

Asian American Studies Program Oral History Project
Michael Thornton
Interviewed by Lori Lopez
11/4/2022

00:00:00:01 - 00:00:03:11

Lori Lopez

So please introduce yourself and the roles you've held at UW Madison.

00:00:04:03 - 00:00:30:15

Michael Thornton

Well, I am now Michael Thornton. I used to be Professor Michael Thornton. I've been several different positions on campus. Chair of Afro-American Studies, Director of Asian American Studies, Director of Morgan Center for Public Service. A number of other kind of capacities of similar nature. So I don't want to go through them all because you may want me to.

00:00:31:16 - 00:00:36:00

Lori Lopez

I feel like we'll probably get to a lot of the important ones over the course of your story.

00:00:36:12 - 00:00:38:19

Michael Thornton

But those those three are the major ones.

00:00:39:05 - 00:00:47:07

Lori Lopez

Okay, great. And how do you identify your background, whatever their most significant background part of if you want to talk about.

00:00:48:03 - 00:01:25:08

Michael Thornton

Well, I'm assuming that means heritage and I'm a first generation Japanese-American. I upon meeting my future wife, she had a a sister of her who gave me my title that actually I've been using for a while. I'm a black man, black Japanese. In fact, I did my dissertation on BJJ, black Japanese Americans and looking at kind of racial identity and socialization and families, most I guess all of them were African American fathers, Japanese-American mothers.

00:01:25:11 - 00:01:57:09

Michael Thornton

Nowadays I call myself a person of color. I'm pushed multiracial, but Japanese and African Americans, and depending on my modes, also had Native American, white and other stuff like that. I've been doing my family tree stuff, so I know about that stuff. But it's changed over time. When I was a college student, an undergraduate, my being mixed racial was much more important than anything else.

00:01:57:12 - 00:02:18:06

Michael Thornton

Since then, it's just kind of secondary to my being a human being, but understanding that I have other kind of qualities as well that intersect with that. So it's kind of telling in terms of what happens when you age. You go from, in my case, anywhere from very racial conscious to a more kind of multidimensional multi ethnic consciousness.

00:02:19:22 - 00:02:24:18

Lori Lopez

Okay. So let's go back to the beginning. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

00:02:25:11 - 00:02:58:13

Michael Thornton

I was born in Japan and I'm an Army brat. My father was in the military for 25 years. I grew up as a little more complicated. If where you're from is where you lived the longest. I'm from Madison, Wisconsin. I by the time I was 18, I lived in three foreign countries and 12 different states in the U.S. And so I feel like a vagabond still in some sense, that kind of experiences living in Florida less onerous.

00:02:59:14 - 00:03:14:07

Michael Thornton

I never thought it would be here. If you had asked me 20 years ago if I had ever lived in Florida, I would say Hell no. But we moved because my wife's family here and she needed to be closer to them.

00:03:15:19 - 00:03:23:19

Lori Lopez

Okay. I'm going to go to college. But are there any other stories that you want to tell about your before college life that are important?

00:03:24:05 - 00:03:27:08

Michael Thornton

Oh, I can talk a little bit about how my identity do that over time.

00:03:27:11 - 00:03:28:10

Lori Lopez

Okay. Let's go first.

00:03:29:04 - 00:03:56:06

Michael Thornton

Growing up in a military family, you're encouraged to kind of think about Patriotism, American flag and apple pie, all that good stuff. And so I was in denial about my race, though, to be honest. If you asked me at the time, I wasn't complete denial because the part I was in denial

about was being black. So I didn't mind if people mistook me from an Asian being Asian of some sort or more likely Puerto Rican.

00:03:57:02 - 00:04:23:02

Michael Thornton

And so something about my own unconsciousness at the time that I would prefer to be considered a Puerto Rican the black, because I thought Puerto Ricans were treated much better. And it wasn't until I went to college where I met this woman, a white woman, who was very much interested in trying of the African diaspora. And so she was encouraging me to kind of follow my book, my blackness, if you will.

00:04:23:15 - 00:04:48:18

Michael Thornton

And it was sophomore year of college. I was sleeping, actually, and I woke up. This is what my roommate told me. I woke up screaming, I'm Japanese and black ass. And part time I was focusing on my African parts and and it was after almost literally after that, I took a class on the African diaspora. So not quite conscious.

00:04:49:03 - 00:05:09:12

Michael Thornton

And I missed the class where they assign that part of the diaspora. We were supposed to investigate, and the only one left was African and Asian. And I'm best among the. But I said, what? However, you know, that kind of stuff, right? And so, like, my karma was with me because that obviously opened up a lot of doors in terms of who I am and understanding who I am.

00:05:09:19 - 00:05:35:04

Michael Thornton

So it was in my unconscious for a long time, but it didn't I don't know. It just came out somehow on its own. And so when I talk to my students about finding an identity, I never I never suggest that do it this way. They should be more systematic about it. Right. But I looked out and I found who I was ultimately led to my dissertation being on that subject, which is another opportunity for me to dig even deeper.

00:05:35:15 - 00:05:45:03

Michael Thornton

All the while, my more mainstream friends would say, You never get a job if you focus on stuff like that. And I don't do too bad.

00:05:46:10 - 00:05:53:06

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's very helpful. So let's talk about college. Where did you go to college and what did you study?

00:05:54:03 - 00:06:21:19

Michael Thornton

I went to Michigan State University. I my original major was is a mish mash category where you had you could be history. History, Major of social science, major of some sort. So it's called multidisciplinary social sciences. So I took that because I didn't really know what I wanted to be and what I was interested in. The woman I mentioned before who got me interested, look at my African diaspora.

00:06:22:08 - 00:06:48:21

Michael Thornton

She was a sociologist and I was thinking I didn't want a multidisciplinary social sciences because it was it really didn't speak to me. And back then, this is back in the day when you had to stand in line for registration. I was standing in line registration. I'll never tell my students this because again, they have to be rational, choosing their major while standing in line, bitching and moaning because everyone else in the world was an multidisciplinary social science major.

00:06:49:21 - 00:07:11:01

Michael Thornton

And I looked down the hallway and I noticed a three person line and I said, What the hell is our. It was social geology. So I walked down. That's how I chose my sociology major because of my girlfriend and also being lazy and the ironic part, I don't even know what happened to my girlfriend. That was the first love of my life 47 years ago.

00:07:11:10 - 00:07:19:23

Michael Thornton

She is long gone now, but she helped me find my major and it turns out sociology spoke to how I understood the world.

00:07:20:04 - 00:07:34:02

Lori Lopez

Okay, so you studied sociology and undergrad, and then tell me about your decision to go to grad school and where you ended up and what you studied There trying to.

00:07:34:20 - 00:08:02:06

Michael Thornton

There's two versions I used to get about this. I'm trying to figure out which ones that was. That was the correct one. Honestly, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. And after undergraduate, because I had for all my life planned on being a lawyer. In part, people were not that I really wanted to be a lawyer, but people said, You like to talk, you can talk intelligently, so you should be a lawyer.

00:08:02:07 - 00:08:30:14

Michael Thornton

I said, Okay, that's a good idea. And it was very much a step off of my family because until my sisters and I came along, all the rest of my family had not had a college education with one exception. And so being a lawyer is not as good as anything else. I applied to sociology again because I had run across an undergraduate and applied a number of places.

00:08:30:14 - 00:08:52:14

Michael Thornton

I really wanted to go to the east west side of Hawaii. Turns out I didn't get in. And it's also good that I didn't get in because I probably would still be there in graduate school. Too many temptations is too many reasons not to go to class, and Michigan turned out to be the place that was really interested in me.

00:08:53:16 - 00:09:12:08

Michael Thornton

And in fact, I had contacted me after undergraduate, said I'd be interested in applying there and I decided I had nothing to lose. So from my essay I told them that I was going to do my dissertation on blacks, and I had the nerve enough to say that I'd be the only expert in the world about that subject matter.

00:09:12:19 - 00:09:35:04

Michael Thornton

And that's why they would. Michigan would gain something out of my getting a degree as well. And ironically, given my background, usually pretty shy about stuff like that. Ironically, I talked to them later on. They said this exact reason why they admitted me because I had this hotspot of sorts that that that typically I didn't see in terms of applications.

00:09:37:02 - 00:09:40:01

Michael Thornton

And so I went there.

00:09:42:02 - 00:09:49:16

Lori Lopez

Okay. So more Michigan. And then what is it that brought you to UW Madison?

00:09:50:17 - 00:10:24:24

Michael Thornton

After finishing my degree, I went to teach at Cornell. I'm changing my demeanor because Cornell was a pretty bad experience. Tell me a little about the process. I had applied and went there and they Cornell of Cornell region at that time had said that the department I went into Human Development Family studies was kind of shameful because they had never hired a faculty of color.

00:10:25:13 - 00:10:44:04

Michael Thornton

And so he hired a funding for that, which is a never heard of that before, since where that individual provided funding for the. So I was one of three candidates coming in. And what I learned later on, there was a controversy about me. And ironically, the other two candidates were white, so I was the only one of color.

00:10:44:04 - 00:11:16:23

Michael Thornton

Seidel. That tells you something about the resistance in terms of in hiring somebody. I went there and as a junior faculty and several of the senior faculty made direct efforts to undermine my by staying there. They would threaten students who wanted to work with me by defunding them. They had the I thought they forced me to teach a 500 student course my first year, first year there.

00:11:17:03 - 00:11:41:05

Michael Thornton

One of the Tas that was assigned to me turns out to be doing his dissertation on morality, but he was harassing female students. It was in all these nasty things and they knew it. I didn't know it. So I had a real problem with him. In class of the evaluations I got where were horrible. It began with my commenting on that.

00:11:41:16 - 00:12:05:23

Michael Thornton

At the time there was explosion of the special space shuttle, and I said it was a horrible sticking to my class. I said, This is horrible, but and we should grieve that. But how many of you will grieve people, homeless people on the street? How many of you will step past them and not talk to them? And it's the weirdest thing to be standing in front of 500 students and see things flying at you.

00:12:05:23 - 00:12:31:19

Michael Thornton

And my mind couldn't register. What the hell is that? Racist? Pencils, spit logs. Right. And I reported that along with the harassment for my colleague, the long and the short of it, the dean said he would talk to the faculty that I accused of doing this. Things that some of them had actually said things at faculty meetings, so it shouldn't have been a surprise to them.

00:12:32:19 - 00:13:01:16

Michael Thornton

Three months later, I asked him what what was the conversation about going, How does the conversation go? Oh, I didn't have time to do that. I filed a formal complaint. And the long the short of it is that maybe you should go someplace else. You'll be happier someplace else. And in the final piece of that story is that three years later, I was asked to come back and be the chair of the department.

00:13:03:03 - 00:13:30:14

Michael Thornton

And the scuttlebutt was that they were saying that that they helped me become the kind of scholar that they thought I should be. So I went from there. So at that moment, some of the colleagues in Wisconsin and sociologists said, we know you don't like it there. How about coming here? And I said to my wife back in Wisconsin, I never have been to Wisconsin.

00:13:30:21 - 00:13:54:11

Michael Thornton

I have never even flown over Wisconsin. And so I was I thought I was going to school at Cornell University anyway, so I thought I'd be there for a while. And so I didn't have anything to lose. And so, as you know, going through the hiring process, you kind of put a wish list together and I put a wish list together and gave it all to them so they could they say no, they just say not anything.

00:13:55:10 - 00:14:12:09

Michael Thornton

And so as a little fact later found that you didn't ask for enough. And so I went to Wisconsin. Wisconsin, for the most part, was professionally it. Wisconsin was perfect for me in other ways. It was Wisconsin was perfect for me professionally. So that's why I went from Michigan to Wisconsin.

00:14:13:21 - 00:14:26:16

Lori Lopez

Okay. Yeah, that's a horrible story about Cornell. What were the years for this? Like, when did you graduate college and grad school? Cornell and then Madison Well.

00:14:26:23 - 00:14:50:05

Michael Thornton

Before Michigan and Cornell, I taught at Eastern Michigan University. So I went to Cornell from 85 to 89, where I then I stayed, but I got the job at Wisconsin in 1990. But I, I stayed at Cornell for another year. And so I was I was ensconced from 1992 to 2022.

00:14:52:01 - 00:15:03:03

Lori Lopez

Okay. Got an. All right. So in 1996, when you came to Madison. All right. Well, let's jump.

00:15:03:04 - 00:15:04:06

Michael Thornton

Start in Stone Age.

00:15:04:17 - 00:15:23:20

Lori Lopez

No, this is this is exactly the moment that we're looking at because the origins of the program. So when you got to Madison, were you connected to the Asian American community or how did you become connected with Asian American? Asian American community in Madison?

00:15:24:19 - 00:16:00:19

Michael Thornton

Well, it's kind of it's kind of ironic. Before my arrival, there was a lot, of course, UW about some kind of racist thing. I couldn't remember what it was anymore. And then I had also heard about kind of the formation of Asian American studies and stuff like that when I went to Wisconsin, what I was looking for, actually, I think I talked to somebody from Asian American studies because I was trying to scope out to the extent and and and what was going on on campus in terms of ethnic studies more generally.

00:16:00:19 - 00:16:23:19

Michael Thornton

But Asian American, African American studies. And and looking for people that I might work with in terms of my own work, I don't remember specifically who I was introduced to, but I think it was probably there was a get together of Asian American studies. People the beginning of the semester. And I got there and I went over to talk to talk to different people.

00:16:24:20 - 00:16:37:17

Michael Thornton

Jen Miyazaki is one of the first ones I met. I don't I don't remember the details of how I walked up to Asian American studies because that's part of the whole larger process. I was visiting Native American Studies and stuff like that.

00:16:40:14 - 00:16:47:14

Michael Thornton

But I was really excited about that because Cornell had started doing something like that. But as I assumed, Wisconsin would be better.

00:16:48:17 - 00:17:00:12

Lori Lopez

Okay, so when you got there, you were looking for other researchers in Asian American studies. Jan, was there, and then was Amy Ling, director of Asian American studies.

00:17:02:01 - 00:17:06:08

Michael Thornton

If she wasn't the first year, she was a second year, I don't know. I don't know which it came in.

00:17:06:15 - 00:17:13:20

Lori Lopez

Okay. And then what was the program like at the beginning? Like, what was there to it?

00:17:15:18 - 00:17:47:07

Michael Thornton

It was lack of a better term up and coming in the sense that it was small. There wasn't a lot of kind of class offerings, but still were there were like, you know, lectures or something like that because of the faculty, Asian American faculty or those interested in Asian American studies. Weren't very plentiful then. So there was a lot more some sense camaraderie because we were bonded more easily, because there are so few of us.

00:17:47:07 - 00:18:03:18

Michael Thornton

And I remember struggling with kind of trying to figure out ways to teach Asian American classes. Being an African American studies department. And so so I was looking for allies and and potential teachers for stuff like that at the time.

00:18:03:23 - 00:18:07:23

Lori Lopez

So were you appointed in sociology and Afro-American Studies?

00:18:08:16 - 00:18:16:15

Michael Thornton

No, I was there was there was some discussion about sociology, but I didn't trust them. So I told appointment Asian American studies.

00:18:16:23 - 00:18:17:20

Lori Lopez

In from.

00:18:18:14 - 00:18:19:20

Michael Thornton

Excuse me, that's what I'm. Yeah.

00:18:20:01 - 00:18:37:02

Lori Lopez

Okay. Got it. Okay. So then did you teach courses in Asian American Studies or what did you. I know you became director, but like, how did you what kinds of like formal roles did you have or were you just like, I'm just part of this community?

00:18:38:08 - 00:18:42:23

Michael Thornton

Well, I think pretty early I was part of the advisory committee for Asian American Studies.

00:18:42:23 - 00:18:43:05

Lori Lopez

Okay.

00:18:44:10 - 00:19:08:06

Michael Thornton

I don't get I don't remember that when I started teaching courses on Asian American studies, but I know some of the earlier ones were like Asian American African American families. One of the My Corner for some courses was mutual perceptions of people of color, who I talked to about relationships with Asian, Asian, Asian Americans, and and African people of African ancestry and other people of color throughout the world.

00:19:08:06 - 00:19:37:21

Michael Thornton

I taught a course on race and ethnicity with a focus was Asian Americans and African Americans taught a course on Asian American. African American identity, taught a course. So I started teaching a number of courses. And if I recall, I started really doing this after I got to study three. And so I studied almost all my courses included some kind of Asian American content after that.

00:19:37:21 - 00:20:08:23

Michael Thornton

And it was also starting service learning. And so a lot of the stuff, a lot of those sites were like our Bayview, which has a large Hmong population of North Port and Packer also has a large Hmong population. So there are a lot of sites my students would go to that involved Asian Americans. And so as part of that course, I also included a lot of discussions and readings on Asian Americans.

00:20:08:23 - 00:20:11:14

Michael Thornton

So I felt just as anchored in both areas.

00:20:11:19 - 00:20:12:05

Lori Lopez

Mm hmm.

00:20:12:18 - 00:20:17:03

Michael Thornton

For another 20 years, I'd put Native American stuff in the Hispanic stuff.

00:20:17:10 - 00:20:23:22

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. And you said you got what year did you get tenure?

00:20:24:03 - 00:20:24:19

Michael Thornton

93.

00:20:25:14 - 00:20:36:09

Lori Lopez

Oh, so, like, almost right after you got to Madison? Yeah. Okay. And then tell me about becoming director.

00:20:37:14 - 00:21:13:02

Michael Thornton

I think I was director for a year. Temporarily, because of. I don't know if that's what Amy died, but for some reason, I was in there only for a year because it was temporary. And then in 2000, 3 to 2006 or something, early 2000, I became a full time director. And what I was trying to do then, and this is before, I don't think there were any other tenured faculty at that time.

00:21:13:13 - 00:21:45:14

Michael Thornton

But what I was trying to do those is trying to up the amount of faculty in the program. And then as they started coming in, blacking out people's names, I'm having difficulty remembering the sequence of events. But when I became director, it really focusing on kind of trying to mainstream much more of the Asian American content in other courses.

00:21:45:21 - 00:22:04:08

Michael Thornton

So we're looking at kind of allies to help us do that by looking at people who might be willing to offer Asian American courses. Also trying to figure out kind of the extent of support for Asian American studies on campus and identify allies in that sense to kind of hopefully build something down the road.

00:22:05:12 - 00:22:16:17

Lori Lopez

Okay. Yeah. So I guess my understanding of that history is a little fuzzy, too. But so it was Amy Ling was director, and then you stepped in for a year and then.

00:22:17:02 - 00:22:22:11

Michael Thornton

I don't know, I don't remember if that's the sequence. I might have done it before. She might have taken leave. I don't remember.

00:22:22:16 - 00:22:24:12

Lori Lopez

Yeah, maybe she had a sabbatical or something.

00:22:24:24 - 00:22:25:14

Michael Thornton

That might have been.

00:22:25:14 - 00:22:41:13

Lori Lopez

In. And then she went back to being faculty. And then she died in 1999. What was it like going around when she was sick?

00:22:41:13 - 00:23:13:20

Michael Thornton

She hid away for the most part and part of the issues, even when she was a faculty at that time, I think her focus was to build a national reputation for Asian American Studies Wisconsin. So in many ways, she she did so she did a lot of traveling. We didn't meet up with her that often. And so that was that was her choice in terms of kind of notoriety to the program as opposed to doing something else good and bad to it.

00:23:13:20 - 00:23:24:04

Michael Thornton

But that was her decision. And so I don't remember having too many faculty meetings. And when we did, they were pretty, pretty brief, huh?

00:23:24:15 - 00:23:28:10

Lori Lopez

Interesting. What do you think she did when she was traveling?

00:23:29:03 - 00:23:40:00

Michael Thornton

I think I'd give her the bit of doubt because she never really thought of back to us that often about stuff. So my hunch is depends on how honest you want me to be.

00:23:41:06 - 00:23:42:13

Lori Lopez

As honest as you can.

00:23:42:13 - 00:24:16:17

Michael Thornton

Me that my hunch was that she was she was one to get herself better known at the same time, wanting to kind of bring some kind of attention to Asian American studies in the Midwest. So I can't judge which one she did more of, but I think she was trying to do both those kinds of things. Well, and in part of it, I think might have been that late 1990s, you could see on the horizon there's this backlash is perhaps too strong a word.

00:24:16:17 - 00:24:39:10

Michael Thornton

There's just there was this reaction to ethnic studies and that people thought passé. We don't need any more than you saw certain ethnic studies programs being sucked up into American studies programs at that time. And so maybe that was part of her strategy, right? Looking out,

there's a way to make sure that we stayed on the map and stayed relevant, especially if you were the first one in the Midwest.

00:24:39:15 - 00:24:43:16

Michael Thornton

So that was a real selling and marketing point.

00:24:44:05 - 00:24:53:09

Lori Lopez

Interesting. And did you feel like there was any threat of that at UW Madison, or was Asian American Studies always like on its own trajectory?

00:24:54:09 - 00:25:21:16

Michael Thornton

Well, I think the I think even today, there still is there's there's an issue for Asian American studies because, as you know, although most of the faculty not all of that all the faculty were joint appointments. And so that creates a certain tension that that that you can't get over. There's no other way you can get over it as a department and have the total attention given to the department as opposed to two entities.

00:25:22:01 - 00:25:47:07

Michael Thornton

So I think that's an inherent problem with ethnic studies at UW Madison, because except for the lab and even now we're thing else, when I'm kind of go down a lot for various reasons. And so, you know, this is a long conversation we had all the years I was there. There's ways to deal with that, but I don't think UW has done enough.

00:25:48:12 - 00:26:02:13

Michael Thornton

I don't know how you feel in terms of how secure you all feel in terms of Asian American studies, but it's like they develop on some level inferiority complex because you always feel like you're not you're not treated as equals because you're not.

00:26:03:12 - 00:26:16:00

Lori Lopez

Yeah, it's definitely test and it definitely feels like you you can't be 50% in a department. You're always 100%. So then you're just 200% if you have two appointments.

00:26:16:24 - 00:26:39:09

Michael Thornton

And especially, I think because if if you're doing is one one of your your your legs in racial ethnic stuff and you're in a mainstream department, no matter how supportive they are, that it's like they're still with you still know that there's some kind of question to why you're spending so much time in ethnic studies. Some parts are better at that than others.

00:26:39:09 - 00:27:00:07

Michael Thornton

But you still but they don't. It's like you're still not a second class person. Some sense, like similarly, if you're in gender studies or something like that, there's always this tension that you're not really one of us. And so that's a real problem is, you know, for junior faculty, because how do they balance that? How do they and how do you prove yourself to both?

00:27:00:10 - 00:27:22:18

Michael Thornton

Right? Equally, because if you put too much attention to to to race, then they see that as well that there is a saps aren't really the ones we use over here. So why don't you start using those? And that's why I really got it. Cornell, why are you focusing only on people of color? Well, because I'm interested to know and and But why don't you use the models that we have in these other areas?

00:27:23:09 - 00:27:48:02

Michael Thornton

But you never you never test people of color. And so in some sense, junior faculty often feel the need to do basic research. Right. Just to set a foundation of sorts, especially when they're doing stuff that no one else does. That's an inherent problem with kind of ethnic studies at most places, because you have to fit into arenas and they all look at each other with suspicion.

00:27:49:17 - 00:27:56:06

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Did you ever want to be 5050 after amnesia? Now?

00:27:57:11 - 00:28:26:21

Michael Thornton

Yeah, actually, there was some talk about that, but I thought that would take away other opportunities for other people because I was going to do that anyway. So why would I take half a position? I'm somebody else completely different from me. And I think that's that's the response of people who are oppressed because you don't want to you want to share more of it with other people because, yeah, you need the numbers.

00:28:28:01 - 00:28:39:24

Lori Lopez

Yeah, I feel that since I'm 100% come out and I am a 0% governance appointment, I'm like, Well, that's fine because I feel very connected to Asian American studies and nothing would change.

00:28:41:10 - 00:29:04:14

Michael Thornton

But but, but also to join a department also just leverage to, if you will, to opposition, because they have some pull in terms of how radical you might want to be tried, especially in junior faculty. And so you might want to do something really outlandish, but it's it's fantastic work. But it's it really brings question to kind of the mainstream.

00:29:04:24 - 00:29:28:20

Michael Thornton

And that's why I didn't want to do sociology, because they were they've always played down on sociology because I never look at white people. That was like my evaluation of Cornell. We liked your work but were whites. I kept saying, and I'm surprised looking back, I was a junior actually arguing with a I don't have an interest in white people and I don't and I don't want to use the theories you all have developed for us because I don't know if they're appropriate.

00:29:29:00 - 00:29:49:23

Michael Thornton

And in fact, I know they're probably not appropriate because one of the things I found early on was looking at just the social research on racial attitudes basically says that more education you have, the more liberal you are, the more open minded you are. It's the flip when you're using a certain set of the same surveys as mainstream sociologists did.

00:29:50:04 - 00:30:15:04

Michael Thornton

We found that African Americans is flex less. Education means more. You're more radical in some sense. Right. And so I don't what model that I use the I use in the mainstream literature to show that when. And that was my argument when I was thinking about coming up for tenure. Cornell And they didn't want to address that. They said, Well, we think you should be more broad in what you do.

00:30:15:13 - 00:30:35:21

Michael Thornton

I said, I talk about Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans. I talk about mixed racial people. And you're telling me that I need to be more broad about what I do, what all your research is on white folks. And so you're not you know, so obviously the conversations are missing each other because I'm being rational. They're being emotional.

00:30:36:08 - 00:30:36:16

Lori Lopez

And.

00:30:38:05 - 00:30:59:10

Michael Thornton

They don't. So they never know. I have a fact. I was going to then the other day, I have letters about letters when I was making this argument for them. They never address that point. My third year review, they never addressed the problem. They said, We appreciate your work, but

you need to expand populations and you need to somehow make sure that students aren't so upset at what you do.

00:31:00:04 - 00:31:26:19

Michael Thornton

Because I got blasted in my evaluations because I taught a class families a lot in America over the 500 student class in the 20 years was taught they had one half a week of all people of color. So I changed it a half a semester about people of color and half about the white folks. And I got blasted.

00:31:26:19 - 00:31:44:16

Michael Thornton

So I don't think that's changing even for junior faculty now. I mean, that's the that's the sad part, the sick part about it. Yeah. Think of all the ideas. We could come up with all of the theories and conceptualizations we could come up with if the Academy was really open to that.

00:31:44:16 - 00:31:45:00

Lori Lopez

Yeah.

00:31:46:19 - 00:31:49:15

Michael Thornton

That's why I'm loving the work I do now, because I. How to pay attention to stuff.

00:31:50:18 - 00:31:51:04

Lori Lopez

That's right.

00:31:51:09 - 00:31:54:24

Michael Thornton

Freedom of evaluate myself.

00:31:55:05 - 00:32:22:07

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Okay. I want to take you back to those early nineties because when you came in, Asian American studies existed and Amy Lang was here. But I think that it was not yet a certificate or like what? Tell me about other like program building efforts that there were and did it feel like that was activism or did it just feel like that at that point, like you were institutionalized and you're just like working within a system that already existed?

00:32:22:24 - 00:32:42:00

Michael Thornton

Well, I think part of the answer to the last question is, is something you're going to have to do. You feel that you're really institutionalized? There? I don't think so. Right. So there's no way we

felt we were institutionalized. We felt like they would open the door, they might slam it and not face any moment. So what we got to do is build allies.

00:32:42:00 - 00:33:02:16

Michael Thornton

We got to I mean, there was some early discussion, but I think Amy was still here then about how we combine ethnic studies into what I mean, we had a have Evelyn Goodheart, who was a historian and I think still a Austin who does did a lot of stuff on or most of her research was on Latin American race.

00:33:03:08 - 00:33:28:23

Michael Thornton

She was an expert on a kind of creating an ethnic studies entity. It was a brawl. And so we had heard to come to campus and this discussion about that. Right. How do we do that? How do we begin to do that? And I think Amy was one of that, one of the leaders in that. So those early discussion understanding that all these ethnic entities, American-Indian studies, Chicano study, all this stuff were on shifting grounds.

00:33:28:23 - 00:33:58:14

Michael Thornton

And we're all cynical enough to say that we can trust these these administrators, be blunt, these white folk about allowing us to stay, encouraging us to to flourish. When you look all around the country, very few places were doing that. And so when I came here, I like that challenge, right? Because it's like I could be on the ground floor of helping to build sense.

00:33:58:14 - 00:34:23:08

Michael Thornton

And that's why I participated in trying to, as an aside, first wave and hoping that come about something like that, because I that's I thought we could be the opposite special in that way where you have good diversity and you have a kind of a built in retention program for students because they have all the diversity available and also help faculty because you have other people, maybe not in your area, but you could talk to them at least about issues and not have to explain race.

00:34:23:08 - 00:34:46:04

Michael Thornton

And I was still here and it hasn't gone away. And so so I was I like that. But the long and the short of it is that that I was really naive. And I think that's the good and the bad of being young. You think that you can change the world. But Wisconsin is an institution, it's an elite institution, and these institutions will allow you to nibble away at the edges.

00:34:46:04 - 00:35:14:02

Michael Thornton

But no, foundationally, they're going to protect their boundaries and their power. So that was the context when I came in 1990. And so part of it was getting to know each other. Part of I was kind of thinking about alternative models I really wanted to look for. But one of the reasons I went to Wisconsin, there was a guy named Larry Bubbles, a sociologist who I was really looking forward to working with, and he was interested in the stuff I was doing.

00:35:14:02 - 00:35:39:22

Michael Thornton

He left like two years after that. And so I was I was looking for people to research Emmett Shore. And I looked up then because he was Asian American studies studies, and I wanted to talk to him about a possibility of doing, you know, research on newspapers among people of color. And we eventually did that books looking around for stuff like that to create allyship and create my own kind of little universe there.

00:35:40:08 - 00:36:05:09

Michael Thornton

I'm not suggesting I did all alone, but there's a lot of people are doing this. And so that's what I remember about that time. It was kind of a time of planting seeds and time of kind of hoping things to get along. But we run smack dab into the conversation. We talked earlier, earlier, the joint appointment staff, the very big new faculty in what new ideas and go through them very quickly.

00:36:06:03 - 00:36:30:01

Michael Thornton

And also saw that even Afro-American studies you goes through them very quickly because the tenure process weeds them out. If they don't use enough of the right models and and the citations from certain kind of people and that that curtails innovation, stuff like that, because most of the stuff we talk about, people of color or women or other dispossessed people is work that's never been done.

00:36:31:02 - 00:37:12:15

Michael Thornton

Many cases never even been contemplated. So how do you theories to that and do justice to. So the long and the short of it is that as you're you're experiencing, as you experienced your career, that you can kind to create your own little bubble. But it's hard to fight the status quo. It's really difficult. And so a lot of the conversations that even we're having with you now probably would ring a bell to somebody 20 years ago and 30 years from now, because we're fighting and trying to not a losing battle, but we're fighting a I can't even think of the word.

00:37:12:15 - 00:37:26:20

Michael Thornton

We're fighting a battle against the winds in terms of conservatism, status quo stuff like that. And they give us lip service and sometimes they give us spaces to talk, but they don't really change anything about what they do.

00:37:27:15 - 00:37:27:24

Lori Lopez

Right.

00:37:29:04 - 00:37:54:18

Michael Thornton

As an aside, since I'm excited about my research still, that we just we have a revised resubmit about a paper. I was interested in trying of looking at leftist white press and the argument, the assumption that they're somehow different, they're woke. And so we looked at the 2016 election looking for, and it seemed obvious that race should be an important part of any conversation.

00:37:55:21 - 00:38:26:05

Michael Thornton

So we compared the white us to the black press in terms of how they talk about working class, the white working class press, not colorblind. And this is radical left. This isn't just like, you know, liberal stuff. They were colorblind. They they thought talking about race was missing the point. And so it was hard to get that place, that paper published anywhere.

00:38:26:20 - 00:38:59:01

Michael Thornton

And it's not radical glossing. But the more I read about it, the more that it seems like, at least in terms of newspapers stuff and press stuff. And I think society more generally that whites, leftist rightists, mainstream have this certain ideas about race that really they handle it differently. So the leftist press talks about colorblind. They don't use the term, but they talked about how they define working class by white men.

00:38:59:22 - 00:39:30:02

Michael Thornton

They never talked about anybody else, but they assume they're talking about everybody colorblind, as used by mainstream people pretty regularly. Now, even the even the rightists are are using code words in a way that's parallel to mainstream leftists. That's colorblind, because even those who are really, you know, conservative know that you can't speak actually in terms of racial terms anymore.

00:39:30:10 - 00:40:00:19

Michael Thornton

So all these white sources are speaking the same language, though they think they're very different. And so you have the liberals and the leftists pointing out all the flaws of the people on the right, but they don't deal with their own race stuff. And that's why they focus so much like MSNBC. So focus is so much about, you know, Trump and the Republicans and blasting them for their racial ideas, but they never confront their own as troubling as hell because that's a fundamental issue.

00:40:01:17 - 00:40:11:02

Michael Thornton

How do we how do we begin to protect our democracy if we can't even we have no allies? Not in the real sense, but sorry for the tangent.

00:40:12:12 - 00:40:39:19

Lori Lopez

Now that's super interesting. Speaking of allies, so when I talked to Peggy, it seemed like there were a lot of support from the community members and then students. So once were director and working, you know, teaching and doing research, all these faculty things, was there still that connection with the community members and the students as supporting this activism?

00:40:40:18 - 00:41:11:18

Michael Thornton

Yeah, there was. And we always had one or two community members there. Janice was always, always kind of took a home there and so she was one of them. But what I never saw, especially when I was director over time and, and I was trying to inculcate this in terms of having a community and university connection. And one of the ways I was doing that was through student Asian American student organization, is when they would get tons of money, like on computers, and then they would waste it.

00:41:11:18 - 00:41:43:23

Michael Thornton

Why? I said, Why not? Why not? We think about something that directly helps students in the community we could use that like Hmong students or just students of color more generally. And there was always this resistance because in some sense, I think that the UW students had access to all these resources and they got happy with them. And so my frustration was always, how do you how do we you can still do the things you need to do, but how do we share those resources with the outside community?

00:41:43:23 - 00:42:03:06

Michael Thornton

Even doing my last couple of years, I never really saw that much. Maybe people were doing it, but I didn't see that much and I was especially trying to. That's why I was especially trying to do that to my classes and service learning. How do we share our resources, the community? Because it was not fun. It and how we saw it was a time for knowledge or something like that.

00:42:03:06 - 00:42:09:04

Michael Thornton

And if anything, I would wish that much more of that for Asian American Studies, for all the ethnic studies entities on campus, for that matter.

00:42:10:20 - 00:42:23:16

Lori Lopez

Yeah, it's really challenging and I'm really impressed that you were able to do those service learning courses because building up those partnerships where you can bring in students in classes is really challenging.

00:42:24:00 - 00:42:52:23

Michael Thornton

Well, don't thank me. It's like they were my saving grace because I was getting as I am now, getting so frustrated with her happening out there. And I couldn't think of a way to really do that through the university. So I said, Let me work around it then. And also enliven the courses because as you know, when you talk to so many of those, the students in the classes know you can talk, you can talk to them forever and they wouldn't get it.

00:42:53:19 - 00:43:11:10

Michael Thornton

And that's the limitation of just like lecturing or even staying within the confines of the university. But what I sent them out to the community. Oh my God, I loved it. I mean, the story I used to tell is that before doing that, I'd read Final papers, I'd be bored, I'd want to come all the same. Great. I would.

00:43:11:22 - 00:43:41:04

Michael Thornton

But the final papers were a service learning courses that it's like light bulbs are popping all over the place. They got very personal accounts and I'm weeping reading these things. And people will walk by my door saying, What's wrong? What's up? No, no, this is wonderful. So I have to all just shut the door because. But it was that that was the saving grace for me the last couple of years, because I saw the students be transformed in a way that a book can do, because now they have a face, they have a story they have.

00:43:41:09 - 00:44:05:22

Michael Thornton

And furthermore, it it didn't make me seem such like a such a bad person saying all these horrible things about our society because they had testimonials like that. I had no control over it. So I think that process and and it wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be, especially after you started getting rolling, because it kept me anchored to the community.

00:44:06:06 - 00:44:11:06

Michael Thornton

So I actually have more contact with people in the community being here than I do at the university.

00:44:11:22 - 00:44:16:19

Lori Lopez

And yeah, it's amazing.

00:44:17:15 - 00:44:20:00

Michael Thornton

So if you're really interested, we can talk about it some other than.

00:44:20:11 - 00:44:26:19

Lori Lopez

Yeah, I always find it difficult to figure out what students can do. Like what do they actually do with the community members.

00:44:26:19 - 00:44:28:20

Michael Thornton

We can talk about it. That's the easy part.

00:44:29:19 - 00:44:30:05

Lori Lopez

Okay.

00:44:30:15 - 00:44:54:01

Michael Thornton

And especially if you were like me getting tired of reading typical final exams of papers. This was a godsend. It was a godsend. I hated reading the final papers before I had service learning because they all sound the same as they should. And then after a while, damn, I don't know. And so then I end up doing at the last minute this I can't wait to them.

00:44:54:15 - 00:45:02:10

Michael Thornton

I couldn't wait for them to send the paper in because I start reading it immediately. But I'll say, if you want to talk about, we can talk about something.

00:45:02:10 - 00:45:16:20

Lori Lopez

Yeah, that sounds great. Yeah, let's do that. Okay. Okay. So let's get back to Okay, so then you are director again. I think. I think you're a director again in 2000 and you said yourself two.

00:45:16:23 - 00:45:18:10

Michael Thornton

Thousand and three. Yeah.

00:45:18:23 - 00:45:24:19

Lori Lopez

Yeah. And so you said you were focusing a lot on hiring. Is that were you the one who hired Leslie?

00:45:26:00 - 00:45:29:04

Michael Thornton

Well, I didn't hire. I helped the process to hire.

00:45:29:10 - 00:45:36:01

Lori Lopez

Tell me about that. How did that happen?

00:45:36:01 - 00:46:06:00

Michael Thornton

I actually don't remember because there were two or three people in there at that time, if I recall. Part of the conversation is whether or not we should try to have Asian American lists in several different departments. And I think that was about the time she was coming. And I don't remember the decision, but I do recall something the fact that that there were two or three possibilities and and she was the best one.

00:46:06:12 - 00:46:26:04

Michael Thornton

And even though she was even though she was in English, because I think some discussion about we need some social scientists or something like that. And she worked out, if I recall, I think we offered it to somebody else and they turned us down. But that could be that instance or some other instance. I don't remember specific.

00:46:27:01 - 00:46:39:24

Lori Lopez

Okay. And then tell me a little bit more about just like your philosophy about being director. Like, what were your priorities or what did you think what how did you spend your time as director?

00:46:40:21 - 00:47:15:22

Michael Thornton

Well, I left in part because that's one of my priorities, was to have short meetings because I didn't I just I hated those meetings. So actually, I think we average about a half hour unless it was something important. Of course, the philosophy was kind of how do we focus on a curriculum? What mean? And this was trying to think long term in terms of it, What arguments can we make to the powers that be that we need more people and so we started focusing on curriculum.

00:47:15:22 - 00:47:37:00

Michael Thornton

We started focusing out allies, on getting them involved in lists and directly in terms of us giving us advice about what would it take for you to hire some someone who's an Asian American. Studies What kind of curriculum would you think would work in your department? So stuff like that. I know we had an somewhere, but like that too many things that got lost along the way.

00:47:37:07 - 00:47:53:16

Michael Thornton

So we don't have an archive of stuff like that. And that was one of the I think that was one of the other things I was trying to put in place archives. Now how do we archives student activities, activism Now, I was trying to do this now for American Studies too. How do we how do we not reinvent the wheel every time a new group of students come in?

00:47:54:12 - 00:48:21:21

Michael Thornton

So we've had archives somewhere so that they can read what people did for that. As part of that, who were the allies in the process? A new group of student coming in have to just start from from scratch. That fell by the wayside. You know, I think ultimately the last year in particular, I was just trying to hold out for I wasn't I wasn't being proactive of about much of anything at that point, because I think at that point I was kind of burned out.

00:48:21:21 - 00:48:24:10

Michael Thornton

Then.

00:48:24:10 - 00:48:28:20

Lori Lopez

Okay. And then did you become chair of Afro AM after Asian?

00:48:29:15 - 00:49:00:17

Michael Thornton

If so, it was only temporary for some because the person who was supposed to do it was arguing, I don't want to do it. And so I agreed to be co-chair. And so I didn't do I did actually did a lot. I did most of the signing of stuff. And if I recall that that person got didn't do anything that semester.

00:49:00:17 - 00:49:05:09

Michael Thornton

But there's worse things in life.

00:49:05:09 - 00:49:23:12

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Okay. So then after you were chair, it looks like we had Leslie. I mean, then we started really getting all these joint faculty with Leslie and Cindy and then Tim and just kind of, I guess, in general. How have you seen the program evolve since then?

00:49:24:16 - 00:49:50:21

Michael Thornton

I think including you, I think overall you all were much more proactive. You all all have, I think much more on on the ball than I did the time. I think you're kind of you're more more cohesive in a proactive sort of way, I think, over overall. And I think part of that's for obvious reasons that there's more of you and that helps.

00:49:52:01 - 00:50:20:12

Michael Thornton

But I also think that I think more of you I think you all are more leaders because I, I didn't see much, though. I think I was selfish in some sense. I didn't see myself devoting my whole time to Asian American studies when it would wear me out and I still wouldn't get much accomplished. And I wasn't willing to give up on my own research and other stuff to do that.

00:50:21:08 - 00:50:43:14

Michael Thornton

I think Hemant was kind of like that when he came. That's why he wasn't director for a while. But what he was like that in a way, though, I think when he became the chair of his department, he was very proactive about stuff. He was became a real leadership leader at that point. But I think you all are progressively better quality leaders than the rest of us.

00:50:43:22 - 00:50:48:06

Michael Thornton

Least I was.

00:50:48:06 - 00:51:08:13

Lori Lopez

And yet and well, we've seen a lot more classes developed. And I mean, it's just become more is more of a system. I guess we're always on the margins but we have we like mentored junior faculty so they can get tenure and stuff. It just kind of feels very department role.

00:51:09:09 - 00:51:12:15

Michael Thornton

And I couldn't do that. I didn't know that I'm going to become somebody.

00:51:14:02 - 00:51:20:24

Lori Lopez

Yeah, yeah. No, the as we grow, they're definitely the, the feeling of the program changes.

00:51:21:12 - 00:51:23:01

Michael Thornton

But how many faculty are there now?

00:51:23:14 - 00:51:26:13

Lori Lopez

I think there's eight jointly appointed faculty now.

00:51:27:07 - 00:51:28:24

Michael Thornton

That's a good figure.

00:51:29:14 - 00:51:30:06

Lori Lopez

It's a lot.

00:51:31:06 - 00:51:36:00

Michael Thornton

But it is a lot. I think that's almost bigger than Afro am, maybe.

00:51:36:00 - 00:51:58:13

Lori Lopez

So I think the numbers change all the time on all of the ethnic studies units. But yeah, it's it's a lot. It's very exciting. Yeah, but you know, we also are have not enough time to do all the things like I'm trying to this archive project but I'm like I could see it not working but it's hard.

00:51:58:15 - 00:52:02:06

Michael Thornton

Yeah. That's what happens when you're on the margins, you know.

00:52:03:15 - 00:52:09:09

Lori Lopez

Yeah. You feel like you don't, you, you don't have any archival stuff at all. No.

00:52:10:01 - 00:52:27:00

Michael Thornton

Well, first of all, I don't I never took pictures. We didn't have staff to do that. And I don't I didn't during that time, I think many pictures of myself about anything. And so I was I was trying to look for that stuff and I had stuff in other contacts. But I have nothing to do with the university.

00:52:27:15 - 00:52:31:11

Michael Thornton

And that's just the way I am in terms of pictures.

00:52:32:13 - 00:52:36:21

Lori Lopez

But what about the documents like the the program archive?

00:52:38:03 - 00:52:41:22

Michael Thornton

I left everything I had was in there.

00:52:42:08 - 00:52:50:01

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Okay. Has it always been in that same the same space on campus? Okay.

00:52:50:24 - 00:53:08:14

Michael Thornton

So we really need an archivist for it. But, but I think that's true of all the ethnic studies. Even after a lab doesn't have anything, they have a library now that started collecting certain kinds of things. But that was messed with in the last four or five years. So we're not survivors and not good at collecting stuff like that.

00:53:09:10 - 00:53:15:04

Lori Lopez

I know it's hard. Yeah, because you do it fighting for your existence and.

00:53:16:24 - 00:53:30:00

Michael Thornton

No, there's a net. You're fighting for existence, but you're also your priority is to look down the road so you can still continue to exist as opposed to thinking about the past. Right? The past is the past.

00:53:30:12 - 00:53:33:01

Lori Lopez

Yeah.

00:53:33:01 - 00:53:52:03

Michael Thornton

And still we have a much better as a people in the world. But even context at university, like I'm fighting a dickens for myself in the program, the department and stuff like that, and I'm going to keep a record of stuff it and that record might undermine me later on. So do I really want to keep the record?

00:53:52:03 - 00:54:04:11

Michael Thornton

Yeah, because I can't tell you how many hours of record conversation we had in that room. I am admitting that I was like, because people were always taken out of context.

00:54:05:03 - 00:54:05:13

Lori Lopez

Right?

00:54:06:09 - 00:54:10:17

Michael Thornton

That was a lot of Now that's true.

00:54:10:17 - 00:54:21:16

Lori Lopez

All right, let's see. Well, I think I asked all my questions, but are there any other stories that you would like to tell about the Asian American Studies program?

00:54:21:16 - 00:54:55:13

Michael Thornton

But this is a more painful story that I don't know if you were around. It was probably four or five years ago when there was a discussion about ethnic studies and becoming one one kind of that. It was painful because for me personally, because a lot of several people in Asian American studies blasted me for the belief that Afro-American studies wanted to eat up Asian American studies.

00:54:55:13 - 00:55:20:03

Michael Thornton

And even Afro-American studies never thought that it said that. I remember the context. They were trying it. They were thinking about how do we make all the ethnic part of Afro am or and they didn't really offer any alternative. But and so I'm at one Asian meeting. I was talking about that not only names, but somebody said, why are you people doing stuff like that?

00:55:20:03 - 00:56:03:06

Michael Thornton

And it's like, Oh, is it my race class now is basically response to the time because I never, never would have figured I'd get that kind of question, you know? And so as an aside that, that and in experiencing that, I talked to other people on campus about their interactions with other ethnic studies entities. In fact, I actually use one of my classes to do that and they several of the students in interviewing people in Asian American studies, Chicano, actually, not Chicano.

00:56:03:06 - 00:56:06:03

Michael Thornton

So this is still Chicano study?

00:56:06:04 - 00:56:07:15

Lori Lopez

Yeah, Chicano, Latino Studies.

00:56:08:04 - 00:56:40:17

Michael Thornton

Chicano Latino Studies, Afro AM, American Indian studies that several of them kind of talked about not feeling that close to Asian American studies. And given that comment directed to me, I can begin to see how that might be the case. Right. And so then that that that that organizing

of a response to what the university wanted to do, that I set that up as my next course coalition building among people of color and I taught that course.

00:56:40:17 - 00:57:04:02

Michael Thornton

And so as a student of the course, when I'm interviewing people and so that was one of the disturbing parts to me of that. And because there's no need for that, we're not talking about thousands or hundreds, thousands of dollars. We're just talking about ideas, right? We're talking about how do we bridge the gap between these groups? How do we how do we empower ourselves by bringing us all together so we're more powerful force?

00:57:05:02 - 00:57:33:00

Michael Thornton

And then you have this kind of intersectional conflict that I think the people who made that comment to me, I give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe they weren't even aware that they had that bias in themselves, and that's a possibility. But that still didn't mean it didn't hurt and shocked me. And so you mostly probably didn't notice the pattern, but after that, I stopped interacting with Asian studies for very much.

00:57:33:20 - 00:57:56:13

Michael Thornton

I just stopped. I didn't I didn't want to tear it up by having a, you know, open argument about it because those kinds of things, it's not someone's going to own up to it. You're not going to go anywhere with it anyway. So what would be the point of the purpose of doing that? And I'm not one who good is sitting in a room, but with people I know feel that way.

00:57:56:18 - 00:58:11:01

Michael Thornton

And that's how I talk about it. And so I started withdrawing and there was a reciprocal the what I stopped asking to Trump to meetings and sort to. That's my final say in that.

00:58:11:14 - 00:58:14:06

Lori Lopez

Well, that's awful. I'm so sorry.

00:58:14:19 - 00:58:15:22

Michael Thornton

Thanks.

00:58:15:22 - 00:58:25:14

Lori Lopez

I mean, I definitely noticed that I did not see you very many program advisory committee meetings, but I assumed it was you were just busy with other stuff. I didn't realize that. So you felt.

00:58:25:14 - 00:58:39:03

Michael Thornton

Like I love Asia now and I don't. I felt sometimes I felt like a jilted lover. Yeah, I didn't. I didn't know emotionally. I didn't know how to handle that, like, meetings because I'd be I'd have an attitude of not.

00:58:39:03 - 00:59:00:16

Lori Lopez

Yeah, thank you for sharing that story. That was a very painful time. I was I was in a lot of those meetings, but I you know, I was like an assistant professor. Not that I didn't have any very much of a role with Asian, and I was just participating. But now we have, you know, we were moving into the new Levy building in.

00:59:00:19 - 00:59:01:08

Michael Thornton

No, no.

00:59:01:08 - 00:59:05:01

Lori Lopez

But yeah, so the they're building new humanities building.

00:59:05:10 - 00:59:06:02

Michael Thornton

Where that and.

00:59:06:09 - 00:59:14:19

Lori Lopez

It's going to be, they're like down like a little dorm, it's like across the street from Granger. It's going to be on the other side of.

00:59:15:04 - 00:59:15:11

Michael Thornton

Oxford.

00:59:16:02 - 00:59:35:17

Lori Lopez

University or Johnson. Wow. And so there's going to be a new building that's like the new humanities building. Eventually they'll tear down the humanities building, but all of the ethnic studies units are going to be in it, and our floor is going to have Asian and Chicano Latino Studies and Afro AM together. Oh yeah. So that'll be really great.

00:59:35:23 - 00:59:48:24

Lori Lopez

American Indian. So it's actually on a different floor. They prioritized like a different floor, but but the three of our units will be together and we all fought for that. We all came into the meetings and were like, being close to each other is really important to us.

00:59:49:17 - 00:59:55:11

Michael Thornton

You know, early on we fought against that. I want to be ghettoized.

00:59:55:19 - 01:00:08:12

Lori Lopez

Yeah, Yeah. Well, now we're we, we are trying to, like, go across the I think originally they put us in different floors in the building because I think they thought that they were like, we want ethnic studies on every floor. But we were like, no, we actually want to be to each other.

01:00:09:14 - 01:00:10:15

Michael Thornton

Come full circle.

01:00:10:21 - 01:00:28:11

Lori Lopez

Exactly. I mean, there's pros and cons to both positions, but I hope that means that, you know, when you really when you are physically close to each other, you do work together. So I'm really excited that especially the Afro AM gets to be brought in with other ethnic studies units instead of being just in Helen C. White over by themselves.

01:00:28:23 - 01:00:29:22

Michael Thornton

I'm envious.

01:00:30:03 - 01:00:53:19

Lori Lopez

Yeah, well, me too. Because I won't be director by the time the building is built. But I hope I can go visit my friends Asian am and see all the I hope that that gives them a chance to make lots of connections with the other programs. And then, you know, the next generation of scholars I think there's a lot of hope that they'll see connections across the programs and continue to grow them.

01:00:54:06 - 01:00:57:15

Michael Thornton

That's exciting. Yeah. So when's the supposed to happen?

01:00:57:15 - 01:01:00:06

Lori Lopez

I think we're they're supposed to move in in 2025.

01:01:00:12 - 01:01:00:24

Michael Thornton

Wow.

01:01:02:08 - 01:01:11:18

Lori Lopez

So it's like not close enough that I'll be in it, but pretty close still in terms of buildings like campus buildings go up in like decades.

01:01:11:18 - 01:01:15:21

Michael Thornton

So, yeah, moving slower.

01:01:16:00 - 01:01:21:16

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And well, is there anything else that we should talk about?

01:01:23:01 - 01:01:31:02

Michael Thornton

No, I think I'm all talked out. I'm. I'm Asian in that way. I think I feel egotistical here. But what about me, though?

01:01:31:17 - 01:01:37:05

Lori Lopez

Well, I really enjoyed it. This has been so great to hear your stories. Thank you so much for talking with me.

01:01:37:24 - 01:01:38:22

Michael Thornton

Thank you for asking.

01:01:39:03 - 01:01:41:21

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Okay, so I get here.