

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

A. KEI WILLIAMS

Interviewer: Kamryn Wolf

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Kamryn Wolf: Hello my name is Kamryn Wolf and I'll be having a conversation with Kei Williams for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of Trans identifying people. It is Monday, April 8th, 2019 and this is being recorded at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. So Kei, welcome to Union, I'd like to begin um just by asking you if you could describe kinda the constellation of identities experiences that that feel important for our listeners to know right off the bat about you.

A. Kei Williams: Yeah um I would say that I identify as a black queer trans-masculine person living in the United States that is very...yeah.

Wolf: Cool, do you have pronouns that you use?

Williams: Yeah, I use he/him or they/them pronouns sometimes sun S-U-N um yeah.

Wolf: Great so just to begin did you grow up in New York?

Williams: Yeah I grew up in New York both Upstate New York, central New York area, and New York City, my family is pretty much split in that way and so there's a lot of going back and forth between the city and upstate, but I graduated high school in upstate New York and yeah.

Wolf: Where in upstate New York?

Williams: Utica, New York which is right outside of Syracuse area and then my family is from Brooklyn, Ditmas park area, yeah my dad's side of the family is Bajan from Barbados. Then there is some Dominican heritage in my upbringing as well as just black American. My moms family is from Florida so there's just like a bunch of mixtures of blackness West Indian-ness and then you know being queer and trans and navigating those spaces yeah my upbringing I think is really crucial to who I am. I'm also like one of I would say one of two LGBTQ identified folks in my immediate family so that's very um yeah.

Wolf: Mhmm. Um yeah, there's a lot of...a lot of different places that you just named and a lot of different kind of cultural influences. I can imagine that created quite a unique perspective on the world growing up.

Williams: Yeah it's I think it's an interesting lens it involves a lot of constant I think searching but growing and shifting. Upstate New York really teaches me to appreciate nature and slowness and diversity and being able to just navigate that world in a much more slower pace and slower way and being grounded and then you know New York city culture loud but just being able to like bring that all together into one's person is kinda like I have no choice but to be queer [laughing] because like that's kind of just the medley of my upbringing and my background definitely allows for a lot of different types of lenses.

Wolf: What does...I'm curious what the word queer means to you or when you say that you don't have any choice but to be queer.

Williams: Yeah I think for me queerness and the word queer is to be able to self identify yourself across whatever specifically gender spectrums but also looking at yourself in fullness. And for me who is black, black American, queer, trans and masculine but probably visibly not presenting so much as so in society is just like an interesting way to navigate the world. I think that it is the one that most captures who I am even in regards to what I do as a creative versus not versus but also like the way that I love people in my relationships. Being someone who identifies as poly polyamorous and so having like an expansive understanding of self or an expansive interest in understanding self and then not being afraid to be oneself despite what society or the norms of society push you to be. Or want you to be and that's like parents or that's teachers or that's employers um there's a whole society around you that really tries to shift you from being yourself and I think being a queer person is both a resistance but at the same time acceptance and how you move through the world.

Wolf: Mmm. I love that kind of like self-correction you made and just like really appreciate the humility in um expansive interest in understanding oneself in that kind of complexity and multiplicity versus just like the understanding. There's kind of a what I'm hearing is there is a lot of intention and a lot of thoughtfulness and kind of a recognition that we're in flux and that we're growing. I'm curious is there do you have like an early experience or like what's your earliest experience of someone creating space for you to be that queer young person? Or to start maybe asking questions and getting interested about who that young queer person was?

Williams: Yeah I think that like because once I started to identify as queer and you know bisexual and started to really navigate those spaces there's a lot of self-work but there was also a lot of being able to be so close to I think Hamilton college and being able to be around other folks that were LGBTQ and really being able to be in that space at that time really allowed me kinda to just step into myself and not shy away from myself. I just think about the ways in which even in my upbringing there was an allowance for self, specifically for me, and I look at other people within my family and I was always allowed a certain amount of freedom to be myself in comparison to the other folks and I think that that came from deep love and affection from my grandmother who really just allowed me to be whoever I was and love me regardless of that also my pops who loved me and you know regardless of what struggles I had. In terms of like questioning myself in those spaces I would definitely say that there were more so social spaces than family spaces or even school spaces. There were spaces that I kinda just had access and privilege to by my connection with people from Hamilton college and so I think that's like the first space that I can identify as being able to ask questions, but yeah I think that part of it is being honest about the different transitions that you go through. As like someone who is at now approaching 30 can say like I am a queer trans-masculine person these are my pronouns here's how I approach life versus you know being an eighteen-year-old [laughing] in upstate New York who like has dated women at that like even at that point in time or even my relationships. I think my first relationship with my boyfriend who was my best friend at the time and even that being an open dynamic of me having boundaries around like mmm you know I like you I love you deeply but I'm not sexually

attracted to you so like how do we navigate this space of having a intimate close relationship that doesn't include the sexual component. So there's like so many different things that I think about that are like oh maybe these are the areas in which I started to really move through those shifts, but its always been a growing process, right. It's never really been something where I can like self define, but I also remember like taking the time even in those moments to go through that self-discovery process. Coming out to my mom which was like really weird it was just like in the car in the driveway we were on our way somewhere or I think just sitting there and I just told her you know like hey mom I think that I'm bisexual I definitely am attracted to women. She cried which is like a really weird response and but has always been supportive has always been supportive. She actually like really adored my very first like girlfriend and was always like, "hows hows she doing" and I'm like, "mom like I don't know" [laughing] "you're friends with her on facebook" [laughing] you know like to the same extent that I am but yeah so I think that even in coming out there has been like a a rippling out effect um throughout my family my mom you know knowing since I was a teenager and you know my aunt last week calling me with some news but also affirming my pronouns and having some questions around that so it's been really a life process. I think that that's something that should always be acknowledged that like even defining my own queerness and defining my own attachment to masculinity or like acceptance of masculinity or whatever whatever that looks like that its been a process but those first moments were social moments in which I was able to see people who reflected that quote-unquote lifestyle that I wanted to live.

Wolf: Was there like any particular person that you remember being like that person like that's that person?

Williams: Yeah I think of...wow I think like the first person that I remember was Mica I don't remember their last name but they were a student at Hamilton College and they were kinda sort of a mentor to me. Real complicated history of course but I remember Mica being very what I would consider gender queer or like non-binary. I don't know if that's how they identify but I would say like in my memory like oh here's someone that like navigates the world navigates the space and doesn't have to decide if they're a woman or a guy. Doesn't seem like they have to make that decision they don't struggle with that um and that was one of the first people that I can remember and identify as one person that stood out. It wasn't until like I got much quote-unquote older. But it wasn't really until I started doing movement work that I really began to identify with like the historical storyline of queer gay folks you know. That wasn't till much older like an older time. So I think about specifically Mica as that first person where I was like oh you can you don't have to be a certain way or don't you know you can just navigate the world as yourself.

Wolf: Mmm

Williams: Yeah

Wolf: Can you remind us where Hamilton college is?

Williams: Yeah Hamilton College is in Clinton, New York so very small basically a college town Hamilton is up on a hill very well known kinda considered a liberal college. I really appreciate having access to that campus and being like really embraced by folks on that campus to like I spent pretty much my entire senior year of high school at Hamilton College. [laughing]

Wolf: It's pretty it's close enough to you that you could...

Williams: It's close enough that like I can yeah yeah yeah.

Wolf: So you met so as a senior in high school you like were starting to meet people or were yeah were you meeting people or were you going to events like?

Williams: I co-founded this drop-in teen center in Utica New York called Underground Cafe, and that was in partnership with Haley Reimbold from Hamilton College who was a really great friend. We built and founded this drop in teen center that would do programs, because Utica at the time was the third highest concentrated city for refugees on the eastern coast. So we had a lot of folks come here from Bosnia during that breakdown in the '90s and early 2000s. Russian folks and there's a huge Bosnian presence in Utica. Somali refugees so there's a there was a huge amount of refugee population but also low impoverished black and brown communities specifically black folks and so even though Utica New York and central New York is you know right there at the foot of the Adirondacks a lot of folks from the upstate area were never able to really access that. So we created programs like Outer Ground which would take teens from the urban area into the Adirondacks or to camp or to bear mountain and do that stuff. There also was um a college acceptance program which we partnered kids with from Hamilton college students and local high school students in order for them to kind of go through the college application process together, since there wasn't a lot of family support or family time. That program the two years that I ran it led to a 100% acceptance rate for four-year schools and I was running this as like a sixteen-seventeen-year old. That's where I learned to do graphic design because I got really pushed like hey we need a logo, you're creative draw this up and then like let's teach you. Doing soft top graphic designer from the age of seventeen because of the work around the Underground Cafe. Just really great stuff they had breakdancing lessons. We did a free bike building day where we would like Haley's dad would just like have collect like all these bikes from Jersey, and he would bring them up like in a big truck. He would just bring all these bikes and we'd collect free bikes and then we would fix them and then the bike that the kids fixed they would get they would be able to take home. So a lot of these different programs and my first girlfriend is a student well was a student of Hamilton College so that's how [laughing] integral Hamilton was but it was like building Underground Cafe so their sorority came and helped support the building of that the cleaning of that which was based in a church. In the basement of a church.

Wolf: Which can I ask which church?

Williams: I don't remember the name of the church I know that it was on James street [laughing] and I think that it recently was sold um but we were in the basement of that church and we moved to another church which was closer to downtown Utica, New York. That program still

exists that area still the underground cafe still exists. It was taken over by the school district to continue to provide those opportunities for folks. So that's just like you know but yeah and then I would go to events at Hamilton. I would stay over on the campus. I ended up dating someone who went to Hamilton so basically I moved into their dorm room [laughing] and their suite and that was a whole situation. [laughing] You know I got real acquainted with Hamilton. I applied to Hamilton got in and then was like, "no I'm not going there." I don't know, did I get into Hamilton? I don't know if I got into Hamilton or I wanted to go to Hamilton so now I'm like maybe I got in but I don't know if that's real or not, you know? Like [laughing] that was twelve years ago, 2007. So yeah but anyway yeah Hamilton College and just I think the entire, the sense of academia around me um or like learning and all those things always being around me has always provided some comfort. Hamilton College was close enough and had a really impressionable I would say saying in how I understood the world and navigated the world moving forward.

Wolf: Mhmm. Yeah I guess I just want to just pause and acknowledge that this...to be a sixteen or seventeen-year-old teaching yourself graphic design [laughing] having a 100% acceptance rate in this program. Sounds like you were working with peers, right? Like people your same age like helping folks. Really an incredible feat and I'd love to hear more if you care to share about if you had people kinda teaching you how to organize or um if you had like earlier experiences um before kind of taking this massive and it sounds like really incredibly potent and successful leadership role with Underground Cafe. How you learned about social justice or like where you got that idea and if you had if that was part of the things that your grandmother and your pops supported you in.

Williams: Yeah I would say that like the first social justice uh thing that I've ever been involved in or event that I've ever was involved in was at a very young age, as a toddler with my grandmother around the Union labor...labor union strike lines around AT&T which was at the time Bell Atlantic. Fighting for fair wages for black operators to receive equal wages and women's rights to be able to hold certain positions. Be doing the work that they were already doing and being paid for it. My grandmother had me as a strike baby I was out on the lines with my grandmother [laughing] I don't know if that's like an influence or not. My dad was also a part of the nation of Islam which has a huge intellectual frame to it. I would also say a really black resistance frame or black nationhood frame. Being raised as Muslim on my dad's side but Christian on my mom's side and seeing that like coexist together in my upbringing that was like really crucial. Also just being involved in activities and spaces that were about like making things better overall for people and always being invested in that. Always being invested in the perfect world the most happiest world the healthiest world and like creating our own ideals. I had three really solid friends in high school where we would sit in history class and talk about at the time what would be considered politics. Always being really interested in politics always being really interested in the news and what's happening in the world. In my household including at my aunt and uncle's house that they raised me pretty much from my teenage years going forward. Just having a really complicated family background as I talk about this but um always being told to do whatever felt right. Not just like what felt right but what was right for everybody in the space what was equitable for everybody. Coming from like a big family you know I'm one of ten from my dad [laughing] one of six from my mom. I'm the only child between my mom--the only living child between my mom and my dad.

So having a complex like family background but really being raised in the church and in Islam. I think those spaces provided kind of that like you care for one another you take care of one another really communal basis, and wanting to especially for black folks make our lived experience as healthy, happy, and safe, as possible.

Wolf: Can I ask if you care to share your grandmothers name? I just wanna kind of fully honor like this woman because she's coming up.

Williams: Mhmm yeah my grandmothers name is Doshier. She's the only Doshier I know. She's named after my great grandmother and she's from Mobile, Alabama. She just celebrated her 70th birthday last week.

Wolf: Happy birthday Grandma!

Williams: Yeah Happy Birthday Grandma. She is probably the most, between her and my pops, the most influential person in my life in terms of like keeping me connected to family. Also spoiling me and being the favorite grandchild and everybody in my family knowing I'm the favorite grandchild. [laughing] I was the first girl. I was the first "girl" in air quotes. I was always in this photo studio this local photo studio called Prints Charming like a photography like a photo print Prints Charming. My grandmother would dress me up every month and take me to have photos and it was a lot. Lots of lace lots of ruffles [laughing] lots of hair berets and that type of stuff. But yeah my grandmother um really remarkable...and she doesn't know it she's also really humble and really funny. Also really able you know one of the things she said [laughing] last week when I called her, the night before her birthday we were on the phone for like two hours, and she's like you know I'm still up and moving. I wrote her texts--that's how me and my grandmother communicate most of the time is through text message, we rarely talk on the phone because you know, can't get her to stop talking [laughing] once you get her on the phone but [laughing] one of the things she said was like, "you know I'm going to keep on moving through this world and if something falls off of me it's gonna have to fall off while I'm walking." She's just like she's really funny but yeah um my grandma Doshier is an amazing woman.

Wolf: I'd love to ask...kind of when...So I'm hearing kind of a lot of pieces of your story of these little kind of...your entryway into a queer life. Through uh through Mica and your kind of negotiations you did with your first boyfriend and Hamilton and I'm also hearing and getting a lot of like a general sense of your entryway into um a black radical tradition and blackness and black identity and the kind of communalism of your family but also the church and of Islam. So I'm curious if there's anything I guess both anything about those two aspects of your identity that you want to add to and also kind of ask when trans-ness or gender...I guess you said with Mica that gender that they were like a gender-queer presenting person but kind of when that language or that culture or that identity started to be something that you took on for yourself.

Williams: Yeah I mean I would really say that even though there was a presence within myself there was very limited amount of language, right? Even now when I've lived in Los Angeles [laughing] I've been to Miami I've lived in Miami lived in a lot of places up and down the East

Coast on my own. New York City is unique in that we embrace and have a lot of trans like language and fluid language and we do our best to like incorporate gender or in at least in our community right. I would say that to be honest it wasn't really until I became part of the Black Lives Matter Movement and language like a queer feminist lens and people like Elle Hearn who was an amazing black trans woman organizer one of the founders of the movement for Black Lives and Black Lives Matter. Whose work impacted so many and still impacts so many and you would never hear Elle's name, right? You know the three co-founders but we don't know Elle Hearn and Elle Hearn is just amazing. In the movement is where a lot of language first started getting introduced to me being queer, being trans, um and also on Tumblr. Tumblr was a way that I found myself. Tumblr digital blogging platform its like the space where I saw a lot more presentation I saw a lot of conversation about transitioning FTM or trans awareness and trans day of visibility. It was really through the movement organizing space that I was able to self-identify but also learn language and learn the spectrums and really embrace the identity of queerness of being trans but it was definitely a language it was definitely a new language definitely a new wave of identity. You see that becoming more and more normalized which is beautiful but definitely like in the last five years is when I was like oh okay and going back and forth on that right. Like do I include queer, do I put queer my queerness in front of my trans-masculinity, do I put you know...I think the most important thing is that my blackness always leads first. Being you know black queer trans-masculine how do you even put those words together came through movement work came through social justice came through being in community with other queer trans GNC [gender nonconforming] folks and moving through that in the best way. It was definitely in the last five years that definitely when black lives matter started and maybe you know a little bit before then of coming into myself but having a solid identity definitely came from my movement work.

Wolf: Mmm. So how did you get involved um with Black Lives Matter and the movement for Black Lives and maybe also for our for anyone listening who doesn't know kinda the difference between.

Williams: Yeah so Black Lives Matter and the Movement for Black Lives often get mixed in together of course because they do and we are built from each other. Same time frame of the movement Black Lives Matter kicked off from Ferguson really a bunch of folks a bunch of us from New York went down to Ferguson, Missouri where Michael Brown had been shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer by the name of Darren Wilson. Ferguson was the midwest uprising that kicked off the Black Lives Matter movement. Busses came to Ferguson in a massive cross nation convergence bound to Ferguson as we saw our comrades and our community members just everyday people who were fighting back and demanding justice and demanding answers and questions for the death of Michael Brown being tear-gassed in the streets of Ferguson. Military tanks and militarized police uniforms and all of these different things that you know you don't imagine happening in modern day America but yet here it was happening in Ferguson, Missouri right outside of St Louis. So Black Lives Matter essentially was this call. It was a love call for Black Folks it was also a call to action. It was mostly an affirmation and it was an affirmation that black folks your life matters despite what the society of America tells you, despite what racism tells you, transphobia, or being murdered in the middle of your street, or being murdered on the corner in a chokehold, or being murdered in a jail cell like Sandra Bland, or being murdered

sleeping in your home like Aiyana Jones Stanley who was a baby. All these different ways in response to Trayvon Martin's murder, or Michael Brown's murder, and Eric Garner's murder those murders really piled on top of each other and they came to a rallying call that Black Lives Matter and that we were going to fight back in that name. That led to massive uprisings all across the U.S. and then eventually across the globe. There's a BLMUK, there's a BLM South Africa, there's a BLM in Brazil building and there's a lot of identifying around blackness for Black Lives Matter. So that was an affirmation, and a call, a chant, a hashtag. Movement for Black Lives grew into that and we call it M for BL for short and M for BL became the larger kind of container to hold all of these different conversations that were happening in the black movement community. Be that trans rights, be that the acknowledgment of black women and black women leadership, and the holding of black women who hold our entire community who raise our community are the first ones on the front line um to embody in black academics but also black sex workers. The movement for black lives really encapsulates all the different ways in which we need to fight against the different capitalistic systems in American and anti-blackness and racism and all the isms that kind of you know bring down society and doesn't serve anybody for any greater good. So the movement for black lives captures all of that and the reason why I bring in Elle Hearn is because at the movement for black lives convening which happened in Cleveland, Ohio a few years ago Elle was the main convener the main facilitator of that. She--I at least give Elle complete--the reason why Kendrick Lamar's song 'All Right' is the movement anthem is because in my mind and it's disputed between one or two people it's either Elle or I forget the other person because you know it's Elle in my mind played All Right in this auditorium with hundreds of black and brown folks. We just celebrated in joy and that became our movement anthem and that's why everybody was brought together. Groups like Black Youth Project 100 the Black Lives Matter Global Network which had many chapters and is now kinda evolved into a different kind of thing. You had other groups like SONG which is based in the south um Southern Organizers on the Ground you had healing groups like Harriet's Apothecary that came together and really supported these different containers and you had a lot of groups like Black Alliance for Just Immigration. You just had a lot of groups coming together and supporting the movement for Black Lives and that really grounds a lot of the work that even happens today. So Black Lives Matter was a global network with chapters and they were kind of run by local organizers in this like decentralized way and Movement for Black Lives kinda was the container to hold all the different work so that's the differences between those two historically.

Wolf: Thank you for that really succinct and clear differentiation. So then going back like when you were saying there were busses from all over the country, from New York, going to Ferguson were you before movement for Black Lives became a thing or like who were you mobilized by? Who were you mobilized with was there a group you were already organizing with that you bused down or were you kinda Kei Williams like solo person kinda getting down there.

Williams: Even when they came back from Ferguson my best friends Genetia Gabrielle, Benjamin, Ben Kabale. He's gonna kill me I call him Benjamin, Benjamin of Uganda. My best friend Salamwei Tarif who is my older sister not by blood but by heart and love. We and Jeremy Vincent who actually is a student of Jungian we kind of had this little hub. I moved in with Genetia after I was homeless living in my jeep in Connecticut and I had posted up on tumblr like--hey homeless trans

person need somewhere to stay. Genetia randomly reached out to me and was like I have an apartment in the Bronx you can come stay here free of charge, get on your feet, I don't know you and I prayed about it and god has moved me in this way. She calls me the best random decision she ever made in our friendship but that's how I came into that. And I I mean I already had some experiences I mean when I lived in Connecticut my partner at the time had been arrested by Norwalk Connecticut police at a festival. That was at the time where I reached out to lawyers and people that I knew at least like what you're supposed to do right when this happens you reach out to black lawyers and black movement leaders and you try to get them. What I realized at the time I was like wow they don't care. But it's actually like there's so much hurt and harm happening against black communities all over that the capacity for your black leadership was really really low. You know they couldn't answer they can't answer every single violent arrest by police across the country of a black person. If that person is a black lesbian a black transperson there's not enough capacity and that was before I got to New York. So I get to New York and then about a year and a half after I get to New York and I'm living with Genetia Trayvon Martin happened— Trayvon Martin happened while I lived in Connecticut but the Mike Brown happened when I lived in the Bronx with Genetia. Then the ride to Ferguson happens and when folks got back from Ferguson the thing was especially here in New York City with Black Lives Matter NYC BLMNYC Chapter was a core member a core chapter in building out the global network for Black Lives Matter. We had the decentralized framework we were the chapter that came in and said here's how you decentralize a network for social justice. That was Arielle Newton, Allen Frimpong, Monica Dennis, and there went on to grow many many others but bringing in a decentralized network framework for the movement came from New York City chapter. The first donation for the BLM global network came from the New York City Chapter. So we really did a lot of the grunt work to building out the BLM platform while having three co-founders that were black women and really using that as a national narrative to ensure that in history folks were gonna know that Black women led the Movement for Black Lives. Folks were gonna know historically that it was black women who were on the front lines who organized the masses who held healing spaces who did this who created this national narrative and that was really important for us to have historically in the books because that often hasn't been the case. For me [laughing] when they first came back from Ferguson we had this mass action for Eric Garner I was not with Black Lives Matter. BLMNYC was kind of growing and the thing that would happen the reason why I ended up getting brought into the chapter was that my best friends were part of the chapter, did go down to Ferguson and so when I would be out on the streets I would be listed with the BLM chapter. They would let the chapter know like hey my friend Kei is out there here is their date of birth here is their emergency contact if anything happens. BLMNYC ensured always my safety and I always knew that if for some reason I needed bail or jail support that they had me and that was really kind of my entryway into BLM but for a very long time I was against it. It was new, I had no idea the people that I would be organizing with, there was limited amount of structure at the time. It was hot that was the hot summer 2014 organizing was just what we did. We were out in the streets pretty much every single day at that point in time. I was really against joining BLM and then I end up being [laughing] pretty much one of the core organizers for BLMNYC and doing trainings all over and when I think about my resistance [laughing] at first and the continued pulling in and the continued calling in by community and saying like you know what you don't have to be considered an actual member but we got you because you know a

couple of your people are our people which by default makes you our people as well. So again this continued calling in from community to making sure that there is a container for folks to be safe and that ignited kinda my work once I got in BLM and I had a political home around me and I had folks that I knew had my back and I was encouraged to do whatever work I wanted to do. To self organize how I wanted to self organize be that in the streets, be that playing the political game, be that you know being a graphic designer and helping to design some of the first artwork for the movement, being able to just show up however I possibly needed to and could in taking up space and being a black queer transperson who was really encouraged to be a front runner leader of this movement and never being pushed to the back. Always being you know put in the center and being able to step up and step in and you know have support. Yeah but first it was Kei Williams and [laughing] then I became Kei Williams Black Lives Matter organizer but at first I was really like I don't know these people and that's okay but yeah.

Wolf: [laughing] I mean it's just interesting. I love this way that your friend Genetia called you the best random decision that she ever made. In your story of coming into BLMNYC chapter into that political home it was like first there was this like random decision and then I hear you very reasonably being like I'm gonna take my time and get to know these people and through the demonstration of communal care and safety and this continued calling in that you're talking about, yeah its just like interesting to hear kind of like both [laughing] of those like both of those different like perspectives. I also am hearing a lot of like you know from what you were saying like Genetia like um prayed on it and it wasn't in some ways it wasn't just a random decision

Williams: It was a guided decision.

Wolf: It was a guided decision. And I I think that is really also beautiful and really important. I'm kind of curious if you could talk about what...you mentioned that the New York City chapter of Black Lives Matter kind of helped the national movement institute like a decentralized framework and I'm curious if you could talk about why decentralized? Why a chapter based system is important for the goals and the aims of BLM.

Williams: Yeah I mean decentralized networks aren't new. Decentralized framework isn't new we've been using those as people forever. The underground railroad with Harriet Tubman was a decentralized network where you had to really trust people along the way. People that you really didn't know but you had a common belief and a common cause towards the abolition of slavery but also getting people to safety was in that movement, right? The women's movement was also decentralized where you had a lot of different ideals building over across webs. So decentralization isn't new but it is a tactic that a lot of current movements are returning to and using in order to mobilize masses of people on a mass scale. It was important for Black Lives Matter specifically because for blackness in America. The way you organize looks a lot of different ways based on where you live. How you organize in New York City is not how you're going to organize in DC. It's not how you're going to organize in Atlanta. It's not how you're going to organize in Columbus, Ohio. Or Kentucky. Or Houston. Or Los Angeles. Or Toronto. You're going to organize in completely different ways you're going to have different storylines different experiences um but you have a unified message that black life matters and that we're going to

do our best to call for the justice of folks murdered by police, for the safety of black women and black girls in our communities, for the safety of black trans-women, and the mental wealth and mental health well being of black folks specifically black queer and trans folks and black women. We were going to build out this real call and say black lives matter regardless of where you are where you come from. So having a chapter base structure allowed us to do that. It also allowed us to focus locally on our local organizing and then having a national global network with co-founders and some staff there that would be able to handle the national narrative that needed to go out. You know between like 2014-2019 there's so many interviews and so many panels and so many books and so many things that have come out around the Black Lives Matter movement that wouldn't have been possible to be the case if it was left on one central person. Or one small group of people making all of the decisions. That was also really important for us to scale out the work. To have capacity for the work that we wanted to do. To build intentional community. To build community across lines to know kind of like on the underground railroad that if I went to Los Angeles that I had a place to stay. That if there was an action happening I could bring to the table you know I've done graphic design for other chapters. So it was really being able to share the resources that we had be that money, be that skill sets, whatever it was and being able to share that across a bunch of people instead of it being centralized to one group or one person. Most importantly I would say the decentralized framework allowed for a leader full movement. Leader full. Which is to say that there is not one single leader within the movement so even though you have these kind of top leader head of Opal Tometi specifically and Patrisse Cullors, and Alicia Garza and the other popular Black Lives Matter activists, that they don't own the movement. Nobody owns the movement. It is a movement for the people. It is run by the people. Whomever however you want to step into the movement or step out of the movement you do that in the integrity to these guiding principles. So just having a structure that was based in principles based in integrity, based in healing, based in black love at the end of the day and having a movement of people to do that together with. It allowed for people like myself to really step into a leadership role and not feel like I was stepping on anybody's toes. It allowed me to take ownership of the work that I was doing one of the things I often say is define me by my work. I want people to remember me by my work and my work should be reflected in the things that I say, the things that I do, how I live my life, how I recover from bad decisions or bad mistakes and how I continue to transform into the most healthy best Kei that I could possibly be that is not just about the self-serving but for the betterment of my community. Right? And so having a decentralized network allows one to do the interpersonal work, one to do the personal transformation work, it allows for so much more capacity but it also allows for... If you can imagine a thinly spun web that just goes across the nation and the world and kind of encaptures where you just have these you know threads that say like black lives matter and you're just all interconnected in some way decentralized networks allow you to do that.

Wolf: Yeah I love so I'm just kind of hearing part of it is a scale thing, it's a capacity thing, and it's about the like locations. Location specific and context specific and that it serves not only the like the movement work but also the people doing that work. I'm curious if you could speak a little bit about like you mentioned Harriet's Apothecary...I feel like one of the things that I definitely learned from friends in the movement but just kind of observing it is this...well you've touched on this the ways in which its integrated healing and mental health and black love work that's not

separate from the political work it is part of that. And so I'd be curious if you could speak a little bit more about what that looks like in the New York City Chapter and/or like in your own life.

Williams: Yeah the BLMNYC chapter we restructured and are currently restructuring into another collective and many other chapters have done that. Kinda to say that we have done the groundwork for Black Lives Matter to be a cultural thing. BLM the culture of BLM and how we organize has influenced the other current movements you see today such as the women's march those types of movements. Even how you see political candidates interacting in the conversations like preparations currently being on the 2020 conversation. So there's been a cultural shift in the things that America cares about and talks about specifically related to the black community. That is not about the criminalization and the poverty even though those are still important topics and subjects but Black Lives Matter has been a cultural shift. So a lot of chapters have started to restructure and do their own type of work and so I just want to name that BLMNYC is transitioning to a different collective but continuing to do the work. And that was important. The important part was having that base splitting happen so that you'd know how to organize, you'd know how to mobilize people, you know how to hold healing spaces for people. In terms of how we center healing there has always been healers in this space even at the M for BL conference there were healers from Harriet's Apothecary in the space. Harriet's Apothecary is a black queer um black mostly black women and queer folk led healing collective that uses black magic, Reiki energy sessions, and meditation. I have been a freedom fighter workshop leader for Harriet's and have done some healing spaces specifically for queer and trans folks through Harriet's apothecary. You know because I'm someone that at the age of 14 was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. That was 2004 when nobody knew anything really about [laughing] and still don't really but definitely in the black community mental illness was much of a taboo. I would say in the last 2-3 years it's become more accepted but for most of the black community mental illness was something that we don't do we don't get. So that was a struggle growing up and so to now have a community that really centers black healing and black wellness means that when I was having a really hard time and I was struggling with the death of my father and I was struggling with all these shifting moving parts that there were folks from Black Lives Matter who came and knocked on my door and packed a bag and said you're not staying in this room by yourself. You're not going to you know like yeah go through your grieving which was like a struggle with suicide a struggle with alcohol and all these different things to have lost my father suddenly and so but they knocked on the door they're like we're not going to let you sit here alone. They came to my apartment they mobilized around me made sure that I ate and to this day we still have that relationship with each other regardless of if we're a structured chapter or not. We still talk to each other on a weekly basis sometimes a daily basis. If one of us is going into surgery we know. If one of us is going on a flight internationally we know. If one of us is having a bad day or anything we know because we continue to take care of each other even without a quote-unquote political home hub because we created a home within you know each other. We created this kind of sanctuary of a safe space to really be vulnerable and trust each other and have a chosen it's not really a family but a chosen collective of people that hold you together both personally and politically, alright. That's how you must reflect your politics, your politics should reflect your personal beliefs and your personal values and often they do. Often you know the principles lean on that. But yes living with mental illness but having black healing and black vulnerability

available in those spaces have allowed me to really take care of myself in a different way. Along with five years of doing BLM work I am going on six years of being in therapy with the same therapist consistently the same day of the week for the last three years. Medically stabilized but also not shying away from other practices of self-care that is cultural be that doing energy sessions, be that holding public vigil spaces, be that meditating with my partner weekly, or by myself weekly it's a mixture but I would say that the container for wellness was definitely set by the Black Lives Matter Movement and specifically my people around me here in New York City. We live by the Assata chant which is by Assata Shakur there is a quote at the very in that says like we must love and protect one another sometimes it says we must love and support one another. Those words are used interchangeably but it's a chant that you know if you say that for five years straight you begin to really embody that. I feel like my community and my collective has really embodied the words of Assata of we must love and support one another ongoingly. That's also allowed me to have a platform to talk about mental illness. It's allowed me a platform to really be able to center queer trans folks and our struggles with mental illness and mental health. I think that is for me one of the most health-wise transformative practices that I've learned through my movement work.

Wolf: Mmm. Thank you for sharing all [laughing] all of that. I'm struck by a few things as you talk. One is this consistency of this network and the reliability of it and the repetition as being it sounds like a really key part to making these practices sustainable and the shift from like just doing a thing to having it be deeply embodied communal practice and culture. That's really beautiful and really striking. I'm also really struck by...you listing different kind of healing modalities that you and the folks that you've met and continue to be in community with through BLMNYC that there's both it's like individual therapy and then you're doing meditation with your partner but maybe sometimes also alone but then like public vigils. It's like there's a public ritual kind of aspect to it too. There are all these different kinds of dimensions to it. Is there anything else that you want to speak about? I guess that I'd be curious to hear what...you mentioned that the chapter is restructuring now and it's kind of transitioning into a new collective and you also mentioned a little bit back about how the chapter really emphasizes self-organization so I'd be curious if you want to share um like what BLMNYC right now is doing and like what specifically like what are the projects that you're involved in right now that feel like they're like really getting you excited.

Williams: Yeah um...

Wolf: Or not and maybe there's like maybe you're doing work that's really not [laughing]

Williams: [laughing] Maybe you're not doing anything!

Wolf: Maybe you hate graphic design [laughing]

Williams: Oh man so much sometimes some days [laughing] shucks especially when the invoices don't come in on time. Um that part...

Wolf: Mmm. That's so real

Williams: [laughing] No I mean BLMNYC hasn't been an active chapter actively organizing I would say in the last two years. We really put a stop on it. That because of the building of that work that has led to so many campaigns that I'm a part of and a lot of campaigns that members in some way or another continue to support. Specifically Safety Beyond Policing which is a campaign that was created where we took the New York City budget for the NYPD department and we broke it down and said if you use this money you could allocate it and divest and invest in schools. You could invest in youth employment. You could provide free transportation for seven days a week for youth under the age of eighteen. You could repair NYCHA [Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs] entirely. And so we really interrogated the NYPD budget and fought back against NYPD adding 1300 police officers which ended up happening anyway but it was a showing of resistance and it laid some groundwork. Another campaign is Swipe It Forward which is probably my favorite campaign that we started by going down into the subway systems subway stations in black and brown neighborhoods and providing free swipes on to the train, and that's because 92% of those arrested currently in New York City for fare evasion are black and brown folks. Primarily black and brown folks from the poorest neighborhoods the Bronx and East New York Brooklyn and black men from the ages of 18 to 34. There's a targeted policing of black and brown folks through the train system. Specifically it's where the NYPD has spent most of their resources on for policing. So we started the Swipe It Forward campaign as a act of self-resistance and self-defense for black and brown folks to stop the NYPD from getting their illegal ticket quota and arresting people. If you don't have \$2.75 for the train you can face a summons. You can also be deported. You can have permanent exclusion which means you can lose your access to public housing. You can lose your financial aid benefits. There's so many ways in which something as small as fare evasion, as not having you know \$2.75 can lead people to jail or interaction with the police can lead to a chokehold killing. There's so many different ways in which we try to keep our community safe and so Swipe It Forward is my favorite action. It's an action you can do every single day if you have an unlimited card swipe people in for free it's completely legal. We do political education through that right so if we're having some type of public action we'll use it. If there's some type of news that needs to be in the community we'll use it for that. We also just pick days like the first week of school. Students cards usually don't work at the subway or they don't receive them in time so we'll do swipe it forward during that time to allow kids to get to and from school. The most recent campaign that I'm leading is the No New Jails NYC Campaign. No New Jails is an initiative that was started in September 2018 of last year as a way to fight back against Mayor Bill De Blasio's jail expansion plan. He wants to build four new jails that will cost 10 billion dollars across New York City and four borough's except for Staten Island. These jails would be massive up to forty to fifty stories tall. They would require that Rikers remain open and people would have to be moved to and from Rikers. There's no guarantee that Rikers will close. There's no legally binding documentation or requirement. Also Mayor Bill De Blasio will not be in office in order to ensure the closure of Rikers. So there's all these types of risks that are happening in the midst of the highest homelessness population in New York. In the nation. The most segregated schools in New York. The MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] is completely dysfunctional and falling apart. NAICA [Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs] housing is dilapidated and being sold out to private investors. So people are really coming together under No New Jails and saying, you must and you can actually close Rikers without

building any of these new jails and that 10 billion dollars belongs to the community. It belongs to us so that we can build safer and smaller classrooms. It belongs to us so that we can have more guidance counselors in our schools vs NYPD in our schools. So that we can repair NAICA. If you take thirty million dollars out of the ten billion budget, you can repair all of NAICA in its current state now. And so we're challenging against building these new jails and really asking for more holistic, true, transformative justice system that does not replace Rikers or just expand Rikers or decentralize Rikers, but actually aims to heal the damages from mass incarceration and provide more sustainable, healthy, transformative ways to justice. It includes the fact that 80% of those held on Rikers Island are there on pretrial meaning they haven't been convicted of a crime yet. We're also interrogating the democratic system, right? You're supposed to have a fair speedy trial. Folks like Kalief Browder should not be on Rikers Island for three years. Kalief went on to murder himself after being on Rikers Island, majority spent in solitary confinement for allegedly stealing a backpack. You know so we think about these different ways that the jail and incarceration system is embedded in New York City and that we don't need these new jails. We need resources and we need services and that those funds belong to the community. The decision to build jails has come through rezoning. Meaning that the mayor has limited the process of engagement and public input, decision making to a decision of do we rezone New York City for forty-foot skyscrapers jails or not. That's essentially the question that we're asking. So we're fighting back against that and the campaign has retaken the brunt of my time right now but it's powerful work that is necessary. We can't commit New York City to a ten-year vision of mass incarceration. We can't have jails be taller than the flatiron building. Can you imagine the sky's like the skyline of New York and you have four massive jails that would incarcerate sixteen hundred people—six thousand people because each facility is prompted to hold fifteen hundred people so they're building fifteen hundred cells or cages in each of these new facilities. So in total six thousand people would be incarcerated every single day in these facilities and 80% of those currently on Riker's not even being charged with a crime. So we're really interrogating the entire system as it stands and really looking at that. For me doing this strategic work and the narrative building work to really try to get to folks to understand the true range of mass incarceration but also the ways in which we can fight back against that. Retain ownership of our communities retain the resources that we need and advance New York City into actually being the quote-unquote progressive city that we want it to be and we think it to be and it's totally possible to be, but we need to re-democratize [laughing] New York City if you possibly could say that. So a lot of my work is spent on organizing even my graphic design work is usually movement or organizing based. I'm currently doing a training manual for Wayfinder organization which is a training manual for activists, it's like a forty-page manual they hired me to design, which will be used at their national conference. Many of my small clients are movement-related. Most of the things that I do is to try to bring culture black culture black history into the space, bring in black voices and really shift the narrative of our culture from racism and anti-mental health and building out a way that is more sustainable and healthy. So yeah I would say that my movement work has been crucial as an organizer. It has really defined my passion. It has allowed me to ground myself into something to find my feet but to also be healthy and whole and to go out on these creative storytelling projects like a Black Gotham Experience and being able to really invest in creative work that shifts culture. You have to change culture first before you can really change anything else including institutions including policies. You have to shift the culture, you know you think

about 99% versus 1%, that's a cultural change from the occupied movement right that didn't exist before. Black Lives Matter and now all the other hashtags about things mattering [laughing] comes from the Black Lives Matter movement. The way that people mobilize, mass mobilization comes from the current movements and so yeah. And so yeah.

Wolf: And so yeah. Between safety, policing, Swipe it Forward, No New Jails NYC I'm just hearing like such...you use this word a lot this like holistic. I feel like you keep going back to this thing you mentioned really early on from your aunts and uncles like this goal is just like communities that are as healthy, happy and safe as possible. In each of these campaigns that you're currently working on there's a real range of like we're gonna just swipe people, I mean, and just in air quotes, like we're gonna swipe people in like that's part of the work and also we're gonna get into the budget and we're gonna like do all this stuff I mean it's really like multifaceted holistic work that you're doing. That's really exciting and I'd be curious if you'd want to share like...I am fascinated by people who maintain a sense of optimism. So when you say like it's possible for New York City to be re-democratized or you know it's possible for them not to build these new jails and I'm kind of curious how you where that optimism comes from or how you nurture it how you cultivate it how you hold onto it.

Williams: Yeah I would say that the hope that I have is based on the faith of my people also that the struggle in blackness is not new and that my ancestors have always fought back and created new systems and blackness even as a culture is a curated created culture. Blackness is multifaceted within itself and so in doing the work that I do but also coming from an upbringing that is very multifaceted. To have a father that is Muslim and connecting heavily with Islam but then having a maternal side of the family that are both Baptist and Methodist. Having things where like you go to this church on Christmas and then you go to this church on New Years and then you go to the other church on Easter and you literally rotate was part of my upbringing around holidays. Just having a lot of different input from different communities. So when I say holistic it is holistic in the sense of health but also holistic in terms of full embodiment of everything that we do. It comes deeply I would say from the struggle and the knowing that there's always room for better. My Grandmother is also very optimistic and there's days where you know...there's never a day where I feel like we can't win. I feel like there are days where it gets harder but there is always belief that we will win, because we have no other choice but to and so even in societal you know loses there are many many wins along the way. You have to take those wins in order to continue to be sustainable. It's also building loveships and partnerships and friendships. It's not just you know hanging out with folks at a vigil but then going to grab drinks and dinner at a black-owned restaurant right afterwards and continuing to build out that communal space. But you know black folks from slave ships till today we continue to fight back and we always have fought back and I think that it is an inherent nature of me specifically and I take that really self specifically. It is in my nature to rebel to resist but also to do it in a way that is for the betterment of my community and my people. Having a deep attachment to this term called my people where you know the African diaspora leads you into many places which is why I have Dominican family and Bajan family and black southern family, black northern family, and family that I don't even know about uh far and few between. I mean like it's just like the way that I found my dad's father literally was like doing online research and reaching out to him and then

becoming this whole awareness of being Bajan and embodying that and having a whole new way of attachment to a different set of people that I had no clue about, so you have to continue to, for me I continue to lean on the shoulders and the visions of my ancestors. I continue to love and be affirmed by my partners and by my friends and by my community. I continue to do my own self-work be that therapy be that organizing be that creating be that you know staying in bed for a day. Whatever is necessary to make it through you do that but there's always love and work along the way and I think that without community it's really hard to survive. Nobody can make it out here alone. You need community in order to, really for me, in order to survive, sustain, and to thrive, and so that's what makes the difference for me. Along with just like having faith, and having my feet planted, and knowing that at the end of the day even in regards to this jails fight, one of the things that I said when I was speaking at Columbia's Social Work had a Beyond the Bars conference and one of the things that I said there was that I'm content and I will be happy even if we, you know not that I'll be happy, but if we lose this fight against these jails that at least I will be able to tell my children I fought back. I was part of the people that fought back to prevent these jails from happening here's the struggle, here's the ways, here's the photos, here is the history that there were people who fought back and fought for the future of New York City to look completely differently. And I think that planting those seeds along the way will always lead to resistance for black and brown people in the struggle.

Wolf: Yeah so that that sense of community is not just like community in the like here and now 2019 New York City but it's like a community for future generations and a community that goes back generations and generations. That there's a real direct...I'm hearing you understand yourself as being part of a really direct and multifaceted [laughing] lineage of and a commitment to black struggle.

Williams: Yeah even my work with the Black Gotham Experience which is a black visual storytelling project based here in New York City that talks about the African Diaspora. Not the just the impacts but the engrainment of blackness throughout New York City since 1625 when it was Dutch New York onward. We talk about specifically the 1712 and 1741 rebellion the slave rebellion in New York City during 1712 and 1741. We talk about in 1643 what is now Washington Square Park was once called land of the blacks, and it was the first land in New York City that we have on record that was owned by black people. And not just owned we're talking like twelve acres, twenty-seven acres, forty acres of land that spread from what is now lower Manhattan up to Soho and Chinatown considered land of the blacks. Being a New Yorker and being really attached to that history. Being brought into this space by Kamau Ware who was the founder of Black Gotham and good Will, William Ellis who is the creative designer, lead curator, musician genius part of Black Gotham. Being part of that team and being part of the BGX family. I learned about Black Gotham by going on a walking tour by my friend MJ who took me on a walking tour and we talked about the 1712 rebellion. It was the first time as a New Yorker, as a black New Yorker that I even knew that there were black folks who were here that didn't escape from slavery and come to New York. There's never really been an understanding of how black folks get to the north but actually knowing that we were already here and that we had been in New York since 1625 and the Dutch had brought us here. [laughing] From robbed pirate ships and so they robbed Brazilian ships, Spanish ships that were going to Brazil and still the first group that came here

were 12 folks probably from Angola and they cleared the land and they expanded Broadway and they built Wall street. Also went on to be sold on Wall Street and we don't talk about the history of slavery on Wall Street in New York but the first rebellion of 1712 happened on Wall Street. And it happened because one of the things that happened, why was because slaves were being sold or rented out on Wall Street. And they rebelled and it's known as the 'great conspiracy of the Negro' rebellion but I think about that work as a New Yorker and it really has the work that I've learned from Black Gotham, being a walking tour guide, and being a curator, and being really embraced into that collective from going on a walking tour. So being someone who was on a walking tour to now leading walking tours, had deep attachment to history, deep attachment to resistance, and a deep attachment to knowing that my people always fought back and that we contributed greatly. Trinity Church was crafted and at least involved some black hands you know and just knowing those very small things come from a linear history of understanding that black folks have this history of resistance and that it lives within us to resist. Always there is a history and I think I'm very attached to the history of my people. I'm very attached to also American History and navigating the complexities of how those two things overlap to be a black American and to love America as Langston Hughes said, "In knowing that America doesn't love me." So just thinking of all the different ways in which black culture and that being a black person being a black queer trans person navigating in this current world. Being able to do so in so many different ways in so many different areas is a blessing. To be able to do that while taking care of myself and by being able to build loveships and being able to dream about a future is remarkable but also radical also revolutionary and it's my faith but also the legacy of blackness that tells me this is what we can do. You know it's also being able to geek out like I'm a black nerd a black geek that's what we do. We go to Black Gotham and we like talk about french sex books and [laughing] just crazy weird stuff. At the same time like drinking rum and being like yeah you know rum was created because they were hyper-producing so much sugarcane in the islands and in Barbados and Jamaica during the British colonization of the islands in the '16s and 1700s. That's where you get rum from. You get rum because they produce so much that it would just sit and ferment [laughing] and then you get this beautiful amazing drink right, but where does that history come from? So yeah yeah yeah but to be able to geek out even throughout my life in all these different ways. To be able to honor my ancestors to be able to embrace my loved ones. To build new friendships, to build new loveships, to have a dream [laughing] of the future of New York. To be able to do all that as a black queer trans person and to live with that joy that comes you know even with the struggle, even with the hardships of being homeless at times, to coming from a really like mixed upbringing that at times was really hard and really weird which is why I'm in therapy for the past six years [laughing] right like no. To really being able to hold all of that within ones self which goes back to like how do you define your queerness like I must be queer. I also was born the weekend of Pride and every year Pride falls around my birthday [laughing] so you know it just so happens that all these different ways the universe I feel has blessed me to line up in a way and be blessed by having deep friendships with great people. To be blessed to have so many great opportunities even in the hardships even in the struggles. To be able to still sustain, survive, and like thrive in many different ways.

Wolf: I just have to say I've never heard the word loveship before [laughing] but I'm definitely gonna borrow that

Williams: You know what I appreciate that just credit the black transperson [laughing]

Wolf: I definitely...well I feel like there's been so much that you've shared and so much that I think is certainly a gift to myself as someone who's been able to sit and listen to kind of all of these different stories...

Williams: Yeah I appreciate you

Wolf: And I think it will be a gift to anyone that is fortunate enough to click on the beautiful picture that's going to be posted on our website soon.

Williams: Awh man

Wolf: But um perhaps a way to kind of close...well I want to give you the opportunity to kind of add anything that you feel like we haven't touched on but now you're giving me the go-ahead to kind of ask my final kind of wrap up question. Which is you, you kind of ended on this like [horn honking] that you're holding onto like this dream of a future of New York like that is a place where black joy and black love and queer love and trans love and health and well being is in abundance and I guess I'm kind of curious as a way to close if you could tell us more. What does that dream feel like? What would be like? What would be that day in that future? Should it [knocking on table] when it [laughing] comes to pass.

Williams: Yeah um I think about when we were in Cleveland. It was one of the first times where I was just really thrown into a small geographical area because we really took over the campus with hundreds of black folks and just seeing black folks be communally safe and communally joyful and smiling at each other and saying hello. When we do Swipe it Forward its part of that community building. The main point one of the main points is that you have to offer to swipe. You have to acknowledge there is somebody there in me you at least have to at least say hi. We don't do that in New York you know we look down we never we're always busy we're always going and so continue to build out a sense of community. Regardless if that is across racial interracial or intraracial if that is you know and with across genders and trans-ness we have to be able to love and protect and support one another at the end of the day. So when I look at that world I look at a world that is full of abundance and doing just that. I look at a world that centers and cares about our youth and our education and the health. Not just you know the physical health but the mental health, the emotional health, the spiritual health of each other. I think about the access to clean food and healthy food and clean water. I think about us not looking at NYCHA and public housing as a place where people should just be happy they have housing. So you know if there's pissy stairwells so what, if the elevator doesn't work so what because you should be grateful to have housing. Public housing should not be this thing set off in the corner. Everybody lives in public housing. We all are public people living in housing [laughing] and so we should have the same expectation for people who have to go through an institutional providing of housing and caring about everybody having adequate equitable housing. Having adequate access to healthcare and specifically black and trans folks embraced with love and not being

murdered. Black trans women are still being murdered at high-level rates and let's actually talk about that but not just talk about it but create practices and containers of safety. Let's create practices in the way that I have folks that check in on me. I want everybody to have access to a community that checks in on them and makes sure that they get home safely if you're in an uber or you take a two-hour train ride home, right? [horn honking] To be able to really have the decentralization framework that we have within the movement that's based in love and kindness and liberation. Have that be center to our society, have that be center to America. I think you know having a dream as a trans person is to also have a dream of trans-ness of transformation. It is to really identify oneself within your community within your neighborhood and figure out how can I transform this into the better way and if everybody could just embody principles of love, care, and transformation you know of power, love, and miracles of all these different things that we have within ourselves and be able to use that for the betterment of community not for any self-serving purposes, right? I get the opportunity to be part of this project but really important for me part of this project is to really explore. Just because I'm a trans person look at all the other things I have done. I'm not defined by my trans-ness but my trans-ness has impacted how I define the world, and how I look at the world, and how I engage in different conversations in different spaces. When I look at this world that is one and done if possible [laughing] you know it needs to be and must be transformed into a world that is more holistic, equitable, and for the betterment of everybody. I think that at the end of the day living in whatever community you live in be that you forcefully migrated there or you migrated there because you wanted to or you ended up where you are we have to continue to build together connectively and I think that that world will be a beautiful world. To be a world that just brings you joy and you get to you know I could geek out on this all day. I could geek out on what I see and what I feel like is I think I can't verbalize it but it brings a smile to my face and it makes me feel very happy and joyful and I think that most of it is because I know it's possible. I know that it's possible.

Wolf: Mmm. Well since I'm a seminary student I'm gonna conclude by saying amen!

Williams: Yes!

Wolf: Which means like let it be so!

Williams: Yes!

Wolf: Let it be so. And thinking

Williams: Inshallah

Wolf: Mmm! Well thank you again so much for taking the time out um and...

Williams: No I appreciate you guys, this project is amazing, necessary, mandatory. I'm glad that it's going to be captured and archived as a historian geek you know I could geek out on it all the time. Not just press play on me but everybody else that you're doing I'm excited for the project.

Wolf: Wouldn't it be incredible to do a walking tour of the Trans Oral History Project Site?

Williams: We could do it! [laughing] We could do it! We could do it!

Wolf: [laughing] All right we're on [inaudible].