

NEH Grant - Tom Izu Susan Hayase May 28 2024

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SPEAKERS

Karen Wang, Susan Hayase, Tom Izu, Mae Lee

Mae Lee 00:04

Okay, thank you. So today is Tuesday, May 28, 2024 My name is Mae Lee, and this is Karen Wang, and we are interviewing Tom Izu and Susan Hayase. We are at the De Anza campus, and in the room we've got some tech folks. We've got Lori Clinchard, faculty member and Director of the California History Center. We have Jiwon Jung, who's a student in Asian American Studies and also a Film and TV major. And we've got Ed Breault with the Online Education Office. And this oral history interview we're about to do is being organized and hosted by the Asian American and Asian Studies Department at De Anza, as well as an NEH grant that De Anza has received through the California History Center. So with that, then we'll start the interview. Thank you. So thanks for being here. So we can start off by, as we talked about, maybe sharing a little bit a brief description of kind of three major efforts that you're involved in. We know that you, in the recent years, have been working with the Japanese American Museum in San Jose. You've also co-founded San Jose Nikkei Resisters in the last few years. And you are also you, you, you, I guess, completed, but still work with the Hidden Histories San Jose project, which you both co-directed. Maybe you can just talk a little

Tom Izu 01:29

bit about those. So I'll start with one of the projects. I'm just calling it special projects that Susan and I have done with the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. And they focus on changing the narrative of Japanese American history. That's how I put it. And so this describes how both of us, but part of it is my own journey having worked here at De Anza College and then wanting to go back into the community and work with the Japanese American community more deeply. So that's the first one. Is some of these projects that I was involved in along with Susan. And then the second one is the formation of San Jose Nikkei Resisters, which is a grassroots activist organization based in San Jose Japantown that we're both co-founders of. And the final project we're going to talk about is the Hidden

Histories of San Jose Japantown, an augmented reality art project, and we're going to talk about how that came about.

Mae Lee 02:25

Can you maybe talk about how each of these came about, or what prompted them for you in terms of your efforts?

Tom Izu 02:32

Well, let's see, do you want to talk about the context of what was going on in our life? Because that's kind of the starting point of how these three

Susan Hayase 02:39

Sure. So Tom and I both personally went through a lot of personal struggle in terms of identity and fitting in and dealing with racism and alienation. This kind of spanned our college careers and our early young adulthood. But I think the way we're looking at these three projects that the story kind of starts in the 1990s so the So the story kind of starts in the 1990s and the redress movement that we were involved heavily in in San Jose was winding down, and we suffered huge personal losses. Tom's father died in '89, his mother died in '90, and my father died in '91, which was really devastating for, you know, how we felt in terms of, you know, being able to do things, and we also wanted to start a family, and so our first son was born in '92, and we also had, you know, been part of the New Left, and a lot of that work was winding down also, so we were trying to figure out how, how could we relate to the political movements? You know, our circumstances were much more limited because we were starting a family, and we're still working part time, I mean, full time. And so we kind of talked about, you know, what do we think we could do as individuals? And, you know, we had been part of the Japanese American movement for a long time, building, and the redress movement, and organizing in San Jose Japantown. And so we we thought that well, at the very least, what we're going to do as our political goal was to try to do what we could to keep the Japanese American community from drifting to the right. Because that, you know, we felt that there was incredible momentum to the right, you know, with Reagan and all the subsequent anti-immigrant politics and anyway, so there was also a lot of anti-Arab American. Then, you know, there were a lot of moves to the right. So we felt like, especially with the model minority, which is kind of a constant struggle and a constant pressure, we felt that we had to do something. And, you know, we couldn't be a real active part of organizing, but we were going to do something. And so kind of one of the things that we did was, you know, partly because of the redress movement, people asked us to speak at different things. And so we used that opportunity to put forward a particular political view of the redress movement and Japanese Americans, and then also the DOR that you were doing at De Anza, right? Was part of that.

Tom Izu 05:47

Right? So should we just get into each of the projects? So I've been here at De Anza College for almost 25 years, and part of my time here, I was asked to do Day of Remembrance programs about the, you know, the signing of Executive Order 9066, in the beginning of the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans. Since I had done that in the community, people on the campus asked me to do it. And so, let's see, about, I think, after 12 years or so having been on doing these Day of Remembrances on the campus, I was trying to wonder, what's the value of continuing to talk about the Day of Remembrance

and also the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans? Was it really that relevant anymore? So I was really trying to find a way to talk more about it that could be useful for students. And I was struggling with that. About the same time, in about 2014, the History Center started the Audrey Edna Butcher Civil Liberties Education Initiative, which was inspired by learning lessons from the Japanese American experience. And this is because Audrey Edna Butcher, her daughter, Margaret, gave the History Center a large gift for us to keep going, because we were not doing so well financially, and we were basically being cut off by the campus at that time. So putting all these things together along very important, I think, is also my efforts to try to figure out why local history, why I had learned so much from working in the California History Center, why local history was also very, a very powerful tool for everybody to learn from, not only students, but everybody in the community. So I was starting to develop a view that I want to figure out how to show that, in fact is true, that there is value in local history. So I was trying to combine all these things together. And they're kind of - they may not seem immediately connected, but in my mind, at least, I thought I was making these connections. So I started recontacting groups that I already was in a network, and through the California History Center because we worked with other local history museum, and one of them was the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. And I hadn't been involved in that since, going way back, I was on the board of the Japanese American Resource Center of San Jose, which was the predecessor to the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, back in the probably late 1980s so I kind of already had a connection, but I didn't know a lot of the people in the museum, but I started talking to them about some of these ideas, and it was kind of an experiment, because I had to figure out where they were at and how I could relate to them, because I hadn't really been talking to some of these people for years, but I noticed a couple of things that were very important to me. And one was that there seemed to be a really separate view of Japanese American history as being something that's just in isolation to everything else, that we just got to talk about Japanese American history. We got to talk about our accomplishments, and why Japanese American history is valuable and why Japanese Americans are great, and it kind of was following kind of a model minority, kind of, approach, which I understand that's kind of what everybody was doing. So I didn't really blame them, but I realized this is not a good way to go, if you're going to try to show why understanding what happened to Japanese Americans in World War Two is so important and why you should struggle to learn more about it on a much deeper level. So also, about the same time, there was a lot of attacks against immigrant groups going on, and people in the museum realized that there were K-12 teachers coming to them saying, "We want to know more about immigration and Japanese American history." The museum was very accessible to them, because people had some idea that something bad happened to Japanese Americans in World War Two, and they feel more comfortable because I think it has something to do with race relations with Japanese Americans, because maybe they think we're more assimilated. But they were getting this interest. So I was telling people in the museum - I wasn't on their board - but saying maybe you guys should broaden out how you look at immigration. That it's not just about Japanese immigrations, let's talk about picture brides and some things that are kind of kind of standard things that people talk about, but look at how we fit into all the other immigration patterns of all the other groups, especially people of color, but especially start with other Asian groups. And so I think they started thinking more about this. Rather than just saying what happened to picture brides and all that, they started thinking like, "Yeah, we should talk more about other groups and how we fit into that." So there was starting more discussion. So I started thinking, this is the role I should try to play, is to help shift the narrative of the museum, and the way I'm describing it is very one-sided, because it wasn't like I single-handedly did this. There's a lot of other things going on at the same time,

but at least for myself, I saw this being a valuable thing that I could now do with my knowledge and my experience. So we started to do some projects, Susan and I together in the museum, because at this time, they did not have staff, and they were pretty open to any kind of help they could get. And they were open-minded about, "We need to do more things to bring in younger people, other kinds of people." So there, they were willing to do this. So for example, there was interest, I was very interested in the history of Filipinos in Japantown, which most people knew nothing about, and I didn't know that much about, and so I met Robert Ragsac, who is they call a "manong." He grew up in Japantown. And there was another board member named Ron Muriera, a brand new board member of the museum, who also knew a lot about Filipino American history. And so I said, "Let's do an event for the Japanese American museum on Filipinos in Japantown." And that was, God, that was about 2014 so this is kind of the beginning of these kinds of programs. So do you want to mention more about the Don't Exclude Us?

Susan Hayase 11:50

Oh, yeah. So, so another motivation was not just keeping Japanese Americans from moving to the right, but that, in and of itself, is part of our feeling that Japanese Americans had a political role to play in this country, along with other people of color. So that means you have to entice Japanese Americans to get out of that rut of just looking at themselves, right? Just looking at ourselves. And so there's always been this interesting thing among Japanese Americans, where people were interested in like the Black civil rights movement, but nobody ever talked about Mexican Americans. And here we are in San Jose, right? There's this large Latino population, and we had this sense that it had something to do with the United Farm Workers, because there were Japanese American family farms, right? And so it turns out that that that was kind of a point of tension among some community leaders, not everybody right, because a lot of young Japanese Americans participated in the grape boycott, and, you know, were supportive of the labor movement. But among some community leaders had been either they themselves farmers, or their family members had been farmers. And we found out from talking to Steve Fujita, who's on the advisory board of the Japanese American Museum, that he had done a an investigation long time ago where he interviewed a lot of UFW people and and I think that the upshot was, I'm not sure if he actually wrote anything about this, but he conveyed to us that there was some feeling that a lot of the agribusiness corporations had kind of shoved Japanese American farmers to the front and said, "You take the heat." And so they, you know, so that's not, that's not to say that there weren't Japanese farmers who were racist or, you know, anti-labor or whatever, but I think that the circumstances really put them in the crosshairs, right? And then, then all these other political things happen, like the model minority thing starts happening, right? And so anyway, so we actually know people whose families were, you know, wiped out in that period of time as farmers, right? And so we, we decided that we were kind of interested in, how could we broach that subject, and, you know, break that wall down, because we felt like it was something that was definitely breakable. And Tom invited, Francisco Balderrama, to a Day of Remembrance at De Anza. And I think that the De Anza Day of Remembrance was very open, right? Because, you know, you were kind of running it, and so you could take a lot of initiative as to the content. And so you brought Professor Balderrama here as kind of an interesting counterpoint to the Japanese American experience, right? And not only a counterpoint, not a counterpoint, I guess, parallel, you know, really, and, and it's actually interesting, if you look at photos of Japanese Americans being loaded onto trains to go to camp and Mexican Americans being loaded on

camps to being deported. You know, you actually can't tell the difference. It's only like a decade apart, and people's clothes look the same, and they kind of look the same.

Tom Izu 15:34

Yeah. So Francisco Balderrama wrote a lot about the so-called repatriation in the 1930s where at least a million, maybe even more closer to 2 million, Mexican Americans were deported during the Depression because they were being they were scapegoated as causing all these serious problems. So yes, kind of the parallel we were drawing.

Susan Hayase 15:58

Yeah, and I think. So the theme of our program that we pitched to JAMsj was, "I Never Saw My Father Again," which was a story that was familiar to Japanese Americans and also to Mexican Americans, and it was something that we were kind of afraid that they'd think was too political. But for some reason they let us do it, and we could go into that, but, you know, but we did it, and it was, it was very successful. We brought somebody from the Muslim American community also, and some people from the Chinese American community to talk, you know, because there's a lot of parallels between our experiences of being banned, you know, and family separation.

Tom Izu 16:50

It was a really emotional thing, in that everybody can relate to it. And then some of the Mexican Americans who came, they were very emotional, because they had their own stories. And I don't know if any of them had talked that much about it, but it became a place where they could say something about somebody they knew, or their grandparents. You know, what happened to them. And that, alternatively, had a big impact on some of the Japanese Americans there, because they could understand how close their feelings are to this other person they didn't know before, who's a Mexican American, Latino identifying person, right?

Susan Hayase 17:24

Right. So, I think that it kind of opened the floodgates. It's like, this is no longer a taboo subject, because I think a lot of people, I think a lot of Japanese Americans, are naturally very progressive because of the camp experience, right? And naturally feel this solidarity. But sometimes there are political circumstances that, you know, people are not real sure how to talk about it, right, because of, like, people knew that there were community leaders who had problems, you know, talking about this issue. So even the person that had a problem with this didn't have a problem attending our program, and I think it was meaningful to him, also that, you know, it was something that was now opened up for discussion, you know.

Tom Izu 18:15

So we did some programs like that. Another program we did was with Chinese Americans, focusing on everything from the Exclusion Act to well,

Susan Hayase 18:28

Well so, we asked Bill Ong Hing, who's a lawyer and immigration, you know, activist, and we asked him, "Can you give us a TED talk on immigration," you know, that was like a real challenge. Do

American immigration in 15-20, minutes, right? But it was, it was great. It was because he put it in its political context. And, you know, it was, it was really helpful. We at that program, we also had somebody from CAIR, you know, a Muslim American, talking about the, the immigration issues for Muslims, and the surveillance issues and stuff like that. And so it was very successful at kind of really opening up the museum to be able to deal with political issues that weren't just Japanese Americans.

Tom Izu 19:18

Right, and so we got a small amount of money from grants, and we also did some interviews with people, Latinos, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Muslims, along the same theme. Then I think the last thing about this part I would mention is we started realizing that people of our own generation, Sansei-identifying people, like mainly people who came of age in the 1960s, 1970s, we felt that people should really start interviewing them, because their stories are not being documented. You know, people were focusing on the Nisei. And of course, if there are any Issei left, the Issei, first-generation, Japanese Americans. But we realized that, we started realizing that our generation was important, because it helped create some of these institutions that a lot of people take for granted: legal advocacy groups like the Asian Law Alliance, the senior center, where I used to work at, the Yu Ai Kai Senior Center in Japantown. A lot of things, they didn't understand where they came from. They came through efforts of people, a lot of times, it was young people, who were activists, who are really pushing forward that we need to do something in our community. So we started really thinking that we should really start looking into this. This should be a project that a museum like the Japanese American Museum did. So we started doing interviews, and that included cultural groups related to the origins of San Jose Taiko, right? And music groups, because there were a number of them coming out of San Jose that did, like folk rock, you know, music of that time, of the 1970s

Susan Hayase 20:54

Yokohama, California, right?

Tom Izu 20:55

So we, so we did more interviews, and we put them temporarily. They're just sitting in a kind of digital archive right now, because we just wanted to collect as much as we could. So that was all part of us trying to shift, I think, the narrative about Japanese Americans and connecting it to a particular local history, showing that locally, we have all these things to talk about, right? And so I think, I think that's about it for that.

Susan Hayase 21:19

And to try to get people to look at it more politically. You know, that, see, I think people look at history as heritage or a celebratory kind of thing, right? But we're trying to get people to look at it politically, and that it has, it has an impact on what you do now and what you want to happen in the future, you know? So we try to move things in that direction.

Tom Izu 21:43

So maybe you can go into the formation of San Jose Nikkei Resisters.

Susan Hayase 21:48

Oh okay. So I think in, you know, 2015, 2016 I think the temperature was rising in terms of anti-immigrant hate, anti-Muslim hate. I mean, it was, things were getting really bad. You know, in 2016, we were at JAs at large. At that point we were, we had joined the ACLU chapter, but we didn't have an organization really, you know. But in, I think it was 2016 along with the three JACL chapters and Asian Law Alliance and the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee, we had a community program to address the issue of hate. And, you know, there was just all this anti-immigrant stuff happening. And so it was pretty well-attended, because I think people, you know, people wanted something to happen, right? And then 2016 and the election of Trump, and I think a lot of people felt like, wow, this is kind of, not only a replay of 2001 but kind of an escalation, you know? So in terms of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab hate, and that turned out to be true, he immediately banned Muslims entering the country. And so we felt that Japanese Americans had to respond, you know, that that it wasn't enough to, you know. I think a lot of people think that their politics is just, "I have this opinion in my head, and that's my politics," you know. But I think what we're trying to do is, you know, you have to do something, you know, and you have to do something collectively with other people. So we did. We kind of, we had something called the Sansei Unfocus Group. We called up everybody we knew that had been in the redress movement with us, and we talked about, and everybody's kind of nearing retirement at this age or already retired, and we're saying, "What are you going to do with the rest of your life?" You know, there's all the stuff that needs to be done and that could be done and that, you know, here we are. We're still fit in the mind and body. We should do something right and see what else was I going to say? Oh, and we started this project called the Unity Pledge Project, and we kind of did this, as I mentioned, we didn't really have a group, so we kind of did this through the ACLU and through the JACL and some of the other organizations. We created this - actually, our son helped us create this tag that looked like the tags that Japanese Americans wore in camp or to go to camp, right? It had a number, and we put a pledge on it. We put a graphic that had barbed wire on it. We had a pledge that said, "I pledge to oppose Trump's policies on immigration and the Muslim ban." And we had a space for a name and a space for their city. And it turns out these were incredibly moving and motivating to people, like we took them to immigration marches and to the Women's March and to the Day of Remembrance. And everybody wanted to sign it.

Tom Izu 25:23

They just wanted to do something. So they wanted to sign it. So they would just mob the table there, "I got to sign it. I want to sign it." Then they got to hang it up on this big cylinder-like structure so they can see how many people have done.

Susan Hayase 25:34

Yeah. So I think this was, like a way to demonstrate to people that, you know, there was, there was broad opposition to Trump's policies, you know, and that people wanted to do something.

Tom Izu 25:48

And Japanese Americans were playing a role.

Susan Hayase 25:51

Yeah, we're playing kind of a leadership role in kind of reaching out. And so anyway, there was this, we kind of were thinking, you know, what should we do? You know, we don't have an organization. Should

we form an organization? Should we go to NOC and see if NOC wants to do that? But we decided that, out of respect for NOC's mission that they're already doing, you know, that

Tom Izu 26:14

we should, yeah, which is mainly they were doing the Day of Remembrance every year. And we hadn't been involved in NOC for many years. It was a different organization, right?

Susan Hayase 26:21

Yeah. So we figured that we should do something. And so we kind of, so the JACL was having these public meetings which were not just Japanese American. They were calling all these people and just kind of having, kind of as an experiment, just saying, What do you think we should do to respond to Trump, right? And, but these were all individuals and whatever, and, and so at some point, Sue Yuen said, Let's all divide up into groups. And so I just thought, Oh, ding, ding, ding. I raised my hand, said, "Anybody who wants to help form San Jose Nikkei Resisters come out to the patio." So, you know, about 12-15, people came out to the patio. And so that was the first and then we started having meetings, right? But it was. And so our mission was to unite and mobilize the Japanese American community against Trump's racist immigration policies. And, you know, and the idea was, Japanese Americans did not go to these rallies. Did not show up, right? Japanese Americans have very progressive policies, but did not show up to these things. We felt like, Japanese Americans and Asian Americans need to show up, right? There are Black people and Latinos and White people at these big rallies, right? But no Asians, right? And so we felt like we need to do that. So our our thing was to get people to and there were a lot of rallies, right? So let's have a sign-making thing. Let's go to this rally. There was also another thing that we had to do, which was, you know, identity is a big thing, and there's so much assimilation it's just in the air. It's like pressuring us constantly to assimilate. And for Japanese Americans and for young Asian Americans, it's constant, right? So a lot of the people who were attracted to us kind of didn't understand the meaningfulness of having a Japanese American community organization come out and make a stand. They kind of, I think their concept was, well, oh, I guess we're Japanese American, but we should get everybody else to join us, you know. So it's not like we didn't want anybody else to join us, right? But we wanted this to be a Japanese American thing, that we were organizing as Japanese Americans, that we were organizing our community, our Japanese American community, as Japanese Americans, and we were going to make a statement and show up, right? So, this was, like an interesting thing we I remember I was kind of laughing. We showed this 30 minute film called Pilgrimage by Tadashi Nakamura, which is a really great, incredible, beautiful film about the first Manzanar Pilgrimage, and then how the Manzanar Pilgrimage became a political movement, right? And anyway, to kind of really try to imbue people with, you know, this sense of history that, you know we come from somewhere, and it's meaningful if we say something, and it's meaningful if we as a group, fight against the assimilation and the dispersal and the displacement of us, and get together and make a statement together, and so that was what we were doing. And the our core some core people from the redress movement who are our age. That was the core people who have, you know, their whole lives, have been doing this right. Yeah, and then we started drawing other people. We drew other Sansei who hadn't been involved. We also drew some older people, including somebody who was in camp when she was like six or seven, and somebody who was born in camp. And then we drew some younger people, right?

Tom Izu 29:28

Some of them were, they were a different age range, but some of them were right out of college, right, right? And so that was an interesting experience, because they identified as Japanese American, but they were trying to understand more of their Japanese American identity overall, and how, especially how it relates to politics, right? Because they had been learning things in the college about race and, you know, class and stuff like that. But I think they were not clear about if "I want to do something politically, can I do it as a Japanese American?" Because they were kind of curious about their identity, because they had some connection or feeling that they wanted to be part of this community. So that was some a big learning experience, right?

Susan Hayase 30:59

And the model minority works against that, right? The model minority says that you're a Japanese American. Oh, you're part of Imperial Japan, and you're part of capitalist Japan, you know what? I mean, that kind of thing. And so you don't, you don't belong here with the rest of us people of color. I think that's a message that a lot of Japanese American young people got in college, actually. And so we were saying that that's not that's not true, you know? And then the pandemic hit, right? So the year 2020, that's when George Floyd was murdered, also, and we had a program on Black Lives Matter, and Nikkei for Black Lives. And that's where, actually, we attracted a lot of young people to our organization. Also, you know, when we went to protest with our sign, you know, we looked around and we ran out and found all the people who look like they're Japanese American, and we picked up a couple of people that way.

Tom Izu 32:10

Yeah, I was just going to say that some of these protests against the Muslim ban, as well as against family separation, if you had a sign that said something about Japanese Americans and why we're opposing it media people would immediately come up to you and take pictures and want you to say something, because they can identify with this Japanese American story, because they had some grasp of what happened to Japanese Americans. So they wanted to know, you know, basically, "What are you doing here," right?

Susan Hayase 32:34

So if you had a sign that says, "We Demand Justice," nobody cares, right? But you said "Japanese Americans Demand Justice," you know that is meaningful because of the model minority.

Tom Izu 32:44

Right. So, so that's why we it became clear to us, this is a good strategy for us to identify as Japanese Americans and do this kind of organizing work, because it has some impact, at least at this time period, it does. So we should really do more of it, right?

Susan Hayase 33:03

Yeah, and we found out that, so one of the things we did was, we, this was 2019, a lot of things happened in 2019, we went to the Board of Supervisors. We tried to mobilize to the Board of Supervisors. So we couldn't bring that many people. We had six people testify, make public comment. There were, there were seven Asians, and the other Asian was against sanctuary. And but we, you

know, made that point that basically the issue that was up before the supervisors, was whether to allow people to have individual due process, or whether they should be treated as a group of undifferentiated, you know, bad people, right? And and so I think that was a real contribution, right?

Tom Izu 34:02

Because it's so clearly linked to the experience of Japanese Americans. It doesn't matter who you are, what kind of person you are, you're Japanese, so therefore you're the enemy. So this is like talking about, when people are talking about undocumented, illegal people, you know, en masse, you could have just identify said, "Well, that looks like somebody who could be is probably illegal, so we could do anything we want to them." The other thing was, of course, if they look Muslim, whatever that means, then they could be a terrorist. I mean, that was kind of the thing that this whole sanctuary city thing was opposed to, right? So it fit really well, in our opinion, the experience of Japanese Americans, and I think it did strike a chord in Japanese Americans, you know, right.

Susan Hayase 34:44

Yeah, so a lot of a lot of the things that we did were part of this larger thing coming out of building the Japanese American people as a political force and keeping Japanese Americans from moving to the right. It means resisting the model minority at every turn, and to do what's right, you know, to do what is naturally politically right, if we want society to change and if we want to build a multiracial democracy, then Japanese Americans, you can't let the model minority strategy, make different kinds of people of color. You know, "These ones are better than those kind," you know, like that kind of thing. So that's, that's what the upshot of the model minority strategy is. And to try to convince people, convince everybody, that Black people are naturally in opposition to Asians, right? And you try to convince Asians a certain way, and you try to convince Black people a certain way, and then you try to convince White people of this truth, right, that there's no possibility of solidarity innately, right? And so another thing that we did was, and all of this, it doesn't just come out of our heads, it's paying attention to what's going on, right? So, like in 2019, I believe was 2019, there were hearings on HR 40. HR 40 is the reparations for slavery bill. And there were actual, it was incredible. They actually allowed hearings, because, you know, the Democrats were in the majority in the House, and they had hearings, and Ta-Nehisi Coates testified, but he also came out with this incredible article in The Atlantic called "The Case for Reparations." It was this, you know, great milestone, right? And so there were people starting to write about it. Okay? So I felt like at any moment, they're going to stick a microphone right in front of a Japanese American and get them to say something terrible, right? And so I thought we we have to be ready. So we started discussing it amongst ourselves. Then we started having community meetings with people like in the JACLs, like, let's talk about our own reparations movement, to start to remind ourselves, what does reparations mean, and how meaningful that was to us, right? And this was actually a big task, because a lot of people don't know anything about reparations, even Japanese Americans. You know, as a matter of fact, there was a San Jose JACL guy who came to a book party on the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations. And he was really mad because he said nobody told me that this happened. You know, he had been fed the line that the JACL, single handedly won redress. So he didn't even know about the NCRP and the grassroots movement, right? So a lot of Japanese Americans didn't know about it. So we felt like, let's talk about this, you know, let's talk about this and get people to understand the what was the motivation, right? And the big motivation for winning redress. I mean, there were multiple ones, you know, individual justice and to right a wrong and stuff.

But a big motivation was that came to us from the former incarcerates themselves, and they said, "Don't let this happen to anybody else," right? So that's that's like the beginnings of solidarity, right? And so we talked about that, and we organized the three JACLs and the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee and ALA and Japantown Community TV, we had a joint statement backing HR 40, and we subsequently became involved in kind of a national Nikkei reparations coalition, yeah.

Tom Izu 38:36

And this also helped teach us, which is an important thing, I think, because when the way we wanted to do our work is that it's not like we know everything so because we're in the process of learning, and so by doing this kind of organizing, you learn. So I think we also were helping our community learn more about what reparations mean. Because Japanese American reparations was, well, maybe you should talk about it, because you're the best at talking about

Susan Hayase 39:03

Well, yeah, so So, we started working with people from LA and people from San Francisco, Japanese Americans that we knew from the redress movement who were still active. And we felt like, okay, so, and there were younger people, right? And so there's, we learned a lot of language and kind of how people are looking at politics, right? So, there's this, I guess, you know, take leadership from Black people, right? So you can look at that in a very unpolitical way, like, Oh, here's a Black people person walking by, right? But I think what that meant was, you know, look at the Black reparations organizations, and what are they doing right? And don't, don't do something that's, you know, in conflict with that right. Don't say things that are in conflict with that right. Because we supported that movement, right? So, our, the mission that we set ourselves to was to learn more about it. And one of the things that we found out was that there was a global reparations movement that had been going for decades, right? That was mostly like former colonized, enslaved countries like Haiti, you know, and other countries around in Africa, and they were demanding reparations, and they had the United Nations had adopted, as a result of that movement, had adopted some definitions of what reparations meant, and there were five major components of it. One was an apology, one was restitution, and if restitution is not possible, then compensation and another one is non-repetition. You know, don't apologize and compensate people, but keep doing that bad thing, right? So non-repetition and one was satisfaction, like people have to be satisfied with the reparations, but and then healing. Oh yeah, healing. I guess there was - anyway, the one that really - so, I saw that, and I had deep respect for this movement, right? That had been going on. We didn't even know it was going on, and it had happened after our movement, right? And, and I felt both admiration but also grief, because it it was stuff that we didn't know about, you know? And we had struggled to figure out, how do you get that non-repetition thing? And by this time, we knew that they were doing it again. They'd been doing it again and again and again, right? Scapegoating people for their identity and so finding people, yeah, so, you know, we kind of felt like, you know, we had a kind of hope to that winning, that monetary compensation that was better than just an apology that make it hurt a little bit, right? We'd kind of hope that that would be the deterrent, but it wasn't a deterrent, right? So, you know? So anyway, so, so learning about, yeah, learning about the broader reparations movement was a learning thing. And I think that, see, this is another thing. Like, you know, how people say things like, oh, once I stop being shy, then I'll go out there and meet people, you know. But you can't do that. You got to go out there even though you're shy.

And then you learn how not to be shy, right? You get confidence. So it's like, we don't know everything, but we have to go out and try it. And in the process, we learn all this stuff.

Tom Izu 42:39

Right, and so it's not just that, oh, we're just showing our solidarity by making a statement, and we're really righteous. It's more, "Wow. We learned something from this," that not only do we have something in common, but you know, we really didn't get what we should have got. And the point is, is that because you're putting it, you're not just making a case for Japanese Americans and how hurt we are, how we feel about it, but you see, as a human, this other group that you know had hundreds and hundreds of years of this damage done to them, that you now can see it in a different light, and that, I think it helped cement the idea that we have a role to play as Japanese Americans, as Asian Americans, it's not just that we're somehow showing you support, And we want to make sure we amplify your voice only, you know, we're just kind of in the background, but no, we have something in this. You know, we didn't get what was due to us because the injury they did based on race and national origin, and this is happening to all these other people. And so we could see that this is part of a bigger movement for change, and this is how we can help educate Japanese Americans, once they understand that, to also see they're part of this movement and they have something at stake here. It's not like they're just being helpful or being helped, helping other people and taking a good political stand that looks good. They're actually doing something for themselves and their community, right?

Susan Hayase 44:01

Yeah. So I think that, like, you know, our original goal of keeping the Japanese American community from drifting to the right, I think it's become more complex and more because we've learned a lot along the way, right? So, so a lot of it is like we, we can see, because we're involved in these things, and we come into other people's, you know, in contact with other people's organizations, and their way that they're organizing and stuff, we kind of see, oh, you know, we can see the impact of the model minority on different parts of our community, and how it plays out, you know. And so, you know, this is all part of this, you know, it'd be nice if it went faster, but it's this long process of moving us towards being a community that that is more powerful and more able to have more impact on building this multiracial democracy and help. Change society for good and getting rid of White supremacy, right? So, yeah.

Tom Izu 45:06

So San Jose Nikkei Resisters is still ongoing, right? Yeah. So it goes up and down in terms of its and now we're involved in trying to figure out how to make Japantown sustainable. So it has a future, right? And I think one thing we learned from that is, and we're trying to help other people understand, is that you need to take initiative, even if you don't know all the answers, right? And the point isn't so much like, Oh, we're we want to be great leaders and tell everybody what to do, because you, you know, just doesn't work like that. Some of this is based on what we did learn in organizing work years before, so we're trying to promote that in our community, because I think in some ways, our community has been traumatized through all of these different experiences, and there's still a lot of fear about standing out and trying to even just say this is a problem. Let's do something, because they're worried that some of the different contradictions and conflicts that happened in the past, even they might be a generation before us even might come up. And, you know, it's kind of this fear. It's kind of built in.

Susan Hayase 46:13

It's, it's, it's, it's the exact inner it's intergenerational trauma. Like an example of this is kind of interesting. We were part of this group that was talking about the future of Japantown, and they said, at some point, they said, oh, let's come up with a mission statement. So I said, you know, SJNR will draft something, and then we can discuss it. So we drafted something, and then we had a group of multiple people from different organizations come to talk about it. And what I had drafted was, our mission is to unite the Japanese American community. I thought that was pretty straightforward, but the other people in the group, said, "I don't know whether we should use that word, and I don't know whether we can unite." And you know, after I picked my job off the ground, I realized that what was happening was this intergenerational trauma. These were young people, well, one old person and one young person, you know, who you know, I would have expected the young person to be, you know, uniting is easy. We do that with our eyes shut, you know. But they were afraid that we couldn't unite. And it was from all these passed down stories of, you know, there was so much conflict from the camps. I mean bitter, bitter conflict, right? And divisiveness that was imposed by the federal government, and then this dispersal. And you know what I mean. So I think people were afraid that, that we couldn't unite. And so we kind of talked about, well, you know, here's something we learned from young people, is that you can have community agreements and you can have guidelines for how you get along and how you treat each other with respect and how you don't just scream at each other, you know. And so people kind of calmed down and said, Yeah, okay, I think we should do that, but it was, but that's, that's generation, intergenerational trauma, right there, right? And I think that there's a lot of times people talk about it really abstractly, like, Let's have a meeting and we'll, we'll do something about it. But I think it happens in the course of doing the work, right? And you have to notice it. You have to notice that it's happening right now, and, you know?

Tom Izu 48:22

Yeah, so something we learned from that is the importance of taking initiative, that even if you don't have all the answers, you can help the group overall that has people that can figure things out how to work together. And that's kind of the most important thing. So we're not, our organization isn't meant to be in charge of everything, you know, because we know we can't do that, but we can take initiative to get things going, and we can set a tone that's more positive, like why you can unite. But one thing I wanted to bring up, and maybe this gets into the last part, is that this was all local base. So even though we talk about how we were connected to nationwide things that were going on, sometimes International, things, you know, that were pushing these political conflicts and things, we understood that it had to be locally based. And the reason why we felt so strongly about that is that we wanted to be part of building something if you're going to have an organization that can play this role initiating things of setting a tone in a broader community or group of people you have it has to be locally based, otherwise it can just become abstract. Nothing wrong with having an organization that's focusing on making statements about certain positions internationally or nationally, because that's important too. But if you're not working with people, then you don't help other people learn. You don't learn yourself much because you're not actually doing something, figuring out how more people are at and then you're not helping create new it may be a new organization if you need one or way of organizing people, because it has to come from some kind of local basis. So that helped me come back to why local history is important. So even though a lot of these things about the camps are not just about San Jose, but you can take stories from San Jose and use them to help people understand what it means to

be a Japanese American, and most importantly, it does what it means to be politically involved as a Japanese American, as an Asian American, or a person of color, you know, on and on, but if you don't have a local basis, it just becomes very abstract. So that's kind of our view. It's not meaning that's the only way you can do political work, but that's what was really, really motivating to us, I think, and I think that's gets into the Hidden Histories project. So maybe I'll just talk really quickly about that. So it kind of came about happenstance, because Tamiko Thiel, who's an augmented reality artist extraordinaire, right? She's one of the leaders or originators of this kind of work. Susan knew her from her college days, so she had a connection with her, and then she became a famous artist, and she still stayed your friend, which is nice. So, she did an augmented reality using technology. So through your the lens of your camera, you can, you can put these different layers on, actually, what you're looking at through a device like this. So she created an art piece in Seattle, where, you know, she grew up, that was focused on the Seattle Japanese American community. And Susan saw it and said, Tamiko, can we do that in San Jose? And she just kept bugging Tamiko and then she eventually said, okay, okay, okay, I'm coming to San Jose. So, you know, she can move that piece to San Jose, and parts of it actually could fit in San Jose. So that's what she did. And we tried to get people interested in it. And then what happened is she later, after she went back to Germany, where she's now living, she said, "Hey, you guys, you should get a Knight Foundation, a national Knight Foundation grant," because they have a grant for using augmented What did they call it, immersive technology in the arts? And said, yeah, just apply. So, you know, I didn't want to hurt Tamiko's feelings, and said, Okay, I'll do it. But I thought our chance is almost zero. Because, you know, I would assume groups doing this were like art museums or people who are artists, and because it's an art, art related, I didn't know anything about art. So we did it, you know, we got a couple people get and we got we applied, and then we got this grant, which was really strange, was one out. We were one out of five nationwide.

Susan Hayase 52:23

And they met with us and they said we'd asked for \$80,000 and they met with us and they said, you know, we'd really, we're really interested in your project, but we'd like to give you 100,000 is that okay?

Tom Izu 52:35

Yeah, later we learned that because we were the lowest, we were to ask the lowest amount of any of the groups. And other in other groups were like these giant museums right back East. And I mean, they were massive museums that wanted to use augmented reality to enhance their exhibits, or something like that, and they had really interesting projects. Ours was really different because we decided, and this is where our kind of political view came in, is that we wanted to do something that would help build the local community identity and understanding of why it's so important to a place is so important. See, this was really important to us. That's what really made us do this. So even though we're not artists, even though we don't know anything about the art world, don't know anything about art funding or anything like that, we decided, well, let's just use this opportunity we have somebody like Tamiko helping us, because she helped us a lot. So the technical part and the artistic part, you know, we have that, but we want to do something that people will understand why it's really important to be able to have a physical space and have a connection to that space and help other people understand that and promote that for the reasons I was saying before, if you have a physical space, then politically, you can do a lot more in bringing people together and learn more, right? And Japantown is kind of a symbol to us. This doesn't represent all Japantowns in and of itself. It's not the greatest place in the world or

anything like that, but we felt that it symbolized a lot of the things that we were trying to develop in a broader Japanese American identity, and the reason to be politically involved. So what we did is we said, we want this to be a community art project, not just bring in some big shot artist to do some installation and then leave, and it probably be really cool, and it probably easier to do, right? So we said, no, no, we want local artists to be involved. And we didn't know how to do this, but we said we're going to have a bunch of local artists. Local artists and we're going to train them how to use augmented reality. Because the whole point is that this is not just something for specialized art form that only a tiny number of people could do. It's accessible. And that was Tamiko's belief too. She wanted to make it accessible. Even though she was a very high level artist, she thought this was really accessible. It's not like, what do you call it other kinds of immersive art, like virtual reality with the goggles or holographic stuff, which cost incredible amounts of money. This was something you can look at on your phone, so therefore it's accessible to the public. But also, what they were saying it is possible for people to learn how to do this, even if you don't have a whole laboratory set up for you, or somewhere.

Susan Hayase 55:02

And the hidden histories that we were trying to illuminate was that it wasn't just Japantown, that it was Heinlerville Chinatown, and Pinoytown, all kind of coexisting at slightly different time periods.

Tom Izu 55:15

Right, so you can see that goes back to our other projects, is that we want people to look at this community differently and see themselves, if they identify being Japanese American or whatever they identify with being they can see this place very differently, and then hopefully make something go off in their mind that, "Wow, I didn't understand this before. Now, when I'm looking at this place and I'm walking around, it actually has this other history that I didn't know anything about." And the Chinese American experience is really integral to the Japanese American experience. Japantown wouldn't be there. And then they can look at Filipinos, which had really been ignored, I think, in our community, that they were here too. And especially the stories from Robert Ragsac, who we got as our advisor, and Connie Young Yu was the other advisor. These are people we had worked with before, too. So you can see all these things are connecting. You can see that these stories can help people coming to Japantown, whatever level they're at, even if they're very much involved in the community, or they're hardly involved at all, start looking at our experience as Japanese Americans, Asian Americans, in a very different light. And so it was kind of to me, from my point of view, it was coming back on this big circle of this is why local history is important, because it's physical place based, because that's what I really believed in. And this also helps people understand your identity, for example, as a Japanese American actually is not taken away, but is enhanced the more you know about how you came about in relation to other groups, not just your relation to the white public that you're fighting against, you know, stereotyping or prejudice that you understand more about yourself as a Japanese Americans by embracing all these other groups and their histories, right, and finding the connections in a very emotional and deep meaning, as well as helping boost the identity of Japantown so more people can go, oh, some we're working on this project together, you know? So it was a it was something else doing this project. I think if I had known what it would really take, I probably wouldn't have wanted to have done it right, because it was so hard, like, we don't know what we're doing, but because, I think we didn't know what we're doing, and we just lucked out, because we found people to help us who were really skilled, and they just said, "Hey, I have some time right now. Oh, it sounds like fun." So they could

really help us. And they were, they were not afraid of, "Let's just try this. Oh, that didn't work. Let's try something else." So, yeah,

Susan Hayase 57:31

And they were connected to different things happening in Japantown. So, yeah, so, and we also, luckily, had a political campaign in the middle of it, around the time the naming of the park, whether it could be Heinlerville Park, or whether it had to be Sakura Park,

Tom Izu 57:48

Which brought before the forefront some of these issues that we were talking about is like, "What does it mean?" Because there were Japanese Americans who said, "Well, Sakura should be the name, because that's Japanese, if you call it some of this other name which doesn't have any meaning to them, or of a Chinese name that would erase our history." But the whole argument is that, no, it does, and it does the opposite. It makes it understand even deeper why we care about the history of this community that you didn't even know. They burned down a Chinatown just, you know, downtown burned it to the ground. That's why Heinlerville was built. So this whole history comes out. And so I think this whole going into the Hidden Histories project, it brought a lot of stuff kind of full circle. And I'm not saying the work we did created all of these things that happened, but I think, I think what we've done is help initiate and create opportunities for other people to come together and have a space to talk about stuff. Like Robert. I mean, he was already doing all this education on his own, so it's not like we created that for him, but I think it, I think it helped push focus on Pinoytown a little bit more, definitely, in his mind, because he was, man, he just really got into doing the tours and all that, and it's wonderful now. And Connie's been slugging away at trying to get people understand local Chinese American history for forever, but this also really gave another, another opening, an avenue for her to talk about Heinlerville, Chinatown, right, which had been almost kind of forgotten. And so I was really grateful for that.

Susan Hayase 59:18

And I think we've had a real impact. Because I think people, as a result of this whole process and the naming of the park, it's pretty obviously there, right? It's not as hidden as it used to be, right? It's not like the secret knowledge you had to have, right? But now everybody knows it, and it's just it's changed. I think the community has really changed, and people who kind of view Japantown from the outside, it impacts them too, right?

Tom Izu 59:47

Right like, so the museum now pretty much accepts that, that we should talk about Heinlerville, we should talk about Pinoytown, along with Japantown. We should do all of that, and we should do more. I mean, so that's, it's not like people didn't know some of this history before, but I think it was just like, we're saying taking initiative and setting the tone. So now it becomes like, "Yeah, this is what we should be doing. Don't you think? Yeah, we should. Do you think we can unite over this? Yeah, we can." Or however, whatever word you want to use, rather than saying, "Well, I have these thoughts, but I'm not sure if you can do anything about it."

Susan Hayase 1:00:18

Oh, yeah. And so another thing that we try to do is, you know, I think it's really, really common for people to, you know, people have a lot of thoughts, like, even people you don't even know and you don't talk to, so they have a lot of thoughts, but they talk to their friends about it, you know, they don't, they don't, they're not part of the public forum or whatever, that they're not initiating it or participating in it. So that's another thing that we're doing in this sustainable Japantown. Thing is we're trying to bring those people that have all those grievances and thoughts and ideas and whatever, together with these other people, and infuse it with some knowledge like so we had, like a presentation by South Bay Community Land Trust. We had a presentation by someone from Little Tokyo Community Council, how they're defending Little Tokyo and that kind of thing, right? So we're trying to, it's like this big cauldron, you know, and trying to add more people in, you know, it's like stone soup.

Tom Izu 1:01:17

Well, I guess we used our time. I mean, do you have any questions?

Mae Lee 1:01:25

I can say, thank you for the sweeping, really, like, sweeping overview of your life's you know, several decade's life's work, and I can see the multi-pronged intentions that you, you know, brought with you to all the different efforts. And it's so - everything connects. Everything's so integrated, whether it's, you know, I mean, in my I think in my mind, I hear you saying, you know you're doing, at heart, you're doing political organizing, and you're also growing political consciousness. And neither of those two things actually ever end, right, because of the conditions you are constantly creating up against, whether it's a presidential administration that comes in or, you know, a local naming of a park debate, right? So I see your work as because it is what it is. In the process you are creating experiences for every individual that touches any part of your work, yeah, so it really is the need for it never ends, right, you know, and what it generates also is always being created through everything that you do. So I, I have, I feel like a great appreciation for that comprehensive and, like, it's just cogent and thoughtful and touches on touches so many things, you know. And I feel like you, you covered a lot. You covered every, you know, everything I was thinking about question wise, you kind of, you know, brought in there. Yeah. I mean, I have a question or two, but I don't know if you want to say anything as well.

Karen Wang 1:03:00

I actually did have a question, which is, I feel like we started off right, and, like you said, the 1990s with not only the dying down the redress movement, but also, like, the death of, like, your family members. But I kind of wanted to just ask a little bit about that. Like, maybe, could you talk a bit about your family, like your parents, kind of it sounds like that was one of the, like, motivations for your political involvement in the first place.

Mae Lee 1:03:30

Can I tag onto that? Yeah, talk about your family. Maybe you know a lot of the things you're doing are setting the tone, as you say, which are public things, right? Because you want to create a space for everybody to have a conversation, or, you know, see something from a certain way. I'm curious, in relation to talking about your family as well, like, what do you see? What are your observations of how the Japanese American community, however you're defining, and whoever you're in contact with, how

it's changed because of, I don't know if it's because of you know what you're doing, but as you do your work, what changes do you see as you're doing the work?

Susan Hayase 1:04:11

So I think, yeah, I kind of alluded to the fact that I think that Tom, for Tom and me, our early life experiences, had a lot to do with being motivated to find out, right, to figure out. Like, you know, how do you deal with racism, right? And like, I think racism creates this pressure on people, right? It's like, this alienation, this loneliness, this feeling like I don't fit in. I can't relate to these people. They don't understand. They don't know who the hell I am, you know, all these feelings and, you know, oh, wow, these people are all messed up, you know. And you know, just this, how do you deal with that, right? So, some people push it aside. And I think that for Tom and me, we were really lucky. I think that we decided that we would check this out and try to solve this problem, you know, and and so, you know, when I was a little kid, my parents, I was so lucky. They talked to me about their lives, and I was curious, so I asked them a lot of questions. So I found out a lot of stuff about my parents, some of which I didn't totally understand, but there were some incidents that really meant a lot to me. So one was when I was seven, my dad bought us, my sister and I, she's 15 months older than me, bought us some wood carving tools, and, you know, made us these little book book ends, and said, Okay, go, go to it. And my sister immediately started carving something. And I said, I was seven, and I said, I don't know what to do. You know? What should I? Can you design something for me dad? So he designed me this kind of coat of arms. My dad is an engineer, but he was really good at drawing and stuff, and so he drew this kind of coat of arms. It's like, it's got waves, you know? It's got this sun with rays, and then it's got a little outline of the United States. And he says, you know, your grandparents came from Japan. The sun represents Japan, and the little came to the United States. And then he said, You're a Sansei, and Sansei is third generation. And, you know, this was, like, so weird. So I'd already started experiencing racism in California, and this was so weird. It's like, wow, I belong to this group. Where are they? You know, like, Oh, I'm in this club. I didn't even join. But, you know, what is this, right? And then, you know, my parents talked about camp, but they didn't really say what it was. It was before camp, after camp, whatever. But my mother had this book by Mine Okubo, and it's called Citizen 13660, and it's basically a graphic novel. She she's an artist, and she illustrated her whole experience going to Tanforan then going to Topaz. And I remember being really fascinated. I read it multiple times, but I still remember when I understood what camp was. You know, what my parents had been through, and I was, like, really outraged. So, you know, even as a young kid, you kind of perceive how other people are treating your parents in addition to how people treat you, you know? And so I was anyway, so I was, like, really taken by this idea, and I was in third grade, and I stayed after school, and because I wanted to tell my teacher, so my teacher's cleaning the board. And I said, "Miss Gormley, my parents were in a prison camp in World War Two," and she doesn't even pause. She goes, "That didn't happen." It was like, "Whoa." That was like an incredible experience being gaslit by my third grade teacher, right? And, but it was really valuable, right? A really valuable but very alienating lesson, right? Like, wow, there's this secret knowledge. I'm in the secret club. My parents have this secret knowledge that nobody else knows or denies happen, you know. And so this kind of fueled my desire to be whole, you know. I also had that experience where, if you saw another Asian, you felt really uncomfortable, you know, because you're just it was, I lived in a White community, and so I knew that, that there was something wrong with that, that's like, unnatural, right, that that was imposed on me by society. And I asked my mother if I could go see a psychiatrist. And she said, "No, I don't think you need that." And so I went to school,

college and, and I went to the Student Health Center, and I tried to sign up for counseling, and they gave me an old White Freudian man, and it was just like, wow, I this is not what I need. And so I figured I got to get a job at some point, and I could pay for my own insurance, you know, and, and I, you know, eventually joined the Asian American Students' Association, you know, which was a big deal for me, because everything that I learned, like from my parents was kind of like to be ultra-cautious and to be afraid and to be kind of paranoid and, you know, that kind of thing.

Tom Izu 1:09:21

Yeah, I think what Susan says, trying to - realizing you're in a secret club, yeah. In other words, there's something unknown that, and for whatever reason you decided you're going to figure it out, that's the gumption you have, right? So I think I had similar feelings that Susan had, and that's kind of when my parents passed away, that really brought it to the fore, that I didn't really - I realized I didn't really understand them that well, and even though I got a lot out of early Asian American Studies, so the classes I took were all cobbled together by supportive graduate students and students themselves, nothing like the classes you have here now at De Anza College, which are quite developed but But I realize there's this whole this whole thing that's not known by most people, and that there's a lot of basic stuff that's just not known even enough to be able to talk about it, to students, even learn something. So that was in my mind already, but what I really got out of all this work, political work, is and then they got kind of triggered, if you want to call it that, from my parents death, is that there's a lot of things more personally I don't know about my parents and their experience, and a lot of things I thought I knew generally, but I was just kind of assuming I understood them when I realized I didn't, and it wasn't just personally. I realized a lot of people didn't understand their generation at all, that there was a lot more nuance involved. And when I say nuance, I don't mean it's minor. They're actually major things. But you can't just generalize this whole generation being with this one way, which was a tendency, because these are our parents' generation. So during the redress movement, we had to fight it out with some of my parents' generation people. They said, "Don't talk about it. You can't do this. You can't do that." Or just gave us the silent treatment. But there are other and you say we worked with who were much more willing to share these stories, and you started to piece together this very alternative view of what their life was like. And it's not alternative in the sense that it's strange, it's actually more normal life. You know, like this person at this age, their experience is really different than somebody who's at an older age when the camps happen to them, or they're from a different background than this other person. They're from the country, this person's from the city. So these are all normal things, right? And then to realize, Well, my dad, I started realizing what I knew about him. He was like, he was just, you know, so many months away from graduating from high school. So really young right when he got, when he left the exclusion zone to do migrant labor, so called involuntary evacuee from the exclusion zone. My mom went, spent her entire high school years in post, in camp. So really thinking, what does that mean? I mean, they were really young. They were kids, basically, right? And so what do I expect from them? Do I expect them to know everything that happened during the war? Well, they didn't have Asian American Studies. So how would they know any of this? Right? So they were just looking at it from a certain view. So that's why they say things that were really contradictory to me. When I was growing up, you know, they would always ask other Japanese Americans, "Oh, what camp were you in?" Or something like that. And that was this weird game they played. And they find, "Oh, you went to so and so camp. Do you know so and so? Yeah, did you know that used to be my best friend and that kind of stuff?" I didn't really know what they were talking about. Later, when I learned about the camps,

it's like, well, what really happened? They go, "Oh, it wasn't that bad." So I always thought that was a cop out, or somebody else said, "Well, it's like rape. Don't you understand that?" You know, they didn't use the word trauma then, but okay, I guess they're traumatized, but that didn't make sense either. They didn't act exactly like that, but it took me a while to understand that. Well, the similarities I had with my own life and not understanding things. They're like that too. And then I also started to apply that to my own generation, realizing that people in my own generation didn't really know a lot about who they were, or their older peers were, or any of these things. For example, I have two older brothers. So this, I think, made me really regret not having been able to know this earlier so I could talk to more people, and not having a sense of level of maturity to be able to talk to more people, because we are losing people like crazy in our community. A lot of these people we work with are passing away. And so this really helped fuel the sense that, you know, we should really have a place like a museum really take on creating this collective memory, and not just individual collecting all these interviews in and of itself, but actually trying to figure out a way to process this stuff and understand this stuff and help other people learn from it, and having the people who are still with us right now actually reflect on it, because that's the only way you can really learn things is not just by having a recording and then somebody looks at it and tells you what it means. So I think that's, I'm not sure if that gets to your question, but it's related to the loss of my parents, because that really brought it home, because you're watching, because I was looking at the obituaries, you know about this time too, looking at all these people that were passing away, and that means a missed opportunity to understand something,

Susan Hayase 1:14:27

I think also that, you know, for Tom and me, we had a lot of empathy with our parents, you know. So there's always imperfect transmission, you know, between generations, but I think we had a lot of empathy for them, and that fueled our participation in the redress movement. You know, I think that like, and that's why like. So my dad died on February 21, 1991 so he was eligible for redress, but there was a big fight for funding, you know. So the bill was passed in 1988 and wasn't fully funded until later in 1991, so I felt just devastated that- I kind of was looking forward to seeing my dad get his check, you know, and seeing whether he appreciated anything I've done.

Tom Izu 1:15:20

Right, because both my parents were alive when the bill passed, so they were eligible, but they didn't live to see the check, but it did go to the heirs. I mean, it didn't go to you had to be alive when the bill was passed, so that you know it's on the record that you get this money, so it goes to your heirs. But not - many Japanese Americans didn't get it. So, for example, my father, he was drafted when he was in exile in Utah, and he was put in the segregated military unit, the 442nd, 100th and you know, he didn't get killed. I mean, if he had been killed, then we would not have gotten reparations, which is kind of weird when you think about it, since all the killed in action people, they weren't eligible because they were dead before the bill passed. But anyway, I realized that my father, he acted so low key that, "Oh yeah, I didn't have to go to camp, and it wasn't that bad." But then I realized that what he was doing as I got older, he was they were just doing migrant labor out in Utah, and one of his uncles, my grand uncle, who was kind of chaperoning this whole clan that went out to Utah, because my grandfather had passed away years and years before. He told me the story, years years later, when I was working at the senior center, about what happened to them. You know, that they were traveling in Utah, and they went to this town and, you know, getting jobs. That's what they did, is they just went in as a group and would

find a place to live, and then would get work. And he said that local town people, in no uncertain terms, said, "You better be out of here by this evening, or we're going to basically string you up." You know, this was not uncommon treatment. It was, you know, a violent reaction to Japanese being anywhere. And he didn't tell anybody that they told him this. And he was telling me this when I was the director of the senior center, and he was kind of this elderly figure in the community. He was this Issei, who spoke English, had won some kind of accolades from the Emperor of Japan for helping Japanese farmers after the war. And he was very proper, and he was kind of scary because he had kind of a shaved head, or maybe he was just, I guess he was just bald, and he was called the godfather of Japantown, and so I thought I was really careful around him, because I didn't know him that well, because we had kind of lost touch with that side of the family, but I didn't want to say anything about the war in Japan, because I didn't know how he felt about it. But when he talked to me, he just started swearing, you know, which was really unusual for him, because he was very, you know, reserved and proper. He just said, "Yeah, we got reparation with the US government. Now it's Japan's turn." And I was like, Huh, what's he talking about? Because I couldn't process what he was talking about. He's saying they're the ones who started this war, dammit, you know, because and, okay, we got reparations, and I'm really happy people like you helped us get reparations. But now I'm going to go to Japan, because he had connections. I'm going to go to the government and say you guys should pay something because the seniors, you know, I was working for a senior center are suffering, and Japan, the Japanese government should give some money so we can, you know, build new senior centers, because that's what they need. Because he was helping me with this campaign to build this new senior center building in San Jose Japantown. And I was just shocked when he told me all this stuff about what he went through when he was in Utah, this, you know, this threat of violence. And it just shocked me, right? But I didn't understand any of this stuff earlier on, and then I started connecting it to my father's own experience. Well, my dad said, Oh, it wasn't that bad, you know, I didn't suffer that much. And here he is high school, you know, right out of high school, going through all this, then he gets sent to fight in Italy, and he didn't tell me anything about that either. His cousin, who also got drafted, told me later their first assignment was to go into the hills when they got somewhere in Italy, I assume, to bring down all the dead bodies of their comrades who had gotten killed in a prior battle because they couldn't reach them by truck. They had to walk into the hills and drag these bodies down. And he goes, Yeah, it was pretty hard, because this is our first assignment. And these were like country kids who grew up what was then the country out here in Los Altos, you know, this area around here. So he never told me that. So then I started really, really, you know, regretting all of this that, you know, it's not like I could have, he would have told me everything, but I just missed all these opportunities and for understanding a deeper understanding then I could understand how some of the veterans, they may not talk about their experience the way people want them to talk. Or some of the veterans decided, Okay, I'm going to do this show, because that's what these young people want me to do, you know. Or other people that yes, I was loyal to this country, or Yes, I proved I was loyal, when, in fact, maybe that's not exactly what they were feeling. They had other mixed feelings, right? So that really. He drove that home for me, and I think that motivated me even more, that I gotta dig this stuff out in a nice way though. You know, not like just in people's face and say, What's wrong with you? Why don't you say this? It's more like understand who they are. So if you ask a question, we can go on and on and on.

Karen Wang 1:20:20

Yeah, no, thank you. I think I just from a personal standpoint, I think one of the reasons I took your class right is because I also want to understand more about my own family, including, you know, family members who have passed. Maybe there were many missed opportunities as well, but I think in a weird way, I like, I think I still really feel that connection with your stories, even though it's like a different generation, different context. So yeah, and we have 10 minutes left.

Tom Izu 1:20:49

Oh, we do.

Susan Hayase 1:20:50

Oh, can I just say, well, in answer to what you just said, I think, you know, I think people underestimate the value of secondhand stories. So even if the person is gone, you can ask the person that knows the person you know. And that's so valuable, right? Because now you're getting two things at once. You're getting the feeling of the person that's informing you about the person who's gone. And I think that's what we're hoping that Sansei will do more is to be that person, like, like, for instance, like, I tell a lot of the young people that I really hate this idea that we're standing on the shoulders, because it's like a dead person, you know, and like they're dead and gone, but we're standing on their shoulders, you know. And and I like the metaphor of shoulder to shoulder, because, you know, like so Tom and I got to work with these incarcerated who are gone now, but if you work with me, then I'll tell you about them, you know, and, and it's obviously filtered through me, but that's part of the collective memory,

Mae Lee 1:22:02

I'm guessing, just to kind of go back to your families when you were doing kind of R&R work, you're both, you're they, they received it, or they were quite encouraging and positive about your efforts?

Susan Hayase 1:22:17

No.

Mae Lee 1:22:18

No? Oh, okay.

Susan Hayase 1:22:20

So I didn't tell this story, but when I got into Stanford and they sent me a letter saying, Do you want to live in the Asian American theme house? And I, you know, this was part of my I was really like, my life is all messed up, and this is just not normal, and I'm really being, you know, deformed by this experience. So I kind of wanted to, so I told my parents, you know, I think I kind of want to do this. What do you think? You know? And they said, Well, I don't think you should do it. Doesn't seem that safe, you know. And I said, Okay, so I didn't, right, but I the way I understand that, looking back on it, is that, you know, Japanese Americans coming out of camp were told to not congregate with each other. They were told to keep low profile, you know, actually. And during the Vietnam War and the protests, you know, which were very brutal, like police just, you know, beating people's heads and stuff like that, I think. And there was a lot of anti-Asian stuff happening during the Vietnam War that I think people don't quite remember, right? But I think you know, so they advised me not to get involved in stuff, and so I remember talking to them about some stuff, but they weren't they were not encouraging, because, you

know, it's it. I think it would have been unusual. I mean, and there are people my age whose parents were encouraging, but that's unusual. I think that's unusual. I think that my experience was more common that they were kind of not so, because they didn't know what it meant, right? They didn't know what that meant.

Tom Izu 1:23:51

Yeah, so my experience similar. My parents really didn't talk about it. I think they were concerned about what I was going to do. I think they had hoped that I would be a professional of some kind, to be, you know, to have a career, right? And then I married an engineer. And so that helped. So they were so nice to Susan. This girl is going to marry him. That's an engineer. Oh, wonderful. They were so happy.

Susan Hayase 1:24:22

Your brother, Dave, married an attorney.

Tom Izu 1:24:24

Yeah, yeah. So that helped a lot. And my other brother married another artist. So that was kind of the problem, but at least two out of three, so, but what I wanted to say is that part of the regret I had that I was talking about earlier is I didn't really talk to them that much. I didn't make an effort later to talk to what was going on. But part of the redress movement involved writing all these letters to people in Congress that when the bill was going - the redress bill was going through Congress. This is the chair of this committee. We got to put pressure on them. This is what the NCRR, NOC, and the JACLs were doing this. And so what I found out later, and what I found out is that, well, my father, now and then, would call me up and say, "So, what letter are we supposed to be working on now?" And so I would tell him, and so, "Do you think you can send me some of them?" "Sure, Dad" and I just didn't think much about I just thought, Oh, he's just being nice to me. Because, you know, he was a nice guy, you know, he'd be supportive in that way. But then later, after he passed away, his coworkers at a memorial for another coworker. You know, this is years later, after he passed away, he came up to me, goes, "Oh, you're the one." And I was going, what, you know, because Lockheed was a very conservative company, right? You have to understand that. And I didn't know, is he mad at me, or what? I recognized somebody as one of my dad's coworkers. You're the one with all the letters. Did you know that your father made me sign all these letters to the point, to the point where, when I would see him, okay, Doug, that was his nickname. What letter do you want me to sign? Just give it to me and I'll sign it. And so it became kind of a joke, but, but I got the message that my dad had been harassing all of his coworkers, very conservative company. These people probably Republicans even, who knows, but they all signed them, and most of them were not Japanese Americans, and they just Okay, okay, because they liked him so much and they respected him. So, okay, Doug, I'll just do it. So then I realized that he had been involved in this. And then later, before my mom died, she had told me, yeah, your dad went to this photo exhibit of the 442nd, there was a famous photo exhibit that started the Go For Broke group. There was just all these photos. And your mom said, Yeah, I've never seen your dad act like this. But afterwards, he felt really moved. He said, We got to do something. We got to do something. And my mom was kind of dismissive, because, you know, my dad doesn't usually act like that, but this probably was the beginning where he started bugging me, like, well, what better should we do? What should we do next? What should we do next? Because he felt upset, even though he hadn't been in camp. He knew all these people who had died during the war. So what's the point? You know, I never got to talk to

him about this, but clearly he felt like he had to do something. So so they supported what we were doing in some way, but it's like you can't. It's not like they come up to you and say, I understand now why you didn't understand me. I'm gonna explain everything. And you and suddenly are totally on the same never like that, because they're the parent, right?

Susan Hayase 1:27:18

Yeah, and you can never totally understand your kids, and you can totally understand your parents.

Mae Lee 1:27:25

Maybe just ,we have five more minutes, so just to close out, I'm just curious how you know, maybe when you tell the story of what you've done over the past decades, it kind of makes sense, because you have a certain point of view now looking back, yeah, I'm just curious, kind of on your own personal reflections, like how you make sense of what you've done in all these years. You know, maybe it wasn't as, at the time, you know, as coherent, or as you know, you knew the path was going to go this direction. I'm just, you know, curious about, kind of any closing thoughts, about your own personal reflections on well, how you made sense of it as you were doing it all?

Tom Izu 1:28:04

Well, I think we're in a reflective period, right? I mean, we're still doing things, but it's becoming really clear to us that, you know, we're getting old, so that clock is ticking on, and then we're lucky that we together talk a lot about it. That's just basically been part of our relationship. So I'll just say, I'll just start talking about these ideas or feelings, and then Susan usually can translate them, Oh, you mean this? I go, Yeah, exactly. And then Susan kind of does the same, but probably more articulate than I am. And I'll go, oh, you probably are talking about this. I think that's related to this. And you go, yeah. So that helps with the reflection, because it helps build our, together, our understanding, right, what's happened to us.

Susan Hayase 1:28:47

But also, I think that we, you know, we learned a lot politically during the redress movement during that time period, and it wasn't just redress. We also were involved in the Jesse Jackson campaign, and there was, like, a murder of a Black kid and doing some support for that and, you know, different elections and things like that. So we learned a lot during that time period. We learned like, what does it mean to do grassroots organizing? We also learned kind of the broader picture, right? So I think that really helped. That was like, so we weren't rudderless, you know? I think that was, I think that's our biggest strength, is that we weren't. We're not. We have never been rudderless, you know, because I think that's a common thing, you know. And actually, the orcas are now knocking the rudders off of a lot of boats. But yeah, I think, yeah. So I think we have, we kind of have a mission, and we have a long term perspective, and so as we're getting old, it kind of makes us think about it, because we realize that, you know, we're not going to be around for the final chapter, whatever that is, you know. I mean, I guess the world could blow up, but, you know, but it's, it makes us kind of philosophical about it too, right? And I think we feel really lucky that we are able to do things, and that we're able to take opportunities. That's like, huge, right? I know a lot of people who, they probably see the same opportunities that we see, but they won't walk through the door. For some reason they won't walk

through the door, and we're willing to walk through the door and, you know, see what it's like. So I think that helps, that really helps, and it makes it interesting.

Tom Izu 1:30:33

Yeah, sometimes, reluctantly being dragged through the door. But, yeah, ultimately, as you get older, you realize, Oh, I guess I'll learn something new, right? Even though it's difficult, or irritating, or whatever.

Susan Hayase 1:30:49

Yeah. Irritation is good.

Mae Lee 1:30:58

Well, thank you for the interview, and thank you for all the work, and all the thought, and all the history that you bring to it. I feel like the work you're doing, I see, on practical terms, just the kinds of conversations that are happening in different spaces, whether it's with the Nikkei Resisters, or the community events in Jtown, or this tour, this Lineage tour that's being developed, I'm kind of. There are doors I can walk through because you've kind of created the room that's there. So, I can see a lot of, personally, the not-finished outcomes of things that you already are doing.

Tom Izu 1:31:30

That's nice of you to say that.

Susan Hayase 1:31:35

And thank you for asking us, because as I've mentioned before, frequently people don't ask those kinds of questions, and it's really important, I think, for Asian American Studies, and the future of the Asian American movement, whatever it turns out to be, to ask those questions. So thank you, so much, and it's really satisfying to be asked those questions.

Tom Izu 1:31:53

Right, right. So we need your help in terms of Asian American Studies, thinking. You know, you're part of this too. About, helping people think about how they think, right? Helping people put things into context. So, I think it's really needed. That's what I'm really starting to realize more than ever. It was important to capture the history because it just wasn't there. I mean, really basic stuff. And it's important to keep debating some of that, as people are doing. But there's part of this self reflection and conceptualization, things that help the next generation on. They need these tools. I think.