NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

LUCE LINCOLN

Interviewer: Nadia Awad

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Transcribed by Frankie Howell (volunteer)

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Nadia Awad: It is July 5th, 2016. And I am in Brooklyn with Luce Lincoln for the New York Trans Oral History Project. And—which is an oral history project that seeks to document the lives of trans and gender nonconforming New Yorkers as told in their own words. First, thanks for agreeing to participate in this. It’s a huge help and boon. I’m excited to talk to you about your life. And I think a good place to begin would be at the beginning. Could you tell me a little about where you were born and what that place was like?

Luce Lincoln: Yeah. So, I was born and raised in a place called Gainesville, Florida. And if you’ve ever been to Gainesville, Florida, it’s a small city of about 150,000. It probably was a lot smaller when I was born in 1979. And—if I knew if the airplane is an issue—So, it is a college town. The primary economy is where the University of Florida is. My father was a professor there. We ended up there actually not because of him but because my mom, who’s originally from the Philippines, her sister was living in Jacksonville, Florida at the time. My parents both hate winter in the North and they were living in Massachusetts trying to find—trying to get a hold of their adult life and relocate somewhere. And went to go visit my mom’s sister in Jacksonville and they both were—are scientists, or were scientists. They basically wanted a university, academic-centered place, so went to the University of Florida. My dad had a project he was pitching to different universities, and University of Florida took it. So that’s how we ended up there.

Awad: May I ask what kind of scientists they were?

Lincoln: [Laughter]. Yeah, it’s funny because I’ve been telling this story a lot lately so I have good sound bites for it. Because my parents studied—the thing I learned about science is that you can just be brilliant PhD person and you can go around and go from one kind of science to another because it’s based in the same foundational knowing of things. My mom studied food science at MIT and got her PhD in the ‘60s. And that’s how she ended up coming to this country. And then my father was kind of like this white American gone rogue—wanted to just live in the desert in Tucson. And got his PhD in Zoology. So, he quickly realized after getting his PhD that it is really hard to make a living off Evolutionary Theory, which is what he was studying. So, he took my mom’s thesis, which was around single-cell proteins, aka algae. And sold that project as his way of, like, bringing to the science world. Which he developed more and needed to be in a warm climate for this to happen. Because basically, he studied how algae could be grown from pig shit—[Laughter]. Pig manure. And so what that would look like is you would create a water filtration system and a food source for the same pigs. So, you take the water and grow algae and then you would filter the water. And so he ended up in the agricultural engineering department at the University of Florida for 25 years. My mom became more of a nerd into Health Science so she worked for the Med School as a Research Scientist doing Immunology, Pathology, Oncology... She sort of kind of, made her way through all kinds of different departments in the Med School.

Awad: Can you tell me a little bit more about your mother. She came, so—she grew up in the Philippines, correct? And you said she came in the ‘60s to MIT to study food science. Can you tell me little more about where she came from? That must have been quite a journey for—
Lincoln: Yeah!

Awad: For a young woman...

Lincoln: So, my mom’s story is really interesting. My family is from a small village called Bateros, which is now part of metro Manila. But at the time it was just a small farm town that basically—Bateros stands for bato—like ducks, and zapateros—like shoe-makers. It was a really straightforward town where basically they did two things. They were manufacturing balut, which is the duck eggs that become fertilized after 17 days. It’s a delicacy in the Philippines or street food where you just boil it and it’s an embryo egg of a duck—And then slippers—they would make slippers. My family was on the balut industry end of things. So, I’m like third or fourth generation balut... I don't know what you call it...makers? Balut makers? You get the eggs, you fertilize the eggs for 17 days and then you sell them to vendors. So, my mom came from that kind of family and her passion was science. She just fell in love with science at some point in college or high school or something. She got a full ride to University of Philippines and then decided to pursue her PhD in the States [United States]. The Philippine government paid for her to basically study Food Science. So, she was sent—got all these acceptances from schools and she picked MIT. So she went to MIT in 1962, migrated there. And—she says it was really white, really male-dominated, and that she as a woman could outsmart anyone so luckily she had access to a lot of great professors. All her roommates and community that she was building with was mostly women and a lot of them were international. So, she felt really supported in that. She would send home all the extra money, which was not a lot. But she had—she was the oldest sister of eight children. So, she felt a lot of caretaking because her parents passed away when she was 15 and 20. She was kind of in this, I think, awkward both caretaker kind of more parental role, but then also young herself. So, I think a part of going to the States was both a way to do both—both take care of her family and probably also focus on herself and her academic pursuits.

Awad: Were your uncles and aunts on your mother’s side—were they academically inclined? Or were they—did they continue the sort of family business of...?

Lincoln: It kind of split in two. She was one of eight, and there were four brothers, four sisters. All the women were these college-minded, brilliant people who got their doctor—they became MDs or got their Masters [degree] in some kind of science or something. While all the men stayed to try to run the businesses and do balut. Some became successful in it and some were complete failures. So, that's sort of the break down of that family. That the men—one of my uncles, still does balut, but that’s it.

Awad: Did some of her sisters go abroad as well?

Lincoln: Yeah. So, one of her sisters followed her to Boston and got, a... I think a masters there? I don't really know. Or, either she came and then fell in love—I don't really know her. She ended up mostly starting a family and I don't know if she continued doing science. There’s a funny story that my mom registered in her to study science for her because she basically was lazy and didn’t want to sign up for two lines at the University of the Philippines. So she was like—You’re
studying chemistry! And her sister was like—What? I told you—you know, whatever—instead. [Laughter]. Well, I want Chemistry, so you got Chemistry. That kind of older sister shit. [Laughter]. But then her younger sister ended up migrating to Australia eventually. So one of them lives in Melbourne, Australia. She's the doctor. She was a town doctor for a while. And then her—her and her husband migrated to New Zealand and then Australia in the '90s. Then—one of the sisters stayed and was the caretaker for the whole family—all the elders, that sort of role. She passed away not too long ago, maybe two years ago.

**Awad:** So you didn’t get to meet your grandparents. Did you have any stories about them?

**Lincoln:** Oh my god, I have so many stories. Well, one of the things I do, is I'm a documentary nerd. So—

**Awad:** Professional.

**Lincoln:** [Laughter]. So, when I was very young, like VERY young. When I was 20, I was like, I need to know more. Growing up in the states, I feel like—this feels really one-sided. My father's a complete character, he took up a lot of space in the family lore. I could go on and on and on—that's like a whole other side of oral history. But, he was also a filmmaker too. So he had a lot of documents. He would just like—here's a film I made of this adventure that I did—when I was 28. He would pull out this hour-long document of him going down to the Amazon river, and doing crazy shit like that. I was just like—this sucks! When I became politicized, I was sort of like—this feels off. I feel like I don't know anything about my mom. I knew my dad's parents—we went to go visit them every summer. I had so much history for that side of the family that I was like—okay, I'm going to dedicate some time to really like just know my grandparents because I think my mom's sadness and grief is taking up the space of her being able to tell stories. So, I just went to the Philippines and lived there for three months and just collected stories and pictures and everything I could. I was just like—tell me more. What was cool about it was that it was a time period where the family was still kind of together. I feel like one of the sort of sad things that I have seen in the decades since then is just that families sort of fall apart based on the older generation passing and people needing to migrate for whatever different reasons. And migrate out the town but then also out of the country. There's just more displacement. But, I feel like I came in at a moment where it was still like—here's the grandparents' house. My aunt that I was telling you about that took care of everyone, she came and took care of me when I was young. So, I had a real bond with her. And so, I went to go live with her and she's living with my great aunts. My great aunts are—one is the sister of my grandfather and one is the sister of my grandmother. Actually, when my grandmother passed away, my grandfather married her sister. So, she is actually my step-grandmother, so they're all living in the same house. These are the matriarchs of the family that basically passed on the responsibilities of my grandmother. Basically, one of them raised all the small children and that was my Lolalita. My Lolamona was sort of, more the financial caretaker and she kind of raised all the older children, including my mom. So I got stories from both ends. And they were beautiful narratives about what my grandparents were like and who they were in the world. And I remember when I went back for the first time, when I was 17, my Lolamona pulled me aside and she's like—I don't care what you're doing—and she just rambled at me—she was kind
of like this person who is old enough that she couldn't hear. So, she couldn't be interrupted. [Laughter]. She would ramble ramble ramble ramble—Let me tell you about your grandmother! And she'd ramble, ramble and it was like—Hi, what's your name again? [Laughter]. I'm still trying to absorb how all the family is connected and she would just sit in a corner and be like—this is what it was like to lose your grandmother. Let me tell you about the day your aunt was born. My grandmother passed away giving birth to my aunt, so it was sort of—

**Awad:** The one who ended up the caretaker?

**Lincoln:** Yeah. She would tell me the story of how it was sort of sudden and what it looked like. Just give me this—Phew. And what an incredible woman my grandmother was. She was sort of this personality that would pull the family together. She started all these businesses including a movie theater in the 19—right after the war. In like 1945—for 10 years, she ran this movie theater. And so she brought in all these Hollywood films for the town to watch. That actually becomes part of the narrative that I understand my mom. Where I can imagine her being this young girl watching American movies and being like, what is this beautiful, incredible place? I need to go to the U.S.! And that, actually, I think is really connected to, probably—my mom would never admit it, but I think it becomes a reason and a pull to go study abroad. You know?

**Awad:** That's amazing. When was it that you decided to go to the Philippines and meet your, you know—live with these other aunts?

**Lincoln:** I was... 21, so maybe in 2000. Yeah...

**Awad:** I'll circle back to that in a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit about your dad's side? I know you said that was another whole oral history piece. You mentioned he's a filmmaker. If you can tell me a little bit more about him?

**Lincoln:** Yeah, so, my full name is Luce Capco Lincoln. “Capco” is very Filipino, and is my mom's maiden name. Lincoln—we all recognize Lincoln as a very American name. Abraham—good ol' Abraham. And so, my dad comes from an old-school New England family that has a lot of roots in—

**Awad:** Where in New England?

**Lincoln:** In Wareham, Massachusetts, is where they claim. And I do think that's true, there's a lot of roots in Wareham, Massachusetts, and New York City. So, I think both should be said because the thing that I've learned about as a family gatherer of history is that there's so many histories. There are so many fake histories that then become real histories. Like, I love my dad's family because we are such a weird, sort of trope almost of Americanness. Where you're like okay, really? My dad's grandfather, so my great grandfather, was OBSESSED with the lineage of Abraham Lincoln—How are we related to Abraham Lincoln? So he literally—there are literally books that he wrote about it. They were just like family trees. He's like—this Thomas Lincoln of Taunton was here in this time; and this Thomas Lincoln over here that we're related to, that means we're just cousins. I would actually get these—are we related to Abraham
Lincoln? Oh yeah, we totally are. But, I think we're not. I think the likelihood is actually like, whatever. It's just like Smith. I don't think it's quite that deep that...you know? But, if you ask other parts of my family, like my brother, even my dad at the time they'd be like—yeah, we're totally related. The way I love to imagine it is such an American myth and legend in my dad and his lineage. I have spent a lot of time with that for a lot of different reasons. And part of it is that I think it got me really obsessed with history at a really young age. Because everyone was talking about history. And actually like my grandparents lived in this beautiful home that my grandfather—my dad's father, inherited from his father which was this family home of seven or eight generations. I could pick up a book and be like—whoa this was like 1850. This is actually a book that my great grandfather bought and is still sitting in the same place he probably put it. That it just became this capsule of time. And so, it gave me a real personal understanding of American history. Which was that white people own land. White people stole land. White people were given land if the fought for the Revolution—which actually is how this land was given to my dad’s family. And everything in this land still captures what white settlement is. That is both a complicated and painful history. And I am one of the few people that I know that actually have access to that kind of physical understanding of what history is in this country. Because I feel like part of what Americanness became, especially in the '50s, is amnesia. How do we erase the white supremacy that we're experiencing? How do we just keep reinventing it through consumerism, through suburbia, through strip malls? So, by the time I get to Florida—we’re so removed from land. Florida is built on amnesia. It's built on the land being a swamp that we only actually remember back to the '70s. Because that's when the population doubles. So, I think while I feel really conflicted about coming from a lineage that I can directly relate to, to the American Revolution, it gives me more understanding and depth of white culture and what it's built on.

**Awad:** I wonder what do you make of this obsession intergenerationally, with people from your family wanting to be related in some way to Abraham Lincoln? What do you make of that?

**Lincoln:** Um... [pause] That's a good question. I don't know if I have—I think it has a lot to do with power. I actually think my dad's family had a lot of wanting to be more blue blood than they were or could be. I feel like, there's a part of me—It was just a way—I think that Abraham Lincoln became such an icon in a particular kind of way that I feel like that was a part of it. But my dad's narrative of it when he would hold it up as a positive thing—was being a Lincoln means being honest and being—

**Awad:** Being distant in some ways from slavery, too. On some—or having a more—

**Lincoln:** Yeah, and I think there is—I think there's a—But, to be honest, I don't know if white people are that attuned to that. [Laughter]. To be honest, I don't think people care. Like, I think that's our understanding of what the Civil War was, but I think to people who were a generation removed—it's fighting the South and standing up for a nation that was going to be torn into two. We stood with the Union, and what that meant was actually about standing for this patriotism, and a United States that looks like this. I actually think white people don't care about slavery. I mean, I don't want to—I think that's what my dad would like to say. But, my understanding of who Lincoln was, I don't...I would always push back, because that was actually
my relationship with my dad, because I was like—yeah, whatever, white dude. Let's have a throwdown about this—and that was sort of our relationship. I would be like—well, actually...why do you think Lincoln is so great? And we'd have these political discussions.

**Awad:** How many kids were in your dad's family?

**Lincoln:** Four. He was the oldest of four brothers. Yeah. He was born in 1930 in New York, actually. And he grew up 12 years in the...I wanna say, upper East Side, about 95th and Park Ave. At the time it was a German neighborhood. And he describes it as the worst time of his life. He hated New York. He would despise me if he knew I lived in New York. He passed away when I was 21. And so, he, so he did his best to rewrite the narrative. Like—we're from Wareham, Massachusetts—that's sort of what everyone says—we're from Wareham, Massachusetts. Which you know, there's the land to point to, to be like, yes. But, my uncle also had a really thoughtful thing where it's like—actually we're from New York. My grandmother, my grandfather even, his family mostly lived in New York and then they would go to the summers in Wareham, Massachusetts. Because, you can't make a living in Wareham, Massachusetts. Especially if you're middle-class, white family trying to do this thing. Because Whereham is mostly a tourist town—it was like a farm town. There was cranberries. There was fishing. That's about it—

**Awad:** Where originally did they come from? Do you know that?

**Lincoln:** England. Yeah. I mean, but we're talking about 1600's.

**Awad:** That's amazing that you can go that far back, though.

**Lincoln:** YEAH! Which is why it's cool that my great grandfather got obsessed with Abraham Lincoln. Because, I can actually do that pretty quickly, where I'm like actually—this Thomas in Taunton—[Laughter] If we're related to him!

**Awad:** [Laughter]. That's amazing. So, okay, so, your father meets a Filipino genius woman, basically, while living in Boston.

**Lincoln:** No. Actually, I never said my dad lived in Boston. Here's the weird thing. So, the cute story of my parent's love story is that basically, my mom got a scholarship from a women's club in Wareham, Massachusetts, which happened to be run by my grandmother, my dad's mom. And so—they became friends—REALLY good friends. Basically my grandmother became her host mother, and was just like—come home for the holidays. And they develop this friendship. At some point my dad comes out of being a hermit in Tucson and comes home for Christmas. This was probably in 1967. Or, '66. I'm not quite sure...There's like a huge snow storm and then my mom was supposed to come to Christmas dinner, and the busses stopped running. So my grandmother was like—allright, Ed, you have to go pick up Gloria from Boston—which is a good hour, hour and a half away. My dad was like—I hate the snow though. This is why I don't live in Massachusetts. She was like—I don't care, there's a blizzard! It was a blizzard he had to drive through to pick her up, and that's how they met. Then I think because of the weather, but also
because of the winter break she ended up staying a week at the house. That's how they sort of developed their dating life and became long distance between Tucson and Boston for a good year, year and a half until she was like—okay, peace out, I'm going to go back to the Philippines. Come get me when you're ready. But, she made the mistake and stopped in Tucson to tell him that in person, and he was like—nah, you can't go back. Let's get married now. [Laughter]. That becomes a crazy story in itself, too, because that was before cell phones, and before telephones even. [Laughter]. So, she sent a telegram back to the Philippines, a little too late. So even to this day, people are like—all the stuffed chicken that went to waste because we were waiting for you. I can't believe you stood us up. Anyway—

**Awad:** So they had prepared some sort of engagement banquet? Or the wedding? Or...

**Lincoln:** No, it was just a return party because she hadn't been home in like five, six years. They were like—welcome back, Gloria! And…she wasn't there.

**Awad:** Wow. That's also such an incredible image, which I hope one day you use that in a film.

**Lincoln:** Well, the best story, that I love, that I actually made a film about their love story so I have a lot of details—is that years later my dad would be like—well, you know I did see you in the airport in the Philippines, on my way in 1962, when you were leaving to go to Boston. I swear I was in the Philippines, in the airport the same day. And my mom would be like—yo, you're crazy white dude! We don't all look the same. What are the possibilities of you being in the Manila airport the day that I'm leaving for Boston? What are the possibilities? And he'd be like—no, really, I have a good memory. I don't forget a face. I remember your family surrounding you. And he would describe the scene. And she's like—nah, there's no way. And then he's like—okay, I dare you to show me your passport. If our dates line up, I was on my way to Australia to make this film—swear that it was you. And they pull out their passports and it's the same day.

**Awad:** Wow.

**Lincoln:** Yeah.

**Awad:** That's incredible.

**Lincoln:** Yeah.

**Awad:** Very fated. [Laughter].

**Lincoln:** Yeah. But to this day my mom is like—I still don't believe it. I'm like—but what about the passports?! She's like—yeah, I guess.

[Laughter].

**Awad:** Probably forged.
Lincoln: I know, right?

Awad: Okay, so, he's from this New England-ish family, your mother's from the Philippines, they finally seal the deal in Tucson, correct? And then they move to Florida, to Gainesville, Florida where they're pursuing their science careers. And you were born in Gainesville. Can you tell me a little bit about what your school-age years in Gainesville were like?

Lincoln: Yeah, I mean...[Sigh].

Awad: ...As a child of two professors.

Lincoln: Right. I mean like, Gainesville, Florida is a weird place. It's like, very Southern. It's about an hour and a half South of the Georgia border, so it's not—it's not the beaches, Miami, Florida. We're talking about all there is, is farmland outside of the city limits. And even in city limits, which is why my dad is running a pig farm in the middle of some city. [Laughter]. You can tell that it's the middle of nowhere. I grew up in this neighborhood—The house that I was born into is the one that I stayed in for all my life. It was this 1950s suburban neighborhood in the middle of the city, stuck in between two state roads. And on one side was, like, convenience stores and motels. On the other side was park, basically, like a wilderness of swamps. And if you've ever been to Florida, everything just feels wild. It's just kind of a wild place. I think that's why my dad also really loved it, it was like as wild as a suburban, legitimate, professional job could get you. Anyway—but I feel like I lived this really strange life of, like, the outcast of Southern like, black/white context of society where my best friends were all Asian immigrants who were either part of the university or were part of the state road business venture basically. Which is basically like the South-Asian, Indian family next door I basically grew up in. They had three families that lived in that one house and basically ran the liquor store and the motel down the street. And that's why they were there and we became best friends. I basically was like, partially raised in this Gujarati family—[laughter] really understanding all the context of Patels in all of Florida really.

[laughter]

Awad: That's awesome.

Lincoln: So, like, I mean—

Awad: We had some Patels in Port Charlotte, where I grew up.

Lincoln: Yeah, it becomes very specific to an '80s way of being, which is like, who knows—displacement from globalization beginning and us piecemealing otherness in these weird places. Like, I discovered when I was probably in middle school. Which were basically all the kids of immigrants who were there on grad school post-docs, or whatever. Who are from Brazil and from Colombia, all these...[laughter]. So, I feel like one of the things I appreciate about
Gainesville is that I had a really international understanding of the world because it was such a hot spot for academics. Or even who my parents were surrounded by. Even though it’s very white. The city is very white and black. I grew up going to the black schools—Lincoln Middle School—that was fun. [Laughter]. It was very much like if you weren’t black then you got tracked into basically the white side. Which was basically like gifted and AP and all that wonderful stuff. But, the thing that I appreciate about it is that it allowed me to have a relaxed—very relaxed upbringing of like—ride my bike to highschool and like, fall asleep on the grass to take a nap. But, still have access to different ways of being. So, I became, in high school, really obsessed with art and filmmaking and poetry and I used to skip high school to go to the University library and teach myself about movement histories. I found organizing at an early age, too, and alternative media. And that like really started my life path in this other way, too. A lot of that was because of it being such a small community and easily influenced by just one or two things that were there. Which are public spaces open. Whether it’s the library or the alternative library that started, and I’m volunteering at age 15 learning about Chomsky. I feel like, in this really cool way to enter into this other leftist world which was so, kinda— Influential in my life eventually.

**Awad:** And it was before the internet so you actually had to show up to things.

**Lincoln:** [laughter] Exactly. You know, and part of it was I didn’t really care, I was kind of the person who’d be the youngest person in the room—the oldest person being the 70-year-old founder [laughter] who was like, in the Vietnam War. It was just a small enough community that it... wasn’t driven by identity politics. It was driven by, like, actually us wanting something different. But, I came in in moments that I felt like were very special. There was a moment when a freedom school started and they were looking for youth to get involved and I got recruited—

**Awad:** What was the impetus for that freedom school? What year about? How old were you?

**Lincoln:** I was 15 maybe, or 16. It was right after, basically some—probably 20-something—I’m like—adults. [Laughter]. They seemed—but I think it was probably 20 to 40, age-wise. Folks who went to Jackson, Mississippi, I believe, for a freedom school reunion, like a 20-year reunion. And they came back and they were like—Yo, we still need one. We need to be talking about racial justice, we need to talk about economic justice, and gender justice. What does this look like now? So they started their own study group. It was a multiracial crew of folks, people who were doing work in different sectors like labor, women’s rights, black history, and like access to black history in schools. They started a freedom school through that. So they took their own study that they developed for themselves and then tried to recruit young people into that. I was part of the first cohort. It was very... awkward. There was some—in retrospect, some structures that I don’t—they were really into consciousness-raising, which, partly because ‘70s feminism was really big in Gainesville. So there were a lot of, still, these forms of consciousness-raising circles that were still employed, they tried to do that with us as young people. I don’t know if I would recommend that now—[laughter] now that I do this work—

**Awad:** Can you tell me a story of what that experience... from that experience of going to this freedom school, or being a part of these activist-ish circles—
Lincoln: Yeah.

Awad: ... as a highschool student?

Lincoln: Yeah. It was like a Saturday meeting. And basically, there were four adults who were volunteering their time to do this. And then I recruited all my friends into it [laughter]. I was kind of this young activist. But, I was sort of like—yeah, cool...that sounds cool...why not.... [laughter]. That was kind of my attitude about everything. [Laughter]. Do I think I’m going to learn something new? Okay, cool, yeah, let's do that. [Laughter]. But, I don't know how they convinced me to get there on Saturday morning because I've never been a morning person. Surely going to do study at 10am on Saturday sounds like hell now. But, anyway, I joined this group and what it looked liked was that they would share different curriculum. They would take turns leading the education about it. We would do one movement history lesson, and then we would do the next session a reflection about how that impacts us personally. So, let's say we were doing black history and they would talk about different movement history—different ways. Sometimes it would be lecture-style. Sometimes it would be like telling stories or sharing documents. For the most part it was pretty boring, it was pretty lecture-y. And the next session would be like—what are some reflections that you have? They would ask three or four questions that were around these issues and topics and then we’d talk about our own personal experience. And in a lot of ways I think that it really helped because I don't think I wasn't thinking that critically about all these things. And I think, maybe it was the first time I was talking about what it was like to be mixed-race in the South, you know? And what that looked like in practice—whatever that looked like at the time. I mean, It definitely lacked certain political direction and analysis. It was definitely—but, I loved how shoestring it was. It was just sort of like—bring what you can in your cupboard—that was our snacks. It was sort of like—sure, I have an orange tree outside I'll just pick some things and bring...[laughter]. It was definitely in a time period where nonprofits didn't exist in the South. You know, at least...If they did, they were like service agencies for a particular medical need. But, not around organizing. And so, I do think that it helped me understand what organizing was and what dedication to a cause is without necessarily seeing it as paid work. But, I also came in at a moment when also youth liberation was being talked about in a bigger way by white suburban youth. And so, It was kind of a weird moment where I went from there to youth-organizing theory which was led by my peers. And I would go down to like, New College where they were starting a youth-liberation space. And, you know—

Awad: New College in Sarasota?

Lincoln: Yeah.

Awad: I had a math tutor from New College who was this Korean man. He was like, 6.5 [feet]. If you can believe it—

Lincoln: Wow.
Awad: And he had a long long ponytail. He was doing his PhD in Math. So, I used to go to New College on Saturdays.

Lincoln: Oh shit.

Awad: Yeah. I love New College.

Lincoln: Yeah, no. What's hilarious is that even the crew of friends that I went on vacation with, like half of them went to New College. Or actually one of them I knew from Florida through other circles—

Awad: It's probably the most liberal college in Florida. Period.

Lincoln: Hilariously, we all were at the same conference in ‘96, which was this youth liberation conference. And hilariously I don't actually remember anyone except one of them.

Awad: It was called a youth liberation conference?

Lincoln: Yeah! So—

Awad: Wow. You know that was so funny, not to pull what your dad did, but, I was at New College in the library doing math problems that I didn't understand about the sky in 1996. But, I had no idea that that was going on. And definitely—

Lincoln: I mean it was a particular subculture. It was very white-driven. It was not something that I would recommend, necessarily. But I think it was definitely a part of my agency. I remember taking some of the curriculum I had learned at the Freedom School to this conference and doing it for my peers and feeling confident running this workshop. I feel like, those are the—when I think about the trajectory of youth leadership which is kind of what I think about a lot now. I'm like—oh yeah, that was a building block toward my own political understanding and abilities. Even if I didn't—even if being in such white spaces, like alternative library, or youth liberation, or anarchist affinity group that I was in when I was 17, and started Free Radio Gainesville... Like, I was in very white, anarchist spaces, that I do think it still laid a foundation for what collective decision-making could be. What alternative structures look like in our society that's outside of capitalism, what organizing looks like when you're not thinking about it in nonprofits. I think it helped me lay foundations for then how do I take that into thinking about it in queer contexts, or queer of color contexts. Or, I think it really helped lay—or even that ageisms exist and as a young person, who's like 17—wanted a lot of access to things and a lot of access to decision making. What that meant is that I went to a lot of adult spaces and just sort of did it. You know? Whereas now, I'm thinking about it as an adult and being like—there's no reason—I can't—I don't patronize. I'm like—you are are 17, yes, and you can do this. And I believe in you because I was starting pirate radio stations at your age. [Laughter]. So you can make a film. Or, insert—you can do my job. You can run a workshop. That's totally fine.

Awad: So, Gainesville is also a ways from Sarasota, Florida. And I'm just wondering...
Awad: At this time, what kind of support or push back or reaction were you getting from your parents as you were doing all of this sort of, organizing?

Lincoln: [Sigh]. I don't think they really understood what I did. I think they were like oh, you're getting A's... great. Do whatever you want. I feel like they were just like...I mean, my brother is 5 years older than me and laid a lot of groundwork and was also a very active youth who was a professional mountain-bike racer by the time he was 15. I think there was a level of, oh, you're NOT trying to kill yourself by going down a mountain at high speeds in Canada? Okay, great. He was a downhill racer. He would like—starting at age 16 or 17, just travel around the United States and like race. And, you know, he was top 5 in his class. He was doing incredible things and very risky. So, they were like—go to Sarasota. Sure, do a conference. Great. Don't become a mountain-bike racer. [Laughter]. So I became less jock and more intellectual and nerdy. And they didn't really care what I did as long as I went to college. [Laughter].

Awad: So you’re in Florida in the ‘90s, in high school—in the late ‘90s, I should say, so after Elian Gonzalez, after they deported all the Haitians that the media had depicted as having HIV/AIDS, et cetera—events like that. I'm just wondering, in your Freedom Schools and these other conferences, was there a gender and sexuality piece and how—what was that like—what was that piece of it for you, as a high-schooler? High school student, rather.

Lincoln: I mean, I think, the thing—I was very queer—always very queer. And, I think—

Awad: What do you mean by that?

Lincoln: I mean, I've always been very gender non-conforming—let me say. That will always be the lens in which I experience the world. But, I don't think it became my political understanding until I got to college. And I think that...while I'm like—oh, we were devoid of identity politics—There was—Part of it is great because I got smart about neoliberalism when I was like 15. You know what I mean? But I couldn't articulate my own experience until I started—I do appreciate that I lived in a college town for this because I did have beautiful moments. Where like, I met Gloria Anzaldúa in ‘96. And like, I was sitting next to her in this small women of color circle that I don't know how I landed up in—[laughter] high school student. But you know, those are moments where I did a lot of—because I was such a leftist nerd—would just go to every single event. Every event. I was just like a sponge. Everything—I want to know everything. It meant that when my brother and I went across country and I like ended up going to every political event I could across the country when I was 17. Part of me was like, such a nerd about different things, but, I don't think I made the personal political connection as a queer person—as a gender non-conforming person, until—probably until I hit college. But, not because college had a better political analysis—I do think that political analysis—obviously if I’m sitting next to Gloria Anzaldúa when I was like 17—really changed me, but then also like, I think it helped that college allowed—here is just a space to figure out your voice. And like, here’s a video camera, here’s a radio station—go. I just sorta like, explored it more from my own experience because I
had space to. Because that's what college classes were built around—Now write a personal essay. [Laughter]. Now reflect about this thing. Now, do a journal entry about this. You know? [Laughter]

Awad: So, I want to ask you, can you remember the first time you felt queer feelings?

Lincoln: I mean, I love my take on just a queer narrative because I'm just sort of like—well, when I was 4, [laughter] I turned to my dad and I was like—Dad, what's a lesbian? And he says—it's when two girls like each other. And I'm like—I like Lin Lin. He's like—No, not like that. It's like when two women kiss each other. And I'm like, well, I kiss Lin Lin. [Laughter]. And I was like—I'M A LESBIAN! And I sort of came out to him. But, [laughter] I don't think he believed me [laughter] nor do I think I really understood. But I think my instinct was there. And then when I was like 7—I love to tell this story because it really is kind of like a root story, which is a—Did you ever watch that movie Just One of the Guys? Oh my god, total root movie, right? Where it's basically this narrative of this woman who's experiencing sexism at her school so she's like—okay, I'm going to become a dude, and I'm going to pass and then I'm going to become this major, awesome journalist, right? I love how wacky that '80s narrative was. But, I feel like it was an instruction booklet of how to pass. So, I would go to the video store every week and rent it and watch it. And rent it and watch it. And rent it and watch it. By the time I—I mean, I'm sure I watched it so many times that we could have bought it, but I just would just rent it every week. [Laughter]. So, if I look at pictures of myself at this age that I'm, like, see—is when I start basically trying to pass as a boy. Where I'm just sort of like, oh, this is possible. [Laughter]. So, I would just start figuring out ways to like dress in my brother's clothes, or hide my hair in baseball caps. So, that becomes a gender marker for me. And I feel like as far as sexuality goes—I don't feel like I really came out to myself until I was 14. And that was based on just, like, accident of somebody just asking me. And then I had to really examine. I was like—oh, that's interesting...

Awad: So, how was gender performed?—I hate that phrase—[laughter] gender performance. Sorry. Let me start over. You're dressing like a boy and going to school in Gainesville. How was that received?

Lincoln: The thing that I appreciate about living in a place that actually is pretty rural and also pretty working class, is that I don't think people really noticed. [Laughter]. They were just like—Oh that's interesting—tomboy—great. I don't think I really experienced—I think there was a certain age that I felt that there was a certain age maybe I felt I needed to perform something different. Which is like probably true for any—puberty hitting. Where around 12 I was like—whoa, ok, let me try date boys and be a girl. And what does that look like. And it was the most tomboy version of that. And that lasted like a year and a half until Grunge hit—Yes, Grunge, I love you! Thanks for opening the door to flannels and my brothers clothes again. [Laughter].

Awad: Wow... [laughter] That's so funny.

Lincoln: And baggy clothes—I could get away with wearing, size 42 skater shorts and long hair and I did that for awhile. Ya know, Living in a hippy town too there was just room for all kinds
of expressions of otherness and artists—da da da...The thing that, if I were to be like what stands out the most, close relationships, being constantly being like, the neighbors that I grew up with—them noticing. They called me Leo as in Leo—Leonard from... Spok. And I don't know why but then it became Leo nerd was my nickname. So, like, those kinds of things would stick out—I definitely got bullied. But, It was the intimate bully of family which it becomes a little different than your everyday homophobia. It was like both more personal and also more—I would notice if my aunt came to visit from the Philippines. And she would be like—What are you dressed like?! And I'm like—grunge. [Laughter]. My own understanding of my gender was so based on alternative culture that I'm just like—whatever you don't understand me. [Laughter]. Nine Inch Nails—play. [Laughter]. Also, Having a brother to sort of be my role model. I didn't think of it as transgressing gender i was just sorta emulating my brother. [Laughter]. And he was cool with it. I think having that support was really helpful. He's like—Gosh, can't you just get your own clothes? [Laughter]. Let's go to the thrift store. There was a sweet moment when I was 17—It was the last time I had long hair—I was like—Ted, I want to shave my head but mom says I can't do it. And he was like—ok, let's do it together. And we went to the hairstylist and she charged us $5 to shave both our heads. And then we come home and my mom was so pissed at him that she said—I am not talking to any bald people. No more bald people! [Laughter]. Wouldn't talk to him—and he wasn't living in the house anymore—but, she wouldn't talk to me nor him for a week. She was so terrified. She was so upset. And she knew—I think those are the moments when she was like—this is real, this is not a phase—This is no longer grunge. This is my kid is a tomboy. Damn. [Laughter]. And but, she rolled with it very very openly. My dad was actually more homophobic than my mom. He would, since I was 14 be like—what are you a dyke?! And just kinda, get really upset when I was just being just tomboyish and wearing my flannels.

Awad: And so then you went to college after shaving your head with your brother. At some point after shaving your head with your brother. Where did you go to school and what was that like?

Lincoln: I went to college at Antioch college. And, I sort of—I think that livingin in this sorta alternative organizing youth lived world, I remember going to friend of mine who was going to New College at the time, who was probably 21 or something. I was like—Yo Andy, what school should I go to? And he like makes a list and we was like, [whispers] Don't go to New College. [Laughter]. And he puts Antioch on the top. And I'm like forget about the list. Make my own Capricorn spreadsheet of all the ones I'm going to apply to. I applied to like 10 colleges. I put Antioch on that for some reason at the last minute. I don't know where Antioch is. I never even—I don't even know where Iowa? Where is it? Ohio? Ok, whatever, Midwest. Who wants to go there? But for some reason I get really impulsive about Antioch, so I just do it. They were the first college to accept me. And I was like, oh interesting. There's like—Do you want to save the world? There's a bunch of queers on the catalogue. And I'm like—that's cool. Ya, I do want to save the world [Laughter]. Such cheesy marketing. And they offered me a scholarship and I'm like—I guess I should check it out. So I go, I'm like, Ohio, New York, New England, whatever, what's the difference? It's all cold. [Laughter].

Awad: I so relate to that.
**Lincoln:** [Laughter]. So, I was just like, why not? And also I was really drawn because that sorta nerdy anarchist that I am—I was really drawn to the governance of Antioch. Which was basically really youth led student-run everything. Student run govt, student run town hall—town meetings, every week you have a town meeting that everyone goes to and then you make decisions. And I was like—Oh ya, totally. I was such a collective decision making nerd. I was like—consensus? Yes, I'm in! [Laughter]. It was—also part of why I was drawn to it is because they had this Internship model. Which was like every other semester you had to go out into the—So I'm like—if I get stuck in Ohio, it won't be that bad because everyone I talked to—I just got back from NY, San francisco, I just went on this thing abroad—da da da. I was really into the idea, like—I'm going to travel the world now, five internships in four years. Done—And actually that's how I ended up going to the Philippines for a semester—sure, this is an internship. I found this independent film organization that I volunteered for and made that into my internship and lived with my family. And that was really amazing. But only after I did a misstep of going to costa rica first. And I was like—why am I in a foreign country and not in the philippines? So I think it really allowed for a kind of reflection and experience that was... helpful to my world understanding—also freedom to do what I wanted. You know? And build my education the way I wanted.

**Awad:** So, you entered antioch in 1998, then?

**Lincoln:** That's exactly true. I graduated highschool in '97 took a semester off and entered in January '98.

**Awad:** And you are studying film predominantly. Is that correct?

**Lincoln:** Mmhm. That actually became the dreamy part of Antioch. I sorta lost faith in it as a institution pretty quickly—private school, liberal, politic—I could see where all the holes were even that young. And I was like—let me just go home and go to New College. I did consider about doing that. But then their media program was so strong. I still think that I've never heard of a department so committed to the way it is to social justice framework, media making—sort of the praxis of it. Thinking about it—how do you make media about it—and also think theoretically about it—and then also—it being multimedia possibly. It was a communications department, so the framework was not built around doing video or film—now that I've gone through film programs I know the limitations of that kind of thing. It was built around—we believe in social justice. How does media become the means to that? And so, I got to really sit in that—which was weirdly already my passion—sitting in the alternative library reading Noam Chomsky. I already...It fit me in this so perfect way. New School didn't even have a video camera. [Laughter]. Oh well, I guess that's out. [Laughter].

**Awad:** So after you finish at Antioch and you connected with your family in the Philippines you traveled you've done different internships, whatever. What did you do? Where did you go next?

**Lincoln:** Well, I think I should pause for a second. Because, I think part of my story is—when I go the philippines, is when I actually came out as trans. To myself, to my understanding about
gender—being this sorta, moment. The year 2000 was the year that changed my life—going back to the Philippines, really changed my life. Getting all these stories from my family changed my life. But also, I came out to myself. I was reading Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein and reflecting on my own experiences. And all of a sudden all this stuff comes together. Where I was like, whoa—gender—non binary—What?! It sort of explodes—That's when I really feel othered from gender. My articulation of it is—whoa, I'm in the Philippines—the gender dynamic is both so scripted and there's so much trans people around me. That is was sort of figuring it out. What does this mean? Trying to understand gender context in the Philippines. Which in the Philippines it is both so scripted and there are some places like Thailand and some other places I can imagine in Latin America—where third gender sort of exists—it's unsaid and it is everywhere. Everywhere you look. A good example is my Lolita, my great aunt has a butch partner. She's just a family member. She just sleeps next to her everyday. And is a total...butch! We have this bond that happens in the moment. It was beautiful. And also, I was constantly criticized by my Lolita for it too. She had all this internalized shit—Why are you wearing all these boy clothes?! And Petong would secretly would be like—Hey, you know, your cousin just bought me this wallet. It's a woman's wallet. Next time will you buy me a wallet that's like yours—Sort of had this whole underlying code—

Awad: So your aunt was in a relationship with another woman?

Lincoln: My grandmother, really. My great aunt.

Awad: Oh your great aunt.


Awad: Ya, how did you understand their relationship?

Lincoln: I was like—what's going on? Family members would reflect it back to me over the years—oh you're like petong. And understand it. And Petong would reflect it back to me. And actually, they just both passed away this last year. This picture on my altar is a picture of them—this is a picture of them dancing together. This is when I went back—I don't think it was 2000—I think it was '97, '96—when I went back...the first time I went back in highschool with my mom. How I understood it—I would always ask my mom she was like—Petong is a family member. She's the caretaker of your aunt—my aunt. And I would be like, [whispers] caretaker...what does that mean? What's beautiful too is over the years I would push back about it. I'm like—they're partners. They literally passed away with in two weeks from each other. A part of Petongs heartbreak of Lolita passing. It's just so clear to me that, If they weren't sexually involved they were such romantic partners in this other way—

Awad: Did your grandfather's sister have any children or Petong? Or were married in other—

Lincoln: That's what I mean—Lolita becomes the mom of my mom and my aunt and other aunt. She doesn't have any children of herself. But, she raised half the family— half the aunts and uncles. So, like—
Awad: So she's the youngest? I just want to clarify so I know. I'm sorry it's my own...I'm just trying to clarify.

Lincoln: Oh no, she's not the youngest. She's...she's—I have two aunts that become the matriarch, and so she's one of them.

Awad: Got it. And so she has lived with this person who was very butch, and so you go to—

Lincoln: Since the 60's—

Awad: —Since the 60's she lived with her. And was a part of the family. And this person wanted a wallet like yours. [Laughter].

Lincoln: We had mirroring genders in this way. We wear men's clothes. We do like men things, whatever that is. But, also this grey area. What do you do in this grey area? So, we couldn't talk about it—what's your queerness like? [Laughter]. She did not want to talk about it. She just wanted to be in the family—and she wanted to get the right gifts. That's all. [Laughter]. I don't think—I think it was a different way of being.

Awad: And so when you went to the Philippines—was this the first time you're interacting with all these relatives? At 21?

Lincoln: No, because I go when I was went back when I was 17 too. That because—It was a quick trip. It was like three weeks—that was the first time. I had a lot of relatives come to the states. I met a lot of people through my life. But, it was the first time I went back when I was an adult, or able to remember. Because my parents would take me back when I was a kid, a lot. So, my first memories were in the philippines. But then there was a time period—I think both our financial situation but also other conditions like their professional life, or—

Awad: School—is a huge...

Lincoln: Yeah—and maybe the Dictatorship too...

Awad: Marcos. Marcos...

Lincoln: in the Philippines. Marcos. There's all kinds of conditions that it slowed down. And then I think my mom didn't want to leave when my dad's mom was sick. So there was some of that as well. So, it took awhile for them to go back and bring us. So, so—let me go back. So then, in 2000 my father gets sick. And gets terminal illness and a matter of 4 months passes away. And so, I feel that really taints my college experience. I'm like, I feel like I'm like—whoa, I'm trying to undo white supremacy and my understanding of life and I come out as trans. And the patriarch in my life that I hate is dead now. And so I'm like—WHOA. So it slows me down a lot. My mom also got sick at that time. She got diagnosed with breast cancer. My dad got colon cancer. All of a sudden, I'm in this other reality, I guess. Where I move back to Gainsville for a
semester and start working on a film to kind of articulate everything. That's when I take the footage and I make this film about myself and about my parents and sort of this whole story. Which I call the, *Autobiography of an Ocean*. It was a half an hour personal documentary. That even talks about my trans identity in this moment. Which is contextualized because I feel like part of what I feel envious of young people I work with today. Which is like—I get 14 yr olds who are like—I'm a transmasculine gay man. My pronouns are he, him, and unicorn and umm....[laughter]. Really beautiful people. But, the articulation they have around gender is so advanced and thoughtful. But, one of the things that I missed out on—that I was also trying to articulate—How do I understand non binary identity, as a mixed race person—as a queer person—who doesn't necessarily identify Lesbian gay. Understood as queerness and how do I understand my trans identity. I was trying to nonbinary without a culture around it— go by they/them. Yo, one of the things I can take away with the culture of philippines is that there's one singular pronoun called, sha. The beautifulness gender non conforming people, everywhere, not just in the queer culture. But, in like, folks—like—town fiestas sort of honoring trans women—that is like a pageant but isn't drag. It's sort of hard to understand. It's sort of rooted in a culture that shames it. Homophobia is a sin because Catholicism. You can still see roots of this beautiful honoring of nonconforming lives in certain weird way, that are still rooted in certain cultures of towns...

**Awad:** Here's a tough question and you can think about it or whatever. Do you think at that time you could have had the capacity or insight to come out as trans to yourself if you hadn't gone to the philippines?

**Lincoln:** Ya. I do. I think I would have understood it differently. Because I still—I think was hard—t was in a time period—that this is a time in the late 90s when trans identity was becoming mainstream. Mainstream—I mean, is such a relative word. T wasn't there before—everyone was fighting for t to be added. Leslie Feinberg is publishing books about trans history. I gravitated toward that. But, I knew at the root of it, Leslie Feinberg and kate bornstein, you people are white people. I'm over here trying to deconstruct white supremacy—this in my own personal life. And I'm like—this is not the mirror I want. This isn't the language I want. It felt awkward. I definitely felt this tension—I do think, in some ways it has kept me more nonbinary. And less of this trans narrative—I need to go on hormones, I need to pass in a particular way, I need to get chest surgery—those are things that I don't think about everyday. I do think about it everyday. If I hadn't gone to the Philippines I might have fallen into a more white understanding of gender. If that makes sense. Because the community around me—this is what we're fighting for fighting we're fighting access to hormones—for getting access to hormones. Fighting for being understood. For me, I feel like, having Petong as a mirror of what GNC is—was like a beautiful way for me to be like—actually, I can be Sha. I can be in the in between space. And the work that I have to do is go into rooms and be like—I prefer he/him. Even though most people wouldn't classify me as that in that external way. Part of me is like—I feel fine with that. That makes sense to me, that's apart of my queer identity.

**Awad:** There's a certain level of serenity that comes across when you talk about that.
Lincoln: I think I tried really hard. So then, part of me wanting to give that back, after I graduate had my father hadn't passed away, had my mom hadn't become sick, I probably would have just moved to NY and tried to become an artist—live a trans life—but, I was instead forced to go home and take care of my mom. And sort of deal—and THAT became harder—now I’m in Gainesville FL with this understanding as a trans person, as a queer person. How do I navigate Gainesville in early/mid 2000’s in this community? And that was really difficult. It ultimately is what probably doesn't keep me there. Because, I'm a little bit—I feel lonely, I feel isolated, I feel like not seen, I feel like I'm struggling to be out as a trans person. I know three white people who are... trans but that was about it. You know? I just felt really like, lonely. I was like ok—my best friend was living in philadelphia and going to film school there. I applied to film school and got in. Alright, let me go to philly. Which is a total different landscape of access to hormones. Culturally a lot of trans folks talking about it being—trying to figure it out together. But, what was interesting about that was then I was attracted to support groups What was interesting was then I gravitate support groups—What's transmasculine support group look like? But that wasn't me either. It became this narrative—we take hormones and then we pass. And this is my struggle butch lesbian. This is my struggle of straight women not being attracted to me. Whoa that's not me either. [Laughter]. I hovered this weird world. And then I started my own GNC didn't really fit anywhere.

Awad: When you had moved from Gainesville to Philly—was the Philly...I don't know the history—was the Philly Trans Health Conference going on at that time.

Lincoln: Yeah. Totally.

Awad: You have trans folks moving in and out. You have the Missoni Center—different other colleges—all kinds of things.

Lincoln: Yeah. And you have West Philly, which becomes this weird enclave weird that is of a particular white subculture. But, it creates a nuanced gender understanding. I met a lot of amazing folks. A lot of folks that I think that—I don't know if I would have met if I stayed in Gainesville. I was like, I like center around we want queer culture—we believe in social justice. We believe in art and we believe in loving each other the best we can. I think that value is really there in philly. And, it was limiting. I felt a little like—I don't know if I should stay here. I fell in love with someone living in New York. I ended up living both lives in philly and New York in 2008. what I loved about NY, all these beautiful queer poc-centered organizing. I would come here on the weekends and then go back to philly—go back to grad school. Be like—oh this sucks. But, also I had my QPOC family there. I didn’t want to leave because living there was so cheap and I could do everything that what I wanted. I could make my art, I could do filmmaking. I could mostly prioritize my friends and not have to hustle as hard as NY.

Awad: When you’re in philly where were you studying film?

Lincoln: Temple.
Awad: At Temple University. Now temple has a pretty well known tradition or roster of queer filmmakers on staff. Were you there at all when Cheryl Dundee any of those—or Elizabeth Subren—the whole range of people?

Lincoln: Yes. Elizabeth subran. Michelle parkinson actually is one of the best—actually is more memorable. She did the Audre Lorde doc. [Documentary]. She is such a beautiful human. She unfortunately left Temple the year into me being there. And, I didn't have a lot of mentorship with faculty, but I loved the community that it attracted. It was mostly outliers—people who wanted to go to filmschol but were international students. Or Who were queers or thinking about social justice documentary. Or...it had a broad range of people it attracted. The department was by far not perfect—mostly white men. And mostly had a traditional film school curriculum. But, I appreciated the different. Started teaching there when I was an underground was, when I was an underground—was one of my heroes. She did History and Memory—remember that old, art documentary about internment camps? Anyways, it was a beautiful piece. It was really cool to work with her. Elizabeth is a beautiful person. The only thing that I would say—I was trying to do—how do I become this beautiful organizer who cares about media justice and the movement and all these pieces, and also make documentaries or be a filmmaker. The most harmful things about grad school is that people kept being like—don't do both. Don't do both. And Elizabeth was one of those people—You can't do both—Don't do both—Do one or the other. Which I didn't believe—I didn't believe that. I still feel that time period was my being awkward. I didn't know how to professionally grow. I think that it both helped me and stunted at me at the same time. The beauty of it If it wasn't in Philly, I don't know if I would have found my queer community the way that I NEEDED in that time period.

Awad: Ok so, after you finished graduate school? Where’d you go? What happened?

Lincoln: Well, I moved to Sunset park, [laughter] a block away from you. [Laughter] .Part of it is—this falling in love in 2008 meant that we had to make a call—Philly or NY? Yasmine tried living in Philly for awhile and that didn't really work. So, then I come to NY. And...ya—I don't have any regrets about it. I Love...I think in retrospect a place like philly is both great and it can get stagnant. And, I think that it was sorta the growth that I needed was to leave that city.

Awad: So tell me a little about what you do in NY. I think that's a good way—we got so much—you've got—I love all your stories and your details. And now we're approaching more your presence. So tell me a little bit about what you do. Are you more of a media organizer or documentary filmmaker? Or both?

Lincoln: I still like to do both. I think that one of the struggles I had in grad [graduate] school was, I was—I think an important detail—I got pulled into queer organizing in the South through Southerners Underground. And I was documenting their work for awhile. But, also trying to figure out how to be an organizer. [Laughter]. I felt this longing I was like—I need to go back to the South. But because I fell into this relationship, I decided to stay in the North. I do I still feel such an affinity to that work by Southerners Underground—I think it’s important for me to say as an oral history—the south is an important place for us to be thinking about queer identity. And it's important as this awkward trans GNC kid, in Gainesville, florida to imagine it as my
political home, as well. My political narrative, was like, I came out of Freedom schools, actually. My grounding is out of—what is it like to fight for civil rights in a place that has the history of slavery. I think, that when we’re rooting our identity more from a point of history like that. Which obviously—telling my narrative—that was kind of my calling is to think intergenerationally, in these centuries rather than decades. Is that, I do think that my narrative is that—maybe if I didn’t fall in love I would have returned to the South because I think often like myself—where I’m forced out because I don’t see community in a place where my family is. It feels sad to me. And, I feel like in this moment where we’re all getting displaced by far right like, beliefs—that the bubble is helpful for survival. And I don’t deny that at all. One of the things that I learned from Southern organizing is that popular education is really important. And what i mean by that is that we have all the knowledge that we need to know. Being apart of an organizing community that understands that will sort of be a beautiful way to build a base. Right? And so, I came to that understanding in my Southern organizing nerdiness. And then, when I was in grad school I was like—what is making media look like in popular education? I couldn’t formulate it. But what it did, when I got to NY I gotta work at a place—the only place that I know, that does that which is Global action project. And part of that was that Global action project was thinking about education not just media making. They were thinking about youth leadership, youth development, and what does that look like in politically developing young people. I think I live a weird/strange life. How did I come from Gainesville Freedom school to Global Action Project? I’m not sure. That’s what I’m currently doing—I work as a program manager there. One of the beautiful things is that everyday the goal of my job is to build a community that is intergenerational, but mostly youth led—to make work, to make film but also media that is about social justice work. The goal is not necessarily to just to finish a polished documentary about this new, like, current issue. But, it’s really about how do we build a community that feels empowered because that is not represented. But, also most impacted by institutional oppression. How do we get those voices to the front of our narratives? But, at the same time building their agency to like, do organizing for their communities. That’s a beautiful daily work. It gives me a lot of feeling of...like that—I have arrived to a methodology. That I’ve felt really—I’ve been trying to articulate since I was in Antioch college class. Or even as a young person—writing a zine called Bells and Cells after Gainsville Freedom School. I think there’s a part of me—I’ve been on this hunt since I understood the way in which we are manufacturing consent, as Noam chomsky says. To build an empowerment through media making, that is not only reflecting ourselves, but able to articulate our voice and to build the relationships that we need to survive. And, it’s not easy. I actually don’t—we are doing an ok job. It becomes more cultural organizing then I think, sometimes if I say—oh, I work at an after school, doing filmmaking—it’s not nearly what I do. [Laughter]. It’s like—just how do we approach holistically making media from the root causes of people’s lives? How do we support them? Like, as a trans women of color how do I support a young 22 yr old into both economic stability and also the skill set to transfer this into any other kind of job. But, then also pull and understand that transphobia is holding us back institutionally and how to push back against that. It’s very nuanced. Its beautiful work and very tiring. Because it’s doing too many things at once. It’s doing too much—Make a 20 min film. GO! [laughter]. On top of all the other stuff. [Laughter].

Awad: So you’ve been at Global Action project for a couple years now.

Awad: ...Since 2013, you've been at Global Action Project—in your view have some of the issues the youth you work with changed? Has their access at all changed—resources changed? Do you have a perspective on that? I know you work with youth age 14-24 now as we were talking about and work with youth who are underserved in a myriad of ways—which I will let you talk about—I'm just wondering if you had any of that—any insight about that.

Lincoln: Ya, it's funny because I think that we are in a weird moment, obviously, I think Trump—

Awad: Florida moment. [Laughter].

Lincoln: Ya right. [Pause]. I work with mostly trans youth and immigrant youth. So, you can imagine that the election of Trump has impacted these youth the most. I would say that primarily I work with black immigrant youth. I mostly work with Muslim youth. I mostly work with trans women, trans GNC folks. I think—what I see is the clear moment in time when we're all in terror and we're all being terrorized by institutional bullshit. Ya know, basically? I feel like it means this year we had more participants than we've ever had in some ways. Because immigrant youth are looking to each other—How do I survive? How do I get support? What are my rights? How do I go to college—I just want to go to college. But, I want to talk about it with other youth. So, let me come to this space. I feel like—I think people are wanting to be involved. I think we have a lot of people come to us because they were like—Look, I need something to distract me. We do a lot of leadership development. So that means that half my staff is under 25. That also means that—I had a beautiful evaluation with of one of our media educators who is an alumni from 2011. He was like—shit, let me reflect about this year. When the election happened and you were like—ok come work for me. And I was like, yes—because I was depressed and what I needed a space to react. reaction is not what we need. What we need is strategy and what does that look like? I think we're all still figuring that out. I don't think we have the answers. I think it's incredibly overwhelming because everytime I go to work I don't know what I will be met by. It could be a trans woman who has just been kicked out of a shelter who needs just a place to stay—on a couch. Or it could be... attempted suicide which happens. I don't think the conditions are changing drastically—like I think—what I realize though today in these moments, that we're still pretending things are normal. At any moment—it's really nuanced what identity politics do—I'm kinda documented, I have DACA. I think even having those moments—actually, that can be taken away from you. Half my youth are going to be impacted by TPS, [Temporary Protection of Haitian community]. Right? And if anything comes back with Trump being like—nah, I'm not gonna renew that—that means—half those families are undocumented...

Awad: What that means for the Haitian community right now.

Lincoln: Yeah. That means—temporary, basically it was ok for Haitians to immigrate to the US. And that has technically run out. And so we need Trump to approve its’ renewal or else people
could get deported. And right now—the only information we have—he hasn't said anything about it. But, what we know about it is that he has asked a lot about the criminalizing around Haitians basically. I think the likelihood is not good. But, there's a lot of a organizing going around it.

**Awad:** And so you have a number of haitian youth in your programs that will be impacted by this.

**Lincoln:** Yes...yes. But I mean, what's beautiful is this nuanced conversation. I've seen since I started working there. Intersectionality in a mainstream way—because of black lives matter. Because of the organizing happening in NY City. Means that youth are coming to me at 14—I'm being persecuted because I'm black not because I'm Haitian. [Laughter]. I'm being persecuted, so is my Brazilian sister here—Let's make a film about our ancestors and we both come from and Yoruba culture—and this beautiful narrative about wanting to go to college but instead having to go to the ocean to reconnect with the Yamaya. [Laughter]. I think there's a certain nuanced connectedness right now that is really beautiful in our articulation of experience—that's missing from my narrative when I was like a young person. I don't—I think there's a beautiful moment where people understand trans identity. And immigrant youth come into this space and their like—[gasp] my parents don't let me talk to queer people. And gravitate towards all the GNC trans youth and are obsessed with them—Can I take a picture with you? [Laughter]. In a way that is partly because of the cultural...celebrity.

**Awad:** Stigma. Oh, celebrity.

**Lincoln:** Ya, which is different.

**Awad:** I was going to say stigma.

**Lincoln:** No, we're in a weird moment—that social media is making trans folks celebrities. Which means that some of the youth that I work with are both homeless and a celebrity. It's the weirdest thing— weirdest being like—because at 21, I was still understanding what trans identity was so for both featured on teen vogue and also homeless is a real—it's a real reality right now.

**Awad:** What do you think when you reflect on all your work that you've done, organizing youth and media—what do you think of as your biggest success or accomplishment?

**Lincoln:** I was telling you this story about how—I think part of what has been really helpful is coming into this organization, is—our ideologies driven by the understanding—youth-driven, and political ed [education]. And these broad strokes of social justice and how we define it—is really based on who's leading it. What's been beautiful is seeing my commitment to building up trans youth. So like switching our LGBT focus youth to being more specific to trans and GNC youth. Being really committed—since I was a young organizers—making sure that we're building enough youth leadership—youth leaders can be at the decision making table—as media, as interns—people reping the films that they make. That's been my commitment. There
have been beautiful moments that—just like I’ve experienced that have been overstigmatized and having trans youth be able to tell their narrative in a different way and seeing that trajectory to go from that to being a peer media educator. Us having 90% trans youth this year from...two, last year. It’s always been, ya know, a welcoming space but I think seeing this shift of how that arch of really being really committed to a certain thing—of leadership really changes the dynamic of participation. Been able to—as an organization, it always has been, but being more open to certain risks. Having more young people take lead. Having more focus on certain specific areas, or intersectional ways. Making sure that the films stay true to being centered by the youth in all realms. That’s something I feel good about.

Awad: Now, I think I want to end with a question about the future a little bit. Given the climate that we’re in—things are feeling a little bit dire—Ya know—In terms of access to resources. You know, there feels like there’s going to be this imminent onslaught of harm—which is already started. But is going to amplify. But, in light of the work that you do—what you’re passionate about—what do you envision for yourself and your work in the next several years? What direction do you hope that will take?

Lincoln: Well, [sigh] I don’t know. I think that’s part of the problem right now. I go back and forth from being—joking that we need to relocate to a different country for awhile. [Laughter]. Which may be true. I think to, wanting to feel more happiness doing more film making work and supporting my community in a different way that’s not necessarily through an organization or through nonprofit that has to rely on funding through these things connected to the institutionalized problem. Ya know? I think that there’s a way—having come from the South to the North I can say I want to go back to the basics—I think that we developed a certain political analysis, a certain political community that is rooted in nonprofits, and I think for me to kinda come full circle—I came up in infinity groups and shoestring Saturday school that was not funded and was volunteer driven. And sort of rooting myself back into—that organizing really comes from your love of people and not a need professional way. To mean that might mean a lot of different things. Like, I live in a 20 person collective house right now. Part of that is trying to understand alternative modes of economies where we can be interdependent in a different way. And I’m curious about that, I think we’re going to have to start thinking of resources as time—as... resources as—what do we have around the table, skillswise. And how do we get through these moments. I have to say that that may mean going back to the South. Where I think our skill set may be better around those things—[Laughter] Around understanding how to do resources—the monetary recourserce in the North. A possibility for a lot of methods and strategies—I’m curious about them. What I will say is that I’m committed to building and staying committed to community that is both thinking intersectionally about queer people of color, about trans people, about immigrants, about our elders—how do we get each other’s backs. I think my future will be tied to that. And I think what that might mean—is again being a bit more resourceful and not necessarily having a professional job.

Awad: Thank you so much for all your filmatics, cinematic stories and being so generous with this oral history. I really appreciate and I think it’s a tremendous addition to this archive.