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**Interview with Hank Williams**

**Interviewed by Amaka Okechukwu**

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[Start of recorded material at 00:00]

Amaka Okechukwu: All right.

Hank Williams: As long as you give me some good beats (laughter).

Amaka: No freestyling on us.

Hank: There's some Coltrane in the background.

Amaka: (laughs) Can you state your name?

Hank: I'm Hank Williams.

Amaka: Okay. So, when did you return back to City College?

Hank: I returned to City College in the fall of '97, but fall of '98 was really when I basically returned for good, and I started part-time, and then ended up going full-time about a year or so later.

Amaka: And, what... Can you describe kind of politically how City College was at the time at which you came back?

Hank: Yeah.

Amaka: In terms of student organizations, and just administrative stuff.

Hank: Politically it was... Politically it was fantastic. It was. At that point the movement had gone down a little bit. As you probably learned from other people, the real big period was probably late '94, but more in '95 through about '96 and a half. So, at the time I got back -- particularly the first semester I got back in fall of '97 -- there was a lot of organization, and the [FIG?]. People always worked on multiple things, but the big thing was really -- the big thing was really open admissions, and I won't go into all the details of that, but trying to -- really trying to preserve it in the way that we see it. I mean, technically speaking, City University still uses the language of open admissions, but it means a much different thing than... It means a much different thing than what the original strikers and students fighting for it -- fighting for it originally meant, and if you want, I can go further into that, but you probably have that background.

Amaka: Yeah.

Hank: So, I didn't... So, the first semester that I got back in the fall of '97, I was aware of the stuff going on, but it was one of those things where I was part-time, and working a good bit, and so I was really in the traditional -- the kind of traditional check-in, check-out student, and I didn't get involved. In the fall of '98, I began to get much more heavily involved, and I was recruited into ISO, the International Socialist Organization, and I'm fine with that. You can put that down anywhere. People know who I am and what I've done, and that point I began to get -- began to get much more involved. And really that was when, in terms of our little campus and also the city-wide -- the city-wide student ISO groups, that was one of the core things we were working on, and at that point, there were obviously -- obviously several other groups. There was the City College Coalition -- City College Coalition to Save Open Admissions, or something.

Amaka: Or to Defend the Cuts, or something like that.

Hank: Yeah. Something along those lines. I think those might have been two different groups, and I'd actually have to go back to check the -- check the literature, but yeah. So, we did a little bit of work with them, but partially because of the way ISO operated, which I now realize was sectarian in a lot of ways, and at that point, they did not have very sophisticated analysis in terms of the Black Liberation Movement and things like that. So, we got involved with the open admissions stuff, but it was a little bit of a dual-type thing, because there was the organizational line on one hand, which we were getting, and I was beginning to get more politicized at that point. So I was... So, for the first time I was really beginning to read the theory, but, we understood it in very basic ways, but primarily -- primarily for us -- it was on-campus organizing, and also general organizing around the city, based on the other ISO stuff, and I guess you get a little bit closer into what you're -- what you're primarily interested in. SLAM at City College had actually gone defunct probably about that time. I think '90-- I think '98, it probably still existed in name, but really wasn't -- really wasn't a whole lot more than that.

Amaka: At City College?

Hank: At City College. At Hunter they retained -- they retained the beachhead, but at City College, it was... It had essentially gone defunct, although a lot -- a lot of the older students, including a few -- including a few who were key in SLAM at City College, particularly Brad Seagal, to a lesser extent, Filipe Buchardo, were still around. Brad's still around. [00:05:00] He's real active on Facebook.

Amaka: I interviewed him last week.

Hank: Fantastic. Over -- don't tell me he was here.

Amaka: The phone.

Hank: Okay, over the phone (laughter). I would have been sorry if I missed Brad. He's -- he's a good guy. Yeah. So, I began to get more... So, I began to have a little bit more contact outside of the organization, particularly with Brad. Rob Wallace was another key person at City College. He was -- he was older. He was older than we were because he was a PhD student at that time. He was at the Graduate Center, but his base... His base of research and work was at City. So, he would be around a lot too, and he was very helpful in terms of having institutional memory, and just knowing a lot of stuff about how the system worked, and the dysfunctionality of City College that we didn't, and the Shakur-Morales Center was really kind of a central place on -- on campus at that point. So, maybe too fast-- So, maybe to fast-forward -- fast-forward a little bit, or I guess quite a bit, because you know -- you basically know the back story with what happened with open admissions and all of that sort of thing, and it was -- it was tough, because we were -- we were really -- we were really demoralized on a basic level at that -- about that whole thing, and so it really took... I think it really took -- for us at least at City College -- it took a while for us to get back together. That was also -- that was also one of the big things that... That was actually, I'd have to say, one of the key -- one of the key fault lines -- that drove a lot of folks in our little -- they called them fractions -- in our little fraction at City College out of the organization, because there was basically a -- there was basically a national decision made in Chicago that the two areas of focus were going to be death penalty, and if I remember correctly, (inaudible).

Amaka: ISO's focus?

Hank: Yeah. ISO's focus. I was still -- I was still primarily in ISO at that point, and we had a huge -- we really had a huge -- huge fight over that, because we said this is... We have no problem with working on either one of those things, but we said, "This is what -- this is what the people on the ground, where we are, are interested in. And you have to understand, people grasp very immediately with all the -- all the coded language and everything that they were talking -- they were talking about us not being able -- not supposed to be in school. And that -- that just politicizes people real fast." But, to make a long story short, there was a knockdown, drag-out fight. The leadership in New York kind of struggled with us for months, and essentially took our campus leader. And I don't know what they did with him, but they argued with him over about the course of a weekend, and they finally won him over to their side, and of course the -- of course the organization operated on democratic -- democratic centralism. So, it's like once the -- once the decision comes down, they can struggle against it and all sorts of stuff, but there were... We also felt that it wasn't quite -- the process wasn't quite straightforward, and there were some underhanded tactics -- underhanded tactics that the national and the New York leadership used basically -- basically to win a couple of the key people in our little group over to their side. And the other thing that I should throw out was there was an alternative newspaper at City College called The Messenger, which put out a lot of really radical political stuff. Brad and Rob were -- to a lesser extent Filipe -- were central people in that, and that's what I began to gravitate to after -- after I had left the ISO, which was about '99 -- '99 to 2000. The big... I think the last nail in the coffin was the decision they made to work for the Nader campaign. And it wasn't necessarily that we had problems with Nader, but it's that they had hammered home to us the futility of voting [00:10:00] and voting doesn't mean anything, and then all of a sudden you're telling us not even -- not even we should actually go and organize with the existing greens, because -- because that might have made sense. You might have been able to either recruit people,

or at least politicize them. We were supposed to set up these separate -- separate groups for Nader, which to me -- to me and a lot of us -- just seemed like the most asinine possible -- possible thing you could do. So, I was floating politically, and there wasn't really quite that much... There wasn't really a whole lot of organization on the campus -- on City College campus at that point. I would like to say that it was sort of a general low point around CUNY, but that may be going a little further than I really know, but in terms -- in terms of what we had, The Messenger was really our primary vehicle of politics. And the politics were kind of non-sectarian socialist, really following along Brad's and Rob's politics. I had some. Not surprisingly I had some Trotskyist tendencies, but -- but that was there. The other thing that I didn't mention was that there was always -- there was always sort of a poll around black studies at City College around Doctor Jeffries. And I really had a -- a nice way to put it would be unsophisticated -- probably more accurate description would be somewhat infantile understanding of nationalism and the various strands of it -- various strands of it at that point, but I had fairly good relations with Doctor J, because I had taken -- I had taken his class years ago. And I was a real -- a really profound, moving experience in a lot of ways, once you got over his unconventional style and that sort of deal. A lot of people couldn't handle that. But the big -- the next big -- probably the next big upsurge really happened around -- really happened after September 11th, 2001, and immediately, we knew -- we knew exactly what that meant, and all the groups on campus began organizing. The ISO had actually reformed. They had reformed. There was a lot of friction between the ISO and some of the other independent groups around. I should also mention League for Revolutionary Party had -- and still does have some people up there, and relationships were so-so. But at that point I was still primarily connected to The Messenger and to the Shakur-Morales Center, and my politics were a little bit -- were a little bit in flux. And that was probably about the time, or maybe a little bit after that, I was -- I decided to join Freedom Road Socialist Organization. But after September -- September 11th, the big thing -- the big thing that came up, we, like a whole lot of other people, set up an anti-war coalition, and it was -- it was truly -- it was truly that. I mean, the first -- the first meeting we had, we just put up -- of course, this is 2000, so nobody's using the Internet -- no Facebook -- we just put up a butt-load of flyers, and just flyer'd the fuck out of the campus.

Amaka: So was (inaudible) coalition or is this SLAM, or is this...

Hank: This was not SLAM yet. It was basically a coalition of... Sorry. Yeah. In terms of getting the coalition started, I forget who it was, but it was probably -- probably Bill Crane in the psychology department, and the faculty PSC, maybe help initial teach-in, and then just a bunch of us, because we knew -- we knew each other from the open-admission struggle. So, myself, Rob, a couple of the other people associated around The Messenger, and probably -- most likely a couple of the LRP people -- League for Revolutionary Party people. We just called -- we just called a meeting to say, "Do you want to organize against?" -- we had no idea what was coming, but we knew maybe shit was going to be... It was going to be coming down. Like six [00:15:00] -- like 60 -- like 50 or 60 people showed up in Shakur-Morales Center, which I remember pretty clearly, because literally you could not get anybody else --

Amaka: In the room.

Hank: -- yeah -- anybody else in the room, and, so -- so in about the space of a week to two weeks, we actually had not only a functional, but a pretty -- a pretty active anti-war coalition. And by that I mean you had a couple people from student government, even a couple folks who were center -- kind of center-left, or even slightly right leaning. We had people from The Messenger. ISO had quite a few people in there. LRP had people in there. Obviously Muslim Students Organization had a couple people there. I mean, hell, we actually had representation from the French Club. We ended up -- we ended up having a few problems with them later on, because their -- their leader was a good guy, but sort of non-- non-sectarian Jewish. And we had -- so, we ended up having a little bit of friction over Zionism and the Palestinians, but just to give you an idea of how broad a coalition this was, and that was -- that was sort of a primary -- and that was kind of my primary vehicle along with The Messenger until -- until -- until about spring 2002. And, so, at that point, I began... So, one of the things that happened -- one of the things that happened after I left -- after I left ISO and joined -- and joined Freedom Road is I was beginning to think, "Okay. What's my area of work going to be?" In terms of being on campus -- in terms of student organizing, and what are we going -- what are we going to do? As -- as the nature of ad-hoc coalitions are, it -- it started with a lot energy and we did a lot of really great actions, both on campus and off. We pretty famously got attacked by The New York Post for one of our teach-ins. It actually put them on -- it actually put it on the front page, and then it had this big two-page spread in the middle, which called out -- I've still got it at home -- but it called out several students. It called out Professor Samad-Matias, who is actually still up in black studies, and that was bad, because there was some big -- you just couldn't believe the really awful combination of racist -- racist, sexist -- the thing that really shocked me was extremely sexually demeaning shit people left on her voicemail. I heard -- I heard -- I heard some of it, and a lot of us were wondering, "What do we need to do to provide security for her?" Because we -- you never really know a lot of these folks are just talking loud because they can. Yeah. You never know, and fortunately

nothing happened, but one of the things I got out of that is I began to think, "Okay. Well, what do we actually need to do in terms of capturing some of this energy and trying to channel into a slightly longer movement?" At that time -- of course, at that time I had no idea that it would last an entire decade, even though Bush -- even though Bush was saying it was going to last the rest of our lives. We thought that was just hyperbole, but well...

Amaka: (laughs) No.

Hank: Yeah. So... But, basically I started looking around, and after having gotten out of ISO, I began to -- I began to have a lot more connection with the folks down at Hunter, and Hunter SLAM. And they formed a very important at that point, because they had -- number one -- they were organized -- two -- they had protocol in place -- three -- they had resources, not just -- partially through student government, but also they had people who were real -- who were real serious, trained organizers, and knew how to run campaigns, and they looked good. It's like, we went down to -- we chartered one bus down to a Mumia rally, and we got down there, and Hunter SLAM had like ten buses, or something insane, [00:20:00] because they were rolling like that at that point. And just on a personal level, I began to -- I liked a lot people there, because you could go down there, and we had absolutely no resources at all -- I mean, period. The Club got 60-- it got something insane, like 200 dollars a semester, maybe, but you could go down there, and they'd be like, "What do you need? Do you need flyers? Here. Sit down -- sit down for ten minutes. We'll give you 300 flyers." Boom, just like that. They also had -- ran internal trainings, and things like that, and they would invite people down -- people down to do so. It was a good -- so it was a good example of using the resources not just internally but also having a broader outlook of: "Okay. We understand what we have here. So, what do we need to do to be -- sort of be a spark for people elsewhere, and help them?" So, as I was thinking about what are we going to do at City College and The Messenger newspaper is still going well. We're bringing people in, but you'd always get people in who wanted to get to -- wanted to even do some political action, or doing something else a little bit more than what you can do when you're primary vehicle is not really an organization, but a newspaper. And the lines were beginning to get a little blurred and we didn't really have -- there was certain stuff that we just plain wouldn't run, but the newspaper didn't really have a very clearly defined politics or political line, because for a newspaper, you don't really need to... I shouldn't say you don't really don't need to do that, but at our -- where we were, we didn't really feel the need to sit down and actually hash a lot of that stuff out. So, I began -- I began talking to -- primarily to Chris Gunderson, who was down there, and I don't know -- I don't exactly -- exactly know why, but he might have been the person who was probably assigned to be a liaison with us or something like that. And I began asking him, "Well, what can -- could we do this at City College?" Because it made -- it made sense, and it wasn't -- and understand. I like the people there, but it wasn't -- it wasn't an emotional decision. I mean, I sat down, and I read through their ten-point program, and I saw the way -- and I also saw the way they operated on a political level, and I said, "This is -- there's no need to reinvent the wheel. This is a really good model for what we need -- for what we need to do. I agree -- I agree with the points. I actually still do. I think they were really ingeniously written, because it was written in a way that it could... They -- I think they realized what they were doing in terms of who was coming in and where students are at that stage of their lives. So, it was the type of thing where the influence was definitely -- and it kind of morphed into the women of -- women of color thing at Hunter -- but it was also done in a way that it was a big -- a big tent. And Sabrine Hamad was actually the one who walked me through that little piece of it, and she said, "Well, some people..." She said, "We are nationalists," at least the Hamad sisters, because they come out of the Palestinian experience, and they're like, "Listen, we can talk about all that stuff later. We don't want to have capitalism, but our people need a state. Otherwise we're just going to be wiped out." But it was a big -- it was sort of a big enough tent, and that particularly point was written well enough that it could accommodate the nationalists -- both the Palestinian and some of the -- some of the revolutionary black nationalists who were in the organization. It could accommodate socialists, and it could even accommodate some of the folks with anarchist tendencies, although you have to realize at that point, my assessment would be that anarchism was not -- at least in the key movement and urban school settings like ours. Anarchism did not really have the hold that it does right now, because that's not the political tradition you look to. You generally -- you generally look to Malcom and that sort of thing. So, I know there were people floating around, [00:25:00] but that wasn't -- partially -- probably most notably my beautiful brother [Kizembe?], but that wasn't the primary tradition, but at any rate, it was written to -- with an understanding that if your primary identification is going to be as key students and students of color, that that was probably not... We could -- we could basically -- we could basically move ahead on a unified basis without having to sort out what the exact mechanism was going to be to take capitalism down, and from my estimation it worked. So, I had a lot of talks with Chris, and -- or at least a few talks in the spring. Over the summer of 2002, I had quite a few -- quite a few more, and I finally said, "Listen, let's -- I want to do this." So, in the fall we started -- we started to go through the process, and we had some meetings with -- we had some meetings with their -- with their steering committee. It did not universally -- universally go well, because there were a lot of questions -- there were a lot of questions about me, and to be real honest, it was primarily

myself and -- I put out Filipe's name at that point, but he -- he's a good guy. He was also kind of scatter-brained at that point too. So, he'd be like, "Yeah. Yeah. Let's do that." Whatever. He would just kind of go along with it, but he wasn't the type of cat you could really -- you could really count on to do solid political work, or always be there. So there was -- probably a little bit of over statement in terms of the amount of interest or the core people, and they obviously -- and they also -- and I would say, meaning the Hunter people, and quite rightfully were asking serious questions about this black dude from City College, particularly -- particularly because of their very concrete experience. City and Hunter are much different places. The historical circumstances of the schools are different. The class composition at that point at least was slightly different. Where from City you had people who were -- you had folks who were a little bit closer to the experience than being off -- than being off the block, or coming through real rough settings. So, suffice to say, it's like the -- the machismo, and stuff like that, had been very heavily represented in the movement. Also, just in terms of some of the very practical stuff that you have to do in case -- if you want to do a building shutdown, you have to -- even the sisters in the movement -- have to have to a certain extent sort of military-type personality. Otherwise it's not going -- it's not going to work, and that's just from a tactical standpoint. Strategically, obviously the politics have to be much different if you want to undo things, but at any rate. So they had -- so they had memories of that, and they kind of -- they kind of knew me from doing stuff. And I think some of them liked me and trusted me, but some of them were real skeptical, and there were also big questions, and a big debate, which I don't think Hunter ever fully resolved in terms of: "Okay. What's the -- what's the relationships going to be in terms of organizing just at Hunter, or trying to spread elsewhere?" And my main argument -- my main point and argument to them is: "Listen, it's like you look at your points of unity. So, if -- if this -- if this is what you really want -- what you want and what you're trying to do, you can't do that just at Hunter. I mean, you can, but that's not going to -- that's not going to undo all this stuff you're talking about. We need to do this and spread this everywhere we can." And, to make a long story short, that ended up... They were split on the decision, but that -- the folks who supported us doing it ended up winning out.

Amaka: Do you remember who was in the room during that conversation?

Hank: I can't tell you exactly. I know for sure Chris was. The Hamads were. [00:30:00] Most likely -- most likely Sabrina -- most likely Sabrina and Suzanne. When I say the Hamads that's basically who I mean. Suheir had -- Suheir had kind of passed on by then because she was a little bit older. Quintin Walcott may or may not have been there, and I believe...

Amaka: He was part of SLAM at Hunter?

Hank: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's actually where I first met him. He's still a real fun guy.

Amaka: I didn't know that.

Hank: Most likely Tameka, and I can't remember -- I can't remember who else.

Amaka: Okay. That's fine.

Hank: I think the Hamads were -- I think the Hamads were kind of split. I think Sabrina was a little bit more -- was a little bit more circumspect to what we were doing. Suzanne was -- Suzanne was a good bit -- was a good bit more supportive, and thought the project -- thought the project was good, and I can't -- I don't know exactly... I got a little bit more of the internal talk from Chris Day, but Chris -- Chris was definitely the main person -- yeah -- the main person supporting it. So, basically I got back to City College, and it was one of those "be careful of what you wish for" type things, because all of a sudden, it's like, "Okay. Well, I have to -- you have to -- you got what you want, but now we have to build this organization, and now it's like -- it's put up or shut up time," and I really didn't have -- didn't have a whole lot of people. It was really myself, Filipe -- I could count on Filipe to come and do stuff, but he wasn't really going to be sitting down and organizing, and so at first, we just did up a whole bunch of flyers. I remember because Eric -- Eric [O'Dell?] actually -- actually designed it -- designed it for us, and things went... So, administratively, it was a graduate club at first, because I was a graduate student at that point. So, administratively, that's how we registered it, which was actually good because you got more money, and you had to do a whole lot less for it. So...

Amaka: What semester was this? So, this was...

Hank: Fall of 2002.

Amaka: Okay.

Hank: So, we were officially -- so we were officially rolling, and started really -- and started really slowly at first, because at that point, it was still important, but people didn't -- people didn't really want to do stuff -- do stuff around the war. They're kind like, "We got beat there." Whatever. Iraq's been -- Iraq's been conquered, and yeah, let's move on, but probably one of the -- one of the key things, or I would say the key thing was recruiting [Rodolfo Leiton?]. He had been working with us with The Messenger, and that was -- it was probably -- it was probably about spring -- probably about spring -- late-fall 2002, spring 2003 that Rodolfo got recruited. There were -- there were a couple of other people -- couple of other people who didn't -- didn't really last that long, but Rodolfo --

Rodolfo was key. He also -- he was the one, although this would probably come a little later. This would probably come in spring '03, or fall '03, but he also recruited Sydney Jordan Cooley, and Lydia Shestopalova, and that began to -- with that we began to really gain -- gain a little bit of traction, because there were -- there were kind of limits what to -- what I could do. One: because I was a graduate student, I was -- I was little bit -- I was a little bit older, so there was that sort of disconnect, but the bigger thing is when you're not taking... It's just like anything else. You really have to be immersed with the masses, and at that point I wasn't -- I wasn't taking undergraduate courses anymore. So, I wasn't going through the experience of being with people in classes and obviously that's a natural way to kind of recruit people. So, we could set up literature tables and things like that, but it wasn't the same. I didn't have quite that connection with folks, but Rodolfo did, and particularly once he got Sydney and Lydia [00:35:00] on board, I think probably the other way around -- Lydia... He recruited Lydia first, and I think Sydney came a little bit later on. Then we began to -- we began to gain some steam, and at that point we began to -- we began to get a little bit of an identity and be able to differentiate ourselves from Hunter a little bit, because at first -- at first we really had no resources at all. So, we would literally just bring their propaganda stuff up and do a very crude... When I say "cut and paste", I mean back in the days when you really would cut and paste. We would take their stuff and we would cut and paste our contact info down at the bottom, and white it out to try and get rid of the lines, and we'd run that off, and fortunately Rodolfo had graphics skills. So, at that point we were able to start putting out our own stuff, and we still -- and we did some -- we did some studies -- we did some studies with Hunter. Hunter was real key in terms of us getting up and running. We were leaning on them quite a lot early on for things like the structure of recruitment studies, and it was -- it was really good, because as you already know, they were -- they were really good at institutionalizing stuff. So, yeah. "You need to do a study on CUNY? Here you go." That's -- this -- this is your Hunter-CUNY study. These are readings. These are talk points. Boom, all that sort of thing. They would run things down there too. So, that was good, but we still had the task of figuring out what it's going to look like at City College, and I think that's the type of thing with any -- with any organization. There's a connection. You have the connection in terms of what principles you're organizing around, but in the end, you've got to figure what -- you've got to figure out what's important to the people you're with every single day, and so we began to... We started to do that. There were -- and with us -- with us, one of the -- I'd say one of the key things we focused on, which may have been -- in retrospect may have been a good and bad thing for the movement is the one thing -- the one thing we decided up front is, "Okay. We really -- we have to deal with the gender patriarchy and machismo thing like head on. We got to do it." Number one, because the Hunter people had kind of taken a leap of faith with us, and two, the one thing we got from our analysis from the earlier stuff that had gone on at City is that -- their -- their... I don't want to put it out context. There were reasons people acted the way they did. Part of it is because some of the Dominican cats came out of some incredibly heavy repression in the Dominican Republic. I don't know if [Eudonis?] will ever -- will talk to you about it at this point.

Amaka: His assistant said she'll let me know.

Hank: Yeah. But maybe even off the record, there other folks which we could probably connect you to. Actually Mark Torres would be good for you to talk to, and he'd -- he'd talk. He's not afraid (laughs). I don't want to imply that [Eudonis?] is afraid. He's a good guy too --

Amaka: I know.

Hank: -- but, they had come out of some really, really heavy -- heavy political repression. So, part of it was they had that mind-- they had kind of a survival-type mindset, too, of any opposition. They're just going to -- they're just going to crush it. But, our analysis was basically that, "Listen, the composition of the school is changing." Even at that point, City College was probably 65 percent female, and so we also saw that obviously that has to -- that's going to limit what we can do, and in my case partially it was very much person-- nexus of the personal and the political-type thing. I had met -- I had Michelle Wallace, and I had gone and sought out and taken -- taken classes with Jill Nelson [00:40:00], and all that sort of deal, and we're like, "We're going to -- we're just going to do this. We're going to do -- we're going to sit down. We're going to do studies on it. We're going to very positively try to -- try to -- going to very positively going to change our practice," and the sisters at Hunter were really good with that, particularly Suzanne, and I'd say Tameka -- probably Tameka also. Other folks I can't -- can't remember right now, but they were -- put up -- to slightly lesser extent [Sassa?] Garcia, but she didn't... It's funny because we're pretty good friends now, but she didn't take any BS at that point, which I think was -- which I think was a good thing. So, we realized that, one... So, part of it was taking their leadership, but the other part was seriously dealing with what we had to deal with up there. So, I say -- I say all of that, and the reason I say it might be double-edged sword. One of the things I didn't understand -- I didn't -- I didn't fully understand the changes that were going through at City College at that point in terms of the high-level stuff, and the strategic plan they had, which we can now see. And that was the point where big money started going into City College. And when I mean big money, I mean a couple years later, Andrew Grove gives them 60 million dollars -- the Grove School of Engineering -- 60

million dollars. Even to Harvard that would be a lot of money. To City College and CUNY, that's huge. So, I didn't -- so one of the things that I did, which in retrospect was a mistake, I vastly overstated -- vastly overestimated the strength that oppressed nationality movements, particularly -- particularly black students had at the school, because in hindsight it was a typical mistake, because I looked at it. And I said, "Well, black students control -- control student government historically, and they still do control one of the newspapers called The Paper. There was a student media outlet, same TV. They're still up there, although not very active. They were controlled by black students. The student radio station, WCCR, was controlled by black students, controlled undergraduate and graduate student government, and we had quite a few black administrators. And in terms of -- in terms of them that's representation politics at its very basic level, but I basically looked at that and said, "Well, we don't really -- we don't really have to worry too much about that, or address it." Because there was also -- there was also a club aligned around Doctor Jeffries and the Black Studies Department called Saint (inaudible) Roots. And it was run by a really charismatic brother, but again, we didn't really do our proper analysis and it turned out that they -- they weren't really anywhere near as strong as we thought they were. And they ended up kind of collapsing, but the reason why I say it was a mistake was because we didn't -- we didn't really -- we essentially didn't think we had to -- we had to deal with that. We were like, "We'll -- we'll definitely ally with -- we'll definitely ally with all these -- with all these organizations, but primarily they got it," but within a couple semesters, it's like student government was taken over, and a lot of the other -- the black student organizations faltered really fast.

Amaka: So, when you say the student government was taken over, do you mean that white students took it over, or...  
Hank: Yeah. And this was about the same time that CUNY -- that CUNY instituted the honors college. So, there was a big -- there was a big shift in class and racial composition. We now know that the black student population went down ten percent across -- across the board. At that point, you could see it happening, but they hadn't crunched enough of the data, and you didn't have the long-term type plan -- type plan going on yet, and I bring this up in context of SLAM, because we -- that's the one thing where I think we -- where I think we failed. I think we did a very good job. I guess that's not up for me to decide [00:45:00], but I think we -- I think we made some strides in terms of dealing with -- in terms of dealing with the patriarchy, in terms of dealing with the gender oppression, and it was -- I think on that level it was fairly successful for a lot of us on a personal level. If you looked at the brother Filipe that I told you about, you wouldn't -- you wouldn't recognize him. He would be -- he'd be at the point where -- in meetings -- he would be bringing up issues in terms of, "Well, how is this going to -- how is this going to affect the sisters around on campus?" And this is a cat coming out of a very traditional patriarchal, slightly machismo Dominican -- Dominican mindset, but it didn't -- it didn't really -- I think the politics we were putting out didn't really resonate with a lot of the black and Puerto Rican and Dominican students on campus. We brought in -- we brought in a few, but we never really got -- we never really got that big of mix in the organization. It was more successful -- it was more successful bringing in the more traditional feminist elements. And it also was -- it also was a place where queer -- where queer students felt -- I think they felt like we'd give them -- like we'd give them a fair shake, and they could -- they could assert them-- they could assert themselves in our space if they wanted to. The one thing -- one thing that I think -- the one other real big tactical mistake we made is Sydney and Lydia and a couple of the other folks brought -- primarily Sydney -- brought in a lot of real -- real anarchist tendencies. And there was -- so there was this big event we planned for probably -- probably I'm going to say fall 2003, and at that point -- at that point the organization looked like it was unstoppable, because I was still a graduate student there. So, administratively we had a graduate chapter. Administratively we had brought in enough students where we could have an undergraduate chapter. We essentially controlled the organization Students for Educational Rights, but because we understood the connection that had -- that that had to the Shakur-Morales Center, my rule was always SER doesn't sponsor any of our events. That way we can -- that way if something goes down, we can somewhat politically insulate that in the center from the consequences, whereas SLAM can go out and do what it needs to do and be real in your face politically and we'll take the heat.

Amaka: Right.

Hank: And we also still had The Messenger newspaper going. We controlled -- we controlled that too. So, it really seemed like we had -- it really seemed like we were just -- like we were ready to move. To make a long story short, we had an event, and Sydney -- Sydney was into the thing where folks go and food's getting put out by Whole Foods and that kind of -- that kind of thing -- these high-end stores, they pull stuff off the shelf that's about to expire or something like that. So, she was big in -- she was big into that, and because of all sorts of snack foods, we couldn't get any cash, and she was like, "Well, let's -- well, listen. I'll just go -- I'll go out with the folks I usually go out with, and we'll get the food like that." It's again -- it's one thing in hindsight where you say, "That was not a good idea." I kind of realized it probably wasn't the best idea at the time, but it was also one of those things where I didn't really want to -- I didn't really want to shut down the younger -- the younger folks in the organization, and we did that. The event went on fine, but there was also this -- there was a student hanging -- hanging around the

Shakur-Morales Center who -- who really had this kind of litigious type -- litigious type mindset. And her big thing was either trying to get some kind of grant to do this or that, or suing the school, and [00:50:00] she'd unsuccessfully tried to sue the school over a couple things. She got wind of the food thing, and really blew it up around the school, tried to bring us up on administrative charges. Those didn't -- those didn't -- those didn't stick. She was claiming she got sick off it. That wasn't -- and at first we were really concerned, because we were like, "Oh, my God," and realizing... We realized a little bit -- we realized going -- we realized about after a month of this back and forth that it was just -- it was really just a scam, but at any rate that did -- that did a lot of -- that did a lot of damage to the organization, partially because of the PR, partially because the school really -- really -- didn't really like us to begin with. So, it leaned on a couple cats fairly heavily: myself, and the other student leadership. They didn't -- they couldn't really suspend us, because they had to bring us -- formally bring us up and charge us, but they basically froze every-- all our stuff. So, you couldn't register -- couldn't register, couldn't do anything, and -- and that scared... I think they sent -- I think they actually sent out this mass letter to the leadership in all of the organizations around the Shakur-Morales Center and the way -- the way we had it was administratively -- administratively you have to have -- you have to have your club officers, but what you do in real life is a different thing. So, we actually had -- we actually had some people -- we actually had some people on the membership rolls who were basically just paper members, or like, "Here, just have to sign paperwork and then we'll go and do what we need to do." But -- and most of the time that was fine, but when -- when these folks got this letter saying, "We're doing this investigation about this thing," not surprisingly a couple -- a couple people freaked, and just bailed -- just bailed out. So, in the end -- in the end nothing really came of it, but it really -- that really took the wind out of our sails for -- for about a semester, and only some of the real strong people -- strong people stayed -- stayed with the organization. And from there -- from there on, not really as -- not really as any kind of consequence -- kind of consequence of that, but I also began being -- getting distanced a little bit, partially because -- partially because the workload of graduate school was really beginning to -- really beginning to catch up with me. And -- and -- and I was doing -- I was doing -- I was in the English master's program there, and particularly in English, it's like -- you have to read three books a week, and that's not including the criticism. So, sometimes you've got like 1500 pages, and I didn't realize at that point that you don't sit down and read everything from cover to cover. So, how the hell am I going to do this? Plus, we were also -- as the organization kind of got over that scandal, it was still Sydney and -- Sydney and Lydia, and (inaudible). She was in LaGuardia Community College. She was fantastic, because she had gone through one of the Hunter SLAM trainings, and so as soon as she got up to City College, she came straight up -- straight up to the office. I think she came to us before she went to register (laughter), and just signed up, and she was fantastic, because she was just really, really organized -- really organized, really passionate. She had a little bit of political training through Hunter SLAM. She -- and at LaGuardia. So, she was able to help them keep moving ahead, and in a good -- and in a good direction, and maybe -- maybe I should stop, because I'm not sure if I'm rambling or giving you what you need.

Amaka: Oh, no, no. You're not. You're giving me everything I need. So that's perfect actually. So, then, in that context, when would you say the end of that phase of SLAM was? What year was that?

Hank: [00:55:00] That actually outlasted -- outlasted Hunter. So, I'm going to say that was in -- that was in -- let's see. I started at the Graduate Center in fall 2000-- in fall 2004. So, I'm going to say City College SLAM called it quits officially in fall '05.

Amaka: Okay. All right.

Hank: I know there was a lot of -- there was a lot of talk as the organization kind of -- kind of did -- kind of did the kind of things that organizations usually do. They change with the times. They morph. Hunter -- Hunter became much less of a -- Hunter became much less of a factor. And after they lost the student election, they just completely fell apart in a process that honestly -- honestly I still don't think they've done -- they've done the full summation of it. And at this point I don't know if it will ever happen, but -- but they were -- the people still organizing -- organizing up a City -- morphed. And they got into -- they really got into organizing around the immigration thing for a while, and had a strong -- had a strong process there. But I would like to say that it basically -- it basically ran its course, and it was -- it was at the point they finally -- the folks up at City finally called it quits. They actually -- they actually put out -- they actually put out a few statements essentially saying that they're not done with organizing and politics but the framework they were using -- the framework they were using just wasn't really working. And they didn't know -- they didn't know the exact next steps or what they were going to do, but they just had to do something else, and I respected that. You can't tell -- you can't tell folks whereas there had been a lot of struggle in terms of changing -- in terms of changing the -- changing the -- changing the ten -- the ten points and that sort of thing. And I was always -- I was always of the mindset that one: politically, I think it was really good, and two: I also -- I was always arguing that we should -- that should be done a political basis. So, don't just sit down and change it because -- because you think it needs to be changed, or because something needs to be done.

No. It's like, "Take a look, and take a look in the practice of the political work you're doing, and then point to the stuff that's not working. And that's what you -- and then you do it on that level," and that was never really -- that was never really done, because I don't think -- because I don't think folks had that kind of -- in my read, at least, was I think the dissatisfaction was coming from other things. The other thing I should point out is one of the things that we wanted to do, or at least in my mindset was to actually -- was to actually expand, and -- and that's something that unfortunately we weren't successful with. At this point now, it's water under the bridge, but I think had we -- had we been able to do that, it may or may not have -- have had a different -- have had a different effect. The people at John Jay were basically told flat out, "You cannot form SLAM here." I really wish -- I really wish... Actually the cat who was down there is still around. I could ask him to know who told him that, but I think the student life people or somebody like that flat out told him that. But the guy's -- the dude's name was Manny [Jalonschi?], and so instead, we formed what they called the Progressive Student Movement down there -- the PSM. And that probably operated for about -- for about a year and a half. We were -- we were also affiliated with students out of Queen's College. They had what they called the FSC -- no SFS -- Students for a Free Society. The John Jay cats, and Manny were sort of -- I don't exactly what Manny's political orientation is, but I'd probably say Marxist -- Marxist-Leninist. The cats out at Queen's College [01:00:00] always had some anarchist-type leaning. So, they weren't -- they weren't going to be SLAM, even though SLAM wasn't -- even though SLAM probably wasn't officially a socialist organization, we had -- we generally had more socialist-nationalist type leanings, and the anarchism was bigger with them. We did try to organize the folks at BMCC, and a couple people -- a couple people wanted to do... We actually went down there and had two or three organizing meetings, and it never really -- it never really went anywhere, and that's for -- that's for a variety reasons. Partially, part of it is just the trenchant nature of the community college setting, particularly the community -- CUNY community colleges. The other piece was the nature that -- I don't really think that they actually had -- aside from a couple leaders -- they didn't really have a coherent core of people who could say, "Okay. We're going to do this. We're going to take this on. This is going to be our project." There was a formation at Hostos led by Miguel Malo, really strong student -- got arrested -- got arrested in a protest there, and CUNY really put him -- put him through the ringer. I mean, if you Google his name, then the news stories will come up. Miguel Malo -- M-A-L-O. He's still around. I see him every once and a while, and he actually went and declared -- he had his own SLAM chapter up there, which oddly enough was a little bit controversial and there were some issues, because a bunch of people were like, "Did you -- did you tell him he could do that?" I'm like, "Not really. I've been talking to him, but not really." And like, "He didn't -- he didn't come to us." There were also issues in terms of: "Okay. Who actually approves -- if you want to use that language -- new chapters? Are they going to go to us, or are they going to go to Hunter?" But that didn't -- that didn't really last long, partially because of the repression he was under from CUNY. Basically they said during a -- he got arrested by the CUNY cops and the NYPD, and as they usually do while -- while they were arresting him, they beat the crap out of him, and Miguel -- Miguel's a little dude. I mean, he's shorter than the both of us, and if you meet him, he's the most -- the sweetest, most mild-mannered -- mild-mannered brother you could see. So, it was just absolutely ludicrous, but at any rate, they beat him up and charged him with resisting arrest and assaulting an officer because I think one of the officers got a scratch on his hand. Or another got -- twisted his arm or some kind of crazy thing, and unfortunately the -- they botched his defense, and he ended being convicted of a felony, which just seriously messed him up. So those -- so those efforts didn't really go anywhere. We weren't -- we unfortunately were unsuccessful at actually spreading it, but I think one of the things CCNY was able to do was we got to the point where -- where we were st-- where we were strong enough -- in about the one-and-a-half to two-year period -- where one, we were able to take a little bit of the strain off Hunter in terms of reaching out and doing -- doing some of this work. Two, we also got politically mature enough that we would also -- we would struggle with them over some things, particularly because they were still going through -- especially because they decided to do the student government thing. We never did that, and a lot of that -- a lot of that was me, because I looked down there, and I looked at what we had. And I said, "Well, we're going to do -- we're not going to do the student government until -- unless the organization is strong enough to stand on its own, and also do that." And my feeling was that -- still is that -- that it never -- it never really got strong enough that it could do that on its own, number one, and number two, just knowing the nature of those things. Hunter I think was the one place where that was the correct decision, and they were also strong enough, because basically -- basically you have to go in and bum rush it. And [01:05:00] if you get to the point where you don't have -- it's like where you don't have the numerical advantage that you can just -- you can just run your stuff through, you end up being -- all your energy and time get sucked into these BS administrative tasks --

Amaka: Yeah.

Hank: -- and it's not that somebody doesn't have to help negotiate the dining contract or stuff like that, but that's not really -- that's not really why you should be controlling student government. So, at any rate, we didn't do that.

So, we didn't have that dragging us -- dragging us down, but we would -- we would be struggling with Hunter because they began -- they began to be getting more insular, and we started... By that time, SLAM had a general reputation. So, people would -- some folks would also approach us in terms of us say, city-wide coalitions, particularly -- particularly when they started ramping around the war against Iraq. And we wanted to -- we wanted to go and join some of these larger -- these larger city-wide things, and sometimes it would really be kind of pulling teeth to get 100 to go, or they would be -- if it was around election time, all their energy would be going into -- going into that.

Amaka: In terms of City College SLAM, what were your -- I mean, you've already described some of them. So, you don't need to repeat yourself, but in terms of your main activities, were you doing direct action? Were you doing a lot of PE -- political education? I mean, what were kind of day-to-day programming events, actions, things that you guys were doing at City College?

Hank: A combination of both. We did -- we did events. We did direct action, in terms of protests, both on -- both on and off campus, and we did -- political education was central. So, we took -- excuse me -- we took some of the stuff that we got from Hunter, but we also got to the point where we got sophisticated enough that we started to develop some of our own studies. So, for instance, we did a study group one summer on Palante, the Young Lords book, and that was -- that was before it got reprinted. But we just sat down over the course of a month, and we read through this -- read through this entire thing, and we would do smaller studies throughout -- throughout the semester, but usually those tended to be -- usually those tended to be kind of perfunctory in nature because of the crush of student work and that kind of thing. You can't really be doing a whole lot of other study. In terms of events, we would just do more sort of -- more general things just to -- just to create awareness and educate people on a basic level. So, a lot of the things we did were, say, showing a documentary film, because that's real easy to do. So, every February, do something on Malcom X, because people are always wondering, "Who's Malcom?" For -- in the fall we do something Latino -- Latino Heritage Month -- things like that. We would -- we would also do general -- general forums and teach-ins, and I can... I should have thought to bring some of my archival stuff. If you're interested in why, then I've got it. So, I can PDF a lot of it and send it to you.

Amaka: Yeah. I'd like to see it.

Hank: But, we would do -- we would do a lot of sort of basic, informational-type teach-ins. A good bit of the stuff was around -- was around Afghanistan and Iraq. So, we'd just hold -- we'd just hold forums on that in terms of "what's the nature of the war? What's the historical relationship of Afghanistan?" That sort of thing, and we'd still -- we'd still do a little bit of stuff around -- around open admissions, and even around basic -- honestly even around some basic campus issues, because City -- it started to -- it started to improve. And my impression is that regardless -- regardless of the political leanings of the administration, City College was much better run than it ever was when I was there, because it was just... I mean the [01:10:00] level of sheer -- the level of sheer incompetence just would really -- really just boggle the mind. So, in all that time we would... So, we would balance it between doing these big things around -- around these -- around these larger issues, and fairly -- and fairly basic stuff in terms of the administration being -- being jacked up, or kind of very basic government level -- student government being dysfunctional and not giving you any of you cash until three weeks are left in the semester --

Amaka: That's crazy.

Hank: -- and then you can't -- and then you can't do anything with it because they won't -- they won't take any -- they won't take any reimbursements after the semester ends. So, it was -- in terms of the -- in terms of the weekly -- in terms of the weekly and semester-ly type thing, we would try to set up -- we would try to set up some sort of plan based on what we thought was important. A lot of the time, it was the -- really the recurring theme -- themes -- were the war in Afghanistan, budget cuts. There were a couple of small coalitions: the CUNY for All Coalition, which if you try to look into it, it's a little bit confusing, because there have been at least -- that I can recall in the last 15 years -- at least three separate iterations of the same thing. And one or two others, but it was -- it was kind of difficult organizing around the tuition increases, and the technology fee -- City -- CUNY now has a technology fee, and they pushed that through at that time. We fought that tooth and nail. We lost. It was difficult organizing around that stuff for reasons that I don't still understand why, but I think -- I think it got to -- I think it got to the point that honestly the people who made -- the people who made the cut particularly after they removed the remedial classes and opened admissions at the senior colleges had -- it's like they had kind of gotten in, and they had enough -- they had enough to do basically just to survive, and keep themselves going through. And I think with the general changes, in terms of neoliberalism... When I first started City College, it costed me -- I think it was -- 750 bucks a semester. So, it was the type thing where, to put it in -- and that went a whole lot -- that went a whole lot further in the late '80s, but to put it in context, I was messenger -- I was doing messenger work for three days a week. I was -- it was like I was fine. I could pay my rent. I didn't have to -- I didn't even have to use up my financial aid. I could just write a check for it, and at about the time of the mid-2000s, with the general cost of living increases in New

York City, and with the increase in tuition, I mean, you really had to -- you really had to hustle to keep your head above water, and pay tuition, and all that stuff. So, my feeling is I think that was -- I think that was beginning to really -- the pressure of that I think was really beginning to really come down on folks in a way that they just plain didn't -- they just plain didn't even have the extra space that we did to organize against 150 or 200-dollar increase, and were like, "Just whatever. I'll figure it out. I'll do it."

Amaka: Right. What was the -- how would you describe the structure of CCNY SLAM?

Hank: Structure was essentially a -- essentially a collective nature. One of the things we never -- one of the things we never did was formalize an operating structure of the organization, but it was essentially a -- it was essentially a combination of -- essentially it was a combination of consensus and majority-rule. So, formally speaking -- formally speaking you had the structure which you had to turn into the school, but operationally speaking that didn't really -- that didn't really mean anything -- mean anything to us. We would collectively -- collectively decide things. So, it wasn't like there was a formal steering committee where the [01:15:00] president and executive board sat down. In reality, as what'll generally happen in organizations like that, the senior -- the senior or more -- or membership that's been around longer would set a lot of the -- a lot of the tone. Although that -- that was -- it was, as I said, it was a combination -- it was a combination of the two and it was somewhat fluid, particularly as -- particularly as we got more -- we got more women into the organization, and then -- and then that's when you really have to... The reality of what it means to be dealing with patriarchy and things like that hits you, and then -- and then you -- and then you have to sit down and discuss issues and you might not agree on everything. But the process was -- I'd say the process was a good one, because we got -- we thought we were doing the right thing, but a lot of times you got pushed in ways that you would not have been pushed in before. So, we didn't -- so, we didn't do, and to a certain extent I'd say we probably never got large enough to do what Hunter formalized, where they had a -- they had a -- they had a formal steering committee. I forget if that's exactly what they called it, but they had a formal steering committee, and the steering committee had meetings. And there would be general membership meetings, but they also needed to do that because they had -- they also had the student government role to deal with. And we were a leaner organization, meaning numbers-wise anywhere from -- I think at our height we probably had about 15 -- probably had about 15 -- 15 members or so, with a couple of sort of hangers-on, with a core of about five -- probably a core of about five to a half-dozen.

Amaka: How -- so then, who were some of the -- who would you describe as core members?

Hank: Core members? Myself, Rodolfo, Sydney, Lydia, who I mentioned, [Igue?] Williams -- no relationship with whom you probably know from MXGM circles.

Amaka: What is Lydia's last name again?

Hank: Shestopalova. Yeah. It's long, but it's completely phonetic. Shesto: S-H-E-S-T-O, pa, lo, va. She's -- she's still around.

Amaka: Okay. So, Rodolfo, Lydia, [Igue?], did you say Sydney?

Hank: Yeah. Sydney -- Sydney Jordan Cooley, and later on -- later on they brought -- they brought in sort of younger core of sisters, who I didn't -- I really didn't get to know very well, because at that point that would -- that would probably be in -- that would have probably been around fall 2004, or so. Because I came down to the Graduate Center, and at that point, I really -- I really started spending much less time up at City College.

Amaka: Okay. And how would you describe the demographics CCNY SLAM? How would you describe the demographics?

Hank: Demographics were probably -- probably somewhere around -- somewhere around 50/50 oppressed nationality -- oppressed nationality and white students -- a mix of -- a mix of -- a mix of Dominican -- primarily a mix of Dominican and black students. At that point there were -- at that point and I think even still now there were -- weren't a whole lot of Puerto Rican students on campus. And in some ways I think they were -- in some ways I think the Puerto Rican students were really one of the more marginalized groups -- groups on the campus, which we were kind of aware of even then. There wasn't really -- I don't know that we were sophisticated enough, and there also wasn't necessarily enough infrastructure there to do much about it. We weren't really -- we weren't real successful recruiting -- recruiting Asian students. I think part of that is because of the demographics of -- because of the way City College was set up and the demographics of the Asian students they got in, a lot of them tended and still -- [01:20:00] I think still are Chinese -- were Chinese and Japanese -- Chinese, Japanese, and Korean nationals, recruited to either architecture, art or engineering schools. So, there were class differences. There were culture differences. A lot of the times, a lot of them didn't -- they didn't speak English real tough, but they were -- they were real good and smart at what they were doing. So, that made it real -- that made it real difficult for us to do any kind of concentrated organizing or recruitment with them.

Amaka: What organizations or kind of other networks did you -- was CCNY SLAM in relationship to? So, you already mentioned there were particular rallies that you would do in collaboration with that you would do with other organizations. What are some of those organizations that you would say were in collaboration or coalition with...

Hank: Right. You mean, in general like city-wide or CUNY-wide?

Amaka: In general. In general. Yeah. So, both CUNY and outside of CUNY.

Hank: Got you. At that point the CUNY -- at that point the CUNY organizing, as I said, was extremely weak. So, it was really more... And a lot of the time SLAM would somewhat be -- at first Hunter and then to a later extent, us, would be sort of the impetus or the touchpoint for greater student organizing. So, the biggest thing would be -- there were, as I said, a couple of iterations of the CUNY for All Coalition -- 4 -- 4, the number 4 -- and that would bring in -- that would -- that would get in students from kind of across the university system. At one point, we actually -- when I say we, I mean us and Hunter -- we took the lead role on that, and we actually -- for one summer primarily -- we made a concentrated effort to try and hit every single CUNY campus. And the way it was done was we would -- we would try to pair people up, one person from City, one person from Hunter, ideally male-female, although we couldn't always do it that way because of the logistics, and we divvied... So, we divvied the city up and I think we hit -- I think we probably hit everybody expect the College of Staten Island, where we had some connections there. There were some cats associated with the student newspaper there, College Voice, and you probably know [Aima?] and [Al-Said?] and Renee -- Renee -- she was Renee [Marhom?] -- her and Iman got married a while back. I don't... So, I'm not remembering her... I don't think she took Iman's last name, but we -- so we -- so we would work a lot with The College Voice people when they came out, and there were various other -- there were various other campus based student organizations, but those tended to be more of the collective-type nature, and somewhat -- somewhat short-lived. I remember -- and I already told you -- told you a few of them, and we related a little bit to -- a little bit to the people at the -- the people at the Graduate Center, but not very much. And I'd say, when I got here, even less, because I made -- I made a couple enemies among the white left here when I first got here by calling them out about a whole lot of stuff. And to be very honest, all that time, I used four-letter words, and I didn't really do it in a very sophisticated way, but I said, "You all are just -- you take a look at this place. I mean, this is just -- this is not CUNY, all the racists. You have the white privilege up the ass, and I just don't have time for that -- for that." In terms of city-wide stuff, we would do some work with -- some work with the -- most of it was really ad hoc city-wide coalitions, primarily against the war, but there was also stuff against police brutality. So, in terms of people you would -- you would recognize, or at least have had some kind of touchstone -- United for Peace and Justice -- which I think is finally fully defunct at this point, or if they exist, it's a name only. Obviously a little bit of work with IAC -- International Action Center -- and [01:25:00] Worker's World, that is, before the big split, but we were always kind of -- we always kept a little bit of distance for kind of -- for kind of obvious reasons. We went through a really bad period with the ISO, because I had left, and a couple of the others -- a couple of the others -- a couple of the other SLAM people, most notably Rodolfo, had left them. And so for a while we didn't really have very good -- for a while we had very bad relationships with them, to the point where we almost came to blows a couple of times up at City. It didn't help that they sent a whole bunch of -- there were -- there was a little core of white students, who'd graduated from Columbia. And they went through the teaching -- the first teaching fellows thing up at City College. And that was kind of jarring, because all of a sudden you saw all these white students, because that's -- and it really seemed like that's all it was with the teaching fellows, and these ISO ex-Columbia people were up there. And it was -- I don't need to go into chapter and verse -- eventually -- eventually our relationship -- working relationship -- got a little better, but at first it was really, really nasty because they were -- they were kind of owning some of their white privilege. And I don't think they realized it, and we didn't -- I don't think we articulated things as well as we could have, too, but... So, we did a little bit of work with ISO, but I would say primarily it was through -- through a lot of the work that United for Peace and Justice was doing, or giving the framework for: the October the 22nd Coalition around Police Brutality. We got closer ProLibertad people who were a little more active than they are right now. So, we would do -- so we tried to do some -- we tried to do some solidarity work around Puerto Rico, and at that point Vieques was still a really big -- still a really big struggle. So, we were -- we were kind of helpful -- kind of helpful with them. We didn't... Some of the people at Hunter -- in terms of the nationalist aspect on the black side -- some of the people at Hunter... The Hunter people had kind of better ties with the December 12th movement and the Brooklyn-based folks and Malcom X grassroots movement. We kind of knew they existed, and I knew -- I knew Kamau Franklin, and I knew a couple of the other folks, but I didn't know them -- I didn't know them very well, and there also wasn't too much of a structure for us to come together. So, we didn't work -- do too much work with them, and at that point, I didn't have really have some of the connections with the folks in Harlem and that's -- and I guess on a personal note that's kind of how I started changing my politics where I realized to deal -- to deal with a lot of our -- a lot of our folks, particularly in Harlem. You had to deal with the nationalists. You had to deal with national consciousness in a way that I hadn't and we

hadn't and particularly if you were going to deal with the organized folks in Harlem, but at that point we didn't really have that. So, we dealt with... So, I'd say that a lot of the work that we did uptown was with -- was through people like Nelly Bailey and Brenda Stokely, who kind of had feet in both camps, but Nelly definitely falls on the -- I would say -- definitely on the socialist end of the spectrum. I couldn't tell you for sure if she is Marxist, Leninist, Maoist, but folks like that. And, there were also some other... Probably the other big connection we had was with -- with the CPU-- the CPUSA, and for a while they were doing -- for a while the Young Communist League was -- for a while the Young Communist League actually had quite a few folks in New York. And they were starting this -- they were starting this initiative in Upper Manhattan and Harlem that I'm forgetting -- forgetting the name of. I'm going to say Uptown -- Uptown Youth, or something -- something along those -- something along those lines, but we started doing... That was one of the other key people [01:30:00] we reached out to, because they would do... And we actually had a few rallies up in -- up in Harlem, including some -- including some big ones up in Harlem, in Washington Heights, or say, marching from 145th down to 125th, and that kind of deal. The city -- and most of that -- most of that stuff wasn't real -- real long lived, but it made a little bit of an impact. And it began to -- it began to get us into connection with people -- better connection with people off campus, including -- including some connections I still have to this day, even if I don't do a whole lot of political organizing with the folks.

Amaka: After you left SLAM, can speak to any political work that you've done since you left SLAM?

Hank: I'd say the biggest thing -- probably the biggest thing after -- immediately after I left would be general -- general stuff against the -- against the war, probably a little bit more -- trending a little bit more into the city-wide stuff with Freedom Road, at least while that -- while that was going on.

Amaka: Did you stay a member of Freedom Road when you were with SLAM?

Hank: Yeah.

Amaka: Okay.

Hank: Yeah, basically continuously -- still am. Lately, and I guess oddly enough, coming down the Graduate Center, I've become -- been doing more work with nationalist oriented -- oriented type folks. So, primarily -- initially I did quite a bit of organizing and work here really just around some basic -- basic type things. I think to a certain extent at City College, I didn't really have to deal with white supremacy in the way I very clearly had to deal with it here. So, oddly -- oddly enough, being here for -- being here for about two years drove me much closer to nationalism than being around Doctor Jeffries for nearly a decade. And at that point what Doctor J had been trying to tell me for 20 years, but a lot of the -- a lot of the work was with the Africana studies group here. And one of our big pushes was to try and get full doctoral level program -- well, one of the things. Trying to get a full doctoral level program in black studies at the Graduate Center, but the plan was to do it incrementally, in stages. So, first we got concentration, which I can't take credit for. People who came before me did that, but that came -- that was -- that was realized about a year after I got here in, say, 2005. The doctoral certificate came in -- I'm going to say about 2010, 2011, and there was kind of steady work towards that. At the same time, we and myself were working on just basic issues of -- it's... The Graduate Center is a grand total of under 20 percent black and Latino students. So, in that regard, it's the mirror image of the rest of the CUNY system. So, that's been -- that was really just a very, very, basic, basic struggle. This is -- you've got to deal with this issue on a like an institutional level. So, a combination -- so, that's taken up -- that's taken up a lot of my time. I've stepped away from that a little bit, and really just spent a little bit more time getting into -- I've been getting into the black studies -- black studies organizations. And really just -- really just been in a period of learning, because I said -- because I basically said, "I need to step back and fully understand -- fully understand all the political expressions that our people are going through in order to get us ahead." So, a lot of what I've just been doing is just going and honestly spending -- spending time with the December 12th movement people, spending time with Cemotap, going to -- going to Clark House, and going to -- going to the events -- NACO -- [01:35:00] National Association (inaudible) Organizations does out in Brooklyn. And doing -- doing the -- doing a lot -- a lot of that study, so I can grasp that part of it.

Amaka: This is the last question: what lessons do you think you took from your period SLAM at City College?

Hank: Good question (laughs).

Amaka: What did you learn from that period?

Hank: I learned a lot of things. Very practically speaking, I learned a good bit about organization, and what it -- and doing, and really just building movements from the ground up. That's actually one of the things that I really -- that I really miss, and whenever I get the dissertation done, and get some time in my schedule, I'd like to get back to because I honestly miss stuff like just sitting down and working at a literature table, just rapping with people, going out working a street corner, just being -- being out in the community. I miss that, but I just physically don't have it. I just don't have any damn time right now. So, I learned that. So, I learned a lot of very practical organizational skills. I think I learned some, in some cases very hard, but I think good lessons, in terms of strategy and tactics and the terminology I'd probably use now -- having studied some more Mao -- is the mass line, but basically about how

you -- how you take a longer-term view in terms of resolving differences in the movement and that type of stuff, and some of that also comes with ago, too. I also -- I think I also learned very practically -- very practically some lessons in terms of understanding the big picture of what you're -- what you're up against as opposed to what you're seeing on the -- on the micro level. As I said, I think the big -- I think one of the big tactical mistakes was not realizing -- not realizing or maybe fully appreciating the plan that CUNY had for -- had for City College, and it's not that we didn't know it. I read... We sat down. We read the master plan documents, all 120 pages of them. We read that, but I don't think that we understood that. But that was one of the things I got out of it in terms of being able to understand the macro and the micro and how that might -- how that might affect what you have to do -- what you have to do at a particular time, and I think politically -- politically, basically getting -- the need to get a better grasp -- to get a better grasp than I had of -- of national -- national oppression. That was -- I still think that was a huge -- that that was really a huge tactical mistake, and, well, a huge strategic mistake that I made at that point, not under-- I mean... I don't know. In hindsight you can say everything. I don't what else I could have done. I think had I hung around Doctor Jeffries a little bit more closely, some other people, it might have been better. It might not have made any difference, because I said, some of the stuff that -- some of the stuff that we were fighting was coming down. The big money was coming in and to a certain extent; I don't think there was anything we could have done to stop it. Amaka: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add, or emphasize, or?

Hank: I think -- I think -- I think I've given you a lot already.

Amaka: Yeah. You were very thorough.

Hank: I can't think of anything else off the top of my head, but I probably will when I go back home.

END OF AUDIO FILE