

Oral History
Peggy Choy
Interviewed by Lori Lopez
7/12/2022

00:00:00:01 - 00:00:06:25

Lori Lopez
Okay. So let's get started. Can you introduce yourself in your role here on campus?

00:00:07:29 - 00:00:15:02

Peggy Choy
I'm Peggy Choy and I'm currently associate professor of dance and Asian American studies. Mm
hmm.

00:00:15:18 - 00:00:19:04

Lori Lopez
And how do you identify your background?

00:00:19:26 - 00:00:24:06

Peggy Choy
I identify as a Korean American, an Asian American woman.

00:00:24:28 - 00:00:29:13

Lori Lopez
Okay. So let's go from the beginning. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

00:00:30:10 - 00:00:55:26

Peggy Choy
I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in Lying-In hospital on the south side of Chicago. My father was doing a pediatric residency at Barbara Robert at Bob Roberts Hospital. And right after that, when I was four months old, the family, which is my mom and dad and my older sister, two years older than I went back to Honolulu.

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Peggy Choy
And that's where I grew up. So I grew up in the kind of key area of Honolulu. And then we moved to Mono Valley, also in Honolulu. But I do want to say that my upbringing was very foundational to my perspective currently. I grew up in a multiethnic neighborhood. My neighbors were a mixed race Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan, Haole or Caucasian.

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Peggy Choy
My parents became radicalized by the Vietnam War, and they were draft counselors. And then my family that had been Korean Methodist changed to Buddhism and that switched to a more

radicalized perspective on Hawaii. Its colonization, illegal colonization to this day really affected my whole perspective. That probably that influenced a lot of my current situation, current thinking. So that community, that community, progressive radicalization and activism in Hawaii was very foundational to me.

00:02:11:23 - 00:02:14:17

Lori Lopez

So what did you study in college? In graduate school?

00:02:15:20 - 00:02:44:20

Peggy Choy

Okay. So at Lake Forest College in Illinois, because I felt I wanted to go back to my birthplace, I studied anthropology and then my mentor there was Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who is the creator of the notion of flow psychologist. And he was also very influential for me as well. But then I left Lake Forest to go to college, which is where I graduated in Portland, Oregon.

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Peggy Choy

And there I studied. I also studied anthropology. So I grad graduated with a B.A. in anthropology.

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Lori Lopez

All right.

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Peggy Choy

I do want to add that at Reed, that was where I first was introduced to modern dance and the Graham technique. So my teacher, Judy Massey, really changed my life. And that's when I began to seriously look at dance as okay. So the Graham technique was very, very interesting to me because she had Japanese-American or Japanese dancers, she had a multi ethnic company.

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Peggy Choy

And I think that that somehow, even though I didn't acknowledge it consciously at the time, was very impactful for me. And it also started me on in a direction of looking at modern dance as a an instrument of of life perspectives.

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Lori Lopez

So had you been a dancer at all before college?

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Peggy Choy

From age seven, I took ballet classes at the YWCA downtown in Honolulu. And before I left for college, I'd taken flamenco dance, a taste of Hawaiian dance. Everybody studies a little. And as we were before you go off to college. So yeah, that was my experience. But nothing like modern dance, which was very different for me.

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Lori Lopez

And is there a way you can talk about like where Modern Dance was at that time?

00:04:19:00 - 00:04:51:25

Peggy Choy

Okay, so modern modern dance is coming out of modern dance is coming out from under the shadow of classical dance, ballet dance, European, West European and Westernized classical notions of what dance should be very codified. And at the time, Martha Graham was at her peak on it, and other very important choreographers like later followed Jose Limon Cunningham, who was in her company.

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Peggy Choy

So Modern Dance is very dominant in dance culture all over the country, all over the world. And so I was very excited by it. There were fabulous dancers, but there is more than Martha Graham going on. There is a lot of diversity in the styles of dance, genres of dance. Uh, the living theater came to Reed, which is a very wild form of theater and physical theater, very anti-establishment.

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Peggy Choy

And so I think that modern dance is one strand, but it was very interesting to me. But I was also interested in a lot of other things that were going on. And in the seventies as well. When I went back to Hawaii to live for a short spell, there was a there was really a cultural, political revolution of young people seeking their roots.

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Peggy Choy

And this extended to all over the world. So young people were searching for who they were under the colonial shadow. So in Hawaii, we this is part of the process of decline, decolonizing our minds and so I became very interested in non-Western styles. So when I went home, um, I studied tai chi, kung fu, Javanese dance, Korean dance as a way to search for a diverse identity.

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Peggy Choy

Really, because I wasn't just taking Korean dance, I also took modern dance at the University of Hawaii, even though I was not enrolled as a university student, I could take special classes, but the Javanese dance and Korean dance were most resonant with me. And then I felt I had to get

out of the country. You know, this is the United States became very impressive for many young people, including myself.

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Peggy Choy

So I wanted to go abroad to study and I chose to go to Indonesia. And that was very also extremely formative for me because I studied all in all, five and a half years there, very in-depth, every day, all night, and learned the essential Javanese form of dance in the town of Jakarta. And at that same time, I was meeting journalists, writers, poets, painters who were also anti Suharto, and they were very radical artists, writers.

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Peggy Choy

I met some a journalist, for example, and a painter who had been imprisoned during that right before that period. And, you know, so so there was this resonance with me with activism as well in Indonesia. It was a very exciting time to be there in Indonesia.

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Lori Lopez

Wow. Can you put years on this? Like when were you when did you start college and when did you graduate from read? And then where did you these other parts of the story?

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Peggy Choy

I graduated from University High in 1966 and right after that, something like last year and right after that, some of my classmates went off to fight in the Vietnam War. So that was devastating for some because some came that most came back that I knew, but very devastated by the Vietnam War and what they had to do there as Asian soldiers from the U.S..

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Peggy Choy

And so I graduated in 66, went on to Lake Forest, but transferred to read and spent my last two years there from 68 to 1970. So I graduated in 1970, which is a long time ago. And after that, yeah, then I came back to Hawaii and plunged into the different dance and martial arts forms that I talk to you about.

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Lori Lopez

Okay, great.

00:08:54:21 - 00:08:57:21

Peggy Choy

Yeah, this is a long time ago, Lori, can you imagine?

00:08:57:21 - 00:09:04:01

Lori Lopez

I love hearing these stories. Okay. So then what eventually brought you to Madison?

00:09:05:04 - 00:09:33:05

Peggy Choy

My former partner, Andy Sutton, and I were in graduate school at the University of Michigan, at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. And he was doing his Ph.D. in ethnomusicology with Judy Becker. And I was doing an M.A. in Southeast Asian Studies. This is after I returned from Java, the first three and a half, three years of intensive study.

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Peggy Choy

So I was doing my thesis on a Javanese form of a golek, which is a Javanese form of dance, at the university there. But then he was hired as a new professor at UW Madison in the School of Music and joined that faculty specializing in Ethnomusicology. And who he became also the instructor of the gamelan. So the gamelan ensemble had been here for a number of years prior, brought here by Lois Anderson, the faculty at the school of Music then and in a large bronze ensemble ensemble called Atomic.

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Peggy Choy

You know, usually players are from about 20 to 24 people. So we put on every year, every spring we had large a large concert for the students and he had a full class of students who were interested in learning gamelan. So this is in the eighties and I would teach informally the students how to do the Javanese dance.

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Peggy Choy

Because I had studied everything from up to the point where I could create a dance drama with all the characters. So I was teaching and sometimes we would have these concerts where I'd have up to 25 to 30 dancers, which sometimes included, interestingly, the community, Indonesians from who are students or partners of students and sometimes children from the community as well as their parents.

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Peggy Choy

So it was not just solely for students because in the gallery we had some members from the community who just kept coming back and wanting to learn my line. So, yeah, it was an interesting time. Um, and uh, let's see. Yeah. So at that time when I transferred here, I was in the middle of my, uh, urban planning major because I had started an urban planning degree at the University of Michigan.

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Peggy Choy

Uh, with a third world or, you know, international focus. So when I came here, I did end up graduating from the urban and Regional Planning Department here and with a, uh, international focus as well. So I got an M.S. here and then, you know, I began slowly, I believe. And then I was also an administrator at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

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Peggy Choy

And eventually I began to teach a Javanese dance class for credit. Some students would get credit. This is at the very beginning. And, you know, that lasted for quite a while.

00:12:39:04 - 00:12:41:23

Lori Lopez

Okay. So what year did you first move to Madison?

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Peggy Choy

So we drove from Ann Arbor to Madison in 1981 in the middle of a snow storm, 80 degrees below zero wind chill and I started working very soon after at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies as a program coordinator. Um, and then after that, I did, I did get my M.S. in urban planning. So I got my M.S. in 1983, and I didn't get another degree, which is an MFA in dance and choreography until 2006 when I went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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Lori Lopez

Oh, did you live in Milwaukee?

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Peggy Choy

They had a very practical program where I commuted two summers, I think it was two summers and did coursework. Uh, a distance coursework. And so it was very, very fitting for me at the time because I was raising a family as well as working full time here. So it fit my career schedule. And yeah, I did really enjoy the program.

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Lori Lopez

Okay, so you came here and you started doing the program administration work, right? Coordination work, but you were still teaching dance the whole time.

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Peggy Choy

Okay. So I was being I was program coordinator at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, but I was just teaching maybe one class in Javanese dance. And later it was for credit, not very many

credits. I can't remember it was one or two credits. So that was, you know, just part of the 100% jobs. And my program coordinator job was going to be 75% and 25 was for teaching.

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Peggy Choy

Yeah.

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Lori Lopez

Okay, got it. And then you slowly built that up over time.

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Peggy Choy

No, no. It really remain that way for quite a while. And I think that the changes occurred because of the Asian American activities of activism.

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Lori Lopez

Oh, well, let's get into that. I So what was your involvement with the Asian American community in Madison in those early days?

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Peggy Choy

So after I got here in 1981, I would say there was really no consciousness, no Asian American consciousness at all. As far as my experience goes. And I, being from Hawaii, I kept searching for something that resonated with me and I wasn't quite finding it. Jason Chung was a he had just graduated from University of Wisconsin, Madison, and he invited I bumped into him and he invited me to come to an Asian student association or, you know, Asian student organization meeting.

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Peggy Choy

And I said, well, what do you do there? And he said, Well, very social. It's you know, we may take an occasional trip to Chicago to eat Chinese food. And at that point, I was really looking for something else. I was really looking for a more political because of my background. You know, he's looking for more an activist interest among Asians.

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Peggy Choy

But as I said, it wasn't yet Asian American. So yeah. And so I kept looking but not finding anything and it grew. And so I created a, an organization and I called it Pacific Asian Women's Alliance because the acronym was power, which could be power or you know, maybe that has some resonance with the Native American culture, not really wanting to take over that culture.

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Peggy Choy

Of course, I bumped into Wendy Ho and we were both going to take an elevator upstairs and Helen C White Hall, and I said, Do you want to join an organization? It already has name because I found out she was from Hawaii. She was Chinese from Hawaii. And so there she was interested. And so we got together and from there, you know, it's it it came how I came together.

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Lori Lopez

What department did she work in?

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Peggy Choy

She was doing she was doing her Ph.D. in English at the time.

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Lori Lopez

Okay. So what kinds of activities did PAWA engage in?

00:17:13:04 - 00:17:48:23

Peggy Choy

So to speak, about PAWA history I really need to name the five women, including myself, that were I mean, not including myself, in addition to myself that were really the core of the first power or the early power years. So there's Wendy Ho. Donna Chen worked for the Wisconsin Women's Council. So these are she's a community person. Jan Miyasaki, who had just graduated from Marquette with a law degree and she had already started working at worked.

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Peggy Choy

And then there was Mimi Kim in sociology, so she was a grad student in sociology and and there was also Joan Barney, who was, uh, Joan Barney, who we met through the Ada James Women's Center. And, um, so we had a diverse number of women, but I must say, Jan is also from Hawaii as well as myself.

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Peggy Choy

So the majority of Asian women from Hawaii, which is kind of interesting and um, that's, so when we came together, the first event, the very first event we did was we had a little, we held a little demonstration in front of the engineering building, maybe it was mechanical engineering, but we had heard news that there was a small nuclear reactor on campus around that area.

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Peggy Choy

So we held a demonstration. And I'll never forget Mimi Kim's poster was Eat Cheese and Die. So I know, right from the beginning we wanted to have an activist. Um, approach. And our second event was being part of the Take Back the Night demonstrations. There were many kinds of women organizations, many kinds of community women, uh, queer women, gay women.

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Peggy Choy

And we were part of that. And we're very proud to be part of that. Women, um, that event for two years. And Wendy Ho was our spokesperson, and through Mimi's contacts in sociology, she was friends with women of color who are also Ph.D. graduate students. Their status in India, from Indonesia. Um, there were, there was another woman. Anyway, these were women of color, but they were very politically radical.

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Peggy Choy

And also through Joan Barney and other women we would meet, oh, we, it came together for us. They were supportive of PAWA. And I need to say that it was, you know, BIPOC women coming together. It wasn't just Asian women finding ourselves and being happy. So we were supported by this larger community. One of our it was perhaps our not our second, but maybe our third event.

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Peggy Choy

It was very early on, uh, I organized a reorganized a small panel and we met at the Metropolitan Madison Metropolitan Education Building. I mean, anyway, it's on Dayton Street and curiously, when I look back, we have it was about the Pulao independence movement and being from Pacific, you know, Hawaii, the Pacific and Asia Women's Alliance, I thought that, you know, we could appropriately bring that let's bring some publicity to that here.

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Peggy Choy

And so we found a a guy from Bilal came and also invited John Bodin, who was he's Chippewa. He was a leader in the native nations, uh, here in Madison. But the reason why I knew John Bodin was that he was a vet from the Vietnam War. And I used to have every I used to have to coordinate lectures every Friday at the Center for South Asian Studies, which was actually very pivotal for me.

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Peggy Choy

So I had him come and speak about being a Native Nations vet in Vietnam and a black vet. So that's how I wanted to bring my, you know, activist consciousness to the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. And sometimes I was held back, let's put it that way. But through the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, I also met very interesting political people.

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Peggy Choy

So there was Chibu Lagman, who was a graduate student who was at the land tenure center from the Philippines, and he was in touch with other radicals who were anti Marcos. And so I met him through the center. Um, he was already he had, he had created the Third World View Program at Ward Simmons of working at Ward.

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Peggy Choy

And then he, he founded that program that still continues today under a different name. But I also met other activists who were here getting away from whatever dangers they face in the Philippines. There's, uh, Tenney Rivera. So I also met him through the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. And so consciousness wise, I think that was very it was very interesting for me because here I was in Madison and yet making more international people of color connections, those in power, we were very energetic and we started writing grants and we were successful.

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Peggy Choy

We put on a big conference that drew people from all over campus. It really created a splash and it was called Talking Story Images of Asian American Women in Literature and Film, I think. And that was in 1987. And just a small group of us did this, you know, and through that that through that major conference, we invited very important Asian-American women at the time.

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Peggy Choy

That's Maxine Hong Kingston, Nellie Wong, Christine Choi, who was an important film maker. She she produced and directed Who Killed Vincent Chin. Lonnie Ding and Elaine Kim, who was the first Asian American woman professor at Berkeley. So they all came and we were shocked that they agreed to come. But the lesson was, when they came here, we understood that they were supporting us as Asian American women, that they were here for us.

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Peggy Choy

And so it was not about fame and ego. It was really like they wanted to support our work and, you know, that was really life changing by changing and through that event, because it was hugely public, well attended, we filled the union, you know, what does that mean, hall? The Great Hall. We filled the Great Hall. We met people like Jim Moye, who is a professor in theater and drama.

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Peggy Choy

And we also met, I think, maybe Victor Jew at that time, I'm not quite sure. But, you know, these men were coming to our events and so I'm not really sure. But anyway, so we became

known in the community on campus and off as this women's Asian women's group with an Asian American consciousness. So that had already started and um, yeah, and then we put on to more conferences.

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Peggy Choy

And so Talking Story was in 1987, there was another conference shortly after, I think it was also in 1987. We it was a conference about racism. And then we put on another one in 1989, I think it was called Strangers from a Different Shore. And I believe that we did invite Ron Takaki here and he was talking about the core curriculum.

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Peggy Choy

So already we were interested in what can be done here in terms of Asian American studies. You know, we started that thought even though we didn't we weren't saying it at the time. Ron talk again. Ron Takaki came supportive of us. You know, that was the the attitude. We were just very inspired by the humility and the openness of all these people.

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Peggy Choy

And yeah, I had just, you know, had young kids. He brought me a little teddy bear with a lei around it from Hawaii is very cute because he's also from Hawaii. So with those events we were, you know, writing grants, getting them and across campus, I believe that we were making one for ourselves. We were always seen. We were always we saw ourselves as a community organization.

00:26:37:22 - 00:26:43:11

Peggy Choy

It wasn't just students and you know, like I was in the academic staff, but we were a community group.

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Lori Lopez

Yeah, that's amazing. Okay, so you've got power up and running. Yeah. And then how did that become Asian American studies?

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Peggy Choy

So we all know that the Fiji incident happened in 1987 and PAWA was busy. We were doing our work, you know, we were not just sitting still when that happened. There was a huge response from us, from the from BSU, Black Student Union Union put her in Kenya, Chicano Chicana student organization. And we knew that we had to do something.

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Peggy Choy

We couldn't be passive. And we were very angry, as everyone else was, because we saw the effigy. It was like, you know, 12 feet tall, a black, you know, a stereotype of black native with big lips and then, you know, a bone through its nose. And we were outraged. And at that point, it was the right time in a way, for solidarity and collectivity to occur, because it cannot occur all the time.

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Peggy Choy

But we supported BSU. Everybody came to the support of the issue because they were the first vocal people. There were many people involved. They were very articulate, very there were a number of leaders in BSU. Charles Holley just became the spokesperson because he was almost the one that the administration called on the most. So he became prominent. But through that experience, the Fiji incident demonstrations, you know, and demanding more, you know, what are you going to do about this?

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Peggy Choy

We created a network of, uh, people of color on campus, and I would yeah, we created this network of activism on campus, but it is always, it was always supported by community people, and you can't really separate it, you know, when things like that happen. So there's always off campus support. For example, there is a, um, there is a Latino student on campus who became very involved with minority coalition and his brother.

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Peggy Choy

I'll have to find the name I can't quite remember, [Marcos Castaneda] had refused to become a member of any organization on campus. And I don't know if he was a student at the time. He may not have been, but he didn't want that status because it was in the university. It was legitimized. I mean, it was institutional. So there were these people that were radical but supported out from outside, and then there were people we knew.

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Peggy Choy

We began to know people at work through Jan. There are some old women that would help us get the word out on WORT. So WORT community radio was also crucial. There was Chip Mitchell who later, you know, a white guy at WORT. Um, so these are people that supported everything that was happening on campus. There was at home who was also in the community but came to demonstrations on campus.

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Peggy Choy

And so that kind of fluidity is really important to knowledge because it was not a campus, only a campus driven thing. The students were leading it. However. And you know, so there was union

where did it? Kenya. There were several leaders there that we began to get to, to meet with. This is all taking hours of time. And Eduardo Bonilla. I'm sorry, Eduardo.

00:30:44:00 - 00:31:07:15

Peggy Choy

Eduardo Bonilla was one of the leaders and he later he's become a very prominent professor. So he was active and we would talk to him. And then there was one point after after the incident, you know, things were happening very quickly. And so we set up immediately the minority coalition, which is a coalition of all these student organizations at the time.

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Peggy Choy

They're fairly progressive, you know, all relatively speaking. And at that moment, we were really starting to push for or trying to organize for Asian American studies. And we said to Munoz, Do you want to come with us, be in tandem with us. We want to go forward with you to get Puerto Rican studies here, and we can do it together because that's the way we've worked.

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Peggy Choy

But they didn't want it, they said, for whatever reason. So we just went ahead alone. And that's why we were alone. So that's kind of important. And I also want to just keep underscoring the leadership of the women. So and by that time, you know, when when minority coalition was going in 1987, we were already in touch and networking with Lon Kurashige, Peter Chen, Victor Jew, Jim Moye would come, but he was, you know, professor and busy and I was there and then I noticed that, you know, we noticed that they would always come to PAWA events.

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Peggy Choy

And then one of them and I kept them who was asked, can we join PAWA? And so I said, Well, no, you can't. This is a women's organization, but why don't you guys set up another organization and call it Asian Coalition and support us? So they did. And so Asian Coalition came into being. And I think Lon Kurashige eventually became.

00:32:34:02 - 00:32:34:29

Lori Lopez

More of a leader.

00:32:35:27 - 00:33:11:15

Peggy Choy

Perhaps, but there are, you know, in that way it helped because to push the Asian American Studies proposal through somehow they become more known as the engine behind it. But it was always PAWA. I have to clarify that, because I don't want that to get lost. All right. We we

really wrote the proposal. We had terrific people help us, Jim Moye helped edit, Pat Takemoto, who is working with WHA TV at the time, helped us edit.

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Peggy Choy

And and I think at that time we met Lillian Tong. So that was in 1988 when we submitted the proposal. It was a good time because all this has happened with the Fiji Incident and the minority coalition was really strong and and, you know, demanding things. Because it has never come to us, no changes come when we just asked for it nicely.

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Peggy Choy

So we submitted the proposal in 1988. And I think in that same year, I think very shortly after the Fiji incident, there was talk across campus among the administrators and then they split us all up into working groups to think about how we're going to make a plan for the campus. So some people didn't want to have any part of this because I do say, you know, we knew that we were being complicit, were coming into the institution, helping them like they you know, we always have to do the work.

00:34:24:10 - 00:34:49:19

Peggy Choy

So there were subcommittees set up and so Victor was extremely active and dedicated along with Jan Miyasaki. I think they were in the Statistics Subcommittee. I can't remember the name, but you'll have to ask them. But I joined the Ethnic Studies Requirement Subcommittee and I believe Wendy Ho was there as well. Chibu Lagman. I said, You got to come with me.

00:34:50:00 - 00:35:17:28

Peggy Choy

I need your support. So he came to the first meeting, Gerta Lerner, a senior professor in history at the time came and she was a member of this committee. So we would have our struggles even in the committee, and there was some representation from the other student arts. But these are rather small committees. And so that was set into motion, you know, the administration utilizing our brainpower, our energy, because we had to do research.

00:35:17:28 - 00:35:57:04

Peggy Choy

George, Jan and Victor can tell you, find out data from other universities, you know, and our subcommittee came up with the conclusion that we needed we wanted more, actually, but we came up, we concluded that we would ask for six credits of ethnic studies requirement credits to graduate, and already that was low for us. So when the Madison plan was rolled out through L.A., I think because by then Donna Shalala as chancellor, they published the Nelson Plan, the chancellor's office published it.

00:35:57:04 - 00:36:29:06

Peggy Choy

But really the engine was more letters and scientists, I would say, and Phil Certain was the dean there. So he took a lot of fire from my area coalition student activism from us debating him. But I must say, he being a chemistry professor, he was really open, thoughtful, responsive. I would call him up by phone and talk to him, you know, and he would just, oh, he and Charles Holly probably developed a friendship.

00:36:30:09 - 00:36:50:14

Peggy Choy

So he was a very good dean at the time and he weathered it. And then I think he was instrumental in helping the Madison file along. But they were public debates. They had open sessions where we would fire questions. We were dissatisfied. We thought the Nelson plan was a failure. We tried to explain why we thought it was a failure.

00:36:50:28 - 00:37:22:28

Peggy Choy

For example, the ethnic studies requirement came down to three credits we were in. And how can you even begin to educate students if in their senior year they take a one course, one course in ethnic studies? So it was just very disappointing that we had some debates about faculty hiring. I think they promised to few you know, we were just saying this, how can we make these changes with so few hires every year, etc.?

00:37:23:14 - 00:37:50:24

Peggy Choy

So that was just from our standpoint. So it didn't go far enough, fast enough and yeah, so so that was what happened. We had submitted the proposal for Asian American Studies in 1988 and then we hired Amy Ling, the program hired emailing in 1991, 1991. She was the first director.

00:37:51:22 - 00:37:57:04

Lori Lopez

How did you feel to have accomplished that, getting Amy Ling as director of her own program?

00:37:57:18 - 00:38:28:26

Peggy Choy

So we interviewed Amy Ling. You know, the community was part of that interview process and everyone was thrilled. We were very thrilled to have any ling as our first director. Historic and when, you know, when you asked me, how do I how did I feel? It was just always a collective victory. It was never about anyone feeling this is just for my ego or this is just for my career.

00:38:28:26 - 00:39:13:07

Peggy Choy

It's just never that way. So it was interesting when you ask that question because I can't really separate myself from, you know, what did the others think how, you know, we always talk to

each other. We always conferred, and that's how we felt. It was really a victory for the community as well as the university students. Yeah. And I must say, Amy was charming, intelligent, knowledgeable with, not giving an impression of being that, you know, I she was knowledgeable, but very humble and very approachable.

00:39:13:07 - 00:39:39:11

Peggy Choy

So she was a great director in that we would go to her house, we would have dinner, we met her family and and she was very warm. So it was a great beginning. I think she was very savvy, but she always just appeared very human, you know? Yeah. It wasn't like she presented herself as a strategic, objective person, you know, she was always very welcoming and warm.

00:39:39:17 - 00:40:05:13

Peggy Choy

Yeah. And in 1992, I had my first concert here through grants from the city Spinning Truths about, you know, Asian Americans, the Asian American experience. And she came I invited her. I had Jenny Lim here as a collaborator who read her poetry. And Amy was just thrilled. I mean, she was like so supportive, so happy. I think she even wrote about it.

00:40:05:13 - 00:40:36:16

Peggy Choy

So and she invited me to be interviewed, her Yellow Light book. So I just felt very supported by her. So after Amy was hired in 1991, by 1992, we wanted to teach our first course in Asian American Studies, and so I applied for it. I think Lon Kurashige did too. And so I got the job. I got the job to teach the first introduction to Asian American Studies course and it was kind of interesting because I think there were students there.

00:40:36:17 - 00:40:45:14

Peggy Choy

It wasn't a huge class, but Munoz, who is an artist, Japanese-American artist, came to my class also.

00:40:46:12 - 00:40:49:19

Lori Lopez

Yeah, that's awesome. Yeah. How big was it?

00:40:50:01 - 00:40:54:18

Peggy Choy

How big? I can't really remember. I mean, it's probably on record somewhere, you know what I mean? I probably have.

00:40:54:18 - 00:40:56:12

Lori Lopez

Yeah, but that's so cool.

00:40:56:17 - 00:41:06:12

Peggy Choy

Well, it wasn't that big, is what I'm saying. It was not big, but I can't remember. Maybe we had enough students. I don't know. I just can't remember.

00:41:06:19 - 00:41:09:25

Lori Lopez

So you that the very first Asian American studies I.

00:41:09:25 - 00:41:32:05

Peggy Choy

Did and I felt, you know, a lot of responsibility. My shoulders, you know, we just came in running, right? We we I didn't have a chance to do a survey of the curriculum taught in the nation, you know, from New York to California, which is already there. And so it was just on the fly. And I just pulled together.

00:41:32:05 - 00:41:59:20

Peggy Choy

I probably I'm not really sure. I probably drew I probably drew upon Ron Takaki book. So, you know, some of the curriculum. But I also kind of remember I did have some, you know, some radical perspectives as well. They may not have been Asian-American. I just can't quite recall. I think they were not always all Asian-American.

00:42:00:06 - 00:42:03:23

Lori Lopez

Yeah. So then if you keep teaching that class or did someone else take it over?

00:42:04:01 - 00:42:27:08

Peggy Choy

Um, I think I taught it. That's really it's really hard. I mean, it's probably on the books. If you look in your file, I may have taught it for two semesters. I can't remember. But by then I don't know. I can't even say if I taught it more because I know. All I know is that in 1999 I changed my curriculum.

00:42:27:08 - 00:42:35:12

Peggy Choy

So introduction continued and maybe it was being taught by someone else. I can't remember when Jan or Victor taught it to you.

00:42:35:13 - 00:42:36:28

Lori Lopez

Do you know? I don't know what is.

00:42:36:28 - 00:43:07:27

Peggy Choy

Oh, okay. So that is an important gap, you know, I just can't remember. But in 1999, I wanted to change my focus and that still I teaching. I did teach a course. Yeah. And it was called Topics in Asian American Culture, Asian American movement. So 1999 was the first time I taught Asian American movement. And it's kind of unbelievable that I've taught this so long for every semester.

00:43:07:27 - 00:43:39:18

Peggy Choy

But I have to say, you know, the curriculum has been refined. It's always gone through evolution. And, you know, that was quite a while ago. But I felt and that's it was more coming from my perspective. And I could put ethnic studies together, Asian American studies together with my artistic interest in dance and my artistic interest in dance had already been, um, you know, telling stories of Asian-American women or Asian women.

00:43:41:12 - 00:44:14:05

Peggy Choy

It had a very progressive, you know, it had a, it was not about entertainment. It was about information and history and perspective of the oppressed Asians that are oppressed. And I do want to say that when I began I do want to say when all the activism around the minority coalition was going on and the Madison Plan maybe had already been published.

00:44:14:23 - 00:44:38:18

Peggy Choy

Lon Kurashige one day asked me a question. He said, Peggy, have you ever thought of making an Asian American dance? And that hit me like, I mean, that was huge. I was so shocked to hear those words. I had never thought about it before. So when he asked me, it stayed with me, of course. And I thought about it and thought about it.

00:44:39:11 - 00:45:00:25

Peggy Choy

And what happened was that I created my first dance Picture Bride, and that was about the Korean American immigration experience, right, of women. So that was my first dance. And I have to thank Lon for saying that I may have come there myself, but it was interesting that he had stimulated that in the in my mind. Yeah. Yeah.

00:45:01:19 - 00:45:07:13

Lori Lopez

Um, were you still academic staff? What was your role at that point?

00:45:07:13 - 00:45:29:23

Peggy Choy

I was academic staff, always working full time academic staff. I you know, I can't I only left the Center for Southeast Asian Studies when I got my tenure track job full time. Right. I mean, my my assistant professorship, I believe. Yeah. That's when I left the center because I was going to have a new 100% appointment.

00:45:30:13 - 00:45:35:05

Lori Lopez

Okay. Yeah. And then that's when you started teaching more class. You would have to do a 2-2.

00:45:35:07 - 00:46:08:10

Peggy Choy

Yeah, you'd have to. I would. I talked two or three. I had to make, you know, the quota of 12 credits. So within that time I wasn't just teaching Asian American movement for you, I mean, for the Asian American studies program. But I was also teaching, oh, Tai Chi and Korean dance. I had another one about, uh, crossing borders. So it was kind of, you know, it was, yeah, different topics.

00:46:08:10 - 00:46:42:09

Peggy Choy

So I wasn't just teaching Asian American movement, but I did for a long time, consistently. Um, and until I, you know, until I created the Afro-Asian improv class, I would say that teaching those. Yeah, got it. Well, I think, Amy, Amy's death was devastating for all of us. Um, we did see her, uh, illness, you know, develop the cancer develop.

00:46:42:09 - 00:47:04:15

Peggy Choy

And so we, you know, it was a process, right? And we tried to support her, I guess. But you really, her husband, Tony, um, was the caretaker was her partner and that was difficult to watch because of the children. Um, yeah. And then, you know, when she died, it was very, very sad.

00:47:05:01 - 00:47:26:04

Lori Lopez

Yeah. Um, so now we have a very big program. We have like a lot of, uh, for a lot of 50/50 faculty and our students are growing and growing. How someone who's been here since the very beginning, how would you describe some of the changes and what happened to them?

00:47:26:05 - 00:48:00:08

Peggy Choy

You know, the changes are amazing. The changes, the growth is really unusually, um, strong. You know, I mean, I think we're kind of a success story that could serve as inspiration for, you know, other things nationwide and, um, after, you know, more hires came in and, um, I mean, you know, people were hired as well as little more recently, right?

00:48:00:12 - 00:48:39:24

Peggy Choy

Amazing new additions in different fields. So it's just grown in size. But also the areas of, you know, inquiry, intellectual inquiry is really amazing because everyone does amazing things and um, making new, you know, inroads to your intellectual discoveries, right? So, I mean, not intellectual discoveries, but just, you know, they're different lines. Asian-American faculty have different lines of research and I think, you know, groundbreaking in many ways.

00:48:40:15 - 00:49:06:02

Peggy Choy

So I just think it's fantastic. And of course, you know, there is always that sense of, you know, we were here from the beginning in the trenches and maybe there was a point where I was saying, you know, I hope that our work in the trenches will not be forgotten. You know, so there is that that sense of what is going to happen.

00:49:06:02 - 00:49:54:21

Peggy Choy

Right. But I think it's all been healthy. And I think we're we're really filling a need for students because the classes wouldn't be so well attended, you know, and I but I think that that's also because the faculty is so excellent teacher. They're really great teachers. Um, so the growth and the potential for more is incredibly present and, and yet I think, okay, so looking at the whole trend of things, if I can generalize, you know, from looking back, the connection with community is a complex one and it's very difficult to continue because every professor, the way the institution supports professors is to somewhat silo them.

00:49:54:21 - 00:50:37:19

Peggy Choy

You go into your work completely, you know, and you're somewhat isolated, even though the what the great thing about Asian American Studies is that we're still a community that we pretty much get along. The faculty has a nice community feeling we support each other. But I think the it's always an ongoing process that has to be renewed and, rethought how to keep the connection with community because and the students that I think you know they're not necessarily the same thing so how to do that on a continue across in a in a in a meaningful way in a way that's relevant is always the challenge, you know.

00:50:37:19 - 00:51:03:10

Peggy Choy

So I think it's been a challenge all along. I don't think it's ever gotten away. Gone away. And yeah, there just, you know, it's it's up to myself involved with the Asian studies programs. Everybody has to sort of think about this and how. And another huge question for me is how the university be made more accountable to us.

00:51:03:10 - 00:51:30:05

Peggy Choy

Not only Asian research with the ethnic studies. Um, other ethnicities, programs and departments because it's to me our time to get, to get more. It really is important to get more right now. Meaning, you know, I mean, that sounds simple, but it's going to be I mean, it's, of course, a complex question. Right. How do you ask for things?

00:51:30:16 - 00:51:54:00

Peggy Choy

Because I know that we've been doing fantastic in the area of faculty hiring. I mean, that is we have astounding, you know, new faculty here, which I'm very excited about. But in the area of community relations students, I'm not so in touch with them except for the ones that I teach. So I'm not really sure that's a very complex issue.

00:51:54:00 - 00:52:07:01

Peggy Choy

And how does that connect with the Multicultural Student Center? But I know that we now have an OPD presence which is really good for the students. So I think that that's going well. That's another addition.

00:52:09:06 - 00:52:24:15

Peggy Choy

But, you know, in a way, it's it's we're strategizing about what our next steps are. You know, not just faculty hiring, but in terms of these complex needs, they'll have to have some kind.

00:52:25:12 - 00:52:30:08

Lori Lopez

Have you noticed changes in the students since the beginning?

00:52:34:05 - 00:53:09:05

Peggy Choy

Well, my classes began. The very early classes began quite small. And as experiments really and now, you know, Asian, our community fairly is full all the time. Um, the students have changed. I mean, they're, uh, you know, it's, it's almost rare when I get an Asian-American student. Um, so I have more international Asian. Um, and for Afro-Asian Improv, I have that's interesting because that's more a mix of ethnicities.

00:53:10:15 - 00:53:44:10

Peggy Choy

However, what has been consistent from the start is that there have always been one or two students along the way that seem transformed by the fact that this is an Asian American studies class or Afro Asian Improv class. You know that I, I've seen that transformation. So that's what keeps me going. It's not like it happens in unless it's just one on one and how much they feel they resonate with the curriculum and and me.

00:53:45:01 - 00:54:08:19

Peggy Choy

But that has made it worth it that's always made it worth it for me to teach or to continue to want to teach, really to do my best to make changes, to get to the students in a deeper way. And so I know that some of the students, like there was I'm not sure she majored in Asian American studies.

00:54:08:19 - 00:54:33:02

Peggy Choy

She may not have but Chanel go grow took my Asian American movement class. She's now a performance artist in New York City. Um, you know, and I still, I got a postcard from her recently. So so there are just I've kept with students over the long term. It was really, really wonderful that that happens. Yeah.

00:54:34:21 - 00:54:41:01

Lori Lopez

Okay. I think that's the end of my questions. Right. Was there anything else that you wanted to bring up? Oh, she.

00:54:52:15 - 00:55:34:21

Peggy Choy

No. I mean, anyways, thank you so much for this opportunity and I just wanted to acknowledge that we are I am you know, I am speaking about the Asian American Studies experience, my experience on Ho-Chunk plan that's been a Ho-Chunk partnership with the with Madison land since or Tejoop Wisconsin for at least three ice ages. So I just want to acknowledge that and I think the one thing I would, you know, I would want to say is that we are all, you know, complex human beings.

00:55:34:21 - 00:56:01:20

Peggy Choy

We have our jobs that there it's always a you know, our lives involve different things, different focus and I think that we are more than just one thing, you know, and that's what is really important. What is important from the beginning in the building of power, in the building of minority coalition through the Madison Plan, through Asian American Studies Program founding.

00:56:02:11 - 00:56:30:26

Peggy Choy

And so I really feel this sense of collective support that the the need for for native nations students to get educated here on campus. You know, they shouldn't have to pay a dime because the universities profited billions from Ho Chunk land and never given anything back. You know, these are things that we all have to suffer together, whether or not we're in Asian American studies.

00:56:30:26 - 00:56:43:26

Peggy Choy

But I think it begins we have a lot of perspective, a foundation of history, you know, that we can actually be very vocal about this. Yeah.

00:56:44:16 - 00:56:48:25

Lori Lopez

Yeah. That's a great way to end! Okay.

00:56:48:25 - 00:56:49:02

Peggy Choy

Okay.