

Hasbrouck Explained or (How I learned to be an individual)

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Abstract: *Hasbrouck Explained* is a documentary exploring the controversy behind the names of the residence hall on Hasbrouck Quad at SUNY New Paltz.

KEYWORDS: Shango Hall; Hasbrouck; College Council; Individual; neutral

Shango Hall, named after the Yaruban God of Thunder was my first home. Bouton Hall, named after the first president of the New Paltz Normal school is my current home. As a Resident Assistant, I am trained to be a resource for students on campus and address any conflicts that come my way. However, there was one conflict that I was not prepared for. A movement erupted where students organized and fought to change the names of the Hasbrouck Complex at SUNY New Paltz; Buildings named after slave owners where students eat, sleep and study. I was stuck in the middle. Do I sacrifice my individuality and support the name change or do I share my feelings on the issue. I created the documentary, [Hasbrouck Explained](#) in order to bring awareness to the issue, listen to both sides, and challenge myself as a filmmaker/individual.

During the Fall 2018 semester, I initially did not know what to write my thesis about. It was on November 1st, where I found the story I wanted to tell. I reluctantly went to the college council meeting open forum because I was urged by my friend that this event, had to be “documented.” This event was an opportunity for students, faculty and members of the New Paltz community to voice their opinion regarding the Hasbrouck Name Change. I myself rarely speak at these forums because I prefer to listen. My camera allows me to distance myself from the conflict and spectate. What I saw during that meeting was tension in the community that needed to be addressed. I felt that my friend’s voices were not being heard, especially when the college council decided to table the vote to next semester. I started preproduction of the documentary with the mindset of having the voices of my friends (primarily students of color), heard. The direction of my documentary immediately changed

after I spoke with my mentor the following day and realized it was not about telling my friends' story, it was about telling the story from a neutral standpoint.

It was a struggle not to take sides throughout the making of this documentary. Every time people asked me about my thoughts on the Hasbrouck Complex, I would have to constantly explain that I am not taking sides and am more focused on telling both sides of the story. Initially, I was not being inclusive, and it showed from the first draft of my documentary. I only interviewed people of color involved in the name change, who I was comfortable interviewing such as: the President of the Student Association Ndella Segue, the Director of the Scholar's Mentorship Program Mark Rumnit, the President of Latin American Student Union Michelle Tejada and the President of the Black Student Union Imani Burnett. I did not even include the community in general, all the interviews were done in a controlled environment. I had to get out of my comfort zone and engage with the SUNY New Paltz community in order to have a variety of opinions. It was easier to challenge white people on their responses to my questions however I held myself back when speaking to students of color. There was no way around it, even with the camera as a shield, I had to take risks and challenge students for the name change on why the name change is so significant to the community and to themselves as individuals.

After listening to both sides and bringing more awareness to the issue, my documentary was still incomplete. It told a story, but it needed someone directly leading the narrative. This is where my challenge as a filmmaker and individual came into play. I thought my presence of as an individual was clear through my editing however I realized that my personal stake in this

documentary had to be shown. This documentary was also about my struggle as a person of color having an unpopular opinion regarding the Hasbrouck Name Change. I disagreed with both sides because I felt that our time could have been used to better ourselves as individuals and prepare us for success after we graduate. After recording my narration and voicing my opinions on the name change, the documentary became more personal. Narrating this documentary informed me that for the future there needs to be an established anchor for a documentary. That anchor could be the interviewees themselves or a narrator that ties the story together. Now that my story was tied together through my visual and vocal presence, I still had to explain my work to my peers, advisors and faculty members. During my thesis presentation, I spoke about the process of making this film, and my opinion regarding the name change, however it was a struggle to formulate an opinion in front of my peers and colleagues. During the audience Q&A, I failed to listen to the audience members in order to engage in constructive criticism of their point of views. I was not able to change their point of views, but they at least were able to hear mine and respect it. The outcome of the Q&A relates to one of the themes of my documentary regarding individualism. You can not change the world but you have control to focus on changing yourself as an individual and how you deal with the world.

In May 2019, I will be graduating from SUNY New Paltz with an open mind. I will not be able to see the effect the name change has on my peers but from experience I expect nothing to change. This documentary taught me that culture can be examined, written about and documented but it can not be changed. It will be a long journey before segregation ends and changing names on a building will not bring us any closer. The moment we can look at ourselves as humans and listen to each other with respect, is when we can foster an inclusive community

focused on the present rather than the past.