people for being gay let alone trans. I'm not even
Dicken: And centering workers.

Imperato: Yeah. And talking about unifying all people. You know? For instance, I'll tell you this right now, the secretary of my party is trans people. On the secretariat. Young. Like 21, 22. Fuck this ageist shit. And old, right? And you know what? I could be off, but it seems like every time we have a conference, we might be 25%, 30%. I mean, it's just, I can't tell you how, it sounds like I'm embellishing my own life, but I'm not. And btw, just to say that if I can close this way, a cis ally, revolutionary fighter from Amir Abu Jamaal, and prisoner rebellions, went to that conference in Cleveland, and on the question of trans leadership, right? In the movement. Said to other cis people, listen, you better wake up, because this is a revolution in the revolution.

Dicken: And that was at the Black Lives Matter conference in Cleveland.

Imperato: And it was said by a cis ally.

Dicken: Yeah.

Imperato: They told me that the kind of cis ally that, if any of us were in trouble in the street, would come to save our fucking ass before that fucking white trans woman in my fucking group would ever. We should think about that, you know? We should not, you know, I know there was somebody who wrote something about the cis cesspool, and I thought, you know, I'm not going to write off all — what percentage of humanity am I writing off?

Dicken: Right.

Imperato: You know, I'm not going to be that nationalist. I think we all have nationalist streaks. I mean, I was in a place with Christian not too long ago, and Christian said, it's a little too cis for me. And I, you know, we know what that feeling is. But you know what, I tell you this, real cis allies, and I mean ones that carry guns to protect me, to walk me home. I don't feel that way at all. In fact, I feel like I'm with my people, you know? It's just a technicality about expression, you know?

Dicken: We'll leave it there for now, with the words of revolution and liberation.

Imperato: Yeah. Well I'm interviewing next time.

Dicken: [Laughter].
Torres: Absolutely.

Imperato: I was actually, I didn't want to say nothing, now that we're finished I'll say it.

Dicken: Do you want me to stop?

Imperato: I was looking forward to interviewing —

Dicken: [Laughter].