

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Ronald Choy:
An Oral History

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2004

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Ronald Choy, 2015
Photo courtesy Margareta K. Mitchell

Ronald Choy was the first Assistant Director of the Center for the Teaching and Study of American Cultures, appointed in 1990 and was instrumental in the development of that program. He retired from UC Berkeley in 2004.

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May 24, 2004

Remarks by Christina Maslach for Ron Choy's Retirement

I'm delighted to say a few words upon the occasion of Ron Choy's retirement. Ron is retiring on June 30, 2004 after more than 20 years of service to Berkeley. Ron was one of those grad students—in this case, City and Regional Planning—who decided to come back to campus and dedicate the bulk of their careers toward furthering Berkeley's mission. Ron came back, and helped transform an Academic Senate regulation into part of the fabric of undergraduate education at Berkeley. In 1990 Ron was named the first Assistant Director of the Center for the Teaching and Study of American Cultures, and for the past fifteen years he has been the guiding force of the Center under Faculty Directors William Simmons, Mitch Breitwieser, Troy Duster, and myself.

The American Cultures requirement was at first controversial, and it is a testament to Ron's persistence, dedication, and commitment that the Center has not only thrived, but received national attention, served as a model for other programs, and received several campus and national honors. Much of the credit for the Center's success, longevity, and visibility on campus is due to Ron's hard work and commitment.

I'd like to highlight several of Ron's significant contributions to the campus. First of all, he has played a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting faculty in their efforts to design and teach American Cultures courses. Many faculty members have reported that Ron has been key to the successful development and ongoing improvement of these courses. Overall, he has provided a comprehensive support system that instructors have relied on whenever they encounter a problem related to American Cultures courses. I attribute to Ron much of the success the campus has had in encouraging faculty to teach these courses and continue to offer them year after year.

To support faculty in developing these classes, Ron has been instrumental in the success of the American Cultures summer seminar, which gives faculty opportunities to develop their skills in teaching American Cultures courses. This model has been so successful that it has been adapted for the Mellon Faculty Institute for Undergraduate Research, which debuted in summer 2003.

Ron has served as the institutional memory not only for the Center but for the American Cultures requirement itself. I also want to acknowledge his engagement with the new Division of Undergraduate Education. Ron is to be commended for his enthusiastic participation in the Division when it was formed in 2001.

As a dedicated citizen of the Berkeley campus, Ron has also contributed in other ways. He has played an active role in Asian Pacific American affairs on campus, contributing to the 2001 report, "Asian Pacific Americans at Berkeley: Visibility and Marginality." He has served as a literacy tutor to staff and as a Hearing Officer for Student Judicial Affairs.

Ron has gained the regard and respect of people on campus for his service to American Cultures and his dedication to the welfare of the campus. Utterly committed to helping faculty develop and teach courses for this requirement, he has been critical to the requirement's success. Berkeley's mission depends on dedicated staff like Ron who devote decades to the campus, and go above and beyond to nurture and sustain the core of the campus' academic mission.

We in the Division would like to give Ron several gifts to remember us by. This first is a photograph of Wheeler Hall by our very own Kim Steinbacher. The second is the gift of time, with an atomic clock.

The quality of Ron's many years of service to UC-Berkeley has been truly outstanding, and thus worthy of special recognition by the campus. I'm delighted to present to Ronald Choy the Chancellor's Distinguished Service Award.

Finally, my own personal gift to Ron recognizes his unique status as the institutional memory for the American Cultures requirement. The history of American Cultures is a critically important part of the history of the university – and so I am especially pleased to provide the funding for an oral history of Ron Choy. And when it has been completed, I look forward to celebrating its publication with all of you, here again in the Morrison Room of the Library.

Interview 1: October 22, 2004

[Audio File 1]

Rubens: What is your full name?

Choy: Ronald KwaiHing Choy

Rubens: Did you ever use KwaiHing?

Choy: No, never. Not even in Chinese school.

Rubens: Was it a custom to have a Chinese name?

Choy: Probably. I don't know. My guess is that my paternal grandfather selected the name. The first character, Kwai, marks my generation in the Choy Clan.

Rubens: Where were you born?

Choy: Hawaii. In Honolulu, in 1943.

Rubens: How had your parents gotten there?

Choy: They were born there. Both my parents were born there in 1912. And they were ninety-two this month; that's why I was in Hawaii last week.

Rubens: What did they do?

Choy: Right now they're retired, but my mother Carolyn was a schoolteacher, and my father Robert was a civil engineer. He worked for the—he was a civilian engineer for the US Signal Corps during the war. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor, and he has all these war stories about Pearl Harbor.

Rubens: Have you taped him?

Choy: No, but my sons have written this down for their school projects, and my mother has written down her life story in multiple volumes. There's a whole volume on this war stuff, from her point of view, which she remembers now from fifty years ago, or sixty years ago. So, he worked for them, and then he worked for the Hawaii Housing Authority. The feds, I guess—or the state, the city and county of Honolulu's arm of public housing.

He was the deputy director of that for a number of years, and then he worked for a private contractor for a little while, and then he worked for Henry Kaiser. He was Henry Kaiser's chief engineer, and Henry Kaiser started Hawaii Kai. He worked for Kaiser himself, personally.

- Rubens: This must have been after the war?
- Choy: I can ask him, and get exact dates. It was in the fifties. When there was nothing out there, it was bushes. I was just there last week. Now it's covered with houses. They have room to build 50 percent more houses, and they're already there. This place is crowded.
- Rubens: So he worked solely on the housing. This wasn't the hospital or ship yards—
- Choy: No, no, no. Kaiser was the developer for this area, and it was private, suburban housing. It's on the east side of Honolulu.
- Rubens: That's impressive. Did your father talk about Kaiser? He has become such a legendary figure in American life. And did you ever meet Kaiser yourself?
- Choy: I might have. I was just a kid then. My father referred to Kaiser as "the Old Man" but didn't talk about him much.
- Rubens: So you were born during the war.
- Choy: I was a war baby, right.
- Rubens: Why did he leave Kaiser?
- Choy: Probably for the security of a civil service job. After that, my father worked for the city and county, in the road division. He was head of the road division, which was—they repaired all the roads on the island of Oahu, except the state and federal highways.
- Rubens: Where was he educated, by the way?
- Choy: University of Hawaii. My mother has a college degree also. In fact, all my brothers and sisters do.
- Rubens: Is there a big extended family?
- Choy: My father's side had eight, and my mother had ten siblings; ten lived to adulthood. Something like that. Yeah! Right, thirteen, and ten lived to adulthood. She's the oldest. She's the oldest living one now. There was one older sister who died in an accident in the sixties. I've got a jillion cousins. When we got married, my wife had to memorize eighty names, and that was just uncles, aunts, and first cousins. So, my father basically finished his career working for the city, and at the very end of his career he was deputy chief engineer for the city. And he was temporarily chief engineer when the chief engineer left. I mean, he was way up there. He worked for [Neal] Blaisdell and [Frank] Fasi, who were both mayors, for a long time.

- Rubens: Did you ever trace your family, how long they had been in Hawaii?
- Choy: Oh, yes. Part of it. You should ask my cousin, because he knows all this stuff. My father's mother was born in Hawaii. Her parents were immigrants, and she was born about—late 1880s. So she was a Hawaiian citizen, and became a US citizen after the coup.
- Rubens: That was in 1893, when the monarchy was overthrown. I think the US annexed Hawaii a couple years later.
- Choy: In 1898. So she automatically became a US citizen then. And then my father's father immigrated in 1896, I think it is, because I've seen his little ID card with his picture on it.
- Rubens: What I was trying to get at is where they were both coming from. Mainland China?
- Choy: Oh yeah, my grandfather came from this area in the Pearl River delta. Everybody from Hawaii came from this one area. It was near Hong Kong, and all the labor contractors who were hiring labor were there; it was the local area. So that's why most of the people who emigrated in the 1800s were from this one area. That's why they're Cantonese, because it's near Canton. My grandfather was in sort of the later wave of that; he didn't come as a laborer, but he was a farmer. They got married in 1909 or something like that. I forget exactly. I have records. But when they got married, because my grandfather was ineligible to be naturalized as a U.S. citizen, because of the 1880s' "You got to be white only" Act—
- Rubens: Right, the Chinese Exclusion Act, in 1882.
- Choy: Because of the Exclusion Act, right, not the 1790 law that said you had to be a free white male. She lost her citizenship automatically.
- Rubens: By getting married to him.
- Choy: Yes, by marrying this guy who was not eligible to be naturalized she lost her citizenship. And then in an amnesty in the thirties she got it back.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Immigration and Naturalization Service
Honolulu District

MRS. LEE YUK KIEN CHOY (43);
Application to file Petition
for naturalization:

Honolulu, T. H.
January 5, 1938

REVIEW AND FINDINGS

This applicant is identified as the subject of our file 4380/4412 who was interviewed at this office by Inspector F. Arnold on July 30, 1937 and to whom was issued Laborer's Return Certificate, Form 432. She departed from this port on the SS "Empress of Canada on August 13, 1937 and returned ex SS "President Hoover" on November 9, 1937. She has presented certificate of residence No. 26803 issued to Lee Yuk Kien dated June 13, 1901 at Honolulu, T. H. (designation of sex therein appears as "male"; picture attached thereto is that of a female child). Applicant further presents Chinese Green Certificate of Identity No. 2349 issued to Lee Yuk Kien, age 15 at Honolulu on February 8, 1909. She has evidenced her marriage to Choy Ho Gnai at Honolulu, T. H. on October 6, 1910 by a church record of such marriage. Her husband is the subject of our file 4380/3318, Choy Hon Lai, showing him to be a native of China.

It appears that this applicant has lived continuously in Honolulu, T. H. except for the period of three months as noted above. Our records present a consistent claim of Hawaiian birth by Lee Yuk Kien Choy. On the basis of our files and documents presented herein it is found that Lee Yuk Kien Choy was born in Honolulu, T. H. on or about August 17, 1894, that she lost her original American citizenship by marriage to a Chinese national in 1910 and that she is now qualified to file a petition under the Act of March 3, 1931 as amended by the Act of July 2, 1932, both amendatory of Section 4, Act of September 22, 1922.

Ernest J. Hover

Ernest J. Hover
U. S. Naturalization Examiner

APPROVED:

W. G. Strench
W. G. Strench
District Director
Honolulu District

- Rubens: Was this something that was known to you as you grew up?
- Choy: No, I found this out relatively recently, when my cousin, who's the family historian, started going down to San Bruno and hauling out all the records. I went with him, ten years ago, and I found my grandmother's file. I haven't found my grandfather's file, but I found my grandmother's file, and there it is! It explains the whole thing, right there in some letter. Because when they visited China, they had to have an interview before they went, to establish their identity and their right to come back, otherwise they wouldn't be allowed back in.
- Rubens: And they went back to visit family, is that what that was about?
- Choy: So that's why this record stuff exists. On my mother's side, my grandfather—there's two stories to this; we don't know which is right. But according to the San Bruno records, the INS records there, he was born in Hawaii in 1880. He had four brothers. There were four brothers, and he was, I think, the younger one, or the middle one, but they were all supposedly—I don't think they were all born in Hawaii, but they all lived in Hawaii. So I have hundreds and hundreds of Chang cousins from these four brothers. We have family reunions every few years, and it's amazing. But we think that this isn't right, because

the written Chinese family genealogy, which I have a copy of, doesn't say anything about him being born in Hawaii. We think what happened was, in the early 1900s, there was a fire in Honolulu which burned everything, just like there was a fire in San Francisco that burned everything. And so everybody had to come forth and get re-identified. So there was a record, the transcript of this interview, where he came with two witnesses, some local guy and some white guy, and they said, "Oh yes, I knew he lived across the street from me when he was a little boy," blah blah blah, so [claps hands], "You were born here!" But who knows, right? [laughs]

So he was a US citizen either way, by default or by trickery. But anyway, my grandmother came from China. She was born in China, and she emigrated—she had bound feet and the whole routine. She was a city person. My mother's family were city people. My father's family were farmers, and my grandfather, my father's father, was a taro farmer in Hawaii. He had a huge farm in Manoa. Then they took the land over for a housing development, and he moved out into the country, and that's where I knew him. He had a place out there. But he was a farmer, and my father and his older brother were—got an education. They had to go into the city, into Honolulu, when they were little kids, like six and eight, and go to school.

Rubens: Boarding school?

Choy: Well, they lived with their uncle. Their mother's brother. My grandmother's brother, the Lees. They went to school, and they got a quality education. My father's older brother was a school teacher, and he ended up as a principal, a high school principal. My father was a civil engineer. But on my mother's side they were city people, and in fact the family genealogy, if you believe it—and I checked it with David Johnson here, and he said, "It's got to be—it's faked." But it goes back twenty—I think it's twenty-three or twenty-four generations, back to 1020-something, the Song dynasty. It claims the original ancestor was some guy who was governor of Guangdong, Guangzhou, which is the whole province. If—this guy was way up there in the hierarchy of officials. And I asked—

Rubens: And maintained a certain class—

Choy: Well, yes. So they were the gentry elite, originally, and they kind of over time slid down a bit. But not much. They were educated. My grandmother, for some reason, knew how to read, which was really unusual. They had servants and the whole business, and they lived in the city. If you look at this genealogy, the story is, someplace along the line their real genealogy gets patched on to this other one, so that they can claim illustrious ancestors. The problem is that the span of time is too great for the number of ancestors, and so it comes out to forty years a person, which is too much; it should have been

more like twenty. That's why David Johnston said immediately, "It's suspicious."

Rubens: David Johnson is a China scholar.

Choy: Yes. He's in UCB's Department of History. And I've taken a class from him, and I asked him about this. He said right off the bat, without even looking at it, "It's probably fake." Just because of that. He's probably right. In theory, I could go look all these guys up, because there are records.

Rubens: So your mother's family were upwardly mobile.

Choy: My mother's family—my grandfather ran a dry goods store in Chinatown. So they were fairly well off. Initially they lived above the store, and then they moved out, and they had a house and all. They moved a couple of times into relatively nice neighborhoods. My mother went to college—all her sisters went to college, and except for the oldest one, they're also teachers. Three of them were schoolteachers. There were five girls; one of them died, or disappeared, when she was in her twenties on some trip to China. It's not real clear what happened. Of the boys, my uncle who lived in Los Altos, just died this year. He is a PhD in physics from Harvard. He went to Berkeley; he was a student here for a while, a graduate student, and he was at Cal Tech for a while, and the University of Hawaii. He's really smart. Theoretical physicist.

Rubens: Where did he end up?

Choy: He worked for Lockheed; he was at SRI—he worked for all of those guys during the fifties and sixties. He has a daughter, so I have one cousin there. The oldest brother ran the store, a dry goods store, and played the stock market and stuff. Another brother was a schoolteacher, and they're still alive, and the baby brother went to Harvard as an undergraduate, and he ended up being a photographer. So he was a playboy.

Rubens: But patched on or not, this claim to illustrious ancestry, that had to have an effect on you.

Choy: Well, it was sort of automatic; education was a big thing. My grandfather forked out for all his kids to go to college, even the girls, which was pretty unusual. So in that sense he was—I don't know if he was liberal, or forward-looking, or that's just the way it was, but education was always a big thing in the family. All my cousins have degrees. Two physicians, dentists, Boalt, Radcliffe, Boalt, another cousin an engineer, another PhD from Berkeley in public health; we all got degrees up the wazoo. [laughs] So it was automatic that we would go as far as we could in school.

Rubens: By the way, where did your parents meet?

Choy: I don't know. I guess it was in college. No, it was high school. At that time, there were two public high schools in Honolulu. There was McKinley, and there was Roosevelt. T. R. Roosevelt. And Roosevelt was English standard, meaning you had to demonstrate some level of proficiency in the English language in order to get in there. Everybody else went to—my parents went to McKinley. So basically all the whites went to Roosevelt; everybody else went to McKinley. Everybody went to McKinley, and they all knew each other because it wasn't that big a school.

Rubens: Was Chinese their primary language?

Choy: Well, at home, yes. Both my grandmothers didn't speak English very well, hardly at all.

Rubens: Did they really lead a segregated life?

Choy: Oh, my mother initially, and her oldest sister, who was a couple years older—between one and two years older—she has this vivid memory of going to school the first time. And she has a similar story, her life story. Her mother packs her up, she and her sister, they dress her up in her usual clothes, they look like little Chinese kids.

Rubens: They didn't wear Western clothes?

Choy: Right. She only spoke Chinese at home; that's all she knew. One day her mother packs them up in a taxi, takes them to school, dumps them off and says, "I'll pick you up." And that was it. She was six or five or something like that. They learned English somehow. Public schools were all English, so you had to learn English. The other handicap my mother had was that she's left-handed, and in those days you had to be right-handed, so she does everything but cut with her right hand. She cuts with her left hand; everything else is right-handed. So they learned English through school because they certainly weren't going to learn it at home, and there was no TV. I guess my father learned English the same way, at school.

Rubens: So they were in the same high school. They both to college.

Choy: And they went to UH. They were a couple of years apart. When I was just home last week I saw a photo album; it had pictures from '34, or '36—because they were married in '38—and they're college pictures, they're there with all their friends. These people I know as parents of friends of mine.

01-00:20:08

Rubens: So you came from a relatively comfortable family.

- Choy: Right. We were professionals, and they weren't rich by any means. They had public jobs, public-sector jobs. You don't get rich on that, everybody knows that.
- Rubens: Kaiser didn't represent a kind of blip on—
- Choy: That was just—they didn't pay much. My mother still complains about that. He was very tight-fisted. But we were comfortable.
- Rubens: Was it a predominantly Chinese world in which you lived?
- Choy: Not really. We never thought of it consciously as a Chinese world. I went to University Elementary School, which was the guinea pig school for the teacher's college, for six years. It was inexpensive, or almost free, and it was a good school. It wasn't public school. There were two classes in each grade, so you were basically going through with the same kids, the whole time you were there, in the first six years. In the fifth grade they mixed the two classes up, which was traumatic for everybody. But you had a supervisor who was a professor in TC, and you had three or four student teachers, which switched every term, so you had a new set of student teachers each term. So you had basically four or five teachers and twenty-five kids.
- Rubens: So integrated.
- Choy: Oh, yeah. But we kids never thought about life that way. This whole ethnicity thing didn't exist for me even in high school. In the seventh grade I went to a public school, Kaimuki Intermediate, which was in my neighborhood—my neighborhood seven-eight-nine school. So I went from this nurturing environment of twenty-five kids and five teachers, where I knew everybody from my whole life, to a place where I was one of forty kids. We sat alphabetically in rows, and we changed classes, and everybody there knew each other because they had come from the feeder elementary school. I was the only new kid in the class. This was a public school; it was huge. I was in seven U-two. There was a seven U-one, seven U-two, seven U-three, seven U-four, seven M-1, seven M-two, seven M-three, seven L-one, seven L-two [laughs]—so you knew exactly where you were in this hierarchy of academic achievement. I went there one year, and after that I went to Punahou for eighth grade.
- Rubens: A very distinguished private high school. And how did that come about?
- Choy: I took the test and got in. My mother said, "You're going to Punahou." Okay.
- Rubens: They were willing to pay for it.
- Choy: Yes, right.

- Rubens: What was the ethnic mix there?
- Choy: It was mostly white. There were a few Chinese kids, there were Japanese kids, but mostly it was white. My graduating class was 389, and maybe there were fifty of us who weren't white.
- Rubens: Was that a language that you were already using, "not white"?
- Choy: We called them haoles.
- Rubens: The haoles were the whites.
- Choy: Yeah, they were the whites, which is the Hawaiian word for "stranger," which became the word for the whites. There were the Chinese, the Japanese, Koreans, the Portuguese, and the haoles. And the Portuguese were counted with the haoles. There were a few blacks; they were the military kids, so they came and went.
- Rubens: Tell me just a little bit more about that term, "haole".
- Choy: It's pejorative, sort of. It was then; maybe it's less now. It wasn't really an insult, but it was clearly, "You're a haole," and that's the way life was. There were the mainland haoles and the locals. The power structure in Hawaii was basically white, and it had been that way because they were the ones that had economic power, and everybody had come as laborers. But after the war, the Japanese—through local politics—became powerful. The Chinese always were the merchants and the bankers and all those guys. Say Hiram Fong, the first senator, was a banker. He's connected to my past. We knew them; they were family friends. Everybody knew everybody then. The Chinese were about a quarter of the population; the Japanese were maybe a third. This was before statehood, which came about in 1959.
- Rubens: Now Japanese interment, of course, didn't happen in Hawaii.
- Choy: It couldn't, they'd inter everybody. They needed the bodies to work.
- Rubens: Exactly. So you're saying that the issue of ethnicity, it's not—
- Choy: Well, it was clear. Part of it was the Chinese-Japanese thing, because the Japanese were the bad guys in the war; they were anathema. So the whole idea of my sister dating a Japanese person, forget that, right? Even though she did, it was a big no-no. It wasn't that you were supposed to date only Chinese, but basically that's the only people I knew.
- Rubens: So that was your world. I didn't ask you, by the way, how many siblings did you have?

- Choy: There were five of us.
- Rubens: Where were you in the birth order?
- Choy: Number two. I was the first son. I was the second Choy grandson. I have an older cousin, my father's older brother's first son is the first grandson.
- Rubens: So that's a position of honor.
- Choy: I guess so. But I got the gold watch; he only got the magnifying glass from my grandfather. [laughs] I got the gold watch. I don't know why—my father has this thing about—I lent it to him.
- Rubens: Somehow you weren't instructed that you were to date or associate with only Chinese?
- Choy: It was clear what was okay. Because we went to Chinese school, and I went to Chinese school for nine years, starting the summer after first grade. I graduated, so I'm supposedly educated, but now I don't remember too much.
- Rubens: Did you speak Chinese at home?
- Choy: No, we didn't speak Chinese at home. We spoke only English, which is probably why I can't speak Chinese.
- Rubens: Did your parents speak to each other in Chinese?
- Choy: Oh yeah, sure. They knew Chinese. They used it between themselves. We knew enough that if my mother needed to tell us something that she didn't want anybody else to know, she would say it in Chinese so we could understand it. But we went every day after school, summer included, hour and a half—in the summer it was two and a half hours—and we had Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, those kinds of days off. And my birthday, because my birthday was on Double Ten, which was the uprising that led to the creation of the Chinese Republic. So I always had my birthday off in Chinese school.
- And then, the church we went to was Honolulu Community Church, which had been a spin-off rebel group from the First Chinese Community Church, or something like that, but it was all Chinese people.
- Rubens: What denomination?
- Choy: Congregational.
- Rubens: At what point did your family become Congregational?

- Choy: My mother was involved in this from college, even high school. They did the YWCA, and the—
- Rubens: What does that represent? Not necessarily upward mobility, or Americanization, or—is it just the ethos of the time; this is what a good middle-class family did?
- Choy: I guess. My grandmother was a Buddhist. She did the temple thing. I don't know. I guess it was an upward mobility thing, but I don't think they needed that, because they had their education. That was their ticket, and that was our ticket.
- Rubens: And I assume the church membership was primarily Chinese?
- Choy: Oh, yeah. The membership was. Now it's a little more mixed, although not a whole lot. Although the minister—ever since Richard Wong left, the minister has not been Chinese.
- Rubens: But while you were growing up the minister was?
- Choy: Yes. So all my friends, except at school, were basically Chinese. Ah, yes, this is the other thing that drives my wife crazy. She doesn't believe this, but, when you look at a person, when we look at a person, we can tell whether they're Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, just by looking at them. And this is some kind of magic; my wife won't believe it. [laughs]
- Rubens: Your wife is not Chinese?
- Choy: She's a McDougall from Montreal. So this whole ethnicity thing—I didn't really understand anything. I found out, after I went to college, that one of my best friends in high school was Jewish. Jewish didn't mean anything. Jewish was a non-category when I was growing up.
- Rubens: Were there Chinese teachers at Punahou?
- Choy: Oh, yes. Yes, Mr. Lee. Chemistry, and he did AP math the year I took it. And there was Mrs. Kau, the chem teacher. She was Chinese. There weren't too many of them, but they were there.
- Rubens: Were there Japanese teachers?
- Choy: I'd say yes, but I'm trying to think of one. I didn't have any. They were mostly white. They were Ivy League graduates.
- Rubens: Tell me about your years in high school?
- Choy: I graduated in '61.

- Rubens: What about the political climate then? Did you pay attention to the Kennedy/Nixon election?
- Choy: Sure, but not passionately. Nobody was politically active, not then.
- Rubens: How about issues over statehood? Do you remember debates about that, or—?
- Choy: Vaguely, not really.
- Rubens: Your family didn't have a strong position?
- Choy: Well, it was a big deal when Alaska got it instead of Hawaii, because the conspiracy rumor was that they were white and we weren't, and that's why they had to go first.
- Rubens: So that was discussed.
- Choy: Oh, yes. The local paper— this was a big deal, getting statehood. I guess people in Punahou are politically active—like, the governor's son was in my class. Billy Quinn, son of Governor William F. Quinn. We had people in our class who were children of the original missionary families, the Dillinghams and the Coxes and the Cookes, and all that kind of stuff. We had people in my class whose families had been in Hawaii for, by that time, over a hundred years. They were part of the power elite, but that was just the way Punahou was.
- Rubens: And that was just accepted?
- Choy: Now, you have people in my class who are president of the Bank of Hawaii, and all that kind of stuff. But that's the way—Punahou always told us, "You're the leaders of tomorrow." It's true.
- Rubens: What did you think tomorrow was going to be?
- Choy: I was supposed to go to college, so I went to college.
- Rubens: Where'd you go?
- Choy: Dartmouth.
- Rubens: Why there?
- Choy: It was cold. Why Dartmouth? Punahou very aggressively advises, counsels you. There is a college counselor, a person whose whole job is to make sure you get in to a good enough school that'll bring honor to Punahou. They have counseling, you meet with them, they give you this list of schools to consider, based on what you got good grades in, and there's a college day where you

meet representatives of the school, which means teachers, because they all went to everywhere. Dartmouth was on the list. Stanford, Harvey Mudd, Oberlin, a bunch of schools like that. Yale, I don't know. You look at the list and say, "Okay, what do I know?" Right? You talk to the teachers, [who say,] "Oh, Dartmouth's a great place, for outdoors, sports." Okay, fine, but Hanover—the whole idea of being in Hanover was like, meaningless to me, coming from Hawaii. [laughs]

So I got in, and I went. I didn't get into Stanford, or maybe I would have gone there. I got into Oberlin, and maybe I should have gone there. But I went to Dartmouth. I graduated in '65, and that year there were three of us from Punahou that went. The two other guys, Mike Chittick and Bob Wilson, finally finished, but not with their class. They flunked out, and [were on] academic probation and all that kind of stuff. They came back later on and did very well. There was another guy from Hawaii, so there were four of us that year, which was really unusual, to have that many.

Rubens: Was there other Asian students?

Choy: Oh, yeah. There was a guy, Mel Ang, from San Francisco. There was a guy who lives in the Bay Area here who was from Laos. His family was way up in the government. So he's an exile here, because he can't go back home. He's a refugee, basically, and he's still bitter about that, and he still carries on the fight to restore the monarchy. [laughs] We had some guy from Hong Kong—there was a Japanese guy from Japan—but there weren't very many. Asians were real unusual.

Rubens: Were you prepared for this?

Choy: I didn't think about it. I'd gone to Punahou, where you're an ethnic minority anyway. So more haoles, what's the big deal, right? Whereas if I'd gone to Kaimuki or Roosevelt—even then, when I went to high school, Roosevelt still was English standard, and my sister went there. It was out of our district, but it was just down the road from Punahou. It was convenient. They were our big rivals. I suppose it would have been a bigger thing, a big deal because then I would have been a minority instead of part of the majority.

Rubens: So this was just a fact of your existence? Do you feel that you ever suffered for it?

Choy: I don't know; I was always the shortest person around. [laughter]

Rubens: What did you study at Dartmouth?

Choy: I majored in economics, which meant that you take Econ 1, as a freshman or sophomore, as part of your distribution requirement. Then in your junior and senior years you had to take one Econ course each term, so I took seven Econ

courses, and that was my major. After you do your breadth requirement you can take anything you want after that, so I took three courses a quarter then, so I took six courses of whatever I wanted. We were on quarters, so I took all kinds of stuff. My GPA in my major was lower than overall.

Rubens: Was that a robust period for you? Was it a good decision for you to be there?

Choy: No, it was the wrong school. I was a city person, and being in Hanover wasn't the place for me. But, you know, you're kind of stuck there, so you finish.

Rubens: Did you think of yourself as a city person in Honolulu?

Choy: No. I realized this after I had tried to figure out why didn't I like this place. And it was all men then, too. And everybody was a jock, and everybody was a this, and everybody was a that in your class. I suppose I was something, too. Credential stuff.

Rubens: How would you characterize what that was?

Choy: Co-captain of the rifle team, and graduated with honors.

Rubens: Did you go to classmate's homes for Thanksgiving? I assume you didn't go back to Hawaii.

Choy: No, that wasn't feasible. Did I ever do that? No. My roommate was from Portland, Oregon, and he was a jock. Football player. He went for freshman football, and then he quit. There were like 300 guys trying out for the team.

Rubens: How big was Dartmouth? Something like 3,000 students?

Choy: Yeah, something like that. I don't think we had a thousand in our class. Maybe 800, something like that. And this was when they were trying to remake themselves, and they built the Hopkins Center, so the arts became a thing when I was there, which hadn't been before. I was on the crew. [During] freshman week you have to do this physical abilities test, and all the coaches are manning the tables. You go by this one guy, [and] he says, "You! I want you on the crew"! So, okay, I had to do something. I was in the band—

Rubens: What was your instrument?

Choy: Flute. I was in the band, so you get to go to all the football games; you get a good seat. That's basically what I did.

Rubens: Were there any issues on campus—'64 of course is the Free Speech Movement out here in Berkeley; I don't know if that had resonance at Dartmouth.

- Choy: No, we were really isolated. I don't think you really—that never hit me. My sister was a freshman then, here. She lived in the dorms. I've got all her letters: war stories about this and that, and in and out the windows with her roommate, and all that kind of stuff. But it never registered on my consciousness, for sure. There were guys in my class who did Mississippi and all that kind of stuff, but there weren't a lot of them. I came home every summer, and I worked at jobs, construction jobs—
- Rubens: Because of your dad.
- Choy: Because of my dad, and so I could earn really good money, because it was all union wages. Even though you were paid the bottom, you were paid a lot, for that time, as a laborer.
- Rubens: College was relatively uneventful?
- Choy: Right, it was nice. My parents paid; I had an NDEA loan, which took me ten years to pay off *after* I finished my PhD—forty dollars a year, something like that, forever. [laughs] My freshman roommate had a harder time. He got married, and his mother was a single mother. He had a sister who went to Washington University. One year we drove back and dropped her off. That was a long ride, from Portland to Hanover. He had to work, doing a sandwich route, selling sandwiches at night in the dorms. Sometimes I would do it for him. That was hard work. He worked in the dining hall, that sort of stuff. But I never had to do that. I was really fortunate. My job was to be a student, and so that's what I did.
- Rubens: When did you start feeling that maybe it was the wrong college?
- Choy: Junior year, maybe some my sophomore year.
- Rubens: But by then you're going to just get through?
- Choy: Yes, right. I wanted to get through.
- Rubens: What'd you do after—?
- Choy: I came to Berkeley. In my senior year, I was sort of going to go to business school. Oh yes, I took a couple of accounting classes. I was going to go to business school, and then my senior year I took an urban sociology class. We read Robert Park and all that kind of stuff, Oscar Handlin and all the classics. And I said, "That's what I want to do: I want to do city planning." So I applied to MIT and Berkeley, because those were the top places.
- Rubens: Yes, and also the University of Pennsylvania.

- Choy: Penn or Harvard. I didn't want—no more East Coast! [laughs] I wanted to go to Berkeley!
- Rubens: MIT was prestigious enough that—
- Choy: Well, I went out and interviewed; I even interviewed with the chair of the department, John Howard. Little guy—he's smaller than me. So I had this interview with him, and we sit in the conference room—there's this huge table—and he's sitting there, and I'm sitting next to him being interviewed. But I got into MIT, and I got into Berkeley, so it was a no-brainer. I went to Berkeley. Berkeley at that time was the best city planning department.
- Rubens: A PhD program?
- Choy: They didn't have it. It didn't exist then. This was a master's, MCP program, in '65. This was when the department was reinventing itself and where PPBS—planning, programming, budgeting systems, systems analysis—that was coming in, and analysis was going to save the city. At that time, they had started this new emphasis on planning and programming for urban systems, or something like that, it was called. There was urban design, and there was the standard general plan. I was in the systems emphasis, we were the systems guys. So we had to learn Fortran, and that kind of stuff. Economics, you took analytical courses, all that kind of stuff. There were thirty-something in a class; it was a master's program, two-year's masters. Mel Webber was my adviser.
- Rubens: We've done an oral history with Mel Webber, but it hasn't been finished yet.
- Choy: He was head of the Budget Committee without a PhD. He was very bitter about having to retire at seventy. I think he was the last cohort they forced out. He was pissed off about this after that. His retirement party was really maudlin. [laughs] That year, that spring, the Grad Division approved the PhD program. I remember where they made this announcement to us students. Mel Webber gets up there, [and] he tells us, "We've got this thing, blah blah blah, so we can accept the first class," which was mostly master's students. There were a few people from the outside who came in that following fall. I remember Mel saying, "We convinced the Grad Division there's this thing called planning theory. Now you students have to go out and figure out what this is." [laughs] So that was one of everybody's task, to invent this thing.
- Rubens: Did you feel that you were a pioneer? This was an exciting time in that cities were in trouble and reforming at every level.
- Choy: Right, we were going to save the cities because we were smart, and we knew how to solve problems, and study things, and do data analysis and all that kinds of stuff. So I applied, and I actually got in, because I was a really good student. Plus, the war was going on, right?

- Rubens: Yes, the Vietnam War. It was escalating.
- Choy: I had a student deferment. I don't know if it was my first or second year. I guess it was the second year in the PhD program, so this was around '68 was when they got rid of the student deferments. So all the guys who were born in '44 lost their student deferment. They were all 1-A. And I, having been born in '43, kept my 2-S. So that was another reason to stay in school. Although one of my best friends—and still my best friend—in the master's program, who had come from UMass, and from ROTC, and had a commission—which was deferred for graduate school, after he finished, in '67—had his orders to report to Vietnam that summer, and then through the connections of one of our professors, Mike Teitz, he ended up spending his two years in Washington, at the Pentagon working on some bullshit data system of property that the US Army had. [laughs]
- Rubens: Fascinating. Teitz had connections in the Pentagon.
- Choy: Well, one of his students had a job, was working there. I don't know how he arranged it. That was from Mike Teitz.
- Rubens: Speaking of ROTC, by the way, was that—that would have been undergraduate, yes?
- Choy: Yes. In Punahou, everybody was ROTC for sophomore and junior, two years of ROTC. Then the senior year, it was voluntary. I volunteered. I was an officer. Then in college I did ROTC too. But because I had done high school ROTC, I didn't have to do the first two years of college ROTC. But then, for the advanced ROTC, I had to pass the physical, and I flunked it. I failed the physical.
- Rubens: At Dartmouth?
- Choy: Back up. I should add that in my sophomore year, at the end of fall quarter I quit. I came home. I had had enough of this. So I went to UH for the spring term that year, because they were semesters. Then I went back in the fall. So when I—
- Rubens: Were you just homesick, fish out of water?
- Choy: Yeah. I didn't like it at all. This wasn't the place for me. So I came home, and then I was in ROTC at UH, because it was required for undergraduates. Then I applied for the advanced, and that's when I flunked the medical. Although my doctor assured me there's nothing wrong with me, but I just had slightly abnormal kidneys. But I could still get drafted he said, yes, but I couldn't be a second lieutenant. Thanks. So I had this thing hanging over my head. I knew this, that I could get drafted as a private, and this was in '63 when this happened. So when I went back and I finished college, then went to graduate

school, the war was going good then. So I had my student deferment. Then, by the time I finished, I was twenty-six; I was out of it.

- Rubens: I should have asked this: were there any protests over the ROTC at Dartmouth?
- Choy: No. Not when I was there.
- Rubens: So your second year—'67, '68—it's going to be People's Park, and—
- Choy: Everything. I was there for the whole business. Got gassed.
- Rubens: How about I follow up with questions about the student protests after we talk about how you finished up your program?
- Choy: I finished my orals in spring of '69. My orals were based on my dissertation plan. I had worked this whole thing out, and I had spent almost a year working this idea. Every little detail, what exactly I was going to do. So I finished my orals, and of course there's too much tear gas, and the Army's here. Nobody could work. "Forget this"! I basically stopped until fall. Then in fall, in September, I started up again, after goofing off since April, something like that. We were back on quarters then, yes. When I first came to Berkeley it was semesters, and then they switched to quarters. And when I started working at Berkeley twenty years later they went from quarters to semesters. [laughs] So in the fall I said, "Okay"! I started, and picked up my stuff—
- Rubens: And how do we say what the dissertation was?
- Choy: It was about planning and programming for free urban public service, or something like that.
- Rubens: Planning and programming?
- Choy: For a free urban public service. It was an economics kind of dissertation. Oakland Public Library is an example. So I collected data from the Oakland Public Library; I met all those nice little old ladies in every single branch, and I ground this thing out in the fall. I had a draft at that time—my committee chair was Bill Alonzo, who specialized in land use and population. My outside person was Lenny [Leonard] Meyrowitz, who had just graduated in economics from Berkeley. Meyrowitz was then an Assistant Professor in economics, he could serve as my outside guy. Alonzo was my formal chair, because Mike couldn't be my chair, because Mike was in New York with RAND at that time. He had taken a leave and was working there. I did stuff by mail with him. I had a draft ready, and then I applied for a job with RAND, and I got interviewed down in Santa Monica by Charlie Wolf, who was head of the Economics Department. I only wanted to work in New York, so I got shipped to New York. That's when I get to meet with—I spend one night with

Mike, we go over my dissertation, he says, “Okay! Write this chapter, finish this, do this, and you’re done!” I got the job at RAND, so I finished, and in July I was in New York, working for the New York City RAND Institute.

Rubens: We’re talking about July, 1970.

Choy: Yes. There were three of us who finished the PhD that year. Barry Kippel, who beat me by two weeks, filing—it was me and Marty Lowenstein, who was a “houser” meaning he studied housing. The three of us finished—

Rubens: So you are the first three PhDs of the program.

Choy: Right. They were anxious to get us out the door. Nobody was going to give us a hard time. Barry went back to Israel, but we had some really smart guys in the class. The class behind me, Shlomo Angel, who worked for Chris Alexander, was in that class. He had been an undergraduate in architecture here. He got the Berkeley Prize for the highest GPA as an undergraduate. Really smart.

Rubens: What were you going to do with RAND?

Choy: Okay. RAND at that time had been going for three or four years. It was a contract between [New York Mayor John] Lindsey and RAND. It was a RAND office in New York. They were going to work on solving New York City problems. There was a fire project, of which slippery water was a tangible result.

Rubens: Slippery water?

Choy: The head of the fire project was Ed Blum, who was a chemical engineer. What you do, you put this stuff in the water, it makes it move through the pipes faster. It reduces friction, and therefore you can put more water on the fire, and because more water, you can reduce the temperature, and blah blah blah. Slippery water. The other one that the fire project did was manning. How many guys on the truck do you have to have, because they were thinking about reducing the manning, or closing stations, which of course is really controversial. There was a housing project, which was headed by Jack Lowry. These are guys from RAND from the west. Jack was an economist, and Jack was there because he used to work on projects like, what’s it going to be like after they drop the atomic bomb on Chicago. That kind of stuff. He didn’t think that was really a lot of fun. [laughs]

Most of the RAND office, first group, were from Santa Monica, and they were all hard technical guys, number crunchers. But that was the whole idea of this, you would have these number-cruncher guys take data and systems analysis and apply it to social problems.

Rubens: What were you doing?

Choy: I was one of those people, except I had this extra thing of city planning and sociology and that kind of thing. Public policy didn't exist then. Aaron had started the public policy school in I think it was '68 or '69 here, the first program. I worked for him for a little while on this Oakland project.

Rubens: Who was this?

Choy: Aaron Wildavsky. He and Mike were co-PIs on this project for Oakland, which a bunch of books came out of. So, public policy didn't exist, and it was only a master's program, anyway. But what we were doing, we figured out later on, was basically—if public policy had existed that's where I would have been, and not in city planning. That's sort of my orientation. It was policy analysis. One of my fields is economics, so I knew all that sort of stuff, econometrics and all that. There was a housing project, which Jack was working on. They were going to reform rent control, make it fair somehow, fair for everybody, which basically meant raising rental rates in a way that you didn't screw the tenants, and allowed the owners to earn a reasonable rate of return on their investment. Then there was a health project, which was hospitals, which I worked on. Gordon Chase, the administrator of HSA at the time, wanted to build a new hospital in the Bronx. I was working on this project, and I was sort of looking at patient data about the hospitals—number of days, number of patients, that sort of stuff.

Rubens: So you were working on a couple of these projects, on housing and hospitals.

Choy: I worked on welfare, and I worked on the hospital project. I didn't work on housing or fire. For the hospital one—I did this little thing of emergency room loads of patients and stuff, and I did another thing on whether the hospitals—whether you could justify building another hospital. Bed capacity, right—utilization. The problem obviously was, the hospitals were in the wrong place. Because they were fixed, and the people lived elsewhere. One solution was, you move the people to the hospital, so you have a system of moving people, so you keep the capacity up, rather than having places too full or too empty at the same time [in] different places. Or you build another hospital someplace, which is what Gordon Chase wanted to do, because it would have been a monument to himself, right?

I clearly remember there was a meeting I was supposed to go to, which I went to. I was going to present the results of my study, which I had written up as a little report, and then the meeting got cancelled. We were all there waiting, and I don't know, Gordon was busy or some such, and the meeting got cancelled. So I just gave my report to the budget office guy, because I figured he was going to get the thing anyway, right? It wasn't a secret, right? It turned out to be not the right thing to do, but what did I know? Anyway, this report

showed that you don't need to build another hospital. So that was what the budget office was looking for, they didn't want to build [laughs]—end of project. And this whole thing got written up in a book by some guy from Johns Hopkins. I can't remember the title, but I have a copy of it. [*Models in the Policy Process*, Greenberger, Crenson, Crissey. 1976]. There's a whole chapter on my little escapade about how I killed this project, single-handedly, unknowingly. As far as they were concerned, I did the right thing. We're not taking sides on these issues; that's the city's problem. The analysis stands on its own.

Then I worked on the welfare project for—not for very much. I worked on economic development a little bit. And then, in my second year, I think it was, maybe third year, Bernie Gifford got hired to be the president of New York City RAND. That's where I met him.

Rubens: Let's go back and just pick up then what the tenor of the times was at Berkeley. We focused narrowly on what your academic and research careers, although I think I should just ask you right here, what was the Oakland project that you were involved in? This was Wildavsky's?

Choy: Yeah, it was—they were trying to help the city government get their act together. It was sort of like RAND. Analysis. It was mostly budgeting stuff, though.

Rubens: You said several books came out of it?

Choy: Yes. One title I remember is, *Oakland's Not for Burning*.

Rubens: Was this Ford Foundation money, or—?

Choy: It might have been. I don't remember. But the project that was run out of—the City Planning Department for years was a successor to this thing, in the '80s, so it's been around for a while.

Rubens: Were you spending time in Oakland?

Choy: I just was working on my dissertation, so my little dissertation became one little thing in this project, even though it didn't cost them anything. It was probably the only thing on the libraries anybody has ever gotten. [laughs]

Rubens: But the tenor of the times, then. You take your orals in April, and the tear gas—

Choy: It was People's Park then, right. We were occupied. Then there was the Memorial Day march in May, which I still—I have a picture of Michael Heyman on the line down there, from then. Heyman was in the law school then, and he had a joint appointment in the Planning Department. Somehow—

and he's also a Dartmouth grad. He was on the Dartmouth College Board of Trustees for a while. I never said two words to Heyman, but when I came back here, and I worked for Bernie, one day I had to go to some meeting for Bernie at Heyman's house, when Heyman was chancellor. And Heyman remembers who I am—like, he knew me by name; he knew I went to Dartmouth, he knew I was city planning. Wow! [laughs]

Rubens: How was it that he knew you?

Choy: Beats me! Just because you're a professor, you know the names of the students. One guy went to Dartmouth, and there was a guy in the class behind me who also went to Dartmouth, but we were probably the only two from Dartmouth ever!

Rubens: How about also—were there Asians in the city planning?

Choy: Yeah, there was me. [laughs] There were people there from Latin America, because of Violich—Fran Violich and his connections with Latin America. These were older guys. Julio Silva, who was a very smart guy.

Rubens: You remember him because—

Choy: He was a Renaissance man; he was into everything. And there was a guy—he had been a government official, and he went home and became a higher government official. Guys like that, they were older than us. Most of us were twenty-something years old; we were interested in what was going on in campus.

Rubens: What was going on, on campus?

Choy: I was here for everything. Stop the Draft [Week], the Vietnam Day [Committee], People's Park, the whole business. I remember the Memorial Day march. That was the end of the People's Park thing, when the place was occupied, and we had this one peaceful march on Memorial Day, and that was the end of it. The razor barbed wire, and the flowers.

Rubens: Were you directly involved in any of that?

Choy: Tangentially, I was.

Rubens: The view from the margins.

Choy: Yeah, I was watching things and got to learn how not to get gassed. We were there for the first aerial attack on the United States by the United States Army and all that kind of stuff. It was a big controversy, because in the class behind me was Judy Wells, and her brother was one of those who burned his draft card and went to jail. We were all involved in David's defense.

The class behind me, which was the class my wife was in, was bigger, slightly bigger—they had fifty, which was somehow—too many people said yes. But they were also younger, as a group, because my class had people who had been working and then came back, and so it was about half-half. There weren't that many of us who had just come out of college, with no work experience at all, who knew absolutely *nothing* about the real world. [laughs]

But I knew how to study, whereas the class behind me was about three-quarters young people. So they were very involved in this war stuff. It was really disruptive for a lot of them. It was hard to do both during your whole time. You really had to focus.

- Rubens: Did any of the professors stand out as people who were sympathetic to the students?
- Choy: Well, yes, Jack Dyckman. It was clear whose side he was on. I think all of the professors were sympathetic to the students. [Martin] Myerson was acting chancellor, and he had been the dean of the planning school, so the planning school was very much involved in the whole business.
- Rubens: But classes went on?
- Choy: Classes went on, yes. I don't remember getting too diverted by the talking about what was going on on campus.
- Rubens: Until the People's Park action.
- Choy: By then I wasn't taking classes, so it didn't matter.
- Rubens: Did you get married at that time, by the way? You said you met your wife in planning school.
- Choy: Yes. '68.
- Rubens: Do you remember the Third World strike? That was in 1969.
- Choy: Oh, yeah, I was here for that, too. That was a long battle, that led to the creation of the Ethnic Studies Department. There was a lot going on then. There had been the strike at San Francisco State. There were the Kennedy and King assassinations. It all came from that. I was only tangentially involved. I don't think I was ever involved in the ethnic studies battle per se. It was just like one more thing like Vietnam, it was what made life crazy on the campus. No, I don't think it was ever a major issue with me personally, something I just knew about.
- Rubens: I guess we have to stop for today and we'll pick up your narrative about your sojourn in New York.

Interview 2: October 29, 2004

[Audio File 2]

Rubens: We're at the point in your life when you went to New York.

Choy: I came to New York in the summer of '70 and left RAND in December of '72, I think. There was a period—this is typical city bullshit stuff, but there was a period when I was on RAND's payroll but I was actually working in the city until they could actually shift me over. So I'm pretty sure I left in the winter of '72. So Bernie came that summer of '72. I worked for a little while with him on economic development.

Rubens: Where did he come from, by the way?

Choy: Oh, he was a postdoc at Harvard. He had the distinction of having two fellowships, one was at the JFK Public Policy School, and there was something in their equivalent to city planning. It was a big deal for anybody to have two of them. He was the same age as me; his birthday's in May, mine's in October. In fact, his birthday is the same week or day as Reggie Jackson and Martin Luther King. They were both born within a couple of days in between, or something like this. So he's a young guy, because when you see Bernie he never looks young; he's always older than us. He got his PhD from Rochester, in physics. He had done a summer internship at Brookhaven. This guy was into heavy-duty theoretical particle stuff. [laughs] But then when he was studying for his PhD, he got involved in some big housing controversy in Rochester, with Kodak. Bausch and Lomb is there too, I think, but Kodak was the one. He took some time off and formed this organization called FIGHT, which stood for something, but he made another one called FIGHT ON. [laughs] The ironic thing about this, which he finds out later on, is that [Daniel] Patrick Moynihan was an advisor to Kodak, because Kodak didn't have any idea how to deal with this black rabble rouser. This is in the late sixties, because I was in graduate school. He was already changing the world.

His bible for community organization was, *Rules for Radicals*, by Saul Alinsky. That was the bible for organizers and activists then. He basically just did what Saul said to do, and it worked. He was able to get all kinds of things going in Rochester. So, as a result of that, he went to Harvard. He kind of had a big decision, whether he was going to stay in physics or go for this public policy, community activism stuff, and he gave up on physics. But he could have been the first black physicist, you know, I mean that would have been a big deal. He was a very smart guy, but he put all his energy in this other stuff, and when he came to the attention of the RAND guys, because they were looking for somebody to head the New York office, they offered him a job, and he took it. So he came that summer. I only worked for him for about six months there, and then I went to work for the city.

I worked for the HDA, Housing and Development Administration. At that time Lindsay was still mayor; this was his last year. HDA was a mess. They had rent control, and they were trying to implement this new maximum-based rent program, which RAND had invented—Jack Lowry’s project had invented this new system. So they were going to implement this, and they had also the code enforcement, and housing inspectors. The code enforcement was reputed to be rife with graft. Graft. Housing inspection was a disaster. The place was just a mess. It wasn’t that the previous administrator was a bad guy or dishonest, he was just sort of out of his league as an administrator, an amateur type. So all of this stuff was going on under him. Lindsay brought in this guy called Andy Kerr, who was a Harvard MBA, and he was a stocky guy, very hard-nosed, and, you know, go! go! go! go! go! Super tight, A-plus-plus-plus kind of guy. He brought in—

Rubens: He did have a lot of advisers that were high-powered.

Choy: Yes, and he brought in with him a whole bunch of young MBAs—young meaning like my age, twenties—MBA analysts, to basically run and clean up this place. They did an amazing job. I worked with them. I wasn’t part of that group; I was off in a different area, but I had a lot to do with them, and I ended up for a little while working with them. They actually were able to draw up—and this was really amazing—a flow chart of how code enforcement worked. This thing was huge. It covered the wall all the way across the director’s office. The director was very much involved. He was an honest guy; he knew where all the graft was. He helped them a lot, and showed how all of this stuff worked, and how the—how HDA also did the subsidized housing, and there was a flow chart for that; that was incredible, too. And then they had this MBR program. And the thing about MBR at that time—this is before spreadsheet desktop computers, this is ’72, ’73—when I started with them it was just the time HP came in with their little hand calculators, and before that we were using the Marchant calculators. This is where we’re still doing batch processing. Hand-held calculators which could add, multiply, subtract, and divide. They were the biggest thing, and they cost 350 bucks. [laughs]

Rubens: HP meaning Hewlett-Packard.

Choy: Right, the original HP. The whole idea of personal computers was—no such thing. Everything was a batch. So for this MBR program, I had friends working on this thing. They had to—well, the basic thing is, they had to collect data from the tenants. There were a million tenants out there, and I don’t know, a hundred thousand landlords. So they had to send a piece of paper to one million people, whose addresses they sort of might know, and get it all back. They have to analyze this stuff, and then do it again. And they have to do the same thing with the landlords. So the whole idea of sending a piece of paper to a million people, getting it back, process it, you know, like, this is

a mind-boggling quantity of work. I remember stuff like, they were in an office building that was rented; it was an old office building downtown, and they said, “We have to order envelopes, all your million envelopes,” and the stuff comes, and it’s like piles and piles and piles of paper. Somebody says, “Gee, I wonder if the floors are strong enough to hold this weight.” [laughs] Stuff like that. These guys were working sixteen-hour days, seven days a week, and they were going full blast the whole year. But they actually did it, I mean they mailed this thing out, get it back, analyze it. And Andy Kerr was on their butts all the time. Every day he had reports, and this was really important, and he cleaned up all the graft. I remember the first thing he did, the first week he was administrator, he held everybody’s paycheck up. Every single paycheck in HDA. You had to physically—your own body had to physically come and sign for the check, and prove that you were the person supposed to get this thing.

Rubens: You mean there had been that level of graft, that people were taking—?

Choy: There were a lot of checks that never got claimed. He did that a couple of times, and finally—

Rubens: The payrolls were padded.

Choy: Yes! School boards like that, too. There were a lot of—some of the political payoff jobs you knew about, but there were a lot that—you just didn’t know who was on your payroll, right? HDA wasn’t that big. It wasn’t a really big agency, but there was a lot of money going through it, because they built housing. So there were billions of dollars going through the place. The code enforcement, of course, was just—

Rubens: So what were you doing, literally?

Choy: I was just another analyst. I worked for Tom Kingsley, who used to work at RAND and was also a graduate of Berkeley Planning School. And Mike Teitz was there, working on—what was he working on, housing?

Rubens: He was on leave from Berkeley?

Choy: Yes, he was on leave. He was there for two years, which is why he couldn’t be chair of my committee, because he was there and I was here, right?

He was on the committee, but he couldn’t be chair, which is why Alonzo was chair. When I went to New York in the winter of January of ‘69—’70, January of ’70, with my draft, there were two things. I was supposed to interview for this job, which I was supposed to get offered to me, because Mike said I was okay, I guess. And I was supposed to meet with Mike and go over my draft so he could sign off on the thing. So both of those things happened. I got the job,

so we were there in July of '70. We lived there—we went there thinking we'd be there for a couple of years, and we ended up being there eleven years.

I worked for HDA, and then when Abe Beame became mayor—he had been the former controller. He didn't have any use for analysts. Oh, meanwhile, all these young hotshot analysts were on this title called PQA, Principal Qualitative Analyst. There was this qualitative analyst series, which was just totally made up by RAND and by Lindsay. The purpose of it was to hire all these hotshot analysts, who weren't civil servants. The way civil service worked, you create this new title and you can hire people on it provisionally until there's an exam. And until the exam, you can hire anybody that you want, which is what happened. Finally, the civil servants got angry, and the civil service commission got angry, and said, "We've got to have an exam." Okay, so we made up an exam, which was written by some guys at NYU. You were supposed to know statistics, and algebra, and calculus, and economic theory, and systems theory, and linear programming, blah blah blah. All this kind of quantitative bullshit, right? That's what the test was actually about. Of course, nobody passed that, so there was no list. And therefore, everybody who was a provisional PQA, or SQA, or QA—principal, senior, and quantitative—just had their job, still had their job, because there was no list. That was a trick.

Rubens: I'm missing how the—it's just impossible to pass that exam?

Choy: Nobody knew—most of these people are maybe good at one thing, but they weren't good at all of them. It was really a hard test. You actually had to know statistics, you had to know linear programming, you had to know regression analysis, and you have to know the formulas. It wasn't just how to use it; you have to know the math of it. So it wasn't any kind of simple exam. Nobody knew what this thing was going to be, because there had never been an exam before, so there's nothing to study from. So this exam happened, and I was—I didn't take it, because I started after this, after the exam was given. So everybody had their job; nobody lost their job, but now there was an exam, and there was going to be another exam in a year, or something like this. But now everybody had something to study from. So for all of spring I ended up giving classes, because I knew all of this stuff.

I actually knew—because I'd studied in my PhD, and this was all fresh in my head, so I could do all this garbage. So I was running classes for everybody so they could have a chance of passing the exam. So, the exam was given, I passed it, and a bunch of other people passed it. There weren't that many of them. A lot of the people who passed it were not working for the city. They were unemployed aerospace engineers, because this was a time when aerospace was going down the tubes, and you had all these people unemployed. So there were a bunch of them. They knew the math, and knew nothing about cities. We were mostly young people who knew about how

cities worked, but didn't know the math. There were maybe a hundred of us that passed the exam.

Rubens: Where did you literally teach the classes?

Choy: At work. After hours, during lunch. I'd have a class on linear regression, linear programming, how to do it, and all that kind of stuff. It was really crazy. So we passed the exam, and I got hired for my job I had, and now I was a civil servant.

Rubens: Any increase in pay, or benefits?

Choy: No, of course not. I just had a change in status; I became a civil servant, so I had to pass the physical exam. So you did this physical exam, running around in your underwear in this place. I remember very clearly; you had the forms, and I came to one of these counters. They said, "Read that! Read the eye chart," and he checks off hearing and sight, and "Next!" You have to bring your actual degree if you claimed your degree as part of the requirement. Your degree was required for the job. You had to have the physical thing, so people were carrying around their diplomas in framed glass. So I became a civil servant, and of course I just continued doing what I did. I worked for the administrator's office. I didn't work for one of the line bureaus, the code enforcement department of housing, or whatever. I worked for the administrator's office as an analyst. I crunched numbers on this and that. Oh, yes, the one project I worked on was a management control system. This was Andy Kerr's Harvard Business School kind of stuff. You've got to have these indicators of outcomes, product, so that you can measure whether they did anything, [that] they did the right thing, and how much. I spent lots of time on this.

Rubens: Developing these indicators.

Choy: Futile exercise. But anyway, it's kind of interesting. You get to meet everybody in the agency, and find out, "What do you do?" Right? Everybody's got to tell you what they do, and here you have this whiz kid—what, twenty-seven, twenty-eight years old. And these guys are lifetime civil servants, and this young squirt comes up with, "Tell me what you do." [laughs] They have to explain their job, and how the whole system works. So I learned a lot about how the agency worked, because I had to rationalize the stuff and figure it out. Then that winter, the next winter, I worked on—oh yeah, I stumbled across this thing, the Central Complaints Bureau.

Anybody from New York would know about it. There's this thing called the Central Complaints Bureau, which is, people call in and say, "I don't have any heat, my pipes are broken, my—" whatever, you know, complaining about their landlord, right? So the city sends out an inspector, who says, "All right,

you don't have any heat." File a complaint, you've got a violation, the landlord's supposed to do something about it. During the winter, of course, there's a large number of calls come in for heat, right? Not enough heat, especially when the winters are really bad. So the city sets up temporarily this place, this room, with banks of phones, and people answer the phones. The problem was, you call and you get a busy signal for all kinds of reasons: nobody's there, too many calls, whatever. Antiquated phone system. The result—there's data on this stuff.

I stumbled across this, and I realized right away, instantly, this is a standard queuing problem. This is in every queuing theory textbook; there's this problem. So I collected all this data, calibrated this model, and came up with this chart that said, if you want a certain level of service, meaning, answer quality, what percent of answered calls—based on the inflow, the rate of flow per minute of calls coming in—how many bodies you have to have there answering the phones. This was like, quantitative budgetary magic. Because the way the agency had always worked is, they had to go to the city, the budget bureau, and beg for money, to hire people. The budget bureau says, "Well, how many do you need"? "I need more." Right? "Well, how many do you need"? "Give me ten, for now." Come back next week, "Give me ten more," kind of a thing. So it was always this—for years, this is how this thing worked.

So here I came along, with this little queuing model, very theoretical, fitted from actual data, and it was a standard textbook kind of a situation. I came up with this table, and I said, "Here." So they could go to the budget bureau and say, "Okay, we need this many workers to achieve this level of service." Because the housing administrator doesn't want to hear about the heat complaints, "Okay, if you want that level of service, you've got to provide enough funds have this many people at this time of day, and—"

Rubens: This queuing model is state of the art. How long did it take you to do it?

Choy: It took me a couple of weeks at the most. It was really easy. I became famous for this thing, and there was nothing to it. [laughs] Actually, something I did actually was implemented. This was for a policy analyst—this is like, wow! I worked on a couple of other things, on rent control, on code enforcement inspection stuff. There was a lot of data that was collected for operational reasons, and every city agency is like this. But nobody, because they don't know how, nobody ever analyzes this to find out what's really going on in the big picture, and whether you can come up with any policy implications, and blah blah blah. Especially staffing. Staffing's always a big issue. So, I did a couple of those. Then—

Rubens: Was Teitz in New York while you were there.

- Choy: I think Mike had gone back by then. So by the time I was working for the city he was gone. But there were a couple of other people from the city planning program here that were working at RAND, and one of the classmates of my wife in the class behind me worked at HRA, human resources. He worked there for years and years and years, and he ended up being deputy administrator for research or something. He ended up way up there in the hierarchy, which was really strange. This guy is Swiss, Georges Vernez. He was a geographer.
- Rubens: Was the civil service diverse?
- Choy: Not then.
- Rubens: Pretty much a white boy network?
- Choy: Yeah, there were some blacks, and no Hispanics at all.
- Rubens: A few Asians?
- Choy: Very, very few.
- Rubens: What about women?
- Choy: Oh, there were a lot of women. Oh, yes, lots of women, especially at the lower levels, because women were cheaper than men, and for the same money you could get a smart woman versus an average man. So there were lots of women, especially in the analyst positions, and they were all very good. These women were sharp. There were no dummies working there. You can't be a dummy and survive. I've found that a lot of the people—even the career civil servants, they're very smart people. I mean, you've got to be to survive in this kind of place; you can't be a dummy. You'd never make it. They're very smart, they're astute, they know what's going on, and to get anybody to listen to how your ideas about how to fix it is a whole different story. But they know what's happening. They worked very hard. When this change over the mayor came, a lot of people bailed out, and so at that time Chemical Bank was hiring people, analysts, because they are really quantitative experts. So these people went to work for Chemical Bank. They got paid more, a lot more, and they could not take their work home. It was like against the company rules, because of security, so they only could work eight hours a day, and that was it. And here we are in the public sector, slaving away for less than they were making and we get to take our work home. Thanks. [laughs]
- Rubens: Did you have some kind of a sense of mission about being in the public sector?
- Choy: Oh, yes. We were out there to make things better. That's what this was all about. We believed it was going to happen. You could point to a couple of

things where you made things better, and the system worked better, and [was] actually more fair, and you got rid of graft and corruption and all that kind of stuff. Anyhow, Bernie left RAND, I forget exactly when. But he went to work for the City School District of New York, otherwise known as the Board of Education, at 110 Livingstone Street, as the deputy chancellor. The deputy chancellor is the number-two person, and he is in charge of anything that's not academics. The chancellor is in charge of all the academics, and the deputy chancellor is in charge of all the budget, the money—the stuff that really matters, as far as we're concerned.

He created—he set up his personal office, and it was literally the room next door to him, his office, his personal policy analysis unit, and he put in there, he brought in two people who had worked in the budget office. One of them was my age, our age, and he had been there for a while. He was a very smart guy, and knew all about how the budget really worked. He brought another guy in who was a bit younger, who was a good analyst. To run things, he hired Catherine Lyon, who was a Berkeley graduate. She was a little bit older than us. Her husband was in planning, David Lyon. We knew them personally, as friends, and we lived in their apartment on Lawton. They left to go to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia to do his dissertation work. We moved into their apartment.

Rubens: So when you said planning, you meant the planning department.

Choy: Yes. Planning, except Catharine wasn't planning. She was education. She studied under Charles Benson. She was interested in education. She wanted to be a school superintendent. That was her goal, her career goal. So for a while, she worked for Bernie. She ran this little office, and then I joined it, so there were four of us working there, and we were his number crunchers. We crunched his numbers for him, did his analysis on anything that had to do with money. The biggest project I worked on for the longest time, and my major project, was the formula.

Rubens: What formula?

Choy: New York City has the K-12 schools, a million students, and that's all right. The elementary schools, through eighth grade, I think it is, but not the high schools, are run by the decentralized community school districts; that's part of decentralization. Thirty-two of them—and they're all over the city, and they all complain about not having enough money. The law says, the state education law says, their budget is given to them according to an objective formulae. It has those words, "objective formulae." I mean, that's it in Latin. So there's this thing, this formula, that actually did this. It was like a billion dollars got spread out among these thirty-two community school districts, so you're talking tens of millions of dollars to each one. This formula had some workload factors that were in the contract, teacher workload factors, like the

teachers get—you need so many teachers per student, class size, all that sort of stuff—teacher workload factors, and the average salaries. Those are the policy parameters, which are the work load factors—the class size, which came out of the contract with the UFT, and then there’s the average salaries, because the average salaries varied widely by district, so you couldn’t penalize them for having expensive teachers versus cheap teachers. So I was stuck with those, so that was really the—and the only other piece of data was the number of children, the number of students in the various grades.

Rubens: Was there a state factor in it?

Choy: No, no. This was all local money, which came from the state. The thing about this was that, there’s one board member—Murray Bertram I think was his name, and his personal assistant, a woman, they were the budget experts according to the folklore. I don’t know if this was true, but it probably was, they were the only two people who actually understood how this formula worked. Every year, when they made this distribution through this bulletin, a business administration bulletin, it would be some bureaucratic jargon, and a big table, with thirty-two lines. And there’d be this money, and it would add up to something over here, and everybody would complain that either they didn’t get enough, or “So-and-so got more than I did, and that’s not fair.” Murray could not actually explain to them in any intelligible way why it was that that’s what they got, because it was just like numerical magic. There was a black box; it was hocus-pocus. So they’d complain and bitch and moan, all the time.

We thought, or Bernie thought, it wasn’t fair, for one thing because it seemed like the white rich school districts seemed to get more than the black, poor, Latino, white, because that’s the way the world works, right? We know about that. So he started poking into this thing—so I started looking, that was my job. “Find out how this thing works.” So I went around and started asking people, assistant superintendents who had been there thirty years, “How does this thing work?” I asked the budget people, “Tell me this,” and, “Tell me that,” and I’d go to take all this stuff and figure it out. I finally was able to do that, and we wrote this up in a report, called *Policy Analysis Bulletins*, or something like that, I forget exactly what we called it. We made up a series of policy reports. We made that *Public Policy Reports Number 1*, or something like this. We made up some high-sounding title.

But the first thing was to explain what, in this past year, the formula had been—just to explain how, why it is that you got your ten million dollars or your twenty million dollars. We wrote this thing up, a thing about like this. We made, I don’t know, a thousand copies of this thing because there are thirty-two community school districts; there are nine board members. You start adding this stuff up, it comes to a lot of numbers. We had to print this thing more than once. So we issue this thing, send it out, everybody reads this

thing, and they can finally understand why it is they got what they got. How the formula works, in their case.

Then the problem became to change it in such a way that it's more rationalized, has some semblance to reality. But using basically the same parameters, but in a different kind of a way. We did that, and that was this next one, the '74-'75 allocation formula. The trick here was the Board of Education had to approve this thing. So in order for us to get them to approve it we had to show that if this formula had been in effect the previous year it would have made hardly any difference at all, tens of thousands of dollars for each school district. So we did that. And they said, "Okay, we'll adopt it." So they adopted this thing, and the next year, when the formula came out, it was based on this new formula. We printed up thousands of copies of the thing, sent it out. We had these meetings with the superintendents, thirty-two superintendents.

Bernie and I, mostly me, would have to get up and explain to these people how this whole thing worked in some way that they could understand it. We actually got them focusing on the policy parameters, which is what they should have been focusing on, rather than how much money they got. Because they could see that the parameters are what drove the amount. So arguing about the amount's pointless; you've got to argue about the parameters. You can't change the data: the children are there and the teachers make what they make. So the only thing you can change are the parameters, and the parameters have to do with how many teachers you need to staff a classroom, which is more than one, because teachers have prep periods, and you have a sub, and maximums on class sizes. If the children in every grade come in units of thirty-two, or twenty-eight, or whatever the contract says, cool. But if you have forty-five, like then what do you do? You cram them all? You spread the extra into the other classes, which you can do? Or do you make another class, so that everybody's kind of smaller than the max, right? Superintendents kind of intuitively know how this works, so this formula actually kind of mimicked that decision-making process. And then a budget crisis happened. It's when the city went under, you know, and Ford said to the city, "Dropped dead," right? Remember that?

Rubens: The time period is?

Choy: This is the summer of '74. This is '73-74. Also that summer, we were negotiating with the UFT. Collective bargaining as an exercise, that was really interesting too. It ended up there was a six-week strike that fall. That was also the fall they laid off 16,000 teachers. They had something like 68,000, 60-something thousand teachers on the payroll, and when they started school that fall, there were 50,000 on the payroll. Literally in the middle of August they just sent out thousands of pink slips. They were strictly by seniority, because that was the only thing they had. And within license title, people teaching out

of license—it was all screwed up; it was really a mess, They did this thing called bumping that went on through January, where some teacher, because they still had a job and they had a license in Latin, even though they hadn't taught Latin for twenty years, they'd been teaching something else, they'd be *boning up* for Latin. [laughs] And then, because of the way the bumping worked, it would turn out there was somebody with more seniority, or less seniority—they'd bump somebody, so the next week they're in some other class in some other school.

Rubens: The strike came in response to those layoffs?

Choy: No, the strike came in because of the budget cuts. The interesting thing about that was that the Financial Control Board, which was run by the state—governor was Hugh Carey at that time—the state was sort of deciding how much money everybody was going to have. Every agency in the city had said, “We're going to give you forty million dollars for the contract negotiation.” It's like this was supposedly real money. Every time they did this, this is the way they do it. You have the base, and you have this extra on top that you can negotiate, or not negotiate; you can do whatever you want. So the question is, what do you use this money for? The state was very interested in reducing the payroll, because payroll meant future obligations; that's what they were trying to cut. So they said, “No more new jobs.” You had to give everybody more money, because they were laying people off, but the union wanted to hire them back, [and] that was the last thing they wanted. After they fired 16,000 teachers, no new jobs. You had to—and so [UFT President Albert] Shanker actually said, “We're willing to trade jobs for money, for higher pay.” And they got the answer back: No. So we negotiated all summer. That's a whole other story, too, about us. I was in the back room crunching numbers for the negotiators in the front room.

Rubens: Did you have a role?

Choy: Yes, we did. But they ended up—what happened on that, I had this crazy idea that we could calculate how much the contract—how much you had to spend on teachers over the life of the contract. Nobody had ever known this before, because you just couldn't do it; there's 50-60,000 teachers; they make \$40,000 each. Fifty teachers, a million, that was the number, right, fifty teachers, a million, that's what it cost. There was millions of dollars involved in it, thousands and thousands of people. They have this pay schedule, and the steps, and movement. It's like random numbers, which was good, because I said this was like a matrix, a Markov process, which is another queuing theory thing, which we had studied. [laughs] We could mathematically model this thing and actually crank out how much it was going to cost over any given period, like, you want to cut jobs, you want to increase more money, that's all parameters, you could put them in and—we had computers then that were still batched, but there was online stuff then. This was in '74.

So we hired these two guys from Brooklyn College. These two mathematicians, really smart guys, and—no, there were three of them. And, “This is what we want,” and they knew instantly what it was. And we had the data, because we had access to all the data, so you could calibrate this thing, so you could actually come up with a transition matrix of probabilities of how people move through this salary table. You knew how many teachers you had, you knew how much you paid them, so it was just a matter of cranking the numbers through once you had this matrix calibrated. So these guys actually did this thing. They set this thing up so that we could sit at a terminal in the back room and punch in some numbers, and it would grind out the answer, how much it would cost over the life of the—how many teachers, how much—you know, how many dollars, all this sort of stuff. This was like, analytical magic. They thought we were geniuses. This actually became an issue. They would have some proposal; they’d run in the back room saying, “Run this thing,” so we’d run it, hand them back the answer, and they’d do whatever they wanted with it. But they actually were able to have some kind of rational basis for saying, “Yes, we like this,” or “No, we don’t,” whereas before, they’d be saying, “Well, hmm, hmm, hmm,” because they had no way of knowing whether any proposal by any side was—how it was going to end up, so it was basically a blank check, which had always been the criticism about UFT contracts.

I got to meet Shanker personally. He’s a very smart guy, very nice. He’s much more liberal than his public persona, his union persona. He knows what’s going on.

Rubens: Did he have a sense of—?

Choy: Yes, he’s savvy, and—he’s a math teacher; he loved what we were doing, and he understood it right away. He knew about fairness, and what was right, and all that kind of stuff, but he had this union thing. What he said to them and what he said to us were completely different personalities.

Rubens: You mean he knew that there were going to have to be some compromises.

Choy: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. He was realistic about the way the world works. He knew it better than we did. So, that was another piece of—something that came out of what I learned in graduate school, [I] was actually able to use in a real situation with real money involved. I mean, there was millions and millions and millions of dollars involved in this thing.

The governor, after the contract was negotiated—oh, and the other thing, yes—they said they were going to cut the budget for the school districts, the decentralized school districts, by so many hundreds of millions of dollars. Because we had this formula that allocated the money that kind of mimicked the staffing, we could say, “You give us this amount of money, this is what’s

going to happen. We're going to have to do this, cut this." We found a way—it was by basically squeezing every ounce of fat out of the system—a way that you could actually run the system without—what you'd end up doing is basically cutting classroom supplies to some ridiculous amount like twenty bucks, ten bucks a child, I forget what it was. It was really stupid; it was a ridiculous number, because it was ridiculously small. But you could actually staff the place. So that made the board feel better about saying yes to the contract, because they could see it could be done, whereas if you didn't have this, they wouldn't have known; I mean, they would have said yes, but who knows what's going to happen. Plus, we gave—we showed the superintendents how to do it, by showing them how to squeeze the fat out of the staffing, and manipulating things. We did things like—teachers had a prep period. So if you put the prep period at the end of day for everybody, you don't need another teacher to cover the class. That kind of stuff. The way the superintendents in fact do that, as a practical matter, that was not our problem. It was the superintendents'—analytically you could show that you could do it.

Rubens: Same with cutting their supplies and everything else, okay.

Choy: So we were able to get a contract. And when the governor had hired two NYU B-school guys to analyze the contract, and write a personal report to him about—

Rubens: The contract fit within the financial parameter?

Choy: The governor wanted to know whether this was really true, that what Gifford said was right. They came back, and they said that the contract was going to cost 400 million dollars, and blah blah blah, and Bernie went ballistic. One thing you cannot do with Bernie is, you can't say his numbers are wrong. He will go absolutely nuts. He went absolutely nuts on this thing. We were the ones who did the numbers for him. Even though he didn't actually crunch the numbers, he participated in the whole exercise.

Rubens: He understood the plan?

Choy: Oh, yes, and he could just as easily have done it himself, too. He understood what was going—the way we were doing it, and how the thing worked and everything. He was as much an architect of this whole analytical plan as we were. So when these guys who don't know anything about the school system, or contracts with the UFT, or anything, said this, he went absolutely nuts.

There's an article in the *Post*, front page, where he was interviewed. He says things like, "They're wrong. Political garbage like this should not be allowed to pile up on the governor's desk." [laughs] He's insulted. "If I am wrong, they can take it out of my check." And the last line of the article is, "The

deputy chancellor makes \$48,000 a year.” [laughs] And of course, that was the last we ever heard of this report.

Rubens: What’s the implication there? In 1974, that’s a decent salary.

Choy: Well, he would cover the deficit by taking a pay cut. We’re talking of hundreds of millions of dollars. That was the end of that. We never heard about this thing again. It went away, and Carey laid off. He never pushed the issue that this was a Christmas tree contract. Then we had the strike, and of course the financial crisis never went away; it just continued on. Then in the spring of ’74—the following spring, ’75, I guess it was—this guy Leonard Stavisky, who was from Queens, he was an assemblyman from Queens, and he was chair of the education committee, he was this big fat guy, real politician, big voice. Everybody trembled when this guy came down the hall, because he was powerful. He got this idea, this bug in his head, that—education was being cut like crazy, and he got this idea that the percentage—the money for the board of ed. was passed by—the state had to adopt the budget, had to approve the budget. So the money for the city school district came from the state, and it was passed through the city budget. There was this mechanical thing. The city couldn’t do a thing about it, which is what the mayor always hated. Even now, this is what Bloomberg was all about, and Giuliani, about putting people on the board that had control; they wanted a handle on the budget. The only thing they knew was one number, whatever, three billion dollars at that time, and that was all they could—then they had to say they couldn’t do anything about it.

They hated this. But this three billion dollars was some x percent of the city’s total, right? And it turned out it was forty percent or something like this, I forget exactly the number.

Rubens: A big percentage.

Choy: It was a big percent. I calculated this number out to nine decimal places because Stavisky had this idea that the city’s share, the school district’s share of the city’s budget, should not go down. Whatever the city got, the school district should get the same percentage as they got last year of whatever the total is. This law actually got adopted, [laughs] crazy law. I remember attending meetings where Stavisky was trying to sell this idea to the school board, which the school board loved, of course—because it guaranteed them something, right?—and of course the city hated.

I remember going to meetings, one meeting especially. It was with the deputy mayor, who was an Abe Beame crony. He was the mayor’s Choy. He ran the numbers for the mayor, just like we ran the numbers for Gifford. But at this meeting, there’s a whole bunch of people in this room. [James] Cavanaugh comes in, the deputy mayor. Bernie didn’t want to have this meeting. So about

five minutes into this thing, he gets up and he starts shouting [laughs], this wild man, and he walks out! We all kind of follow behind; that was the end of the meeting. This is something Bernie learned in Rochester, about how to deal with power.

Rubens: Not necessarily straight out of the Saul Alinsky manual, but—

Choy: Well, he learned how to—

Rubens: Confrontational politics.

Choy: Yes. I'd been to meetings where Bernie wasn't there. I forget exactly why, but Irving Anker, the chancellor, was there, and the new deputy mayor, after Kavanaugh left, and we were talking about money for the school district for the next year, and there'd be me, with my little HP calculator, [laughs] a piece of paper, and my head crammed full of numbers. And I'd be sitting there at the meeting, and Irving Anker and the chancellor and the deputy mayor were talking, blah blah blah, and then they'd come up with some number, and they'd kind of look at me and I'd say yes or no. And on the basis of what I said, that's what happened. So here you have—the thing about this is, here you have this analyst who has this kind of power, but no line [of] responsibility. I'm not the chancellor; he's the chancellor. He's got to make the decision. I have no decision-making power, but I'm the one who feeds the options.

Rubens: You also—you do have a political stake, because you're part of the—

Choy: Oh yes, the place has got to work; you don't want to tell them that, "No, it's not going to work." My interest is making sure the school system has to run okay. You can't make it so that it can't run okay. But here you have a decision-maker, and you say, "These are the four options which I've analyzed, and I've come up with scenarios for only viable ones. You pick one." In effect, you've made the decision, because you've given him choices, and whatever one he picks—

Rubens: You were conscious of this?

Choy: Oh yeah. They teach this to us in planning school, about who gets to make the decision, for real. It was like this for a while, we would go from one crisis after another, and there were other things like the custodians. There was all kinds of graft in the custodians in the school, bringing them to court, and people went to jail over this thing, for padding the payroll. Fortunately, I personally was not involved in some of these other things. I was sort of stuck to the budgetary things. Other people were working on those problems. But there was all kinds of stuff going on in that office. And we were the ones who did his analysis, whatever it was he was working on.

The bureaucrats—we made it clear to them, we did not want their jobs. I did not want to be director of the budget. Once they understood that and could see that in fact it was true, they were very willing to help us. We got data from them; they realized that we were all on the same page, trying to make the system work better, and that we could help them do that.

Rubens: It sounds exciting, intense.

Choy: Oh yes, the excitement goes on for a while. After a while you get kind of burned out, working six, seven days a week.

Rubens: Is that what it required?

Choy: Oh, yeah. I had the good luck of living only two blocks away. So coming to work—

Rubens: You lived in the—

Choy: I lived on Livingston Street in Brooklyn Heights.

Rubens: Were you sending the kids to school by then?

Choy: No, they hadn't started school. Robert was born in '72, so he hadn't started school yet. The public school in the Heights was good. It was competitive to the private schools. It was a real decision, do I fork up x thousands of dollars, or do I send my kid to public school? It wasn't a no-brainer at all. So, this went on, and then finally there was some crisis over the custodians or something, indictments and stuff like that, and there was some big issue, and Bernie got mad. So, he was going to quit. And right at this time, Aaron Wildavsky came to town. The Russell Sage Foundation hired Aaron to reinvent itself. The Russell Sage Foundation, as you may or may not know, was set up by his wife after he died, and its job was to give away his fortune. It was the oldest social science research foundation in the country, and had done great stuff. It had been kind of moribund for a while.

Rubens: Where did the money come from?

Choy: Railroads. And stocks, stock manipulation, railroads. So, Aaron came to town, and he was going to reinvent the Russell Sage Foundation. His idea was to create a Brookings Institution-type institution for New York City, where you could have policy analysts, and they could grind out this stuff, and it would be wonderful. Because he had been dean of the Public Policy School here. He took a leave from there, and—

Rubens: You had studied with him, right?

Choy: Well, no; I knew of him. I didn't study with him. He had started a public policy—he was in poli sci [political science], and he had started the Public Policy School. The first class I think was in '68; it was a master's program, because one of my friends was in it. It was too late for us, but if it had existed—because they didn't start the doctoral program until much later. He was going to hire people, and he decided he was going to hire Bernie to be his New York City point person. And he hired Mary Douglas, an anthropologist, and he hired some other big names. There were four Senior Fellows, I think they were called. Bernie asked me if I wanted to go with him, so I said, "Sure." I needed a job, right? I wasn't going stay at the board of ed. if he wasn't; it wasn't going to be fun any more. Or interesting.

So I went with him. I continued working for him and then, after a couple of years of this, Aaron presents his vision to the board. You have to understand, this board is like total WASP. Aaron is total New York Jew. They didn't like it. It was the end of that.

Rubens: And this was a two-year process?

Choy: Yeah, he had the development. He created this thing, and he set this thing up, and then he presented this grand vision; they didn't like it. After they thought about it awhile, and they said, "Goodbye." So Aaron left and came back to Berkeley. Meanwhile, all of us are there. [laughs] It's supposed to be the nucleus of this new policy research paradigm, so we didn't get to do whatever we wanted. I was studying the New York City economy, and there were some guys at NYU who were doing the same thing. It was interesting stuff, but it wasn't going to go anywhere as far as policy goes. There was no client anymore. That was the other thing; you were working for the New York City government, you had a client. The mayor was the client. You worked for the city, you got a client. You work for the board of ed., you had a client. And here, I got no client, so you're just basically spinning your wheels for fun.

Then Bernie decided he was going to run for Congress in the north part of Brooklyn, Green Point. I forget exactly what the neighborhood was. There was this district. I forget the guy's name [Fred Richmond]—I should remember this—but the guy who represented them, his family was from Boston or someplace; he was Irish.

He'd made his money—mortuary business, selling coffins. That's how he made his money. In Washington DC, he had made an advance to some boy in a public place and got caught. Pedophile, right? So this guy has a problem. The main reason Bernie thought he was vulnerable was that—there's a Jewish community, a Hasidic Jewish community—the place where they had all the riots?

Rubens: Yes, the Bensonhurst?

- Choy: Yeah, Bensonhurst, right. That was in this district. And pedophile is like, big no-no, right? The thing about them is that they're only about 2500 votes, but they vote as a bloc. So if you get them, [snaps fingers] guaranteed win! The way the incumbent had played it, he had money, so whatever you wanted—projects, gifts, whatever, okay. But Bernie had no money. He had—
- Rubens: And this was for US Congress?
- Choy: Yes. He had integrity. So he was running for office, and—
- Rubens: Did you work on the campaign?
- Choy: I fortunately did not work on the campaign. I did not have to work on the campaign, because at the same time, Bernie took a job as a consultant, and advisor to the judge in the court case—the school desegregation case, Crawford, in LA—because we had done this sort of stuff for New York City.
- Okay, so I was the one who was doing the work for that. That was my job, because I was the source of income for his campaign. [laughs] So, he couldn't screw that up. So I worked on that. I made some trips out to LA from New York. It was a really interesting project. They had all kinds of interesting ethnic data.
- Rubens: It's a landmark case, isn't it?
- Choy: It was busing, yeah. That summer, the judge said, "Bus!" It was still undecided exactly how he was going to do it, whether it was going to be done—and this was summer. This judge could have cared less, and didn't understand about the logistics of running a school district—bus I don't know how many thousands of kids they have, but thousands and thousands of them, all over this huge place. The way they did it was—you had to have a map, you had to have bus stops, you had to have bus routes, you had to have buses! And these drivers have to practice. They have to know where to go. All of this stuff happens during the summer, so that when September comes, they're ready. But summer—"Are you going to bus, or—" "I don't know." "Where are you going to bus?" "We don't know where we're going to bus." The whole thing was up in the air. This was an impending disaster.
- Rubens: This was the summer of '76.
- Choy: I was working—right, because there would have been an election in the fall. No, no, no. It was later. No, it was '78. Right, the summer of '78, because the election was that fall, and this was one of the first projects that Bernie had taken on. We were trying to advise the school district on how to comply with the desegregation law, to do desegregation *really*. There was a resource component to that, and that's what I'm doing: budget, money. We were trying to help them with that, but I got interested in this busing thing, and the ethnic

makeup of the school districts, and I did some analysis of the data they had. They had school census data by year for the entire district, so they had a whole stack of this stuff—ten or twelve years of data. It was really interesting how the schools changed ethnic mix.

What I found was, there are these borders—freeways, major streets, whatever. The borders would hold for years, and then all of a sudden they would just move a whole bunch of blocks, and in the space of a couple of years, all the schools between would just suddenly tip. We saw this over and over again. I don't know if anybody cared or understood about this, but I thought this was interesting, as a city planner and as a geography problem. As a demographic problem, it was something that nobody had ever studied before. I worked on this project—

Rubens: Could policy change what's going on here?

Choy: Yeah. Whether you could do anything about it, whether policy could intervene in it—I thought it probably couldn't, because that was just the way the world was.

Rubens: What was driving it? Housing?

Choy: Demographics, yeah. People coming, and then the schools were all segregated, and they then decide, "Okay, the pressure gets too big, we've got to—" The border gets violated, and then suddenly *zoop*—it shows up, and then it does it again, after a few more years. That's just the way it was. Anyway, I worked on this project, and the income from that is what was paying for Bernie's run for Congress. So that's why I didn't have to work on the campaign. [laughs] Everybody else had to; I didn't. I was doing my job in the back. Then that was over—oh, yeah, the Russell Sage people went nuts over this, because Bernie was running for Congress, and they're supposed to be apolitical—their foundation status and apolitical, all that kind of stuff, their tax status.

Rubens: Was he still on their payroll?

Choy: Yes. That was his problem between 1978 and 1979. The year I was working for him on this Crawford thing—the year I was his friend, because Bernie lived in the Heights at that time, too—and so the vice-president of the foundation, who was this really *slimy* guy, came to my office one day, and *actually told me* that I couldn't talk to Bernie. I said, "Huh? Excuse me? What is this"? [laughs] I complained about it, and I never heard about it again. But that's how scared they were. I thought this was really strange—I can't talk to my friend? Excuse me?

Rubens: Did he win?

- Choy: No.
- Rubens: I presume if he had won he would have resigned.
- Choy: Well, he would have been in Congress, too. But no, he didn't win. So we kind of stumbled along after that, and then finally the Russell Sage board got their act together, and they hired a retiring vice president of the Ford foundation, who was a New Yorker, who lived in the UN Plaza, Marshall Robinson. He came in, and his job was to really to clean house, [laughs] and get rid of us. He finally did that in '81. What happened was, we had to move, because our apartment was too small, two boys in a two-bedroom apartment. We had to move, and I had to change jobs, because my work at Russell Sage had come to an end. Our choices were, stay in New York, which we could have done—I guess I could have got a job someplace—move to Boston, move to Washington, DC, or come back to the Bay Area. Come back to the Bay Area was of course our first choice. Any place else in the country was out.
- Rubens: Did you enjoy New York culturally and socially?
- Choy: Yes, yes. It was getting hard. It was expensive, too, because we had public sector jobs, so we weren't going to make—
- Rubens: Your wife worked as well.
- Choy: Yeah, she worked—she got her PhD while we were there, at NYU in public administration, under Dick Netzer—and she was working part-time at the board of ed. and stuff. We had friends who were like, Wall Street lawyers and that kind of stuff. But it was clear we were never going to be rich. I was able to put together a year's worth of salary, so we came back out here. Russell Sage gave me half-pay for another year of severance, and I got a teaching job at the public policy school here; I taught a couple of classes.
- Rubens: Is this when you were a visiting scholar?
- Choy: Yeah, and then Mel Webber gave me some desk space in the department. So I had a place, and we came back here. We rented a house in North Berkeley, and then the Reagan recession hit, and so, no jobs. I figured I could get a job within a year. There were no jobs, so I was unemployed. My wife at that time got a job, sort of, through connections of Mike Teitz, yet again. We owe our entire family income—we owe to this one guy. [laughs]
- Rubens: At critical points, anyway.
- Choy: Yes, starting with the RAND job, which led to everything else. And then he, when we came back, linked Susan up, my wife, with Gary Hoachlander, who had a company—who had a partnership. He wanted to start up a company and do research. So Mike said, "Ah, I've got just the person for you."

He [Hoachlander] had been a Charles Benson student, and a planning student, but he had been working with Charles Benson on some voc. ed. stuff. Charles had this big voc. ed. project here. Catherine had been a student of Charles Benson. So they started working together, and they had an office down; you know this weird building by Alta Bates? On Telegraph, across—the one that's got the bank that's got the hole in the middle? There are two office buildings opposite each other, and—what's the real estate company?

Rubens: Oh, the lefty.

Choy: Yeah, there used to be a Mason McDuffie office, and across the street was this office building, so they had an office in there. There were the two of them working on this little contract for the state, and for whoever else—a part-time secretary, and a bunch of rented furniture. They started this in '81, and now they have two, three floors of the PowerBar building, and they have sixty-five employees. It's a big business. But it started out with just the two of them, and maybe you get a paycheck, maybe you don't. Then Bernie got the dean job, here.

Rubens: Are you anxious? I mean, where do you—

Choy: No, I've got no job. I'm looking around for a job, and then in that fall, the fall of '82, Bernie gets the dean job. And because I recommended him—and remember, [Chancellor] Heyman said, "We're not going to close the school, because for the University of California at Berkeley to turn its back on education sends the wrong message. Forget it, we're not going to do it."

Rubens: So this was a real commitment.

Choy: Oh, yes, because Neil Smelser had led a task force—there were all these reports. What had happened was, the dean, seven years before—seven deans in seven years, right—the dean who had been brought up from Riverside, well from down by the Riverside, fell off his bike and became incapacitated, so they went through this period where it was a disaster. L & S [Letters & Science] professors hate the professional schools anyway; they hate education especially, so this was their chance to kill this thing.

Rubens: Why do they hate it especially?

Choy: They don't like professional schools to begin with, because that's voc. ed., although they seem to have no problem with engineering—

Rubens: Which is precisely the science of engineering. Was the—?

Choy: Right. But education was always this thing where there was all of this study, and there was no science. You know, it was all touchy-feely—besides everybody being survivors of the system, you know, all these people can't be

that smart; they can't be trying very hard. What's so hard about teaching school? And on and on. Anyway—it was big, too, because remember, in the early seventies was Title I, and the school was huge. They had a lot of staff—four- or five-, 600 students. It was huge. If you go back and look at the numbers, it was really amazing how big that place was. So, when this thing happened, they had a respite for a while, but it's amazing how quickly a place can deteriorate, and then Heyman became chancellor—

Rubens: How long was this period? It was seven years—

Choy: Yeah, they sort of took turns. The faculty took turns being acting dean for a year. Seven deans in seven years. So, no new minds, and this was the Jerry Brown budget cut time. So, bad news, right? Cut education, cut education, nothing's there to defend it, right? Finally, in spring of 1982, when Heyman decided—they had two big studies about—what do you do with the school? One of them said kill it, but the other one said, well, maybe you could just fix it. Heyman said, "I'm not going to kill it. How are we going to fix it"? So, "Well, if you're going to fix it, you've got to do this, you've got to do that, you've got to—" Okay, so they did this dean search, and Bernie got the job. He was going to be their savior.

Rubens: And what had he been doing for the last couple of years?

Choy: Oh, he'd been to Rochester, as vice president. He'd gone back to his alma mater, he was fiddling around. He was just spinning wheels, basically, is what happened. So, he got the job, and when he—

Rubens: Was this the first African-American deanship?

Choy: Oh, yeah.

Rubens: Yes—not of the school, of the University.

Choy: That I don't know, but probably. If not the first, it's certainly one of the—you can probably count them on one hand. So, he asked me to work for him, to run the budget for him. He wanted me to protect his back; I needed a job, so I said, "Sure." I started working in March of '83. Geraldine Clifford was still acting dean. Bernie hadn't started; he was going to start in May, I think. I came there, and I knew nothing about this place, and—

Rubens: You knew nothing about the School of Ed. You had a—

Choy: And I knew nothing about how the University worked, but I knew a lot from working for the city, working at RAND, working board of ed—

Rubens: Incredible! You'd been around in the center of the storm.

- Choy: Anything I learned about how this place worked, I learned from people who worked there, who are still working there.
- Rubens: What was your title? What did you—?
- Choy: Ah, yes. I was an academic coordinator. My informal office title was assistant dean for administration. At that time, the only people who could hold the title assistant dean were faculty. Therefore, I could not be assistant dean. Academic personnel was adamant about this. I was Academic Coordinator Choy.
- Rubens: They were saying that the position was an assistant deanship—
- Choy: Everybody there treated me as assistant dean, and I didn't find this out until later on. We sent some piece of paper there with my title on it—
- Rubens: Had you started teaching, by the way?
- Choy: —that came back and said, “You can't call yourself this!” I said, “Huh”? [laughs] I had been teaching sort of off and on. Yes, right, I got a job teaching at Hayward when I wasn't—this is really real, this is a Saturday class, and every other Saturday for six hours. It was awful. And it met up here on campus.
- Rubens: Was it a public finance course?
- Choy: Yes.
- Rubens: Out of the Department of Public Administration?
- Choy: At Hayward State.
- Rubens: Why was it awful?
- Choy: Six hours, twice a week.
- Rubens: Oh, teaching it was awful.
- Choy: Yes, teaching it was awful.
- Rubens: Interesting students?
- Choy: They were okay.
- Rubens: You had just mentioned earlier, you had taught at the—

- Choy: I taught at Columbia in the Public Policy School, and I taught a course at Teacher's College, at Columbia. This course I taught was during the transit strike, and getting from Brooklyn Heights to Columbia was really a drag, especially at ten o'clock at night, getting home.
- Rubens: You taught resource allocation in the public sector.
- Choy: Then I was a TA when I was a grad student.
- Rubens: So they're not giving you anything to teach at the School of Education.
- Choy: No, no, no. My job was to—I didn't—teaching was way too hard. [laughter] Too much work.
- Rubens: It sounds as if the School of Ed is really under the gun. It's going to have to—
- Choy: We had to—
- Rubens: What are the issues? Do they want to get rid of it? I mean, is it not cost efficient?
- Choy: There's no research; it's all bullshit. Reading, language and literacy—
- Rubens: Have they started the Bay Area Writing Project yet?
- Choy: Oh, that was going for a long time. That was a one-man thing, Jim Gray. That was one of the two projects that had real money. That was not state money. The other one was Nadine Lambert's school psych project. She was school psychologist, and she studied troubled kids, to keep them under control. Basically, they had these two projects that were kind of independent of everything. They had their own life, and nothing else. There were a bunch of teacher-education programs. There were about three or four of them—I forget exactly which—and they had the principal thing. It was the institute for principals. Because you could never just become a principal in the state of California; you've got to take courses and get certified. So they did that. And there were some vacant positions that had been held for who knows how long, waiting for the next dean, or a plan, and so we started. We went from whatever it was, I don't know, fifty employees on the staff—fifty, forty-something, thirty-something faculty, I'm not sure exactly what the numbers were—and grew. Four years later, when Bernie left to go to Apple, as vice president, we had like a hundred and something, a hundred-plus staff members. We had like \$20,000,000. There was a lot going on. We were spending a lot of money.
- Rubens: What accounts for that? How did that—?

- Choy: We hired people, they brought in grants, we snatched the voc. ed. center—the National Center for Research in Vocational Education. We snatched that. Charles snatched that from Ohio State, where it had been for the last twenty years. And when we did, he somehow magically ran it. [laughs] Huge.
- Rubens: He and Bernie?
- Choy: No, Charles, Charles Benson. That was one of the big, big projects. They managed to go through a couple of re-bids on that before they lost it, gave it up again.
- Rubens: That was directly supported by the—
- Choy: The Feds. Sarah Freedman got a writing center project, Fed money. Andy diSessa came from MIT; they hired all these people in the math-science education to rationalize that, and that was a big area, and on and on. And we introduced computers to the school, too.
- Rubens: Oh, a big story.
- Choy: That was the time when computers went from WordStar, when you needed to have a left thumb; that's why God gave you a left thumb, so you could do WordStar.
- Rubens: Why left thumb?
- Choy: Because you needed it for the commands. [laughs]
- Rubens: Bernie has this galvanizing power?
- Choy: Yeah, we got computers and desk calculators, word processors. Vice provost, or provost of the Professional Schools and Colleges, Doris Calloway, she was at Public Health, Doris Calloway. She was the one whose job it was to make sure that Bernie was successful.
- Rubens: This was a good collaboration?
- Choy: Yeah.
- Rubens: So what are you doing?
- Choy: I'm Dr. No. [laughter]
- Rubens: What does that mean?
- Choy: Well, because of the way the paperwork works in this place, I have to sign for and approve all the expenditures. So I did that, so everything that got spent I

knew about, and every person on payroll I had to sign—the dean is supposed to sign the PAF, the green thing, which we no longer have. Remember those?

Rubens: No.

Choy: The personnel action form, which was a contract. But it was one of the required things, so I signed every single one of those, hundreds of them. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them. My signature of Bernard R. Gifford became Bernard R. Gifford's signature. Whenever I was on vacation, Bernie actually signed, and payroll would return it questioning the authenticity of the signature. If it didn't have the dean's signature, they'd have to send a sample—yes, it is. So I was the one who basically made sure that what got spent was spent on what it was supposed to be spent on. I rationalized the budget, kept track of the numbers, with the help of the people in the business office, indispensable. We tried to computerize the bookkeeping system, the record-keeping system, and we made some headway with that, before—this is way before BFS [Berkeley Financial System] and BAIRS [Berkeley Administrative Initiatives Reporting System], and all that kind of stuff. We were doing it, and Chemistry was trying to do it, and they had their own system. Chemistry had their system, which was running on batch computers. Ours was running on desktop computers. This was the era of the IBM PCs, the XTs, remember that?

Rubens: When you say running this, you mean running the whole budget—?

Choy: Keeping track, record-keeping—knowing where you are today, as opposed to waiting until the end of the month, waiting for two weeks after the end of the month to figure out where you were six weeks ago. Because we were spending money, a lot of money, *fast*.

Rubens: And new faculty's coming on—

Choy: Yeah, and so there's lots going on. We did things like—oh, the other thing I got involved in late—was this when Bernie was still there? I don't know if Bernie was still there, or if Bill Rower was dean. I got involved in the throughput of graduate students.

Rubens: Throughput?

Choy: Were they taking too long to finish, like eight, ten more years? Why is this, and who is responsible for minority progress? Of course, I've got all the data, and analyzed it, and I worked out this thing on the spreadsheet that sort of tried to measure the rate of progress of graduate students through all the hoops they've got to go through, and where they would get hung up, how long it took to get from step A to step B, on and on. We found out that there were some faculty members that had fifteen, sixteen graduate students, and some who had almost none. This became an issue, because how can you take care of

that many students properly? And we heard all of the excuses and reasons and—

Rubens: Inequity of—

Choy: Yeah, right, because the best students take the longest time, so you can't measure the acquisition of knowledge, and all that kind of stuff, right? Of course, Jane Ellen Croke—who was Lambert's student—was twenty-six years, and she actually finished. She finished. [laughter] The next person was only twenty-two years. I gave it—basically the data for the faculty to crack down on this, and actually ride herd on this and crack the whip on them and get them through—because they were taking up spaces. Oh, yes—no output, no input. They were taking up spaces, and if you wanted to accept more students you had to get them out the door. That became the incentive for the faculty to crack down on it. These people were working professionals with regular jobs, so they had not a really great incentive to finish quickly. If you look at the data at Stanford, nobody takes their time! At Stanford, they're in and out in four years. At that kind of money, whoever's paying, you don't hang around for eight years, or ten years, or twenty years. You can't afford it, right? Whereas at Berkeley, because it's so cheap, and because nobody's watching, and nobody cares, they can be registered forever. It doesn't cost them a whole lot.

Rubens: You call that throughput?

Choy: Yeah, throughput. This is a factory. I did stuff like that, and then when Bernie—and then this job came open. American Cultures happened. I remember Bernie going to the debates, and—

Rubens: I was going to say, by '86, there's going to be all sorts of—

Choy: All sorts of things are happening.

Rubens: Starting to happen, yes. And he sat in the council of deans. Do you have any recollection of this?

Choy: I never got involved—

Rubens: Brought in to—

Choy: He had somebody else. He had another assistant, special assistant who helped him with that kind of academic stuff. Linda Wing, who succeeded Ami Zusman, who now works for the Office of the President. She used to work for the Center for Studies in Higher Education, and then he hired Linda Wing to do that kind of stuff for him. So I never got involved in this. I was strictly the business side in the staff. I was Dr. No. My favorite job, when we were hiring new faculty, was to throw the old faculty out of their offices. They had these

big offices, and I had to tell them, “We need your space; you’ve got to double up, you know, share and consolidate. I know there is only a little desk in here, but no room to store your life’s files and research data.”[laughs] That was my best offer.

Rubens: Was that some kind of wrist-slapping?

Choy: They understood. They’d all been acting deans, and they understood what was happening, but of course, did I have to be nice about it? Because they didn’t deserve it, and it wasn’t as if we were beating up on them, but it was a fact of life: they had offices, we were hiring faculty, and they’re not stupid; they know what’s going on. So I had to work that out, get rid of their stuff, do something with it, pile it up, whatever, but—three or four times. And then the other thing I had to do, since I was the person in charge of the building, was—one of the secretaries would call me. “There’s a guy in the hall!” [laughs] So I’ve got to go up there and throw this bum out.

Rubens: You didn’t call security, or—

Choy: Well, this was—I’ve got to go check out what’s actually going on, and then I’d decide, do I need to call the cops? What you do is, you ask them, “Excuse me, who are you, why are you here?” They’d kind of get up and walk off.

Rubens: So does the School of Ed during this period from ’82 to ’86 get re-rated? Does it get—?

Choy: Oh, yes, we get rated, and we’re the *top!* Except for Harvard and Columbia’s TC. But, as Bernie said, it’s all smoke and mirrors. But yeah, we got national recognition for who knows what, where, I don’t know why. But they did get recognition, as opposed to being off the radar screen totally.

Rubens: Yeah, I mean, you’re not going to be axed. So there’s good news for you?

Choy: Oh, yeah, we got a lot done—

Rubens: How do you measure this by the budget? What was the annual budget by the end?

Choy: One hundred fifty staff, \$20 million budget. Went from basically five million dollars to twenty, in just a few years. We were running like crazy. It was an exciting time. I could actually say yes and no to things. I made sure that the dean made the decisions. Bernie had always told us this, all people who worked with him, from the very beginning, back in the seventies. He never wanted—because we worked directly for him; even at this job, I worked directly for him—he said, “If anybody’s got a problem with me, if they want to complain about me—” if, you know, they try to do an end-run and they would complain to us—he says, “Don’t listen to them. Tell them, you’ve got a

problem with Bernie, go talk to Bernie. Never make an excuse for me, never accept responsibility for my decisions, whatever they are; they're *not* your problem." So, cool! You've got a problem with Bernie, go see Bernie. Go see the dean. Talking to me is useless; I'm not going to do anything.

- Rubens: So did you have that? Did you not pass on complaints?
- Choy: Oh, yeah. Eventually people understood that—
- Rubens: Was there a lot to complain about?
- Choy: Oh yes, about money, about this, about that. I'd say, "Hey, man, I can't help you. Go talk to the dean. "
- Rubens: He goes to Apple in '87?
- Choy: Yeah. Vice president for something.
- Rubens: No kidding. What kind of decision is that?
- Choy: Well, he took a leave. It was maybe a career move, maybe not. Steve Jobs—Scully, he worked for Scully. Scully was president then.
- Rubens: He was interested in making some money?
- Choy: Yeah, it was big money. And it was something different. Every three or four years he gets bored, got to go on the next rescue operation, move on.
- Rubens: How long did he stay at Apple?
- Choy: Two years, I think.
- Rubens: Then what did he do?
- Choy: He came back. He took a leave—he got tenure! Ah, yes, the tenure campaign. He started this job. He did not have tenure. He was the only dean that Berkeley hired that did not have tenure. And for some reason—
- Rubens: Maybe they couldn't negotiate that the budget committee—
- Choy: Either the VC [vice chancellor] didn't want to give it to him because he didn't have the publications—I don't know what he did, he didn't have the publications. So Bernie was willing to accept the job under those conditions. Of course, he felt this was like dual standards, right? This was all discrimination against the blacks. Scream dual standards, that's—ends everything, right there. You accuse somebody of dual standards, then they're a racist. So he accepted the job, and then he got tenure. He wrote a book; Linda

Wing helped him on that. I didn't help him on it, and he got tenure. He got tenure, man! He's not going to give it up, right?

Rubens: So he's still—who's—

Choy: Bill Rohwer. Bill Rohwer became acting dean, and then he became dean. He was a member of the faculty. Bill Rohwer was a good guy, a smart guy. I worked for him, basically doing the same sort of stuff. And then American Cultures came along. Bernie was still dean when the debates were going on, because I remember him coming back after hearing the debate with opponents of the requirement where John Searle had said, "There's no substance there." People in Ethnic Studies were really mad at him, and Bernie would respond. After that he had gone out and had lunch with philosophy professor Hans Sluga, and they continued the discussion. Bernie never saw this stuff as personal. It was all about ideas, trying to understand the ideas, trying to convince him that my ideas are better than your ideas.

Rubens: And he was committed to this.

Choy: Oh, yes, but I wasn't really involved, unless there was something—when I was looking around for something to do, because I didn't want to do this anymore. The earthquake came. I remember that, sitting in my office, and the whole building shaking, and thinking—you know, Tolman [Hall] has those eye shades, those concrete eye shades, up five floors. I said, "Oh, man, one of those is going to fall off and jump in my lap. I'm going to be squashed." Then this job came open, as I said last time. Manny Pereira, who's in personnel, told me about it. I was talking to him about something else, and he asked me about this job, and I kind of looked at him and said, "Oh, that sounds interesting." I found out—I looked into it and I found out that Lily and Guadalupe had been involved with it, and so I went and asked Lily about it, and she—

Rubens: Lily Wong?

Choy: Lily Wong Fillmore, yes. She was very pleased that I was interested in it, and she wrote a letter of recommendation. I applied, and I got interviewed, and I got the job, because Bill Simmons liked me better than anybody else.

Rubens: And had you known Bill Simmons before?

Choy: No, not at all.

Rubens: So you were really coming in—

Choy: This is the only job I actually got on my own. [laughter]

Rubens: In terms of status, what did it mean to take this job?

- Choy: I had a real title, Assistant Director, but I kept my payroll title, and my payroll pay, and I actually got a step increase for this, so paywise—oh, I got to bring all my vacation with me, my 284 hours.
- Rubens: You had not taken much vacation.
- Choy: No. I accumulated up to the max, and I finally ran this thing down a couple of years ago; I finally used it all up. It took a while. I gave some of it back on a catastrophic illness, to somebody; I gave back forty hours. I'll give it to them. But it took me a while to run it down.
- Rubens: Maybe that's where we should take up next time. Let's just review and see if there's anything more to fill in. You were talking about—there were some heavy times in New York.
- Choy: Oh, yeah. There was a lot going on, and we were at the center of the action. The products of our work, our analysis, made a difference. There was money being moved around because of what I said.
- Rubens: Oh, obviously that was the question, and yet you, you know, it's a whole different domain, but you really see a school begin to flower when you come to Berkeley. It's becoming politicized—
- Choy: Yes, but you look at it, this is about institutional change. You're trying to take this institution and make it work, to accomplish whatever its objective is and make it work well, and fairly, and make it grow, and—
- Rubens: Berkeley, you're referring to.
- Choy: Yeah. Berkeley, New York City, the housing, school board, whatever.
- Rubens: Any engagement with the political process? Are you dealing with the state, with the city, when you're at the—?
- Choy: No. We get involved with Berkeley school stuff, because our kids now go to public schools. This is another thing. We wanted our kids to go to public school. That was another reason why coming back to Berkeley was really attractive, because we knew we could do that without any problem, and it's worked out really well for us. They got a great education—to listen to the parents at the Berkeley school system you'd think this was the worst place on earth, but, tsk! They've got to complain about something, right?
- Rubens: Where did they go to college?
- Choy: San Diego, UC San Diego. The farthest they could get. Berkeley was their backup school. They were both admitted, but—they were into biology, and at that time, for biology, that was the place, and still is the place.

Rubens: So, next week? Shall we look at our calendars? Is next Friday good? We'll walk through your assumption of the position, and then maybe reflecting back. I'd love to hear you restate this about what you think you remember Bernie saying—I don't know if we got that story about Hans Sluga, about them meeting. And then we'll just talk about it in terms of how you establish the center and you map out the progress, and what are certain benchmarks.

Choy: Oh yes, I remember that.

Interview 3: November 5, 2004

[Audio File 3]

- Choy: Deborah Humphreys—vice president for the Association of American Colleges and Universities—visited us, and I talked to her a lot. If you go to their web site, you'll see Berkeley has got a special little thing all about us.
- Rubens: So Troy was on the board already at the AACU.
- Choy: He's still there. I don't know if Troy showed you the copy of the newsletter, the quarterly thing, that's got a picture on the front. This has been an ongoing project for them for a while. Their goal was to have colleges actually implement curriculum changes, and that's why Berkeley was of such interest to them. They had money to do it, too.
- Rubens: They did.
- Choy: Yes, to go in and—wave some money at them and [laughs], it gives them an incentive to do something.
- Rubens: I was surprised that they had Ford money.
- Choy: Yeah, especially when Ford didn't want to give us a dime. Ford heard about us, and they'd go back and forth, and finally sent a new program officer at the time. Bill was the director then. He came and visited, and Bill could never convince him that what Berkeley was doing was something Ford should support. He just didn't have his head in gear. We didn't think he was very smart because he didn't figure it out, he didn't get it. I don't know. Anyway, we never got anything from them. Then when Margaret went there, she supported African American studies and all that kind of stuff. By then this was like five or six years down the road already.
- Rubens: But he had—what is the word—cachet through her; she didn't get any—
- Choy: Well, I don't think we really needed—it would have been nice, but it wasn't like we were just starting out at the beginning, where we kind of were making this thing up as we went along, and who the hell knows where—
- Rubens: And so how did you get the Pew as the one—
- Choy: How did we get the Pew grant?
- Rubens: Ellen Wert was the person who wrote the grant.
- Choy: Yes, Ellen was our program officer.

- Rubens: Okay. We don't know if she's still there or—
- Choy: She might be, but she got—after about five or six years, they reorganized their entire place, and then the education team basically went away, and she worked for some other vice president in there.
- Rubens: Okay, alright, that was just one of the things I want to start pursuing next week is finding out who else on campus has Pew money and then—
- Choy: Probably nobody.
- Rubens: And have some discussion with Pew just to see if they would give the same amount of money to do a broader oral history.
- Choy: They might. I don't know, but we got that grant. I think it was a fluke, from what I could gather, in that before we even started, at the very, very beginning, Heyman had been shopping around for a foundation to help with this thing, and he went to all of the biggies—looking at files of people with the Chicago one, I forget what it's called. He went to Ford, and—you name it, he went there. I don't know why—I suppose he sent it to Pew just because the Pew was there. After I started, the Pew came back and said, “Yeah”! They'll fund us, send us a proposal. We have some money. So I looked them up, and their program thing is, they don't do curriculum, they don't do public colleges. They do bricks and mortar, so I wondered, [laughs] why are they doing this? To keep Heyman from bugging them?
- Rubens: But they do preparations for citizenship.
- Choy: Yes, but that was—this was also fifteen years ago. They've completely changed what they do. At that time they did have a bunch of trusts, and it wasn't—they reorganized themselves into one thing. I guess it was a bunch of trusts that belonged to each of the different family members. There was Sun Oil, that's where their money comes from. But now it's one big trust.
- Rubens: It just seemed logical that maybe they'd give—I wouldn't ask for very much money, but—
- Choy: Well, see, that was the thing. They give money for bricks and mortar, so they'll give millions of dollars to build something, and so like \$350,000 was change.
- Rubens: Could have built a center. Space is of a primary concern on campus—maybe that's the perfect segue. I guess the question I want to ask you was, how did you understand the job that you had been hired for? How did you begin establishing a center?

- Choy: Well, we started—this was February of '90, and there was just Bill and me. We had this room that had a rug on the floor.
- Rubens: The room in Wheeler. Somehow that had been—
- Choy: Well, Rod Park gave it to us, because remember, that was right after they were fixing Wheeler up, and then they found asbestos, and they threw the English Department for two years. Remember that?
- Rubens: No, I don't.
- Choy: All right. Well, that's what happened just before this. So the place was empty, and our particular room, and that whole mezzanine, which is on the north side, had been used for offices for all kinds of stuff—like the Student Learning Center was there, SPO was there, and this MAG group was in our room—the Management and Analysis Group, which was kind of a SWAT team to help the administration in the academic departments. So, everybody got thrown out. [laughs] And so, when this thing came around, Rod Park gave us that space, because everybody who had been there was somewhere else now.
- Rubens: Administratively, who do you fall under?
- Choy: Rod Park. I mean, the chancellor. We reported to Rod Park, whoever reported to Rod Park. He was executive vice chancellor, for everything.
- Rubens: Executive vice chancellor?
- Choy: *The* vice chancellor. That's with a capital "T". He was *The* vice chancellor. I don't think it was even "executive"—Rod maybe was the executive vice chancellor, but he was *the* vice chancellor.
- Rubens: Okay. So he found the room for you, there's a room.
- Choy: Right. And he gave us the money, \$250,000, \$240,000, I forget. But the actual amount wasn't figured out that first year until near the end of the fiscal year because there had been numbers bandied about, and nobody knew what this thing was going to cost—
- Rubens: What was the money going to be for?
- Choy: That was the thing. We had to make this whole thing up. So there was a promise of money, but how much and what for was yet to be determined. So when Bill and I started, the first thing we did was go get some furniture, and we had our nice blue rug, which we still have, so that was all we got from Rod Park. We got money, and so that way we could make up a program. We had some meetings, if I remember correctly. I remember going to one meeting in the faculty club—the upstairs bar room, or whatever it's called. Faculty there

were talking about what we were trying to do, and what this thing was all about and how we were going to do it, and it was an afternoon thing.

Rubens: This must have been faculty that had been part of the—

Choy: People on the committee, and also people who were interested in contributing. I remember Clara Sue Kidwell saying something like—we were talking about institutionalizing this whole thing, we were talking about courses for majors, and whether it was a good idea, and how to do it and all that kind of stuff. And she said something that really stuck in my mind forever after that. She said, “Well, you know, if we get the courses into the major, then we’ve done it, haven’t we?” In other words, you’ve actually institutionalized the American Cultures approach into the way you teach about the US in the major, which is *the thing* in an academic department. That sort of defines your whole intellectual approach. So if you have American Cultures courses that meet major requirements, you’ve in effect reformed the curriculum in a very deep way. I set that up as kind of a goal—like, every course that met the major, that was good, and that was what we really wanted.

Rubens: By the way, did you know that you were supposed to open up the following fall? Was that the—?

Choy: No, we had until the fall of ’91, because that was in the resolution in the Academic Senate laws, Resolution 300. Classes were going to start for the lower division in the fall of ’91. In Fall ’93 it was required for all students, all entering students. That meant the transfers, too. So the first year was just the freshmen; the first two years were just freshmen. Subject to just the entering class—entering freshmen class, and then from then on it was everybody. So you basically had a year and a half to get the first courses ready for the fall of ’91. It was Bill’s idea—this whole seminar thing was his idea. Once he had explained to me, I said, “Okay.” I saw my job as just making it happen. It was a faculty program; he was in charge. My job is to do it.

Rubens: Had you worked with Bill before?

Choy: No.

Rubens: And he came from the Department of Anthropology?

Choy: Yeah.

Rubens: Was that full-time?

Choy: He was half-time then. The way he tells, it, he got the assignment to chair the committee that came up with the requirement, because he was sort of interested in it, and being in anthropology, they’re sort of in the culture business, so they know something about this sort of stuff. But he hadn’t been

actively involved in the fray per se, the way Ethnic Studies faculty were. He wasn't closely identified with—

Rubens: A faction.

Choy: Yes, a faction. Plus that his major—his other major qualification, he'd been chair of Anthro for seven or eight years, and he had been a successful chair, and his successor remembered that he had been able to continue in that. Not too many people hated him, and the department kind of functioned, because that department is notorious for being very factioned, because they have such a wide—

Rubens: Conflicts between the physical and cultural and—

Choy: Yeah, yeah, and then these guys don't talk to each other. They have nothing to do with each other; they hate each other. But he was able to keep things going. He was available and willing, so he got the job. He made it happen, and his reward for getting it through the Senate was, he got to do it.

Rubens: Tell me about the seminar, how—

Choy: He came up with the idea of the seminar. As I understood it, his reasoning was that faculty—first you need to have a stipend. And it had to be some significant amount of money. His reasoning for it was that faculty—when they work on a new course, they use their summer time to do it; that's when they do it. Based on his many years of experience, he figured, ah, it takes about a month of work to come up with a new course. You take what you know, you add some more stuff, you come up with a new course. At that time the average L&S [Letter & Science] salary for a month was about \$6,000. That's where the amount came from, and that's where the time parameter came from. We kind of looked around—should we, like, when should we do this? Should we do it in the summer, when in the summer, should we do it in the spring quarter—no, we were already semesters then, because we switched when I was in Education. Shall we do it in the spring semester, and then you have this or that, and nobody's got any time, which is true. So, we should do it in the summer, right after classes end, right after the end of the term because everybody's still here and they're still in the mode, and they can focus on this thing. So that's how the summer seminar—the one month, twice a week—it started out two hours twice a week, 10:00 to 12:00.

Rubens: What was the point of the seminar?

Choy: The way Bill explained it—I don't know if this was after the fact or before the fact—but what happened, as far as I could see, after the fact, when I saw how this thing actually worked, and people talked about why this thing worked the way it did—I guess this was Bill's idea, too. Yeah, he had this idea before the fact. This is part of the why it was the way it was—that faculty members,

when they want to learn a new material, they figure out who on the campus knows that, right? Because somebody here knows something about anything, right? Because we're Berkeley. So they contact that person, and they have lunch with them, or they talk with them. They pick their brain, basically. So that's what this seminar was supposed to do, except that it was supposed to speed the whole process up. So essentially what you did is you collected in a room, for an extended period of time, a bunch of faculty members who all had the same goal, to teach an American Cultures course, all interested in the same kinds of areas of American Cultures. But they all had their own course in mind, and they all needed to learn new material, and they all came from different disciplinary backgrounds, so they had different kinds of analytical tools. The whole idea was, they can learn from each other, and speed the whole networking process up.

The way that we envisioned the first set of seminars, the first couple of years, actually, was that there would be presentations by panels of experts on broad topics that everybody needed to fill in their background with, because part of the problem—okay, back up. The way American Cultures was set up, you had to take substantial account of at least three groups. The way the academy, especially this particular academy at Berkeley is set up—and probably the academy everywhere else, although to a lesser degree, but in some ways to a greater degree in other ways—is that, when you go to graduate school and you learn something, if you're ever interested in American race and ethnicity, you learn black, because that's all there was, right? There wasn't anything else. But this is California, so we knew better. But the rest of the country didn't, at that time. So the best you had was maybe you knew black and white. That wasn't good enough for American Cultures; you have to have another group. So you had to learn another group. Even the people, the faculty members here at Berkeley in Ethnic Studies, were specialists in only one group, because that's the way the department was set up. If they were going to teach an American Culture course, they have to learn more groups, just like everybody else. They're different groups, but you have to learn more groups. So everybody had to learn more groups.

The idea was, the simplest-minded panels that we'd have—the five experts on Asian-American literature. Plop them down there, they'd give a little ten-minute thing on their different areas, and people could just ask questions about anything. That way they had instant access to this walking encyclopedia of what to start with if you knew almost nothing. So your particular course, and your particular subject: "I want to know about blah blah blah," "Read this, read this, don't read that, forget that. That would be your quick entree, targeted entree into the literature. By listening for a couple of hours to everybody's questions, you could get a good idea of what was out there as far as the literature that you knew nothing about. So, we can march through all the areas that way. We did session on American identity, what's that? Because none of this—now we can look back at it and say, all right, sure, but back then

it wasn't so clear what this was. You basically had to make this thing up, and organize it in a way that made sense of it; you could have a program.

Rubens: There must be a list of who were in these seminars.

Choy: Oh, yes, the Center has that.

Rubens: There were about how many in that first one?

Choy: The first year we had, believe it or not, thirty-two, or thirty-seven—it was a big group. Most of them—not all, three-quarters of them—had been veterans of the fight. So this was their reward, because they were going to teach the first courses, right? But there were also about a quarter of them who Bill didn't know. I mean, he literally did not know them. He never even would have thought they were interested in this sort of stuff. People like Ken Weisinger, who died two days ago. Ken was in Comp Lit and German, because everybody in Comp Lit is in something else, right? He taught Hegel and that sort of stuff. So, why is this guy interested? He admitted he was interested in doing this, that he knew absolutely zip, nothing, and that—so he had to start literally from the ground up and learn everything. It took him a while, but he came up with the course and taught it as a freshman seminar several times. He said that he learned a lot; everybody said they learned a lot from the students. Just sort of this whole exercise—you've got to learn a lot of new material, so that's always intellectually exciting, and interesting, but you also learn a lot from the students, because sometimes in some areas they know a lot more than you do.

Rubens: So Bill was commenting on, or you were both noticing, that about a quarter of these people who are—

Choy: We noticed that. I can probably go through and identify them. The second year—so, we had this seminar, and it was wonderful. After about the third, fourth session, I decided, oh, I should tape record these. I started making audio tapes. But I did not get the first one, which is too bad. Then we tacked on lunch to this thing, so people could hang around and yak some more afterwards, if they wanted to. We institutionalized the lunch—maybe it was in the second year—we made the thing three hours instead of two hours; lunch was included, and so it was a more informal kind of discussion afterwards. But the second year we had, believe it or not, forty-two. It was crowded.

We crammed everybody in; we had theater-style seating, no tables—except for the head table for the speakers—and everybody was scrunched. It was crowded, but they all hung in there. That was the year we had a lot of younger faculty from places like Rhetoric. We had Avital Ronell, and Fred Dolan and Michael Mascuch. Tony—I think Cascardi—was in the first group.

Rubens: Were there repeats?

Choy: No, not then. Repeats came later.

Rubens: Who was the first one you said, the very first name?

Choy: Avital Ronell. She went to NYU. She has a book called *The Telephone Book*. [*The Telephone Book : Technology--Schizophrenia--Electric speech*. Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1989] She deconstructed the telephone book. Jill Stoner from Architecture, who still owes us a course; she was interested in prison architecture, the way you use space to control individuals, and maybe even thinking. People like that. They could clearly see how what they were interested in fit, generally, how race and ethnicity fit into what they were doing. So they would say, “Oh, yeah, I could see how I could do a course.”

That summer there was a couple of sessions, because—Alan Dundes was in that group too, and he gave a whole presentation of folklore, which was really interesting. You know, this guy is like a walking encyclopedia, he just goes for as long as you let him go. He was really great. And then they got arguing about truth. Can you imagine? “Of course there’s truth!” And all these people were flabbergasted. “What do you mean? There’s no such thing.” They argued about this for two days, and they couldn’t convince either side of the other side. But anyway, it was really interesting, and I think I have that recorded. These discussions would sort of wander off into just about anything anybody was interested in talking about. Part of the reason why that second group was so big—Don McQuade said it. He said, “The reason I’m here is because my colleagues raved about this thing. That’s why I’m here.”

Rubens: It was intellectually exciting.

Choy: Yes, it was intellectually—yes. This was the seminar’s reputation. That was why people did this. They didn’t do it for the money per se. Some people did it for the money, but they wouldn’t commit a whole month of their time to this thing if it wasn’t worth their while.

Rubens: How much was the money? I didn’t ask that.

Choy: It was \$6,000, which we paid out as summer pay, or we set it up as a research grant, whatever they wanted; we didn’t care. It was just money to us.

Rubens: But it was really the reputation and the experience.

Choy: What we figured out was that here you have—the reason why this thing was so intellectually interesting and invigorating was that here you have a set of faculty members, colleagues, who spend an extended amount of time together, and they got to learn from each other.

So, you’re from history, right, and you have your way of studying things and solving problems and all that kind of stuff. This is what you learned. You

don't know much about how somebody in rhetoric does it, or how somebody in education does it, how they see the world—what they're interested in, right? So if you get a chance to listen to a colleague talk about something you might be interested in, because it's kind of relevant to your course, or the idea you have, all of this that you're hearing is totally brand new. You've never heard it before, you've never heard it talked about it this way, you've never heard this language—this different way of looking at it as literature, people are mentioning, and so that's where all the new learning came from.

- Rubens: And I should assume that since these presenters were speaking to fellow faculty, they were going to do a good job.
- Choy: Oh, yeah, right, right. Anybody who's on the—
- Rubens: They weren't winging it; they knew what they were doing.
- Choy: Yes. They were colleagues. Nobody could slack off, because—and the other interesting thing is, because these were all, especially in the beginning, mostly senior faculty. If the discussion was going off on something they weren't interested in, they'd just ask a question and hijack the thing, take it off and—so it could go all over the place.
- Rubens: Did Simmons run that, as a director?
- Choy: Well, he kind of moderated it, in that he kept things going, but he really didn't need to do much except to watch the clock and that kind of stuff. It had a life of its own; they wanted to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about, whatever the general subject of each session. That was what the seminars were like the first couple of years.
- Rubens: At the same time, you knew how many people were coming in the freshmen year, and so—
- Choy: Oh, yes.
- Rubens: —sort of a cap to how many would be in the class?
- Choy: Guesswork. Nobody knew. Nobody had ever done something like this—nobody had ever done something like this at Berkeley. This had never been tried before. First of all, this was the first ever campus-wide graduation requirement. There was no other—
- Rubens: There was no US history?
- Choy: No, that's not a campus requirement. It's a UC requirement. All undergraduates in the entire UC system have to do that. There is no campus requirement. There never was—this is the only one, and you can imagine

why, you'd have to get these people to agree on—to teach everybody the same thing, right? Give me a break, right? Unlike Stanford or some other places which have these core things that everybody has to take, because they're liberal arts schools, we have this college system, blah blah blah. So there was no such thing. The very fact that this was a campus requirement—the faculty after months of debate, the Senate decides it's important—they made it a requirement for everybody. Also, the courses could be anywhere in any department. All it takes is somebody coming up with an idea. That's why probably L&S was going to bear the burden, but they could have courses everywhere.

Rubens: Well, how you were calculating the number of courses you needed?

Choy: Okay, so we knew how many freshmen there were. So I went to Nina Robinson, who worked at that time in the budget office, in the planning section. They were the number guys. I knew her from before, and I said, "We've got to have some sense of how many seats do we have to have, and what kind of"—because we had to ramp up, because we knew how many freshmen came in. They had a little formula or model for this. I had an idea of how you could do this, Markov transition probability thing. So we did this. I still have the output from this. We figured out that under various circumstances about what the uptake rate was going to be, how many percent of freshmen were going to take the course, which term, and all that kind of stuff, how many had come in and—you'd need to supply 5500 seats, and we got up to steady state, because that's how many—basically 5500 students graduate each year, and that's how many there are. Even though there were 4500 I think at that time—freshmen and a couple of thousand or less transfers—and that's where the 5,000-something students coming in. So I kind of said, okay. I didn't know the numbers too much at that time, but after a couple of years I paid attention to what the numbers were—but it was clear to me that you were basically taking in 6,000 students a year. That's the absolute minimum number of seats you have to have at steady state. You can't have fewer than that, because there's more students than that, right?

Rubens: Can I interrupt just for one question?

Choy: Yes.

Rubens: At what point was it made that it would be a freshman—

Choy: That was from the beginning, but you can do it anytime. You can't get out the door. Anybody—you can do it anytime, but it was subject—the students who were subject to the requirement had—were supposed to start someplace. That's why we started with the entering class of fall 1991. And so, if you began your studies at Berkeley before that, you didn't have to do the requirement. That's how it's worded. So I learned about who can—you can

only begin your studies at Berkeley once. So if you started in 1984, and then you dropped out and came back in 1994, you didn't have to take it. All that sort of stuff I learned.

Rubens: But I just wanted to make it clear, you were targeting the freshman class that first year, but you eventually were going to be—

Choy: Because in two years it was everybody. Students take four years, I didn't know about the five- and six-year stuff at that time; I assumed that everybody finished it in four years, but I found out better later. They're moving through the system, and what you've got to avoid is constipation at the end, the float. And so that's why we urged students, "Do this sooner rather than later, because you have to do it." That's also why lower-division courses are so important, because you get courses like History 7B, you can knock off a lot of students at once with that, whereas it would take four or five upper-division courses to knock off that many. The numbers, as far as I was concerned, quantity, that was my problem. Quality, faculty problems.

We figured out roughly how many seats we had to have, each term for the first four or five years, in order to reach a steady state. That was our goal, and as long as we were above that, I didn't have to worry, because the seats were available; it was up to the students to go get them. That I couldn't do anything about. This is all before Tele-BEARS, too.

Rubens: Tele-BEARS meaning—computer—

Choy: Computer registration and scheduling and all that. It dawned upon me, how do we tell the students about this thing? Because they're freshmen, and it's got a big splash two years ago, and no one would remember or know about it. We had the brilliant idea, we'll send a letter, and how do we do that? Well, there's CalSO. You can do it through them.

Rubens: CalSO stands for—?

Choy: Cal student orientation, new student orientation. CalSO at that time wasn't as big as it is now. Now it's like required; before then it wasn't. We made up this little letter, "Welcome to Berkeley. You've got to do this, this is what it is. Take it please sooner or later, good luck on your studies," all that kind of thing. On the back of it we had a list of courses for the fall term. This was for freshmen. Also, of course, it was in the catalog, and it was every place we could put it.

Rubens: And you had enough teachers? How many teachers did you have?

Choy: The first term there were fifteen classes, something like that.

Rubens: I know we have the stats at the AC office.

Choy: It's all in that binder, all that stuff, but if you want, I can get it to you. We had lots of seats, and Leanne Hinton taught her class that first term. Alex Saragoza taught a class—was there sociology that first term? I forget. Alex did his class in the spring. Leanne did her class that first year, Linguistics 55AC. They just leapt in and did it. Hertha Wong taught a course—who taught the upper division English course? Oh, David Littlejohn and Elizabeth Abel. They team-taught a course. So, we were going. I found out things like how do you tell the students about which particular courses? Because there was no way to tell an American Cultures course from any other course, it was just this course number. At that time, the AC suffix didn't exist, and you couldn't just type in American Cultures and search for courses; that didn't exist, either. I poked around in Sproul Hall, and I found out who put out the schedule of classes. I talked to them, and I asked, "Can we have a page"? It turns out I knew these people from other things. "Yeah, sure." This was clearly—this was the thing. The entire time I worked on this, I worked with staff all over the place. The staff always bent over backwards to help me make this thing happen.

I never got a hard time from anybody. They were, "Okay, how do we do this?" And it was really crucial, because if they had given me a hard time I don't know what I would have done. So, we had this list of courses, and ever after that we've had this list the whole time, until the printed schedule went away, and now we—and then, when the web site came—

Rubens: There is no more printed schedule?

Choy: It's gone. The last one was last spring. No, this is fall. This fall I think was the last one; next spring it's gone. Well, there's no printed schedule, I think that's right. Yeah, right, right, the last one was this fall. There's no money; the money drove it away. But people have been trying to get rid of this thing for years, and they finally agreed to it. So, when the schedule of classes became automated, and we had web sites, I invented the American Cultures website, basically to provide useful information to the students.

Rubens: Do you know when that was?

Choy: I don't know. We were under UGIS at that time: Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Studies. The web people there helped us set this thing up. That's how I know it was there.

Rubens: How long were you at UGIS?

Choy: Mitch Breitwiesser was director, so that was in the nineties. So this whole area of the Center's responsibility, which nobody had ever thought of before the fact, which was servicing the students, because this was the only place on the campus where American Cultures was anything. And because of the way this campus works, because this is a campus requirement, and not a college

requirement—not a department requirement, not a UC requirement—everybody who already existed advising the students, this was not their job, because it wasn't their requirement.

Rubens: Were you making an effort to get it to—?

Choy: Oh, yes. I mean, they were willing to help. They understood that you don't—students don't pass this—I mean, don't tell me that it's not my job, it's going to be useless because my student still isn't going to be able to graduate. So they were all very helpful. I met with them several times, although the head advisors for each of the colleges, and all that kind of stuff—and also Karen Denton in the registrar's office, the records office. She was really very important and really useful, explaining to me how credit is given, and how it *actually works*. Also, the committee—the American Cultures committee—decided that they should allow transfer courses. Any course, as long as the course met the requirements, and the faculty committee here approved it, was okay. It didn't matter where it was taught. That meant courses could be out there. That's how the summer seminar for the community college thing came about, because that was the way we would sort of disseminate the idea, to spread the disease.

Rubens: So there was a separate seminar for faculty from community colleges? When did that start?

Choy: Ninety-two, I think. Summer of '92.

Rubens: And that's gone ever since?

Choy: Until the campus stopped subsidizing it, and we stopped it. In 2002, I think was the last one. I'm not positive, but I know we didn't do it in '03 or '04. I think '02 was the last one.

Rubens: There's no fund-raising for that, then.

Choy: No. It seemed like it only cost 10,000 bucks. It was even less than that. I figured this was something—we could afford it. But then, we couldn't afford it after the cuts. That's when we stopped it. For a little bit of money, we got such a huge bang. As far as I could see, this is the only program like it, in that here is Berkeley—at the top of the educational food chain, the apex—reaching out to community college teachers, who are at the bottom of this thing, and saying, “Come here, and we'll talk.” Colleague to colleague, Berkeley faculty, and we'll treat them like they got a brain, and instead of just being told what to do—and for some of them this was difficult, to tell them, “You have to make up your own course. Anything you want, just make it up. Invent a course.” They had a hard time with that. They wanted to—“Give me a course and the way you teach it, I'll copy it.”

- Rubens: The outreach must have been some effort too.
- Choy: Initially the idea was for the transfer students. We looked around—why, where do the transfer students come from? And those who were at private schools, the high feeder schools, anybody else, the word got out that we had this thing, and people wanted to come. Ah, sure, I didn't care; the more, the better.
- Rubens: And then you had to also line up Berkeley faculty who were willing to—
- Choy: Yeah, get Berkeley faculty who teach an American Cultures course do a show and tell about their course: "This is how we do it here. We do history, we do linguistics, we do English, we do whatever."
- Rubens: And this is running parallel to the summer seminar?
- Choy: Monday, Wednesday, Friday. The other one's going Tuesday-Thursday. [laughs]. So we'd be going five days, four days a week. It was Monday and Wednesday, Monday and Wednesday. We did that several years, where we split it over two weeks, because we tried to have the same amount of time, and mimic the Berkeley Summer Seminar structure, and all that kind of thing. Then, we were—ah, this is too much, we don't have time, crowd it all into one week—so we did Monday-Wednesday-Friday, or something like that. I forget what it was. We jammed the whole thing into one week, though. That was really awful. Yeah, we jammed it down to one week, and we did it twice, that's what it was.
- Rubens: I see, for different groups.
- Choy: Right. We still had—for a month we were doing these back-to-back things where we only had one day a week off, for four weeks. We got real expert at running meetings, because we provided lunch, and—
- Rubens: But there was no problem getting people?
- Choy: No. We charged, too, because—initially we charged the full freight, and it was like \$450 a person, because that's what it was going to cost. Just twenty-five people, my budget is this; divide by twenty-five, that's what it came out to be—all the money for the direct expenses and the stipends for the faculty speakers. Then after a while, when everybody started going broke in the late nineties, we cut it in half, and changed the way we financed it. We basically subsidized the other half with our money. If you couldn't pay, because your district was really broke or you're on your own, "come on and [laughs] we'll give you a scholarship." Money wasn't the issue. We had people all right. People who wanted to pay for it out of their own pocket, I said, "No, you can't do that." The whole idea of this was that we wanted the course.

And in order to get the course, you've got to have your college on board, or your department. If it's free to them, they're not going to care. So that's why I wanted them to pay for it. Also, initially you could just apply to us, and then I realized that this is really dumb. That's when we started having direct contact with deans in the different colleges and department chairs, and saying, "Pick people and send them to us!" Because that way they had a stake in getting the course back. It turned out we didn't get many courses. There were all kinds of reasons for that. That part never worked. Running the seminar, and spreading the word, and revitalizing and changing the curriculum—that all happened, but we didn't get that many course out of this.

Rubens: But what about the reforming of basic institutional courses? I mean, whether it was English, US history, or sociology—

Choy: That's just the problem, that because they were teaching such basic lower-division stuff, the only kinds of courses they could teach—they could convert courses that were their personal property, not the mainline courses. And see, that is ideal. In fact, we weren't even doing that, except for History 7B and Sociology 3—

Rubens: Yeah, I wanted to get over to that, about how were you trying to implement this in the majors, you know, getting—

Choy: Not very well, that's why it never happened—

Rubens: This had to take a lot of your time. I mean, you're the one doing this.

Choy: I hired somebody to actually be the moderator and run it, to do the intellectual part, and to run the meetings. I mean, I couldn't do it. You had to have a faculty member do it, so I hired somebody to do this. I just did the logistics stuff.

Rubens: But even all the contacts of the community college deans, and the—

Choy: Once you had that set up it was easy. Once people knew about this thing, you'd just tell them, "We're doing it again. Send us your people."

Rubens: But even in the seven years that it's going, you're not finding a lot of—

Choy: There weren't a lot of courses. There were places like Santa Rosa [Community College]. Santa Rosa actually adopted an American Cultures requirement modeled on ours, as a result of sending—I don't know, it must have been a dozen of their faculty members over a couple of years to our workshop, our summer seminar. Chabot also adopted a requirement that was like ours, modeled on ours, and other places did also. Santa Monica did. They sent two people up, they went back, and two years later there it was. This thing actually happened on a trial basis up there. But other places it didn't.

City College of San Francisco, they could have cared less. Diablo Valley, this isn't their thing. Part of the reason why you didn't get courses like Sociology 3, and History 7A and B, and those courses, is because everybody teaches those courses. They have, I don't know, five, ten faculty members teaching those courses. If you're going to do this, the easiest way is they all have to do it. A lot of them didn't want to do it. That's not the way they can qualify their course for transfer credit. This is a Berkeley weird thing. We don't teach US History that way; they taught it the old way. Chabot had this problem, so what they did, which made it a more of this red-tape nightmare, was, they certified individual instructors the way we certified individual instructors, so some of their US History courses met their requirements; some didn't, so it was instructor specific. Finally, starting this year, I think, they made them all. Finally, they unloaded them out—people are gone. But it took a while for that to happen.

Rubens: That's interesting. That's an interesting. How change occurs in an institution. That hasn't happened—

Choy: Because we have more leverage out there, right? My leverage was even less than pushing on strings.

Rubens: Why all the effort in the community college?

Choy: Because they come here, they've met the requirement; we don't have to provide seats. That was the whole idea. If you could knock off half of the transfers, that's a thousand students. But I don't think you'd ever get more than a few hundred, ever—even now, and there's more out there, but I don't think it's very promising. This is something that somebody could actually, in theory, go and analyze the data and find out.

Rubens: Are you at the same time, one more strategy, trying to work on the majors?

Choy: Yes, okay, here. Initially the way this worked was, it was total free market in the usual Berkeley decentralized non-decision-making sense. It was up to individual instructors, and sometimes in the case, their departments were involved in actual department policy about what was going to be American Cultures; like, Ethnic Studies was like this. History—initially it was individual instructors, and then History finally decided, "Okay, we're going to go this way as a department policy about changing the way we teach about the US." Sociology never did this, Poli Sci hated this thing, Linguistics had only this one course. The reason they set the course up, the reason they had it, was to get enrollment. That was plain and simple, no bones about it, because it didn't feed into a major. It had nothing to do with their major. Education did it because they wanted to build a minor. Geraldine Clifford did a course and then Pedro Noguera did a course, because he wanted to—and his course

became big. The first year, he had seventy-five or fifty. He thought he was going to get twenty-five, and the room was just *packed*.

- Rubens: This was word of mouth, this was—they know Pedro's a good teacher? You're talking about Pedro—
- Choy: Pedro Noguera. He wanted to do the course, and so he ended up doing this thing with 350 students. More, 400.
- Rubens: It is all ad hoc and seems to be driven by individual instructors.
- Choy: Initially, in some departments, that's all it was. And in some departments it was a policy; it became, you know, History 7A, History 7B, whatever, History 127AC, California. Those became American Cultures courses no matter who taught them, eventually. So History has a whole bunch of courses like that. Ethnic Studies did the same thing.
- Rubens: Anthropology?
- Choy: No, Anthro never did this. Anthro—the only reason Anthro had courses is because Bill was there. So Bill—he and Kent Lightfoot, his buddy—did a course on California. It was a freshman class, Anthro 10, California frontier—I think it was called California Frontier. He taught it twice; I think he taught it twice, maybe three times. I think it was only twice—with Lightfoot, Kent Lightfoot. Bill also developed an upper-division version of this, Anthro 174AC, which was California archeology or something, which basically became Lightfoot's course. Then Bill became dean, and that was the end of that. So he never taught that anymore. Those were Anthro's courses. Then Gerry Berreman, who had always wanted a big lower-division course—when Bill stopped teaching 10, basic anthro was out of business. So Gerry Berreman decided he was going to take 3 and make 3 an American Cultures version of 3 because 3 is taught every term, including the summer, and is taught in Wheeler Auditorium. So if you could get one of those, once a year—you had 700 students. He did this three times. Anthro 3 is an assigned course, the instructors rotate. They teach it for a bunch of years and they rotate out, so everybody has to do this. It's a service course of the department. So when he rotated out, that was the end of that. Nobody's ever taught it again, which is too bad. Recently Lightfoot took 2, which was the archeology course, and he made it an American Cultures course. He taught that three times, and then he rotated out. We hope we're going to get it back by somebody else. But that's how this thing works. It's individual instructors. If you happen to get a course for the major, it's like blind luck.
- Rubens: English?
- Choy: English, okay. English set up two numbers, an upper-division number and a lower-division number. We had hoped that they would offer one of those—

they would offer two course each term, one of each. And in the summer they usually offered—first they did the lower division one, and then they did the upper-division one, because lower division—there were two courses—are losers. Upper division—there were two courses—are winners. That’s the way summer is. There was one term we had four—

Rubens: Even summer classes could count?

Choy: Oh, yeah! Anything, anything could count. Summer became a whole thing by itself; it’s a whole ‘nother story. English was very difficult, even though they had a lot of faculty members who were fellows, by far more than anybody else, any other department. It’s a big department, and everybody who’s US did the seminar at one time or another, more than once. But they don’t all teach, because they have to do this and that, and they have this weird way of—they have this committee way of deciding who teaches what. They have a curriculum committee; everybody says, “I want to teach this,” and this committee decides who teaches what. So they decide what has to get covered, who’s going to do it, and they assign stuff based on your preferences. It ended up after a while, when the cuts came and all that sort of stuff, that they were short-staffed like everybody else. They had to take care of the major, and blah blah blah, but they would only have one course; 31 basically disappeared. It was taught off and on a few times after that, but they offered 135AC every term, or they tried to. Sometimes they would even offer two sections, which was good—can’t complain. But then, sometimes they’d offer no sections, because whoever got assigned to it in the fall, for next year, got some grant and was, pop, gone, and unless somebody volunteered to substitute, it was gone. That’s just the way it was.

English doesn’t use people like Genaro Padilla and Don McQuade and Caroline Porter. They’ve all gone to be administrators, and—

Rubens: Porter. I didn’t know that. How come the resolution 300 never made it—?

Choy: Aaah! [laughs] It would have never passed. The Senate, in its wisdom, required the students to take something that didn’t exist. They did not require the departments and the faculty to provide those courses. And this is Christina’s problem, right? This is—

Rubens: Was that debated?

Choy: I don’t know if it was debated, but it was clearly—anybody who knows how this place works—I figured this out in five minutes. Any faculty member—anybody who was chair—would have known this right away, and it was really clear. Because you couldn’t dictate—the Senate would be dictating, right? And you can’t do that, because this is Berkeley. That’s why the—so everyone was kind of crossing their fingers that there were in fact going to be enough

faculty out there, which wasn't at all clear and that you'd have enough seats of the right kind, at the right time, and blah blah blah. That's why my job was—more was better than fewer, and I was interested in quantity. We were fortunate in that we did get enough quantity that—I figured out that you needed to have, with this number of students initially, 8,000—maybe even 9,000 or 10,000 now—because there are more students. But you needed that many more; you needed a cushion above the minimum number, because otherwise the whole market for course selection doesn't work, where you have people taking courses they don't want to take, or can't fit into their schedule. Everybody gets *mad*. So you need to have this—degrees of freedom in the system. In—I don't know when it was—about '99, 2000, yeah, 2000, I started noticing that the numbers are going in the wrong direction. This is when I kind of waved the warning flag. We raised the specter of a possible float. This had been—

- Rubens: Numbers going in the wrong direction, meaning you're not having teachers?
- Choy: They're not going up. They might even be going down—seats—well, teachers too, but seats. I looked at seats.
- Rubens: Some classes are big things right here. Just explain that.
- Choy: The difference is class size. For every Leon Litwack, I need five or six Elizabeth Abels.
- Rubens: People who have twenty-five, thirty in a course.
- Choy: Yeah, and if you've got a hundred in a course, then I need seven of them, and if I get twenty-five, I need—I don't know. So that's why it wasn't really teachers, it was seats. It's seats that matter. But there's a relationship between teachers and seats.
- Rubens: What does float mean?
- Choy: Float. Ah, okay, this was raised during the debate. And it was even raised after the requirement was implemented, was started, and even before the first classes. There was a Senate meeting, I forget, was it in the fall of '90? Yeah, when [Professor of Political Science] Sandy Muir tried to revisit this thing. He had raised, after the exhaustion of the substantive arguments, the political arguments, this argument, that argument. And finally, after all of those were dealt with, it came down to resources. "We don't have enough classrooms. We don't have enough TAs. We don't have enough teachers. We don't have enough"—it was that kind of stuff. If you look at this as, we're adding courses, a lot of new courses onto what already exists, then you're right, we don't have enough. But if you look at it as, we're just substituting—you know, Rubens teaches four courses, so one of them is not American Cultures. She just changes one of those; she still teaches four courses. So none of that part

changes, just what you teach changes. That's why—it's garbage. I never was bothered by that. If you look at it that way, it's more clear that this is all about the curriculum. Bill said this from the very beginning, this is what this was really about, is changing what the faculty teach. If you look at it as well, you don't teach your course you used to teach. You teach an American Cultures course instead; you've changed what you teach. That's the real reform. This is about changing the curriculum. But this is not presented any place, in any of the rhetoric, that way. You will not see this any place. You go look for it. The closest of any place, it's—nobody ever talks about this. But that's what it really is. Bill talked about it, but it's not written down.

Rubens: Larry Levine?

Choy: Yeah, Levine, everybody, that's what they're after. They're after changing what the faculty taught. In English, in history, in sociology. They set this thing up so that that had to happen, but they never presented it that way; it was always about students. The only place this is mentioned is in our little brochure thing, which you have a copy of. It talks about this. But it doesn't make a big thing of it. It's in this thing. That little point gets mentioned, but clearly that was a really key issue. If you think about this whole thing, starting out, this is what we have to do, and then you're backwards. Well, how do we present it so we can get it past the Senate? It's a political campaign, right? You've got to vote.

Rubens: In the end—well, let's stay with the story. You're saying, suddenly you notice that the numbers are going down. And the float—

Choy: Oh, what's the float? Okay, so—

Rubens: Has that hamstrung the program in a certain way?

Choy: No, well, so far there isn't a float. But there could be a float, or there could be a sort of incipient float.

Rubens: So a float is—

Choy: Okay. This is a graduation requirement, right? You can't graduate without it. Now, suppose there are not enough seats. Or suppose, for whatever reason, you can't get into a course. You can't graduate. And as Sandy Muir says, this is a graduation ban. That's how he says, "Look at it this way. It's a graduation ban," rather than a graduation requirement. So you can't graduate. Suppose there's only a few seniors; that's not a big deal. But suppose there's a couple hundred, or more—that's a float. English 1A and B, Subject A—there are seniors taking this course, because otherwise they can't graduate. That's a float. That's the thing you're trying to avoid. So that's why you want to take it sooner, take it early, get it out of the way, don't leave it until your last term—

- Rubens: Somehow you'd scare up a teacher and a room?
- Choy: Well, they'd have to jam themselves into a course. As long as there were seats somewhere, in theory, we could do this, right? It's your problem to organize your life, because you know you have to do this, and if you get yourself in a bind—hey, man, welcome to Berkeley. This is the students' problem of fitting this into their life.
- Rubens: I meant to ask that earlier. Isn't English 1A-1B, some foreign speech, isn't that a campus requirement? No, that's again a University requirement.
- Choy: Yes, but somebody's got to do it, and that's why initially it was all English, and that's why now there are these course all over the place. Otherwise you'd have to—so I'm saying, the real problem wasn't so much that the number of seats wasn't rising fast enough, but the number of lower division seats, especially in the fall, had dropped precipitously.
- Rubens: It's now ten years, right?
- Choy: Yes. This is '99, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and finally in the fall of 2004 it goes back up, in a big way. Part of that is shifting between terms, but some of it's real.
- Rubens: Let's talk about that. So you're concerned, what do you do?
- Choy: I tell my director.
- Rubens: And your director is, at that point, Troy Duster, right?
- Choy: He wrote a memo, which you can find in the files, about a possible float and the possible things you can do. You have to warn people, because we can see this thing. If you don't fix it now, it's going to hit you two years from now.
- Rubens: That's called planning.
- Choy: Right. They got excited, which they should have, but it wasn't clear, because there was never this requirement on the part of the departments to do anything. It wasn't clear how from a top-down thing you can make them do it, and this is the problem that Christina is trying to work on.
- Rubens: Was it the director's job? Was it your job?
- Choy: It was the director's job. If we could get enough faculty members into the program, and get them actually teaching their course, that would kind of take care of itself.

- Rubens: Seminars continue to go, but I assume that during the semester, during the academic year, there's some kind of development taking place.
- Choy: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a whole process of making the courses happen, which I can explain to you, which involved me, because I was the only one there. The way that part works is, the Senate committee, whose meetings I started going to when Alex was chair—so this was after him, this was in '92, I think. I didn't go to the meetings in the beginning because they were the Senate; we were administration. You know, separate, right? Besides, there weren't any courses. And then for some reason—I forget exactly what it was—I started going to the meetings.
- Rubens: Meetings of the Academic Senate subcommittee. How often did they meet?
- Choy: Then, every other week. There were periods when they were really busy. I mean, they were approving like sixty courses a year because they set up a rule that said the committee has to approve each individual instructor's version of an American Cultures course. That's why you had to have your version of History 7B approved by the committee, even though the number, 7B, was an American Cultures course, because this is faculty, right? Under academic freedom, you can do whatever you want in a classroom; there's no control. So that's why each person who taught a course, before they taught for the first time, had to go through the committee.
- That's where I came in, because our job at the Center was to help them—the way I saw it—was to help the faculty members put together a proposal that the committee would approve. This was something the faculty has got to write out. They have to explain to the committee how it meets the criteria, and provide a syllabus, a reading list. So they have this little narrative that explains the intellectual architecture. The thing about this was—we don't do this at Berkeley, right? Nobody does this sort of stuff. You have this one little paragraph you send in to the schedule, or the catalog, and that's all there's ever written publicly about what this course is about. Now here you've got to provide this whole page and a half, and you've got to have the entire syllabus with the reading list mapped out for the entire term—an explanation of, well, you're going to teach about identity. Well, how are you going to teach about identity? What is it about identity you're going to teach? Explaining all of this to this faculty body on this is—
- Rubens: How many are on the committee?
- Choy: Nine. Seven, is that right? Two students and seven faculty, I think. Maybe it was five, five and two. Something like that, I forget. Five and two. No, seven and two, seven and two. So you're having faculty vet your course. This is really scary for some people, because it has never been done before. So the committee has to be very careful about not making things too hard, because

they don't have the courses, or making it too easy, because it becomes meaningless. They talked a lot about what makes a course an American Cultures course. Just because you read ethnic literature, or you talk about this and that, does that automatically make it an American Cultures course? Or is it the way you do it and how you put the materials together, the intellectual architecture? They talked a lot about that sort of stuff.

Rubens: Continuously?

Choy: Continuously, because every committee has its personality about the way they look at it, and it does change a little bit at a time.

Rubens: You had a lot of chairs?

Choy: My job was to figure out what was going to get a yes and help the faculty members tell them, "These are the issues you have to address, and I have samples. I have a copy of every single proposal that's ever been submitted that the committee has approved, a whole filing cabinet of this stuff—600 of them. So if you want to look at what's gone before, you're welcome to do that." That's my job. My job is to hold their hand, and get them through the committee. In the minds of everybody, the Center and the committee became one thing. There really wasn't any difference. That's the way it should be. There is a difference. I call them the gatekeeper. They see themselves as facilitators. We were the advocates on the development on the front end, and we ended up having to work on the back end with the students, because nobody had ever thought about doing that. We were the only ones around, so we had to do that part too.

Also, there's the part of their getting the courses advertised and making sure that they actually happened. I learned about course scheduling, and screw-ups, and equipment, and all kinds of stuff, because—normal mistakes, error corrections, horrors would happen, and usually the faculty have to deal with their department schedulers. And I would hear about this, and I would try to fix it because I didn't want this course to get screwed up and get people mad, and then they'd go away, right?

Rubens: You could lose another set of seats.

Choy: I learned a lot about how the bureaucracy works, and where you get things fixed, by knowing the right people. So, I became this magician.

Rubens: That's back to your point about your saying that there was a lot of staff that really did help with the—you think they wanted to see this happen?

Choy: Yeah, they wanted to make it happen. They were perfectly willing to fix problems. They just needed to know, be told that this is a problem, and—

Rubens: I'm just trying to understand your point about the Academic Senate's committee being blurred with the AC Center.

Choy: Oh. As far as the faculty were concerned, it's all the same thing. The committee, the Center, it's one thing. The committee started meeting in our room to do this and that, and meet there. To outsiders, we merged into one body. And then also since Waldo Martin was chair we actually started working more with the Senate staff as sort of backing them up. And it also became—the secretary of the committee changed over several times, and so I would be the one to train them on what they were supposed to do. In effect—

Rubens: Is the secretary literally someone who's taking notes, and—

Choy: Yeah! Every committee—oh, man, you know about paperwork. The Senate is like—anyway, they had somebody assigned to each committee. So there's a person assigned to the American Cultures, and they're supposed to do all the secretarial stuff of the committee, and take notes by hand, do the minutes and all that kind of stuff—agenda, and keep track of the records. I ended up helping them. The Center ended up being sort of quasi-staff to the committee, although it was all kind of informally working—

Rubens: But the Center also had its own secretary, its own—

Choy: Oh, yes, but she wasn't involved in any of this. She had enough to do just keeping the normal bookkeeping stuff going. She also worked for AH&I, American History and Institutions. This is one of Bill's—when Bill became dean at L&S, he was looking around at so many—and there was this AH&I office, which had a room down in Dwinelle next to the AV guys. They had been there for a long time, and they had a supervisor, who was a grad student, quarter-time, and they had an AA who was half-time. Bill was looking to save money, and at that time we were looking for an AA, too, so he had the brilliant idea to put them with us. He wanted space or something, I don't know exactly what. They needed space in Dwinelle, I think it was. So he pulled a deal where the AH&I office got housed in the American Cultures Center, and he got a room for them in our building. He got a little office for the supervisor, and so they came and lived with us, starting in the summer of '95. So here was American History, American Institutions, and American Cultures, all in the same place, and all kind of run by the same people. Everyone was all confused about American this and American that.

One of our frequently asked questions is—don't confuse these, because you're going to get screwed if you do—you think that you did meet a requirement and you didn't kind of thing. So, they lived with us. The AA became our AA, and we made her sixty percent. Part of her job was still AH&I stuff, and part of her job was American Cultures.

Rubens: Is that still the—?

Choy: Yes, that's the way it is now. She's been very valuable. She's a very smart person. She managed to get her master's in ESL while she was doing this, and teaches at Laney. If she could get a full-time job at Laney, she's gone.

Rubens: Is this—?

Choy: Candace Khanna. So we have this—the whole American Cultures thing basically lives in the Center. The other thing that happened early on was—students thought they were going to graduate, and they can't, because for some reason they screwed up on this. I remember the very first guy that this happened to was an engineering student, and he was from Singapore. I forget exactly what the screw-up was, but he didn't do it, and so he couldn't graduate, and he was gone. He was literally in the Singapore army; he was not coming back. So the whole idea—come back and do this and you can graduate—was not possible. So he petitioned the committee—so we invented this whole thing of petitions, which nobody had ever thought of before. I don't know why, they should have, because there are petitions for anything here. So students who screwed up, for some reason or another, could petition the American Cultures committee for mercy. [laughs] But then the committee's problem is, it says right here, "Must pass a course," right? There's no leeway. "Must pass a course."

Rubens: Some advisor had to have signed his—

Choy: Oh, yeah, okay. So, if the student could say, "Well, my advisor," an official of the University of California at Berkeley, "told me this was okay, and I believed him, because who am I supposed to believe? It's my advisor." Then the committee said, "Okay," because otherwise "I will sue," right? So okay, goodbye.

Rubens: When did this first crop up?

Choy: The first year somebody tried to graduate, '94. In the spring of '95, the first class after '94, it happened then. We have records. We have Petition Number One. We're up to three hundred and something. For the first few years it was screw-ups. It was mostly L&S students. There were some engineers. Because advisors didn't know what the rules were; the rules weren't really clear, and the courses weren't obviously marked. Then we got into—we had the first one where, "I took a course at my community college; it was just like Ethnic Studies 21AC, so I think I should get it." Why, it doesn't work that way. Then we say, "Okay. The committee is willing to consider your course. If they say it's okay, it's okay, and if they say it's not okay, it's not okay. You have to petition the course, and you have to provide to this committee all the information it wants," which is exactly the same stuff that everybody else has

to submit to the committee, whether it's a course here or a course there. Except the difference is, the student's got to go get it from the instructor. That's our petition process, which if you read our web site—that's what it says.

So, we started getting those. They came from every place, around the world. Mostly we got questions about, "I took such-and-such at so-and-so," and I'd sort of give them the third degree, and I'd say, "Well, in my opinion," keeping in mind that I would not decide. But in my opinion, having attended the meeting and knowing what they want: "This isn't going to fly. Forget it." And they would go away. But if I said, "Yeah, it kind of looks like it would be okay; this is what you have to do; you have a chance," then of course they'd leap at it, because—

Rubens: Sure, they have to take a chance. There've been no lawsuits?

Choy: No. The way the petitions actually work is, the American Cultures committee approves the content of the course, and it's the course committee that actually approves variances. They're the ones who actually have to say, "Yes, okay." They do all the variances, so there's a whole variance process, which I learned about. Student petitions have to go through two committees. The American Cultures committee—if it's a course. If there's a course involved, then the American Cultures committee approves the content of the course, recommends to its brother committee that they approve a variance because the course is okay. Usually the committee says, "Okay."

Rubens: There's a variance course committee?

Choy: Yes. Subcommittee of the course committee does nothing but variances, and American Cultures petitions are just like one variance of some rule, right? Of course, they hate variances, because it means not following the rules. The other thing about this is, suppose you just totally messed up, or somebody gave you the wrong advice, then there's no course involved. Then you come to me, and I have my box of Kleenex, and, "Tell your whole story about how your life is going to be ruined," because, this is May, or April, and, "I thought I was going to graduate next week, and my grandmother's coming, and my life—I can't go to graduate school; my life is going to end," right? This is a really big deal for these individuals. So I listen to their story, and I find out what it is, where the screw-up happened. Why did you think you did it? Because they wouldn't think I didn't—I'd get out the door. They thought they did, and for some reason they find out they didn't. You try to figure out whether there's anything in there that can be a basis for a petition to the course committee, because they're the ones that actually have to grant the variance in this case. The student has to convince the committee that you're not an evader. You have to explain what happened: why it was they ended up in the situation, what's going to happen if you can't graduate now, your

summer, “I can’t take a course because I’ve already got these tickets and I’m going to go to Turkestan for”—whatever.

You hear all kinds of stuff. Initially—of course, this is Berkeley. So if you couldn’t come back in the summer, or you couldn’t come back next fall, that was it, right? Especially if you were going to go to graduate school next fall. We had one, somebody who was already *in* graduate school, and this was *October*, and he finds out he didn’t get his degree, and he needs it to stay in graduate school. We fixed it somehow. Every once in a while I got to produce a real miracle. And sometimes you can’t do it.

Rubens: You’re really talking about the administrative functions—

Choy: This is a thing that’s not really a job of the Center.

Rubens: So one question I’d like to come back to is when you started noticing the numbers going down.

Choy: Well, you’ve got to beat the bushes; you call up people who owe you a course and ask them, “When are you going to do it? Now is a good time.” You do stuff like that. I would call my friends in a different department, and say, “How come you guys aren’t teaching?”—whatever. They’d have some reason; they’d tell me that the schedule is set in stone, a committee assigned courses.”

Rubens: It must have been a big loss when Noguera went, right? I mean, here he was teaching—

Choy: Oh, yeah. Well, Education made a good-faith effort to hold the course together. They had a graduate student, one of Pedro’s students, do that, because he just left suddenly. He left in the spring, and his course was scheduled for the fall. So they got one of his graduate students, who had been the head TA, teach the course, and everybody blesses it, because what else can you do, right? Then the next year—

Rubens: Is there an accounting? Is there some reason that you came to understand why it goes down for three years?

Choy: Oh, yeah. I’m the only one who has the data. I have my personal spreadsheet, because I’m a numbers guy—

Rubens: That’s why they wanted you.

Choy: I do accounting, AC course accounts, right? But I have a spreadsheet. Also, I keep track of people. But I have a spreadsheet which has a thousand-something lines on it. Each line is a person and a course. I know who it is; I know what kind of person, what kind of faculty member they are—lecturer,

professor, blah blah blah—whether they’ve been a fellow or not and when, and I know when the committee approved their course.

Rubens: Fellow means taking that seminar.

Choy: Yes. When the committee approved their course, I know when they taught it, and for each term they taught it. I know how many students were enrolled. So I have this giant spreadsheet, and from this thing I can summarize every which way you can think of, and that’s how I was able to produce all that stuff—and that big thick binder for the Omi committee— because I had this database, which now is not going to be kept, so this is like history. But that’s how I’m able to tell what’s going on, because I know how many lower-division seats there are; I know which kind, I can see why. So Alex Saragoza leaves. Alex doesn’t teach any more—or Ron Takaki. Not a good example, because they replaced him. Carlos leaves. Carlos Muñoz in Ethnic Studies retires. So he has a course, 34AC. He teaches it in 155 Dwinelle. Four hundred students, right? He’s gone [snaps fingers], minus 400, just like that. They don’t replace the course. It is gone. Pedro leaves. They keep the course going the one term, but the replacement next year, it’s down from 350 to 100.

Rubens: So is this what’s happening in this three-year big drop?

Choy: Jerry Berreman stops teaching 3AC, Anthro 3AC. Sociology drops teaching 3AC; that’s 500 right there. This kind of stuff happens, and you don’t teach a course once, and it could be hundreds of students just—

Rubens: So it’s kind of overlapping, this was a critical—

Choy: Yeah, if enough of this stuff happens all at the same time, you’re really screwed. Once the stuff gets set, you can’t easily put the course back, especially if you don’t have a room for it. So we just have to kiss that off and say, “Okay, I have to recover next time.” So you start beating the bushes.

Rubens: So 2000 through 2003, you’re really beating the bushes.

Choy: The budget cuts really hit, too, because you have fewer TAs—well, fewer TAs, fewer sections; fewer sections, smaller enrollment.

Rubens: When were those starting, the budget cuts?

Choy: Around ’90. In the ’90s, when Tien was chancellor, and then again, the second time around—the first time around—for example, Sociology 3AC was being taught once a year, alternating with 3, and it was taught by a lecturer, and then—okay, here’s an example of this kind of bureaucratic stuff. A lecturer. So his six years is up, and he doesn’t get a renewal. Bye-bye. Because that’s the collective bargaining agreement, eye of the needle, camel going through the eye of the needle, all this bullshit. Okay? So the course is gone. They hire

somebody to replace that person, but he doesn't want to teach 3AC. So for two years this course is *gone*. And this is 500 students. Then finally, policy changes, the instructor comes back. Great. But the course is now only half as big as it was, because that's all that Sociology can afford, even though this course has no sections, only readers. Why is this? That's a few hundred bucks, right? That's the way I see it, but they're the ones who decide. So now this course is only half as big. But now at least it's taught on a regular basis.

Rubens: So that starts up again. What accounts for 2004?

Choy: We pick up more courses. Oh, Music. Music 26AC is a good example. Bonnie Wade's involved in this thing. She creates this course, teaches it the first year, and it's taught every year, once a year, ever since. It's also taught in the summer now by her graduate students. The problem with this course is that Music doesn't do music, you know, ethnomusicology; it's kind of this weird little major. The way she set this thing up, she needs four graduate students to run this thing, unlike 27, which can run every term and has hundreds in it. The plan eventually is, 26 AC is going to replace 27, and they alternate, which actually has happened. Eventually they build this course up, and then they hired somebody to teach it, Jocelyne Guilbault. And then also Ben Brinner, who does gamelan, decides he's going to do it, and so the two of them alternate now. But when Jocelyne goes on leave, like she has for this past year, Ben does it both times. Sometimes she does it in spring and he does it in fall, so some years we have this period where for two terms in a row it doesn't happen. But then you live with it, and all that kind of stuff. That course now is limited to 350, because that's how many students the four graduate students can handle, and they don't have more TAs, and therefore it'll never get bigger.

Rubens: They almost have to go listen to it, go in the listening room? I suppose you don't have to go to a listening room anymore.

Choy: They go to the library and they get—it's all online now. But they offer it in the summer and there's sixty to a hundred each term, so it's another hunk there. It's taught by the graduate students, so this is a winner. Summer started out with—the first year we had maybe a dozen courses, something like that.

Rubens: Did you start summer right from the get-go?

Choy: The first summer of '91, we had courses. Summer of '92—summer of '92 there were courses. Now there are three dozen courses, so there's thirty-something courses. It got to the point where we got up to about 1,200, and it was growing every year, the enrollment. Because summer, you take everybody who comes and is willing to pay, right? So we got up to 1,200, almost 1,300. I think it was 1,289 was the top year. This is two summers ago, when they did the fee increase thing, and that just killed it. Then this past summer, another fee increase, and you know—so it hasn't grown. Enrollment

stopped growing. Maybe 1,300 is saturation. I don't know. But there are courses left, like—there's only one film class now, in the summer. And summer, film, I mean, this is perfect, right? So Mario teaches his one film class, and he limits it to sixty students. Mario Barrera, in Ethnic Studies. African American Studies has a film class, and I told them, "You guys ought to offer this thing in the other term, from Mario. You'd make a killing." They have never done it. Don't ask me why.

Rubens: Why doesn't Poli Sci—?

Choy: Why doesn't Poli Sci do this? There is a substantive reason. I might misrepresent it, because if you ask them about this—

Rubens: Yes, well this is your opinion, interpretation.

Choy: It's my understanding, because people like Ken Jowitt have spoken out about this, and Sandy Muir and even Jack Citrin, a fellow who owes us a course—

Rubens: They've been opposed to the requirement.

Choy: Yes, and the reason, as I understand it, that they're opposed to it, is because of the group thing. First of all, they don't want to deal with groups. They want to look at the nation; they want to look at the individual person, not—with humanistic characteristics, and ethnicity is one of those.

Rubens: They're opposed to identity politics?

Choy: They don't like that. There's another reason—this is my interpretation of what one of the graduate students, the way she'd presented their courses—the masses, that there's—in the US government, in the US political field, there's this tension between anarchy of the masses and you know, top down, right? This is an old—from the very beginning, the people in charge at the very top are always afraid of the tyranny of the masses. Jefferson was afraid of—the federalists wrote about this. This American Cultures thing—that's what this is about. It's about the people, and that's how history teaches it. Instead of this great man, leadership, big-picture thing, they teach it from bottom up rather than top down. Poli Sci wants to teach top down.

Rubens: There's nobody teaching social movements, or—

Choy: Robert Kagan teaches two courses on the Constitution, one on due process and one on equal protection. He actually came and looked, and considered converting his courses. He talked to us for a little bit and then decided that he didn't want to, because it would have been teaching a totally different kind of course, a course he didn't want to teach, which is true.

Rubens: But no one could ever convert anyone. I mean, I hear your reason is—

Choy: So that's why they don't want to do this. But there are a whole bunch of courses on American politics. You get people—

Rubens: Mike Rogin, didn't he do it?

Choy: Yeah, Mike did. He did one on identity.

[Audio File 4]

Choy: Mike Rogin was one of the original Fellows, and he did his course. He came up with his course on identity, and he taught it as a freshman course, 33. Then Aaron Wildavsky got interested in this, and he talked to Bill lots of times, and long, about a course. Aaron's idea of a course was completely different from what a typical course at that time was. It was a course about theory, about theory construction, because that's what Aaron was interested in. It was on political cultures, so it's sort of possible—except the way it was structured, it had nothing to do with individuals, and nothing to do with place, nothing to do with any of that stuff. So this was a total foreign object to the committee, and they just didn't want to approve it and didn't understand. Aaron went away, and he came back with another version of this, and Bill took it upon himself to sort of be an advocate, tried to explain this thing to the committee.

Rubens: I was going to ask if the director had shepherded the thing through? Usually it was you?

Choy: Usually it was me, but this is early on, when things were not set the way they were. Nothing was routinized or bureaucratized, it was all kind of make it up as you go along. So Bill took this up as a project, and he physically tried to understand what it was that Aaron was trying to do, so he could explain it to the committee, which he did, and the committee finally approved this thing. It was 111, and it was called Political Cultures, or something; I forget exactly what the title was. Finally, after a year, or a couple of years, Aaron was going to teach it, and he got cancer and died. That was the year, that summer. So it never happened, which was a—really disappointing, because this would have been something, it would have been a mind-blowing course. It would have been something completely different over the very issue of theory.

Rubens: And no one picked it up?

Choy: No one picked it up, because—it was Aaron. Then, the other persons in Poli Sci were Mike Rogin and Aaron Wildavsky, and then Paul Thomas. I found out all kinds of personal stuff with Paul, and people connected as you get into these relationships among faculty. Anyway, Paul Thomas, he's Scottish, I think, and he teaches Marxian political theory; that's his field. So Paul Thomas happens to be interested in jazz. He serves as a jazz critic for the local

rag around the Bay Area; he's a well-known person. He became a Fellow, and, "How am I going to do this? How am I going to do this?" He came up with this idea for a course, and he called it Jazz, Hollywood Cinema, and Theater Music.

Rubens: Border Music.

Choy: And that's what the course is about. It's about jazz, Hollywood cinema, and theater music. Somehow he got the department to field this course under 118. The teen series is political theory, if you look in the catalog. Somehow they agreed to this thing. So he teaches this course, and he taught it several times in the year, and he taught it during summer—

Rubens: Were they big classes?

Choy: It ended up being big, yeah. He cut it back, because he wanted to do it himself; there were no TAs. Then he switched to summer. He hasn't taught it during the academic year for a while, but he teaches it every other summer. It's known as the jazz class. The problem is, with Poli Sci—that course used to be kind of okay, regular, but then it's basically disappeared. The only other course Poli Sci teaches on a regular basis is the one taught by Nad Permaul. Nad is a graduate of the Poli Sci Department. Nad is a Berkeley graduate; he lives in Berkeley, he's one of these guys with blue and yellow blood. He has a PhD from Berkeley, and he's worked at Berkeley his entire life, and he is my age, maybe a couple of years younger. He had worked for Parking. He is Mr. Parking on campus. And transportation, and emergency planning. But he's the guy everybody loves to hate.

Rubens: So he's not a Poli Sci faculty?

Choy: He's a staff member. But he wants to be an academic. So, he developed this idea of a course, and he shopped it around, and Rhetoric bought it. Rhetoric said, "Cool. You can teach it here."

Rubens: He has a PhD, so—

Choy: Oh, yeah, he can teach—

Rubens: Does it matter if it's an adjunct teaches—

Choy: He's a lecturer, without salary. Because he's full time, they can't pay him more, right? He just wants to do this. So he does this as an overload. For free! He teaches this course in Rhetoric, and it's about the formation of the nation at the very beginning. He uses *Moby Dick* as the model about multiculturalism, and being stuck together on the same ship. So there's his course. But he really wants to teach in Poli Sci, so he shops it around some more, and Sociology buys this thing. So he does it a couple of times in

Sociology in one term and Rhetoric the other term. Finally Poli Sci says, “Okay. Since you’re already doing it, in effect it’s an okay course.” He teaches this thing; he teaches it by himself, from 3:30 to 5:30 Tuesday-Thursday, that’s his day. I forget whether he’s Poli Sci. I think it’s spring and Rhetoric’s fall, one or the other way around. It’s Politics of Displacement. He’s teaching it in the spring. Spring is Poli Sci, fall is Rhetoric. Rhetoric’s number is 152AC, I think it is. Poli Sci just changed it. They gave it its own number this coming spring, it’s 117—I forget, but it’s got its own number now, like it’s its own course, as opposed to being a section of this Omnibus AC topics course, which is called Three American Cultures. That’s the name of this 118, which is [laughs]—

Rubens: Not too exciting a name.

Choy: So Nad teaches this course with thirty-five students, because he does it himself, and takes writing seriously, okay. He does it for free, and he teaches it once a year, every year, and he’s done it ever since ’93, or I don’t know what it is. He’s sort of up there with having taught the most times, individual courses, personally.

That’s Poli Sci’s only regular course. Every once in a while, they will have a graduate student, one of Michael Rogin’s graduate students, who finally finishes, and they allow them to teach a section of 118AC on something, California politics or whatever. Oh, and they had Gaston—Gaston was a grad student. He taught a version of 118, and he applied for a job when it was open. They didn’t give it to him, and so he’s at Brooklyn College now. That wouldn’t have been too bad. I mean, people thought he would have gotten the job. He was really good. There were a bunch of them, there were about less than a dozen. A few of them, ten, have done this, but they teach it once or twice and then it’s gone. It’s a Topics in AC course. There is no regular American Cultures course in Poli Sci. What we’ve done—our dream was to get something like 1, Poli Sci 1AC, which is taught every term, including summer. Sandy Muir teaches it—oh, forget that. Or Jack teaches it—forget that, right?

Rubens: These are the permanent faculty.

Choy: Yes. When Judy Gruber was chair, she helped us a lot. To the extent that she could, she would send people our way. That’s how we got sections of 118, but they were all one or two times, and then they were gone, so it wasn’t regular faculty teaching this thing. Other than Paul Thomas now, there is no regular faculty who—basically, no standard faculty teach American Cultures in Poli Sci. Same thing in Sociology.

Rubens: Wow. Hard to believe!

- Choy: *Troy's* department.
- Rubens: What about Kim Voss?
- Choy: She owes us a course. I know it's hard to believe who they are. Even with Bob Blauner and Troy, it never happened. I mean, Jerry [Jerome] Karabel, Kristin Luker, you go right down the list—no, I'm sorry. Claude, Claude Fisher. Claude Fischer teaches urban sociology. He is the one who headed the group that responded to the Hirsch and Murray book on equality, the IQ thing. Claude teaches urban sociology, and he had been on the committee way back in '91 or '92.
- Rubens: Is he a Fellow?
- Choy: No. This is his course; he teaches it forever. He had toyed with the idea of making it an American Cultures, but he didn't really see how he could do it, and he really wasn't convinced it would work.
- Finally, he said, "Okay, I'm going to do it"! So he did it. He made up a version, he taught it several times—three or four times, I think—and then he stopped. He actually wrote me a thing, a letter, and he said I could use this, which I did. It's in my binder for the Omi report. It's an example of why faculty members bail out. He had reasons, but the major reason—this really is substantive—but there were process reasons, and student attitudes. But the substantive reason he bailed out was that this wasn't the course he wanted to teach. The way he had done this was the way not to do it, because he had taken his existing course, lopped off a little bit to make some space, crammed more material in for American Cultures. So he didn't really restructure the course, and rethink the thing and teach it a completely different way, which is what you have to do. He was never satisfied with it, because he couldn't teach what he wanted to teach; he had to teach this other stuff that he didn't want to teach. That's why he—he never really converted the course, and he never sort of intellectually was on board.
- Rubens: Now, is that when you're saying that, to the extent that American Cultures hasn't succeeded, it's all about restructuring of how people teach?
- Choy: That's why the people have to rethink the whole way they approach the subject. Departmental commitment is tied in to this, and so there's lots of examples of that. Sociology now has no seminar faculty teaching American Cultures. The only ones are Brian Powers, who teaches—he's a lecturer, and he teaches 3AC once a year, in the summer. Does a great job, you can count on him, no problem. And Andy Barlow, who teaches 130AC, which is Race Relations, and 170AC, which is Social Change. He's a visiting professor at Diablo Valley College. He teaches 130AC as a version of 130AC at DVC.
- Rubens: As a visiting sociology professor here, not in Diablo Valley—

- Choy: His home campus is Diablo Valley College. He's very much committed to American Cultures. He's the one who said that, "I already do it. I do this race relations course. Sure, it's American Cultures." But he told me that when he actually started thinking about how was he actually going to do this American Cultures thing he realized he had to remake the course. It wasn't just a matter of doing more of the same, because it's not just a matter of saying, "Oh, yeah, I have this major story and blacks have this role in America, and Chicanos have this role, and Asian Americans have this role." That doesn't by itself make it an American Cultures course, because what this thing really is about, the way you've got to think about it—especially in social science courses, because yeah, sure, urban sociology—you have blacks in the city, you have whites, Chicanos, so they're there. But that doesn't make it an American Cultures course, which Claude found out. What you've got to do is ask yourself, how do I teach—the cultures kind of question, which usually you want to teach about urban sociology, and you use the groups as a way to teach about urban sociology. What you've got to do is turn the thing around and look at it the other way, as: how do you use urban sociology to teach something about the groups? That's why—you've got to look at it backwards, in a way. The problem is, that's what makes these courses different.
- Rubens: And that's what the seminar was trying to do. Is it a requirement of teaching one of the AC classes that you take the seminar?
- Choy: No. Anybody can do a course.
- Rubens: So it seems to me that maybe the direction we want to go, I certainly want to talk about, is—which courses were successful, and why? I want to deal with the criticism that was still laying around, that you inherited probably from the beginning. I didn't know that Muir had revisited it. I guess you're saying Ethnic Studies was not the backbone of it then?
- Choy: Well, Ethnic Studies was, in a way. It's a very small department, at the beginning—
- Rubens: Takaki was the only one who really had—
- Choy: Takaki, Terry Wilson, Alex Saragoza, Carlos Muñoz, Ling-Chi Wang—
- Rubens: What I meant about Takaki was that he had written a terrific book on—
- Choy: Oh, yeah, *A Different Mirror*. He was sort of the intellectual godfather of the thing. He was never a Fellow, but he taught his course.
- Rubens: Did he ever present at the—?

- Choy: Oh, he presented. He wasn't a Fellow. He never took the money. He didn't need to. But he presented several times. We even got him to present for the community college one year. That was really something.
- Rubens: I'll bet. Lucky them. [laughter]
- Choy: In the beginning they had a quarter—more than a quarter of the total enrollment in American Cultures. Their proportion only dropped after History started building up, with 7B and then 7A, and then all these other courses. And when Carlos left, Ethnic Studies started going down. They still are second—they're the second-biggest contributor, in all departments and in social sciences. They play a significantly big role in this.
- Rubens: You've worked under three directors, and I don't know if we should talk about those subcommittee chairs particularly. The folder that—you're referring to a binder that you did for Omi; I guess I didn't see that.
- Choy: Well, it's like yea thick [laughs], and it's full of information. Charts, tables, analysis. It's what I gave to the committee when the committee asked for information.
- Rubens: The other thing we might want to talk about is evaluations, student evaluations.
- Choy: Yes. We stopped doing them about a year ago because we ran out of money, and we stopped printing them about '95. But we have them electronically since then, and we have printed copies for everything before that. It was only in the spring of '94, when I forgot to do this in time, that we missed. Otherwise we got them all, every single term. We have—
- Rubens: So you stopped doing evaluations in the spring of '03?
- Choy: Yes, I think it was about then, I'm not sure exactly. We didn't print the fall of '98, so we have everything before that. You can read those, you can read the electronic versions, the Center has them. They're worth reading. Initially you can read them all, because there weren't that many, but then you get up to a thousand pieces of paper; it gets a bit onerous. But the other thing is, on the old web site, a couple times, we—this is really interesting. Yeah, read them, because what happens is, you get a good sense—recently, most of it's junk, in that either they don't respond, or it's perfunctory.
- Rubens: Did you work with someone at survey research?
- Choy: Initially, they could say anything they wanted. But early on, the first bunch of years, it's really interesting, especially the first couple of years, because this was a hot issue. This was brand new, and so there was a lot of bitching about

that. But every once in a while, you get a really good essay from some student about something that's—

Rubens: Yes, they're quoted. I saw some of them quoted in—

Choy: So it's worth digging around to find those, because they're really interesting. Also, the way the students think about this topic changes over time. You can see it in the way they respond. For example, the most obvious one of these, in, I forget, '93, '94, I forget exactly when it was—spring of '94, maybe—we asked about ethnicity. Takaki's always been after me to ask about ethnicity. We never asked that question, and I didn't want to, because I figured, like, what am I going to do with this thing? Finally I said okay, so we did. We asked that question. The question was, "What's your cultural identity? Please explain." They could write anything they wanted about who they thought they were. We got 1600 responses, I think, to that question—something other than a blank. They could say anything about who they were. We put those all up on a website; in the old website, they were there. Then we did it again four years later, three years later.

Rubens: What year was that, when you first did it?

Choy: Ninety-three, I think it was, I don't know exactly when it was, but it was up—it was really interesting, because we got some terrific essays, and you could actually—and the very things I noticed, like, almost all the Vietnamese students would write this long essay about themselves, and about Vietnamese, consistently. The Indians, the South Asians, always complained about not being included. There were these patterns, and then also, people—the whites would say, "I'm a mutt." Or, "I'm German, dah-dah-dah." They nailed it down to the third decimal place what they are. Or they knew nothing at all. Or they would say, "Fuck you! None of your business!" You'd get that, too. "Why are you asking me this?" You get the paranoids. All kinds of responses to this question. The Chinese would say, "I'm from Taiwan." "I'm Chinese." "I'm Taiwanese, not Chinese." [laughs] "I'm from Hong Kong." Some of them would get really specific about where they were from.

The second time we did it, the responses were much more perfunctory. "I'm Asian American." More of that, rather than—the first time we got much less of that. So this whole category stuff became more—agglomerated stereotype, and students started thinking of themselves as Asian American. I never think of myself as Asian American. That's a made-up thing, right? What's it supposed to mean? But for students now, who are growing up in the early '90s, this became a real category that they were a member of.

Rubens: Does it, despite the fact that in terms of the pedagogy, or the writings—?

- Choy: What do they know, right? Maybe by the time they're seniors, you'd think—because we asked them what year they were, so you could see if they learned anything in their four years, but they did. The difference between what freshmen say and what seniors say is very marked. Oh, yeah, the freshmen—they know nothing, I mean, “I'm Asian American,” whereas the seniors know all about identity politics and the complexities, and they can go on forever, if you let them, if they want to. Reading those, they're really interesting, and then for the 2000 census, they had the question for the first time about—the multiple check-off. So we asked it again, in the context of the 2000 census, what would you have said if you had been asked? We get all kinds of answers to that, too.
- Rubens: I'll look at student evaluations.
- Choy: We have the student evaluations; we have them by course, which is private, because we're not trying to evaluate the instructor. We gave it back to the instructors, but then we would put them all together in one big report, and we dropped references to instructors and courses. That's kind of the public thing, you can—if you just want to read the comments, you can read that. That's public. They're in the bottom drawer, file drawer, of the new director's office. They're interesting.
- Rubens: I meant to ask you something in the very beginning; it's not related to the interview, but if—maybe you know this off the top of your head, but you were talking about these different community colleges that started having the requirement, some part of the requirement. Does the Diversity Digest of the ACC have some kind of record of how many universities have either ethnic studies or—
- Choy: I don't know if they have anything comprehensive. I had a crazy idea once, that—all the UC campuses are supposed to have something, some kind of ethnic studies requirement. They're supposed to, right? It's policy. American Cultures is Berkeley's version of it. What do the other campuses have? I had this idea, and I wrote this whole thing up as a proposal for a conference that I thought would be really cool—is that we ought to get all the campuses together to talk about what they did and why, and how it's different. I actually did this. I went through all the catalogues of all the other campuses, and I looked for this thing. Most of them—when they have an Ethnic Studies requirement, which Santa Barbara does, and San Diego, and Davis is—I don't know. UCLA doesn't, UCLA is the only one that doesn't. Santa Barbara I think is the best example of this. They have Ethnic Studies courses. All of the courses that meet their Ethnic Studies requirement have to be Ethnic Studies courses. There are courses in other departments, but they're cross-listed—whereas Santa Cruz at the time, in '88, if you look in the Simmons report, the committee's report, they talk about what Santa Cruz had. They sneeringly say, “Well, Santa Cruz doesn't. They have two courses, and so if you take a course

in basket-weaving or the Japanese Noh drama, that takes care of it. That's not what we want to do, that doesn't do anything about teaching about the US." The problem also with that is, it equates American minorities with foreigners. Irvine was sort of like that, too. They had a two-course thing, which was US and some foreign global thing. San Diego had something that's like Santa Barbara's.

Rubens: So you wrote up—

Choy: I had this idea of getting together, getting all the campuses together and having a conference on, how do we approach this? There was some reason—

Rubens: When was this?

Choy: I can go look in my files.

Rubens: I think this would be a good thing to have.

Choy: I sent the idea to Julie Gordon, in the OP [Office of the President]. The reason I knew her—we had gotten a little bit of money from OP for some curriculum thing, for American Cultures. John Heilbron ripped off \$15,000 of it.

Rubens: *Fifteen?*

Choy: We were mad at him. We got the money—he just took \$15,000 away from the money he'd given us. Anyway, she was the one who was giving this money out. It had to do with some curriculum integration stuff. That's how I knew her. So I had this idea, and I sent it to her. I said this is something that would fit in her area of intercampus exchange. That's what she's interested in, that's the stuff she does. Nothing ever happened, but I thought it was a cool idea.

Rubens: Yeah, it is a cool idea. But to your knowledge there was no other university that copied the—

Choy: I got a lot of calls in the beginning, especially after we got the [Theodore] Hesburgh thing, you know, we got a lot of national publicity.

Rubens: What's the Hesburgh thing?

Choy: We got an award. There's this award, a national competition, annual competition in faculty development things. I got the brilliant idea [laughs] of applying for this thing. We didn't win, but we got one of the honorable mentions. As a result of that, we got some publicity, national publicity. We were told that if we ever got our act together on real faculty development, we should reapply and we'd probably win, just because of numbers alone, and just because we're Berkeley and all that kind of stuff. I think that some of the stuff that Cynthia and Barbara Davis are trying to do under Christina—if they

can ever get that stuff together, and package it into a coherent program, they could win this, no problem.

- Rubens: Hesburgh was the president of Notre Dame
- Choy: Yes, they run it through TIAA-CREF funds; it's a national competition. Usually these little schools win, and they have some program for new faculty, and it affects ten people.
- Rubens: Who are you referring to when you talk about Cynthia and Barbara Davis?
- Choy: Cynthia Schrage is vice provost, Christina Maslach's Assistant, and Barbara Davis is assistant vice provost They're doing all the campus evaluation, the WASC certification. They're in charge of making everybody get their act together, faculty development, and that kind of stuff. And that's why American Cultures fits with them, because that's what we do, right?
- Rubens: It's part of the whole mission, looking towards the capstone experience, and undergraduate research.
- Choy: All that.
- Rubens: I'd love to hear how you evaluated the program.
- Choy: I used to get calls. People would call me up about this, and students would be very interested. Texas, Washington, Penn, Iowa, you name it, Wyoming. I'd get faculty call me up, and I'd get assistant deans call me up. Everybody's interested. I'd explain what this thing is all about, how it works, and the students of course are all enthused, but they're gone in a few years, so nothing ever happens there. A couple of years later, another bunch of students from Texas would call. The administrators and the deans would pick up right away; this costs money, they're not interested.
- Rubens: It cost because you wanted to give an incentive to faculty to participate?
- Choy: Santa Barbara had something that was all voluntary, and this stuff was not self-implemented. You can forget that. Also, from my perspective, if you don't put any money where your mouth is, you're not serious. So Tien put money in here; he's serious. Heyman put money in, he put a lot of money. He's serious. Berdahl, he didn't put any money—he ain't serious.
- Rubens: Really. Didn't put any money in it?
- Choy: Very little. If he could have not funded it, he'd—and he's not funding it, the last couple of years. He's not funding this. Zero. He's not interested; this is not important to him.

- Rubens: So we have no idea what the new administration is going to do about grants or—
- Choy: The way Bill wanted to have this thing is, he wanted the campus to pay for the faculty stipends, because if they didn't do that, they weren't serious. All of this other—the research grants and all this other stuff—that was what the Pew money was for. But the stipends, the fellowships, the faculty—
- Rubens: Came out of the chancellor's—
- Choy: Campus should pay for that—came out of hard money, and they've got to pay for our salary, which they did.
- Rubens: What happened to Simmons? He went on to be—
- Choy: Dean of social sciences, and then he went to Brown to the Department of Anthropology.
- Rubens: Do you think we got enough for today, then? John Heilbron—did you finish the story of how he stole \$15,000?
- Choy: Okay. Every year they give us some amount of money for the fellowships. We say, "We expect to have this many at this amount per," and it multiplies out to some number. When we got this money—we got two grants from the Office of the President. The first year, they both were \$15,000, I think. The first year we used the money—you have to use it to give grants, though, to some faculty members. So we got more faculty members to be Fellows as a result. The second year we got the grant, Heilbron had just given us our allocation, and when his money came through, he just subtracted that amount from the amount he gave us. He just took it back. So we didn't get any extra money out of this. That's how he ripped us off. And it's not that the first time he's done something like that, too.
- Rubens: Remind me. What was his position?
- Choy: He had Rod Park's job. Executive vice chancellor, with Tien. We reported to the executive vice chancellor, and then after three or four years of that, we got moved to the provost, the vice provost—the provost for professional schools and colleges, who was that guy from Public Health, I forget his name. After that, in '95, Mitch became director. We got moved to undergraduate affairs, in L&S. As far as I was concerned, that was a huge mistake, because the message this sent—first of all, this is a campus requirement. We are part of the chancellor's office. We're important. We report to the vice chancellor, vice provost, okay, but we're still part of the chancellor's office. But we're clearly getting moved out, right? So we got moved out. We got moved out of California Hall to L&S, so now it suddenly looks like the property of L&S instead of being a campus thing. So the professional schools go, "Eh, we can

forget about this,” right? Bureaucratically this is how I see it. Plus, we’re in this division which is like nothing, leftovers. Interdisciplinary studies is no discipline; according to some people, undisciplined studies. So we’re off to the side, we are marginalized big time. Plus the amount of money drops significantly. We’re talking \$2,000, maybe \$1,500, a stipend now. Or maybe zero.

Rubens: And Carolyn Porter was—

Choy: She was the dean of UGIS [Undergraduate and Interdisciplinary Studies]. Don McQuade had been dean, and he went off back to teaching. Then he got the development job right after that. Maybe he got—anyway, Carolyn Porter from English, again. She’s dean of UGIS, and we report to her.

Rubens: And who was Kwong-loi Shun?

Choy: Shun became dean after Carolyn Porter, so we reported to him for a year. That’s when Troy was director for part of that time, and Mitch was director part of that time for Kwong-loi. Then Troy came as director, and then they were talking about this new job, vice provost for undergraduate education. I said, “That’s where we belong.”

Rubens: And that was a new job.

Choy: Yes, the new vice provost.

Rubens: That hadn’t existed.

Choy: Undergraduate education—we didn’t do undergraduate education, right?

Rubens: At the time, you were moving—

Choy: We’re back to California Hall, and we’re back to the chancellor’s office.

Rubens: Good. Well, I think that’s a good place to stop then, for today.

Interview 4: November 12, 2004

[Audio File 5]

[Interview begins off tape with a discussion of the Wade-Giles transliteration of Chinese into English.]

Choy: In the fifties or maybe even earlier than that, they used the Wade-Giles, and so K is G. K sounds like a G. There's a name called Gu, which is totally different, so it could have been spelled "Ku," because there is a Ku also. Wade-Giles were both British guys. That was one system that the Taiwanese, the Nationalist government, adopted as the official whatever. The mainland had pinyin, which is totally different, which is derived from French, because all these guys were in Paris during the twenties, and so—basically French. When we see stuff during the fifties and sixties and 'seventies, and even into the eighties, when you see Chinese written in English, the system they're using tells you where they're from, what their politics are—especially in the eighties and nineties, because then it—until the *New York Times* adopted pinyin as the official translation. Basically, what they said—they were not going to recognize Taiwan anymore, the government doesn't rule China. This is bullshit about Taiwan. So now, Harvard University Press still uses Wade-Giles.

Rubens: It does?

Choy: Yes. There are other systems. I don't know when Berkeley switched, but they use pinyin. So when you see people's names, you have to kind of figure out where their family's from, and decide whether they're from Taiwan or the mainland, and then you [laughs]—that kind of stuff. The system you use tells you something about your politics. And also the characters—if you use the simplified characters, of course you're from the mainland, but if you use the traditional characters you're most likely from Taiwan; but you could be from the mainland too, nowadays. Ten years ago, it was very clear: if you used the simplified characters, you were from the mainland. Nobody else used them; everybody else thought they were stupid.

Rubens: Thought the simplified ones were?

Choy: Yes. It was politics, too.

Rubens: I have to ask you a really stupid question. Is there a difference in language between Taiwanese and—?

Choy: There's Taiwanese Taiwanese, which is like not Chinese, which is totally different. They were the locals who were there—the mainlanders all came in the forties, right, and they slaughtered a whole bunch of people in 1944.

- Rubens: Did they?
- Choy: Oh, yes. They still celebrate this. In February, toward the end of February, you go down to Sproul Hall—Sproul Plaza—you'll see there's a group of Taiwanese students who commemorate the slaughter of I don't know how many tens of thousands where—the Nationalist army went over there, they [clicks tongue] just wiped out a lot of people.
- Rubens: I didn't know that.
- Choy: Tens of thousands. This is something, of course, you don't hear too much about, because this happened—and so there's still a lot of animosity between the locals and the imports, because they all just came fifty years ago. Then there are also people like—was it Li Teng-Hui? Yeah, Li Teng-Hui, the former president of Taiwan, who grew up in Taiwan. As a boy, he had been under the Japanese occupation, so his first language wasn't Chinese; it was Japanese. Then when the mainlanders came, they—a lot of people from the mainland after 1949 when the big immigration came were from Fukien—Fujian, which is right across the water, so they have a whole different dialect, too.
- Rubens: Yes, but that's a dialect.
- Choy: Right, but it's—
- Rubens: Sufficiently different than—
- Choy: Yes, it's like another language. It has the same written language; it's basically not very well understood. Northern people can't understand Cantonese. It's like a different language. But a lot of Taiwanese are from Fukien, on Taiwan. I don't know how many Nationalist officials are over there—a few tens of thousands—but a lot of the other hundreds of thousands are from the people who bailed out, mostly from the coast. This was after—in the late forties.
- Rubens: Is the presumption, though, would you say—the language spoken there now, the official language, is basically a Chinese—?
- Choy: Well, it's Mandarin. Mandarin had been the official government language since I don't know, during the Qing and on, so like about three or four hundred years. The interesting thing about that is that the Qing were from—they were Manchus, right, they're from the north. So Mandarin's basically not really Chinese. In fact, there's lots of scholarship, and you can ask David Johnson or Yeh Yenchin about this, but the Chinese that was spoken 2,000 years ago sounded more like Cantonese, today's Cantonese. Yet because the government had always been run by people from the north—I mean, they said, "This is our language," so naturally they were trying to impose this language on everybody. Mandarin isn't embraced by people in the south. [laughs] The

people in the north really could have cared less. The government's officials and the governments follow it, that's what it is. And it's still like that. In lots of cases, it's a matter of what's the language of economic power, and in the south it's Cantonese. When we were there in '96, our guide, who was from Beijing—she said, when she travels down into Shanghai, or certainly for Guangdong or Hong Kong—I guess she didn't go to Hong Kong then—when she went with groups, the only common language they had was English, because she didn't know Cantonese, and they didn't know Mandarin. So the guides, among themselves, from north and south China, who knew English would speak English, because that was a common language.

Rubens: Really? As late as '96? How is it that you were there?

Choy: Bear Treks. [UC Berkeley travel program] It was the first Bear Treks trip to China. It was really good. It was very interesting, and the group that arranged it, China Advocates, they still do the trip. We went to places that hadn't been opened up yet. In effect they were kind of practicing on us, the Chinese tourist people.

Rubens: Did you go with anybody from the American Cultures program?

Choy: No, no, it was just twenty-something of us. Most of those were a group who had graduated in the forties. I was the only Chinese person. There was one woman who wasn't from Berkeley, all the rest were from Berkeley connections. There was one family who brought their two kids, who were just—they were in college, or they had just graduated from college.

[Irrelevant conversation omitted]

Rubens: The focus of last session was structurally how the program was set up, and what were some of the pitfalls and the highlights, and I would like I think for this session to be just slightly more philosophical and analytic. We can go any direction you really want to, but I was wondering if we'd start with, just as I'd asked you—what was your understanding about how you would structure this job? What was your intellectual understanding of what role this requirement would play on the campus? And then really try to see if—did it change over time?

Choy: I don't think it changed over time. I had read everything I could find about it. At that time, because I hadn't been very much involved in the debate that led up to the adoption of the thing, I really didn't know too much about the issues. So, I kept my mouth shut and listened to everybody else talk about it, because these were the people who had been thinking the most about it. They were trying to explain it to a basically sometimes hostile audience, as well as a friendly audience that didn't quite know why we were doing this, and what's it all about. That was very useful. I learned a lot about what the faculty were

trying to do, what they were trying to accomplish, and they never talked too much publicly about how it was going to happen, because I don't think anybody really knew.

They had ideas—like I told you, Clara Sue Kidwell had said, I remember this—meaning that if we could get these courses into the major, then we've done it. So it was clear that the goal was to change what the faculty teach. Well, they never really said it that way. Exactly those words you won't see anywhere, even if you look hard for it. In fact, they really downplayed this whole idea of changing what the faculty teach. It's all implied, and you've got to figure this out yourself, because you're talking about why you're going to make these students take courses that don't exist. So the faculty have to invent them. What does that mean? They have to change what they teach. Well, how did that happen? That's sort of how you back into it. You can see what they're really trying to do, which was what they were really trying to do, except they had to approach it from a totally indirect way. It was clear that because our constituency of the Center was really the faculty—we were supposed to do faculty development. Except that you don't do faculty development at Berkeley. There's no such thing, right? But that was what we were all about.

Rubens: In the seminar.

Choy: Everything we did was about that. Any of the student stuff that we ended up doing was just kind of by the way. I think that, right now, Christina has converted the Center back to its original mission and dumped off all the other stuff.

Rubens: The original mission being?

Choy: Faculty development. That's what the Center is focusing on now, and all of the student stuff she sort of pushed off to the advisors and the bureaucracy. Let's hope it works. But that was what this thing was all about. That was about—from my perspective, not being a faculty member and being kind of a little bit of an administrator and interested in making this thing happen, I saw my job as taking these faculty ideas and making the events, and making the thing work, because there was lots of budget stuff, and staffing stuff, and logistics that the faculty don't care about. That's not—they don't think about that sort of stuff when they come up with this idea. The requirement is a really good example—the faculty get this idea—“Oh, great! Great idea, yeah, cool idea, let's do it. Okay, we're going to do it. Here, you do it.”

Well, how does one do this? Nobody knows, because something like this had never been done before on this campus, and so you kind of make this thing up as you go along. You ask around, people tell you, “What about this, what about that?” and then you realize that you've got to start covering all these little points to get from here to there. There are lots of steps. This whole area

with student record-keeping, who would know about *that*? You learn about scheduling classes, how classrooms work and all that stuff, and because I ended up helping faculty with getting classrooms, and with getting the right classroom—so I learned about how that works, and then all these little pieces. I learn about advising, because the students come to me and say, “I didn’t do the requirement.” “Well, why didn’t you?” You get into, “Somebody told you.” “How did that happen?” So you learn about how advising works. You learn about how departments schedule classes, how they assign people to teach courses. Every department is different. All of this stuff, because—we ended up, because of our constituency with the faculty, we saw our job as to help them do what they want to do, and make it easy for them, and take care of all these little annoyances and stuff that people would say, “Ah, forget it, because it’s too much trouble.” It’s things like getting classrooms and this and that, and on and on and on. It’s basic bureaucracy stuff that the department schedules, or the department’s staff is supposed to take care of, but because they’re overworked, underpaid, whatever, they don’t get the personal attention that faculty think they deserve, right? In the beginning it was easy because there were only fifteen, twenty of them. I’m going to ask, “What’s the big deal?” Right? I’ve got all year to solve—I’ve got two weeks to solve ten problems, or even two problems. That’s nothing. But over time that changed; the thing grows to be forty classes each term.

Rubens: What was the high point, do you—?

Choy: Well, the high point was probably this year. One hundred twenty courses a year, and forty-forty-thirty, something like that.

Rubens: Summer?

Choy: Yeah. Forty-forty-forty, maybe, even. You get on a cycle, this three times a year cycle. You’ve got to take care of that, because that never changes, and you’ve got to keep up. You can’t ever slack off, and then you get into this approval process with the committee because each person has to have their particular syllabus approved by the committee the first time. If you have twenty new courses in the fall term, that’s twenty people you’ve got to deal with. Next spring it’s another twenty. You can have easily—out of a hundred and something courses, half of them could be new courses in a year. And it’s like that this year, it’s like that next year. It was like that the year before, so you’re always keeping up. This is something California Hall [the Chancellor’s Office] never understood. They had this vision that you could pay up front once, to get this thing started, and then it just runs itself. They never understood that it needs continuous maintenance. Being faculty—because they’re all faculty, right?—they never understood. And I guess I never really thought about it in the beginning, but once it started happening it was clear to me what was going on—was that people drop out. They stop teaching their course for all kinds of reasons: either drop out permanently, they quit, they

retire, and we got hit by a lot of VERIPs [Very Early Retirement Program retirees]. They would take leaves all the time, and this is normal faculty turnover stuff.

Of course, the departments are dealing with this all the time. If somebody drops a course, maybe you need to replace—put something in its place. Either have a substitute teach it, which usually the department takes care of if they want to, or you have to have another course—from that department or some other department—and then we're talking about parts of the bureaucracy that don't talk to each other, right? They could care less. So, we're the only ones who are watching this whole thing overall. I am the only one watching this whole thing. Literally, I am the only one watching the big picture, and you can see, well, we lost this, we need something else here. Or, we've got these other things, so I don't have to worry about that, this I'm going to be worried about next term. In this whole thing, we're just moving this thing along, pushing. I call it pushing on strings, but not really in charge of anything, because the departments make all the decisions; faculty make all the decisions. We just keep track of what's happening, and if there looks like there might be a problem, then we tell the right people, tell the director, and the director's supposed to tell the right people, and maybe something happens and maybe it doesn't. You just eat it, and you hope you recover from it the next time because there's always another term coming up.

If you look at it in the long run, rather than just this term, term by term—if you look at it in the big picture, you see, the students are here four years, they've got to do this, and so they have to fit it into their life, and from that point of view it's their problem, and my job is to make sure there are enough seats so that they can take the course. As long as there are enough seats—the what kind part, I don't really have too much control over, because departments decide.

Rubens: Shall we talk about if things changed both because of who the director was, and then also because of a kind of natural passage of time and its relationship to other political issues that were—the campus was facing, both in the state level—whether it was anti-immigration, or Prop. 209—and then on campus, whether it was Ethnic Studies—

Choy: Under Bill, the job was to get the thing started and ramp up.

Rubens: And Bill was there for—

Choy: He was there until the summer of '95. I think '95 is when the transition—and really the last year he was there he wasn't there; he was dean, and we didn't do much different that year. We were up at the steady-state level by then. We had accomplished the getting-up-there part.

- Rubens: So there were no major political assaults on it?
- Choy: There may have been very early on, but then they kind of gave up. The little sniping by the opponents of it had gone away, except we had that David Littlejohn thing. He wrote a piece in the *Cal Monthly*—
- Rubens: Yes. I forget the date of that.
- Choy: And Ken Jowitt gets his little dig in a couple of issues later. That sort of stuff. And [John] Searle is always commenting. But basically our attitude was, “We won. Who cares about that. They lost, and they’re just bitching. So what?”
- Rubens: These were sniping—
- Choy: Yes. It was clear that when Chancellor Tien came in, he said this was important, and he put his money where his mouth was, so I don’t care. As long as the program’s funded, the chancellor says we’re important, we’re important. I don’t care what anybody else says. [laughs] The chancellor made a big point of featuring American Cultures in his annual reports, in his public statements about the life of the campus and blah blah blah. American Cultures was always there. We didn’t have to worry about whether we were important or not. We just had to make the thing work, and there was a lot of problems with that, because—just getting the courses on-line, and getting the departments and deans to understand that this wasn’t additional resources necessarily. It was substitution of existing resources, and in other words going to be—oh, if there was going to be, there could be, and there probably was, shifting of resources between departments. Diane Clemens’ 16AC, History 16AC, that was a brand new course that didn’t exist before, and it became big. I think she taught it in Wheeler once, and—it was several hundred students, and had TAs, so this was a new course that they just jammed in there. She had never taught a course this big, so this was literally a brand new resource thing for the History Department, so they must have gotten additional TA money for this, and it had to come from somebody. I don’t know who it was, but that’s the dean’s problem, to figure that part out. Of course, you know, this year’s budget is based on last year’s data, so you’re always running one year behind. We met with deans and department chairs—
- Rubens: But no fund-raising is going on?
- Choy: No. Nobody’s going to fund this thing anymore. Why?
- Rubens: I remember seeing in the alumni magazine, maybe it was in the clipping file, something that—what’s his name with the bow tie? [Ira Michael] Heyman. When Heyman had—
- Choy: He was the one who got the Pew grant. That was the only grant we ever got. He tried. Before it got started, he tried. But then once the faculty adopted this

thing, it wasn't experimental any more, even though nobody outside the foundation world understood that this was experimental, from our point of view. We could never get that through their heads, that we didn't know what the hell we were doing—we were making this thing up—and that also, all the courses were going to be brand new. I think Pew was the only one that understood that part.

Rubens: So Diane Clemens's course is so big, and they've got to bring on TAs. Why is it the dean's problem? Why isn't it—?

Choy: Because they're the ones with the money, they're the ones. They had a pile of money, and they dole it out to departments. And the funding was for TAs and all that kind of stuff. Some of these TA allocations are based on things that don't exist anywhere. This is bad—and then there's a lot of inertia in the system.

Rubens: So when Mitch comes in—

Choy: When Mitch comes in, we moved over to UGIS—

Rubens: And how did he come in?

Choy: He applied for the job, I guess. There was a committee to select a new director. He said he wanted the job, so—

Rubens: Had you known him before?

Choy: Only as another faculty member, because he had taught his American Cultures course already. But Bill said he was okay, so, okay! [laughs] Carolyn Porter was dean, and he reported to her. This was all when the budget cuts came, so we got less money. Just like everybody got less money, we got less money, okay. The problem was getting interest, getting any new faculty in the program. That has always been the problem. How do you recruit new faculty? And keep the summer seminar interesting. The expectation, if you were going to be in the summer seminar, was—you're going to do a course, even though there was never a quid pro quo for that. We weren't paying you to do a course, but that was always the expectation. The summer seminar became a thing in itself. In order to take advantage of *that* part, that aspect of it, they created this other category of applicants where a research project would get you into the American Cultures seminar. This was sort of up to the director's discretion, to decide—

Rubens: Was this a program Mitch developed?

Choy: Well, it was an idea of a way to keep the seminar going. This is when we started getting repeats. Repeat Fellows.

Rubens: So we're talking now, '96?

Choy: Ninety-six, '95-'96-'97. I have records of exactly how many repeats, and how many times, and who, and all that sort of stuff. The stipend went down to \$2,000. It had gone from six to 4500 I think, if I remember correctly. It's in the big binder at AC; it shows all of this stuff, all the numbers. It was down to 2,000. It was smaller, with a dozen to fifteen Fellows. It was okay, but it wasn't; it didn't have the pioneering rah-rah spirit that the first ones did. The talks were interesting. It changed; the nature of the relationship among the Fellows changed, in that the first set we had, we brought in experts to lead the discussion, and then we graduated—we tried to have people within the seminar take the lead in certain areas, because they were the experts. Under this new configuration, it became more internal. We would bring in a speaker, a former Fellow, maybe the first time, just to get the thing going and show how it was done, and then after that anybody would be a presenter. They basically talked to themselves about their course, the course they did, or their research project, rather than bringing people in. It was more like—

Rubens: An actual seminar.

Choy: An actual seminar, rather than having experts talking.

Rubens: What would be an example of a research project?

Choy: Oh, well, they could be closely tied to a course, like Paul Thomas. He was doing work on Duke Ellington. Or it could be something like Mario Barrera's—he got into movies, film; he got into film. He didn't do political science totally, but he got into film, so he got interested in story-telling and all this kind of stuff. So those would be research projects.

Rubens: It was faculty research projects?

Choy: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. They were faculty research projects. I could go through the list where I could tell you what's what. So, we went along like this. We were marking time. Then—

Rubens: Was Breitwieser committed to it?

Choy: Oh. yes. People who got involved in this did it because they believed this was something worthwhile to do, also worth their time. Faculty don't do anything unless they get a return, right? So why would faculty do this thing? Because you're asking them to do a lot of work, teach some course. In some cases they have never taught undergraduates, sometimes they had never taught this many undergraduates, and they certainly had never taught undergraduates who knew nothing about the major of the course—the course the department was in, I mean—linguistics, what's that?

Rubens: They certainly had not had the syllabi approved, I mean the investigator—

Choy: Right, that was a whole other kind of uncertainty. We had set this thing up so we could, you know, “don’t worry about it.” As far as I could see, that was the least of their problems. I think the uncertainty part was more like when the faculty in Sociology don’t do this, because they certainly are interested in the subject. They do race and ethnicity, and like, why not participate? They have all kinds of reasons why they don’t want to do it. Those became real obstacles, and they’re still obstacles. The fact that anybody wanted to do this, my job was to make it easy for them to do what they wanted to do. A lot of this was what I’d call hand-holding, or helping solve little problems, smooth the way for them, help them with this or that. Especially the newer faculty, the junior faculty—they didn’t have a clue how this place worked. Nobody had ever told them about scheduling classrooms, about getting equipment, about anything. About resources, money, fellowships, grants, whatever! They knew nothing. So, I would sit down with them, especially if they were new, and explain how you get things—should be done. Eventually they learned after a few years, making a lot of mistakes and getting a lot of frustration, that there’s no systematic—it’s not even training—systematic information for new faculty, and there still isn’t. New faculty programs—it’s a joke. I’ve been—

Rubens: They aren’t the equivalent of orientation.

Choy: No, they have this one-day thing where they talk about the faculty handbook; they talk about “Don’t get sued;” they talk about sexual harassment and all that kind of stuff—who needs this? They talk about, “You’ve got to get tenure, that’s what matters.” They really beat that in, so teaching is secondary. They really get them from the very first. So this whole bureaucracy stuff, I don’t know how they learn this. If you’ve been around here long enough, you finally figure it out, right? But it’s a very inefficient way to do things. So, I would help them with that kind of stuff a lot. Even senior faculty, there are things that they just never wanted to know, and that would make their life miserable sometimes, and so I would help them out with these things.

Rubens: What was an example of that?

Choy: Well, classrooms. It was the biggest headache. They’re going to teach a course, so they’ve got a classroom, and somehow they never get the message clearly enough to their scheduler that if they want to do videos. Or they want to do whatever, right? This was five, ten years ago. It’s better now, but nobody thought it was really a problem. If you wanted to do videos, there were like, ten classrooms, or twenty of them, and if you had a course that was going to have 200 students, well, there were only two of them. Getting them, of course, you’re fighting twenty people for them, right? This kind of stuff nobody ever told them, and so they’re bitching about, “Well, this classroom isn’t appropriate.” Meanwhile, these people would be paying fifty, eighty, a

hundred thousand dollars to move equipment around on campus; this is crazy! Really stupid!

You pay somebody ten bucks an hour to move that thing around, not your faculty. Maybe you're paying \$10,000 an hour. It was really stupid. They still do it, but—this whole place is kind of—that's the sort of stuff that faculty really get irritated about. It's sort of, "Ah, it's just the system." Yeah, but it can be fixed.

Rubens: Of course, of course. Now is there any point—Breitwieser, is that right? He's there until—

Choy: Five years, four years. I forget exactly.

Rubens: Until '99? I think so.

Choy: He quit. They didn't have a replacement. He quit, he said he was going to leave, and they had a whole year, and they still didn't have anybody, and so—

Rubens: And they, when you say they, that's the Senate committee on—

Choy: No, no, the administration. The dean's supposed to find a new director. Kwongloi was dean then, and he's Philosophy. Shun. He's the dean, right? The control unit head, or whatever they call it. He's supposed to find somebody. So for six months I had no director, until Troy took the job under Berdahl. Berdahl funded the program. Berdahl funded Troy, because remember, this is when Troy was going to leave and go to NYU. This was about keeping Troy here. Berdahl funded Troy; he didn't fund the program, as far as I was concerned. He gave the program—we got a lot of money out of it, but he never really funded the program. He funded Troy. And so, from my perspective, money's money, I don't care where it came from. It was clear that that's what would happen. I'm not stupid. It's clear that's what was going on. Troy's job was to try and figure out a way to revitalize the thing, get the departments to participate more, recruit enough faculty. That was still a problem, we needed new faculty—get the departments to commit. His analysis of the situation was, until there were structural changes in this business about—the departments aren't required to do it—until we could do something about that, nothing was ever going to change.

Rubens: So did he have a strategy to address that?

Choy: He had recommendations about programmatic changes that we could make, but nothing ever happened. Berdahl never really cared about this thing, I think. From my view at the bottom, that's the way I saw it. I don't think he really understood the whole ethnicity business on this campus, either. Look what he—the mistakes he made with Ethnic Studies—

- Rubens: Can we talk about that? When was that?
- Choy: When was that? This was in 2000. Troy is director. When the thing happened, it was that spring, I think. I think it was that spring. Berdahl was getting advice from everybody, and he followed the advice of the wrong people. That's the way Troy said it—Troy put it, because Troy put his two cents in, but the chancellor did something else. So he got himself crucified, he had this explosion—
- Rubens: Now, you're talking about over the issue of Ethnic Studies.
- Choy: Yeah, yeah. Ethnic Studies. And—
- Rubens: The issue was—we should just spell it out here—it was that in fact our enrollments were going down, but they were asking for another one or two FTE?
- Choy: Yeah, they were after FTE—they were asking for attention, and FTE and budget, money, resources. They had a lot of majors, and the majors were going up. The faculty wasn't; people had retired by then, they had these vacant slots they couldn't hire. They couldn't get—part of the problem I think with Ethnic Studies was that they could never agree about anything as a department, because there were too many factions, and all that—oh, internal stuff as well as external stuff—and the students have their own view of what's going on, too, and why. It's usually not that accurate, but there's lots of them.
- Rubens: And what are you basing this on? What you would hear, or—?
- Choy: Yeah, what I heard, and just from having watched this sort of stuff—years with students, the student rhetoric, and listening to what the faculty would talk about, what are the issues and how things are going with the decision-making is going on. When Jack Citrin and those guys had that—the censure motion? My understanding of what happened then was that Troy stage-managed the defense. He didn't say a thing in the meeting, because I was at the meeting. He was the one who organized who was going to do what and all that kind of stuff. He was the brains behind the whole thing. When the votes came—because I was in the room then—easily out of the 200 and something faculty that voted on the chancellor's side—
- Rubens: And that meant to grant the—
- Choy: Well, no. It meant the vote on the censure, or the equivalent of the censure. I don't know, I would say something close to half of the faculty members who stood up had some connection, either directly or indirectly, to American Cultures. I could see who was in the room and who stood up; I was counting just like everybody else. American Cultures faculty, whatever they thought about what was going on, they stood up and got counted. A lot of them—they

didn't like the situation, they didn't like being forced, this kind of—what was happening, but they couldn't bail out on the chancellor, either. There was a lot of grumbling on all sides about this.

Here's a case where—I don't know if the chancellor ever understood that American Cultures supported him, backed him. Anyway, Troy was the one who, as far as I could see, saved his ass, and after having not listened to Troy's advice about getting in the situation in the first place. Troy was director for three calendar years, might be two and a half. I think it was two and a half. One of those he was on leave for six months. Oh, yes, he retired. He was a regular faculty member when he started, and then in June of 2000, the first year, he retired. So when you retire you have to formally be off the payroll for a while, so he had to be off payroll for a semester, and then he came back six months later. He lives around the corner from me, and he was back and forth. He was four days a week in New York, and three days a week here.

Rubens: Now, was he being recruited for—

Choy: He had a project in New York. He said he was doing something, and that's what he was doing. I don't know if they were trying to recruit him or not. They probably were, but he had wanted to do other things, I guess. But I know he lived in Pat Hilden's apartment. [laughter] I know that. I see her at the Berkeley Bowl, and we talk about what's going on. But this New York thing went on for a couple of years. He was back and forth a lot. So he was never really here after the first six months or so. He was dividing his time and attention. We basically were just—

Rubens: Is that part of the factor when you said that enrollment started to go down?

Choy: No, no, I don't think that had anything to do with—that just happened. But the program clearly had hit—

Rubens: A saturation point?

Choy: It wasn't saturation; it was old. It was routine. So the problem, Christina's problem now, was how to make it vital and new again—revitalized, in that sense. There are faculty out there who want to do this, who are willing to do it, and who are doing it, but you need to get newer faculty, others who—into the program, so that they can make a commitment to it for a number of years.

Rubens: Let me ask you a question. Where do I have my—?

Choy: That's what's not happening.

- Rubens: Yes. Also, the original goal that you've got to get it into the major. Let me just ask you—one of our colleagues in ROHO, Martin Meeker, has taught several courses, and he said to me—
- Choy: He's going to do another one in the spring.
- Rubens: That's right, that's right. And he said what he was interested in was the issue of what he called contested categorization. That's three or four years ago, I remember—
- Choy: The group thing became a problem.
- Rubens: Do you have a certain sense of when that—?
- Choy: I don't know when it became a problem. Maybe after about five years. In the beginning, nobody really—
- Rubens: This is novel?
- Choy: Not so much that. My take on it was, being very cynical, what had happened at Berkeley in the late eighties was, they had taken a sixties idea and they had finally institutionalized it. In some sense it was already thirty years old, the group thing. They built this thing into a requirement, because that's the understanding at that time in '88, '89, when the thing got invented and they were trying to describe it. And then—
- Rubens: But there was more than group, it was also comparative, and—
- Choy: Yeah, all of that. That was new. But the group thing was critical to it, because that was the political part. The comparison part, that was the academic part. But the group thing was critical to the whole way it was viewed, and the way it was presented, because remember, the issue had always been race and ethnicity. How do you study about American minorities, right? So the group thing was critical to the whole way they did it. After thinking about this in this new way for a few years, it was clear that this thing was a problem. The groups themselves became an obstacle.
- Rubens: This ties in to my earlier question. You seem to understand that yourself.
- Choy: Yeah, I think so. You could see it. The faculty started attacking the groups and so the whole idea of the groups—there would be courses where they would attack—well, not—but they would critique the idea of—are the groups meaningful? How do they apply? It was sort of this case, Troy says, you have concrete structures constructed, but when it hits you on the head, you feel it. So race is constructed, but when it hits you, you feel it. In that sense it's real, and yet in this other sense it's constructed, so it's this made-up thing.

- Rubens: And then the real racialization came to be used?
- Choy: Yeah, well that was Michael Omi's thing. They talk about this process, racialization of non-racial groups, and not the category themselves. It's clear that, being in California, you're really way ahead of everybody else in the country. That was clear from the very beginning; even in '90 we brought people from Chicago and New York City, and all they knew was black and white. They come out here and they just listen to the students talk about what California's about, they realize this is a whole other way of looking at the situation. It took a while before this became generally accepted in the Berkeley culture, that these groups—we're sort of stuck with them, because they're in the law, and nobody wanted to change the law at that time, and they still don't, I think.
- Rubens: Meaning?
- Choy: Change the rules. Nobody wanted to do that, because that's bad news. We don't do that lightly. There's got to be a really good reason for that. They did change the American Indian student business to indigenous peoples of the United States, and that did happen.
- Rubens: The name?
- Choy: Yeah, the phrase. They substituted that, because we had a course on Hawaii—yeah, that was Pat Kirch's course on Hawaii. He said the Hawaiians are like a third group. Pat Kirch. Anthropology. His course came up, and in response to that they changed the wording, and that kind of opened up the category to something other than just American Indians. So the whole thinking about intellectual structure, and the foundation of this thing, was being questioned. This went on for a long time, and it wasn't until the last couple of years, when the committee, the Senate committee, actually started doing something about it. It became obvious this was a problem that people did not want to participate in because of the groups, because they saw that as way too formulaic. People said that to us. It became a real problem, not just something that was sort of in the way.
- Rubens: Are there people specifically that we should talk to who do this?
- Choy: The guys in sociology, ask them. I think they're a part of—
- Rubens: Do you think that's an excuse?
- Choy: It could have been. It could have been, but I also think intellectually they had a problem with it. Also, people like Wendy Brown. She's in poli sci. Her partner is Judith Butler in Rhetoric. There are lots of people, especially in Women's Studies, participating women, who study race and ethnicity. It's central to their research here, but they just did not want to touch American

Cultures. Even Norma Alarcon—she’s a Fellow. She teaches a course in Ethnic Studies that’s cross-listed with Women’s Studies and sometimes is cross-listed with American Studies. I even talked to her about getting this course certified, and she said, “uh, uh, uh,” but she’s never done it. There are all kinds of reasons why. “There would be more students than I want.” Everybody’s got an excuse why they don’t to do it. Then in a way—

Rubens: This came out of a real intellectual—

Choy: Yeah, it came out of—a result of having studied this, by having a lot of people study this a lot, and think about it, and talk about it, because your classes are just talking about your research, right? With students. After a few years it became clear that this was a big problem. And it became more and more of a problem, and now the committee’s trying to do something about it. That’s what all of this rule interpreting, the way we interpret regulation 300, is all about. The other thing was that—it was the same with the departments all the time, getting new people from new departments became a real issue. So this committee now under— Jeff is trying to reach out and broaden the applicability or the relevance of American Cultures to other disciplines.

Rubens: What department is he, Jeff Romm?

Choy: ESPM [Environmental Science, Policy, and Management]. He does environmental justice. I forget which exactly, which emphasis, but he’s very much into this. He was the one who carried the ball for Berdahl at the Senate meeting. He used the words “institutional racism.”

Rubens: Really? What did he mean by having these five categories?

Choy: No, no, no, he was talking about the campus in general, the governance and the thinking and—he actually used those words in the Senate meeting. I thought it was very—

Rubens: Harsh?

Choy: Well, it was very frank. It wasn’t anything nice. He didn’t beat around the bush about it.

Rubens: Do you think he was right?

Choy: I think, sure. I think you can cite examples of institutional racism, or the equivalent of racism—like faculty, who’s on the committees, who chairs the departments, that sort of stuff. Just look around, it’s real obvious who’s in the administration. Anyway, so Jeff on the committee with Colleen Lye. They’re trying to come up with ways of staying true to the spirit and the intent of the original requirement, but broaden it so that we can get new people into it, and reinterpret it in such a way that we don’t necessarily have to go back to the

Senate to change the wording of it all. Because if you do that, everything's up; you can reword the thing out of existence. So that's like—

Rubens: Are any of your folks particular on sexuality, or on gender, on migration? And these are all the things that people are raising, but—

Choy: They intersect with race and ethnicity all the time. But they're not involved in American Cultures.

Rubens: Right, exactly. They're not specified.

Choy: Well, they could be. It's a matter of coming up with a course, talking with the committee, talking with me, talking with Jeff about what would work, what would the committee be willing to approve, and doing it.

Rubens: Martin teaches this class coming up in the spring, and it's about social networks, I think, and sexual identities. He's still going to have to cover three different ethnic racial groupings.

Choy: Right. In order for it to be an American Cultures—

Rubens: That's what you have to do.

Choy: You've got to do that. But the way the committee has reinterpreted that, it used to be three groups out of the following five, and now it just says three groups. The committee interprets this section of the law as saying, and it has "three groups," and doesn't say anything, period. Go read it. Basically, the committee is open to groups that aren't named, explicitly, and as long as the intent of the requirement is met by the course, and you sort of cover yourself on the letter of the law, okay. It's always been—

Rubens: The intent? Let me just get clear. So the intent is to—

Choy: Well, they have a little statement about what the intent is, too. That's the first thing. After meeting the intent, it has to meet the three things about comparing the three groups, and I forget what the third thing was. But there are three. But it's always been the case, because the law has never changed. The wording of the law—in fact, there's another interpretation of that phrase about three of the following five groups. It could always have been interpreted a different way. Colleen pointed this out; I had never thought about it like that, and she's right. It takes these English people or Rhetoric people. It has always been the case, since they've never changed the exact regulation 300 itself, it's always been the case that whatever the committee's trying to deny, you could have done before. It's just that whether the committee—if anybody had ever even thought about if that was an okay course or not, at that time, because remember we've sort of evolved in our thinking about what's an okay course. It's become broader, and less rigidified, and more complex. It's not that it's

looser, it's just more complex. Lots more complexity, because we've advanced in our thinking. We've actually learned something in the last fifteen years. I think it's a matter of, if you want to do this, there's a way to do it. And if you don't want to do it, there's all kinds of excuses for not doing it. That's the way I see it.

Rubens: And Colleen pointed out that there always has been this—

Choy: Yeah, because the wording has never changed; there's always been another way to interpret that.

Rubens: I keep coming back to, it said three of five. And that's the part that's been dropped off, the "of five."

Choy: Not in the interpretation. The committee interprets the paragraph in the following way. And it talks about three groups. So if you read this carefully and think hard about it, you will realize that was the big change. And also maybe it takes somebody to actually point this out [laughs] because that was really significant.

Rubens: When do you mark that?

Choy: That happened this past year. They adopted it—well, let's see, last year, yeah, this past year. There's a letter out from Jeff—when did we send this thing out?—that has this in it. So, like it's official. Yeah, it was in the spring, it was early in the spring, because it's so official that this letter's marked "draft." Just to cover themselves in the legalities of things, this letter has been sent up the chain of command in the academic Senate to the committee that interprets the law, I forget what they're called. The American Cultures committee has asked this other committee—this is what we want to say—is this okay? It's up to them to say, "Yeah, it's okay," or "No, it isn't," or not say anything. Right now they haven't said anything. So it's still marked as "draft."

Rubens: It's a letter that Jeff wrote, in the spring.

Choy: It was sent out to everyone in the Senate from the committee, from the American Cultures committee, saying, "This is sort of like a reminder, we still have this, by the way." And the draft of this letter has gone to this Senate committee, and they're supposed to—because they're just trying to make sure that somebody's not going to say, "Hey, you guys, that's not what the law says."

Rubens: By the way, this is really a stupid question, but most of the committees—do people volunteer to be on a committee?

- Choy: No. How does that work? Okay, there's this thing called the committee on committees. Members of the committee on committees are elected. You must run for this.
- Rubens: This is the law of the Berkeley Academic Senate.
- Choy: Right. The committee on committees appoints people to committees.
- Rubens: Okay. So you're elected by the whole Senate—
- Choy: To be on the committee on committees.
- Rubens: Do you have to be nominated, or can you nominate yourself?
- Choy: You get nominated somehow. Probably you can self-nominate. Every once in a while—I remember this coming up, because so-and-so was running—and you know, “We've got to go out and support them, because it's one of our people.” The committee on committee matters, because they're the ones who decide who sits on the committees, and if you want to get some change effected, you've got to have the right people on the committees. That's what David Yamane's book [*Student Movements for Multiculturalism: Challenging the Curricular Color Line in Higher Education*] was all about. Remember, he talks about the committee, who was on the course committee at that time, and it was critical to the membership of the committee for making stuff happen. That's why it takes so long for stuff to happen, because you've got to plan ahead, and position your people, and blah blah blah. But also people volunteer, because you have—they volunteer in the sense that they'll tell the committee on committees, “I'd like to be on this committee.” Anybody who asks to be on a committee probably gets it.
- Rubens: Of course. I'm sure there are people who don't do their committee work, and people who do. It's a feature of your contract, that you're supposed to do it.
- Choy: They have to, it's a service. It's required. Everybody's got to do their turn. Like jury duty.
- Rubens: Oh, there are plenty of people who slip off. Then the committees—do they vary? How long the service is, or is it basically—
- Choy: It's a couple of years.
- Rubens: Two years, yeah, and then you can either—
- Choy: You can re-up, and somebody volunteers to be chair, but the chair is usually more work and of course more time.

- Rubens: So the committee on committees—I just didn't understand that, and then the other committee that seems so critical is the budget committee.
- Choy: That's different. Budget committee rules on, advises the chancellor on, appointments. Tenure, promotions, all that sort of stuff. It's called the committee on budget and something. They decide whether History is going to get any FTE to recruit. So History gets organized. For that to happen, every department has a little academic plan, and then "We want, we want, we want," and, "This is our area, so we want to recruit here and there and there," and so this all gets sent in every x years, and the budget committee says, "Okay, we're going to let you do this." And when history hires somebody, the budget committee has to say okay. When History wants to promote someone from assistant professor to associate professor, it's a big deal, and the budget committee gets to approve that. If the budget committee says no, and the chancellor wants to say yes, then you have a problem. Or if somebody wants to challenge it—
- Rubens: But what is your point about—that it's different? Is it still the committee of the Senate, or equal to it?
- Choy: Well, the powers are different. What they do is not—it's academic in a sense, but administrative, resource allocation. The only thing more powerful than them is the parking committee. [laughter] Almost as powerful.
- Rubens: There's another issue that—this is just a note that I have to look into it, and I wonder if you knew about it. There is in the mid-eighties state legislation that's being passed. I haven't done the research on that. Who's pushing that?
- Choy: I don't know who's pushing it, but there is a review of the Master Plan, periodically, and it happened then. If you go and look on the old website, I had it there. If you look in the Simmons report, buried in there is a paragraph about this. My understanding of what happened—because I never really looked too hard into this; I just pieced together stuff and imagined how it must have worked—was that there was this review of the joint master plan. The Master Plan was reviewed by a joint committee of the legislature, of the two houses. This happens every now and then. One of the things that came out of this was a joint resolution, where the legislatures make some pronouncements about policy. What they think should happen is that they recommended that every segment of the state's higher education system basically recognize the demographic realities of the state of California, and that they thought, they recommended, that there should be some kind of ethnicity graduation requirement, a curriculum recognition, or something along those lines. Those were the kinds of words they were using. Clearly this said a course like ours should be really important. The way this place works is, each of the segments has its own little turf, they're independent, blah blah blah, right? So, okay, cool. The word came down from above, and it was clear, this is an academic

issue, but if you don't do something it's going to get done to you, because these guys have the budget. So each segment, in its own way, studies the problem and comes up with a recommendation. What happened at UC, I think, is that the system-wide Senate, the Academic Senate, took up the issue, and they studied it around for a couple of years—this joint thing was in '83, I think. And in '85, I think it was—

Rubens: It is '85; I have it in my notes.

Choy: The Senate makes a pronouncement about “Yes, this is important. Every campus should do something about addressing this issue.” Then every campus has to get its Senate to do something. Right at this time is when all this ethnic studies requirement thing happens at Berkeley. I don't know if it's in response to this— it was just like, it's in the air, and everybody can see the demographics are changing, and they were taking this up as, ah, now we have a mandate, so we've got to push this campus to do something. And that's probably how it happened.

So they pounded on the desk for a few years, and then finally, in '87, if I remember correctly, Ed Epstein was chair of the Senate then, and Arnie Lyman from Psych was vice chair or something like that, because he became chair, and John Heilbron was next in line, I think. Epstein wanted to do something; he wanted to respond to this. So the Senate was ready to—and this is when you've got to start stacking your committees. This is when Christina gets—what's the women's committee? She gets on that, and the right people get on CP—it took a while to get the right people on CP. All of this is going on at this time. Heyman is chancellor, and he's getting beaten up over this Asian Americans, right? Right about this time. Yes, he's getting beaten up about that, and the students are clamoring for something, so all of this comes together, and Heyman finally—everybody agrees that we've got to do something about this, because we can't ignore it anymore, because it's clear that if we don't do something it's going to get done to us; the thing's going to blow up. Because this is clearly something you can't ignore.

So all right, what do you do? Form a committee, study the problem. That's what they did. In '87 they appointed the committee, and made Bill chair, to study the problem, and then they came up with something in the spring, and then they didn't quite pass it and they wanted to do this mail vote, and they couldn't do that, and they had a second chance, because it would have gone down if they had actually voted on it in '88. So they get another chance, and it comes up in the spring of '89 and gets passed. That's where this whole thing came from.

Rubens: Who is Ed Epstein?

Choy: He's Business.

- Rubens: I mean, good guy to be around? It's just so—
- Choy: Yeah. The other little weird thing about this is, his wife—I forget what her name, her first name, but she was trying to get a job, and she ended up in Education, so I actually knew her before all of this happened. She was on some project. She was a faculty wife.
- Rubens: Okay, so we have a story put to you that Ed—he seems to play a critical role.
- Choy: Those were the people that mattered, because if they're against it, it's dead. They control procedure.
- Rubens: That was exactly the next thing. It was the legislative push. And the other thing was the issue of overrepresentation. What was the language? I'm not quite clear—this just blows up in Heyman's face.
- Choy: The Asian American controversy. Well—this is admissions. It's over admissions, and I guess there was—I'd say there was some tweaking of the criteria for getting admitted, and it—
- Rubens: Well, the tweaking was to offset what was considered overrepresentation. They wanted other factors to count, not just scores and grades.
- Choy: The other thing that happened at this time, and I think it was partly driving this, was that they had changed the admissions procedures—the application procedures. You remember it used to be in our day you could only apply to one campus? And if you didn't get in to that campus, you got put in—what do you call, re-routed or diverted, I forget exactly what the word was—redirected to your other campuses of choice. You had to write in—you had other campuses that would be okay for you—but you were moved to the bottom of the pile there. As long as you had spaces, this was okay. But then, because they never built the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth campuses, in the late eighties, late seventies and early eighties, that Gardner had recommended, the spaces suddenly started—the number of spaces wasn't going up with the population, and right at that time is when they changed the admissions procedure where you could apply to any campus—all of them, if you wanted to. Before that, the only people who applied to Berkeley were people who thought they could get in. Now, anybody can apply. And of course, because—
- Rubens: Were we making a big mistake? [laughs] Why did that come about?
- Choy: I don't know exactly why. The previous system was causing problems with this redirect thing.
- Rubens: The redirect was the problem.

- Choy: Yeah, because people who got bumped from Berkeley were clearly more qualified than half the people above them on the list at the redirected schools. This was crazy. And part of the reason this redirection bumping thing came is because there's not—spaces aren't growing, and—okay, so the population is driving this thing. Remember, this is ten years after all of these people were born, and Gardner knew these people—they're already alive. You've got to build a campus, right? I mean, they're going to be here; we've got to do something about it. For the budget reasons or whatever, they never did, and so now you're paying the price for it. When they opened this thing up, that's when the number of applications started escalating to where it's the astronomical numbers we have now. That's also when this thing became more open, when the whole—also the population, demographically the population started changing. People really weren't ready for that, too, I think.
- Rubens: So the number of applications escalates, and so the higher achieved student is the one who's—
- Choy: Becomes who Berkeley could cream—it used to be that anybody, just about—all my friends, getting in to Berkeley—no problem. Now, these parents—no way they could have gotten—
- Rubens: But the intermediate step is that then it becomes that it's considered an overrepresentation of Asians.
- Choy: Because they were underrepresented in the population. Well, the standards are what they are, and that's what happens. So in order to—that's when they tweaked—they tweaked it, right.
- Rubens: And they say that other criteria will matter.
- Choy: And they changed the percent taken by the academic index alone. It used to be, all you've got are the numbers, right? It didn't matter about anything else. This wasn't just happening at Berkeley, this was happening everywhere.
- Rubens: So this was prior—
- Choy: Yeah, the Asian American report, the chancellor's task force reported. I think it was '85.
- Rubens: Yes. Doesn't this come up again?
- Choy: Oh, yes, it came up again. It came up again when Berdahl was chancellor, because I was on that committee.
- Rubens: Oh, so tell me about it. That's what I actually don't have background on.

- Choy: The chancellor's advisory committee—this is the *chancellor's* advisory committee, that reports to him. Mark Tanouye, he's an insect guy, entomologist—he was chair. Ling-Chi was in this, and Benito Delumen, from Public Health. Who else? George Chang, from Nutri Sci. Was Elaine Kim? I forget exactly. Those were the major people, I think. And there were a bunch of staff people. Walter Wong and I were helping out with that. There were some other staff people on this, who had been through this thing before, because these are lifers. So they—
- Rubens: Now, what year are we talking about?
- Choy: I was working in American Cultures. Ninety-something. I guess maybe Mitch was director then, because they used to meet in my room, because I had a room that was available. When this thing started, Tien had been chancellor, so it happened right in the transition time. He was there seven years. '97, '98, something like that. We got the chancellor to sponsor a conference here on campus on Asian Americans at Berkeley, and the theme of the conference was "Visibility and Invisibility." There's a whole thing on this. Ask Walter about it, he has all the records.
- Rubens: Walter Wong?
- Choy: Yes. He's associate registrar. He can tell you more about—he was much more involved. I helped out with the conference and everything, and the report. Mark took the lead on this. He had certain definite axes he wanted to grind, issues he wanted to bring to the chancellor's attention. There was a report that addressed faculty hiring and faculty review stuff, there was a lot of bad feelings about that—horror stories. Institutional racism. Student admissions was an issue, administrators was an issue—who gets to sit at the table to make decisions, and also student retention stuff, advising, all of that. They had—it was everything. Staff—you've got staff, faculty, students; they hit them all. There was a report, which Walter has, and there was an executive summary, and we met, and I was there, met with the chancellor to present to him—
- Rubens: Were you representing American Cultures?
- Choy: No, no, no, I was just a staff member. I was part of the advisory committee—
- Rubens: Was it a specific advisory committee?
- Choy: Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Asian American Affairs. Mark chaired it. We presented this thing, and it was very, very hard-hitting. It was very critical of the chancellor. In fact, we kind of glossed our language a bit in this executive summary, because it was really too specific. The chancellor wasn't very happy to receive this. He thought it was not fair. Our point was, whether it's fair or not, this is what the Asian Americans on campus think.

- Rubens: And where was this? How would you say that?
- Choy: We wrote that there was a—that even the visible were still invisible, a glass ceiling—all of those, all the complaints, about especially faculty review, about advising, who sits at the table—all of this stuff. Whether the numbers support the chancellor or not, this is what the students and the faculty and the staff think. That in itself was a problem. If you have nothing, you have a PR problem. As far as Asian Americans are concerned, it was more than just PR. Anyway, we presented this thing and never heard about it again.
- Rubens: Oh, come on.
- Choy: [laughs] I never heard anything more about it.
- Rubens: Really, it just disappeared? That's an example of what? No student component, or an active enough faculty to keep pressure on it?
- Choy: Well, this was advice to the chancellor himself, so he said, "Thanks for the advice." This is why I say Berdahl could have cared less about this stuff. His staff were never reporting this to him. This was before this ethnic studies thing. This is like another example of, this guy's totally clueless. He just never got it. And he still doesn't get it.
- Rubens: But his position on [Proposition] 209, his opposition to the end of affirmative action, was very militant.
- Choy: We saw this as—he used that to be careful, because he's a good bureaucrat. This is the way we see it. He has to say all the nice words, and he can't do what Tien did, which was quit—basically quit over the issue.
- Rubens: How did Tien quit over the issue?
- Choy: He recommended against it being adopted, to the Regents. And the Board never forgave him for that. So he quit. He quit or bitched. He said, "I'm not going to implement this." That's basically the way we saw it. He never said it like that, but that was clearly what was going on.
- Rubens: Oh, okay. Then when Berdahl comes in, it's as if he's—
- Choy: He's stuck with this thing, right?
- Rubens: Well, but he's also publicly presented as someone who opposed the proposition. In fact, this is—
- Choy: Yes, but he says, "We've got to carry out the law." Maybe it's his style, and maybe he couldn't be more vocal or obvious about his opposition to it, but I think that especially in admissions, we're not really impressed with the way it

worked, although the Regents were really on Berkeley's case. They still are. I know David Stern, who's chair of the admissions committee, and he said it's really nasty.

Rubens: On their case being?

Choy: On the admissions criteria. That this whole [UC Regent John L.] Moores thing last year—Moores' criticism about comprehensive review. Moores is chair of the Regents. This guy owns the San Diego Padres. He believes in merit. Everything by the numbers. So he thinks that comprehensive review is a crock. And that everything should be by the numbers. So he attacked comprehensive review, showing all these qualified people not getting admitted, and underqualified people—not-as-well-qualified people—being admitted. It's not a—it sets the tone. Everybody knows that they're looking over our shoulder, so everybody leans a little bit in a way they wouldn't otherwise. It has an impact. It's very subtle, and it's hard to measure, but it's definitely there; you talk to the people—talk to people like David, and Pam Burnett; they'll tell you that it matters. David Stern is Director, Office of Undergraduate Admissions. Pam Burnett, who's now at Davis, was Director of Admissions.

Rubens: How did she get to Davis?

Choy: She quit Berkeley and took the job there. Because Judy said, "Hey, come work for me." She said, "Cool."

Rubens: I think this a—I really want to look for the advisory committee on Asian Americans, the report.

Choy: There's one in my office—in the American Cultures office. Walter has all that stuff. He can tell you all about it. And Edith, Edith Ng. Edith is the other person involved. She is director of staff affirmative action office, interim director, or maybe director now of employment. But Edith is another Berkeley grad. They're all Berkeley grads, they've been here their whole adult life.

Rubens: Did Bob Kerley play any role? Does that name—?

Choy: No.

Rubens: Okay. I think he'd have gone by the time. He was a vice chancellor for student affairs.

Choy: This is before Mac Laetsch?

Rubens: Yes, but Mac's not in it anymore either, right?

Choy: When Mac left they created this whole undergraduate affairs thing [vice chancellor for undergraduate affairs], and then when he left Russ [Ellis] took the job, and now Genaro [Padilla] has it.

[Audio File 6]

Rubens: I'm now asking my odd things, without kind of summarizing. Ling-Chi Wang seems most important to talk to.

Choy: You ought to interview him. He's been around here forty-something years, since the sixties, right? Yeah, and he's a really interesting guy. He's got his whole life here on campus, and he's got his whole life over in the city; he's an activist, and he's done all kinds of—he's got his family, and his kids. He's like ten or twenty interviews.

Rubens: You bet. And of course, the whole thing is—the money, where does the money come from for these?

Choy: You need to have a look at his degree. Is it Abyssinian? Yeah, he has his degree in ancient Middle Eastern languages.

Rubens: I've only met him once, and—I just thought at the time, I didn't even know, really, about thinking of AC as a study, but I just thought that the Third World strike should be documented. I don't know how we can go in and add it as a Third World strike. I think it should be part of the history background of American Cultures.

Choy: American Cultures is, I think, part of that story.

Rubens: Continuum, yes. And so—

Choy: You ought to get [Ron] Takaki, too, before he—his health isn't that great.

Rubens: Is that right? I did interview him about the Free Speech Movement, but we didn't talk about Ethnic Studies.

Choy: You should get a history of the Ethnic Studies Department, and the whole Third World College, and the—because that's really interesting. It's the kind of thing that we don't want to know about. We meaning the institution, we would rather not know about how or why the campus administration gave them a hard time, but it's really interesting. We hear them talk about what it was like, how the department got started, why they're there, how they got there, all that sort of stuff.

Rubens: I think that it's demeaning, almost, but it may have to be a strategy to have students do it. I mean, it's something that the University should support, but it's something that also there should be some kind of granting agency.

- Choy: I don't know how much this thing costs, but it can't be that much of your time and transcribing time.
- Rubens: Around a thousand dollars to do one interview hour.
- Choy: That's nothing in my mind, so we're talking maybe twenty thousand bucks. It's not a lot of money.
- Rubens: I just wanted to get into the record, Theresa Hughes's resolution. It's January of '85, which is saying that—
- Choy: It was around then that all of this was happening.
- Rubens: It's asking the three branches of the higher education system to review course examining—courses which would examine historical experience of non-white ethnic groups that had been excluded from the core curriculum. Okay, so you started to say—
- Choy: I found out David Yamane was doing the research for this. I talked to him, I pointed him to a lot of resources. I think I was the one who pointed him to this whole—
- Rubens: David Yamane is—
- Choy: He came to us from—he did his undergrad at Wisconsin, I think. I'm not sure. Yeah, and he had heard about us, knew about us. He came to us when he was writing his senior thesis, in history. I think it was history. He contacted Bill. Very early on we met him, and he was interested in us. We had his senior thesis in our files someplace, the result of that. So he kept on with this, I guess, in his doctoral studies, and the book came out of that. Then he was at Notre Dame. He left Notre Dame; he's at—if you go to his web site, in North Carolina or something like that, I forget. But he moved just this year.
- Rubens: What is his background?
- Choy: Japanese. He took this one angle, the student part, the student role in it. I think—he wasn't able to interview Emeca, because Emeca had been killed already.
- Rubens: He was a young man, yeah. Yeah, oh my god, what a story.
- Choy: I'm sure he talked to Mark Min, who was the undergraduate representative. Mark's still around; he lives in the city.
- Rubens: Regarding Prop 209 in 1996—it decreases the admissions of blacks and Latinos by fifty percent.

Choy: Oh, yes. 209, really—you look at the numbers, it's really definite.

[Interview interrupted; irrelevant discussion omitted]

Rubens: I would like to ask you about non-measurable, anecdotal reports about how the program was received. How did people talk about what these classes were like?

Choy: The atmosphere, but environment?

Rubens: Yes, okay, and what's politically correct, PC.

Choy: Yeah, okay. That has evolved, and there were concerns. Oh yes, from the very beginning there were concerns about content of discussion, and discussion procedures, and classroom management, and all that kind of stuff. From the very beginning, the first day, this came up. Very clearly, this was a big issue in everybody's mind. Especially in 1990, because the cultural war was raging then. In '91, if you talk to Diane Clemens, there's lots of stories about this. Oh yeah, from her classes.

Rubens: Well, maybe that's the—

Choy: All the people who taught early on have stories about that.

Rubens: What's the word? It's sort of from the trenches.

Choy: Yeah, what actually happens in the classroom. What's on the students' minds, how they express themselves, what they say, what they *don't* say, who sits where, how they wear their hats. All that kind of stuff. It says a lot about attitudes.

Rubens: I think I raised this a bit when I was saying that I've heard that there's a pattern, driven by student's identity. White students take American Studies, and kids of color take Ethnic Studies, and it just seems to be a big divide.

Choy: Yeah. It's noticeable. This is one of the things I'm looking at when I visit all the classrooms. Like, who's in the class. You notice, there are definite differences in the demographic mix of the students in classes.

Rubens: But you were looking at AC classes.

Choy: Yeah, AC classes—people like Hertha Wong, in English, who taught an English AC course, and American Studies AC course. David Henkin has done it also.

Rubens: In History?

- Choy: Yeah, History and American Studies. Who else? Alex Saragoza has taught Ethnic Studies course and a UGIS—not American Studies—a UGIS American Cultures course.
- Rubens: What you're pointing out about these is that they have—
- Choy: They've taught both places. They've taught American Studies, and they've taught Ethnic Studies or History, and they can tell you who's done AC courses versus anything else. Who in Ethnic Studies has taught in— [snaps fingers] Jose! Saldovar. Has taught in American Studies and Ethnic Studies. Not American Cultures courses, but American Studies and Ethnic Studies courses. They're cross-listed, even. [pause] Who else? Martin Meeker has taught in History. Oh, he taught AC and he taught UGIS. UGIS 20AC, the alternative sexual communities and identities.
- Rubens: Sometimes there's a great disparity in evaluations for the same course. The students enrolled in the departmental course rate the class higher than those enrolled in the same class as AC students.
- Choy: Oh, yeah, people complain about that, too. Part of it, I think, is because you shouldn't change the number. Lower evaluations is what happens. Who takes your course is different. I mean, the students sitting there, because you're now teaching a course that meets a requirement, so it's like a general service course. Anybody can take it, and so you get people who are not interested, who are not majors, who may not necessarily be interested in your particular subject, but they need an American Cultures course, and it kind of looks interesting and fits your schedule, right? That kind of stuff. You get that. This is one reason why Dundes says he doesn't want to teach required courses, period—any kind of required courses. It's for this reason that you get students who aren't interested in taking, you know, in folklore, the way he's interested in folklore. This is a fact of life.
- Rubens: How do you handle this? How important are student evaluations?
- Choy: Depends on the department. They're probably more important than they should be, the way they treat the numbers as sacred. I know about evaluations from Education. Bullshit! It's just that—what are they really measuring, the kinds of questions they ask, the answers they get—they have to scale everything, because otherwise you don't have any numbers. I never liked scaled stuff. When you use scaled information you get numbers, you get answers to the questions you ask, but you never find out what you never asked. And it might be relevant and important. They have the open-ended questions. That's why student evaluations for American Cultures—I never wanted to use a scale. Barbara loves scales, so we stuck some scales in the last few years, but I never liked them—and why we always had that question, the way it was worded, which is, “The Senate has made you take this because

they think it's important, tell us what you think about it." They say anything they want.

Rubens: Did you have anybody in Education help design your evaluations?

Choy: No. When we did that thing, I suggested to Bill, "We should collect some information. Otherwise it's going to be gone, and we should do something." We asked around. It was going to be a huge deal, and it was going to cost money, and for some uncertain result about doing some validated blah blah blah, right? So I said, "Forget this," because it was already too late anyway, by the time we thought about this. We didn't have enough time for that term, and so we just made this thing. We sat down, well—what do we need to know? I made up those categories about—you'll see, there's a bunch of check-offs. "Why did you take the course?" That kind of thing. Then we have this one thing, and they have half a page to say anything they want. Then we just kept it. Judy Innes, in one of her classes on survey methodology, had a couple of times the student projects where they came up with an alternative as a student project: a paper, a survey for American Cultures. It's around someplace.

Rubens: What department is she in?

Choy: City Planning. She surveys stuff. Sociology.

But the other thing is that I wanted the whole thing to be on one piece of paper. Not something that was going to take for—everybody's always complaining that it's another five minutes out of my time for your survey, we get complaints about that.

Rubens: But what about the matter of impact on certain professors who don't want their evaluations going down?

Choy: Yes, it did matter. Some people—Judy Innes, you can talk to her about this. This was an issue with her. She taught Urban Community. She was the one who developed the original 118AC. course.

Rubens: And doesn't do it anymore?

Choy: Well, she's been head of IURD [Institute of Urban and Regional Development] for the last seven, eight years, so she's taught infrequently to begin with, but she did teach it twice since she's become the head of the IURD. Before that she taught it every other year. It's city planning.

[Irrelevant conversation omitted]

Who is interviewing the faculty? Nobody has interviewed them. "Why did you do this? What has it meant to your career? How did you fit it into your

career here? Has it been good for your career?" It's got to be good for your career, otherwise they wouldn't have done it, right? But how? And, "How did it change your research?" That sort of stuff. And intellectually, what difference does it make? But also, the thing that I would like to know, and you could probably figure this out from the existing data, is, what are you not teaching because you're teaching this? Because they have to drop something, right? Especially initially. Everybody does four courses, so this is one of those four. Especially when you do it the first time, you're not doing something else. So, what got dropped?

Rubens: Is that true of trying to figure the logic of the—?

Choy: Yes.

Rubens: It sounds like you would be adding—

Choy: No, you're not. This is not an add-on. This is like any other new course. Anytime you do a new course, you've got to drop something else, whether you take an existing course and totally remake it or you just don't do this anymore and you do this instead, right? Something drops. Something's not happening because you're doing this course. I would like to know if there's any kind of systematic anything about what's not being taught, because this is. Because one of the complaints—in fact, Mel Webber made this comment to me, that—I don't know when it was, but it was after a few years of implementation. He was never a very big fan of this. He asked me how many courses, I told him, he said, "Ah, that's a lot of FTE." And he's right, it is a lot of FTE. You think, how many courses is this, right? He had the same thought, that something is not happening because this is. After all, this is about curriculum reform. Change what you teach. So what are you not teaching?

In the case of Diane Clemens [History], she definitely—this was a totally—she had never taught a lower-division course like this, so she definitely dropped something. She dropped something somehow. Robin Lakoff dropped stuff. They all dropped something in order to do this. So, what was it? Especially if they're untenured. It's clearly important to them, for whatever reason. And also why, because in the seminars they would talk about the importance of American Cultures and what we're trying to do in molding the minds of the future leaders of California. Berkeley faculty talk about that sort of stuff.

But they actually talk about it as a real reason. Well, this is—excuse me. [laughs] If it's clear to me, just from knowing the people who do this—they all believe that this is something worth doing as a social justice kind of thing. That's why they do it; it's worthwhile. So that clearly matters to them, because it's obviously work, and you just don't do something like this unless you think it's worth doing. And why is that?

- Rubens: You mentioned Michaela Rubalclava?
- Choy: She is a student employee in the Ed Psych Library in Tolman Hall.
- Rubens: Did you say she interviewed ten faculty members?
- Choy: Yes, extensively. I don't think she taped them. I know Donald McQuade was one of them. Also, Alan Dundes, Genaro Padilla, Carol Christ, and who else was English? English had a—
- Rubens: Breitwieser.
- Choy: Yes, but English had a lock of top positions. There were three of them. I don't think we had a copy of the interviews at AC, but we might have. I know I never read it. I only talked to her about it. It took her a couple of years to do this thing. I hear about it now and then.
- Rubens: I should interview some of the oldest faculty.
- Choy: There is Takaki and Diane Clemens, whose health isn't good, either. She had a stroke, and she never really recovered from that. She's a really interesting person. She's an old-time lefty, and a troublemaker. She has her stories about Ohio, and graduate school. Who else? Carlos Munoz is still pretty active, though. Undoubtedly, Mario is still around. Barrera, in Ethnic Studies. Geraldine Clifford, in Education. She came up with the first Education class. She was in the first group, I think. Second group, second—she lives in the city now. She used to live down in my neighborhood. She's a historian of Education.
- Rubens: Oh, that'd be interesting. I just think so little is done with anybody from the Department of Education.
- Choy: There's Lily [Wong Fillmore], just retired. She was on the committee. She's older than me.
- Rubens: There was a story about her in—
- Choy: Yes, big spread in the *Chronicle*. She was in Education.

Ling-Chi Wang has got an interesting—he's done so many different things, and he's had his finger in lots of pies. I remember when I first started at the Center, he and Bill and Rod Park used to—every Friday they'd go out and have a drink after work. That was—he knew people like that. That's the way he met people. This of course all takes money. Jeff Yang, who founded Yahoo, when at Stanford—well, you know, \$20,000 might not be—I think Ling-Chi knows him. He always teaches at eight in the morning. He is here at

seven-thirty or something. [laughs] The only people who take his class are serious. He's around, that's the best time to get him.

Rubens: Victoria Robinson, the current AC Director, is a phenomenal teacher. She has won awards.

Choy: She's an interesting person, too. She grew up on a farm. Ran away when she was sixteen, ended up—she was like, this rebellious kid. And she ended up—she went to school, got a PhD. She was in Italy—she worked in Italy for a while. She was interested in immigration, women mostly, in Europe, which is a big deal. A lot of forced labor stuff. She did her undergraduate here. She was in Poli Sci, I think. She lived at the I-House, and so she met her husband. He's from Jamaica. Howard. He's an architect. She was doing something, working on some research projects, and the year Alex had his problems—he was supposed to teach that summer, and in three weeks before classes started, he bailed out. So, they contacted her. I don't know how they remembered her, but—she had been doing something with them, that's why they knew about her. And she took the class. In three weeks she came here, I met her, she took over this class, and—

Rubens: Where had she been?

Choy: She had been in England that summer. She was living there then, I think. She was doing research at some institute in Europe—part of the European Community, as it was called then. And so she took over this class that summer, and then she also taught it that fall for Extension. So she's not full-time. She's not a prof, right? Piecework, she does piecework. There was a point—I wrote a letter of recommendation, so I looked at the numbers. She had personally taught—in one year, she had personally taught more students than anybody else in Ethnic Studies. In all other Ethnic Studies classes—American Cultures, Ethnic Studies—more than anybody else. Nobody was even close.

Rubens: The word just got out, she's—

Choy: Well, she had 21, which is 200-something, every time. And then she had Extension classes, which were seventy-five, and then she had to do two sections, so that's 150. And then she took over Jean Molesky-Poz's course when she left, that's another 100-something. At one point she was teaching Takaki's course, she was teaching 21AC and 130AC, and those were the two biggest Ethnic Studies and American Cultures courses. She was doing it herself. Also, I think she's passed now probably, in aggregate, the total number of American Cultures and Ethnic Studies enrollment. She has more than anybody else. Even more than Carlos, who had like 400 students at a crack for a few years. More than Alex. Alex just dropped out. She's really committed to this. She says it's her whole career right now; her research is all

built around American Cultures. She does three American Cultures courses. She does 21AC; she does 130AC, which are Takaki's courses; she's doing 135AC, which she took over from Jean Molesky-Poz when she left. This was in Ethnic Studies. She did the—that was the immigration class. She's also doing—she does the women—136, I think it is—in Ethnic Studies. This term she's doing four classes, and she's doing one-third American Cultures, and she's got this Chicano-Latino policy project, and she's been to them, but she had committed to—back in June, they still hadn't hired for this American Cultures thing, so she's hanging on by her fingernails right now. It's going to ease off a bit after the term ends. They're out of [Institute for the Study of] Social Change.

Rubens: Where Troy Duster had been based.

Choy: Yes. They're over there someplace, in Anna Head. So, she's really busy. But all that adds up to only 100 percent.

Rubens: The money must be so different.

Choy: So she'll be half-time American Cultures. And she's probably being paid more for American Cultures per minute than any of the other jobs.

Interview 5: November 24, 2004

[Audio File 7]

Rubens: Thinking about our last interview, I agree with you that the role of the faculty is the story to pursue.

Choy: Oh yeah, definitely. Especially from an institutional point of view.

Rubens: What do you mean by that?

Choy: The campus poured a lot of money into this thing over the years. I even had a spreadsheet at one point where I knew exactly how much they actually put into this thing.

Rubens: Is that available?

Choy: Yeah, it's on my computer. It's probably on a piece of paper someplace, but I don't think I ever did it for the Omi report. They didn't ask for that, but I have that; I know this. There's one point where people were asking for this thing, so I actually kept track of it very accurately up until—through Mitch's tenure. And after that, the last three—when Troy was director was easy, I mean, it was \$166,000. Four-fifty three times, and that was the end. [laughs] So we just added that to this total I had. But the campus put a lot of money into this thing. The program as well as my salary and all that sort of stuff, which is—adds up to, over the fourteen, fifteen years or whatever it is—supposedly the thing they got back out of this investment, because Bill always liked to call it an investment, were the courses. Because we were interested in curriculum reform and institutional change, and that part sort of happened also. That's the product, if you want to think of it that way. The campus put something out, they got something back, and this is what it was. The story of how faculty changed what they taught—the faculty know best, so you ought to ask them how they see it.

Rubens: There is a limit to what curriculum reform can do. One of the questions that I had left over from last time was about institutional racism. What is the relationship between the two? Institutional change certainly was reflected in the requirement is a requirement of an AC class.

Choy: Well, I hate to—the whole idea was that you would change what the academy taught, the way they taught about the US. That sort of thing happened in some places. That definitely did happen. It didn't happen everywhere we would have liked it to, which was everywhere, [laughs] But you can't have everything. We were disappointed that it didn't happen as extensively as we thought it could have.

Rubens: For example?

Choy: Poli Sci, or Sociology. The usual departments. And then places like Legal Studies, and the business school, who—as far as they’re concerned, this doesn’t exist. When we think that they should be very much interested in this topic, and they clearly aren’t. Then you have places like Natural Resources, where you have Carolyn Merchant was an original supporter of this, and still a stalwart. And then she recruited Lynn Huntsinger, and Sally Fairfax was also part of the original group. Lynn Huntsinger—she was new when she started this, back in 1991. Assistant professor. She worked with Sally Fairfax to create a course about culture and the environment. Sally taught the course the first time. It was Forestry 1-something, I forget, 118 or something like that. I forget exactly what number, but it was taught once and then the college changed. They reorganized themselves, and then ESPM was created, and this course became an ESPM course. Lynn took it over, it became her course—ESPM 50AC—and she’s taught it regularly ever since. Then Jeff Romm decided to join in.

Rubens: Is this an example of where there was institutional change?

Choy: Well, yeah. A couple of years after ESPM was created they redid the major and all this kind of stuff. I remember, Sally, or Lynn, or maybe it was Carolyn—I forget who exactly told me this—but she said something about—maybe it was Lynn—that the whole American Cultures approach had been fundamental in the way they had approached redesigning the major. The resources, the research, and I don’t know, they have all these different majors in the department. The whole college, the department is organized in a way I don’t really understand, I never put the effort in to figuring it out. It’s one of these matrix things with divisions and emphases and god only knows what else, beside the department. But anyway, there was this one emphasis, I guess, that they were involved in, where they were focusing on the users of the resources, and the societal issues, unlike the old Forestry department was basically—trees are a natural resource to be used and exploited for economic purposes, that was all they ever cared about. So, these women, because they’re all women—

Rubens: Well, Jeff joined in.

Choy: Yeah, Jeff joined in. But initially, Sally and Carolyn and—oh, Louise Fortmann, too. She was a big supporter; she never taught a course, but she was like, associate dean, those kinds of positions where you can make things happen in a department. She had always been a supporter of the requirement. But basically, these women put together this new major, and I remember telling them, “You guys ought to apply for the Educational Initiatives Award.” Yeah. They did, and they won, because they put forward their new major, and the usual blah blah blah about how many students it was going to impact, and the innovations, and all that kind of stuff, and they actually won. Carolyn’s course won also. Her ESPM 160AC also won an Educational Initiatives

Award. That's an example where race and ethnicity wasn't even on the radar screen with these people, and then this thing is there, these people were interested in it, they hired one or two, and that doubled the number, maybe tripled the number, and they were able to create this thing out of—where probably it wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for American Cultures.

Rubens: Sure. Although, now I want to go back and say, it seems so dependent on the faculty.

Choy: See, this is the thing, this thing. The whole thing depends on the individuals. That's the way this place works. If you get a critical mass of individuals, you can make stuff happen. In a way, it was a strength, because if it wasn't faculty-initiated, and the faculty didn't support it, I don't care what you did, nothing was going to happen, right? I mean, that's just the way this place works. In a way, by not requiring the faculty to do this, and relying on volunteers, it probably was—for those who did it, was more meaningful and important and all that sort of stuff. But on the other hand, by not requiring the faculty to do it makes it administratively much more difficult. It's difficult to sustain it.

Rubens: Because what I was trying to thread in here at the same time is considering the weight of institutional racism that one has to constantly—the example you were using last time was the visibility/invisibility study about Asian Americans. Then going from there about who sits at the table; who are the chairs, who are the administrators, and then I was—were there other things that were at play?

Choy: When you look at this whole period of the nineties, when 209 and the Regents resolution—and all that was a big issue about—and the whole question was access, who gets to be here? Because the institution has to be selective. Toward what end—what kind of class do you want, right? That's always the case. You don't want people who have only the highest grades, which would be, from an institutional point of view—everybody agrees would be a terrible thing to happen in the long run.

Rubens: Why?

Choy: Why? The Ivies don't do that. They don't take people just on grades. That's crazy, right? This is a public institution; it has other goals besides training the best minds; it has other purposes, and you want your graduates to go and do certain things, be leaders of community and all that kind of stuff, and so that's what you look for, in addition to being smart and having good grades. Of course, in California having good grades and being smart means you went to the right schools, which meant you lived in the right neighborhoods, which meant you had the right parents.

- Rubens: So there we are. Institutional racism.
- Choy: That hasn't changed; it hasn't changed in California. I don't think it's changed anywhere in the nation. That's the way this country's K-12 system works. It's got all these things built into it—structural. So, American Cultures is where the campus, or the faculty as a body of the campus, decides as part of its ethos, culture—
- Rubens: Its mission or *raison d'être*?
- Choy: Yeah, that this is going to be so important we're going to make it a requirement for all the right reasons, right? I'm convinced, although nobody's ever wanted to go find out for sure, but I'm convinced that American Cultures became an important consideration in whether you even wanted to go here.
- Rubens: Really?
- Choy: You don't have kids in high school? Getting ready for college?
- Rubens: Well my son just started UC Santa Cruz.
- Choy: When they were looking for a school, did you ever realize that in their minds, whether it's based on facts at all—but every UC campus has a definite personality. Well, we always knew that, we had students here, and that Berkeley has its own—a person who would love to go to Berkeley would never consider going to Santa Barbara or San Diego, right? You wouldn't. There's all kinds of irrational reasons for this, from the students' point of view, why you wanted to be there. I'm convinced that when American Cultures came in—those first few years, when you look at the student surveys that we took, that a lot of them—after a few years, the amount—the proportion of students who were complaining about the requirement as brainwashing—there was the brainwashing argument—
- Rubens: And political correctness.
- Choy: The politically correct one. It went away. I mean, it decreased a lot. In the beginning there was a lot of complaining and bitching about requirements. “I should be allowed to take anything I want,” students wrote. I don't know where they ever got that idea that anything here was free. They have requirements up the wazoo, everything they take is almost—or maybe except five courses, there's a requirement of some kind. The whole idea that “I can take anything I want” is nonsense. I don't know where they are. But the liberalism—“You didn't brainwash me,” that stuff went away. I think—I even heard from faculty—not a lot, but occasionally—who'd do the interviews for the admits, the recruiting interviews—I asked them one year to find out if having an American Cultures is sort of some reason why you want to go to Berkeley, or a reason why you don't want to go to Berkeley. People who felt

really strongly about not wanting to be subjected to this didn't come here, so you're never going to know—

- Rubens: When I looked at the evaluations, it seemed to me strange that the highs and lows decreased, but it seemed to me—
- Choy: The really hostiles went away—
- Rubens: But it seemed like the slightly disaffected went up.
- Choy: Well, you're right. What happened was, in the beginning, in the early nineties, this was brand new, and it was important; it was a hot issue. Then after 209, this became—there was a lot more hostility.
- Rubens: There were three periods of change: '94, '97, 2000. The “no comments” dropped, the “strongly unfavorable” dropped, the “unfavorable” increased three times. The “neutral” increased three times.
- Choy: Yeah, it became the kind of thing you do at Berkeley; it wasn't a big issue anymore. Also, the students' attitude about “What was your racial identity”?—that became much more perfunctory in the late nineties. If you look at the actual comments about the couple or three times they asked them about what's your cultural identity, you'll see this. Early on, the first time we did it, we would get these very detailed essays about “my life story, and my parents,” and yada yada, you know. Then later on, the answers were much more perfunctory, especially if you look at the 2000—“I'm Asian American.” Like, these two-word answers, rather than some essay. Because—
- Rubens: Partly you're saying it's who comes to the—
- Choy: Yeah, but also I think this became a non-issue. With 209, the whole attitude toward this became changed. Also, something that there were more complaints about: “I'm sick of this stuff being shoved in my face twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week.”
- Rubens: Does it speak to any expansion of the curriculum in high school? I know you were striving to do it in community colleges.
- Choy: I don't know. Maybe the curriculum, yeah, but certainly all the school integration thing went down the tubes. I mean, that never happened, and so if anything, just about everybody at Berkeley comes from a school that's even more segregated now than it was twenty years ago.
- Rubens: We're saying that this sort of drops in the extremes of the evaluations, speak to a lessening of—

Choy: It's less of an issue about your identity, and the students are much more focused on "me as an individual, and I'm here to get my ticket punched, and I want a good job." Getting a college degree becomes—the reason you're here is because you want to get a good job. You had it beaten into their head ever since they were a little kid, right? And it's probably true.

Rubens: So are they perfunctorily taking these classes?

Choy: Yes, because they have to. A lot of them will admit, after they've taken the class, that "Now I see why you made me do this." The other thing we had suggested the campus do is that they go find out whether there is any long term effect after graduation. [laughs]

I spoke to Cynthia Schrager, who works for Christina. We had a nice conversation on the phone, and then I said that we wanted to design a study to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the requirement, and then also to look at the faculty and how it changed their research and their subsequent understanding of the US and a couple of other things. She just said, "We're not interested. We have different interests. We have a number of higher priorities, including a major administrative transition the Center is currently undergoing. Down the road our plan is to revisit the assessment issue, once we have made headway with our objectives and goals." She may have been referring to a conversation between Cynthia, Victoria, and Barbara Davis; that's the assistant vice provost. That's the troika that runs the Center now. The thing is, from my point of view, Barbara and Cynthia, that is—American Cultures is just one of many things that they're interested in, in this whole mish-mash of efforts to improve undergraduate education at Berkeley. It's not special the way it was special to us. So we have only to care about one thing, they care about forty-nine other things, and we're number—we're one of those. Her reply reflects that, and I think that's consistent with the way they see the role of American Cultures and everything else.

Rubens: But they will have a pretty sharp faculty that will contest any watering down. Colleen Lye. Richard Cándida Smith, our ROHO director—

Choy: Well, I think what everybody's trying to do, even Colleen Lye and everybody—I mean, Ling-chi would say, he would be very critical of Christina Maslach's support of American Cultures. But I think people like Christina and Jeff are concerned about the practical realities of how do you keep this alive, given the situation you have, not complaining about the situation per se, because you can't really change that. That's why they're looking at ways to keep it intellectually interesting, because that was always the thing that made it attractive to the faculty. And if it's not intellectually interesting, they won't participate. That's always been the challenge. No matter how you dress this thing up institutionally, who runs it, all that sort of

stuff, whoever's in charge. If they can figure out how to do that, it'll happen! And if they can't figure that out, it won't.

Rubens: That was one of the questions I was going to open with. Would it the AC requirement be approved today if it were put to a vote?

Choy: Would it make it today as a requirement? I don't know, I think it—I don't know. You'd have to make a different kind of case for it than you did twenty years ago, or fifteen/sixteen years ago. I think now you've got, in the academy, you've got more issues competing for attention. This whole globalization issue, and the whole group in structure.

Rubens: What do you mean?

Choy: The named cultural groups thing. I think that would have to be totally revisited and presented a different way. And the other thing is that American Cultures looks only at the US. There's a lot of people doing work on comparative studies, US and everywhere else. So I think that they'd have to find some way to allow that to be included. If you could, it would expand quite a bit the number of eligible or possible faculty who would be interested in participating in this. That's the trick to this thing. The problem is, how do you expand it in such a way that you get a bigger group, but you don't water it down so much that the original purpose about focusing on the US, and the issue of race and ethnicity, which—this is important now, it's just that it's different. That's the other thing, that you have—we have students now whose families, they never lived under the old rules in the sixties. They're way distant from *Brown*, and Jim Crow laws, and all that sort of stuff. They come here, like, "What's the big deal"?

Rubens: That's sort of what we were getting at, wasn't it, when we talked about institutional racism?

Choy: Right, we're not supposed to take that into account. It's illegal. This doesn't make the situation go away. People are still here, and it's still an issue in American society.

Rubens: Sure. That's what you said before, there's housing and neighborhoods and—

Choy: None of that went away. It's just that it's not legal to do it anymore, but it can still be done.

Rubens: It's not quite as visible.

Choy: Well, it's not as blatant. But it happens.

Rubens: Oh, sure. In housing especially. I just wondered if you would mind revisiting—I listened to a tape earlier and I didn't get it straight about where is

the loophole. Maybe there's a letter Jeff Romm wrote that talks about how you can change the—the committee now says, there are three groups, not out of the five?

Choy: Right, right. Okay. The regulation says—must take substantial account of at least three of the following five groups. Yes, of the following five groups.

Rubens: And that's Regulation 300.

Choy: Right, and then it lists the five groups. Now, that can be read as, those are the only five groups you can use. There aren't any other groups. But it also says, as long as you take substantial account of any three of them, you can do anything else. It doesn't say you can't. So there was always the possibility, although nobody ever read it this way, and the committee never read it this way, either, that there were other groups. But you had to have three of the five. So the game became, how do you fit any group you wanted into one of those five. If you could do that, you could make the case that it was there, then say, "I did it." So now, what the committee has said, after quoting that part, they said, "The committee now interprets this as, must take substantial account of at least three groups." Period. Doesn't say, "of the following five." So basically what the committee is saying is that if you can come up with a course that has three groups that are different enough that the comparative part makes sense—they have broad coverage of American society, sort of meets all the intent of the requirement—then, we might consider it. You might be okay.

Rubens: But that still is US-based. Or are you saying it even allows for that?

Choy: Well, if you can come up with a way of teaching about the non-US experiences as a way of understanding US experience, cool.

Rubens: It still depends on the academic committee.

Choy: Right. The committee gets to interpret Regulation 300. They have the authority to do that.

Rubens: Well, but in reviewing syllabi, curriculum, the faculty—

Choy: They can say whether it does or doesn't—they're the ones who say whether it does or doesn't meet the criteria.

Rubens: And the document that Jeff wrote.

Choy: Right. It was a letter, which he wrote last year—"Dear colleagues." It was sent out to every member of the Academic Senate—like 2000 of them. We used the Academic Senate mailing list, all active members. It was a letter from Jeff, as chair of the committee, reminding people about—this is official, the annual letter. We used to send this letter out every year with the call for fellowship

applications. Because we don't have that anymore—there's no mechanism for that, so the committee decided, we've got to do this, because we haven't done it for a year.

Rubens: Why is there no mechanism, because you're not doing it?

Choy: No, because there's no fellowships. No fellowship applications. That was the way they sent the letter out. It was reminding them that we still have this requirement, it's still important, and this is what the rules are, and the committee welcomes proposals from a range of disciplines, even those that—and the committee understands that different disciplines have different ways of looking at the world, and that there are okay American Cultures courses within the limitations of disciplines. Meaning, if you're in Physics, and you can come up with a course, cool, because whatever the limitations of physics and race and ethnicity are—

Rubens: Have you ever had a business course?

Choy: No, but in the course of coming up with this we had a little session with some scientists, a few we could nab, and we had even, what's the guy—Paul Chernoff, from math. He came, and he said, "There's not a chance in hell that we're ever going to participate, but I'm always interested in this quirky stuff, so I'll come." He listened to us, and he told us why Math was never going to have an American Cultures course—or anything vaguely like it—and it's because what the Math Department here tries to do, when they teach their subject, is—they try to remove every single aspect of personality, of the person. *Everything!* That is totally irrelevant. Not only is it irrelevant, it's counterproductive—sort of like, get rid of it! Like, who did this, came up with this idea, is totally irrelevant. It's the idea that matters. That's all they care about. So we said, "Okay"!

Rubens: You could do some applied mathematics to population groups and migration rates.

Choy: That's an example of—within the limits of the way they define the discipline here—whereas Econ might be able to come up with a course, within the limits of its coverage of economics. Maybe labor markets, consumer behavior, impacts of economic policy.

Rubens: Did Jeff have to change that letter?

Choy: Okay, now, this is why it was marked "draft." This was a committee thing, committee's words, and the concern was—and Christina was involved in this decision—was that in order to make this committee's interpretation official, it should get vetted by the Senate's whatever committee. There's a committee on something. I forget exactly what they're called—rules and something. They get to say whether this interpretation is okay with the rules and

regulations of the Senate. This got sent to them, and we hadn't heard back. The AC committee hasn't heard back. I don't know if we're ever going to hear back, but there you are. So until this committee says yes or no, whatever they say, it's this letter that Jeff is like, "That's it." The concern was that somebody could say, anybody could say, "That's not what Regulation 300 says. You guys have stretched it beyond recognition." That's where there would be an opponent or a supporter of the requirement. Who wants to rock the boat, right?

Rubens: I missed this part of the history. What do you mean there are no more fellowships? The fellowships were for the teachers to take a summer seminar to prepare their classes.

Choy: The Center offered a fellowship program and a stipend, and the summer seminar was part of that, and this was all paid for by the campus. This was money. And so when the campus stopped giving money, no more fellowships. The way the fellowships worked from the very beginning was, every year the Center would send out an announcement to every member of the Academic Senate—every active member. We did this every year saying, "Fellowship, apply," blah blah blah, "summer seminar, money"—

Rubens: To develop a course.

Choy: Yes, "and we want you to develop a course." When that stopped—

Rubens: When did it stop?

Choy: The last one was 2003, I think—that summer. We didn't have one this past summer. So now we had to reinvent the whole program to do it without money—or very, very little.

Rubens: Because the people who do teach are not given extra pay; it's just part of their load?

Choy: Yeah. It always was. The fellowship was never a quid pro quo; it was never a payment to produce a course.

Rubens: So was it Berdahl who pulled the plug on the money?

Choy: Berdahl funded Troy, and then when that ended, that ended. Yes, Berdahl pulled the plug on the money.

Rubens: And there was no—nothing out of Christina's office that said let's continue this.

Choy: She didn't have any. Her budget was getting cut, too.

- Rubens: Any discussion of going for grants? There was the Mellon grant.
- Choy: Okay, that's different. The purpose of the Mellon grant, which came through the library, was to—it was a faculty workshop institute to teach them how to incorporate undergraduate research into the course. So we used it to support anything, any topic. So it wasn't American Cultures. What she did with it this past summer was that faculty who were teaching American Cultures courses got moved up at the top of the list. They got priority. So, we don't have that anymore. We don't have that anymore, so we've got to do it a different way.
- Rubens: This is such a minor parenthesis, but do you have a particular feeling about research in general, about whether undergraduates should be doing research? I'll tell you why I'm asking. I'm interviewing Joe Tussman, who you may know was in the Philosophy Department, and he ran an experimental program from 1965 to 1969, and it was based on a classic liberal education. That's what he believed in—strict curriculum, and he just goes ballistic about it. He said, "Undergraduates don't have the capacity to do research." But what I see, because we've taught oral history to undergraduates, and that is a kind of research, and they're really quite remarkable—I mean, they should have a choice.
- Choy: I think that the undergraduates forty years ago weren't nearly as sophisticated as they are now. There's no way I could have kept up with half of these people. [laughs]
- Rubens: It seems like so much money and effort has gone into creating research as a capstone to the undergraduate experience. Perhaps it's just the swing of the pendulum.
- Choy: I suppose. I don't know. This is Berkeley. Berkeley is a research institution, and that's what they've got going for them, so they've got to push that as hard as they can.
- Rubens: How does the institution sell the American Cultures requirement? That's changed dramatically over time.
- Choy: On campus or off campus?
- Rubens: Off campus.
- Choy: I don't think they ever tried to sell it off. Bill was never interested in selling the idea anywhere. He said, "We've got enough problems making it work here. The last thing we need is to try to proselytize." Although, I'm sure that if we wanted to, we could have gone into business and run all kinds of summer seminars, and made people pay money to come here, and we could have gotten rich and famous. It would have been easy to do, but it would have required kind of another apparatus.

- Rubens: Or structure.
- Choy: But I'm positive it could have been done. But Bill was very clear that, "We don't want to do that. It's not our business." The community college thing was the only thing we ever did. Well, we did a couple of times—we helped some high schools out a couple of times.
- Rubens: Presumably that's because they came to you?
- Choy: Yeah, they came to us, and it was like a one-time thing. But the community college thing was justified on the basis of providing—if students could meet the requirement before they came here, they wouldn't even have to do it. That was sort of an operational reason. That's why we did it. It turned out, we're not doing anything in the summer anyway, so it's not like it was depriving us of—displacing anything we had to do. I think that it was very successful. It was successful in that we got people here, we gave them a good program, they got introduced to new ideas, they took them back, and they did whatever they could with it. It was unsuccessful in that it was very difficult to actually get the courses into community colleges, all things up and running—reasons that we didn't have any control over. So when we realized this, after about the third or fourth year, we kind of—"Okay, that's—we didn't mean that's the reason why we're doing this, but that's never going to happen, so basically we'll do it for these other reasons," which was—
- Rubens: Which was what? Just summarize.
- Choy: It was something to do. We could have a real outreach program from Berkeley to the community colleges. I don't think there is another one like it on this campus. We just don't do it. The fact that Berkeley would even offer this thing—we're at the top of the chain, right?—the pyramid, and these people are at the bottom of it. So the fact that we would even bother with them—
- Rubens: Except that there's that guaranteed transfer.
- Choy: Oh, this was *way* before that. This was in 1991.
- Rubens: I thought the guaranteed transfer was part of the Master Plan.
- Choy: Oh, that. Yeah, but we only took like 1,600-2,000 students on this campus a year. And it was still competitive. It was the same guarantee you had to go to UC. You're not going to *this* UC campus.
- Rubens: But I understand that the community college kids—the transfers have priority over UC campus students who want to transfer to another college.

- Choy: But there are very few inter-campus transfers. The only ones that I see a lot of—there must have been like five San Diego students, two from Davis, one from Santa Barbara—
- Rubens: Who come here?
- Choy: Yeah, but there are a whole bunch from Santa Cruz. It's because they have this thing with the engineering school, the three-two program. It's a formal program where you go to Santa Cruz for two years and you come here for three and you get a degree from both places and a master's or something. I don't know what it is. So there's like a dozen or more of them every year. I know about this because they want to petition something, right?
- Rubens: To get out of the requirement.
- Choy: So, there are very few inter-campus transfers.
- Rubens: That's one way of selling it. But in terms of being replicated in other institutions, it really hasn't been.
- Choy: The closest thing that ever happened was Oregon State. Oregon State has a program that is modeled on American Cultures. It's called difference in something—I forget exactly what its name is, but it's sort of the same idea. The particular emphases are different, but structurally it's set up the same way.
- Rubens: Oh, yes. You have comparative and analytic, and—
- Choy: All that kind of stuff. It's the same. They have the fellowships and all. They basically just copied us. I talked to them a lot. I've talked to places like Washington—Iowa State has something. I've talked to them a couple of times over the course of a couple of years. I remember talking to one faculty member who was in Engineering, I think. He was head of a committee to make this thing happen, so I talked to him for a long time. I asked him, "Why are you guys doing this? Why is race and ethnicity a thing at—" He said, "We understand that our graduates don't live in Iowa." [laughter] "We've got to prepare them to live—" I said, "Okay, cool." I've talked to Texas, students, mostly. There, every few years you get a new controversy. The students reinvent this problem at Texas, in Austin, Amherst, Princeton even. Students would call me up, mostly—sometimes administrators, sometimes faculty or deans. When we got the Hesburgh here we got a lot of interest. So, I'd explain what this thing is about. The students are all enthused about, "Oh, this is cool, this is exactly what we want," and the faculty says, "Oh, yeah, okay," and then they realize that it's about new courses. The deans—the administrators realize right away, "This is about money. Forget it." So that's why—when I explain it, "See guys, we're not expecting anybody to adopt this. This may be a good idea, but this thing was crafted to work here—"

- Rubens: Yes, and out of a specific historical—
- Choy: A specific historical circumstance, and we can make it work this way because we're Berkeley, and we have an Ethnic Studies department, and we have all these faculty, we have these resources at the campus, blah blah blah. I tell them that—even to the community colleges, who are thinking of doing something like this, I say, "To make this thing work the way it worked here, you've got to look at—you've got to go with what you have." We used to get complaints about, "Why is *he* teaching an American Cultures course"? Hey, man, he wants to. Who am I to say; I don't care about his politics. Students mostly complain about that. When you look at who's on the faculty here, and if they're the ones who are going to be teaching these courses, they're the ones who are going to be teaching the courses, so you've got to work with what you got.
- So you should figure out what kind of talent you have on your campus, and figure out what you can do with that, because the idea of bringing people in—having them do their little thing for a couple of hours and, goodbye!—doesn't work. It would never work here anyway, because who could tell us what to do? We think we're so smart. So that would never work here. Maybe if that's the way—and that might be a problem with the way community colleges work. They have staff development day and they bring somebody in, they talk, and they go away, whereas if you get together as colleagues and figure out what can we do, and help each other—which is basically what this American Cultures seminar thing is all about. Then you've got something that will work, I think—has a greater chance of succeeding. And having support of the faculty, that's the other thing.
- Rubens: You mentioned, Bill never wanted to sell it; let's just go down the list for a minute; Mitch didn't—
- Choy: Mitch didn't care about that, either.
- Rubens: And Troy?
- Choy: Troy didn't care about it. That job was to make it work here.
- Rubens: Make it work here. When you said sell, I guess what I'm also wondering—there was one article on it in *Cal Monthly* by David Littlejohn, and maybe an earlier article during Heyman's administration. When all the to-do is happening with the anti-apartheid movement and Ethnic Studies, he's saying, "We need to prepare our students for what the culture is," so at least there's—that's what I was saying is sell. Did you have to keep explaining yourself? Was there any Regents opposition?
- Choy: I never heard of this.

- Rubens: For instance, Ward Connerly. Did he ever—?
- Choy: No, the Regents never bothered us ever. I never heard of anybody having an opinion about it. And I would have thought that if Ward really seriously looked at this and figured out what it was all about, he'd probably be in favor of it. Even though it focused on the groups, it was about American society and how the group business—and racial and ethnic identity— those issues are important in society. He never denied that they were important. It was the mechanism he didn't like. I don't know, maybe he wouldn't have supported it. He would have been more like the poli sci guys. That never became an issue.
- Rubens: The opposition said this was watering down the curriculum. I want to review some of the faculty names that should be interviewed. You said she was there from the beginning—Diane Clemens, Judy Innes—
- Choy: There are people like Leanne [Hinton] and Robin [Lakoff] in Linguistics. Then there's Carolyn Merchant and Lynn Huntsinger. And you should interview Ling-Chi, of course, and Takaki, and Carlos. You ought to try to interview Pedro [Noguera], too. He is at Harvard—NYU now, I think. I think he left Harvard. He's at NYU, English. There's lots of people in English. Mitch [Breitweiss], of course. Also, Abdul JanMohamed. He's from Kenya; I think it's Kenya. He does research on Richard Wright. He has this great talk on hegemony and dominance and the difference. You put a gun to a person's head and say, "Dig a ditch," and after a while they learn how to dig the ditch. You don't have to put the gun to their head; they'll still dig the ditch for you and not think anything of it.
- In English, who else? People like Colleen Lye, Chris Nealon, because he was also involved in the gay-lesbian studies. In the Department of History there was Clemens, Jon Gjerde, David Henkin, Robin Einhorn—
- Rubens: There were some names in Anthro. What was really striking, looking at the Omi report, was the classes that were big; there were classes that had twenty and thirty, and then those ones that are 400 or 200. I can see how that would really make it easier to keep up the seats.
- Choy: Right, that's why I say, you just look at the number; that's all I cared about, was quantity. Oh, you ought to interview Nad, too—Nad Permaul. Nad teaches in Rhetoric and Poli Sci. He's the guy who's head of transportation; he teaches as an overload, for free. He's done this since '93, I think.
- Rubens: Not the man who does the jazz class?
- Choy: No, that's Paul Thomas, a faculty member. Nad is also—he's a full-time staff employee. He's a manager. He gets paid big bucks. But he wants to be an academic, so this is how he does it. He has this class, he teaches one class every term: one for Rhetoric, one for Poli Sci. Right now he is president of the

Alumni Association this year, and therefore he also sits on the Board of Regents, so if you want to interview a Regent you can. Now's your chance.
[laughs]

Rubens: He's been doing it for quite a while?

Choy: Yes, since '93, I think. Nad has a—he grew up in Piedmont, I think. He lives in Piedmont now, but I think he grew up there, too, around there someplace. He went to Cal, he has a PhD from Cal, he's worked at Cal. The only place he's ever worked in his life is Cal. He's a few years younger than me. Poli Sci this coming year finally gave his course its own number. It used to be 118AC—section of 118, which is a Topics thing. Now Nad's course has its own number. It's officialized.

Rubens: I wanted to revisit, because I couldn't restate it to somebody, the issue of professors offering a course—the same course, AC, or just in their department—and the manner of evaluation, where—

Choy: All right, okay. Judy Innes would be a good person to talk to about that, and Claude Fischer, in Sociology, because he's done it both ways; and Judy has, too. The other person who had that as an issue was Susan Ervin-Tripp, who is retired now from Psychology. She does socio-linguistics. She taught second language acquisition. She had taught second-language acquisition, Psych 125, for years and years and years and years and years, like twenty-some. That was her thing. She was near the end of her career, and she decided this was going to be a way to revitalize the course, so she joined up, and she struggled for the first couple of years, but she managed to do it. Then she took a VERIP or something, I think.

Rubens: Were the three of them in agreement? Did they feel their evaluations went down when they—?

Choy: This was an issue that they mentioned, specifically.

Rubens: You said, when I asked you about it last time, that it was because it was a different student body.

Choy: I think that's part of it. When Susan Ervin-Tripp mentioned that—and Claude definitely had that. That was an issue with him because before, when it's not an American Cultures course—in his case, teaching urban soc[iology]. The only people who take it are the majors, whereas now, anybody can take it as long as you've had some intro course, or maybe you can even beg out of that. So you get people taking the course for other reasons than urban soc. That became an issue. So, background gaps in knowledge, specialization, all that kind of stuff. It takes you a couple of terms before you learn how to read the literature in a particular discipline, because they've got all that lingo. So that becomes a problem in just doing the reading, figuring out what the hell it says

if you've never taken a Whatever course, and you're from Engineering or from whoever or wherever, right? If you're from Poli Sci and you can't get into a Poli Sci class, right? And most of them hadn't ever had lower division students—they had taught upper-division classes. Or in the case of Judy Innes, she only taught graduate classes, although she had taught this urban soc class before, but she only had, like—I don't know, fifty students at the most, maybe not even that. And it was an elective thing, and it was maybe students in Engineering or in Architecture, so they were there—so it met the requirements in their program. She opens this thing up, she gets all these other people—this wider range of students—and it becomes an issue.

Rubens: I thought that's what you said, and when I tried to explain it to someone it sounded hollow, or they asked me some questions and I—

Choy: Some instructors see this as, “this is great” and some, “it's a problem.” Like Renee Chow, in Architecture. And Hertha and Lew Watts, who's now at Santa Cruz. Lew is a photographer, and he was a senior lecturer. Lew and Hertha came up with a course. I'm sorry, Lew came up with the course first, and he and Hertha developed a new course. Lew's original course was in Architecture. Lew taught photography to Architecture students, and it was a skill that Architecture students have to have. He was in Visual Studies, which is a thing in Architecture. He had this idea of a course where the text was still images. He called it “Picturing Identity.” It was a really cool course. The students made stuff, and it was run like an Architecture course. They had to critique, and make. Lew has slides of—and I've seen them, because that's part of his talk about the course—of the student projects, and there are some of them that are really amazing. He said that easily half of his students would not be Architecture. They'd be from like, anyplace else.

Rubens: They heard it was a good course.

Choy: Initially it was just American Cultures and, the other thing is, it wasn't reading. “I want a course that has no reading.” Here you go, right? He used to get mobbed. He wanted thirty students, and he would get 300. Hundreds! You couldn't get in the room the first day of class. So finally he instituted a competition to get in. You had to write this little essay about why you deserved to be in his course, and he would pick students on the basis of whatever they said, because he wanted people with different backgrounds, and different reasons, and all this kind of stuff. So, he got to hand-pick his students. But he wanted students from all kinds of backgrounds, because they brought different ways of looking at the world, and different skills, to the course. He and Hertha worked together; they had a fabulous grant from Hewlett that was run out of UGIS to team professional schools and colleges with L&S. So you had the faculty from two colleges come up with some new course. They teamed together and they made up a new course called Visual Autobiography, which Hertha still teaches now. Hertha's thing is

autobiography. The whole idea of the course was, how do people who basically think in words use pictures, and how do people who think in pictures use words, and what happens when you put them together, and work together on projects? Half the class would be these picture people, and half the class would be word people.

Rubens: It sounds fabulous. Lewis went to—

Choy: He went to Santa Cruz. He got a real job there. Tenured.

Rubens: Who is Renee Chow?

Choy: Renee is in Architecture. She teaches the Housing class. Sara Ishikawa used to teach the housing class, and then Sara retired, and they hired Renee. Like Marcie Wong, they gave Renee a hard time about getting tenure, but she got tenure. Her course has developed over a bunch of years. It's about designing internal space in housing. If I remember correctly she's written about the course, and she's written about teaching it, so there's published stuff on this. The course is about—architects, when they design houses, they don't know who's going to live there. Somebody's going to live there; some American is going to live there. So you design the space according to a certain set of criteria, it's got to function in a certain kind of way, blah blah blah. When people move in, they've got to move things around; they change the use of space. This is what she's interested in. Is it possible to come up with a set of design criteria, design theory—that is sort of cross-cultural? I think that's what the course is about. So having students who are not in Architecture really helped in this course.

The other person who had a course in Architecture was a lecturer who's gone, Jean McMann. Her course was also a visual studies course. She was a graduate student, and then she finished, and she kept teaching this course. Her thing was also about internal space—sites of memory, that's what it was. She had the students—as one of their projects, they had to go out and find—they worked in teams, three to a team. They had to find people who were willing to let you into their house, look at the way you decorated your house—and looking for shrines, and the kinds of picture you put up, how you use space and all this kind of stuff. And they'd write up all this stuff and see if there was any kind of cultural whatever involved in this. That was really an interesting course. [laughs] The built environment guys have the most interesting stuff.

Rubens: Did Paul Groth ever teach one?

Choy: Paul Groth still owes us a course. He's one of our deadbeats. He teaches a course now that is cross-listed in Architecture and American Studies.

Rubens: He's interested in store fronts. He could do it.

- Choy: He knows a lot. Dell Upton does the vernacular architecture course. For a while he was sort of here and sort of there, and then he moved, and came back, and now he's gone. It's just too bad. That was a cool course.
- Rubens: Is there anything else you think we should be talking about, or get on the record? When these are transcribed, then I'd love to come back and see if we need some follow-up. There are some documents I haven't seen. I want to see the visibility and invisibility study.
- Choy: I think there's one there.
- Rubens: Did Judy Innes actually write an alternative evaluation?
- Choy: Her students did, as a project, and it's someplace in my files. I could probably find it. We never implemented it, but they turned it into a term paper.
- Rubens: You could get some sociology students or education students to interview people that are five, ten years out.
- Choy: We suggested that this is something—this is the sort of thing that you might be able to get somebody to give you money to do.
- Rubens: Maybe—could we do it under the auspices of oral history? Or have students do it for course credit?
- Choy: I think that would be really interesting, because we've had—there's a letter in a file, one of Diane Clemens' TAs wrote back to her a couple of years later—was he a TA or a student? What was his name? I just saw him back in the spring. The student wrote back—and the letter's in the Center files—about how he didn't realize it at the time, but how her 16AC course really changed the way he looked at the US, and how it made a big difference to his life later on. Wonderful letter. That's the kind of stuff that—
- Rubens: It could be done—I told you I'm doing Joe Tussman. Katherine Trow goes back, and I don't know what the number is, but she goes back and interviews some goodly number of the people who took his program; it was a two-year program. Twenty years later. Her book is wonderful. [*Habits of Mind: The Experimental College Program at Berkeley, 1998*]
- Choy: Oh, you can find these people. You don't have to find too many of them. There are all kinds of ways to find them; a lot of them don't totally disappear. I think it would be really interesting. For example, Brandi Catanese is an assistant professor. This is her second year at Berkeley; I think it's her second—
- Rubens: What department?

- Choy: She's in African American Studies and Theater, Dance, and whatever the hell they call it—Performance Studies—among other places. She teaches an American Cultures course. She took over Theater 25AC, Introduction to American—Drama of American Cultures. It's a required course for the major. When Margaret was chair, they redid the whole place before they almost killed the department. They reinvented themselves, and this is one of the things that came out of it. This was Margaret Wilkerson, before she went to Ford.
- Rubens: She is a narrator in ROHO's series on diversity access here at Cal. It's online.
- Choy: They had 25 A and B, which was a literature class—drama and literature class. When they reorganized that, they made 25AC required for the major. Besides—I don't know how many in the major, not that many, but—she teaches it in Morgan [Hall], so that's about 150-something, right? She has a hundred students, easy. Anyway, she started a year ago. This is her second year. She got her degree at Stanford, her PhD at Stanford. I'm not sure when this was. But she graduated from Berkeley in '95. She had to do American Cultures as a student. She came here as a freshman. And so she's come back. [laughs] You ought to ask her about this.
- Rubens: Okay, fascinating. Is she African American?
- Choy: Yes. She started as a freshman in '91, and she graduated in '95. First class, first group out the door, and she remembers having to do this.
- Rubens: I have a question left over about Berdahl, who did not listen to Troy.
- Choy: Yeah, on Ethnic Studies. I guess Berdahl was getting advice from everybody about how to handle—
- Rubens: It was Troy who saved him.
- Choy: That's right, because when they had the Academic Senate vote—the censure vote—Troy was the one who orchestrated the defense. Troy wasn't angry about him, just—it was somebody else.
- Rubens: And then, you mentioned Edith Ng, the director of staff for affirmative action. I think that's another story. It's not this story, but I thought diversity training was a story.
- Choy: Edith—she's the one who—if the campus now has any kind of diversity training, it's because of her. She's another Cal graduate, lifetime employee. She's already worked here thirty-something years, thirty-five years. She's worked here like Nad, her entire adult life. Since she was a student, she's worked on campus. It's the only place she's ever worked.

- Rubens: Are there any other little—not secret stories, but special stories that, given your extraordinary reaches into this campus, you think we ought to pull out?
- Choy: Well, I think there's lots of really interesting stuff that people might be willing to fund that would be interesting institutional research. I had always thought that—you know the Center for Studies in Higher Education, they should be studying American Cultures. [laughs] This is the last thing they would care about. [laughs] Mike Heyman *hated* them. He tried to—this is when Marty Trow, and all those guys—his description of them—they invite their buddies, and they give them some money, they come here from wherever around the world and they sit here and bullshit for a semester, and have coffee and tea. [laughs] I do know that when Heyman was chancellor he hated these guys because they were just like a sink. A big huge waste of time, the kind of stuff they did. They study higher education everywhere but at Berkeley, or at Cal, California. I thought that this was something that was happening right under their nose, and they should be the ones—I had always thought that if you're going to evaluate American Cultures, we should never do it. That's stupid. If you want to do it on campus, they should do it. Or Troy's Social Change guys, because they know how to do something like this.
- Rubens: That institute is alive and well.
- Choy: Oh, yes. Rachel Moran's head now, from Boalt. She and Mary Louise Frampton and Marjorie Shultz, they're all Troy's buddies. Frampton is head of Social Justice, Center for Social Justice. Marj Shultz and Troy and somebody else just published a book, about a year ago.
- Rubens: Oh, Shultz, of course. I know that book. It is *Whitewashing Race*. David Wellman is one of the editors. What an irony, Heyman becoming the head of the Center for Higher Ed, having hated it. Jud King is now the director.
- Choy: The Provost for Professional Schools and Colleges when Heilbron was vice chancellor.
- Rubens: He turned down an application that The Bancroft had put in to fund UC institutional history. Apparently the collecting process of the Office of the President's papers and of the papers of Cal is just hit and miss. I mean, there is no systematic way, and he wouldn't fund one FTE to get a full-time archivist. I don't know what his position is now as head of the Center, because in fact the Center is doing some collaborative grant on that with The Bancroft, not with us.
- Choy: Maybe they don't want that stuff to see the light of day.
- Rubens: [laughs] Ah, that's great. There's a nice web site, though—it's ancient history in a certain sense. There is a good digital library on the Loyalty Oath stuff at the Center. Well, there will be fiefdoms on campus. It's really how people

carve out turf. Area Studies is an interesting program. My understanding is that it was a post-World War II phenomenon, Cold War phenomenon.

Choy: Well, one of the things that I always wished would have happened, but didn't, and I guess I see why it was, when Tien was chancellor I thought he could have easily raised buckets and buckets and buckets of dough to orient the Berkeley campus to the West, to West of California.

Rubens: To the Pacific Rim?

Choy: Yeah. I mean, he would have money pouring in here from there, and it seemed to me like Berkeley is more than any other UC campus—even more than UCLA, much more—is so positioned, just because of the student body, to—where they could orient themselves to the West. Their jobs—this is about jobs for students. We've got all these bilingual students. As far as I'm concerned, the 21st century is going to be China's century just like the 20th century was the American century and the 19th century was the British century. This is going to be China's century. That's where the action's going to be.

Rubens: So you're critical of Tien because?

Choy: Just because he could have raised so much money. But the thing that would probably have been much harder to do was to go to the business school and say, "Reorient your programs to train your students for international business in the east—and west." They could have made the business school completely different from what it is now. You look at the faculty, too. I would be really interested to find out the faculty members who have projects over there. I remember Renee saying, in the early nineties, every single architecture faculty had some building go up in Shanghai. There's this business over there, and you have all this expertise, and it looked like a no-brainer.

Rubens: It takes a lot of dedication, time and money to start new programs.

Choy: You've got to move a hell of a lot of money. It's a long process, too, because then you've got to hire faculty, and that's where the money would come in. Basically, you can't expect the existing people to change. You've got to put a lot of money up, create a whole new area where you hire people. That's how you do it. But it could have been done. I'm sure that Tien could have raised the money if anybody were interested. You have—like Tom Gold, in Sociology; Journalism's got [Orville] Schell—there's lots of resources on campus. This whole East thing—Tom Gold works on China. He's done China his whole career. He did time at Tunghai University in Taiwan, in the sixties. He was a student, an undergraduate.

Rubens: So let's talk about your retirement. Was it just time for you to retire? How did that come about?

Choy: Yeah, I thought so. I had wanted to leave the December before, even before that. I was sixty, I didn't want to work anymore anyway, and I didn't need to work. That was the thing; I don't have to work. I'm not like other people who have to work for whatever reason. I don't have to work. I've got other things I want to do with my time. And the job itself had become—once we didn't have any program money, I'm like, "What am I supposed to do"? The only thing I knew was what we had, and that worked really well, and I wasn't interested in coming up with something that wasn't going to work as well. Everything that people had suggested, we had already thought of that, tried it, and I could give all the reasons why it wasn't going to work. So I figured, "I'm a problem here. They don't need me." The whole thing was clearly in the process of being reinvented, so it was a good time for somebody else to do it.

[Audio File 8]

Choy: The AC Center was something for the faculty. It was directed by a faculty member, and without the faculty direction faculty aren't going to pay attention to it. The whole idea that I could have been director, that was nonsense. You need to have—it has to be something where the faculty can come and talk. This is a class system, right? I know that. I'm not a faculty member, and without the faculty leadership faculty aren't going to pay any attention. I don't care how much money you give them, they're not going to do it. This is going to be just a means of getting money; it's not going to be something for them. It's not going to be something run by them, it's not going to be something for them. It's not going to be something that's of them.

Rubens: So you said, once Troy—

Choy: Once the money was gone—and once they didn't replace the faculty director, you know—Christina stalled and stalled and stalled and stalled, for all kinds of reasons, and finally she says that it wasn't going to happen—they had already decided this, and they never told me that summer. This was 2003—I forget when it was. I said something in some meeting, and Barbara looked at me weirdly, and then she said, "Oh, you guys, we never told you."

Rubens: You're saying they had decided?

Choy: Yeah, they decided that summer. I think it was 2003. I think that's when it was when Troy left. Troy leaves, and then we're waiting for the review. The review was supposed to happen in the spring, and Troy was going to leave in June. The review was going to be done before Troy left.

Rubens: Was this the review that Richard Cándida Smith did?

Choy: Right, right. This is the Omi report. For all kinds of reasons—

- Rubens: The Omi report was different than the one that Cándida Smith ran last summer.
- Choy: Right, right, that's different. There was a round-table. First we had the round-table. That was 2003, that summer. I guess Troy had left. Yeah, that's the summer Troy left, 2003. I'm losing track of my dates now. We were supposed to have the review, and then for all kinds of reasons—mostly the off-campus guy at San Diego, who couldn't do it in the spring. He had to do it in the fall—
- Rubens: This was someone off campus, at San Diego?
- Choy: Yeah, it was an off-campus guy. He couldn't do it in the spring, so we scheduled for the fall. So, we've got to wait for that. We don't want to hire somebody until we have the review. I'm already sixty that fall, right? "I want to go, I want to go." "Okay, I'll stay, I'll stay, I'll stay." It didn't happen in the fall. When we finally got together, we make the committee, it happens, and then they finally get the report. We do the review in December, and we get the report in, I don't know when it was, February or something like this. Still no director, right?
- Rubens: So you're into the second semester.
- Choy: We're in the spring now—no, I've got my years wrong. Anyway, we're in the spring, so I figure, "When are you going to start the search?" We've got the Omi report, let's go. No, no, nothing happened, nothing happened. So I figure well, it's already too late, maybe you're going to do it in the summer, for the fall. Because I already kissed off the spring long ago, because once the review committee wasn't going to meet until fall, clearly nothing was going to happen until January at the soonest, and then there's no report until February; nothing could happen until the fall. So, fall. And then finally that summer is when they decided there wasn't going to be a director. That was it. They were going to cash in that line. I found out in August. Barbara finally told me, and they had decided this but had somehow forgotten to tell me. I don't know when they decided, but it was clearly part of the budget cycle. That's when I got kind of really pissed off. Then I said I wanted to go in December, and they said, "No, no, no, stay around until June." So I said "Okay, I'll stay up to June 2004," this past year. So they're doing this reinvention now. I told Christina long ago. I wrote this down; I sent her a long letter. I said, "This not having a director, I think, is a big mistake." I gave her all the reasons why. It was never going to get respect. I don't care—because the way the thing works right now is, you have this troika running this thing, and it's basically Cynthia and Barbara. I've been reporting to Barbara for all the whole time I'm here.
- This is the way they run. Well-directed—I am the only assistant director in all the twelve units under Barbara, and she runs—she manages the place like

she's a manager. So I—my every other week thing, I go and talk with her about what's what. That's fine, but as far as I'm concerned, Christina is the faculty director. She said she was, and as far as the committee was concerned she's the faculty director, but there is no other faculty director. You're not going to have a faculty—

Rubens: Victoria is not. Even though she has a PhD, she's a lecturer. We talked about that earlier.

Choy: Yes. Well, now, that's a whole different thing. When they listed that job—finally, when I saw the ad for it this past July, because it took forever to get the thing through academic personnel, I was like, “When? When are you going to—?” Because I had thought back in April they were going to start the search. I had told them in the fall I was leaving, so like, “What is this, April? You haven't done anything yet? I'm leaving in three months, eleven weeks.” I wrote a letter to—I complained in writing to the former directors and the committee members, and the members of the special committee, and Bill even, all about what's not happening, and why, and what I was concerned about, because these are the only people I could bitch to, because I couldn't bitch to anybody else, and I couldn't complain and whine to anybody else. I was going to go, not my problem, but these people were going to be left with this, so I—what's going on? They never said anything until—they finally had a draft of the job description. In April you have a draft of the job description. And they didn't get this thing out of academic personnel until July!

Rubens: Did you have anything to say about the job description?

Choy: They never asked me directly.

Rubens: Who wrote the job description?

Choy: Barbara and Norma.

Rubens: Who's Norma?

Choy: Norma's the MSO, the administrative officer for the division. She's the one that handles all this kind of stuff. The thing that I never understood—when I finally found out, like what's hanging this god-damn thing up, and it was because—it was the affirmative action part of the search. They wanted to limit the search to campus-only. They had reasons for that, and academic personnel—“No, you've got to search the world.” That was the hang-up on this thing. Finally they had to go I don't know how high—see, this is another thing, this is the kind of stuff that Norma is supposed to get. She's a very laid-back person, so she doesn't—

Rubens: What's her last name?

Choy: Partridge. Partridge-Wallace. So I fault her for this. On the other hand, it's also Christina. I think she should have gone to Paul Gray and said, "I need this! Now!" Bullshit, right? And she didn't do that. So if you—this thing's not important. From my perspective, they're stalling. The longer they stall, the more money they save. This is about money. So in July they finally list the job, and I found out about it by mistake or something. When I read the thing, carefully, first it said that this person was going to be academic coordinator for the Center. It was going to be the academic coordinator I rank. And I'm a II. That was the job title, Academic Coordinator for the Center. So it wasn't even assistant director. It was not my job; it was a transition job. It was half-time. You were part of this team. You reported—explicitly reported to Barbara and Cynthia. In my mind, that meant Barbara was in charge of the Center. I told Mitch this; I wrote him a letter. I said, "This is my critique of what this job ad says, what it really means, and how it's actually going to work." I went through the whole thing, all little points about the intricacies of the bureaucratic bullshit.

So that's what happened. They wanted to pay less. They were using—the rate range was half of what I make, and they were only going to pay fifty percent of that, and they end up—Victoria coming in at one third time, so they're saving a little more. She's going to work half-time in the spring. So they're going to pay a fourth of what they were paying me, to do I don't know what—reinvent this new program. All of the stuff that I was doing that was being done at the Center, that I was doing, and Candace [Khanna], that they shoved off to other people—mostly the advising, the record-keeping, the web site, all of the intelligence-gathering about what's going to be taught. They didn't understand—they don't understand how this whole approval process works, and how I find out months in advance about what's getting taught, who's doing it, figuring out who needs to get committee approval, get on their case months in advance—because you need to have it done months in advance by the time the term starts. There are courses—when I left in June, there were still courses for the fall that had not been approved by the committee.

Rubens: Is this unusual?

Choy: No. This is not unusual. There were courses for the summer that hadn't been finished, done yet. But during the summer I'd find all these people. I'd get them on track. I'd say, "You've got to have your stuff by the end of the summer before fall starts." That's what I'd do in the summer. There was nobody doing anything about that until October. Nothing.

Rubens: The courses ran in the summer and in the fall?

Choy: Sure. They were scheduled, they were taught, and there's stuff for the spring, so you find out about spring in August. In July—the end of July, you start working on spring already, because they have to have stuff through the

committee by October at best. November—certainly by now it's got to be done, because they don't meet after this. The committee is not going to meet again until after January. Classes start. Too late, already. I said—there were these dozen courses; I named them. I sent this thing to Cynthia, and she said, "Thanks." I don't know what ever happened, whether anybody followed up, but certainly Victoria didn't do anything about it until three weeks ago, when she started—four weeks ago, whenever it was in October she started. They don't understand that all of this hand-holding I do, that's why—that's how you help the faculty. That's why they love us, that's why they do this. Otherwise, they say "Screw it! Too much trouble." That's how you make sure those courses are there. Otherwise, they're not going to be there.

Rubens: Victoria's title is what?

Choy: She's an academic coordinator. That's her job title. My job title was assistant director.

Rubens: You're saying coordinator is one step down.

Choy: No. There's a payroll title of Academic Coordinator. My payroll title was Academic Coordinator and my rank was II. There are three ranks. Her payroll title is Academic Coordinator and her rank is I. Her office title—her work title—is also Academic Coordinator, but she is definitely not the assistant director. That was clear, they did not—my job is still vacant. She has to reapply I guess next year, when they set whatever they're going to set up, some new structure—

Rubens: She's a lecturer in Ethnic Studies?

Choy: Yeah, she's a lecturer in Ethnic Studies. The whole way they handled this transition was very, I thought, poorly done. There was no sense of urgency at all, and from the cynic's point of view, they were just trying to save money, which they are doing. They have money for a program now, because [laughs] they're not paying me. They have twenty-some thousand dollars, or they should. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight thousand, I think. I figured this all out before I left, because I figured that if I didn't do it, nobody else was going to be able to figure it out.

Rubens: So theoretically they could run one of those seminars.

Choy: They could do something. They have money. That's how they've funded the program internally for the last few years. No new money from the campus. And the money always came from the chancellor, so if we got no new money, the chancellor could have cared less. So, they're trying to reinvent their program, and incorporate it with all this other faculty development stuff that's going on, which is probably a good idea, but it loses its unique specialness. It's not just another faculty thing. This is the whole thing, and they don't

understand the faculty leadership part was—it didn't matter what the rest of it was, the faculty aren't going to do it! Right?

Rubens: Well there's a lot more we could talk about, but we'll stop for now.

End of Interview