

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Peggy Cooper Cafritz

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cafritz, Peggy Cooper, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz,
Dates:	June 26, 2001 and June 26, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2001 and 2012
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:11:29).
Abstract:	Community leader Peggy Cooper Cafritz (1947 - 2018) was president of the Washington, D.C. Board of Education, and an award-winning documentary producer. While attending law school in Washington, D.C., Cafritz founded the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, which was initially a summer arts workshop for minority children, but was later accepted into the public school system in 1974. Cafritz was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 26, 2001 and June 26, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_011
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Peggy Cooper Cafritz was born on April 7, 1947, in Mobile, Alabama, to the well known and respected Cooper family. Her upbringing was decidedly Catholic. Her father, a well respected community leader, and her mother, an astounding beauty, worked to provide the correct upbringing for Peggy and her siblings. After graduating from a private Catholic high school, Cafritz attended George Washington University, where in 1968, she earned an undergraduate degree in political science and in 1971, a law degree.

Cafritz became involved with education and the arts in the Washington, D.C., area when, as a law student, she founded the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Initially a summer arts workshop for minority children, the program was accepted into the D.C. public school system in 1974. For the rest of her life, she continued to serve the school and its non-profit fund-raising affiliate, the Ellington Fund, in numerous positions. Cafritz served on the Executive Committee of the D.C. Board of Higher Education from 1972-1976, which implemented the merger of Federal City College and Washington Teachers College into the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). From 1979-1987, she chaired the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and in 1993 President Bill Clinton appointed her to serve as Vice Chair of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

Cafritz was the youngest person ever selected to serve as a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. She worked as a programming executive for Post-Newsweek and a documentary producer for WTOP-TV from 1974-77, earning both Emmy and Peabody Awards for her documentary work. Her work as an arts reviewer on WETA-TV's "Around Town" also earned her an Emmy Award. Cafritz worked to develop a dramatic literary series for the Community for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Corporation from 1977-79 as Executive Director of the Minority Cultural Project, a joint venture between Harry Belafonte and WQED/Pittsburgh.

In November 2000, on a platform stressing the importance of academics, athletics, and the arts, Cafritz ran for President of the D.C. Board of Education and won. Her cousin was former Secretary of Labor, Alexis M. Herman.

Cafritz passed away on February 18, 2018 at age 70.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on June 26, 2001 and June 26, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Community leader Peggy Cooper Cafritz (1947 - 2018) was president of the Washington, D.C. Board of Education, and an award-winning documentary producer. While attending law school in Washington, D.C., Cafritz founded the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, which was initially a summer arts workshop for minority children, but was later accepted into the public school system in 1974.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Cafritz, Peggy Cooper, 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Cafritz, Peggy Cooper, 1947---Interviews

African American women educators--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

African American school administrators--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Mobile (Ala.)--Social life and customs--20th century.

Suicide--Religious aspects.

Segregation--Alabama--Mobile.

George Washington University.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

Art--Study and teaching (Elementary)--United States.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Art Collector

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, June 26, 2001 and June 26, 2012. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Section A2001_011_001_001, TRT: 0:28:03 ?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz describes her family background and her life growing up in Mobile, Alabama, depicting a deeply Catholic household that was rocked by her father's suicide while she was in college. Cooper Cafritz talks about the race discrimination she faced during her schooling, and describes the oppressive segregation in Mobile.

African American women educators--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

African American school administrators--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Mobile (Ala.)--Social life and customs--20th century.

Suicide--Religious aspects.

Segregation--Alabama--Mobile.

George Washington University.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

Art--Study and teaching (Elementary)--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Section A2001_011_001_002, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz describes her childhood personality, explaining how her rebellious spirit laid the groundwork for her activism during high school and college. Cafritz details her time at a private boarding school and at George Washington University, sharing many examples of her early activism, including her efforts to desegregate restaurants and public facilities with Alexis Sherman. Cafritz also discusses her decision to attend law school.

Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Section A2001_011_001_003, TRT:

0:13:24 ?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz describes her role in opening an arts school for inner city youth in Washington D.C., the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Cafritz also describes a series of photos depicting her life, family, and career.

Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Section A2001_011_002_004, TRT: 4:30:04 ?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz attended St. Mary's Academy of Notre Dame, a boarding high school in South Bend, Indiana. During the early 1960s, Cafritz' sister, Dominique Cooper, and their cousin, Alexis Herman, protested the segregated seating at Ernest F. Ladd Memorial Stadium in Mobile, Alabama. Then, in the summer of 1964, Cafritz and Herman attempted to desegregate various eating establishments there, including the local drive-in. She also experienced segregation in the Catholic churches in the area. Aspiring to a political career, Cafritz went on to attend George Washington University in Washington, D.C. There, she and other African American students like Gregory Millard and Cyrus "Russ" Jollivette organized a demonstration against the university's segregated Greek life. As a result, the sororities and fraternities were unable to operate until they admitted students of color. At this point in the interview, Cafritz talks about her parenting style; and the evolution of the terms used to describe black America.

Video Oral History Interview with Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Section A2001_011_002_005, TRT: 5:30:47 ?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz attended George Washington University (GWU) in Washington, D.C. from 1964 to 1968. During this period, she worked with artists Sam Gilliam and Lou Stovall to develop a black cultural arts festival; and advocated for the incorporation of black studies into the history curriculum. Cafritz was also active in GWU's Black People's Union, which collaborated often with the Black Student Union at Howard University. In 1967, Cafritz and her classmate Gregory Millard created Workshops for Careers in the Arts, a summer training program for underprivileged youth. With the support of GWU president Lloyd Hartman Elliott, Cafritz secured the program's initial funding from the Hattie M. Strong Foundation; and gradually expanded her donor network. The program participants performed street theater throughout Washington, D.C., such as at the intersection of 14th and U streets; and elsewhere in the United States and Canada.