

- **Title:** Gregory Castro
- **Subtitle:** Born in The Dominican Republic to Dominicans parents and at the age of seven was brought to The United States by his father with the hope that coming to this country would open doors and give him and his family more opportunities to get a better education.
- **Interviewer:** Dioni De La Cruz
- **Place of interview:** Lehman College Cafeteria. May 7, 2018 8:31 PM
- **Languages:** English and Spanish
- **Length:** 25:29
- **Description:** Gregory was born in the Dominican Republic where he lived until the age of seven. In 1996 his father brought him to the United States and before that they were living with his grandmother in the Dom. Rep.
- **Speakers:** Dioni D:DD and Gregory Castro: GC

DD: So, like actually we can do this interview however you prefer to do it. if you me to do it in Spanish mostly, that's going to¹ be fine, if you want me to do it in English actually fine too. So, if you would like to introduce your name that is going to be fine for me.

GC: So, Gregory Castro

DD: Okay so, I want to² start asking you, **where are you from?**

GC: I am from the Dominican Republic.

DD: And **At what age did you came here and what was the reason behind that?**

GC: So, I came to the United States when I was seven years old, back in 1996. My father, who had married and had requested us brought us to this country. Yeah, prior to that we were living with my grandmother, who basically took care of us.

DD: **What was the reason behind, why he wanted you to move to this country instead of staying in the Dominican Republic?**

GC: I don't know if it was a question between guardianship, like he wanted us to be with him seen that he was our official guardian, he was our father but then also one of the things that he also always mentioned and always noticed was that coming to this country would be³ opening doors and giving us more opportunities to get a better education, which was repeated ten thousand times [laughter] every day in my household, about becoming a bilingual individual essentially.

DD: Now that you mention like bilingual individuals, **was the language a struggle when you came here?**

¹ Gonna

² Wanna

³ Light stutter

GC: Oh Lord! So, when I came here I knew nothing in English. So, they put me in an ESL classroom. I was supposed to be going to third grade, but they put me into a second-grade class, mmh, into a second-grade class, for the months of May and June, and then I believe the following year in third grade I was also in English as a second language, in ESL classes but I tested out by fourth. I didn't really know the language as much and one of the things that happens was that my stepmother at the time, every time that we came home from school it would be straight up sitting in front of a tv Inglés Sin Barreras⁴, listening to the videos [little interruption] and it was something that we have to constantly do. My siblings who actually live here, were born here, they didn't speak much Spanish, So I had to speak to them English and kind of forced me to have to learn the language hence why, I don't know I also think that age also played a different. Since I was young it was easier for me to learn the language.

DD: So, like how was your experience when you first got here? Well, first how were things back in DR? How do you remember them?

GC: Education was difference.

DD: In what ways?

GC: So, the way that education was over there was set up It was broken up into two schedules certain individuals would go to school in the morning other individuals would go to school in the afternoon. And for me it was, I believe if I'm not mistaken I had the... morning, I had the morning shift. I can't recall at this point, I had the morning, or the afternoon and we would go, we will be let out, everything was taught in Spanish and we had like had, we had Spanish! We learn how to properly speak in the language, how to write in language, there was no specific- I don't recall any other specific language being taught- It was fun! it was fun... It is funny because I was talking to my grandmother the other day, and she told me that when I was younger supposedly I used to help out the teachers a lot, and I wanna⁵ like tell people what to do and I will take like "la regla"⁶, the ruler and just kind of like "not you got to do this, you got to do this," when I was younger.

DD: Is funny now how you are teacher now.

GC: Exactly! and I always wanted to be a teacher. I guess that is has been embedded in me. But it's different when I came to this country. It was a complete different schedule because I had to be in school from morning to the afternoon and we spend most of the day in, in the school it was just, we didn't have that break where we would be able to go home and have lunch or be with our family, It was like no you're stuck in the school for a certain amount of hours, you got to different classes, you take different subjects. Is the same, we learn the same things but for example in history we will learn the history of Dominican Republic not the history of either the word or it was just different. Let me see what else. Yeah, it was different. Being stuck in the school, where not everyone really understood you and you didn't understand them, yeah...

⁴ An English course in the U.S. Since its creation in 1988, thousands of Spanish-speaking people have used it to master written and spoken English.

⁵ Want to

⁶ Ruler

DD: How was it- how would you describe your family background? Like if somebody asked you “how is your family like?” From the point of view of someone that doesn't know anything about Dominicans.

GC: Well, family it's your typical Dominican Family-

GC and DD: *But I don't know*⁷. I mean like⁸

DD: For like the point of view of like, let's say somebody from India, doesn't know anything and has never have an experience with Dominicans at all.

GC: I would say we are the sam- Let me not say the word the same because everyone is different, but we have- my family is my family. It is composed of the same kind of people, my parents my, grandparents, siblings, things of the sort. We're a little bit crazy, but that's just any family. We have our issues. personality-wise, very caring for the most part also very- we're also a part a lot, because you know you're in your element when you're around your family, and you're not. if anyone asked me about my family and they were from a different culture, I would be like “same make up, we just have different believes.” Mmh, I don't know if that makes sense, like the way that you get along with your family are same the I get along with my family. The same things that we believe in, they might be different, I don't think... anything else thought...?

DD: Did you had like any expectations when you were coming here as a kid even though you were seven, you through anything when they told you “oh we are going to the United States? You had like anything going on in your head?

GC: I didn't really have an expectation, I just figured that everything would be so much better. everything will be much glamorous and like be amazing. Like when I first got to this country, I was throughout the whole ride from the airport to White Plains, where I resided. All I did was just look at- ‘cuz⁹ we came/were here night, so all I looked at the lights, and the buildings that were tall as hell, I wasn't used to that kind of environment ‘cuz in Dominican Republic, you see houses, and houses, and houses, and small little Pueblos, that really don't have risen and I was a little astonished and somewhat surprised of just the structures. I didn't really have an expectation I just thought it was going to be different that's all.

DD: Would you go back to live in DR if you-

GC: No, I would not. I would not.

DD: Why not?

GC: So, I came to this country in 96, I went back in-

DD: How many years had you been here now?

⁷ Gregory taking

⁸ Dioni taking

⁹ Because

GC: 22 going on 23.

DD: Any years that you have been back to DR?

GC: I went to the Dominican Republic once in those 20 somewhat years, when I was 12 years old and like seven to eight grade, eight grade. Right after the World Trade had, you know.

DD: 9/11

GC: After 9/11. We went, and We visited family. It was fun, it was great because you know after some time that you don't see the people that you grew up with is nice to see them, but I wouldn't go back to live there because I'm already used to living here. I'm already used to the standard. I'm already used to be- I'm already used to this lifestyle. If I go back to Dominican Republic, I don't know how I'm going to communicate with you know my family, I don't know how I am going to be able to [people around talking] really relate with them 'cause¹⁰ I haven't seen them in so long. Like even now when I'm talking to them on the phone, my grandmother, I'm like "you haven't really seen me grow up, other people have, not you." And then not only that, I know that Dominican Republic is not exactly how I remembered it. Back in 1996 I was an innocent child, who didn't really pay attention to anything that was going on in my surroundings and now I'm like, oh there is all this violence and you can even walk down the street without you know being able to or at least feeling that you're going to be atracado¹¹ or if you're going to be, you know what I mean? so [janitor using vacuum], I don't feel safe going back. And there are other reasons, obviously. No all- my whole family does not know about me, completely. I'm very open about it, but they don't know, and I don't know how they will react¹². And that's another reason.

DD: Yeah, the mentality of people is not the same.

GC: it is completely different. it is completely different. I don't think it is as open as The United States' and as much as the United States has its issues

DD: People has not so much acceptance

GC: They don't have that much acceptance. It is very conventional, very patriarchal, machista¹³ in a sentence, in the fact that you know, you as an individual differ from that social norm you can't really be yourself and express yourself

DD: express

GC: So, it will be very different going back to Dominican Republic. I'm used to living in New York. I love it, it is what it is.

¹⁰ Because

¹¹ To be rob

¹² GC and DD

¹³ Male chauvinist

DD: **what do you do for a living?** Since we mentioned it before but like going specific into it.

GC: So, I am- I started off first with just plain and simple after school programs and you know working with teens but now I am an English teacher 7 through 12 currently teaching at 11 grade an Ela and AP language and composition. As of next fall I should also be able to teach English as second language or other language to speakers of other languages; immigrants who come to this country who don't know the language.

DD: **What college are you going to right now?**

GC: I'm currently a graduate student at Lehman College part of the City University of New York.

DD: **And do you like your job?**

GC: I do. It has its stressors. especially because you're expected to do miraculous things with individuals with who, at the grade level that I'm teaching, they already being exposed to so much and they may not be at the same wavelength as you. I like my job. I like my career, 'cuz it's not just a job it is a career choice that I've made. I love teaching, I wanted to teach obviously as I said earlier since I was young, I belong in a classroom I suppose, I like it, is good and it rips positives things if it is done properly.

DD: Since you're a person that not only has been like in the education system learning from it in New York City, but also teaching from it. **What do you think about like the whole system of education of the whole city?**

GC: It sucks. It doesn't suck per say but in my opinion and depending on where you are being educated, the supports that you get are completely different. I grew up and I was educated in Westchester County, Word its taxes are up higher, and taxpayers don't play with their kids and their education. well now I work in the city and you are dealing with impoverished individuals who, may not come from either a wealthy background or who may just be middle class working individuals we're always driving for the better and then others that are completely out of it. I've experience in some crazy crazy crazy things with certain parents and the education system, how student look at education, how they look at- view education.

DD: **Any experience that you want to share about?**

GC: Well, the school that I'm at right now it's in East Harlem, and The East Harlem is a very diverse community and has a lot of Mexican, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, African Americans, a lot of Middle Eastern individuals, and depending on where people come from their view of education differs so there is not continuity, there's nothing that is consistent throughout. and my kids for example, they don't look at it location as if it is something that they can use later on. it doesn't seem relevant to them. now with everything else that is around they care more about, I don't know, a phone, or social media, or being able to score the next chick, or trying to be the biggest papichulo¹⁴ or the biggest you know- Education doesn't have the same effect that it had before. The system itself is flood because it doesn't really serve people properly, it doesn't serve

¹⁴ Spanish for an attractive man, or a "Handsome daddy"

people properly at all. Like I remember having a working Library. I remember having a working, you know, computer room. Having my accessibility to multiple supports. When I was in high school, my sister was still an English language learner. she's 3 years older than me. When I was in high school she was receiving services, as an English language learner but they were specific, but they were specific places where she could go. Like they were support for her point in at every point and time and people were on top of her, I don't see that happening, all the time. The school that, you know...¹⁵, I was at previously, didn't have a working Library, didn't have the technology that student needed, didn't have people that were constantly or at least consistently aiming at making education something worth for everybody and I think it was the same thing regardless if it is in the Bronx, in the city, if it is in Queens, if it is in- Education does it have the same value and it's because the system also like I said is flood. they tried a lot different thing, I'm like venting right now. this instant rice to put in a lot of efforts in things but they really don't rip anything. They don't really lead to anything. one year you try something, the next year is something different, there's no consistency. So, it all start from the top.

DD: What do you think about the Latino influence in the United States? In general, do you think that. I mean, throughout the years we have known that is something that has grown exponentially-

GC: The population has grown exponentially.

DD: Do you think that the influence is also growing; like it is having a huge impact into everything that has been going on in the country as a whole?

GC: Yes and no the same time. So, from an educational of point of view. The influx of immigrants coming into the country from Latin countries, from Latino and Caribbean countries, they have definitely switch up the way that we look at education, how we approach at the education that we provide for our English Language Learners or for our new commerce. But overall on a wider scale I think that, I don't think the he has to really affect the United States as a whole. Yes, the population has increased. Yes, you see some engagement and some improvement in the services and the opportunities that offer to Latinos in this country but there are still some kind of a stigma about being an immigrant and there's still a lack of education towards Latinos and minority that allows them to- for example if I'm a Latino who regardless if I am in this country legally or illegally, what I do depends on what I'm taught to do and what I'm given value to. So, if I am, if I am told you as an American citizen, resident or otherwise you have the right to do this, you should be able to do this, your Civic Duties are this. There is no Civic Duties for Latinos in this country, hence why we have the people in the office that we have; not really representative of who we are as the people. Get what I'm trying to say?

DD: Yeah.

GC: So, it's like. Yes, it has impacted the United States because the number has changed, any census report would tell you. Latinos are ever-growing in this country, but what were you doing in this country? Yeah, you see people who have careers and professions and are in colleges but what are they doing to change the dynamic in the country?

¹⁵ I used to go to this school, so I know what he is referring to.

DD: No everyone who has a position to actually make a change is actually making it.

GC: Exactly. And once you get into that position, you always have to play politics and you have to be politically correct.

DD: Since you mentioned politics, **do you have any political concerns about...?**

GC: Any political concerns regarding?

DD: Any? In general. Let's say about, the Trump Administration.

GC: It's not so much concerned

DD: Maybe about the midterms election coming up

GC: Honestly, like I said there's a lack of civic duty that's being taught. I remember that one of the biggest things when I was teaching at my previous school was that, my students knew that I was permanent resident and was not a citizen, so I wasn't able to vote. Had I been a citizen of the United States I would not have voted for Trump, because of the ideology, his rants and all this other stuff, and the lack of just appreciation for the individuals coming into this country looking for a better life and have a better future. Do I look for Politics as my- I like to read current events? I know that currently you know we were making strides with North Korea, and we are making strides with, you know, Russia or at least trying to break ties. I know what's going on, but I don't have an opinion about it except the fact that the leader of the nation is not really receptive and at least accepting of anyone coming in, and that definitely has- it plays a big role in how I look at politics. Ask me anything about social, ask me anything about the education, I'm good. Politics I have not say 'cause I still have not say.

DD: That's understandable in a sense. Since, Trump can cause some effect on people

GC: Yes, he can. And he knows how to get out any, any, any, any, controversy, and people continue and allowed him to be the president. How beautiful!

DD: Stupidity is an infection! **Would you like to change anything in terms of your cultural roots?**

GC: Would I like to change anything? like I said earlier I don't think that- first of all Let's talk about 'cuz I know that I say typical Dominican family. Yes, my mother is loud. Yes, my father is like crazy and he's a mujeriego¹⁶. But if I had to change a few things about the culture, I would say is the way that we as Dominicans kinda; there is already a stereotype associate with being Dominican. Like the loud, like the obnoxious, like the mujeriego, like the-But that's not all we are. There are lots of educated Dominicans individuals. There are a lot of educated women, there are kids who don't strive to be the next, you know, rapper, the next but for somewhat reason and I think, I'm kind of lost track of what I was saying, but when it comes down to the way other

¹⁶ Womanizer

perceive us I think we need to work on our image because I think we're focusing too much on the negative and we are allowing people to see the negative rather than being able to showcase the good of the country. You know that Dominican Republic has a lot of folklore, has a lot of history, has a lot, but it's not being showcase. Is not something that people see, they only see the negative. And again, I always turn it back to education. If my Dominican students would look at their history and say "well this is not something that I want to go ahead and have people look at me for, let me see how I change or how I act according to or depending to my circumstance. So that people see that I as a Dominican, I am educated, I am capable, and I will be able to succeed." you know what I mean?

DD: Mmmh¹⁷.

GC: That's one thing. I could change a whole bunch of stuff. The other thing is the expectations, the norms. I know that not just in Dominican Rep. but Worldwide, we still have a very sexist and gender driven, kind of a mentality and like I said earlier patriarchal being. We look at men is being superior and as a man, hooray for me!, but I don't feel superior because as a minority, within the subgroup in the subculture of what it means to be man or a female, it kind of takes away and that mentality that if you are gay, or you are a woman, that you have this duty and that you're lesser or inferior to me, that shouldn't be the case because I'm a human being. And I feel as though Dominicans and any culture that has that this patriarchal, sexist, it should be change. Someway somehow, at least there should be some kind of progress, we're not living in 19- or the 1800s, we are not living in the 1600s. We're not Puritans, we're not pure at all! We. Are. Not. Perfect. So, our imperfections need to be accept it and yeah, I can go on about what I could change but that's what would change for the most part.

DD: Well, I feel like we are mostly done.

GC: We are?

DD: I feel like- I agree with what you said at the end. We're all humans and yeah Latino culture is a lot, is complex and is a lot to change but

GC: But it's not just Latino, I think that we need to take away that

DD: I think we humans all have to work together, and we have to realize that we are all humans regardless of Religion, culture, background, whatever you come from.

GC: But it's never going to happen. Is never going to happen. Who are divisive individuals.

DD: Since the moment that we are born, we are put "Oh, you are Christian. Oh, you are a woman. Oh, you are a female. Oh, you are black. Oh, you are white."

GC: Exactly.

DD & GC: Thank you!

¹⁷ Agreeing

DD: Thank you for allowing me to interview for this project!

GC: It was my pleasure! Thank you so much.