



## H. L. T. Quan & C. A. Griffith

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[00:00:25]

**CTM:** Welcome. We are completely delighted to have you here, given that we have been trying for many years, to get you to do this with us! Also because we were inspired by the two of you to actually do the Feminist Freedom Warriors video project.

**LEC:** So that got us started.

**CTM:** You all got us started. So it's wonderful to have you in front of the camera now. Today is April 22nd, 2022. We want to just begin by asking each of you ... Linda, do you wanna add something of a welcome [*Laughter.*]

**LEC:** No, welcome! [*Laughter.*]

**CTM:** There you go [*Laughs.*]

**LEC:** This is the third welcome since you have been here.

**CTM:** So we really want each of you to begin by telling us a little bit about your stories, about what brought you to the kind of radical, anti-racist, transnational, feminist work that each of you do, and then that you are now doing together with the documentary films and stuff that you've been making for a long time. So, whoever wants to start ...

**CAG:** I'll let H.Q. start, if that's okay ... put you in the hot seat

**HLTQ:** Oh, first of all, thank you for talking with us. We give you permission to use the material herein for your—

**CTM:** Thank you very much. Our teachers just taught us something—

**LEC:** Very important!

**CAG:** We give you permission to use this material for the Feminist Freedom Warrior archives. And we are very honored to be in your presence and to share this time and space with you. So thank you.

**CTM:** Of course. Good.

**HLTQ:** So you want me to start, really?

**CAG:** Por favor.

**HLTQ:** Seriously? Why don't you start?

**CAG:** I think of myself as an artist, and I was raised by really very ... socially conscious parents. So my father's a first generation American from Panama. My mother was raised in the Jim Crow South and they gave birth to three kids in the late sixties, early to mid sixties at a time when ... I, if I were them, I wouldn't have had children ... cause it's just things were on fire. And there was not a lot of—I think there was a lot of hope at that time, but there was also just horrible, horrible things in the world. So I think the reason why I'm committed to social justice work is, is partially because I always had to ... we've always lived in borderline communities.

So my parents made sacrifices to send us to the best schools and things like that. But what that meant is I grew up in a lower middle class, Black community, Southwest Washington, bordering Anacostia. The public schools were so violent cause they were integrating, that my parents took us out and put us into private schools and made tremendous sacrifices to do that. So I grew up in a Black community where if I go down to the grocery store, I had to keep very quiet because then they would say, oh, you're not from around here. They would say it in a way that made it very clear that I wasn't from around there, but this is my community. Then I would go to this really exclusive white public school in Washington, D.C. that was supposedly the first integrated school in Washington and all these other things. There were very few Black students and they just wanted to sort of erase everything as opposed to acknowledging where people were and where they came from. That really had a profound impact on me, that and spending the summers down south. Where, I'm going a long time to say this, but I just have long, I have memories of my parents driving us from Washington D.C. to Tennessee. My mother would always, I remember my father said one time, "Linden, it's not Jim Crow anymore. We can stop any place we want, we can go eat any place we want. We don't have to just drive 14 hours straight just to get from one safe place to the next." So that was always just something sort of always ... not quite feeling like I belonged, etc, but also really wanting to be part of community and try to make things better. So I think that had a profound impact on me. That first-generation part, the Jim Crow stuff, and then the sort of existence that was really across class boundaries constantly. So, that had a profound impact. I don't know if I answered your question, but I'm nervous as hell. So there I go. [*Laughter.*]

**CTM:** Let me follow up then. So, what about taking us to the point at which you make decisions about filmmaking and about that being the space in which you would make your contribution.

**CAG:** Ahh, okay. That's an easy one. I grew up wanting to be a career diplomat. That was what I was going to do. I was gonna be a career diplomat. I was—

[00:05:53]

**HLTQ:** You said career?

**CAG:** Yes.

**HLTQ:** I thought you said queer diplomat [*Laughter.*]

**CAG:** Oh, that too.

**CTM:** That too [*Laughs.*]

**CAG:** But I was gonna be a career diplomat. So I was going to learn the colonial languages first, and then once I figured out where I was stationed then I would learn the indigenous languages. I was going to learn Spanish, French Portuguese, Dutch. I probably wasn't gonna deal with the Dutch cause it's not a romance language [*Laughter.*] My brother was born in Nigeria. I always figured I would probably start in Nigeria and then probably go into Liberia or someplace that was just sort of, I think I was drawn to Nigeria, Liberia. Let's just leave it at that. So that was the plan.

**CTM:** So did that come out of the white private school?

**CAG:** That just came, that came out of my parents, my father did his graduate work in Nigeria. And there was a whole, the, the Obembe family took him in. And then they had lots of children, whenever they came to the United States and they were there. One of the Obembes married Funmi, and she spoke seven languages perfectly, no accent with each one. So the perfect accents for each one, I was just so blown away by this woman. And I just thought, oh my God, I want to do what she does. And I don't think she was a diplomat, but she saw that I was a middle child, and I was constantly trying to negotiate my stuff as you do as a middle child. And I was just drawn to that. So that was gonna be a career diplomat. And then I realized that wasn't going to work because I don't have a poker face and things make me very angry and I'm very emotional to response to things. So I thought, okay, I'll be a photographer. I thought, okay, I'll be a photojournalist. Cause I was drawn to that and I was very shy. But then I realized if I'm a photojournalist, I will get myself shot [*Laughter.*] because I will just be, I will be focusing on getting that story and talking to people, I will put myself in harm's way. So then I thought, wow, maybe I could become a documentary filmmaker. That way I have a group of people and we're going in as a team to work in community and to amplify people's voices and type of stories. So that's how that happened.

**CTM:** Wow.

**LEC:** So happy for you

**CTM:** [*Laughter.*] Cause if you were a career diplomat, you wouldn't be sitting here, for instance.

**HLTQ:** Probably not.

**CAG:** I love that, if I have a camera in my hand, I can talk to anybody, I can do anything. This is from when I was like, I couldn't keep direct eye contact until I was 12 years old, that's how shy I was. So the camera in my hand, I can talk to anybody. I can do anything.

**CTM:** How interesting. So the camera is a real tool of empowerment and agency, for you. But what's also interesting is besides that, what seems to inspire you is the fact that you want to amplify stories within a community, not your own story.

**CAG:** No, no. I was the kid that would be listening to the parents and aunties and everyone was talking—large Southern families. So we're talking at least 15-20 people at any gathering. And all the other kids would've gone to sleep and I'm just literally, I would sometimes fall asleep under the table and I'd just be listening to what people were saying. I just loved hearing people's stories. So that was wonderful. That was wonderful. I had a teacher who assigned us in sixth grade to go out and we were reading [unknown] and said, "okay, go out into the community, interview somebody that you don't know, you can't know them." I was very, very shy. I went into the, the fire station in Anacostia and I said, "I would like to find out what it was like to be a fireman in the 1960's when you're using the fire hoses against people, as opposed to helping them out of there burning homes." And most of them were Black firemen there and said, "well, we weren't there when that happened, but this is my experience with that in terms of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I realized, I just went into a firehouse, I don't know anybody there. [*Laughter.*] And—

**LEC:** And they spoke to you, they talked to you.

**CAG:** They spoke to me, and they told me beautiful stories. So I'm like, I like this stuff. So documentary filmmaking was a way to just listen to people's stories and hear them and I love it.

**LEC:** So as moving this together in equal fashion, we wanna ask you the same question, HQ.

[00:10:34]

**HLTQ:** Well, [*Laughs.*] I'm just still thinking about the queer diplomat [*Laughter.*]

**CTM:** The queer diplomat? [*Laughs.*]

**HLTQ:** Well, I did not dream of being a diplomat for sure. Actually when I was growing up, I thought being a garbage man was a pretty decent job, because the only people my parents knew that had pension, that had health insurance were people who worked for the city, and some of them indeed drive trash pickup trucks. So I was

exposed to political mobilization at a much earlier age. The Third World Student Movement was not strange to me because I grew up in San Francisco and right around the corner from Glide Memorial, it's a very historic church. So the idea was that you have to do something, you have to embed in a community. Cause my mother had a five months education. I didn't figure this one out until after she died, because when people die, they tell your story, right. Children are really horrible with secrets. They either blab their mouth or they misremember. In my case, I misremembered, I thought when I was growing up, I thought my mom had a five-year education to herself. She only had five months, but she was very worldly. One of the things that she taught us was that even if we had one grain of rice, we have to share it, halve it, because that's the point. She was Buddhist anyway, so she was all about sharing. So she brought in a lot of different people and we were exposed to a lot of different people. But one of the first political events I remember organizing was actually protesting outside of a restaurant against slave wages. Back then, the idea was that you build solidarity within your own community, but these were Asian restaurants and they were using slave labor.

**CTM:** How old were you?

**HLTQ:** Probably 15 ... So, then we also worked with trying to get bilingual ballots. I remember some of these campaigns, we all also obviously trying to mobilize against the CIA recruitment in high school. I went to a high school where I had more friends in prison, in army, than gone to college. So I was one of those kids. But I got involved in the entire apartheid movement very early on. So third world consciousness was really important to me. That idea of working in solidarity with people all over the world. So that was the idea, now, how I come to this work is really interesting in many ways. I saw myself as an organizer. I never saw myself as, I don't believe in leadership. I don't do any of those things. So even though I'm perfectly capable of speaking at political rallies—

**CAG:** And you did, and you were great!

**HLTQ:** But what I really like was the organizing and working with building events. So what happened was where I went to college, at UC Santa Barbara, the radio—so I came to filmmaking from sound, Crystal came from the ...

**CAG:** Camera

**HLTQ:** Cinematography department, the camera department. So the way I come into sound was we had a community radio station that has a very long history of broadcasting edgy stuff. In fact, it is the only community radio in the country that got shut down by the FCC, because in the early 70's, it was broadcasting live the protest and burning of the American bank—

**CAG:** Bank of America.

**HLTQ:** Bank of America. So this is that history and—

**CAG:** KCSB FM, Santa Barbara.

**HLTQ:** And the station—sound is in some way, just as bad, if not worse than film, because it's very male and it's very white. And at the time this is in the mid 80's ... it was impossible. There were a number of shows that were very homophobic, racist, misogynistic on top of it. Sean Hannity, by the way, came out at the same station—

**CTM:** Oh really? Interesting.

**CAG:** At the same station.

[00:15:31]

**LEC:** That makes sense, that makes sense.

**HLTQ:** We organized against his show. I mean, as students. So anyway, what happened was, so we find out that a number of the people of color who have shows there 24/7 is a lot of time slot, right. And yet, coincidentally, all of these people have shows that are at times people are sleeping where a certain kind of show during the time where you're driving or you're listening in your office, they are a white male show. So we demanded—we didn't wanna censor them—but what we did want was equal time. Well, there was a regime change at the radio station and our friend Elizabeth Robinson, who's a dear friend of ours for many years now, she's the one that I blame or credit, whichever you wanna say, for where I am. Because in the previous regime, we had a show after all the protests, they gave us a show and it was called *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* because it was by all of those of us, we were in this woman's group, called *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*. It was a name of a book that just been released by Alice Walker, a collection of essays. So it's a feminist radio collective, and we organize it as a zine format ... but back then they didn't think women could, should program. And what that meant was we had one of those proto feminist guy and his name was Harmony, I'm not kidding [*Laughter.*] And he was a hippie dippy dude, he was so sweet. He programmed, he engineered the show for us. Well, when Elizabeth took over, she insisted that it was not enough for us to critique media ... that if we want to critique media, we also have to learn how to do it. And she was serious. We had to go through training. We had to engineer our own show. And so we are licensed—

**CAG:** FCC licensed programmer.

**HLTQ:** FCC licensed radio programmers. Because back then it was before deregulation. So you have to have a license to operate a radio station.

**CAG:** The board, just the sound board is this wide [gestures] and this deep [gestures] and it's got all these doddles and it can be very intimidating. And so one of the things that was great for us is when we were working there, we were graduate students at the time I was working as a staff person at the university, HQ was a graduate student, there would be students that would come in from Summer Transitional Educational Program, STEP, and these are just high school kids.

**HLTQ:** No, no, no. You're thinking about Upward Bound.

**CAG:** Oh, Sorry. Upward bound. Sorry. Upward bound. So they're about to come into the university, but we also work with really young kids too. And we said, okay, well, we're gonna teach you at KJUC. So, there's the FM station and there's a sort of the AM station that's. So that's where you sort do the training. "We're gonna teach you how to do this board." And I go, oh no, I can't! Like the first thing I had to do is turn on the power. Then these are the main microphones and these are the supplementary ones, and you just pull with the dials till it sounds right. And the confidence that's built from just knowing you can step into this room with all like hundreds of dials with powered up, boom, up there you are. More women need to learn how to do that. So that's what we focus on.

**HLTQ:** So we actually have experienced training, like fifth graders, how to do radio programming, but to go back to the story ... I got trained, I do my own show. I did a number of blues shows, and we did a lot of public affairs. Then when I was asked to help out on a film project, I discovered that I like doing sound, film sound, really, really like it. And I think even today, less than 1 or 2% of women are in the sound arts. So sound art is everything from radio program engineering to sound for film, to soundtrack, to sound design and sound editing and including music for video games. It's just an incredibly male, because it's also very techy. I feel like I may not remember your faces, but I will remember your sound. It's just one of those things. I love the human—

**CTM:** The voices?

**HLTQ:** The human voice to me, is so rich. I could just sit and listen to people telling me stories all day long and I don't have to say a word if I don't want to

[00:20:16]

**CAG:** So we started collaborating, and we just really enjoy working together. It's just, it's really a lot of fun.

**HLTQ:** We started QUAD in 1999. QUAD Productions, in part, because we were asked to put together a project and it was a real challenge because we were working with the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. That meant that mostly what they had were audio footage and our job was to produce a 30-minute visual documentary.

**CAG:** About the work that they do on all seven continents.

**HLTQ:** On all seven, right.

**CAG:** So multiple languages—

**HLTQ:** And whatever video footages that they gave us was in all kinds of format. I mean, like, literally there's really fuzzy little image of some dude in South Africa,

riding on his bike with his battery. I still remember his battery. And that's how he got his community radio going. And at that time and still to this day, so many people in the world still depend on their daily news and happenings in their community from radio.

**CTM:** From the radio. Absolutely.

**HLTQ:** And we did that. It was so much fun and we're like, "oh yeah, we have to do more of these things." So that's how we formed QUAD and well, the rest is what we've been doing. [*Laughs.*]

**CAG:** Should we tell them what QUAD stands for?

**HLTQ:** Yes, please.

**CAG:** So—

**HLTQ:** It's a misnomer but go ahead.

**CAG:** It's a misnomer. So we wanted to just do these projects to sort of help communities and people would ask us to do these things. It's not like we're helping, , it's not that sort of approach to it, but we were asked to do things and we were thrilled to be able to generate or to offer our time, to help people put these projects together. So the whole point was, we're working full time, we're graduate students. We just need to do it quick. So QUAD stands for QUick And Dirty.

**CTM:** [*Laughter.*] Oh!

**HLTQ:** Did you know that's what it stands for?

**CTM:** No!

**HLTQ:** Quick and dirty. [*Laughter.*]

**CAG:** And then it's kinda funny because...

**HLTQ:** Our feature films are not quick, and they're not dirty.

**CAG:** So then one of the first films that we're most known for, it's not our first documentary, but one of the films we're most known for is *Mountains That Take Wing - Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama: A Conversation on Life, Struggles and Liberation*. And we say that we have a long title, because it took us 13 years to make it. 13 years to make that film.

**HLTQ:** So not quick.

**CAG:** It wasn't quick, wasn't dirty. And that's because nobody gave any funding for that documentary. We applied for grants ... even with distributors that wanted it after we had finished it, we would apply for a sponsorship, et cetera. They didn't wanna have anything to do with it, but then after it was done, oh, gimme, gimme, gimme.

**CTM:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's such an incredible pedagogical tool, that documentary.

**CAG:** Thank you.

**CTM:** It's recording something and talking about history that almost nobody knows about or has written about. Everyone knows Angela, as a part of a particular history. Very few people know Yuri, one and two, very few people actually see that there has, there have been these cross fertilizations of struggles and that's historic.

**LEC:** And even fewer people know anything about Yuri's history and longstanding work across communities of color and with close communication with people like Malcolm X.

**CTM:** So it's really—

**CAG:** And so that part about the conversations and just listening, that goes back to my just, being the shy kid and just listening to adults talking about things. Then also we wanted to do a project and the idea was, is that we said, okay, what are we gonna do? We wanted to do a series of conversations between Angela Davis and other women of color cultural workers. This was supposed to be the first in a series that we were going to do. And it took 13 years to make it. Then the second person that we were gonna try to talk to was

**HLTQ:** Was June

**CAG:** June, June Jordan

**HLTQ:** By that time, June passed. We actually still have some footage of June.

**CAG:** It was just heartbreaking. Just heartbreaking.

**HLTQ:** I mean, the thing is, is that well, I'm a political theorist, so I have like a whole other life aside from my production work. But I think the idea was that we were persuaded by the feminist proposition, that we learned differently that we learned through conversations and dialogues and co-learning. And so at that time there weren't really any feature length documentaries on Angela.

**CAG:** There was one with Herbert Marcuse and she had a part in it.

**HLTQ:** Yeah. And we said, let's hear from women of color so that we can learn about the meaning of life and struggle. And because they have a lot to [inaudible] us and, but rather than having her giving speeches, because that's what people imagine Angela to be. But having Angela sitting down and talking, because that's actually real life. Because why should Charlie Rose be the only person who sits down and talk other people? I mean, Angela is also a philosopher in her own right. So we said, let's do this, and we approached Angela and Angela said, "Really, you want to do that?" We're like, "Yes! Who do you wanna talk to?" And so we actually collaboratively developed the list of people.

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**CAG:** The list of people, yeah. And we were graduate students at the time.

**HLTQ:** But, but for us collaboration is, is really about the nature of that work. And then, I mean, both in terms of radio, audio production, as well as filming production, it breaks us out of this really idea of privatized, individualized work. I think that the most meaningful work, whatever that nature of work is shared ... the labor is shared. Like I said last night, we honestly differ on approaches and we have faith that we can talk it out and argue. Then in the process workshop, an idea. Does that make sense? Like, we don't think we have the final answer individually.

**CTM:** No it's how Linda and I work together, I think as well.

**LEC:** And it's what we were saying last night, too. Your methodology—and in the workshop just now—your methodological approach really comes from that feminist practice of how you work through collective. So you don't think that this is individual work cause it's not for any kind of appropriation, but sharing and sharing it with the community that it comes from, that's crucial. So that informs the kind of films you make and how you make them.

**CAG:** And even when we were working on *Mountains*, I mean, it was really, the crew was very small. But there were times when the whole point was Angela and Yuri would have a conversation with each other, but then there were times when there were certain things that weren't, for example, clear to my other co-camera person, and she's this wonderful woman, white woman from the Midwest. And so she would say, "oh, could I ask a question about such and such?" And I'm like, "yeah, please." So it was everyone involved could ask questions because it was like, we would like to hear, could you share Yuri, or could you share Angela, could you tell us a little bit more about X, Y, and Z. So it wasn't like "crew shut up." It was just, it was really a conversation between Angela and Yuri. And then if there was stuff that we just, "oh, could we please ask...?" "Yes, please do!" It was very open. It was very, very open.

**CTM:** That's such a profound thing about feminist method. And it really is feminist. It's not any other kind of critical methodology. No, it comes from. Literally comes from. So, how would you characterize sort of the work that you've now done over many years and decades? In terms of it's contributions to sort of a larger anti-racist, transnational feminist project, which is global.

**HLTQ:** Right so, there's—

**LEC:** And sorry, particularly at this moment.

**HLTQ:** At this particular moment. So our work is at several different levels. One of course is the film work that we make and we circulate. The Other, we think has to do with collaboration in the community, through training and through resource sharing. As we said earlier, QUAD productions—and we learn a lot from AMARC which is the Community for Radio ...

**CAG:** World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.

**HLTQ:** Thank you! t's a French acronym. So they believe, and they help wrote the UN Declaration of Communication of Human Rights. So we subscribe to that.

**CAG:** We were very inspired by that.

**HLTQ:** That means that we also support the preservation of endangered languages. We support the global movement, indigenous movement for land and food sovereignty. I mean these are connected issues. We think the body of work that QUAD produce helps just one, if we somehow like, sort of create work that say, here are these alternative spaces for stories, but also for solutions. Because you asked the question, Linda, why this moment? I mean, we are living in a time of pandemic of catastrophe, of white supremacy, ascendant and on the move. And that means that we need to always restock our skill sets. And continue to learn and develop ... because we have to be just as resilient and flexible—

**CTM:** As capital and everybody.

**HLTQ:** You know it, you know it

[00:30:50]

**CAG:** And it's joyful, otherwise it will grind our bones. So we have to find that resistance, sometimes that resistance is existence itself. And other times it's yeah, I resist, I exist and I can still laugh and I can mess around and turn it on its head. So we like showcasing that, amplifying it.

**HLTQ:** And so for a little bit, if somehow we contribute just minorly, just at the suggestion of a possibility of a different way of learning, how to work with each other and how to work in a community. Yeah. so that we can together make our community more resilient in these times. I think I would just feel so honored if that's true. One of the thing I regret about this morning is I never was able to talk about these earrings. See, can I point to [gestures]—Linda, you see these earrings?

**LEC:** Yeah, I see it

**CTM:** Did you make it?

**HLTQ:** No, she did not make them, so I wanna tell, so one other thing I wanted to say in this workshop this morning was that the woman who makes these earrings, her name is Carol Lujan. And she's an amazing indigenous scholar, and artist. And for years, her medium was very different, not glass. She retired at 70 and she, it was only in the last couple years where she realized that "I think I want to work with glass now". Hmm. Well, this is Carol Lujan. Her work is in the Heard Museum. The Native, indigenous, museum. And so she started doing, she went to class, she took classes with teachers, much younger than she, probably less skills than she has. And

within a few years she make these amazing—she made those for Crystal. But what I wanted to show you—

**CAG:** She makes—if you take, for example, a traditional Native American blanket with the beautiful geographic pattern and those rich colors, instead of making that on clay and that sort of movement of it, in glass.

**CTM:** Wow.

**HLTQ:** It's phenomenal, right? And so this is when she was just doing—

**CAG:** Yeah. So I would make, I would make earrings for her, as a gift. That sort of thing. I call them insomnia rings.

**HLTQ:** Earrings.

**CAG:** So when I can't sleep, oh, earrings. HQ and I, she's like here, make something that looks like this. And so we would sit together, HQ and I would, within our insomnia, make earrings. And so I would give some to Carol. And then one time she gave me these, and so ...

**CTM:** That's so lovely, special

**CAG:** She said "Oh, I like how you—because she, I usually wear them asymmetrically. So there's a subtle asymmetric asymmetry in these. It's very, very, subtle.

**CTM:** Because I was thinking that that is unusual for you because I've always seen you with—

**CAG:** Different ones.

**CTM:** Yeah.

**HLTQ:** So the reason why I wanted to tell the folks this morning about the earrings is because, to me, it's an inspiration about how we can, whatever age, whatever skill level, we can continue to learn and co-learn together. And develop beautiful things, simple things.

**LEC:** But that in itself comes from the notion of looking at community. As being part of community and as community and sharing. That's not academic, that's not how we are trained or what we learn. That's what makes your work distinctive, because you do this at every step of the way with whatever communities you're working with. Yeah. It would've been useful to talk about the earrings this morning [*Laughter.*]

**HLTQ:** I'm so sorry! I did [cross-talk 00:34:25]

**CTM:** It's alright. We convey it.

**HLTQ:** Yes. We can convey it, please share [*Laughter.*]

**CTM:** Okay. So talk a little bit about now the real challenges that you have faced and what do you remember about them?

**LEC:** And we know that there are multiple.

**CTM:** Right, we're sure.

**LEC:** We are sure there are multiple.

**CAG:** I'll tell you one, I'll tell you a story

**CTM:** And how have they impacted sort of your ongoing ...

**CAG:** Yeah. Well, I was the first, if I was not the first, I was one of the first Black woman first assistant camera assistants in IATSE, the International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees also known as the camera man's union. Yeah. Okay. So very male, and almost exclusively white. And so—

**LEC:** Like your story this morning.

[00:35:24]

**CAG:** Yeah, it's all nepotism and things like that. Just generations of that. So to get into the union, you have to have someone sponsor you, you have to have multiple people sponsor you to get into the union. And I just remember I was getting my union card. I got my union card on Juice, which is Ernest Dickerson's first feature film starring Tupac Shakur, and we have a big truck and we're shooting in Harlem. And you have a New York City team series, which, have a kind of rough reputation, right? So they just did not appreciate this little Black girl, cause I was, 20 something, maybe 24 or 25, whatever. They just, they just had to ride me. So what happened was the camera truck is supposed to be placed as close as possible to the location. So if we're filming, this is the entrance to the building, the camera truck needs to be just right there, because you might need to film something right there. So they would get it as close as possible, but I would step out and I'm like, what did I step in?

**CTM:** Uh, oh

**CAG:** Oh yeah. They did all sorts of really nasty, dirty things. And I, that was just the small stuff. So I'm dragging that into the location.

**CTM:** So active, sabotage.

**CAG:** Active stuff, ok?

**CAG:** Then one of the people who sponsored me for the union, this woman named Alicia Weber, she's a British camera woman. So she had a whole career in Britain. She came to the United States and the guy who sponsored her to get into the union as a camera, as a cameraman. People literally threatened him. They threatened to break his legs and that made him, he just thought she was complaining about these guys being obnoxious. He had no idea—

**LEC:** What she was experiencing.

**CAG:** Until they threatened him physically, and that made him so angry. He's like, "oh, she's getting in. Alicia, who else do you wanna get in?" So that experience. So I said, if I can, anytime I'm dealing with really bad, just stupid stuff. I'm like, I've dealt with New York City teamsters ... next. [*Laughter.*] So that's part of it. I've had lots and lots of struggles, but, but the thing is because it's such a male, white male space but I had fantastic mentors. So I worked because I wanted to be a cinematographer, it's all apprenticeship. But I worked with two women and five different guys. What that means is that when they're working, you're working. So I worked all the time. Most people apprenticeship with just one person. So I was working all the time. I went from production assistant all the way to union camera assistant, and also independent film, you don't have to have a union card, director photography and camera operator in four and a half years. That's unheard of. So that type of stuff you don't do by yourself. So it's it's a community and it's filmmakers like Ada Gay Griffin and Michelle Parkerson, I'm gonna cry—

**HLTQ:** There's a thing called editing.

**CAG:** Yes

**LEC:** You were there for you cause they were part of your community. And you became part of their community.

**CAG:** Yeah. Ada Gay Griffin, Michelle Parkinson, A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde. Oh my God, they really showed how you do this well and it's and it's community and it's not just, they are the director, you're working for them

**CTM:** For them.

**CAG:** But you're working together. That in combination with experience working on Eyes on the Prize, all of that came together. So whatever struggles, I also had fantastic mentors. That really showed me how to do this, and how to do it well.

**CTM:** Makes all the difference though, doesn't it? Because the point is, , and it's the same thing about however difficult the work, it's still possible because of community, relationships, and the joy.

**CAG:** The joy.

**LEC:** And knowing those came before you, strengthens you.

**CTM:** Exactly, that you're not the first.

**CAG:** And the struggles that they had to go through, to do what they needed to do. Oh my gosh!

**CTM:** Yeah, absolutely.

**CAG:** So this is why I couldn't be a diplomat [*Laughter.*]

**CTM:** Yeah, either career or queer [*Laughter.*]

**CAG:** Yes. And when I film, I usually wear a baseball cap.

**CTM:** Right.

**CAG:** Because then I've got the camera right here and people are saying,

**CTM:** So people can't see.

**CAG:** They can't, and I don't want them to see the fact that what they're saying is impacting me.

**CTM:** Yeah. So you hide.

**CAG:** Yeah. Baseball cap, right there.

**CTM:** Well these days with the mask, you can hide even better. But anyway, that's a different thing. What about you, HQ?

**HLTQ:** Well, so it's interesting because we are two women of color and what we do at one level is so technical and so specialized. Frequently when we show up in certain spaces, people don't really know what to do with us because we are professional filmmakers but we're not coming with the Hollywood kind of, either credential or the resources. So people usually don't know what to do.

[00:41:02]

**CAG:** And we have really professional equipment, but we come in really soft and quiet.

**CTM:** We don't look it. And you don't act it and you don't hold yourself like they hold themselves.

**LEC:** You don't look it, [*Laughs.*]. What does it look like?

**HLTQ:** Exactly, exactly.

**LEC:** White male power with money.

**CAG:** Yes!

**HLTQ:** So, frequently we find ourselves in between the police and community members. I remember we were in the middle of a shoot in Puerto Rico and the riot police were raiding this one apartment complex, a housing project.

**CAG:** It's called Las Gladiolas, basically it's the, the Puerto Rican equivalent of the Cabrini-Green projects in Chicago, so it's this really poor community. They built up this monstrous public housing in the middle of one of the most wealthy sections and then just tried to destroy it, destroy it, destroy it.

**HLTQ:** So we we find ourselves in this space and the raid was occurring and we're very respectful of the community. And we were traveling with, we were there at the behest of a human rights attorney and we ask him, do you want us to stay? What would be most helpful? Do you want us to stay? Or do you want us to leave? He said, no, I want you to stay. I want you to turn on your equipment. And I wanna make sure that they see that you are here. I don't know what impact we had, but we knew that for some of the activists we were in proximity, physical proximity with, they felt safer because we were the buffer. So we find ourself in these spaces so often ...

**CAG:** Can I add to that really quickly? The reason why the police were there, this is during like the Five Kings celebration, which is a big, big deal in Puerto Rico. So people had fireworks and they're setting off the fireworks and the police come in, in full riot gear with the helicopters. "Oh, there's gunshots here", so they come in to try to do that. At one point, because the cops are just really trigger happy, we are ducking behind a car because we don't feel safe. And we're like, what should we do? That's when we were told, "no, you get out there and you keep filming"

**HLTQ:** And that's what we did

**CAG:** And I happened to have been wearing a red t-shirt that was written in Arabic and small print Stanford University. I don't usually wear university stuff, but I just, I was hot and that was all I had. I saw the cops like staring at my chest ... I'm like, "oh, oh, she's got a camera, and she from Stanford, oh shit..." So there, I could see the calculus.

**CTM:** Yeah, absolutely.

**CAG:** I could see the calculus happening.

**CTM:** It's how one uses whatever little privilege one has, and the context.

**CAG:** Yep. Exactly. I've got my camera pointed in this direction. And meanwhile, HQ's got this, the Boom microphone getting all around.

**HLTQ:** You don't carry that Boom unless you are a professional sound person. *[Laughs.]* So, I think for me, in terms of the challenge required the most important challenge for me, and we are constantly trying to negotiate this ... is that while we do the work that we do, there is the audience factor that plays in. And particularly, I mean, we made peace a long time ago. I didn't have to, but Crystal certainly did kinda with her background that who are we making the work for? I was always very clear, Crystal sometimes is ambivalent, but we don't need Hollywood approval. And that liberates us. So for us, that's not the issue, but the issue is we still want our work to be seen seen. So the challenge always is, "why are you telling these always so complicated stories? Can't you just make it simpler?" *[Laughs.]* People want to know why we spend so much time talking about housing and food for the documentary about LGBTQ people and the struggle for economic justice. And I asked them, well,

what do you think? That's ... like, what do you think economic justice is. Why do you spend so much time talking about health? Like, well, that's part of economic justice—

**CAG:** Or some people would say well, "but these people they're talking about this, that and other, but they're not specifically talking about the LGBTQ community." So that's why I had to put that little thing in the beginning. "Everyone in this film is LGBTQ plus or a fierce ally". So when they're talking about these issues, it's, from that perspective, you don't always have to say queer queer queer queer queer. It's, that person is queer, and this is their community.

**HLTQ:** The challenge is that we are constantly being asked to authenticate, that the people that we are making films about are worthy of everybody else's attention. Obviously we know, obviously the people who show up in our films know, and that's why they wanna do this, but it's the challenge of distributing the work where people constantly come back at us, demand that we make it simpler, that we package it so that it's ready for consumption. And the pushback that we have, we do and say, well, maybe we don't want to do that. So we'll just keep doing what we do.

[00:46:14]

**LEC:** Because in that industry, that's what they look for, for legitimation.

**HLTQ:** Yes.

**LEC:** They have certain standards and criteria that they expect you to conform to. And so if you don't, then you're a challenge to them.

**HLTQ:** So often we will say, well, okay, well that doesn't work out then, we'll just, won't do that. We're gonna keep doing what we do. So that means that, I mean, there was literally a time where we didn't take a vacation for 20 years.

**CAG:** 20 years.

**CTM:** Oh, yikes.

**CAG:** I mean, we have the, we have the privilege of having day jobs as faculty, I teach in film production. So every time a new camera comes out, it's about \$3,500 just for the body of the camera. I can't afford to keep buying those things. So I teach at a film production unit. They have the different equipment. I mean, we have a little bit of stuff on our side, but we mostly invested in sound equipment, and then lenses. So then I can put adapters on the, whatever different camera it's gonna be. But I don't fool out with my glass. My lenses are very particular. [*Laughter.*] So all of that stuff, it just, all of our excess time and energy and the resources that we have, which are limited ... but the two of us are seven-woman crew.

**CTM:** Yeah. I remember you saying this to me, years ago.

**CAG:** So we co-direct, we—

**HLTQ:** Co-produce.

**CAG:** Co-produce.

**HLTQ:** Co-edit.

**HLTQ:** Co-edit.

**CAG:** And the editing is we started off on VHS, analog, then Media 100, Final Cut Pro—

**HLTQ:** Yeah we tried about six different platforms

**CAG:** Avid and all these other things, Premiere Pro, whatever. So now we're cutting mostly on Avid, but just learning each one of, downloading those editing platforms. It's a lot of work. So, so where are we? So we have a co-director, co-producer, co-editor ...

**LEC:** Co-writer?

**HLTQ:** Well, we don't write.

**CAG:** We don't write exactly.

**HLTQ:** We develop.

**CAG:** Develop, yeah.

**HLTQ:** Archivist.

**CAG:** Archivist, production sound ...

**HLTQ:** Yeah, production sound

**CAG:** Postproduction sound design, camera operator, and cinematography. So the lighting, so actually it's a eight person crew and as we're getting older it's a bit exhausting—

**LEC:** Yeah, that's a challenge.

**CAG:** But we've found, there was a time when we were working on, on this current documentary, back before *Queer, Broke & Amazing!* we had some people that wanted to help us out. But there was something that happened when there were other people in the room. When it was just the two of us, people were so much more open and just giving of their stories. And this other person that was there to help us out was a wonderful, generous, beautiful person. But people were a little bit reticent with that person in the room and we recognized that and we said, "Hey, could you just go out and get us lunch? Because we're gonna be running late." And then it just, the gates opened, there's something about the two of us.

**LEC:** It's a trust thing

**CAG:** Yeah, I don't know what it is it just ...

**CTM:** Well, and you've developed it over decades, really.

**LEC:** The energy comes through, the energy comes through.

**CAG:** People trust us with their stories and we feel honored to be there.

**CTM:** And that comes through. I think, I mean, your humility, and the fact that you care about their stories, is what comes through.

**LEC:** That sensitivity, that helps people to develop trust quickly.

**HLTQ:** I think the challenge is just for us to just try to honor the spirit, because people share so generously—

**CAG:** They do

**HLTQ:** So our job is really just to make sure that we honor that spirit, and we don't always succeed. But I think the effort comes through. I mean, and we just really fortunate. I mean, that's the thing is people are so generous and gracious and a lot of time they also recognize that their stories are important. So they like, okay, so what do you need? I mean, seriously, none of our project would be without folks, other folks making it. So on the one hand. Yes, it's just the two of us, but on the other hand, it's not true.

**CAG:** Absolutely.

**HLTQ:** At every step of the way. And folks like you who bring us here, do all these things ... But that goes a long way in just building up morale, having a little extra resources, and all of the things that people at different levels including students. I mean, we couldn't do this without, by ourselves, technically

**CAG:** And the Wexner Center for the Arts

**HLTQ:** That's right.

**CAG:** Oh my gosh, without them, we would've never finished *Mountains*. But that whole aspect, in terms of, lost my train of thought, but I was just thinking about what you're talking about in terms of community of people. So when we ask someone to be a part of the documentary, we always tell them why we want to talk to them. "So and so recommended we contact you because you're doing this amazing work helping a communal kitchen in your trailer park area, and you're doing this great stuff in terms of alerting people where there's checkpoints". And so we do our research. It's not just sort of like "so, and so said you should talk to us about our documentary." It's not, these are the things, these are some of the stories that we hope you might be able to share with us. In other words, you are the expert. These are these wonderful stories that we hope to be able to amplify through our documentary.

**LEC:** "And we recognize you have something of value to share"

[00:51:51]

**CAG:** Yes, yes. "And if you're willing to share it, we would love to try to help make that happen"

**HLTQ:** One of the things we learned is that there's an—once trust is earned though, that means that there's an implicit expectation of being accountable. So that means that, It means that, okay, so they may share us a story, but five years from now, they may call you up and say, we need you to do this and you better show up.

**LEC:** That's right.

**CAG:** And there we are.

**HLTQ:** Yeah, there we are.

**CAG:** So during, in terms of this, this particular time, you were talking about, that when we were filming parts of the documentary it was in the middle of Trump being horrible with all this stuff at the border. And we had several people whose legal status was questionable, or you have a household full of people. Some people have documentation, others don't, etc. So we had to make a decision how we were gonna handle that, because there were some amazing stories about resistance and how people were just unafraid! But then the infiltrators happened. [cross-talk 00:52:55] Claudio, whose last name just ran out of my mind, but this is a man who's been in the United States forever. He's supposed to go in every once in a while and say, yes, here I am. And I don't have my papers yet, but I'm doing this and I've started my own business, blah, blah, blah. So he went in for one of those usual check moments, okay? And then they took him!

So what happens when you have internationally renowned filmmakers, Alex Rivera and Cristina Ibarra—who of course just recently got dual MacArthur's—but just that they had to have a whole legal campaign to try to help people, this man. And international protests and letters signed by all these movie stars and they still deported that man! And he's just now back. So we had to make a decision. Like, we don't wanna put anybody at risk. So we had to make a decision. We just, those questions, we just kept them out of there. And there was some person that we interviewed in the documentary, as we were editing it, I called them. I said, "I know that you mentioned this in the documentary, but given what's going on ... how do you feel about that?" And then they said, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said, would it be okay if we kept that information out? And she goes, "oh, yes, please!" I said, "you could have told me that". I just want, I literally asked you what you want us to do, what? We told people, as we were filling, if there's something you say, and you don't want it in there, then it's gone. And I, I said, and I need you to say it on camera, because what if I lose my notepad. So say it on camera, "no, don't include that part" and we honor that.

**LEC:** Well, given this time and this moment and looking over this trajectory that you've shared with us ... what do you see as some of the frameworks and strategies for continuing what you do in the future? Looking across borders and cross border solidarities, with different people's across the world ... cause you know whom you've worked with and what already, [inaudible 00:51:38] that can be viable and continue what you're doing.

**HLTQ:** I think it's very exciting at one level because film making is no longer as mystical, and certainly audio production with podcasts people can produce podcasts for nothing.

**CAG:** [*Gestures to cell phone*] And these shoot in 4K. [*Laughs.*]

**HLTQ:** Yeah, smartphones. The one that's not even an expensive smartphone can shoot very well. So at one level there is a democratization of a media that's going on and that's exciting. But on the other hand there's still only about half a dozen or a few more of companies that own 98% of all the media.

**LEC:** So the decolonization is still necessary.

**HLTQ:** That's right. That's right. And so, but I do think that because there are distribution platforms that were not available before and there's, there are micro films that we can do, micro stories, micro fictions ... and I agree with Arundhati Roy, when we are confronting empire, we have to tell our own story.

**CAG:** That's right.

**HLTQ:** I think Elizabeth Robinson is right. We can't just critique media. We have to do media and given this context, I don't feel that we need to respond always in a moment. I think right now the challenge is really, we feel this pressure cooker to make things happen really quick. But sometime when we do quick things, we are less thoughtful and fewer people can get involved. The challenge of working with the community and working with more than one person is that it does demand time and it does demand time negotiation. But I think that unless we draw the connection, like there is a connection between gender violence and the prison industrial complex, and there's a connection between the food sovereignty movement and neocolonialism. And if we don't pay attention—

[00:57:08]

**CAG:** And catastrophic climate change, right.

**HLTQ:** And planetary ... so we have to pay attention to these big issues and draw connection. I really think the only way we can tell those stories well is to move across and beyond borders. There's no question about it. But it's possible. It's possible, we can do this with Zoom, with whatever ...

**CTM:** Yeah, which is so interesting that that is a whole other level of communication that's now possible.

**HLTQ:** Yes. I mean, we now can—some of my graduate students are foreign students, and some of the people we met this morning are also foreign students—they can work with the community, even if they don't have the resources to travel back and forth.

**LEC:** That's right.

**HLTQ:** And so I think we are just trying to get people to be a little bit more creative about how we think about community, how we think about collaboration and how we put together a story that is faithful to the collaborative project. I mean, it's so exciting to see some of, and to hear some of the ideas that folks like really young people in the community are thinking about. What they wanna do in terms of pushing back against corporate media against Metaverse against Google.

**CAG:** Against gentrification in the neighborhood.

**HLTQ:** We also have to be really careful about the technology of surveillance, because the problem with media is that it can be, if you can stream it, it means somebody have access to it. Then somebody can use it later against particularly activists of movement. For policing and suppression. And so like when you shoot a protest, we have a responsibility to make sure that that footage is not going to be available to the police. So that's, that's part of what I think we need to do with this framework is that we need to be more we need to be more agile and vigilant and vigilant.

**CAG:** A lot of the digital cameras now have dual slots. So if you're filming a protest or something like that, you film in both slots. You have a pre-addressed package envelope With your name—and it's not going to your address, but to somebody who you trust you're filming. And then you just categorically at a certain point, you take one of the cards out, pop it in the mail.

**HLTQ:** You can also stream it to the cloud.

**CAG:** Yes. You could send it to the cloud, but also that's a federal crime to go in there and take that mail. So back in the day, when we were shooting on little mini tapes, we were at a protest and things were getting kinda tense. I took the mini tape out. I scribbled something, I send it off and boom into the mail and I just put it another tape. Cause if they can, they can take it off.

**HLTQ:** Cause we also living in a moment of total fascism. Intense authoritarianism. I mean, we're censoring math book for God's sake, who thought that we do that in 21st century. And so, so we have to be, and we have a responsibility as media producers—

**CAG:** To the communities, that trust our stories, we don't put them in harm's way.

**HLTQ:** To communities so that we don't put them at risk. Because the police could in fact have access. And they also have software and algorithm for real time face recognition. That means that we can't just post anything. We like, "Oh, that's a cute picture. Let's post it on our Instagram channel." You can't do that because you might put some people at risk.

**CAG:** So we also film the police.

**LEC:** Right, I was just gonna say that. Absolutely.

**CAG:** So after a while we recognize, oh, that person's undercover. That person's undercover. So we make sure we film them as well. And so there was this point when in Phoenix, they would—

**HLTQ:** That was at Occupy, right?

**CAG:** Yeah they would wait until a lot of the students that were involved with the Movement for Black Lives, they would wait until people were going to their cars and then they would pop them.

**HLTQ:** Yeah, that happened.

**CAG:** So we made sure we're like, okay, everybody, when we talked about it in the security meetings, "do not go by yourself back to your car. And sometimes don't go directly back home either. Drive around town until they get bored with you and then you go home." But so, and then we said all of that and still one of the activists they're like, "oh my car's just right there. I'm good." Got popped. You have to be very careful.

**LEC:** At the same time we think about these measures of resistance, some become automatic because of experience. That teaches you how to work against the capitalists, just call them what they are, pigs. And so you recognize that these are skills that you're developing at the same time. And they recognize that the cross-border solidarities that we are talking about are really crucial, cause they're right here. The same people that they're afraid of, the same immigrants over there, they're here. And like the guy was saying in the film, by 2030 the majority won't be them. Yes so the fear is what's driving them to be more and more authoritarian. And at the same—

**CAG:** Dying gasps of empire [*Laughter.*]

**LEC:** Exactly, the last breaths.

**CTM:** Let's hope.

**LEC:** And then while they're doing that, automatically all the abuse from all the years have made the same people really adept to their tricks.

[01:02:30]

**CTM:** So I think we are more or less at an end ... so we are going to ask you the same question that you suggest this morning that people ask. So is there something that we haven't asked you or that you would like to add?

**CAG:** I will say that I teach film production, and I've been doing it for quite some time and there are times when I wonder why I do it. Cause I just feel like, oh, there's still many more important things to do. I should be doing this. I should be doing that. I'm not a political theorist .. I should be doing something more than the arts cause sometimes the students are just making derivative work. It's like, okay, when zombies were in, well let's just do zombie things and we're gonna do, whatever. And so sometimes I just get very discouraged and then I realize, no, they're, they're learning their own voice. And they blow me away. So that's the part that I love. I'm teaching film production and I tell my students, "you teach someone else how to do what you've learned." Whoever it is, sibling, parent, friend, whatever. Particularly in these two years of COVID lockdowns people realize how important the arts are, and those stories. And there's been a resurgence of interest in documentary films. People who never were interested before, like, oh my God, real people, real stories that so, so much better than all this other stuff. Yeah. So I'm very hopeful, very hopeful. I love when my students just, that sort of thing with the sound board, right. Instead of having a sound board, they're mastering and feeling confident, their own voice and what they're trying to, , communicate about themselves, their culture and their language is so important and they realize that, I love it!

**CTM:** Q?

**HLTQ:** Well, so I don't think people know this. I read computer manuals to go to sleep [*Laughter.*]. I read manuals, I read manuals.

**CTM:** Good God. Okay.

**HLTQ:** Yeah. I read manuals. And here's the thing. One of the things that I really appreciate as a political theorist is doing this practical and technical work because sometimes, well actually not sometimes, but almost always abstraction is so violent. They erase communities and people, and the technical, we seem to somehow debase it and think that it's not as important as theoretical insight. And I don't believe that technology is going to save us. I think we are going to save ourselves, and sometimes we'll use technology to help us, not always, but I think through something that is boring and dead as, as metal and plastic and cable, but through it, we bring voices and images and poetry alive. To me, the things that get me through is people's laughter, people's songs, and dances, and the way in which they cook and share food together. And then I think about how they're just at one point metals and cables and plastic and it makes reading computer manuals really, really an exciting experience

**CTM:** Wow.

**CAG:** Because they're always gonna break down and stuff's gonna happen and we don't have the budget and we can't call IT. Because they'll just mess it up more

**Feminist Freedom Warriors**

*Linda E. Carty and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in conversation with H.L.T. Quan and C.A. Griffith*

anyway. So, she figures that stuff out. So it's always back into QUAD and how do we help amplify voices, which is what we love doing.

**LEC:** It's incredible.

**CTM:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**CAG:** Thank you guys, I'm getting mad. You made me cry! *[Laughter.]*

[01:06:54 end video]

*Feminist Freedom Warriors (FFW) is a first of its kind digital video archive and documentary project. Born out of an engagement in anti-capitalist, anti-racist struggles as women of color from the Global South, this project is about cross-generational histories of feminist activism addressing economic, anti-racist, social justice and anti-capitalist issues across national borders.*