

Asian American Studies Program Oral History Project
Jan Miyasaki
Interviewed by Lori Lopez
2/17/2023

00:00:00:07 - 00:00:02:17

Lori Lopez
So let's start. And you don't have to look at this.

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Jan Miyasaki
All right. So? So I was born in Washington, D.C. in 1969, in September. And my parents were there because my father was going to school at Georgetown. And so my brother and I were born there and then he graduated. So we moved to Hawaii. My family moved back to Hawaii in December of 1959. So I came back to Hawaii as I instrument three months old.

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Jan Miyasaki
That's where my father and mother, their parents, you, you know, immigrated to Hawaii from Japan. And so my my parents are in D.C. and, uh, so but I was born in the mainland. And then, uh, my parents returned to Hawaii in 59 at the end of the year, and that's where we stayed and grew up. I grew up there and, um, you know, I left for college in 1977, and I, there were a number of people from Hawaii at Marquette in Milwaukee, the they were doing a lot of recruiting in the South Pacific.

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Jan Miyasaki
And so there was a really nice recruiter there who, like, totally convinced my mother that everything was going to be okay. And so she packed me actually pine pineapples for him and sent me to Milwaukee to in the good care of Mr. Flynn. He was a really good recruiter and my parents felt really safe for me to be going all the way to Milwaukee.

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Jan Miyasaki
But there are kids from Hawaii, Guam, you know, all the South Pacific going to school there at the time. And so I graduate from there in 1981 and it was, uh, majored in political science. And, um, had some com arts kind of thing going to and, and then kind of, uh, had looked at graduate school after that in 1981, ah, in either history or political science.

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Jan Miyasaki
So I did some of that for a little while, but it didn't really go back to school full force until 1986. And I graduated from Marquette Law School in 1989. But I had actually by then moved up to

Madison, and so I cut to Madison in 1984 and, um, was working on campus, and that's when I met the, uh, Pacific Nation Women's Alliance people.

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Jan Miyasaki

They were actually all day there were people from the community and working on campus or, or graduate students that were pretty advanced. Actually. There might have been maybe a couple of masters, but they were like Ph.D. students. We were all kind of older group and started, uh, uh, people from Hawaii mainly, um, kind of pretty diverse ethnically. Um, we got together, um, and became part of a another community group called the Women of Color Network.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so this is all in 1984, 85, mainly 85, when there was really not that much, uh, uh, there weren't that many people. And so we were sort of like magnets and so each other and everybody, I mean, whether we just the, the Hawaii people, the Asian American people, the women of color, we was like magnets that were, that were just a critical mass of people.

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Jan Miyasaki

But not that many. And so we started organizing on issues of concern. We organized, um, about at the end of continued stuff. Do I was Peggy told you about uh we organized on, you know, take back the night and violence against women and it was really, really super cool. I mean, we were just I didn't realize it. I kind of knew it at the time, but over the years, just realizing how even more important all of those relationships were, I, um, even more so than I recognized.

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Jan Miyasaki

But I was aware at the time that something really special was happening in that these are like, really smart. I mean, you know, I was, you know, still kind of trying to figure stuff out. Um, and so I was observing these like for these folks who had sort of somewhat figured it out, at least their academic path. And, um, so I respected them so much that I kind of was a good marching soldier behind them.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so, you know, my role throughout this kind of process, probably beginning in 85, which I started out as I wrote a book club and the book that we were all supposed to read was Racial Formations by my Me. And I mean, you know, it was just like, so super cool, you know, And everyone was so what they were was that they were really creative, you know, they were like thinking way, but could be, you know, and generating this energy and momentum, everybody was like that.

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Jan Miyasaki

I mean, everybody was just so close. They were older, but just so full of creativity. And really, for me, thinking so critically, it was just so energizing and it was so, uh, uh, I think for us, for the folks from Hawaii and the Asian-Americans who, you know, really respected the other people of color and, you know, really sort of had kind of the most folks that we were most akin to or the Puerto Rican students, you know, But there was just sort of a, uh, a compassionate grace space that you might think that there might have been a lot of, uh, needing to, um, uh, build trust.

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Jan Miyasaki

But, you know, there was almost like this grace where, where I mean that in the sense that people weren't looking, they were looking for solutions that we're going to, like, surpass any possible value, actually mean that we can trust you because it's that important. And that was a big lesson learned that, you know, you can surpass differences, eat together, figure it out, hatched a plan all at once, you know.

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Jan Miyasaki

And that's exactly what happened. It happened all at once. We didn't like there was no time to waste. And so we were getting to know each other or learning about each other, trying to have people understand who we were trying to. That was the biggest understanding who we were, because that was the that was kind of the piece and really respecting how, you know, indigenous communities fit into this as well without trying to, you know, on their own terms, you know, so it was just really so urgent that that we pocketed a lot of things that, you know, you know, could be figured out later and but it wasn't always easy.

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Jan Miyasaki

I mean, particularly trying to it within the within the institutions in the community, trying to carve out Asian-American space was more obvious, you know, when we were working with community leaders. But inside of the university, it was harder to carve out Asian-American space. And so, you know, you know, that was taken on by some pretty remarkable graduate students just trying to carve out like, why are you here to the other students of color?

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Jan Miyasaki

And what what why are you here from the university? You know, and I think that was that was really challenging. It was less challenging in the community space for I was just organizing because of racial incidences that were going on on campus and building ties with people in the community. Um, which is kind of my wheelhouse.

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Lori Lopez

So what was your, your job then?

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Jan Miyasaki

I was working. I must've been working, but I got a job. Relief. Yes. I was working at the university counseling service, and then after that I was working at I just got a job in, uh, nutritional sciences. I was working on a grant, um, with a professor who had gotten a grant, and I was just kind of doing, you know, a program assistant type things.

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Jan Miyasaki

But again, we're doing that and we're doing so many we were doing organizing there. There's incidences that occurred off campus of police brutality that and that got the campus organizing. And I are African-Americans and and then we were getting to, you know, there were other issues around, uh, tenant rights and, you know, the kinds of things that, that, um, you know, civil rights stuff going on at the time which sort of ends up kind of the direction I took, um, by going to law school, um, the, yeah, so it was just a really, it's so, so, so in 85, so it was really important to talk about the Asian-American women's organizing and the organizing with

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Jan Miyasaki

women of color on campus and off campus. I mean, it was almost natural to organize this way just because that was how you got a critical mass of people. Plus, you know, in addition, there was a community of resettled, formerly incarcerated Japanese-Americans that were important to the Asian-American community. There were also people who were, you know, in the 442nd and the 100 of Italian, there were people here who had had come, you know, a lot of first generation Filipino American community at that point, a first generation Indian American community.

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Jan Miyasaki

And then, of course, there were the there was be that southeast Southeast Asian community. I mean, so there was a a diversity of ethnic groups coming in the different eras, you know, of moving to the U.S. And we were all kind of looking for each other, you know, And then at that point, we were also forming a, uh, a group called the Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans.

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Jan Miyasaki

So, you know, I can't believe we did all this. I just can't believe it. I mean, we founded Pacific Nation Women's Alliance, who founded the Asian coalition with the Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans. And they all had distinctive agendas. Um, so the reason why I recollect this is that was kind of my wheelhouse, was just trying to figure out the vehicles for different things.

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Jan Miyasaki

And, you know, each vehicle might have had a critical mass of 2 to 5 people. They weren't overlapping and some might overlap too, but not they. They were not the same people in all the groups. And they were, of course, really, uh, diverse ethnically. So it was just that would be the time period that you name 1987 that the Fiji incident happened.

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Jan Miyasaki

So we're all just trying to organize Asian-Americans and we're always wanting to build. And it was a kind of intentional valley, of course, to build Asian and black unity. I mean, that was always beyond, you know, what we were doing that was important. So, so, so we were just kind of doing that on, on building those partnerships and really strong relationships that would be really, really important later, especially when it comes time to the Los Angeles riots.

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Jan Miyasaki

So yeah, it's like this whole thing is like it just all sort of intersects with these critical moments and you don't know what's going to happen, but not for all of this organizing. We weren't organizing from scratch, you know, because yeah, it was it's just coincides with critical moments in Asian-American history. Right. But did you.

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Lori Lopez

Want to explain the Fiji.

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Jan Miyasaki

Incident? So the Fiji incident happens when the Fiji fraternity has a party. You know, it's really important that you're taking this because this story gets mis told, not just because, you know, issues can be, but this is this you know, what is what happened and why it was so important for Asian-Americans. So there I guess you would call it a meme.

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Jan Miyasaki

No, but their logo was a Fiji with a black face with a ball through it. And they had this like almost like a antebellum ball, you know, And they had the Fiji, the blackface, which was not only just about blackface, but it was like like a 1930s, like animated blackface and it had a bond to it. And and then there, you know, all these white people going to their party and the African-American students said that they were offended because it was just it was just really it looked like, you know, something you might have seen in a salt and pepper shaker that was really offensive.

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Jan Miyasaki

You know, And I anyway, the bottom line is they said, no, it's not a blackface. It's a Filipino. That's what they didn't say. Then at some point they might sue it in Fiji. Do. But I think I think it went from blackface to, you know, Fiji to it's a Filipino. And I think that that for that so so it was with that incident that just pulled everybody together and because those are the kind of other incidents going on in addition at the time and because of police brutality issues that had already caused us to be organizing on the ground outside of campus, there was already people who could be mobilized, you know, And so, I

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Jan Miyasaki

mean, those I it was just, uh, what followed. That was just a whole lot of protests. And so there's a lot of that. But behind the scenes of all of that was just a lot of organizing that, um, from, from our Asian-American community. Victor Ju was really critical in representing Asian Americans on the minority coalition. And um, and Wendy Hall, Um, we were all the Pacific Nation Women's Alliance was all of up in terms of who the, the campus was most interested in and who they really had a hard time denying.

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Jan Miyasaki

Their issues were graduate students and um, across all of the groups. And, you know, they didn't care about the community, they didn't care about as much about anything else. But but they had to respond to their consumers. That would be my take on that and their call for, um, improving their experience on campus. Right. And, um, I mean, it was, it was there.

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Jan Miyasaki

You have to be held accountable. And at the time, you know, there were they were critical people inside of the system who opened doors after they had been out of reach, too. I mean, you know, I'm sure sure that people can tell you, you know, who they were, but there were a couple of key deans and, um, really elite perceived faculty in, you know, some pretty important departments that, um, you know, supported with the, with the, what was being asked for, um, and, and all of that ended up being in the, what we called the Holly report.

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Jan Miyasaki

And I ran into Charles Hawley on the airplane coming back to the coast from Hawaii a couple of years ago, um, because he's our lawyer in Chicago and, um, I mean, it's just such a like, it's an unforgettable experience that we shared with all of these people because I don't think it would have been I think, I think the university had to respond to the graduate students, But I think that the academic staff and community and other people just made it even bigger.

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Jan Miyasaki

Right. Especially, you know, their commitment was to the community. Right. The town legal thing. So it was just my there were other organizing, um, and organizers that were doing it was like a five ring circus. But I can tell you that those organizing skills were learned on the fly, but have been useful throughout since then. But so, so there's the Hollywood part that is reported the minority college coalition.

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Lori Lopez

What was your role on the minority coalition?

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Jan Miyasaki

So I was like the the more like a like a, um, Victor and Peggy, Victor and Wendy, uh, were the face and Victor and I because I was floating around and taking courses, but not really deciding what I was going to do yet. And, but I was working and at that point, yeah, because I didn't go back fully to school to 86, but I was like a note taker.

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Jan Miyasaki

And I was like, All right, what happened? And then I would like report back. That's why I remember what happened. It everything. I was like the scribe. Like I was like. Like the messenger, like, like, you know, that was my job because there were people who were like the conceptualize areas and the state, the strategic people and that.

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Jan Miyasaki

And then there were people who were doing all the latest reading so they could sort of figure out how it all fit into the latest to the cutting edge of women and gender studies, ethnic studies. The problem, you know, problems at the core curriculum. I mean, just all that. So I'm just sitting there like, like, like, like hearing everything and like a reporter, you know, and Victor and Victor was.

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Jan Miyasaki

So we just went to so many meetings together. We just were taking so many notes. And then we were like coming back and, you know, telling people, reporting back what was going on. Almost like like, like on a lot of levels. What was the political dynamic between the group? How is everybody getting along? What was most important to people?

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Jan Miyasaki

What was this? You know what, honestly, what did this group within that group, we did, you know, and then we were trying to figure out, you know, how we fit in, how we supported it. So it we just we just kind of like just observing and covering that to report out to the group and

and then which we tried, which I know was really important work to do, but it was more bringing that back to the group for our with a little bit of analysis like, like, like they they trusted my my gut about the politics of of of how Asian-Americans would fit in to this social justice context and racial justice.

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Jan Miyasaki

You know, in the best interest of all of us.

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Lori Lopez

So it was the group that you would bring it back to Asian-Americans.

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Jan Miyasaki

It was Pacific Nation Women's Alliance and Victor was the honorary male of it. So at the time of minority coalition, it was only power. It was a power. And Victor, Victor, Victor might have had other places where he did this kind of work, but he was really the honorary male sort of connections. So we would bring it back and it was just really Victor, Wendy, Peggy, Mimi, Kim, who was a graduate student in sociology at the time.

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Jan Miyasaki

And it was just really the the one, two or three five of us. And, um, and Victor and I were just kind of like the I mean, we were everywhere, like every single meeting we represented power or an Asian-American community at every single meeting, like every single night, there would be like a meeting about something because they were committees and, and, and then, then it advanced to, like, demands.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so when it got to the demand portion, then and it became more about, about that, then then then Victor and, and Wendy were more at the forefront of representing us because it was, um, because that was just the strategy. But, but we went to so many meetings and I guess I had internalized a set of values about why I was there.

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Jan Miyasaki

And this set of values was really about supporting the other groups. You know, our, our community's issues, you know, um, it was more than, you know, representation. It was representation that meant something. It meant for, you know, it was it wasn't that simple. It was, it was, it was, you know, we we, we were we didn't just want us to succeed.

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Jan Miyasaki

We wanted all the other groups to succeed, to and with that, and that was how the other groups were, too. So that's what made it so special. But anyhow, so that was my role. I mean, you know, it's weird because everybody might remember, you know, I forget I remember it was important because there were so many meetings or to to tell people about it.

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Jan Miyasaki

But I don't know if that sounds like it was important. I don't know. Like when you say when did you do it? It was like we went to all these meetings and told people what happened and then gave our perspective on what was going on. Because what was super interesting was the critical thinking was we all thought about it and then we thought, okay, you know, and that they trusted my rehash.

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Jan Miyasaki

We called it rehashing and we rehashed for hours. So let's say you go to a meeting and it ends at nine and then you rehash till like one or two in the morning. Right? And we were just trying to rehash the meaning of things. And we had we were even rehashing how people were relating to each other and what we thought and, you know, all kinds of things, all in the purpose of advancing this whole need to respond to, um, stereotypes, hate, police brutality, all of that.

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Jan Miyasaki

Right.

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Lori Lopez

So then how did all that lead to Asian-American studies?

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Jan Miyasaki

Okay, So, so the reason why this story is really important is because of the strategy, because inside of that strategy, who cared the most about ethnic studies was a requirement. And I have to tell you that that that's the thing I learned the most is, you know, we hardly got anything for Asian-American kids out other than the minority, the not we got a lot of intangibles out of it.

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Jan Miyasaki

But in terms of the Madison plan, I mean, we had some really important things that happened in terms of that that that that were like seriously valuable. I brought serious scholars to Madison. But, you know, there were if you actually read the Holly Report and you see what we

got, you know, then although now we have the regimen, knowledge, reservation and all that and, you know, all the things we asked for.

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Jan Miyasaki

But the the thing that was in the Holly report was the ethnic studies requirement, right? I mean, there are there was a African American studies department. There already was Native American studies. There already was Chicano studies. Right. We knew they were floundering in terms of the the university not supporting them in the manner that they believe these first.

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Jan Miyasaki

Right. But that was the end bad in the and that's why this whole story is important because it was really difficult to have people understand the needs of Asian Americans who who weren't post-Vietnam war folks, you know, And so so but the ethnic studies requirement and I think the original proposal was six and we got three, but that was still like something.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so that's the significance, because that was what the entire Asian American Studies program up built on was the fact that we came out of that with an ethnic studies requirement. So so you know, by by that that post May 4th, 1987, that that was kind of a busy maybe I can't remember a year or two Donna Shalala was announced that she was coming to Madison with one year in advance.

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Jan Miyasaki

So she was at Hunter College and, you know, people knew who she was. She was, you know, was given one year before she could come here. And so, you know, all of this minority coalition thing. But, you know, I don't really remember exactly how long it lasted. But but Donna Shalala, I think comes by 88 or 89. So I have to look at if she she came in 88, I'm pretty sure, because I think Amy Ling came in 89.

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Jan Miyasaki

But what happened was that what was left for us after the minority coalition Holly report, many people had already moved on, had left to other allied core people had left. And I think if you had left by that time and maybe Amy had and left, and then there were two new young graduate students like Chris and Peter Chen came in and both of like super smart, super, super smart.

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Jan Miyasaki

And but, but before then, um, must've been 80 the spring of 88. Donna Shalala was in town and we were like, you know, after I thought about this, you know, I jokingly say we kind of stopped her. We, I don't know how we knew her schedule and what she was doing and what had been announced that she was going to be doing some events at the local union.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so and Wendy Hall, Peggy and I waited outside, took before a union, and she came out. And my memory of this is that she was I don't think I she was alone. And the three Asian-American women ran up to her and said, oh, you know, we're excited about you coming. And, you know, we are really want you to we want to have a Asian-American studies program.

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Jan Miyasaki

And, you know, in a way that is so signature down the Shalala. Shalala. She said, Oh, give me a plan. That's that's all she said. And then we all looked at each other. I remember this because that was sort of my role was like like I was like photographing in my memory, you know, everything that was going on.

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Jan Miyasaki

And I remember us looking at each other and just went, I could sense. So there you had the ethnic studies requirement, which was like the only thing that we could hang on. And then she said, a plan and do what I mean for us that that that that was like the Mount Holly report that you know all that.

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Jan Miyasaki

So that was that was the moment. But there were other things going on. And my memory, I have to really look at it. But also in 87 and 88, Power was organizing events that there were there were three events we did one that in 86 that focused on Asian American women writers, and then there were two. And so that one was very important because they were all the foundational pieces on that.

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Jan Miyasaki

So my role in that was actually to write the grant and raise the money for that, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council would help pay for that. And so we had MAXINE on Kingston and Elaine Kim and other folks that came the concept and the name and all of the theoretical pieces, you know, Wendy, I mean, it was all, yeah, this is they, they, this is what we wanted.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so I just wrote it up and they but that was the way we worked was like I had these theorist academic type folks who would conceptualize it for us and then we would make the organizers would make it happen. And and so that was the we have actually when Kingston came, it was just really wonderful. Lonnie doing what's her name, the poet, you know, the folks who came.

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Jan Miyasaki

Then in 87 we had one Takaki come right? Takaki came twice my to come either in the fall, in the spring of one year when academic year. But I don't I'm not sure. It was eighties I think it was 87. It in 88. And those two events again were it was they were huge. I mean the budgets them and the multiple funders, but it was really focusing on ethnic studies and critiquing the core curriculum.

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Jan Miyasaki

Right. And at that time, this, um, Secretary Cheney, Lynne Cheney was the sort of the head. And even then it was kind of really you know, there's always been a retreat from Asian, from ethnic studies ever since it started, right? I mean, you had this glorious moment and then it was always been kind of having to avoid the systems and the powers that be for recruiting for it.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so it was one of those moments where when she was secretary there, it was one of those moments where they were like questioning the validity of ethnic studies altogether. Right. It was just always been like that. It's it's always been in the state of having to fight to stay equal anyhow. So so that was the environment. And so Ron Takaki came and then came the, then came the OR at about the same time by 88 that Shirley was coming.

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Jan Miyasaki

So listings are slightly ahead of it and then maybe by 88 around the same time. So we were kind of following up with these things and but I remember Lori, they didn't even have email. And, you know, if you wanted to have a word processor, you had to install it yourself using off. I mean, this was like a completely different time.

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Jan Miyasaki

So, you know, what did I do? I was kind of like the Pony Express because part of this was in a chance for the I remember being, you know, driving around, dropping off edited copies at Gameboy shows and talking models and people's. And then, you know, they were edited that picking it up. I mean, all it was it was done that way.

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Jan Miyasaki

It was done in Peggy Choi's living room. And and then and then Wendy was ultimately the master editor of all the edits and I mean, it was really, uh, so at that point, you know, I, I was given, there was a task that I was given for that proposal, and that was to dream up what I wanted the courses to be.

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Jan Miyasaki

And so the list is actually with consultation with every because that's how I was, that was my contribution to the report was, was, was for me was what I cared about was what would the courses be. So you can see there's literature, there's law, you know, um, but clearly, you know, everybody had their piece of what they wanted to have, but I was kind of typing that part up.

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Jan Miyasaki

And then, and then we, we created kind of what it would cost. So I did the budget because I was in the budget. But you know, that inside of that, that that process or discussions about did we want to be a part of an ethnic studies department, you know, there was all kind of, you know, Peggy and David and people researching other campuses and, you know, so there was a whole discussion about structure.

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Lori Lopez

So the minority coalition, you said the group was just the five of you from one or victor in there. But it sounds like this group is a.

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Jan Miyasaki

Bigger this is a this this group. So, Mimi and Victor have gone and now it's Peggy, Wendy, myself, Jim Moy and I talk about all Lon and Peter are kind of I don't think they they, they come at a time when we're almost done with the report and I this is another really this could be like this could be the movie is part of because there are some funny scenes.

00:40:47:26 - 00:41:14:02

Jan Miyasaki

I remember when Peter Chan got word perfect and I was in this Peter, Lon and I were again, I was more like chopping things off, picking things up. Hold that. That was my job, you know. And so I was with Peter and, and Peter was unpacking his new computer because back then they were not desktops. You had to buy your computer in pieces.

00:41:14:16 - 00:41:47:20

Jan Miyasaki

So. So Peter got his computer and then he got WordPerfect and he was putting it together in his chemistry lab. I can't even remember wherever the chemistry lab building was might have been right down here, but, and he was putting it together. And so then the document I think

Peter or Lan then typed the documents into they, they were involved, you know, in other ways that they contributed.

00:41:48:00 - 00:42:12:20

Jan Miyasaki

But the, his, the moment that I remember was having it typed into a word processor that's like should be a movie, right. I mean this is hilarious that, that I remember. It was I mean, it was like, oh my God, You know, so but, but, but, but surely Peter and Lan would remember way more than that about the other contribution.

00:42:12:20 - 00:42:35:16

Jan Miyasaki

But from my lens, I just remember now it was in a word processor and, and then I remember having to I do remember it's still I still have these problems people don't anymore but tried to make the margins right, trying to center things, trying to block. I mean, it was just still clunky like that, but it came up beautifully.

00:42:36:00 - 00:43:06:23

Jan Miyasaki

It came up beautifully. We're waiting for Donna Shalala to come. And lo and behold, she comes to me and I. I remember I can't remember. I don't think I gave the report. I think Lon and Peter and some. But I just remember it was a big now we're giving her the report. Basically what happened was that summer, it was like we got to get it done, got to get it done that last year it was coming in September and we got to have it ready for Donna Shalala.

00:43:06:23 - 00:43:32:11

Jan Miyasaki

And so the people who actually gave it. Right. Have a clear memory. But I just remember that was the deadline. The deadline was when she got here. And so I think the last she ever saw of Asian-American students or community people were give me the proposal. And then she came in and she actually got a proposal. I mean, it wasn't even like it was like it was ready.

00:43:32:11 - 00:44:12:17

Jan Miyasaki

It was done when she got here and and she kind of again, circling back because there's so many layers to the story. At one of the events, it was they're talking stories out and our one of our our he hosts that we invited was Nellie McKay. And so Nellie McKay, I think, had come from Hunter. And so she knew Donna Shalala and Peggy Donna Wendy Hall went to invite her and ask her.

00:44:12:17 - 00:44:48:13

Jan Miyasaki

It was like, Oh, I actually am. I'm going to write Nellie McKay. So she went in, invited Nellie McKay and and she was wonderful. And I mean, they were sort of knitting together the

relationships because I think Nellie knew that. Shalala And we were just trying to like, really are there are all of these relationships, you know, So we didn't want to we knew that we but intuitively, that that you had to do that, you know.

00:44:48:13 - 00:45:17:01

Jan Miyasaki

And so I think that and I'm telling you that is that in in in different ways, so many people supported the birth of Asian-American studies. And and I would say even, you know, I have to mention Nellie McKay for supporting us. And and she I don't know what subsequent event it was. I can't remember it. But I unless she had something to do with it, she introduced Donna Shalala for us at something.

00:45:17:15 - 00:45:46:24

Jan Miyasaki

You know this. I need to look at it exactly what the event wasn't, what it was, but and, you know, all the powerful people here in there in the earlier phase of the minority party were kind of important to the integration of Asian American studies, but more directly, like the support from Nellie McKay, you know, was really important.

00:45:47:06 - 00:46:32:01

Jan Miyasaki

So so the proposal gets submitted and and to somebody who was not against us and the the proposal was good and there was kind of a commitment to find the chair. And so that what follows that, which Donna Shalala gets here is another opportunity where we bring in a lot of really smart people who were potentially going to chair the Asian Studies program.

00:46:33:01 - 00:47:04:21

Jan Miyasaki

And one of the important components of our plan, I don't know if it was in the plan or the subsequent follow up discussion with the with the university was that it was always going to be a senior person who came with tenure. That was that was just brilliant. And so the people that were coming were on that on par with that.

00:47:05:04 - 00:47:39:08

Jan Miyasaki

So we were like getting like great people from like New York and Boulder as well as from California, you know, But mainly they were more like New York side. But and so you'll see in Asian-American studies files, you see a lot of people who came in some more serious than others. You know, some folks ended up just getting a raise where they were going, but some people were more serious than others.

00:47:39:08 - 00:48:42:13

Jan Miyasaki

And and a lot of really smart, powerful people. Um, that were senior and then where and then we're lucky to get Amy emailing and so that must have been I think Amy came in 1989, right? I mean I think that, that before I think that just for the sort of I don't know what marks the founding of it, but I think it would be fair to say when Amy Lane comes, which I think is in 89 and and she comes to us surrounded by just all of these people who hatched a plan which is just, you know, she's coming from Hunter, she's coming from a you know, a place that was so different from what

00:48:42:13 - 00:49:27:19

Jan Miyasaki

we were building here because it was just her. So that was just that had to be really strange for her and then for that era as we were building it, because it was like, what is this, this incentive program? But if and then you can find people who can talk more about how that that that should have is a struggle to grow for a long time and then some kind of, I think, newfound respect because of who we get here, just they became undeniable.

00:49:27:19 - 00:50:10:17

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, everybody in the American Studies program, was it super exceptional who came here? And so but but in terms of my perspective on this story, it was just really I don't know if other I imagine that their programs start this way. You have a moment followed by organizing and developing some credibility. And then you have to have the opening and then you have to have, you know, a critical mass of people there that it didn't happen, that that straightforward.

00:50:10:17 - 00:50:43:25

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, there were there was a lot of support for the events that we presented in 86 and 87 and 88. There's a big turnout at Great Hall for all of these. We were at participating still and they were still of the African American Studies. African-American Students Union was still leading some new civil rights issues. There was still, you know, hate cartoons.

00:50:43:25 - 00:51:30:02

Jan Miyasaki

There's still police. I mean, there's still all kinds of things going on. And so that's still going on, you know, by Yeah, yeah. The so and then, of course, in L.A. riots, Right? So that's sort of another piece for me to just remember working with the community on that. So so what I guess what I'm circling back to see is that even if we gave we ran up here and asked to get the which you could do even if we gave you the proposal, we it wasn't enough.

00:51:30:02 - 00:52:09:10

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, it was part of a larger movement where the African American students are organizing, where we're organizing with others, you know, communities of color. It was perceived, I think, as the our work was part of this larger movement. You know what I mean? It wasn't just Asian-

Americans were doing this. It was these other things that were going on that were that she that that the powers that be, that be.

00:52:09:10 - 00:53:08:00

Jan Miyasaki

Then you followed this earlier protest, and then they knew that it was following the current protests. And then there were and then there was other things like L.A. and all of these things are all happening, right? So it was in that context, I don't think that it would have meant anything if all of it hadn't been happening and that we had community support and that people turned out for each other, you know, So, you know, the the I mean, I recollect, you know, I still recollect the things that now since I haven't been involved, I don't have the memory of the more recent things, but I certainly have a memory of, you know, with Trinity

00:53:08:00 - 00:53:44:04

Jan Miyasaki

Power from sociology, substantive. You have from sociology. I mean, she was an important ally in that important department who was working hard to at that time. You know, I think it's still a struggle today. You could tell me. But, you know, you know, for for to try it and, you know, get lines into ADD, you know, people and all of that.

00:53:44:04 - 00:54:09:25

Jan Miyasaki

I think. Peter and long leave so Peter and Lorna here until about 93. Then Peter goes down to teach chemistry because he gets his Ph.D. and Peter goes down south to I you know, historically black college. I can't think of where it is if it's in like Memphis or something. And then long California.

00:54:09:25 - 00:54:12:26

Lori Lopez

But when did you start teaching?

00:54:13:04 - 00:54:57:11

Jan Miyasaki

In 93. That's why I remember because I started teaching after law and left. And, you know, I, I had some grad school experience before I went to law school. So I, I mean, they've been teaching it from a legal standpoint because I finished school about 89, right. And and, you know, in terms of, um, like a poly sci sociology sort of in terms of identity and community formation, that kind of stuff.

00:54:57:11 - 00:54:57:17

Jan Miyasaki

Right.

00:54:57:19 - 00:55:01:12

Lori Lopez

What were some other parts of the curriculum? So Amy must have been teaching.

00:55:01:21 - 00:55:55:26

Jan Miyasaki

So at that point. Amy So, so Amy was teaching a wildly popular, um, uh, uh, Asian American women's writers. I mean, there was just huge she, that was, it was a huge cause. And, and it was a, had been so hard for her because it wasn't that there, it was really hard because the nobody was, the, nobody was good enough, you know, to even, you know, wanting to invite to present a lecture.

00:55:55:26 - 00:56:47:17

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, it was really tough in some disciplines like poly sci history, you know, that that the more hard, you know, how they view themselves and the field that was but it was English and literature. It was like boring and joyful and right in contrast to these other disciplines. And so and because we had Amy who was, you know, who brought her her research and prestige, so I think she had a her class was so big.

00:56:47:17 - 00:57:24:10

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, I think she had a cadre of white Tas that, you know, she trained and, um, really helped her out. Um, and, and some of those graduate students, you know, went on to be sort of specialized in Asian-American literacy literature, right, within women's literature, um, and it was also some of her earliest opportunities were in the English department.

00:57:24:10 - 00:58:13:21

Jan Miyasaki

And so we sort of ended up having kind of like a mini specialization in the literature, Um, and um, which was also something I think was more understandable to politically to the university. Like they could understand literature, whether you mean police, poly segregation, but you know, but they, they, they, they, they, it's who doesn't like literature, right? So and I think, I think she had great, um, um, colleagues in English.

00:58:14:07 - 00:58:55:13

Jan Miyasaki

Amy did I think she was respected by her colleagues in English. So, so you know, what was really going on was a number of years where we were she was teaching there was one or one. There might have been some affiliated courses in like Center for Southeast Asian Studies, but but mainly, you know, she was able to piece together, uh, kind of extraordinary record of film, film events and just yearly like guest lecturers.

00:58:56:12 - 00:59:24:24

Jan Miyasaki

And there were some pretty like cool people that came during that time period and I think she was demonstrating that students wanted to take it. So they came in and she was just proving on this like this, this unsupported environment. And the Asian-American studies was such a little I mean, she almost everybody was, you know, to some degree, you know, experiencing this.

00:59:24:24 - 00:59:58:29

Jan Miyasaki

Right? And so, um, she was just demonstrating. She had a program assistant. And then there were those who were still kind of organizing and supporting some lecture series, you know, um, which I think is every moment I think of the development of Asian American Studies to this moment, a series of skirmishes and, you know, each one being decisive to the next one, right?

00:59:59:09 - 01:00:31:12

Jan Miyasaki

And she that that era was showing that kids wanted to since wanted to take courses you know one was a yeah there was there was you know that Generation X guy which is but he was really what's his name. He was here for a year and his classes were packed. David Um, I can't think of name is, but anyhow, there was anthropologist who was a creative, he taught creative writing.

01:00:32:01 - 01:01:09:08

Jan Miyasaki

Um, they, they were just so popular and, um, and then, and then that slowly gave way to, um, some hires. Um, that were, that were half Asian American studies. And after that we have and then subsequently have had people in other so the other departments that would teach Asians can set these courses but aren't part of it, you know, they don't have a line in education studies.

01:01:09:29 - 01:02:08:06

Jan Miyasaki

Um and so Asian-American studies was always kind of like the little engine that could, you know, I mean, these wonderful people like you and I mentioned like all who just contributed, um, on your own, you know, um, and so there was a point in there when, you know, Kevin Coombs, Schiro, who's really gone on to I think due in part to work in education, who was, you know, and um, joy, most refreshing joy, but they were, you know, were, were important to the expansion of Asian American studies beyond the original commitment of.

01:02:08:06 - 01:02:41:07

Jan Miyasaki

Amy So you have the original commitment of Amy, you have the series of guest lecturers. There's all these mini film festivals. Um, there are. It's really just Amy and the program assistant and then other a few of us that are jobs are posted. There are applicants, but it, it was just really hard to get a department to sign on to it.

01:02:41:07 - 01:03:08:24

Jan Miyasaki

Right. And so this is all going on. I think that there's at the same time. Well, this is all going on. There's clearly a demand for courses and and so I think it just comes together with the organizing and the students, undergrad students actually signed a huge petition that Joi and Kevin have put together to expand Asian-American studies.

01:03:09:06 - 01:03:48:00

Jan Miyasaki

And they were graduate students at the time. And, you know, it was their thing, but since I had been there, could give some historical memory and then but the undergrads took the petition, they ran all over campus and got that also like hundreds of names on that petition. Um, and then, then they turned that in and then, then, then the next sort of era is that we do get more faculty.

01:03:48:00 - 01:04:22:14

Jan Miyasaki

It's hard to retain in this environment. So I think during that era it was just trying to retain people in this kind of thing that we were trying to pull together here. You know, um, yeah. And so, you know, people would go elsewhere that, that they, they got treated better, you know, just straight, straight that way, you know.

01:04:22:14 - 01:04:46:15

Jan Miyasaki

And so there was sort of a for us organizing because, you know, Asian American studies and to me the value of me because, you know, why do you wanna hear from me Laurie is more about um you do have to have organizers and you do have to have community support for it. Um, I don't think it is institutionalized right.

01:04:46:15 - 01:05:13:15

Jan Miyasaki

Um, because I, I mean, there's pretty inside of the story that I remember, you know? I mean, when people laughed, you know, you like, you have this dream of having this program, you get some pretty brilliant people coming in here. And, you know, Amy is trying to keep the and they aren't they just want to leave. And so we lost people.

01:05:13:15 - 01:05:43:19

Jan Miyasaki

So there's an element of grief for us thinking, oh, God, why could we keep these people? You know what I mean? So know we lose Amy later. We lose Amy right before August the 1990 that I right before the turn of the century or whatever, is arguably the turn of the century. 2002 anyway. But but there's grief in, you know, just thinking that that we brought good people, that we could spare them this agony and pain.

01:05:43:23 - 01:06:40:17

Jan Miyasaki

Right. So there's that to all but and then just kind of a period of time where I think that good things happen, you know, good things happen at English Department and, you know, history. I mean, some good things start really happening. And that's there was there was this need for somebody to have to organize in the way that we had to organize back then until until that word to African American studies came up, you know, And so there's these kind of moments right.

01:06:40:17 - 01:07:19:03

Jan Miyasaki

And and then you never want Asian American studies to be used as a wedge, right, to break another program or you know what I mean? So there's all of that there. And, um, so, so so, you know, that's kind of, um, that, that, that, that, that kind of growing era which really, you know, there wasn't a whole lot of like crises and emergencies for, for a little bit of time.

01:07:19:27 - 01:08:17:20

Jan Miyasaki

Um, and the chairs of the department could actually mentor and really, you know, do some things like that that could end, you know, that there's so many skirmishes going on, you know, that when you got a win that you started fighting the other battle but didn't take care of your when you know. So but um so so from that, like looking back on all the things that I've talked about in, in in the issues of concern for me when I was them, when I, when I did and when I teach, you know, where at a time when, you know, I always have a reaction papers teaching people to think critically.

01:08:17:20 - 01:08:42:02

Jan Miyasaki

Right. And now we're in the era of, like, critical thinking. It's like bad, right? So it's like another skirmish, right? So, you know, probably the the value of talking to somebody like me and all of the all these is to have that perspective of how things go around and come around over and over again. Do you know what I mean?

01:08:42:02 - 01:09:23:28

Jan Miyasaki

Because that's kind of, um, but what's different is that I think the students want to be taught critical thinking here. I think that in the past it was harder to teach critical thinking, but I think they're coming in more prepared to think critically. So I think that's, you know, a development, you know, that gives gives me sense that this might might not be so much of a retreat because the students are independent thinkers.

01:09:24:23 - 01:09:41:09

Jan Miyasaki

You know, these those I've been encountering lately. Um, but that's because they're starting to come from a generation that's questioning a whole lot. Right? So you asked me one question and I talked for God knows. Did I. Did I?

01:09:41:13 - 01:09:44:15

Lori Lopez

Over an hour? Yeah. No, that was wonderful.

01:09:45:00 - 01:09:56:13

Jan Miyasaki

That was all. I mean, it's. Yeah, I don't know. Is there anything that I don't know? Is that what you thought you were going to get or.

01:09:56:15 - 01:10:03:16

Lori Lopez

Okay, we've talked about this enough. Yeah, I felt like I knew the the general flow of the stories, but I just wanted to capture them all.

01:10:03:23 - 01:10:44:03

Jan Miyasaki

Yeah, there were a lot. There were. There were. It's really, you know, I should not fail to mention the role of the Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans. So there was power Pacific in the Asian Women's Alliance. And then when the and then, then when and that's with with, with Victor. Then when when Lon and Peter come along and they that's when we became the Asian coalition.

01:10:44:03 - 01:11:13:03

Jan Miyasaki

It just came together that way instead of power. Although Powell was part of the Asian coalition and then and so it was the Asian coalition in power that submitted the proposal. And then and then all the while there were community members of the Asian coalition. There was Donna Chan who was really important, and Agnes Kammer from the Filipino Association.

01:11:13:13 - 01:12:03:05

Jan Miyasaki

And then there were these, um, the the Association of Indians in America, Association of Filipinos, Indian County, surrounding areas. J JCR The vacancies and the I mean, there were all of these other communities that we know about in Asian American studies or Asian-American stuff that were in the community that were like we were organizing as a Wisconsin organization of Asian Americans and, um, there were different chairs over the years and co-chair from that different ethnic groups for a long time was it was I was co-chair.

01:12:03:05 - 01:12:34:20

Jan Miyasaki

It was like somebody from the from the Filipino Association or from the Indian Association, you know, power or whatever. It's always two cultures. And, you know, they supported the Asian-American studies proposal. So you'll see policy. A He was active, there was Baba Komatsu. There were just people who were retired. They were Bob and Paul were both in internment camps and had settled here.

01:12:34:28 - 01:13:17:20

Jan Miyasaki

Then Mr. Toki, who was a veteran, I mean, there were, you know you will always find in any story like this that there was community support. Right. And everybody came to support this. And and war was Wisconsin organization of Asian-Americans. You know, so so in terms of the core group, the core group it spans, there's now Pat Takamoto, there's Cheryl Cocteau, there's, you know, worked here.

01:13:18:25 - 01:14:17:19

Jan Miyasaki

Um. Lillian Tong You know, there's just other people that start expanding at and Cheryl off campus on campus, really around campus. Donna, Agnes, all these Asian-American women in the community. Lakshmi unlike me. Sure, sure, sure. How can I shut Shepherd? I mean, there's all these Asian-American leaders in the community that, you know, in some ways you're interviewing me because I'm one of the like I hate actually when we think of movement as having, like, individual people, because I actually don't like that narrative way of telling history, you know, because there's all these people on in behind me that I can I can tell you all about them, too, because I do remember of them.

01:14:17:25 - 01:14:36:21

Jan Miyasaki

And I can tell you all those stories as well, and all the potlucks and all the meeting that we were organizing there, because I was that that was actually another lens for me was organizing that aspect of it. And so says the same thing. Yeah, just.

01:14:36:27 - 01:14:39:17

Lori Lopez

The attention on her. Yeah, because it was always about the collective.

01:14:39:17 - 01:15:10:14

Jan Miyasaki

Yeah, Yeah. And then, and then part of that group was a group called the Wisconsin Women of Color Network. And actually Amy was part of that and they loved Amy. And it was a group of like really grassroots, the women of color who came together. The Filipino-American community was really active and Indian-American in terms of Asian-Americans. And then they were, you know, the Mary McLeod Bethune Club members.

01:15:10:14 - 01:16:00:14

Jan Miyasaki

I mean, like really grassroots, the African American women in the community that were here in Madison. And so, yeah, those those connections are so important. Those connections are, you know, were really important actually around the L.A. riots, too. That was 92 or 91. I think it was April 30th. It was 92, 92. But anyhow, so. So you're interviewing and taking a and but which is I really actually hate the telling issue, but I'm just on the record because there's just so many people.

01:16:00:15 - 01:16:35:25

Jan Miyasaki

Yeah. That I'm trying to at least see their name for that they ever see this. I didn't need somebody to tell, but there's so many people and actually another important development that happened during the nineties and where we expanded was the Asian-American Student Union. The undergrads got really active and there were two really super cool activists. Maybe you should interview them, and I can't remember their first names, but there were a couple.

01:16:35:25 - 01:17:04:25

Jan Miyasaki

I think they got married, but I don't know, maybe they I don't know their status now, but it was a shot. I knew this Ashok Bhargava, son. He became a doctor whose last name is Bhargava. He was the president of. The U. S you just took off under the leadership of Bhargava was his last name. And and you and I think he name was and you and and you and.

01:17:05:07 - 01:17:49:20

Jan Miyasaki

And I can't think of Isaacson's name. And because. Because prior to all of this, the issue was very, you know, present in that they were they didn't start petitions and but but really got reconstituted in a way that maybe is like where it got elevated. It wasn't that where it is today like it was on a certain trajectory and where and now it's like a pie you know that the but Anil and Peggy will remember they were they were like amazingly smart.

01:17:49:20 - 01:18:21:16

Jan Miyasaki

I think they both became doctors, but they were doing, as you all remember, his son's name. But it was Bhargava and and young and they both just became leaders of the Asian-American student union. So, you know, the more you talk about it, the more you remember the names of people that were really significant. And I honestly, if I hadn't remembered those two, I would feel really bad.

01:18:21:16 - 01:19:07:00

Jan Miyasaki

So high. I remember you guys. You were so significant to Ed. I yeah, there were a lot of leaders and then there were just a lot of people who showed up, you know, and there were, you know,

inside of the community, you know, they were still like a broken heart. And I won't mention this because being Japanese-American and there were some really active kids from Hawaii at 1.2.

01:19:07:17 - 01:19:35:00

Jan Miyasaki

Oh, gosh, Joe. Oh, yeah, I'm a miller's son. I sorry, I don't remember your name, but he was awesome. He ended up going to me, going to Hawaii, going to law school. He was awesome. Joy. Yeah, I'm a miller. I need to mention, you know, she, uh, very active in our community. And her son was Mark Miller, who is in the legislature.

01:19:35:07 - 01:20:40:15

Jan Miyasaki

And their son went GW took Asian-American studies course for me and then went to he went to U. U H Law School where he ran into my sister and and so my sister went in there, but so I want to mention here. But the point being that these kids and like I can picture I'm Victor might remember some of these kids name because Victor was already here they organized a event that brought veterans of World War Two, Japanese American veterans and internees together and because particularly amongst the internees that were resisting, you know, there's there's still unfinished business that that still exists.

01:20:40:15 - 01:21:13:16

Jan Miyasaki

And so the the undergrads Asian-American undergrads organized to see that. And it was really important. And I had to I had to do a welcoming talk and had this intention of trying to put the onus on why Japanese-American community had this broken heart, not on the Japanese community. And I was trying because it was a it was a special event to bring everybody together because a community's are pretty here's the veterans, here's the internees is interned.

01:21:13:20 - 01:21:44:20

Jan Miyasaki

I don't get along with the other internees, you know, because they were political. But the reason being why I want to mention this event is they were there. That was all organized by student. I know Victor advised them and how smart they were to do that because a whole bunch of aging veterans came from Chicago, from the community, and I got a letter from one of them and I you know, I kept it, but I would give it to you because it was because it was as my role in Asian American Studies.

01:21:44:20 - 01:22:20:02

Jan Miyasaki

And these veterans were really old by the time this happened, who were from Chicago. And they say, oh, dear, you know, which I am. And before I got what you were trying to do and that and I thought all that and and then I got with the students were trying to do that was and that's why I'm sharing the story is that they were trying to do something transformational, you know, and these old veterans who had backed into their corners and still loved the community.

01:22:20:10 - 01:22:41:04

Jan Miyasaki

But I got what you were trying to do. I think that was the letter was really funny. Yeah. I got what you were trying to do. I mean, those are the kind of things you think about that support. Asian American studies say they no matter what people's differences were, they all showed up to support the Asian American Studies.

01:22:41:04 - 01:23:15:24

Jan Miyasaki

Right? Because they had an investment in it. You know, as veterans, as interneers, you know, these people like if you ask them to show up for Asian American studies, they would show up because, you know, even if you say value education and they value that it's at the UW and they value that visibility inside of education, in higher education, not just education.

01:23:15:25 - 01:23:50:26

Jan Miyasaki

They value that in higher education. And so from and that was just the lens through that at that that ethnic group. But that's the case people in the community who are senior generation people they value and will show up because they want Asian American subject matter to be in higher ed and they might not be protesting or being at the rally or writing the proposal, but that's who we do it for.

01:23:50:26 - 01:24:16:18

Jan Miyasaki

Right. And it's really important to them, even if, you know, we people bring that generation brings all kinds of attitudes and misinformation about each other. Right. But they all show up together for Asian American studies, even if they don't even know that much about each other beyond their own ethnic group of that group. And that blows my mind.

01:24:17:03 - 01:25:16:27

Jan Miyasaki

It really and it still happens today when I meet people, they know what that means. They know what Asian American studies mean, even if you know, you know, you know, they weren't at Cisco, you know, or they at all these they know exactly what it means that that we are in high regard and I don't know if the the ivory tower like people who live in the ivory tower, you know, people who are professional ivory tower academics in the management and oversight of it, you know, the teachers know that the profession really that should move them.

01:25:17:11 - 01:25:54:13

Jan Miyasaki

It should move them that it matters this much. You know, about all of it, whether it's I'm sure, you know, it would be the case that African-American studies. You know, I don't know if they actually can understand how much it means to people to to be in academia and to have their

stories in academia. You know, But I guess I'm just adding that to this because whoever sees this is really important to people, you know?

01:25:54:29 - 01:25:58:05

Jan Miyasaki

Anyway, Laurie, stop me. That's not a great.

01:25:58:05 - 01:25:59:02

Lori Lopez

Place to stop.

01:25:59:05 - 01:26:00:25

Jan Miyasaki

You know, I was. Yeah.