

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Mike Miller

Mike Miller: Establishing SLATE on the Berkeley Campus

The SLATE Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2018

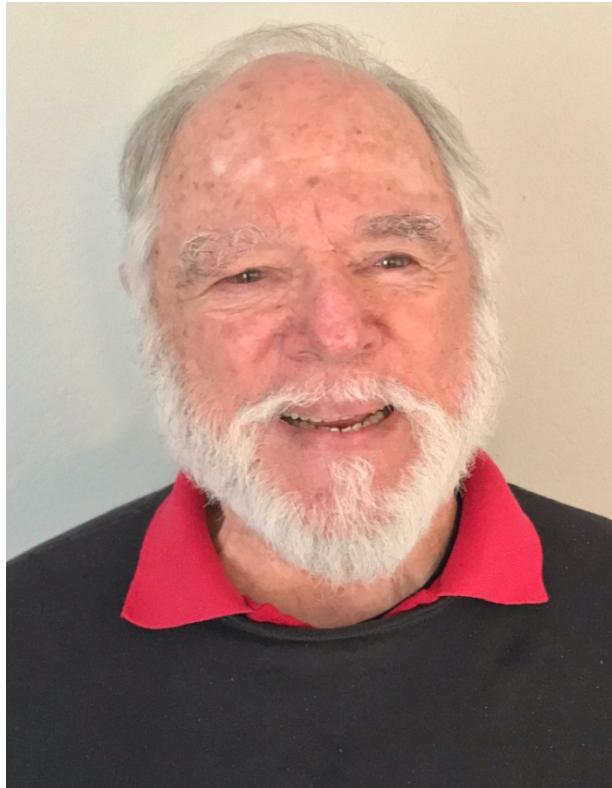
Copyright © 2018 by Mike Miller

Since 1954 the Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

This oral history recording and transcript is made available to the public under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License signed by Mike Miller on March 16, 2018. For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

The Bancroft Library recommends that this oral history be cited as follows:

Mike Miller, “Mike Miller: Establishing SLATE on the Berkeley Campus,” SLATE Oral History Project, conducted by Martin Meeker in 2018, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2018.



Mike Miller

Photography courtesy of Mike Miller

Mike Miller attended the University of California Berkeley as undergraduate between 1954 and 1958. In fall 1957, Miller joined a handful of other students who ran on an informal “slate” of progressive candidates for the Associated Students of the University of California council. The following spring, Miller and several other students established SLATE as a formal student organization which sought to influence not only student government but an array of social and political issues from left-leaning perspective. Miller returned to Berkeley in the 1960s when he took some graduate school classes, worked on campus, and observed the Free Speech Movement. He went on to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and for community organizer Saul Alinsky, among numerous other initiatives. In this interview, Miller discusses the following topics: Miller’s family background and leftist politics in San Francisco in the 1940s and 50s; the UC Berkeley campus in the 1950s and sectarian politics; the formation of SLATE and the subsequent activities of that organization; the influence of SLATE on student activism and on larger political trends.

Table of Contents — Mike Miller

Interview 1: January 5, 2018

Hour 1	1
Born in San Francisco, California in 1937 — Father migrated from Russia — Great Grandfather endured political persecution — Mother politicized by the Great Depression — Name change: Milowski became Miller — Father's views on World War II politics — Father a linguist for the U.S. government; Soviet files reveal potential espionage — Father's involvement with American Communist Party, <i>People's World</i> newspaper, and labor education with fisherman's union — Views on the First Amendment — McCarthyism as an atmosphere of fear — Sidney Roger's Radio News Broadcast — Cloyne Court Berkeley Housing Cooperative — Stiles Hall — Campaign to end discriminatory listings in housing office — Cecil Thomas — Martin Luther King, Jr. comes to Stiles Hall in 1956 — Student Civil Liberties Union — Elimination of University Rule 17 — Jacobus tenBroek — Loyalty oath controversy at UC Berkeley — Panty Raid of 1955 — Resolution to ban campus recognition of racially discriminatory living groups — 1956 meeting in support of the Hungarian Revolution — Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) — National Students Association — Fritjof Thygeson — Toward an Active Student Community (TASC) — Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) — Shachtmanites — Young Socialist Alliance — Issue-oriented activism: an end to A-bomb and H-bomb testing, opposition to apartheid in South Africa and compulsory ROTC, increasing wages in the campus bookstore, lowering prices for students — Fall of 1956 ASUC election	

Hour 2	16
Fraternity/sorority mobilization against SLATE — Race demographics on campus — <i>About SLATE</i> — SLATE views on First Amendment — Vincent and Patrick Hallinan — Philip Selznick — Americans for Democratic Action — C. Wright Mills — Henry Street Settlement House — LaGuardia Housing Project — LaGuardia Tenant Association — Saul Alinsky — Hudson Guild Settlement House — Mobilization for Youth — Cecil Thomas — William "Bill" Davis	

Interview 2: January 29, 2018

Hour 1	32
Martin Luther King, Jr. presentation at Stiles Hall in 1956 — Fighting urban renewal in Bayview-Hunters Point in 1961-62 — Protesting US intervention in Cuba — Picketing and protesting — Civil rights, union organizing, and the labor movement — 1961 SLATE summer conference on agricultural labor — Connecting campus to community forces — Ongoing conversation in SLATE around tactic and focus — Building a broad based, multi-issue organization; educate, but do not impose ideology/world view — World Youth Festival —	

Student-led Civil Rights Movement in the South activating students nationally — House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) propaganda film labeling students as communists — Zellerbach Hall — Direct action versus voter registration — Bayview-Hunters Point Citizens Committee — 1962 SLATE summer conference on “The Negro in America” — Youth for Service — Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) staff member 1963

Hour 2

46

1957-58 SLATE “breaks the mold of the Silent Generation” — 1960-62 Growing support for Civil Rights Movement in the South — SLATE no longer the center of student activism by 1962 — University of California Students Against Intervention in Cuba — SLATE disbands in 1966 — Activism that preceded the Free Speech Movement (FSM): farm labor, peace/antiwar movement, Civil Rights Movement — University of California bars students from collecting money for the Civil Rights Movement — Alinsky presents to SLATE — Lead organizer for Mission Coalition Organization — Community Service Organization — Student representative on the Board of Regents as cooptation rather than real power — Community control versus institutional change — The importance of building strong social bonds within SLATE

Interview 1: January 5, 2018

01-00:00:02

Meeker: Today is Friday, January 5, 2018. It's good to be in a new year. I am interviewing Mike Miller for the SLATE Oral History Project, and this is Martin Meeker. This is interview session number one, and we are here at Mike Miller's home in San Francisco. So the way that we begin all interviews is the same, and that is: tell me your name, date, and place of birth.

01-00:00:34

Miller: Mike Miller, San Francisco, January 24, 1937.

01-00:00:40

Meeker: Tell me a little bit about the circumstances of the family into which you were born?

01-00:00:48

Miller: My dad was an immigrant from Russia. He came sometime between the 1905 and the 1917 revolutions. I don't know a whole lot, but my understanding from my mom is that his grandfather was a Russian anarchist. So his family sent him to the United States when there was heightened repression in Russia. And earlier family had come here, so he connected with some family here. What he did between his arrival here and when he met my mom is pretty vague. He was in import/export for a while. He was a furniture salesman for a while. He met my mom when she was a librarian at UCLA. My mom grew up in Los Angeles. There were three or four brothers and three sisters, big, big family. She was the youngest. And she was politicized by the Depression. So my mom met him when he was doing some research at the UCLA library, and she was a librarian. So she graduated from USC, and she had a teaching credential, but she never taught. Or maybe she didn't get the credential. She went to school to be a teacher but never taught. So they connected in 1935, '36, around in there, came up here, and I was born here in San Francisco in 1937.

01-00:03:06

Meeker: How old was your father when you were born?

01-00:03:07

Miller: My dad was twenty years older than my mom, so he was probably around forty, forty-one when he met my mom.

01-00:03:24

Meeker: What was his name?

01-00:03:29

Miller: It was something like Milawski. And so, as many of these stories go, when people with these names arrived at Ellis Island the American immigration officer said, "Oh, people are not going to be able to say that name," and so they helped them contract it. So I was told, I think by an aunt, that for a brief period it might have been Milaw, M-I-L-A-W, but it quickly became Miller.

And so he was James Walter Miller, and he married Ester Kleinman, and I think they were pregnant with me before they got married. They got married up here, and I don't know exactly when they arrived here in '36. They arrived in San Francisco in '36. They were married, I think, by a kind of a left Presbyterian minister, who was up on Potrero Hill, who was very involved with the Longshoremen's Union, which was a left-wing union, Harry Bridges and all that. And they had a little apartment on Valencia, in the Mission District, near 24th Street. And at that time next to the apartment was a little used auto lot, and the guy had a racing car up on a platform in his lot, and I used to go over there, and he'd let me sit in this racing car. That was one of my big thrills of my early, early childhood. Then, when I was about four or five, we moved into the newly opened Sunnydale housing project, which is out in the southeast corner of San Francisco, out by the Cow Palace. And we lived there until I went to Berkeley. But let me come back to that.

So in the war, during the war, my father worked for the Censorship Department. He was a linguist. And in those days they would steam open letters and read them to see if there was information in them. These are letters that are being sent internationally. So is there information in this letter that might be useful to the enemy? Maybe it's written in there quite innocently, like someone writes, "Oh my gosh, we had all these ships come steaming into San Francisco Bay the other day." Well, they're not trying to reveal anything to the enemy, but it might be useful to the enemy. So with scissors, he would cut this line out of the letter, and reseal it, and on it would go. Now, there's some evidence in the opened Soviet files since the collapse of the Soviet regime that he was actually sending information to the Russians. Now, the information in those files is itself open to some question, but it's quite conceivable that he was doing that. It's quite conceivable to me, and that he was a member of the American Communist Party, although for most of my life I was skeptical of that idea. I knew he was on the fringe. He translated for the *People's World* newspaper, which is the West Coast Communist paper. And he did labor education work with the leftwing unions around here, particularly the Fishermen's Union. And through the Fishermen's Union in 1946 he met a guy by the name of Gregory Gorby. Gregory Gorby was a fish canner. He had canneries. And he hired my dad to be an import/export rep with Europe. And the condition my father had for taking this job was that Gorby paid for my mom and me to travel with him. So in late '46, we embarked on a trip that was meant to take us ultimately to Moscow. And my dad's—kind of his vision for this was that if trade could be open with the Soviets, and there could be major trade between the United States and the Soviet Union, it would mitigate against the emerging Cold War, and the threat of war between the two of them, and whatever. So we went on the *HMS Gripsholm*, a Swedish-American line ship. Landed in Gothenburg, Sweden. Got on a train to Oslo. And in Oslo my dad had a minor heart attack. So we made it as far as Prague. Still, Moscow was the destination. He had a sister in Moscow. I had a cousin in Moscow. And the doctors in Prague said, "You won't survive a Moscow winter." And so we were grounded in Prague. Stayed

in a fancy hotel there, the Alcron. It's one of the three big hotels of the time in Prague. And probably in the summer returned to San Francisco.

One of the things that struck me at ten years old, but I'm already kind of politically aware, because my home was filled with discussion of politics. During World War II my dad had a big map on the wall, and colored pins representing the Allies and the Axis powers, and then within that American, French, British, Russian, and Italian, German, and Japanese. And so he had all these color-coded pins, and he'd move these pins to follow troop movements. And that was the discussion at the dinner table was always politics. And one of the things I never understood: when we traveled, my dad had access to very high levels of Communists in government in Norway, in Poland, where we stopped briefly on the way to Czechoslovakia, and in Czechoslovakia. And my mom remained closemouthed about that all her life. She lived, I think, until her death in the fear of another McCarthy era. So we came back. My dad was grounded because of his health. My mom went to work. He was writing all the time, translating or writing. So I'd come home from school every day, and we'd play hearts or checkers or chess, and then my mom would come home from work. We'd have dinner. There'd be political talk at the dinner table, so on. So I went to Visitation Valley Elementary School, then Guadalupe Elementary School, Denman Junior High, and Balboa High School. So when I was in junior high, or maybe my first year of high school, somewhere around in there, I read a book, *The Loyalty of Free Men*, which was a liberal defense of civil liberties, which I found very persuasive.

01-00:12:24

Meeker:

Who wrote that? Do you recall?

01-00:12:25

Miller:

Oh, boy. [laughter] I can't remember. [Alan Barth] I don't remember who wrote that, but it was a paperback, little paperback that I got. And so I became very persuaded of an ACLU view of the First Amendment, that you can't have free speech for the left and not the right. And that became a big interest of mine. And then when the Korean War occurred, my family's view of that, I couldn't make that jibe with the fact that the North had moved so fast all the way down to Seoul, to the tip of the Korean Peninsula. So that didn't jibe with this innocent North Korea as it was portrayed. So I was critical of that, too.

01-00:13:29

Meeker:

When you had these conversations, did you feel like you were a spectator or a participant?

01-00:13:38

Miller:

At home?

01-00:13:38

Meeker:

Yes.

01-00:13:39

Miller:

Oh, no, my parents encouraged me to ask questions, and to be engaged. And we went to various events around here. I can't remember the specifics of all of them, but I know when Paul Robeson was out here and sang we heard him at Third Baptist Church. He was shut out of the Veterans Auditorium because of the McCarthy era. So I remember things like the Rosenberg case, and the Army McCarthy hearings. And that's a little bit later, but McCarthyism was—I was very aware of all of that.

01-00:14:27

Meeker:

How were you made aware of that? Was it something that came from your parents? Were they personally concerned?

01-00:14:32

Miller:

Yeah. Yeah. There are kids I know who were part of a San Francisco Communist Party left subculture. We were not part of that, so I didn't know it from that. I knew it from my folks. And in those days, just to give you an idea of the climate, there was a guy by the name of Sidney Roger, who had a radio news broadcast. When we were first listening to him, it was daily, and I think it was on KGO, which is one of the major radio stations. And as a result of the McCarthy era, KGO cut him, and so he was then on another radio station. I think it was called KRE. And it went from daily to weekly. So when I was in junior high, I was in a circle of kids who would talk about the news, what was going on in the world. And so what someone like me would do, or what I did, I'd say something that I'd heard on Sid Roger's news, but I'd say it very cautiously. And if one of my friends said, "Oh yeah, I heard that, too," well, then I'd know, oh, this is a kid who's from a left family. But you would feel each other out. You would not say, "I listen to Sid Roger's news." No, you would not do that, because of this atmosphere of fear that was so prevalent then. So I had two buddies in high school at Denman who were also from left families. So then I became a rebel, and I can't remember what year that was. I don't know if it was the tenth grade, the ninth grade, when I was about to graduate from junior high, or the twelfth grade, when I was graduating from high school. But I joined Junior Achievement. This was a thing that placed students—it must have been high school—it placed students in business enterprises. And so for about a semester I thought I was going to be a Republican businessman. So this was my revolt, only it was to the right. Other kids revolt to the left; I revolt to the right. By this time, my dad had died. He died in 1950. So that didn't last long. I went to Berkeley, lived in a co-op, Cloyne Court—

01-00:17:52

Meeker:

Could I ask you to pause there?

01-00:17:53

Miller:

Yeah, yeah.

01-00:17:54
Meeker: So you said that your father passed away in 1950. McCarthyism really gets going in 1948-ish. Did your parents ever express any concern for their own personal position, that they might be called up to testify?

01-00:18:13
Miller: Yeah, the FBI came to our door, and my dad threw them out. Yeah. They told me, "Michael go out and play." But an FBI agent came. That was probably '48 or 9. So, oh yeah, it was very present.

01-00:18:35
Meeker: But your father, I guess, wasn't working at that point.

01-00:18:37
Miller: Right.

01-00:18:38
Meeker: Your mother, where was she working?

01-00:18:40
Miller: She started at the State Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, and then she went to the State Department of Social Welfare.

01-00:18:47
Meeker: So she would've been a—

01-00:18:48
Miller: A clerk librarian. She was a clerk librarian. And when she was at Social Welfare she became the person who traveled with one of the referees, Maury Rosen I think was the guy's name. So the State would referee disputes between a Welfare recipient and the county Welfare agency. So Maury would travel around, I guess, Northern California, and he'd have hearings, and my mom would be there, I don't know, to take notes, to do what. But she and Maury became good friends. And I saw Maury when I was in college. Occasionally I'd visit. He lived in Berkeley. And he was a liberal guy. He had worked for the UN refugee resettlement agency in the immediate post-World War II period.

01-00:19:49
Meeker: Was there ever any concern in your family—by your mother, for instance—that she could lose her job because of political association?

01-00:19:57
Miller: I never heard that. I never heard that.

01-00:20:06
Meeker: Was your family religious at all?

01-00:20:07
Miller: No. Not the slightest trace. So in school kids say, "What are you?" They want to know what you are. So I'd say, "Mom, what are we?" She said, "It's none

of their business." That was her first line of defense. "It's none of their business." So I'd persist. "No, no, no, Ma. I want to have an answer. What are we?" "Well, you tell them you're Unitarian." [laughter] So that was my answer. But in high school, I met a girl. Her name was Ann Smith. And so we were a couple. And she went to St. James Presbyterian Church, which was in Visitacion Valley. And they had a basketball team that competed in a church league. So I played for that basketball team, and I went to Sunday night youth group at St. James Presbyterian Church. But I wouldn't say I ever became a believer. I liked the people. And then when I went to Berkeley—well, to go back to the beginnings at Berkeley, I lived at Cloyne Court as a co-op. And I learned about Stiles Hall. Stiles Hall is the university YMCA. And it was the one institutional center at Berkeley where people left of center, liberal left kids gathered and talked about politics, and did things.

01:00:21:56

Meeker: Was Harry Kingman still around?

01:00:21:59

Miller: Occasionally. He'd drop in to visit. But Bill Davis was the executive director. And the people I remember on the staff were Pierre Delattre, who was a Presbyterian minister; Cecil Thomas, who was a Quaker; and there was one other guy who was there briefly. And then Nat Schaffer. I think he became a prof in the social work school. So those were the staff people. Now, I should go back. One of the things about my childhood was my parents had, in those days, Negro friends. So we had African American people over to our place for dinner, and stuff like that. So I was friendly with African American kids at school. In junior high I was president of the Scholastic Society, and we had a dance one afternoon, and there was a young African American girl there who was a member, and nobody was asking her to dance, so I asked her to dance. And my buddies, they thought that was—I don't know. And there was another girl who was a terrific athlete. So I went over to her place. She lived in Crocker-Amazon project. In those days there was almost total segregation of the housing projects in San Francisco. I think it became a Supreme Court case. So I was opposed to prejudice and segregation, racism, discrimination. The word "racism" I don't think was too widely used then. But anyway, so at Stiles Hall there was an interest in doing something about discriminatory listings in the housing office. Barbershops in the campus area wouldn't cut the hair of black students. And we did things around that. We met with the housing office, and we got them to end their discriminatory listings.

01:00:24:26

Meeker: So I'd like to know more about Stiles Hall. Clearly this is a pivotal place in the history of the campus, as well as for SLATE in particular. And given that it doesn't physically exist anymore. [laughter]

01:00:24:41

Miller: Yeah, right.

01:00:24:42

Meeker:

And I don't think it exists for a long time in the way that it did then conceptually. Like, what was it? Was this like a community center where you would walk in and there would be a desk and a bulletin board? Can you describe the process of actually visiting it, and what it was like, and how you would engage with it?

01:00:25:05

Miller:

Yeah, Stiles was a two-story concrete building at the corner of Bancroft and Dana. So you would walk in. There was kind of a reception desk on your right. I can't remember the woman who worked at it. She was terrific, a wonderful woman who was the receptionist, secretary, whatever. And then you'd go in a little further, and there was a big, open space where there's a big round table, and you could sit around in this round table, talking with other kids who were there. There were newspapers and magazines on the table. And then toward the back, on the left side, were offices of staff. So Pierre and Cecil, I think they had their offices back there. I think Bill Davis' office somehow was as you walked in behind the secretary's space. And then upstairs there was an apartment. There was kind of a resident student who took care of the building and stuff like that. And there was a big room. I think at the maximum it would seat maybe 125 people, and there were folding chairs in a closet, and you'd bring the folding chairs out for speakers who were invited to come visit at Stiles Hall. So you'd go there after school, and there might be a coffee hour. Cecil's wife Fran had gone to Spelman, I think it was, with Coretta Scott, who became Coretta Scott King. So through Fran—that's Cecil's wife—and Coretta, we got to Martin Luther King, and he came to Stiles to speak in '56. So this is shortly after the Montgomery bus boycott. And hardly anybody knew who he was. There might've been thirty people. There would've been three thousand five years later. But so we had speakers, and Stiles had a policy that any group who wanted to have a political meeting at Stiles could use its hall. There was some left group. I think they wanted to have Gus Hall, so it must've been some Communist Party-related youth group. And Gus Hall was the national head of the Communist Party, and they wanted to have him speak. He couldn't speak on campus because of Rule 17. I'll come back to that in a minute. And so this group invited Gus Hall to speak at Stiles. And then there were groups. There were groups. There was a Student Civil Liberties Union. That's how I met Peter Franck. Peter was head of the Student Civil Liberties Union. It was at Stiles that I met Hank DiSuvero. He was a year older. And I think he lived in Barrington co-op, or maybe by that time he had his own apartment. And he became an elected representative at large in the student government. What were other groups? I can't remember right now.

01:00:29:12

Meeker:

Were they mostly political, or were there any kind of—

01-00:29:14

Miller: No, no, no, no, it was not entirely political. I can't remember what else, what other activities.

01-00:29:25

Meeker: Well, it sounds to me like this was a student union for politically engaged students.

01-00:29:30

Miller: Yeah, probably. There was a lot of that, but there was another dimension. There were much less political kids who were there. And I can't remember what the activities were that engaged them. So the campus had a Rule 17, and Rule 17 is a university rule. Rule 17 said if you have a controversial speaker you have to have, on the same platform, a speaker of the opposite point of view. So if you wanted to have Gus Hall, I suppose you had to have a conservative Republican.

01-00:30:08

Meeker: A Bircher. [laughter]

01-00:30:09

Miller: Or a Bircher or something. So of course it was prohibitive. And so when candidates for U.S. presidency came to speak, they had to address students from off the campus, at the edge of the campus. They'd talk into the campus where the students were assembled, because for them to speak on campus you'd have to have their Republican opponent on the same platform. So we had a group. I think Peter was in it. I think Hank was part of it. I was in it. And we very quietly negotiated with the administration for the elimination of Rule 17. And Peter reminded me that I was arguing at the time for a public campaign, that we should have a public campaign. Otherwise, the educational value of engaging with this issue, engaging on civil liberties, would be lost. But I was a minority. And so we remained a very behind-the-scenes group. I think we may finally have met with Clark Kerr. And Kerr agreed to the elimination of Rule 17.

01-00:31:34

Meeker: Do you recall what arguments were made on your behalf?

01-00:31:38

Miller: Yeah, yeah, it was civil liberties. The campus ought to be a free market place of ideas.

01-00:31:49

Meeker: Using Holmesian terminology.

01-00:31:51

Miller: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We were reading. Jacobus tenBroek was a professor in the Speech Department, and Speech 1A was the First Amendment. So all of us were taking—tenBroek was a fabulous teacher—blind, Socratic method. So he'd call out your name and say, "Miller, and what

do you think of Holmes fire in a theater limitation on the First Amendment?" You'd have to answer, and he'd engage with you for a while. And then if you wanted the discussion to go for a longer period, and you were on track to answer his question, he'd move to another student. He'd call another student, because he didn't want the question answered that quickly. He was a fabulous prof. So I took from him. Speech 1A was the First Amendment. Speech 1B was the Fourteenth Amendment. And Speech 137, I think, was documents, founding of the United Nations, stuff like that. So he used original documents, court cases, in 1A and 1B, as teaching material. And then you wrote a term paper, like a 500-word paper. It might've been every two weeks. Yeah, I think maybe every two weeks. And my reader in 1A or 1B was Carey McWilliams, Jr. So his father, as you know, was editor of the *Nation*. Carey was a figure in the Young Democrats on campus. And he had a lot of influence on me. I had high regard for Carey McWilliams. But there wasn't much politics on the campus in those days.

There was a huge loyalty oath fight at Cal. A number of faculty left over that. And there was always a presence of left and liberal students. When I got there, there were still GI Bill students from World War II, and Korean War. And Telegraph Avenue had coffee shops, and Telegraph Avenue went all the way up to Sather Gate in those days, and so there were some coffee shops in that block that now is the student union on one side and the administration building on the other. And so there was an atmosphere where political conversation was ongoing.

01-00:35:09

Meeker:

The co-ops, were those political entities in any respect?

01-00:35:13

Miller:

No, but that's where a lot of the liberal and left kids, because they were from lower income backgrounds, that's where they lived.

01-00:35:25

Meeker:

How did you select Cloyne? What attracted you to that?

01-00:35:27

Miller:

[laughter] A guy from Balboa High School, who was older than I, had ended up there, Gene Poschman. So when I was exploring where I was going to live, Poschman said, "Well, come to Cloyne and be my roommate." So as I was about to go to Berkeley, I got a call from him: "Mike, sorry, you're not going to be my roommate." I said, "Gee, why not?" He says, "I'm getting married." [laughter] So he married a woman who was also a Balboa High School student. So when I went to Berkeley, my first roommate was a guy by the name of Severino Santos, who was about as apolitical as you could imagine: Filipino, war veteran, so he was a little older. Cloyne had a lot of electrical engineering students, because the electrical engineering building was just inside the north gate. And then there were some architecture students, because the architecture building was just inside the north gate. And we were on the

north side. But there were not many political students. So I became education chairman at Cloyne, and then I became house president at Cloyne. I was house president the year that there was a huge panty raid in '56, maybe? Does that sound right? Do you know?

01-00:37:02

Meeker:

Tell us about it. I can't give you the date, but I've read about it. [laughter] I'm intrigued. Can you just first define what a panty raid is?

01-00:37:16

Miller:

Well, these guys were going into sorority houses, and women's dorms, and opening dresser drawers to get souvenir panties, women's panties. There was nothing like rape, or I don't even think there was physical encounter with women students. But after that, the presidents of all the residences were called into a meeting with the dean. I think it was Dean Bill Shepherd, who I liked. And I think they asked us for the names of students who were in the panty raid. And I think almost everybody said, "We've got to go back to our respective houses and talk about this." So we had a house meeting that went into the wee small hours of the morning that I chaired. I think it went until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, started at 8:00. And we decided not to give names, which I had that view. We don't give names. [laughter] So that was my big event as the president of Cloyne Court.

01-00:38:44

Meeker:

Was there any encouragement for those perpetrators to step forward themselves?

01-00:38:52

Miller:

I don't remember that. There may well have been. So by this time, when I was a sophomore, I think I moved out of Cloyne my second sophomore semester. And I got an apartment. Who did I room with? I don't remember my first roommate. Maybe I got an apartment alone. In any case, Hank DiSuvero was already elected as a rep-at-large on the student government. He was the lone undergraduate liberal voice. I think there was about a fifteen-member student executive committee. And Ralph Shaffer was the graduate student rep. He was a left guy, democratic socialist. So Ralph Shaffer introduced a resolution to ban from campus recognition any living group that was racially discriminatory, which applied mostly to the fraternities and sororities. And there was heated discussion back in those days about that, whether it was an infringement on civil society—we didn't use those terms, but an improper governmental infringement.

01-00:40:42

Meeker:

Like on the freedom of association, or—

01-00:40:44

Miller:

Yeah, yeah. So there were liberals who opposed the Shaffer amendment. And I think the thing that finally persuaded me to support it was, well, if they want to associate that way, maybe that's their business, but that doesn't mean they

should be recognized by the university. So I supported the Shaffer amendment. And in '56, or maybe '57, there was a big campus meeting in support of the Hungarian Revolution, so I spoke at that. So Hank said, "Mike, I'd like you to run as kind of my successor." So I ran for student government. And I got elected. So this is probably fall, maybe, of '56.

01:00:42:03

Meeker:

Can you step back? Because this is about SLATE, which is basically about student government at its core. Can you describe what ASUC was, and what the elective apparatus was around it?

01:00:42:21

Miller:

So there's an Associated Students of the University of California, ASUC. It must be incorporated, because it had assets. And there was an elected student government. There was an NSA, an affiliation with the National Students Association. There were programs. The ASUC had a campus bookstore. I think there was an ASUC coffee shop, or something like that. And they were in a building—I can't remember [Stephens Hall]. It was very close to the Campanile. South, almost due south of the Campanile there were some steps that went down—

[Side conversation deleted.]

01:00:43:29

Miller:

So I think that was an ASUC building. There was an advisor from the administration to this elected—and the Executive Committee, ExCom, was the board of directors of this corporation, I guess. So there was a president, a vice president, reps-at-large, and there were other representatives. I can't remember quite how they were defined.

01:00:44:06

Meeker:

Were they defined by living arrangement?

01:00:44:08

Miller:

Maybe. Maybe, but I was going to say that, but I'm not sure enough of it to say it. So by the time I got elected, the graduate rep was a guy named Fritjof Thygeson. He had run to replace Ralph Shaffer, when Ralph Shaffer's term ended. So Fritjof's an older guy. He's probably seven, eight, maybe even ten years older than I. And he described himself in those days as a utopian socialist. Now, I should say that in this period there are off-campus political groups. There's the Young People's Socialist League, and they're Michael Harrington kind of socialists. They're a mix. It gets pretty obscure. [laughter] Shachtmanites, people called Shachtmanites, who they were third camp socialists. The third camp socialists believed that the Soviet Union was an equally inhuman, totalitarian system, that it was an inhuman, totalitarian system that bore no resemblance to socialism. So they weren't that kind of a socialist, but they were equally hostile to capitalism, so they called themselves third camp socialists. There was the Trotskyist youth group, the Young

Socialist Alliance. Jim Petras was a key guy there. A key guy for the YPSLs was a guy named Bogdan Denitch. So Bogdan was also an older guy.

01-00:46:15

Meeker: YPSL was—?

01-00:46:16

Miller: Young People Socialist League. They're the third camp socialists. And Norman Thomas Socialists, which is historically the American native socialist party in this country. And I used to go to their forum. They had forums. They'd invite speakers, I think, who spoke at Stiles. So I got to hear all these—Michael Harrington and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They'd be invited to campus. So there was this climate, and I think it always existed at Berkeley, even in the darkest years of the McCarthy era. Left students were talking about politics. So Hank asked me to run, and I did, and I got elected. And Fritjof was the grad rep. And the two of us started introducing resolutions on things like an end to A-bomb and H-bomb testing; against apartheid in South Africa; against compulsory ROTC, which ROTC in those days was compulsory for undergraduate men, two years. And then campus-related stuff typically having to do with either economic benefits—increased wages in the campus bookstore, lower prices for students, kind of welfare state [laughter] New Deal. We had an on-campus New Deal program. And with probably some exception, but for the most part, these were defeated. So I think our second semester I was on the executive committee.

01-00:48:34

Meeker: Okay, just a point of clarification: the elections happened every semester, and the term—

01-00:48:38

Miller: Yes, but you'd get elected for a year.

01-00:48:40

Meeker: You'd get elected for a year. Okay.

01-00:48:41

Miller: So you would overlap. You wouldn't have a whole new group coming in at one time.

01-00:48:46

Meeker: All right. I was confused about that this whole time.

01-00:48:49

Miller: Yeah, so that's why I'm not quite sure whether I ran in the spring or the fall.

01-00:48:54

Meeker: So if you were elected in the spring, then you would basically be on term the full next school year.

01-00:49:01

Miller: Correct.

01-00:49:02

Meeker: Okay. So if you were elected in the fall, that would then be a calendar year.

01-00:49:08

Miller: Well, you'd be that fall, and then the next year, the spring.

01-00:49:14

Meeker: But what time of the semester was the election? Was it at the beginning or the end?

01-00:49:21

Miller: [laughter] I don't think it was the beginning. I don't remember. If I had to bet, I would say it was in the second half of the semester. Oh, yes, that's right. So if you ran in the fall, you'd serve the next spring and fall. That's right.

01-00:49:45

Meeker: But they were staggered.

01-00:49:46

Miller: Yes, staggered, staggered.

01-00:49:54

Meeker: So you think that you were elected in the spring of '56? And then you would've served the schoolyear of '56-'57?

01-00:50:07

Miller: That's what I think, but I wouldn't swear to it. [laughter]

01-00:50:10

Meeker: All right. It's in the record. We can certainly find it.

01-00:50:16

Miller: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's easy to find out. So Fritjof started with some of his buddies a thing called TASC, Toward an Active Student Community, to be a campus political party. Fritjof was the bearer of the idea of a campus political party. None of us thought of anything like that. So it kind of made sense. You needed organization. It has continuity, and students can come together, adopt a platform. Candidates run on the platform. But they made a fatal flaw. So the first time they ran candidates might've been—

01-00:51:09

Meeker: I think that was spring '57.

01-00:51:12

Miller: I doubt it's that early.

01-00:51:13

Meeker: Really?

01-00:51:17

Miller: I doubt it's that early.

01-00:51:18

Meeker: Well, if it was spring '57 that they would've run candidates, and then I believe it ended early fall of '57, so then TASC sort of fell apart. And then if it was early fall of '57, then it was early spring of '58 that SLATE has its organization meeting.

01-00:51:45

Miller: Okay, so that means I resigned in the fall of '57, which means I was elected the previous fall to serve spring and fall.

01-00:51:59

Meeker: Okay, so you were elected fall of '56.

01-00:52:03

Miller: Yeah.

01-00:52:04

Meeker: Which is, I think, what we said.

01-00:52:05

Miller: Yeah.

01-00:52:06

Meeker: Cool. [laughter] These things are possible to figure out. Were you part of TASC?

01-00:52:11

Miller: I think I was.

01-00:52:14

Meeker: But you had already been elected, so you didn't need to run as part of it.

01-00:52:16

Miller: Yes. Yes, right. I think I was. And I might even have been in leadership of it, but it's kind of fuzzy in my mind. In any case, TASC ran two candidates, Alan Madian, who became a roommate of mine, and I can't remember the other guy's name. But TASC made a big mistake, influenced by the British Labor Party. These are political science students, and they're thinking seriously about politics. If you elect someone from your party, you hold him accountable, and the electorate, which is atomized, has no way to hold that person accountable. You have to have an organization to hold somebody accountable. And how can we do that? So the candidate to be a TASC candidate has to sign an undated letter of resignation. And TASC, if TASC feels that he's not upholding the program on which he was elected, TASC will invoke the letter of resignation, and he will be no longer on the student government. Well, the *Daily Cal* got ahold of that and had a heyday with it, and of course it's so alien to the [laughter] American political tradition that it didn't go very well. So TASC got badly beaten, number one; and number two,

it didn't increase the turnout of student government election, which it was a low turnout. There wasn't a lot of interest in student government. So that next semester Fritjof and I are introducing these resolutions, and the next semester TASC decides we're not going to run candidates because we got so badly beaten this last time. We've got to regroup, got to figure out exactly how we're dealing with all this. And then by that time I was living with Alan Madian. Alan Madian and I had an apartment on Channing between Ellsworth and Dana. And I remember we're up late at night, and I'm increasingly antsy about there's no liberal candidate running for student government. So I said, "Alan, I'm going to resign. I'm going to ask some people to run with me as a slate, and I'm going to resign," in protest of what we called sandbox politics, little kids' politics. So I called people up late at night, probably into the morning, and I talked them into doing this with me. Sally Hagerty, myself—who else was on that slate? Well, this is discoverable, easily discoverable. I don't remember the members of the first slate. And I said, "Let's meet on campus tomorrow morning, and we'll tie down all this stuff, and we'll go file for candidacy, and we'll organize a campaign."

01-00:56:07

Meeker:

Could I ask you about the decision to resign?

01-00:56:10

Miller:

I was going to resign in protest.

01-00:56:12

Meeker:

You were going to resign in protest, and you still had another semester left to serve, it sounds like, or—

01-00:56:17

Miller:

I was filling— Yeah, I think I was in my second, last semester on the student government.

01-00:56:23

Meeker:

Okay. What was the goal of the resignation?

01-00:56:31

Miller:

To dramatize the sandbox character of student government. I knew it would get a big story in the *Daily Cal*, and it did. So there was a guy who was a high school friend of mine who went to Cal by the name of Mike Pease, very talented artistically, and he became an architect, taught at University of Oregon at Eugene. And I think he then dropped architecture and became an artist. But he designed our flyers, so we had these very attractive flyers. He designed our posters that we put on campus. And there was a guy who owned a restaurant—was it Hank Rubin? Potluck. I think it was the Potluck Restaurant. And he had a letterpress in the basement of this restaurant. This is a press you feed a sheet of paper, and you take the printed, one at a time. So we had crews staying up all night printing ten thousand leaflets for the next day's distribution on campus. We had coverage at every campus gate, every major gate, and some minor ones, too. And to make a long story short, our

platform was the things that Fritjof and I had been introducing resolutions on: anti-apartheid; no compulsory ROTC; end A-bomb and H-bomb testing; higher wages in the student store; lower prices; no racial discrimination. Things like that. Civil liberties. And we doubled the electorate. And I got the highest vote, because I was the most known, so I got about forty-five percent. And I think our lowest candidate got thirty-five percent. But doubling the electorate told us we were on to something. And so after the campaign was over, we started talking about we ought to formalize this, and TASC would disappear, and we'd form a new organization. And we argued, "What are we going to name this organization?" So people started to say, "Well, everybody knows this as the slate. You are running as a slate. So let's just call it SLATE." It wasn't an acronym. So we thought, yeah, that's a good idea; we'll call it SLATE. So we called this thing SLATE. We had a founding meeting in it might've been January, and we adopted a platform. Oh, I know: Pat was on the first SLATE. So I was on it, Sally Hagerty, Pat Hallinan. I don't know if there were four or five of us. Anyway, so Fritjof was a big influence in the founding of SLATE, and he was a radical decentralist. So his vision of the structure of the structure of the organization was a highly decentralized—

01-01:00:05

Meeker:

I want to talk about the structure, but I have a couple questions that precede that. So one is: I've seen it told time and again about the thirty to forty percent of the vote, and also the expansion of the electorate, which means that more people are voting, right? But since you were still only getting thirty-five percent, does that mean that there were a lot of people, do you think, coming out to vote specifically against you?

01-01:00:37

Miller:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. There was a big fraternity/sorority mobilization against us. Yeah.

01-01:00:45

Meeker:

So did they see your agenda as somehow contrary to their own?

01-01:00:51

Miller:

Yeah. Yeah.

01-01:00:52

Meeker:

How was that?

01-01:00:53

Miller:

Well, student government was a franchise of the fraternities and sororities, essentially, and—

01-01:01:01

Meeker:

What did they get from it?

01-01:01:03

Miller:

Status. It's a place to do things that you think make a contribution to the campus, from your point of view. Like that. And some of them, like Roger

Samuelson, who was the student body president when I was on the executive committee, he was a very decent human being, I thought. He just had a much more conservative view of the world than we did. And there were other people like that. Sally, what was her name? Also a Sally. She was a rep-at-large. I liked her. So some of them were quite decent people; they just thought student government should be about things, quote-unquote, that are on campus, as opposed to off-campus. Yeah, they had a big turnout. [laughter] And we campaigned in some of the fraternities and sororities.

01-01:02:22

Meeker: So were there debates, or were the—?

01-01:02:25

Miller: That's not the way it worked. You would go around at the dinner hour, and if you were smart you had a member of that house introduce you, and people would stop eating for a moment, and you'd make a two- or three-minute presentation. So there were houses that we thought were worth speaking in, and we did. Certainly I did when I campaigned. When I ran for office, I campaigned in houses where I had members introduce me, and I'm sure I got votes there. We had sorority members in SLATE, the Jewish fraternities for sure, and we had—Alpha Phi? Was that a sorority? Alpha Phi? Whatever. We had a handful of sorority members. So yeah, we thought we were onto something, and we had a great founding meeting, but there was this serious debate on structure. So here's Fritjof with his highly decentralized structure, and there's Pat Hallinan as leader of the other structure caucus, and they're presenting kind of a traditional centralized executive committee, committees that are under it and subordinate to it, and then a membership meeting that is the sovereign organization, except at the annual meeting when elections are held and the platform is adopted. It's a pretty traditional kind of structure. So a few of us—Peter and I, and I can't remember who else—we thought, this fight is tearing us apart. We haven't even launched. So we tried to come up with a compromise resolution of the structure fight. And both sides [laughter] dumped on us, and we got hardly any votes for our proposal. But I ran for president of SLATE, and I got elected. And I remember people around Hallinan thought my election was a big defeat for the left. A friend of mine remembers that exact quote from him. I didn't remember it until I was told this story a few years ago. But Pat and I were friendly.

01-01:05:02

Meeker: So when you say you got elected, you got elected to—

01-01:05:04

Miller: Chairman of SLATE.

01-01:05:04

Meeker: Chairman of SLATE, right. How many people were involved at this point? I think it was February '58 was the organizing meeting.

01-01:05:15

Miller: Oh, okay, the organizing meeting, February. Okay. So I think at that meeting there were probably a hundred, 120 people, something like that.

01-01:05:28

Meeker: Were there many nonwhites on campus at this time?

01-01:05:31

Miller: There were a few. One of whom was active in SLATE, a guy whose name I can't immediately recall. He went on to teach in some Eastern university. When I came back to Berkeley in '60 to '62, there was then a group of African Americans. There was a campus NAACP, I think, and so a number of us worked together, and we'll talk later about that. Were there other African American students? There were some Latino students. There were more African students, I think, than there were African American students. There was International House, and a number of African students lived at International House, which is, as you know, up at the top of Bancroft.

01-01:06:40

Meeker: Were there a number of Japanese Americans who had returned to campus?

01-01:06:43

Miller: There was a Japanese American guy in SLATE. A number. The campus was overwhelmingly Anglo, white, so—

01-01:07:02

Meeker: Well, there were probably a fair number of Jews on campus by that point, too.

01-01:07:04

Miller: Oh, yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah. So my parents were non-Jewish Jews, and there were a lot of people like that.

01-01:07:16

Meeker: What do you mean by that?

01-01:07:17

Miller: They weren't practicing religiously. They weren't Zionists. I guess you'd say they were assimilationists. And their view of the world was a Marxist one.

01-01:07:43

Meeker: So back to February '58. And what did it mean to be the chair of SLATE? What was your job description?

01-01:07:54

Miller: Well, the main thing was to try to hold these contending political forces, tendencies, points of view together in a single organization, because those of us who were at the center of SLATE—Hank DiSuvero, Peter, myself, Fritjof—I think we had the idea that we want to create an entity within which, CP-related—there wasn't yet a Du Bois Club, but there were clearly kids in a Communist tradition, the children of Communist parents, or former Communist parents. So there were those kids. There were Shachtmanites.

There were utopian socialists. There were Trotskyists. There were Luxemburgists, Rosa Luxemburg followers. And these were pretty esoteric arguments for ninety-nine percent of the kids on campus. So we wanted to have something in which those people would be active, but that their debates wouldn't chase everybody else out. And so out of all that came a slogan. I don't think it was that first semester, but there later developed an idea that was summed up with this phrase: lowest significant common denominator. Because most of the people who were getting active were people for whom this was their first foray into politics. A lot of them came from either liberal families—historically Democratic Party, liberal families—and a number of them were the children of former Communists, who were still frightened of the McCarthy era. They didn't want to get involved in what we considered sectarian debates, whatever their merit. They were interesting. So I was kind of the person who most was responsible for holding this all together. And there was a little group of us who wanted to hold it all together. And we did that. We were successful at that. And I deliberately, when I asked people to be on the first slate, I asked Pat Hallinan, because everybody knew who the Hallinans were. Vincent Hallinan had run in 1952 as the presidential candidate of the Independent Progressive Party. So it was clear what their politics were. So I asked Pat to be on this slate, and I asked liberal students to be on this slate. So we had this balance from day one, because that was what I thought politics should be about: how do you bring people together around core values, and then translate those core values into a practical program that can have some impact in the world?

01-01:11:20

Meeker:

So what you described right now, based on my reading of your life's work, is, in fact, your life's work.

01-01:11:29

Miller:

That's right.

01-01:11:31

Meeker:

Where does that come from?

01-01:11:32

Miller:

[laughter] Well, the core values come from my family. The value of respecting diversity, racial, ethnic diversity, that was in my home. Opposition to exploitation, economic exploitation, or any kind of exploitation: that was in my home. What I diverged from my parents on was their view of the Soviet Union. But I wasn't a quote-unquote "anti-Communist," either. So I remember there are people who said of me in those days I was a Stalinoid. I wasn't a Stalinist, but I was a Stalinoid. And then there were people on the other side who at times would call me a red baiter. So nobody knew how to figure out my radicalism. I didn't have a name for it, either, so I couldn't figure it out, other than what I just said to you. I didn't have any big analysis of the world that could be summed up by the word "ideology." I had core values. I had some understanding of how power worked pretty early, I think.

And I wanted to see how do you build something so that our side of the fence can increasingly have influence in the world.

01-01:13:28

Meeker: It's like a left ecumenicalism or something.

01-01:13:30

Miller: Well, that's a good way. That's a term you could use.

01-01:13:36

Meeker: It wasn't too much longer before this that Trotsky was killed for being a Trotskyist, if you will, and these factional battles were for real. They were bloody.

01-01:13:49

Miller: Oh, they sure were. They sure were. And Herb Mills, who I met later—I met Herb in '59, I think—Herb was a brilliant political science graduate student. And I remember when I went back to Berkeley, and now the student movement has really moved off campus. The sit-ins have taken place. The antiwar movement is beginning to grow. And the Silent Generation period is over. After we started SLATE, we started getting phone calls, letters from all over the country, from people on college campuses, "How did you guys do it? Can you come tell us how you did it? We want to do it here." So there were things like SLATE springing up all over the campus. And Herb was, as I say, a brilliant, brilliant political science student. And so he would go off with Bogdan Denitch, was a key guy with the Shachtmanites. Jim Petras was a key guy with the Trotskyists. Bob Kaufman was a key guy with the Communist Youth. It wasn't yet formal. I don't think it formalized until maybe '64 as the DuBois Clubs, but you knew who they were on campus. Robbie's was a beer and lunch place on Telegraph Avenue. So Herb would take Kaufman or Denitch or Petras, go off, and they'd sit in Robbie's for hours. And Herb essentially was the one who in this later period persuaded them you can't raise your full agenda inside SLATE, and the reason you shouldn't do it, from your point of view, is SLATE is a place in which you can recruit for your point of view. But if you destroy SLATE, the thing that gets people into politics to begin with won't be there anymore. And so he was able to prevent each of these groupings from trying to pursue their maximum program. Now, it came to a head in probably '60 or '61, around the time of HUAC, and the question is civil liberties for the left only, or is it for the right. And I took the point of view the First Amendment was for everybody. And we had an argument about that in the writing of a booklet called *About SLATE*, which you probably have seen. And if you read that, you will see it has a full defense of the First Amendment. There were people who were arguing against that; Nazis shouldn't have the right of free speech. I think SLATE actually invited a Nazi speaker to speak on campus, because the majority of us thought that's what the First Amendment was about. I still think that. So SLATE was able to survive with this delicate balance of political points of view, highly elaborated

political points of view, with people for whom this was their first dipping a little finger into politics.

[Narrator addendum: Here's something that was really important about SLATE, the collective nature of its leadership. SLATE's members and leaders were primarily undergraduates, most of whom were liberal arts majors but including some in mathematics and physics. But then you had these brilliant graduate students, like Fritjof Thygeson, Herb Mills and Carey McWilliams, Jr, and a guy like Bogdan Denitch who wasn't in school at the time, but was an advisor to the Young People's Socialist League. Bogdan later became a faculty member at CUNY. Herb completed his PhD in political science; beginning in 1963 he became a longshoreman, and then an important leader in the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU). Fritjof later taught at San Diego State. Carey wrote a brilliant book—*The Idea of Fraternity in American Life*—and taught at Harvard, then Rutgers. These guys were friends and mentors.

There were no behind the scenes brains, strategists or gurus who guided SLATE. For the most part, the Thygeson slogan "open conspiracies openly arrived at" governed the organization's purpose and direction. Of course people caucused and met in various political groups they belonged to such as Young Democrats and several socialist organizations, but broad debate was the outstanding characteristic of SLATE.

Equally significant was the daily gathering of activists on the open plaza of the Bear's Lair, the student cafeteria. There, during lunch and afternoon breaks from classes, we had long strategy discussions, arguments and consensus-building sessions, and that was where our organization jelled.]

01-01:18:34

Meeker:

I appreciate your description of Herb Mills and the work that he did with these different factions in SLATE's infancy, in the spring of '58.

01-01:18:42

Miller:

I was doing that in my own way.

01-01:18:44

Meeker:

Well, what were you doing then?

01-01:18:45

Miller:

Well, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I think it had as much to do with the fact that I was probably the most known person on the campus who had these kinds of politics, and so I would just use my influence somehow to keep people onboard in this organization. I don't [laughter] know exactly what I did. And there was a group at the center of the organization—Peter, Alan Madian, Carey McWilliams. So we had Young Democrats, too. See, Carey McWilliams, very influential figure. He's more a communitarian Democrat, but he's solidly in the Democratic Party. So nobody was going to do things

that would tear this thing apart. I think people knew it was fragile, and it was important, because, as I said, very soon we were getting dozens, multiple dozens of inquiries from all over the country about what we were doing, and how we were doing it. And the sit-ins took place in '60, so we're before all that, before the sit-ins.

01-01:20:56

Meeker: How did you personally resist the pull of factionalism? Were you ever convinced—

01-01:21:06

Miller: It didn't make sense to me. It just didn't make sense to me. What do you want to be so-called right about on some esoteric question that has absolutely no impact on anybody who's doing anything out there in the real world? It just didn't make sense.

01-01:21:23

Meeker: Did you have a desire to articulate this as its own clear perspective, if not ideology?

01-01:21:38

Miller: Yes, I probably did, but I don't know how I articulated it then, other than—well, we had the phrase "issue-oriented." I think that summed up that we had core values, and we would look at issues from the perspective of those values, and then take a position on issues, but we weren't going to have some full-blown, internally-consistent view of the world that we then sought to apply to everything.

01-01:22:25

Meeker: When debating about these issues, or considering these issues, do you recall any issues that were tabled or decided that shouldn't be covered as being, perhaps, too instrumental, or too sandbox-like?

01-01:22:44

Miller: Oh, well, I don't think we had anything that was too sandbox-like. We had positions on the price of books in the bookstore, and student wages, and housing discrimination on the campus, and service to African American students, and anti-compulsory ROTC. We had all that. That was part of our program. Issue-oriented: I think that's how we escaped the big, internally consistent ideological framework. We responded to that with we have some core values, and from those we look at issues, and take positions—we're issue-oriented.

01-01:23:58

Meeker: You graduated in '58? Is that correct?

01-01:24:01

Miller: Fifty-eight, yeah. I had a Woodrow Wilson at Columbia, so I entered Columbia in the fall of '58.

01-01:24:13

Meeker: So that last semester must have been pretty intense.

01-01:24:18

Miller: [laughter] It was incredibly intense.

01-01:24:21

Meeker: What was going on? Can you take me back there, if possible?

01-01:24:25

Miller: Yeah. We're constantly talking about what we're doing. We're writing term papers. Philip Selznick taught a course on the sociology of organizations. So my term paper for Philip Selznick had to do with SLATE and how we organized it. William Kornhauser taught a course on social movements. So we were applying what we were hearing from Kornhauser in our coffee shop conversations. So we were eating, sleeping, breathing this stuff. It was heady, intense, and I think we were having fun, too. We enjoyed what we were doing.

01-01:25:18

Meeker: What kind of response were you getting from your profs about this work that you were doing?

01-01:25:21

Miller: They were very interested. The liberal and left faculty at—When we had this structure debate—I think this was largely at my initiative—we had a forum on the structure of political organizations, and we invited Lewis Coser. That year he was a guest professor in the Sociology Department. Coser wrote a book on the sociology of conflict. He was a democratic socialist. I loved his courses. And so we invited him. His course was on the sociology of conflict, I think. So we invited him, and we invited Philip Selznick—the sociology of organization—to be a panel, and to talk to SLATE members about the organizational implications and value implications of alternative organizational structures. I later discovered that they had been in some esoteric, small Marxist formation in the late '30s, and I think they'd been adversaries [laughter] in it. I'm not sure, but we didn't know that at the time. So we were trying to relate what we were learning in our courses to what we were doing in the world. So people like Coser and Selznick and others were quite interested in what we were doing. Now, Selznick later came to conclude that we were too influenced by the CP, Communist Party, or that political view. And so, I don't know, in '61 maybe—it was after I'm back on campus—they started a student Americans for Democratic Action. In those days they were called Cold War liberals. They didn't have major dissent from American foreign policy and containment of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is the principal evil in the world. And so there was a contest within ADA for president between Bob Bell and I can't remember the other guy. Bell was for working with SLATE. The other guy was for isolating SLATE. So several SLATE people, including me, joined ADA to vote for Bob Bell, so Bob Bell got elected. But Selznick by then was critical of SLATE. And Lewis Feuer was hostile to SLATE, but he hired me as a teaching associate. This is

in '61. He was teaching an integrated social science course, which is an undergraduate course that brought together different fields in the social sciences. And he hired a lot of left students. Interesting guy, and he was great to work for. But anyway, that's a little later.

01-01:29:38

Meeker: This last semester.

01-01:29:39

Miller: Yeah, so '58 I applied for a Woodrow Wilson. I actually applied for three scholarships: a Rhodes, a Marshall, and a Wilson. So I made it into the finals of the Rhodes and the Marshall but I didn't get one of those, but I got a Woodrow Wilson to Columbia. And I wanted to go to Columbia because Robert Merton, the dean of American sociological theory, was there, and C. Wright Mills was there. We were very influenced by C. Wright Mills at my undergraduate, later undergraduate years.

01-01:30:20

Meeker: Had he already written his key books by then?

01-01:30:21

Miller: Well, had he written *Power Elite* yet? I'm not sure. [published in 1956] So maybe it's when I went back in '60. But I think he'd already written *Power Elite*.

01-01:30:34

Meeker: I think you're right.

01-01:30:35

Miller: I think that's a '56 or 7 book. So I get to Columbia and I discover Merton is on sabbatical, and Mills teaches in the undergraduate college. And there's a wall between the graduate faculties and the undergraduate college. So taking an undergraduate course with Mills I think would not have helped me pursue my master's or whatever I thought I was doing in graduate school. And the rest of the faculty, the emphasis there was quantitative analysis. This was not a strength of mine, and it was not an interest of mine, so I didn't much like—I loved New York. I didn't like my year of graduate school there. I should probably have a bunch of F's. I took incompletes, and I never completed the classes, and so probably after some point of time they turn into F's. [laughter] I haven't seen my Columbia transcript ever. And at the end of the second semester, I was thinking, well, I like New York. I'm going to see if I can get a job.

01-01:32:02

Meeker: The Wilson Fellowship was a yearlong gig.

01-01:32:04

Miller: One year, yeah.

01-01:32:07

Meeker: What else were you doing? I mean, if you weren't working much on your classes, what else were you doing in New York?

01-01:32:13

Miller: Having fun. I was exploring New York. I mean, I often went down to the Village, and I had a great schedule for nightlife. I think the very first class started at 2:00 in the afternoon. That might've been Tuesday and Thursday. And then I had four o'clock classes. So I'd take books out at the end of the day, go home, cook—I had an apartment alone—maybe study a little, and then I'd go out on the town, and come home, and I'd study until the wee small hours, and then I'd walk up to the campus, put the book in the overnight chute to return it, and go home, go to bed.

01-01:33:04

Meeker: Where'd you go? I mean, were you going to folk music clubs, or jazz clubs, or what was your interest?

01-01:33:08

Miller: Yeah, yeah, folk, jazz, coffee shops where people were talking.

01-01:33:16

Meeker: Were there interesting interactions that you remember of any notables?

01-01:33:21

Miller: Not really. Not really.

01-01:33:28

Meeker: You didn't come across Hannah Arendt?

01-01:33:30

Miller: No. She came to Berkeley. I think she was there when I went back. So I went to the day to enroll in her class, and I can't remember; she had some requirements. "These are the requirements to enroll in my class." And my friend Vic Garlin was there, and he remembers this—I don't remember it—he says, "You said at the end of her presenting her criteria," I said, "You have a formula for irrelevancy." [laughter] Maybe I did. But I didn't take the class, so I must have thought that. And then a woman I knew at Berkeley, Suzanne Louchard, we weren't close, particularly, but in New York we became friends because former Berkeley, we had that in common. So it's coming toward the end of my second semester, and I said to Suzanne, "I'm looking for work. You got any ideas?" "Oh, my coworker is leaving. She's organizing public housing tenants on the Lower East Side of New York." So she said, "Why don't you come down for an interview?" "All right." So I went down, and Jose Villegas, Puerto Rican guy, was her supervisor. He interviewed me. At the end of the interview he said, "When can you start?" I thought he was kidding. I said, "Tomorrow." He said, "All right, see you here at" whatever hour. So I went to work. I didn't take finals. I started working, organizing public housing tenants on the Lower East Side of New York. It was bringing my whole life together. I grew up in the public housing projects. By then I'd

been reading labor organizing stuff in classes. Charles Gulick taught a great labor history class when I was an undergraduate.

01-01:35:54

Meeker: Who was your employer in the projects?

01-01:35:56

Miller: The Henry Street Settlement House.

01-01:35:59

Meeker: Okay. So that's an independent nonprofit, correct?

01-01:36:03

Miller: Yeah, there's a tradition, like Hull House in Chicago, Henry Street in New York. There are other settlements in New York. They serve low-income people. And their origins are kind of in upper-middle-class and upper-class, I think, mostly women, who felt a sense of obligation to serve the poor. So they have very paternalistic kinds of origins, for the most part. Now, Hull House was a little different, because of Jane Addams. So Henry Street was now exploring doing something a little different also with the idea of organizing. So I got hired to organize, and I worked with a thing called the LaGuardia—this is the name of the project, LaGuardia Housing Project—so I worked with the LaGuardia Tenant Association. In my first six months, at some point there was a picket line. The tenants organized a picket line to stop traffic in a street that went right through the middle of the project. So further south there were warehouses and light industry, and trucks would come through this street—I think it was Clinton Street, actually—heating to Delancey Street, maybe, to take the bridge over the East River. And it was dangerous for little kids, and the tenants wanted some different routing of the trucks, or whatever. So my boss said, "You shouldn't be on the picket line with them. It's okay to organize it, but you—" So I didn't understand. How can I help them organize a picket line and do all this and not picket with them? So I'm going to picket with them. So I got canned, and I was called too militant and a little Alinsky. I said, "Who is this guy, Alinsky?" I had never heard of Saul Alinsky. So it turns out that Alinsky had earlier worked with Hudson Guild settlement house on the other side of Manhattan, in the Chelsea neighborhood. Chelsea was a working-class, I think largely Irish neighborhood, into which were moving Puerto Ricans. And there was an urban renewal scheme that was jointly sponsored by the settlement house, and I think the Lady Garment Workers' Union. But it was housing that was beyond the reach of these newly arriving Puerto Rican tenants. So Hudson Guild had asked Alinsky to be a consultant to an organizing effort that they had underway. Alinsky didn't usually do that. He usually would run. He was operational, not a consultant, but he was a consultant. And so there emerged a split between the Catholic parishes, which were largely Puerto Rican, and Hudson Guild. The Catholic parishes were concerned about defending the very affordable housing. Hudson Guild fired Alinsky, canceled the consulting contract, and he became anathema in sections of the social work world in New York.

01-01:40:29

Meeker: What was it that they didn't like about what he was recommending?

01-01:40:33

Miller: I don't think it was what he was recommending; I think it was his willingness to engage in militant tactics, and his support of the Catholic parishes in defending their low-income people.

01-01:40:55

Meeker: And when you're saying "low-income people," was this primarily Puerto Ricans?

01-01:40:58

Miller: Yeah.

01-01:40:58

Meeker: Okay, so it wasn't the lower-income or working-class Irish; it was the newly—

01-01:41:04

Miller: Well, maybe there were still low-income, lower-working-class Irish there. There probably were, and they were both in these Catholic parishes.

01-01:41:19

Meeker: But was he seen as like a carpetbagger or something, coming in from Chicago?

01-01:41:22

Miller: I don't think that so much, because Hudson Guild had hired him. It's not that he's parachuting in from someplace else; he's invited in. So anyway, I was called a little Alinsky. So, well, I'm going to try to find some other kind of job in New York. So I was friendly with Nathan Glazer. Nathan had been a visiting prof at Berkeley when I was an undergraduate there, and we had taken his class, a number of us. He was deeply engaged with cities, racial and ethnic minorities, things like that, and a very personally engaging guy, more open to continuing engagement with students than was really traditional of faculty. So we got to know him personally. So I called him up, and I said—Nat was what we called him—"Nat, I got canned from Henry Street. You got any ideas about where I might go to work?" "Yeah," he says, "go up and see Caplovitz"—I think it's David Caplovitz—"at the Bureau of Applied Social Research." This is the Columbia Sociology Research Institute. It's an independent connected to Columbia. So I go up. Caplovitz is delighted. I have experience on the Lower East Side. He's doing the research for what became the book *The Poor Pay More*. It's an analysis of comparative pricing of middle-income neighborhoods and low-income neighborhoods, and he wants to do interviews on the Lower East Side. So he hires me, and I show up for work the next day. He's got a long face. "Mike, I can't put you to work on the Lower East Side." "Why not?" "Well, Jane"—I can't remember her last name—"at the Lavenberg Foundation is the executive director. I was at a party where she was last night, and I kind of enthusiastically described that I

had hired you, and turns out that the Lavenberg Foundation is also the funder of the Henry Street settlement project from which you got fired, and Jane said, ‘You can’t put Mike on the Lower East Side. You can put him somewhere else, but you can’t put him in the Lower East Side. It’s just too oil and water with Henry Street.’” So Caplovitz didn’t have research anyplace else. So he said, “There’s a study on responses to disaster. I can get you work there.” I said, “No, I’m not so interested in that. Let me see.”

So I called Nathan again. “Nat.” I tell him this Caplovitz story. So he says, “Well,” he says, “there’s a guy over at the Social Work School, Richard Cloward, and he’s developing this thing, Mobilization For Youth.” So this is like the government in waiting. The Ford Foundation funds these huge urban projects—HARYOU-ACT is in Harlem; Mobilization For Youth is on the Lower East Side—and the anticipation is that these things are models for what becomes governmental policy if a Democratic administration comes in that wants to address poverty. And Ohlin and Cloward have coauthored a book on juvenile delinquency that says if you want to understand delinquency you have to look at the structures of poverty, and it’s not an individual psychological pathology; it’s kids who buy into the American dream, but the legitimate avenues for pursuing it are not available, and so they pursue it by illegitimate means. That’s a long time ago, but that’s my memory of their kind of theoretical scheme. So I call up, and Cloward says, “Come on over, come on over.” So I show up at his place. “Mike,” he says, “the first thing I want to tell you: I can’t hire you. But I want to tell you about what I’m up to.” And he outlines the Mobilization For Youth strategy. And he says, “The main obstacle that I might encounter is Helen Hall and the Henry Street settlement. So if I hire you now, it’s going to tip my hand.” And I said, “Yeah, you’re right.” [laughter] So that was that.

So I can’t remember, did I call Nat again, or did I get a call from Aryay Lenske? Right around then I get a call from Aryay Lenske, who is probably—this is either very late ’59 or early ’60, maybe spring of ’60. Aryay says, “We have a statewide campaign against capital punishment.” This is the time of the Caryl Chessman case. Chessman’s on death row at San Quentin, and capital punishment, big issue in California. So Aryay said, “Would you come out and run a statewide initiative against capital punishment?” “Sure.” I mean, that was a point of view that I shared, and felt strongly about. It was a folly. I mean, the campaign was a folly. Had we gotten it on the ballot we would’ve been slaughtered, but we didn’t have the capacity to get it on the ballot. In those days I think you had to get maybe about 500,000 signatures, because a significant number are disqualified because the person signs the petition in a way slightly different than his or her name as it’s registered, and so when you compare the two they’re not the same. The signatures toss out. But if we had 10% of that number, I would be surprised. So that runs out of steam by summer. I go back to campus at Berkeley, and I’m at Stiles Hall. And I can’t remember, who am I talking to? Maybe Nat Shafer, who’s on the staff, or maybe Bill Davis, who’s the executive director. I want to come back to Bill in

a minute. And Nat or Bill says, "Oh, Ernest Greenwood up in the social work school is looking for a teaching assistant." So I go up, I'm interviewed by him, and he hires me, but I have to be a student again. So I said, well, I might as well go back to school. So I register to go back to Berkeley.

01-01:49:11

Meeker: For grad school it's just a matter of registering? You don't have to apply?

01-01:49:15

Miller: Well, maybe because I have my undergraduate B.A.? There wasn't much to it, whatever. It was pretty easy in those days. So anyway, I got back into graduate school, and then, when I was an undergraduate, I had worked on the grounds and buildings crew. This was a kind of patronage job for athletes and student government people. You worked as a gardener on the campus grounds and buildings crew, union wages.

01-01:49:51

Meeker: Do you recall what those were hourly at that point?

01-01:49:53

Miller: I think it was three bucks something an hour, which is probably like thirty bucks an hour now. Tony something—what was Tony's last name—Tony was the foreman. We got along. We liked each other. So I'm going back to campus. The income from a TA job isn't quite enough, so I go see Tony. I say, "Tony, I'm coming back to school. Can you put me back on the grounds and buildings?" So I'm back on the grounds and buildings crew. So I'm earning a decent income, I'm back in grad school, and I get reinvolved in SLATE.

01-01:50:31

Meeker: Is there where you start to room with Herb Mills?

01-01:50:34

Miller: Comes a little bit later, little bit later.

01-01:50:37

Meeker: Where are you living when you first come back to California?

01-01:50:45

Miller: I'm at Berkeley. I have an apartment close to the campus. That's all I can tell you. Because I walked to school. I can't remember where I first lived. I didn't have roommates when I was in graduate school. So who do I say I wanted to go back to? Oh, Bill Davis. I meant to say this before: Bill was executive director at Stiles, and he was a very cautious guy, very cautious guy. But as the years went by, I have come to have increasing regard for him, because on core principals he would not back down. But he was tactically, I guess you'd say now, or as I look at it now, very cautious. We were always impatient with him, the students, Peter, myself. Anyway, he's a guy who not many people talk about these days, but I think it was Bill who hired people like Cecil Thomas, this Quaker, or Pierre Delattre, this maverick Presbyterian. When I

went back Pierre knew about Saul Alinsky. Presbyterians by then were deeply involved with Alinsky. So anyway, I go back to Berkeley. I have a decent income. I get reinvolved with SLATE. And by now the sit-ins have taken place in February of '60.

01-01:52:51

Meeker: What I'd like to actually do is hold off on the second SLATE chapter for the next time, because I've got some questions about it, and I did just read that "About SLATE" document and found it to be really quite interesting. I want to dig into that a little bit.

01-01:53:08

Miller: When was it published? Do you know?

01-01:53:09

Meeker: Sixty-two. I don't know what month.

01-01:53:10

Miller: Oh, it's that late? Sixty-two.

01-01:53:11

Meeker: Yeah, I believe '62. The date is not on the document, but I've seen it referred to as '62. That could be wrong.

01-01:53:26

Miller: No, it's possible.

01-01:53:27

Meeker: But actually, I want to follow up on what you were saying about Davis—again, this Stiles Hall connection. You said that he was cautious, and that you and your colleagues were pressuring him. What was that about? How was his caution evident, even though they're hosting Communist Party groups?

01-01:53:55

Miller: Yeah, I don't remember specific things that we wanted to do. We had an elected student cabinet at Stiles. I think my sophomore year I was president of Stiles. I'm pretty sure it was my sophomore year. And the student cabinet would approve programs. And Bill would attend those meetings. And when he felt that something threatening to Stiles as an institution was being considered, he would speak. And a majority of the cabinet would generally defer to his judgment. And the minority of us, [laughter] who were more adventurous, more militant, more whatever, would get upset with him. But who he was was really reflected in who he hired. I mean, he hired pretty liberal to left people. Cecil Thomas got us involved in nonviolent direct action stuff at the testing site in Nevada. So Bill was a complicated guy, but an interesting guy. Someone should do a biography of Bill Davis.

01-01:55:56

Meeker: I need to look and see if we have an interview with him, because we have an interview with Kingman.

01-01:56:06

Miller: You're kidding! Oh, you mean in the archives, not that you did.

01-01:56:09

Meeker: In the archive. Not that I did, no, no, no. Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

01-01:56:13

Miller: Well, you might well have a Bill Davis, William Davis or Bill Davis, executive director, Stiles Hall. If you do, I'd like to see it, actually. So anyway, you want to go back to what?

01-01:56:30

Meeker: Well, I think that that was what I wanted to ask, so maybe that's probably a good spot to wrap for today.

Interview 2: January 29, 2018

02-00:00:13

Meeker: Today is January 29, 2018. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Mike Miller for the SLATE Oral History Project. We are at Mike's home in San Francisco, and this is interview session number two. Last time we covered a lot of ground: your upbringing, education, and your key early role in the campus political organization SLATE. Also, we rounded up with your time in New York, starting at Columbia, and then doing community organizing on the Lower East Side. Before we head back to the West Coast from New York, you had mentioned some community organizing/protest activity that you participated in, I believe in Harlem, and this was in the context of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement.

02-00:01:08

Miller: Yeah, I think we picketed a Woolworths. There was a picket line up at the Harlem Woolworth that I'm pretty sure CORE organized. So I participated in that. And that issue was the issue of—in those days Negro rights was one that I'd grown up with in my family. We knew African American people. They were over at our house, which was pretty unusual in those days. It wasn't unusual for people on the left, but it was unusual in the society. So it was an issue that was always present in my mind, and this unfolding Civil Rights Movement was something that I wanted to identify with.

02-00:02:07

Meeker: When did it become apparent to you that there was an awakening of concern around racial inequality?

02-00:02:15

Miller: Well, when the Montgomery bus boycott started in '55, we had Martin Luther King speak at Stiles Hall in 1955. He was relatively unknown in the North, because at that meeting there were maybe thirty, forty people. Well, if you'd had that meeting two years or three years later there'd have been two thousand or three thousand people. And his being there was the result of Cecil Thomas, the Quaker guy who was on our staff, whose wife Fran had gone to I think it was Morehouse with King's wife, Coretta Scott. So Fran called Coretta and said, "We want to get Martin up here for Cecil over there at Stiles Hall," and boom, that was it.

02-00:03:21

Meeker: Did you attend that presentation?

02-00:03:22

Miller: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:03:25

Meeker: How well do you recall that? How well does it stick in your mind?

02-00:03:28

Miller:

Well, the interesting thing is that I don't think at that point I fully appreciated the meaning of what they were doing. I tended to see it as a local thing in Montgomery. And I don't think I fully appreciated the meaning of the bus boycott, what it meant to have to sit at the back of the bus, and then stand if there were empty seats in the front, and you'd worked as a domestic all day long on your feet, and were returning home, and you couldn't sit, the extraordinary indignity and effrontery of that. I don't think at that point I yet fully appreciated it. But King, obviously he's a very engaging person, and so I think those of us who were there were kind of impressed with this guy. [laughter] This is a pretty impressive guy, you know? And at that point, I'm still an undergraduate, and we were doing stuff around barbershops not cutting the hair of black students. We had successfully, or were about to successfully, get the official university housing office to stop listing explicitly discriminatory apartments. They used to have lists. You'd go and look: "No Negroes accepted," or I don't know they said it but it was explicit. We said, "No, no, no, this has got to stop." We got that ended.

02-00:05:21

Meeker:

Did King have anything to say about what should be happening in the North to help the cause?

02-00:05:29

Miller:

I don't remember that. I'm sure that he had, at that time, a larger than Montgomery presentation, because they were trying to get things like that going on in other cities in the South, and there were efforts like that in other places in the South. None reached the magnitude of Montgomery, but a number of cities had these clergy alliances that later became the affiliates of Southern Christian Leadership Conference when SCLC was born. So I'm almost sure he talked some about that.

02-00:06:16

Meeker:

What had transpired between 1955, when King came to Berkeley, and then your decision to participate in a picket at Woolworths in New York in 1960?

02-00:06:30

Miller:

What had happened in the South, you mean?

02-00:06:32

Meeker:

What had happened in your own experience of the issue?

02-00:06:35

Miller:

Well, besides the stuff I was doing at Berkeley, I don't think I was yet doing community-related stuff that was separate from the campus. That didn't come until after I returned from New York to Cal, when I got involved in Bayview-Hunters Point, and we had a student group that was formed to help the residents fight urban renewal, the threat of an urban renewal bulldozer destroying their neighborhood. But that's in '61 or 2. And we did a survey of the public housing tenants, and not that I was great in quantitative analysis,

but I knew enough about it to have a methodologically—and other people I was working with, who were sociology grad students—we had a pretty sophisticated instrument, as they call them, to interview a big number of public housing residents in Hunters Point, and pretty conclusively show that people wanted public housing improved, those who lived there. They didn't want it torn down, because they knew economically it was a good deal. So it kind of undercut some of the arguments that, well, nobody who lives in a project wants to be there.

02-00:08:27

Meeker:

You know, this picket that happened at Woolworths in Harlem, I'm curious: do you recall what your first experience of protest, of picketing, was, firsthand?

02-00:08:46

Miller:

The first experience of picketing. Wow. [laughs] My first experience of picketing was sitting on my father's shoulders as a five-year-old, marching around a department store on Mission Street, supporting the old Local 1100, the department store employee workers. So being on a picket line is something I did very, very early in my life. Now, the civil rights pickets, I think CORE, I think that Harlem picket line—it would've been in early '60, I guess—was my first civil rights picket line. The barbershop and the housing stuff at Berkeley had not involved direct action. How did I feel about that? It's hard. I can't tell you, really. I think I was glad to be part of it. It certainly was something that I thought was the right thing to do. But emotionally, I don't think it was a big deal the way for some people it might've been, because this was so in my family's tradition.

02-00:10:29

Meeker:

Were there many conversations at the time about the idea of direct action, of protest and picketing, when it was going to be effective, maybe, when it wasn't? Were people talking about that? Or was it just something that was done?

02-00:10:54

Miller:

Well, no. No, no, no, there were lots of conversations about being effective. In the early SLATE days, including into the early sixties, SLATE people were very, very concerned about how would a wider public view what was being done. So, for example, when we had picket lines, there was a march up to the Greek Theatre when JFK spoke. So that might have been opposing Bay of Pigs, which would've been in '62. Is that right? So do you remember the month?

02-00:11:50

Meeker:

No.

02-00:11:51

Miller:

So I think JFK spoke at Berkeley at the Greek Theatre shortly after Bay of Pigs, and we had a group on campus opposed to US intervention in Cuba. We

were concerned about how people dressed. The slogans that were on the picket signs had to be approved by a committee of the organizations sponsoring the march. The leaflet that was handed out was carefully thought about. My friend Frank Bardacke, who wrote this wonderful book on the farmworkers, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, so he showed up with his own picket sign. And I think it said "Fuck Jack." [laughter] I may be exaggerating, but it wouldn't have been out of character for Frank to have that picket sign. We said to him, "No, Frank, you can't have this picket sign." And he said, "What about free speech?" We said, "No, this is not about free speech. Free speech is about what the state can do to people. It's not about our right, or lack thereof, to say what slogans we want on our signs." So, okay, he complied. I don't exactly know how it all played out, whether he stuffed the picket someplace and marched with them. I suspect that's what he did. Similarly, with the HUAC demonstration—now, I was in Los Angeles when that happened, but the people who were picketing outside—for one thing, the conversation about that demonstration started in SLATE. A decision was made by those people having that discussion that SLATE is not the right banner under which this protest should take place. It should take place under the banner of the campus ACLU, Civil Liberties Organization. And Gene Savin, who at that time probably was a graduate student in economics, was the chair of the Student Civil Liberties Union. And so there were careful discussions about what would the picket signs say, what would the leaflets say. There was a picket captain to ensure the nonviolent and proper behavior of the people on the picket line. I mean, we were extraordinarily conscious of impact. Now, the people inside who were banging on the door, because they wanted to get in and be part of the hearing, and who became outraged when they realized HUAC had given people passes so that they could pack City Hall chambers with supporters, rightwing supporters, so they start banging on the door and yelling—that was a totally separate activity.

02-00:15:06

Meeker: Who were those people?

02-00:15:08

Miller: Well, I know some of them. I mean, Becky Jenkins was among them, Kate Cole—

02-00:15:13

Meeker: Is she related to Dave Jenkins?

02-00:15:15

Miller: Oldest daughter of Dave, good friend of mine. Kate Coleman was one of them. I mean, there were a number of people washed down City Hall steps who I knew.

02-00:15:29

Meeker: A lot of them were Berkeley students, right?

02-00:15:31

Miller:

They were mostly State and Berkeley. As far as I know they were mostly SF State and Berkeley. I think Becky was at SF State. I'm almost sure of that. Now, out of that came an independent—not the Student Civil Liberties Union, but the Bay Area Student Committee Against the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, BASCAHUAC. It was one of the longest acronyms in captivity. [laughter] And the people who headed that, [sighs] two guys. Their names aren't coming to me right now. But they were new to us. We didn't know them. Similarly, on campus, a guy named Frank Kofsky started a civil rights organization, so he was also outside the set of relationships that SLATE people had, and that SLATE people had with groups that they kind of spun off, if you want to look at it that way, or that they decided that's a better sponsor. Student Civil Liberties Union predated SLATE, so it was already on campus. But there was this decision, that's the better voice for the anti-HUAC picket line.

02-00:17:00

Meeker:

This idea of SLATE being kind of an incubator, if you will, for additional organizations, or issue-based movements, or something along those lines, I think is interesting, and it's something that maybe doesn't get covered as much in the typical SLATE narrative, which is just sort of focused on the narrative through-line on campus that kind of leads to the Free Speech Movement, but there are these other forks in the road.

02-00:17:30

Miller:

Here's another perfect example of it. SLATE had summer conferences; they were called issues conferences. So when I came back to Berkeley, I think the first of those I went to was '61. I think the '60 conference I probably was in LA. I was working full-time on an anti-capital punishment campaign. So at the '61 conference, Hank Anderson, who was the research director of the AFL-CIO Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, was there, and he spoke on farmworker organizing in the valley. And Cesar Chavez was still at Community Service Organization. He had not started his National Farmworkers Association work. So as a result of Hank's presentation, a number of us—we had already been involved, actually, in farmworker stuff. We had gone to Tracy, and Stockton. There were some farmworker priests down there, so we'd gone and done stuff with them. I remember [laughs] I pulled carrots one weekend and earned about thirteen cents for a whole day's work. It was hard work, and slow work.

02-00:19:10

Meeker:

Why did you do that?

02-00:19:12

Miller:

We wanted to find out what's this work like. So we went to the shapeup. We went to a 4:00 a.m. shapeup in Stockton, and got on the bus and got taken out to I'm pretty sure it was—I'm pretty sure it was carrot picking, or whatever

you call it, pulling. Exhausting. [laughs] I got blisters on my fingers and all that. We, through Anne Draper—

02-00:19:43

Meeker:

So you know I'm interviewing Marshall Krause, and one of the early cases that he dealt with was a Berkeley student, Jefferson Poland, who was arrested for trespassing when he tried to go to a bracero camp to tell them about their rights. And it's clear that one of the difficulties in organizing farmworkers was their inaccessibility. Was any of this work that you did an attempt to kind of develop relationships, or get to speak with farmworkers?

02-00:20:33

Miller:

No, because we weren't staying. I mean, we had no pretense that we were going to organize farmworkers. But we should go back a minute. There was a migratory stream of farmworkers, but there were also, in the California Valley, what were called shoestring communities. These were stable, almost entirely Mexican and Mexican American little communities, where people worked ten months of the year, maybe, and they traveled, they followed crops, but they typically came home. These were not migratory workers. That's who Chavez organized. AWOC, the AFL-CIO thing, was organizing the Filipino migratory stream. It's those two forces that came together in probably '65 in the United Farmworkers Organizing Committee. But student engagement, Anne Draper, was the—Hal Draper, the librarian at Berkeley, of whom Mario Savio said, "He's the only guy over thirty that we trust," so Anne Draper, his wife, was the union label person for hats. By that time, I think the Hat-Makers' Union had merged with the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. I'm pretty sure this is right. And so Anne Draper worked for that union, and her job was to promote the idea that consumers should look for a union label before they bought a hat. So I remember she always wore hats. And she was a strong, strong advocate of farmworker rights. So she got students involved. We would go with her to Sacramento for hearings of the State Welfare Commission, the State Industrial Commission. Some state regulatory body in those days set farmworker wages. Somehow, they set the minimum wage for farmworkers. It was an unusual procedure.

02-00:23:10

Meeker:

Agricultural labor is often managed differently than—

02-00:23:14

Miller:

It's excluded from National Labor Relations Act, and that goes back to what the Dixiecrats did in the thirties. So the state commission set these wages, and Anne would get students to come to be part of the audience that was trying to make a presence to influence them to decide in the benefit of workers, not in the benefit of growers. Also, back in those days, the Packinghouse Workers union, totally separate operation, because they had packinghouses, and they had some forays into organizing fieldworkers—Clive Knowles is the name that comes to mind, and I think he was with the Packinghouse Workers union. And there was a big strike down in the county cantaloupes, very close to the

Mexican border. So at Berkeley, we organized clothing and canned food collections, and to send car caravans down there to support the strikers. So anyway, at this '61 SLATE summer conference, agricultural labor was a major issue on the agenda. Hank Anderson, Research Director, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, made a presentation. He did a whole series of brilliant papers where he would show the farm labor portion of the cost of getting a head of lettuce onto a grocery store shelf was like half a cent, so if you increased farmworker wages from ninety cents an hour to \$1.25, it was insignificant what that would add on the consumer end. And, of course, the growers said, "Oh, no, we can't do that, it'll make lettuce beyond the purchase of an average consumer." And so he had done papers like this. As I remember them, they were two sides of 8.5-by-14 mimeograph. You had to really want to read this stuff, because it was dense. But he did that for like thirty or forty crops. I mean, it was terrific work. So I think it was at that point that we decided we should have an ongoing presence of this issue on the campus. Now, Stiles Hall was also involved with farmworker stuff, so I don't know where John—John Griffiths, was it? He became the first chair of Student Committee. Does that name ring a bell?

02-00:26:25

Meeker: No, I'm sorry.

02-00:26:26

Miller: I think it was John Griffiths was the first chair of Student Committee for Agricultural Labor. And he may have come out of Stiles, rather than SLATE. But back to how we presented ourselves. There's an article that we've talked about, "In Defense of the Student Movement," by Herb Mills, and Herb challenges this—the prevalent view of observers of the student movement was that it was moral, as distinct from political.

02-00:27:17

Meeker: What did it mean for it to be moral?

02-00:27:23

Miller: Well, it would be better to ask people who thought that, but as I understood it, these students didn't have any real political analysis of what was going on; they just looked at something from the point of view of their values and asked is this right or wrong, and if it's wrong then we're going to take a stand on it.

02-00:27:46

Meeker: Moral outrage?

02-00:27:48

Miller: Yeah, you could say that. At least moral indignation, if not outrage.

02-00:27:56

Meeker: Whereas political, in Mills' term, would've been—

02-00:28:00

Miller:

It would've been more calculated, more assessing forces in the larger community. What does it take to get from point A to point B? And so on and so on. And what Herb says, which I think is correct, is that a lot of us who were at the center of SLATE were very political people, and what we were mostly interested in was, number one, on the campus continuing this breakout from the McCarthy era, so that the Silent Generation now was becoming a noisy generation. And secondly, could we be in some way a catalytic agent in strengthening or fostering wider community forces? So we wanted to identify with and support the labor movement. We wanted to identify, support, and work with the Civil Rights Movement, and so on. So these are pretty political conversations that people were having. Now, what I think Herb missed was there was another strand emerging that was outside this conversation we were having. Frank Kofsky, I think, on campus represented it in relation to civil rights. And in the South, when there was debate in SNCC over direct action versus voter registration, I think that was another expression of these two strands. Diane Nash, who came out of the Nashville movement, was very opposed to voter registration. There were a number of SNCC people very opposed to voter registration. They wanted the clarity and purity, if you will, that direct action allowed, whereas the voter registration people, they were more talking about, well, you know, we do these direct action things, but the vast majority of people in the older black community, they may be cheering us on, but they're not participating in it. So we've got to listen a little bit and see what they want us to be doing. Well, when Bob Moses did that in Mississippi, what he heard from key adult people with whom he touched base, and to whom he had introductions from Ella Baker, voter registration: we have to break the back of Dixiecrat power in this state, and the way to do that is achieve the right to vote, because we are a big, big, big population in Mississippi. In the Delta, when I worked in Leflore County in '63, the African American population was about eighty percent, seventy-five to eighty percent of that county, with some infinitesimal number of them registered to vote.

02-00:31:34

Meeker:

This debate around tactics, around focus—is it going to be on the political process in terms of voter registration, or other related activities or direct action—it sounds like this was maybe percolating as a topic of conversation within SLATE after you return in '60?

02-00:31:59

Miller:

I think it was an ongoing conversation in SLATE. What SLATE had done was—and I think we talked about this last time—it was a place where a student who was just beginning to get her fingers or his fingers into political activity could come, and you wouldn't have to have a fully-blown ideological commitment as a Shachtmanite or as a Trotskyist or as sympathetic to the communists, people that weren't openly members of the Communist Party. But you could get involved in issues that you thought meant something, and so you had that kind of a student. Plus—and Herb Mills was a genius at this—persuading these highly-developed ideological organizations that you don't

make SLATE the place where you argue out your points of view, because if you do you'll drive everybody else away and you'll be right back to where you are now. Here we are creating something that's engaging new people. Now, we'll have educational forums where your points of view can be presented, or you can present them in your own educational forums, and students will become more curious as they become more active. They're going to want to listen to these ideas, and you're welcome to recruit them, but don't try to impose your whole point of view on things in SLATE.

Now, I think it was when I first returned to the campus there was a World Youth Festival. This was an international gathering of students that was funded by, sponsored by the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc countries, but presented itself as almost like SLATE, like an issue-oriented, nonideological thing, you all come. So their committee here in the US wanted leaders of SLATE to endorse it. And they actually brought endorsement to a SLATE meeting, and I opposed it in that meeting. And the endorsement was defeated. And afterward, right as he was chairing the meeting, Ken Cloke said, "Well, I want you all to know that as an individual I have endorsed it," and I really blew my stack. [laughs] He and I are good friends now, but I remember at the time I really was angry. I thought it was abuse of his role as chairman of SLATE, and undermined this notion that we had of being kind of a neutral ground in the intense ideological arguments of the day among people on the left, summed up the third camp socialists, who said, a plague on both your houses, Soviet imperialism, versus Western imperialism"; the Trotskyists who said, the Soviet Union is a deformed worker state, but it's still a worker state; and the Communists, who said the Soviet Union is the hope for a new society.

02-00:36:34

Meeker:

It's interesting, looking back, and you mentioned this incident with Ken Cloke, and I know Mike Tigar attended one of those summer youth festivals, in Helsinki, I think.

02-00:36:48

Miller:

Yeah, I think that's the one that we're talking about. I think Ken might've, too, and Mike Myerson, I think, did. There were a number of SLATE people who got involved in that.

02-00:37:01

Meeker:

It sounds to me like there were still people like you, though, who, whatever your own personal sympathies or identifications, resisted having SLATE become too closely associated with one of these—

02-00:37:24

Miller:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. There was a little circle. There was always a little core of people in SLATE who thought that way, at least while I was on the campus, and I left at the end of '62, I'm pretty sure.

02-00:37:43

Meeker:

Can you tell me about those two years? You arrived back on campus in fall of '60. I know that you had been keeping up to date in general of what was going on at SLATE, but when you get there what did you think of SLATE now two-plus years after you had left?

02-00:38:05

Miller:

Well, the sit-ins have come in the middle of that time, or toward the end of that time.

02-00:38:12

Meeker:

The sit-ins, meaning—?

02-00:38:14

Miller:

In the Deep South, the Woolworths sit-ins, and they spread like wildfire. And so now there is an explosion of a student-led Civil Rights Movement in the South, and it's activating students all over the country. So the spark that became little fires all over the country because of SLATE—I mean, SLATE fomented a whole bunch of—I mean, there were dozens of campuses that we were in touch with that were starting campus political parties. But that qualitatively changed with the sit-ins. The spark became a flame, a blaze, really. And also, around then is when the Student League for Industrial Democracy breaks from the League for Industrial Democracy and becomes SDS. I don't remember the year of that, but I know Paul Booth, who was an early national secretary of SDS, came out to Berkeley to see what we were doing in SLATE. He spent a summer with us, and then he went into West Oakland and became a tenant organizer in West Oakland. The fall of '60, by the time I got back on the campus, it was quite different from before I'd left. And I was pretty sensitive to the idea that I didn't want to be the wise guy from early days who's going to tell these new undergraduates what they ought to be doing. I really didn't want to do that. I don't think I was on the governing committee of SLATE then. I might've been, but I don't remember that. I think I told you about this: in the booklet about SLATE, we had a very, very intense argument in that committee over how we were going to present the first free speech. Was free speech for the right? Was it for Nazis? Was it for racists? And I said yeah, I don't want the state governing who gets to say what. But there were people, left people, who they're kind of the precursor of all those who say hate speech ought to be regulated now. I disagree with the current variation, as well. But we had a big discussion about that, and the final agreement was that in the SLATE booklet we're going to say the First Amendment's for everyone. Somewhere along in there—I don't know when it happened—I'm pretty sure SLATE actually invited a Nazi to speak on campus. Does that ring a bell to you?

02-00:42:23

Meeker:

I haven't seen a reference to something like that. That doesn't mean it didn't happen, though.

02-00:42:31

Miller: But certainly supported the right of a Nazi to speak on campus.

02-00:42:39

Meeker: I'm curious the way you were talking about what had transpired in the intervening years between your departure and your return to Berkeley. And it sounds like a critical part of this is an expanding and a deepening of a communications network of active students across the country. How was this done? How was news spreading? How were students communicating with one another? Were there specific publications, or was it mostly on the level of personal communication?

02-00:43:23

Miller: Well, pre-'60, the NSA was a forum in which that happened. National Student Association was an association of student governments. And in the days especially before '60, as these campus political parties were getting organized, and as they were electing people to student government, or they would get active in a campus-based NSA committee, they would become delegates to these National Student Association conferences. National Student Association is who first supported sit-in students going around the country and talking on Northern campuses about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. So the NSA was a place. Then, as the campus political parties started popping up, we all started communicating directly with one another. And there were some older students, like at Chicago Otto Feinstein. And Chicago was one of the few places that already had a campus political party. I think it was called POLIT. So Carl Werthman who was in POLIT, came out to Berkeley. We lived together as graduate students. And Otto Feinstein and Carl and others started a magazine called *New University Thought*. So there were a number of student magazines, including *Studies on The Left*, *New University Thought*, *Root and Branch*—and there were probably several other magazines that sprouted led by graduate students, but reflecting this new energy on the campus, and trying to take a fresh look at American and international politics. So that was another way of communicating.

And there were the beginnings of national actions. There were national peace demonstrations, I think, in '58, 9. I wasn't too connected to that, but I knew people who went to Washington to participate. And I think SLID, the Student League for Industrial Democracy, that became SDS, by the late fifties, early sixties, that was another forum in which people were meeting one another. And I'm sure whatever the CP, Communist Party, network was called then—I don't know what the shape of it was. I think it's post the Labor Youth League, which was what existed when I first came to Berkeley in '54. There was actually a Communist Party youth organization, but I think it disbanded, and they were the ones who sponsored or initiated the Du Bois Clubs, but that didn't come until probably '62, '63, somewhere around in there. And you'd be an undergraduate at Wisconsin, and then you come to graduate school at Berkeley, so there was a lot of that kind of transferring around. A lot of networking of this type was going on.

02-00:47:54

Meeker:

You were a grad student, and you said you didn't want to play this role as the wise elder coming in and teaching, and I can totally understand that, but you must have engaged with this next generation of undergrads.

02-00:48:10

Miller:

Oh, yeah. Well, by then the terrace, which was the cafeteria, just outside of Sather Gate, to the west of Sproul Hall, there's that cafeteria there, and there's a big outside deck. That was our gathering place.

02-00:48:38

Meeker:

Was that new? Had that been there when you were a student?

02-00:48:40

Miller:

I think it was new. It's Zellerbach Hall. When was Zellerbach—? It was all part of that Zellerbach complex. [Zellerbach Hall was completed in 1968]

02-00:48:48

Meeker:

Okay, it was part of that whole complex, yeah. I'll have to look and see when that was finished.

02-00:48:52

Miller:

I don't think that existed yet when I left in '58. And people had tended to sit with their own little circle around these tables, but there was back and forth. An example: Frank Bardacke had come from Harvard. Oh, I'll tell you what—Frank tells this story. After the HUAC demonstration, the House Un-American Activities Committee made a propaganda film against the students, wanting to label them Communists and blah, blah, blah. So they showed this film at Harvard, and Frank went, and it had the opposite effect with him. He said, "That's where I want to be." [laughter] So he left Harvard and he came to Berkeley. So he showed up at the terrace, and somehow or other we got acquainted, and I introduced him around. So it was a place where people would meet, argue, friendly discussions, so on and so on. But this HUAC film I think actually ended up being a recruiting tool. I mean, the HUAC film ended up being a recruiting tool for the student movement. [laughter] It boomeranged. I think it really boomeranged on HUAC.

02-00:50:17

Meeker:

Wouldn't be the first time something like that had happened.

02-00:50:19

Miller:

Yeah, that's right. And I think San Francisco was the last time they left Washington, for these hearings out in San Francisco. They got a big bloody nose in San Francisco. Let me go back to this distinction, direct action/voter registration. Now, in San Francisco, you had the Ad Hoc Committee for Civil Rights, which was campus-based, and it did the Sheraton Palace sit-in.

02-00:50:59

Meeker:

I think that was '62, '63, right?

02-00:51:01

Miller: That period, activity is so intense then, you could've gone to no classes and gone to meetings and protests and spent all your time doing that kind of thing.

02-00:51:18

Meeker: I think it was '63. That's what I'm going to say. [the Sheraton Palace sit-in was in March 1964]

02-00:51:30

Miller: So, going back to Bayview-Hunters Point, now, I think we did that survey in probably '62. So there was a group on campus, African American students and Anglo students, who were interested in working in the community. So we didn't do direct action stuff. We hooked up with the Bayview-Hunters Point Citizens Committee. There was a woman by the name of Ardeth Nichols who was its leader. I mean, if you want a stereotypic, strong, Southern-origin, black woman, you couldn't beat Ardeth Nichols. Wise, wise woman. So we hooked up with her because Carl Werthman, who I mentioned a minute ago, was doing research on gangs, and had gotten to know Youth For Service, which was a street work agency in San Francisco, and Orville Luster worked with Ardeth Nichols. So our student group, we had Ken Simmons, an African American architect; Cedric Robinson, who became a major African American sociologist, taught at Santa Barbara, died a few years ago, unfortunately, prematurely; several other people: Herman Blake, who was, I think, dean of Tougaloo for a while, he was part of this group. Sondra Robinson, she was, I think, a sociology major. [Margot Dashiell too, who was on the Berkeley City Council]. I mean, this was a terrific group of people who I got to know. And then of the whites, it was Carl Werthman, Jerry Mandell, Harry Brill, myself. So all of these students were either sociology or city planning or architecture students. And we hooked up with Hunters Point because this threatened urban renewal, and we did this survey, and we in other ways tried to be of use to the Citizens Committee. So that spanned, I think, '62 to '63, because I think the end of it was happening at the same time the Sheraton sit-in took place. I remember going to the Sheraton sit-in, but I wasn't a sit-inner myself. By then, I was the SNCC-er out here. So let's look at that story. The '62 SLATE summer conference is "The Negro in America." SLATE invited Chuck McDew, who's the chairman of SNCC at this time. What does he say? He says of himself, "An African American by birth, a Jew by choice, a radical of necessity." He had something like that. Very, very talented guy. So he spoke, and by this time Herb Mills and I are renting a little house at 1915 Milvia, and McDew stayed with us. So at the end of the two days of the SLATE summer conference, he asked me to be the full-time SNCC rep, or the campus SNCC rep. Yeah, campus SNCC rep. And then, for reasons having to do with my graduate studies, I didn't want to take a language, and I didn't want to get back into quantitative analysis, but there were requirements that I had to meet to stay on my PhD track. And right about that time Orville Luster at Youth For Service offered me a job, so I said at the end of graduate school I'm going to work. So I was, by fall '63, by September—yeah, September—instead of going back to school I'm working at Youth For Service. And now I'm the Bay

Area rep for SNCC, but it's still a volunteer position. Well, let me just carry that out. But I'm spending a lot of time on SNCC stuff. So in December, Orville calls me into his office. "Mike, I love what you're doing for SNCC, but this is a small agency. We can't subsidize it, so you've got to decide: are you working for Youth For Service, or are you going to go full-time with SNCC? Sleep on it. Tell me tomorrow." So I slept on it. I said, "I'm going full-time with SNCC." So around December '63 I go full-time onto the SNCC staff.

02-00:57:25

Meeker: Can we pause there for a second?

02-00:57:26

Miller: Yeah.

02-00:57:26

Meeker: So I'd like just to do one last bit about SLATE when you were there on campus. Can you tell me about the leadership in that second generation? Who did you engage with? Who did you think was really pushing the group forward and doing the work that needed to be done?

02-00:57:54

Miller: There were people like Mike Tigar, Mike Myerson, Ken Cloke, Sue Witkovsky, Sue Griffin, Kate Coleman, Cindy Lembcke. There were a lot of talented, talented people, and that's just scratching the surface.

02-00:58:18

Meeker: There were quite a few women on that list.

02-00:58:21

Miller: Yeah, Leslye Russell, who was a YPSL, she was active. Who were some of the other guys?

02-00:58:36

Meeker: Well, was Brad Cleveland around?

02-00:58:38

Miller: Oh, yeah. [laughs] His passion was education reform. He's the one who introduced the SLATE catalog, this campus— So SLATE published this thing that evaluated faculty. Students eval—I mean, nobody had done that kind of thing before. All of a sudden faculty found themselves written up in this catalogue that students really enjoyed looking at. Yeah, that was Brad's passion. Who was the guy? Steve Saloff, maybe, who was the head of the SLATE Peace Committee, he had a pretty much World Youth Festival orientation. But yeah, there were a lot of talented people.

02-00:59:41

Meeker: Dave Armor was elected student body president.

02-00:59:42

Miller:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. David Armor got elected student body president. I don't remember what year, but I was on campus, I think. I think when I was there SLATE might have elected its first majority to the student government, but certainly it had more than one or two people.

02-01:00:02

Meeker:

Well, there was the year that Joanne Fowler, Dave Armor, Cindy Lembcke, Mike Tigar, and Ken Cloke were all elected. Where did you think they were headed? Did it seem like this next generation had a clear vision for what the next chapter of SLATE should be?

02-01:00:28

Miller:

Well, I think by '62, SLATE is no longer the center of student movement energy at Berkeley. I think these issue groups that connect the campus to community forces are where the energy is shifting. So you had University of California Students Against Intervention in Cuba. This is Maurice Zeitlin and Bob Scheer who were the coleaders of that. Because we had a lot of, in those days, kind of romantic notions about Fidel Castro and the guerillas in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. And there was a probably campus peace group, I think, and you had campus Friends of SLATE. So SLATE is no longer the hub of the UC student movement. And when did it officially disband, '56?

02-01:02:00

Meeker:

Sixty-six.

02-01:02:01

Miller:

Sixty-six, I mean. Yeah, so the early signs, by '62 you can already see that it's not the center of student movement energy, and winning campus office does not have the meaning that it did earlier. Now, I always felt this is a good check on whether you're in touch or not. Running for office and getting a big turnout and a majority of the student vote tells you you're still in touch with your constituency. But by this time the student constituency and moving it into activism is not so central, because there are a whole bunch of forces out in the society that are in motion that you want to be identified with. So it's a really different time.

02-01:03:10

Meeker:

Well, it's interesting: SLATE begins with the critique that student government was just sandbox politics. And it sounds like, from what you're saying, that by the time SLATE starts to wind down, that sort of remains the critique of student government overall.

02-01:03:29

Miller:

Well, yeah, yeah. That's right, because earlier, getting student government to simply pass resolutions against compulsory ROTC or things like that was a pretty big deal, because it meant the official voice of the University of

California student body is now speaking against the dominant Cold War consensus. But by '62, that is shattered. So it's a very different era.

02-01:04:06

Meeker: So maybe SLATE achieved what it had set out to do, and—

02-01:04:10

Miller: For sure. I think for sure.

02-01:04:16

Meeker: Did you pay much attention to the Free Speech Movement when it emerges in fall of '64?

02-01:04:23

Miller: I did and didn't. To be on the steering committee you had to be a representative from a student group, so Mario Savio was officially on the FSM steering committee as the chairman of the University of California at Berkeley Friends of SNCC. But he wasn't doing any SNCC stuff. And I had met him the summer before. Wait a second now. When did Free Speech Movement start?

02-01:05:05

Meeker: It was fall of '64, and I don't think that he came out until right before that, right?

02-01:05:11

Miller: Well, he was in Mississippi Summer, and when he came back he was at Freedom House, an organizer at this thing. SNCC, ILWU, Local 6, the warehouse local, and the Housing Committee of the NAACP in San Francisco started a thing called Freedom House in the Western Addition, which imagined itself doing grassroots organizing in the Western Addition against urban renewal. And Terry Cannon—who was editor of *The Movement* newspaper, the SNCC newspaper out here—and I, Becky Jenkins, and Chester Wright, at SF State. And another black guy at SF State, [Austen Thompson, who later became a dean there.] Anyway, we were the kind of nucleus of Freedom House. And we had a lot of young people, campus people, who were doing door-to-door, talking to people about urban renewal, and thinking we were organizing. Well, we didn't do very well at that, but Mario Savio was one of those people. And I think he still had his stutter. I'm not quite sure about that. So I knew Mario before he became famous, both because he'd been in Mississippi and because he was active in Freedom House. So now Free Speech Movement springs up, and Mario becomes a major leader of it, but he's not doing any Friends of SNCC stuff. So I had a meeting. I, in a friendly way, fired him. I said, "Mario, we need someone who's—" He said, "But FSM is SNCC. It's what SNCC stands for." I said, "Yeah, I know that, I know that, but there are some practicalities. We need to raise money. We need to blah, blah, blah." And he said, "Yeah, yeah, Mike, you're right." So I can't remember who; somebody else became the chair of campus Friends of SNCC, but Mario remained the campus Friends of SNCC delegate to the Free Speech

Movement steering committee. So I stayed in touch with Mario. There were big gaps, but [he was a] talented, extraordinary guy. I mean, an ability to give voice to what students wanted to say, but didn't have the clarity of intellect or mastery of language that he brought to that student movement. Really extraordinary.

02-01:08:18

Meeker: Free Speech Movement is widely known, widely taught. A lot of people like to chart the sixties student activism to really getting its start there. I think SLATE is less widely known, less widely taught.

02-01:08:38

Miller: Yeah, for sure.

02-01:08:40

Meeker: What do you think of that? What do you think of the current state of historical knowledge about—

02-01:08:46

Miller: It's not very good. [laughs] It's not very good.

02-01:08:49

Meeker: How would you teach it differently?

02-01:08:52

Miller: Oh, boy. Talking about Berkeley, or nationally, or what?

02-01:08:57

Meeker: Well, let's stick with Berkeley, but I'm also curious on how you think Berkeley fits in nationally.

02-01:09:08

Miller: Well, I would say SLATE, in the '57-8 period, was the first catalyst to break the mold of the Silent Generation. And it did it on campus at Berkeley, and it fomented it around the country. Then, the coup de grâce for the remnants of McCarthyism is the Civil Rights Movement in the South. It begins with King, but for campus people it's the sit-ins and subsequently the Freedom Rides. So '60-62 there's a huge involvement that's growing to support the movement in the South, as attested to by the almost thousand campus-based people who go to Mississippi Summer Project, which is '64. So all of this is before Free Speech Movement. The activity at Berkeley was extraordinary: connecting with farm labor; connecting with the peace movement; connecting with the Civil Rights Movement. And the Civil Rights Movement becomes a deep commitment on campuses across the country. And you have the beginnings of an antiwar movement. So the people who come back from Mississippi are setting up a table at the edge of the campus to raise money for the Civil Rights Movement. So you have free speech and the Civil Rights Movement. And the university decides, after we've had all this history of free speech on the campus and finally thinking that we've won, students thinking, well, we have free speech on the campus, you can invite speakers, you can do whatever, and

now the university decides you can't collect money for the Civil Rights Movement. Serious mistake [laughs] that they made. And so Jack—what's his name who goes in the police car? Weinberg?

02-01:12:16

Meeker: Weinberg, yeah.

02-01:12:17

Miller: Weinberg. So they arrest Jack Weinberg. They put him in the police car. Direct action is in the air, so students just sit, surround the police car. The university doesn't back down, and so there's this dramatic stalemate. It's big news. [laughs] So students who were supportive of all this stuff, but passive—largely occupied, maybe they'd give a buck at a Friends of SNCC table to support the movement in the South, or they'd sign a petition—now they're outraged. This is too much. And so it activates a whole new layer of people who show up at these Sproul Hall rallies. And by that time I think the Interfraternity Council was part of the Free Speech Movement Council. Is that right?

02-01:13:22

Meeker: I don't know about that, yeah.

02-01:13:24

Miller: Well, I heard a tape; this is the '66 tape of Stokely Carmichael. Now, this is in the Black Power period. He's speaking on the steps of Sproul Hall, and the guy who's introducing him says Interfraternity Council is one of the sponsors of this thing. So by the Free Speech Movement time I think they were part of it. I'm pretty sure the Young Republicans were. So everything on campus has moved to the left. Everything has moved to the left. The fraternities are having trouble recruiting. It's just a qualitatively different place. And this affront, this outrage of not letting students collect money for the movement in the South, people who just—they were really upset about that. And you had this broad-based committee. And one of the most interesting things about it, to me: they still are interested in communicating beyond themselves. When Mario climbs up on top of the police car in which Jack Weinberg is held, he takes off his shoes. He's wearing a sports jacket.

So later—I would say maybe '65, maybe late '64, '65, '66—at some point the conclusion that no matter what we do the system is not going to respond leads to this what I consider crazy militancy that isolates the black movement, student movement, increasingly isolated from the possibility of moving majorities of Americans to continue to support these issues. In the '66 midterm election for Congress you have the biggest shift since the thirties of the electorate going from one party to the other. In the thirties, they went from Republican to Democrat; in '66 they went from Democrat to Republican. And an early sign of what was going on was the strength George Wallace had in his forays into the North running for president in the primary of the Democratic Party. So things started going a little crazy, I think. By mid-'66, I

was holding Friends of SNCC together out here, [laughs] but it was difficult. It was increasingly difficult. We had a broad base of support. Were it not for this dear friend of mine who died earlier this year—Naomi Lauter was the chair of San Francisco Friends of SNCC—she and her husband Bob were highly regarded people in San Francisco. He was the chairman of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission under Shelley, I think. He was the fundraising chair for Leo McCarthy's race for Assembly. Leo McCarthy became Speaker of the Assembly. Naomi was deeply involved in Americans For Democratic Action, the California Democratic Clubs. Willie Brown was part of that. Phil Burton was part of that. We had a broad base of support. But it was getting more and more difficult, and Naomi was a critical person in holding on to support. But I knew by mid-'66, I said we're going in the wrong direction.

02-01:18:32

Meeker:

Yet, at the same time, you didn't give up on progressive social change.

02-01:18:36

Miller:

Oh, no, no, no. Not at all. This is deeply part of me. Going back to the SLATE summer conference of '61—so I told you about Hank Anderson, the research director for the Farmworkers. So Hank is leaving the campgrounds. I said, "Hank, where are you going?" He said, "Well, I'm going to go meet this guy Saul Alinsky. He knows a lot about farmworkers in California." So I said, "You mind if I tag along?" So when I got fired in the Lower East Side job I was called a little Alinsky. I didn't know who was this guy Alinsky. So Hank takes me, and we show up at Alinsky's door. And Alinsky had a very gruff manner, so he opens the door. Hank introduces himself. Alinsky points at me, and he goes, "What's this guy here for?" [laughter] So Hank is taken aback. He doesn't know what to say. So I say, "Well, Mr. Alinsky, I was fired from a job on the Lower East Side as a little Alinsky, and I wanted to meet the big one." Well, that tickled his ego. He had a big ego. So for an hour he regaled us with stories about his work in New York City, the social welfare establishment there, [laughs] how the contract with Hudson Guild Settlement House had been canceled, and on and on, and he'd keep going. He had this way of moving his hand. "Don't worry, we're going to talk about the Farmworkers." Hank is getting edgier and edgier. "Don't worry, we're going to talk about the Farmworkers." So later that summer Alinsky spoke at a SLATE forum. I think I'd become education chair of SLATE, maybe. In any case, I got him invited to come and speak on the campus. And there are already the beginnings of my separation. A lot of people at that meeting, "What's your ideology?" I didn't think that was a very meaningful question. I still don't.

02-01:20:45

Meeker:

They were asking Alinsky that?

02-01:20:46

Miller:

Yeah.

- 02-01:20:48
Meeker: How did he respond to that question?
- 02-01:20:50
Miller: Not very well. [laughter]
- 02-01:20:51
Meeker: I bet.
- 02-01:20:52
Miller: He said to me afterward, "Yeah, well, I think I broke the eggs, but I'm not sure if I made an omelet," or he had some funny post-event phrasing. Yeah, he didn't handle—I wrote a long piece on the student movement and Alinsky, an alliance that never happened. Did I send you that?
- 02-01:21:29
Meeker: Yeah.
- 02-01:21:32
Miller: Yeah. So already by then I was thinking Alinsky's stuff made sense to me, and that, in fact, he had a democratic ideology. But I don't know why he decided to handle that question that way. And community organizers today are even worse. "We don't have an ideology." Well, everybody has an ideology. It's nonsense to say we don't have an ideology. Articulate it. We have a substantive understanding of democracy as a way of life, not simply procedures.
- 02-01:22:16
Meeker: People power.
- 02-01:22:17
Miller: Yeah. And wide disbursement of power as the capacity to act, no great concentrations of wealth and income, elimination of poverty, blah, blah, blah. So the question of socialism is, in that context, a question of policy, not a broad, big, big, big question. Are we better off having public power in San Francisco, or a regulated PG&E? That's a specific policy question. Should we nationalize the banks? It's a policy question. To me, socialism is policy questions.
- 02-01:23:04
Meeker: Interesting. So I hate to give short shrift to the rest of your narrative. Happily, a good chapter of it—the SNCC chapter, and some of the Alinsky—was included in a previous oral history that we will footnote in this transcript. I did want to ask you about the Mission Coalition Organization before we wrap up today. I've done a little reading about it, and it's just one example of many of the kinds of community organizing activities that you've done over the years. And some amount has been written about it, which is good. The reason I wanted to bring it up is, again, kind of in the context of SLATE, and this idea of the lowest significant common denominator, and also not an ideological-based but as an issue-based organization, it seems to me in reading about the

MCO that that might well fit as a description for what that organization was, too. What do you think of that idea?

02-01:24:23

Miller:

Yeah, I think that's probably right. We had the idea that we wanted to unite the community so that we had the people power to give voice to the aspirations, hopes, dreams, and interests of the overwhelming majority of people who lived and worked in the Mission. So we had in that organization everything from the Maoist-led Mission Tenant Union to the Mission Merchants Association, headed by Frank Hunt, a moderate Republican from Oklahoma. And we had homeowners associations. We had most of the Catholic parishes. At the second or third convention of MCO, there were a hundred organizations represented, and there were twelve hundred delegates and alternates on the convention floor. Every seat was wired by the phone company. People had headsets, and we ran that convention as a bilingual English/Spanish convention. So I was the lead organizer for MCO. I'd already directed the second half of a project of Alinsky's in Kansas City, Missouri, which was a bust, but that's another story. So yeah, we had the idea we wanted to bring a broad base of people together. And I'll take just one example of how we dealt with a difficult issue.

02-01:26:27

Meeker:

Before you do that, maybe just define what the Mission Coalition Organization was, and what the context for its work was.

02-01:26:36

Miller:

Oh, okay. So while I was still on the SNCC staff I was working with people in the Mission District to defeat urban renewal. And I left before that happened, but the Mission District defeated urban renewal at the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. One of the few neighborhoods in the country that was able to stop what came to be called the federal bulldozer. In black communities it was called Negro removal. In Latino communities it was typically called Chicano or Latino removal. It was doing this to poor whites, as well, but that wasn't as visible. So urban renewal was defeated, and the Mission Council on Redevelopment disbanded, because it had won its issue. So at the '67 Spanish-speaking issues conference, Mayor Alioto says, "If a broadly-based group of people in the Mission ask me to include the Mission District as part of the City's application to HUD," the Department of Housing and Urban Development, "for model cities money, I will." Bayview-Hunters Point is already going to be a neighborhood for which he seeks model cities money. But there are people at that conference who say this is urban renewal with another name, so we have to jump into the leadership of this group that's going to deal with the mayor. So they did. So through '67, and into early '68, because I had connection with these people from the earlier fight, I was in correspondence with them, and sometimes they'd phone me up and ask me what I thought about some tactical situation. So in spring of '68 I get a phone call from Ben Martinez, who I don't yet know. He's the chair of this then-called Temporary Mission Coalition Organization. And he says, "When are

you done in Kansas City." I told him. "Well, we're interested in hiring you to work here. Are you coming back?" I said yeah. So at that point I wasn't sure I was going to be an organizer. So I said, "Well, I'm willing to consider the job of helping you organize a founding convention, but I don't know if I want to sign on beyond that." So when they interviewed me, I said, "A condition for employment on my part is that this be a multi-issue, not a single-issue organization. It's not going to be just a model cities organization; it's going to be a multi-issue." So you had people there who'd been through the anti-urban renewal fight, who they understood the idea that you don't want to reinvent the wheel every time you have to face some new crisis facing the Mission, so multi-issue makes sense. There were some veterans of the Community Service Organization that Fred Ross, Alinsky's associate, had organized in the late forties, early fifties. Herman Gallegos, Alex Zermenio, Adan Juarez, other people had been CSO, so they knew this idea, multi-issue. So there wasn't really any objection to that. So I got hired, and we're bringing together all these groups to officially vote. We're going to join this thing, and we're going to send delegates to the first convention, at which a platform will be adopted on issues that we face as people of the Mission. So there were a bunch of committees: housing; consumer rights; job opportunities; education; police-community relations. So this is a volatile issue in minority communities. You have some people whose focus is police harassment and brutality, and so they want a strong anti-police brutality/harassment issue. There are other people, particularly older people, stable, longtime residences, and the merchants; we want police presence against the crime in the neighborhood. So I said we have to bring these two points of view together. And so there was a guy, Jim Queen, who worked with youth. Terrific guy. He had a thing called the Real Alternatives Program, RAP. So the youth had a high regard for Jim Queen, so Jim brought young people into this conversation, and my organizers—I by then had a staff—brought some Block Club people into the conversation. I was working with the churches; I brought some clergy leadership into this conversation. And so we hammered out language. "We want an increased respectful police presence in our neighborhoods, and we do not want police harassment or brutality." So everybody could stand on that platform. So it was lowest significant common denominator in a totally different environment. That's how you build people power, I think. So the conclusions for Black Lives Matter and this whole new movement—which I hope is going to learn some lessons from where SNCC went wrong, but there aren't great signs of that so far—I hope they'll figure that out.

02-01:33:46

Meeker:

It's so interesting to hear that through-line, how there's a real consistency in your identification of problems and approach to solving them.

02-01:33:59

Miller:

Yeah, because it's crystal clear to me that if you don't unite a very, very broad base of people in this country you're not going to change its central features of exploitation, dominance, whatever word you want to use, ruling class. I don't

care. Power elite, whatever. If you don't bring a whole lot of people together in a common voice of people power, you're not going to change any of that. You can write great pamphlets about it. You can have militant demonstrations. You can do all those things. You're not going to change it.

02-01:34:43

Meeker:

Have you developed a way to engage with or respond to individuals who want a more purist approach, or fear that the approach that you're talking about requires too much compromise? The policing issue, there are activists who just say police should get out of communities of color, period.

02-01:35:13

Miller:

Yeah, I know. Well, I wouldn't spend much time talking to them. But back in those days, it was before cops were pigs. There was anger, legitimate anger, on the part of particularly Latino young people who hung around in parks and on street corners who weren't quite gangs. They were near gangs, or [laughs] I don't know what label you want to put on them. They were the kids who were going to be dropouts from high school, and so on. That's who this guy Jim Queen worked with, and he worked with high school kids, too. And he wanted to be part of MCO, so he brought young people in. [They were students at Mission High School; they had seventeen non-negotiable demands.] This was based on what SF State was doing. SF State had fifteen non-negotiable demands in the student movement out there. So I actually first heard this from Lou Goldblatt, who was the secretary-treasurer of the ILWU, leftwing guy, very, very talented guy. He said, "Mike, we don't have non-negotiable demands. The only thing that is non-negotiable is that you recognize and negotiate with us." So I thought, that makes a lot of sense to me. And another thing he said was we are in a constant struggle over prerogatives. That was another thing that made sense to me, that you negotiate in your first collective bargaining agreement—to stick with a workplace metaphor, whatever you want to call it, example—you negotiate wages, hours, and benefits, and maybe some basic things about working conditions. The next time around, maybe you now have greater support from your membership because they've seen what it means to have a union, the qualitative difference in '36 or '35, whenever recognition comes after the general strike in '34, the qualitative difference for longshoremen, their lives pre-union and post-union. So now there's belief and commitment in this union, so, well, maybe now we can use it as an instrument to get more, and to not only get more but change the balance of who gets to decide what. That's the prerogatives question. That's the more radical question. Twenty cents versus nineteen cents, that's not a radical question, but getting to stop work when you think there's a safety issue, that's a radical question. You don't go to the foreman and say, "We think this is dangerous; we want you to instruct the workers to stop." No. If the union thinks it's dangerous, we're going to stop work. So that's a very radical proposition. The hiring hall is a very radical proposition. You're not going to select who works; we're going to select who works, and we have a system: rotational dispatch. That means the guy who worked last is going to

be the first one dispatched when a new job comes in, because he's been out of work the longest. And there's a system developed, and it's administered through a hiring hall, and the employer has to get longshoremen by going to the hiring hall. He doesn't do what he used to do, which was go to what they called a shape-up. Men would show up at the port side, and along the water, and a guy would say, "Okay, you go to work, you go to work, you go to work." Who got to go to work? You gave this straw boss a kickback, what was called a kickback. You want to work, you bribe him to go to work. You want to work, you're the guy who stirred up shit about work last week on some issue, you're not going to work. So it's solely a management prerogative who goes to work. Well, now it's solely a worker. Even though nominally the hiring hall is run by management and labor, it's really solely a labor—so there's a phrase: I actually think its origins are in Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, but I'm not sure about that. But there's a phrase, "a long march through the institutions." That's how I think fundamental change is going to come in this country. It's going to take a long time. There's not going to be some violent, revolutionary movement when capitalism is defeated and socialism is installed, or however people think of that, which doesn't make much sense to me. But people are going to struggle over prerogatives, and they're going to struggle over the concentration of wealth and power, and they're going to break that up, and they're going to equalize it. But that's going to take time. It's not going to be in my lifetime, and probably not yours, either.

[Narrator Addendum: But I want to go back to your question. People who want to be purists usually don't join the kind of organizations I worked with. If they did, they learned that compromise isn't a bad word. Let me take a different example: if you've got family 'x' living downstairs in a two-flat building, and the woman of the house works a night shift as a nurse, so she sleeps in the day, and upstairs you've got a family with three little kids who like to run their skateboard on the uncarpeted floor of their apartment, and this keeps the woman downstairs awake, you have to work out a compromise between them: maybe she'll trade babysitting for quiet. "Within communities, you have different interests and they sometimes have conflicting aspects to them. If you want to unite people so they can have real people power they have to figure out how to work together in a common organization. To do that, they have to overcome conflicts among them. That requires compromise.

"Let's say you've just organized a union at *Somecorporation's* factory, and let's say the company pays the CEO ten million dollars a year, and is paying handsome dividends to stockholders, and let's say your members' hourly pay is less than \$15.00, and now you're negotiating a first contract. You might think (I do) that they should get \$25.00 an hour. But that's not a winnable proposition. So you might start with a lesser amount and even negotiate downward from that. Getting \$17.00 an hour would be a terrific victory for the union's members; they'd view it that way. But it's a compromise from the \$25.00 you think they should receive." "There's a great line in Jean Paul Sartre's play, *The Dirty Hands*: "Purity is for yogis and monks."]

02-01:41:33

Meeker: Does that process encompass what SLATE was trying to do at Berkeley in the fifties and sixties?

02-01:41:43

Miller: Well, no, [laughs] it is a little bit more elaborate, I think. Brad Cleaveland's idea that students are going to evaluate faculty, that's a little step kind of toward that, that we're not simply passive consumers of what the university decides it wants to offer us. No, we have a capacity to discern who among those faculty people are good teachers, who aren't; who are relevant, who aren't; so on and so forth. Now, maybe a next step would've been a seat on the faculty hiring committee. I don't know what this would look like in different institutions.

02-01:42:42

Meeker: Was there a student rep on the Board of Regents at that time? I don't think there was, was there?

02-01:42:45

Miller: No. No. And having one rep on the Board of Regents is cooptation more than it's real power, I think. So you have to be very careful what's cooptation, what's real. That's the issue on which MCO floundered. We had a huge debate in relation to the Model Cities Program. The terms of the debate were community control versus institutional change. The community control people said, well, we're going to start a bunch of new nonprofits, and we're going to name two thirds of the boards of directors, and we'll administer the programs. So I said, no, that's not community control; that's control of the community, because you don't have any say over the funding, you don't have any say over the guidelines, you don't have any say over the legislation that created the programs. And so what you're going to be doing is administering these things. But all your energies are going to be absorbed in administering those things. So the institutional change argument was let's negotiate, for example, let's say, with the San Francisco Housing Authority. Housing Authority we'll make you a partner in Model Cities money if, in the housing projects in the Mission District, you will do A, B, C, and D, and you'll sign an agreement with us to that effect, and we're going to evaluate and monitor how you implement that agreement. But we stay outside the day-to-day administration of the thing, because that's how we preserve and expand our power. We lost. The institutional change people lost, and, as was predictable in my judgment, MCO evaporated over the next few years. It happened all over the country. I'm writing a piece now called "Defeating Racism" where I'm trying to explain this in ways that I hope younger people might take it seriously. Whether they will, I don't know. Will they? I don't know. [laughs]

02-01:45:23

Meeker: It's a fascinating piece. You gave me the opportunity to read a draft of it, so—

02-01:45:26

Miller: Oh, did you read it?

02-01:45:27

Meeker:

I did, yeah. Absolutely. I'm pretty interested in these issues. I think that we should probably wrap up, although I know that we could talk for many more hours. [laughter] I appreciate that you're writing your thoughts down, and that you're providing a good account of it, not to mention the massive archival collection that you assembled that's now at the California Historical Society. So that's great, if anyone's interested in more of this. It's a good place of source material to go to.

02-01:46:07

Miller:

Yeah, unfortunately, the Historical Society stuff is still in the basement, and they're these big—I don't know how they work. They slide them in. They have to slide them out, these archival storage facilities. But I'm pretty sure they're accessible. You have to know they're there, and ask. They sought money. They wanted to create a Mike Miller collection, and they sought money from the California Endowment for the Humanities, and I don't know where else, but I don't think they got it funded. So I'm hoping they get it funded, and that it'll be made more [available]. If they get the funding, as you well know, they index document by document what's in archives. I mean, when that's done, it's just fabulous for a researcher.

02-01:46:58

Meeker:

It's the processing is the expensive part of it, right. I'm wondering if you have any final thoughts in particular about SLATE that you would like to add. And you gave, I thought, a pretty good historical description of where it fits within the broader movement toward social justice, and—

02-01:47:27

Miller:

Well, I'll tell you the one thing I wish we'd done differently. I wish in maybe '61, or maybe even earlier, that we had tried to organize a national federation of campus political parties. We didn't do that. We should've done that.

02-01:47:51

Meeker:

Was there any idea of doing that? Was it discussed?

02-01:47:54

Miller:

I don't remember it. If it was discussed, it was like in passing. I think had we tried to do it, in those days you could drop out of school and live on next to nothing. I think there would've been students willing to do that. And we would have parties on campus to raise money, so we could've raised money for travel and like. There was a funny *Daily Cal* headline once: "SLATE holds liquor party." [laughter] I don't know if you ever saw it.

02-01:48:31

Meeker:

No, I didn't!

02-01:48:32

Miller:

Yeah, we had a party at the apartment of Gloria Martocchia. What was her roommate's name? Jalna Alderman and Gloria's apartment. And we had a bar,

and we charged. And a *Daily Cal* reporter came, so that was a big scandal. “SLATE holds liquor party.” [laughter] But I wish we’d done that, and we might’ve persuaded people in the Student League for Industrial Democracy that this form was a more bottom-up, grassroots form than the way SDS evolved.

02-01:49:16

Meeker: What do you think something like that would’ve achieved?

02-01:49:19

Miller: I don’t know. Whether it could’ve, both because of the need to win votes on campuses, would that have kept it grounded, while at the same time being able to do the antiwar stuff, for example, that SDS did? I don’t know. I don’t know whether—Probably not.

02-01:49:44

Meeker: Have you gone to any of the SLATE reunions?

02-01:49:48

Miller: Yeah. I’ve been on panels at most of them, as far as I know. I think in all of them.

02-01:49:55

Meeker: I think the first one was, what, ’84? Eighty-five?

02-01:49:59

Miller: I gave a talk at one of those? Did you see that talk?

02-01:50:03

Meeker: No, I haven’t seen that. Is there a video of it, or—?

02-01:50:06

Miller: No, it was published in *Social Policy*. I should have a copy, an extra copy here.

02-01:50:15

Meeker: What did you say, in a nutshell?

02-01:50:18

Miller: Well, I said that we did a lot of things right, and I think I said the thing that we could’ve done better was to create a deeper sense of community among us, to pay more attention to that.

02-01:50:33

Meeker: What does that mean?

02-01:50:35

Miller: Well, I think it we had done that. In SNCC, singing together did that. And so after sometimes really intense debates, the Freedom Singers, who were all SNCC field secretaries, would just—often in the middle of them—they’d just start singing. And so there’d be a big break in the debate. People would all

gather round, sing songs. And it reminded us of the bond that we shared, rather than the things about which we disagreed. And so there was a depth of meaning among the people in that organization. It was qualitatively different from what SLATE was as a campus political party. But I think had we been more attentive to how we build bonds of relationship, it would've been a stronger thing.

02-01:51:36

Meeker: I wonder how that would've happened in SLATE.

02-01:51:39

Miller: [laughs] Who knows. Who knows.

02-01:51:45

Meeker: Maybe SLATE should've gotten involved in football. [laughter] I'm joking. Can you tell me more about what those reunions have been like for you to go to?

02-01:51:58

Miller: Well, it's been a lot of fun. I mean, people have enjoyed seeing each other. There have been a lot of reminiscing and remembering. The last one, already a number of people weren't on the planet anymore. So I think mostly it was that: remembering, reconnecting, sharing stories.

02-01:52:35

Meeker: There was a session at the first one about gender inequality.

02-01:52:42

Miller: Oh, yeah, the women gave the guys a lot of shit for their behavior, and I think, in retrospect, given the times, SLATE was better on that than most groups. As you noted, or I noted, SLATE ran women candidates for executive committee of the ASUC. Cindy Lembcke was a chairperson of SLATE in its third or fourth year, maybe. I think there were always women on the steering committee. Now, they claim, "We were ignored and asked to make coffee," but I think that's an exaggeration. Granted, it was not what we would do now, but what we did then was better than what most people were doing.

02-01:53:40

Meeker: Have you been surprised about the life trajectories of the people involved in SLATE? I know that not all of them are as politically active as you've been, but a number of them are.

02-01:53:54

Miller: Well, no, not really. I mean, a number of them are academics, and they've retained interests that are kind of left of center. Dave Armor is unusual, and Rick White. Dave and Rick White are token conservatives in SLATE. And people went into public health, or social welfare, or teaching, or law. I mean, very, very few that I know have become—I don't know anybody who's become a cutthroat capitalist. A fewer number went into labor. Herb Mills became a working longshoreman, and an important leader in the ILWU.

Others, their choice of occupation was a little more traditional—teacher, social worker—and became active in the unions of those occupations. There's about a dozen of us who still meet. I think we've been doing it about ten, twelve years now. So we meet once a month, and we all are supposed to read something in common. And we gather at now ten o'clock; 10:00 to 10:30 is informal time. Everything brings something so we have kind of a potluck breakfast, or brunch. And 10:30 we start. We sit around. We have a check-in. People say how they're doing, and blah, blah, blah. Everybody does check-in. And then at about 11:00-12:30 we have this substantive discussion. They vary in quality, but for the most part people find a way to coming back to what they want to say [laughs] about the world, whatever the formal topic happens to be. So if you went a year ago and went the coming Sunday one, there would be a ring of familiarity, no matter what the formal topics were.

02-01:56:13

Meeker:

I can only guess what that is a year after the inauguration.

02-01:56:18

Miller:

Yeah, there've been Trump discussions. And we rotate around. It's voluntary, but different people take responsibility for sessions. So the last one I did, and we used as our point of departure Jean-Paul Sartre's play *The Dirty Hands*, and I prepared some discussion questions. I'll send them to you. [laughs] What was the discussion questions the time before? The election, of course, has been more than once a topic. I don't remember the immediate previous.

02-01:57:05

Meeker:

I think that you said that you guys had been talking about the political trajectory in Greece recently.

02-01:57:12

Miller:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I led that one, too, because I'd been there, and I'd been following Syriza pretty carefully. So this people power framework that I have, strong civil society organizations as a precondition to important quantitative, let alone qualitative, change in the society, when I look through that lens at Arab Spring, Syriza, Chavez and Venezuela—well, I say this in this book I coedited on Alinsky; I think my opening line is: "The people from Arab Spring could've benefited from a reading of Alinsky. The people of Syriza could've benefited from a reading of Alinsky." This focus on electoral politics of Chavez, Syriza, now in the Labour Party in England, if you don't have strong unions, strong civil society associations that are outside the parties, I don't think you have the people power to— Because there are other tools you need to have to use: boycotts; strikes; massive nonviolent disruption. Political parties don't do that. They don't do that, because they tend to become over time run by politicians, who are looking at the next election, whatever their ideological commitment.

02-01:59:07

Meeker: Interesting. This group of people who meets together, was everyone involved in SLATE at some point?

02-01:59:13

Miller: Oh, yeah. Yes, I believe so. And they were more or less the period '56-7 and '60-62. I think people who were in '63, 4, 5 SLATE, I don't think any of them are members. Sarah Cleveland may not have been in SLATE. Her husband, Peter—who, sadly, died a couple of years ago—he was. But everybody else—Marv Sternberg, Vic Garlin, Peter Franck—they're all the early period that I'm part of. Then Julianne Morris, Barry Shapiro, Barbara Epstein—who am I forgetting now? But anyway, they're the slightly later period, but—

02-02:00:14

Meeker: Do most of these folks trace their interest and engagement politics back to SLATE? Is that where it starts for them?

02-02:00:25

Miller: Some of them were involved in the earlier—Like Marv Sternberg and Vic Garlin, there was a thing called STCM, Student Committee to Combat McCarthyism. Do you know about that?

02-02:00:42

Meeker: No.

02-02:00:42

Miller: Oh, you should know about that. [laughs] So I think it folded before I even got to Berkeley. So it was like '50-54, somewhere in there. So Marv Sternberg was involved in that. I think Vic might've been involved in that.

Meeker: Thank you.

[End of Interview]