

Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong

Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong: Japanese American Confinement Sites and My National Park Story

Japanese American Intergenerational Narratives Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Amanda Tewes
in 2022

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Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong in front of the Guard Tower Replica at Minidoka National Historic Site, photo by Stan Honda, 2019

Abstract

Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong is superintendent of the Hono'uli'uli National Historic Site and a Gosei. During World War II, the United States government incarcerated her family in prison camps at Manzanar and Minidoka. Wakatsuki-Chong was born in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1986. She grew up mostly in Boise, Idaho, and attended Boise State University and Johns Hopkins University. Wakatsuki-Chong's public history career has included work at Tule Lake National Monument and Minidoka National Historic Site. In this interview, Wakatsuki-Chong discusses growing up in Idaho, including experiences of racism; her Japanese American and Korean American heritage, as well as multicultural family traditions; connections to Japanese American and Korean American communities, including Friends of Minidoka; education and work history, including positions at Japanese American confinement sites; family's experiences at Manzanar and the long-term impact of incarceration; Great Aunt Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's book *Farewell to Manzanar*; attending pilgrimages to Japanese American confinement sites; interpretation of incarceration history, including terminology changes; the eightieth Day of Remembrance event; Manzanar's impact on popular culture; thoughts on intergenerational trauma and healing; and reflections on personal identity.

Table of Contents

Project History	viii
Interview 1: August 2, 2022	
Hour 1	1
Birth in the Bay Area, 1986 — Move from California to Boise, Idaho — Story about name and thoughts on the importance of names — Immigration history of Japanese and Korean sides of family — Parents' meeting and marriage — Experiences of racism in Idaho — Values learned from family — Non-religious upbringing — Family holiday celebrations — Korean American community in Boise — Mexican American influence on father's upbringing — Impact of the murder of Vincent Chin and the redress movement — Paternal grandmother's experience of Japanese American incarceration at Manzanar — Great Aunt Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's book <i>Farewell to Manzanar</i> — Learning about Japanese incarceration in school — Education at Boise State University — Involvement with Friends of Minidoka and role as president	
Hour 2	19
Influence of high school history teacher and interest in teaching — Transition to museum work and public history — Discovery that family members were also incarcerated at Minidoka — Building connections with the Japanese American community — Exploration of personal identity — Involvement in Japan Club and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) — Master's in museum studies at Johns Hopkins University — Work at Tule Lake National Monument and departure from the National Park Service — Relationship between identity and historical interpretation — Interactions between Minidoka National Historic Site and the local community — Terminology about incarceration — Importance of sharing historical knowledge with the community	
Interview 2: August 9, 2022	
Hour 1	34
Role as first superintendent of Hono'uli'uli National Historic Site — Incarceration of Japanese Americans in Hawai'i — Planning process for Hono'uli'uli National Historic Site — Work with Pearl Harbor National Memorial, and its connections to other World War II histories — Role in the Japanese American Confinement Sites Working Group in the National Park Service — Importance of language and changing terminology about incarceration — Role as a White House advisor on Asian American and Native Hawai'ian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) policy — Family history of Japanese American incarceration — <i>Farewell to Manzanar</i> — Economic and emotional impacts of incarceration — Religious community at	

Manzanar — Father's experiences of childhood poverty — Loss of cultural heritage after incarceration, and intergenerational trauma

Hour 2

50

Embracing Japanese American and Korean American identities — Connections to the Japanese American community — Family's lack of discussion about Japanese American incarceration experiences — Visit to Manzanar with Great Aunt Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston— Relationship with great aunt — Thoughts on ethics of historical research — Personal relationship to Japanese American incarceration history — Experiences with pilgrimages to different Japanese American incarceration sites — Eightieth Day of Remembrance event, including: guest speakers, importance of representation, and personal role in planning —Thoughts on Manzanar's impact on popular culture — Thoughts on the future of historical interpretation about Japanese American incarceration — Reflections on intergenerational trauma and healing

Project History

After the entrance of the United States into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which mandated the forced removal of Japanese Americans from their homes on the West Coast into incarceration camps inland for the duration of the war. This unjust incarceration uprooted families, disrupted businesses, and dispersed communities—impacting generations of Japanese Americans.

The Japanese American Intergenerational Narratives Oral History Project documents and disseminates the ways in which intergenerational trauma and healing occurred after the United States government's incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. These interviews examine and compare how private memory, creative expression, place, and public interpretation intersect at sites of incarceration.

Initial interviews in this project focus on the Manzanar and Topaz prison camps in California and Utah, respectively, and pose a comparison through the lens of place, popular culture, and collective memory. How does memory graft differently on different sites? What gets remembered about these sites, and by whom? How does memory differ across generations? Has interpretive work around these sites provided intergenerational catharsis for families of those incarcerated? Does geography and popular culture matter in the healing process?

Exploring narratives of healing as a through line, these interviews of descendants of World War II incarceration investigate the impact of different types of healing, how this informs collective memory, and how these narratives change across generations.

This oral history project began in 2021 with generous funding from the National Park Service's Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant. Most of the early interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Interview 1: August 2, 2022

01-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a first interview with Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong for the Japanese American Intergenerational Narratives Oral History Project, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. This interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on August 2, 2022. And Ms. Wakatsuki-Chong joins me in this remote interview from Kaneohe, Hawai'i, and I am in Walnut Creek, Hawai'i—California, not Hawai'i, alas. Thank you, Hanako, for joining me today.

01-00:00:36

Wakatsuki-Chong: Hi, how are you? Thanks for having me.

01-00:00:38

Tewes: Let's start at the beginning here. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

01-00:00:43

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So I was born in 1986 in the Bay Area.

01-00:00:50

Tewes: But you didn't grow up in the Bay Area, correct?

01-00:00:53

Wakatsuki-Chong: That's correct. I grew up in Boise, Idaho. So my father worked for Hewlett-Packard and got transferred in the early nineties, and we went up to Idaho from California. I went up there when I was seven turning eight and lived up there until I first got my job at the National Park Service over at Tule Lake. So all my formative years were up in Idaho and I would consider myself an Idahoan, even though other people don't see me as such. But I definitely have the cultural tendencies and nuances of an Idahoan.

01-00:01:28

Tewes: I love that. Is there a story about your name you'd like to share?

01-00:01:33

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, sure. So when I was in utero—I don't know if that's the correct term to say—my father and my mom really wanted to see what sex I was going to be. And at the time I guess ultrasounds were about \$300 and a one-time shot and so when they tried to check on me I had my legs closed, because I didn't want people peeking. And so my dad was really hoping I was going to be a boy so I could be his namesake, so he wanted to name me Steven. So if I was a boy, I'd be Steve, Jr. But I came out as a girl, and so my dad actually asked like, "Could we name her Stephanie?" And my mom said no. And so that's how I got my name Hanako, because even though my mom's Korean, she wanted me to have something that's kind of culturally related. And since I was born in the spring, hana means flower, ko means child, so she thought that that was appropriate. And then my middle name is Bom, which in Korean means spring. So my name kind of goes hand-in-hand with flower child, spring,

young moon. Sound like a hippie. But that's the translation of my name. So yeah, so that's how that all came out. But when I think about my name, it made me who I am, because I had to immediately discern if people were hostile or not when they're trying to learn my name. If they're like, "Hey, can I call you Hannah because that's easier?" or "Do you have an American name?" or something like that to me. Name is a very personal thing and it's part of your identity. And when I came across people who would say, "Sorry, could you please pronounce your name again, because I want to say it correctly," that's when I knew there was someone who I can invest time in, versus people who are like, "Your name is just too hard," or something like that. So I do feel like having an ethnic name has helped create me to who I am, which I'm proud of. Because, if not, I see how like my sister, my brother tried to fit into the community by Americanizing their names or tried to put their identity aside, where in one aspect I was able to double down and I feel like that gave me a very different experience in my childhood growing up.

01-00:04:03

Tewes: And does this extend to your last name these days?

01-00:04:06

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So within the last couple of months, I started to use my full last name, which is Wakatsuki-Chong. So technically, immigration messed up. It should be spelled J-e-o-n-g, but they put Chong, because it sounds the same kind of thing. But yeah. I just recently did that, because I've been in spaces where I have collateral duties with my House Initiative on Asian American, Native Hawai'ian, Pacific Islanders, being the region lead of Region 9: Hawai'i and the Pacific, and then also working with the White House in other capacities where I'm in these spaces of other Asian Americans. And specifically, here in Hawai'i, there's a lot of multiethnic Asians, and I realized I could actually be both. I felt like over the years I've been pigeonholed, because I do a lot with Japanese American incarceration history as a Japanese American ranger, even though I feel more culturally Korean. When I'm sick, I want Korean food. When I think about home cooked meals, it's Korean food. I've traveled to Korea many times, because we have family over there. And it was only recently, in the last fifteen years or so, I've been exploring my Japanese American identity, because I did not grow up in a place that had a large Japanese American community. There was a community that existed, but I didn't find that community until I was in college. So this whole aspect of being Japanese American is a relatively new thing for me in which I've always been raised as a Korean American, right? And so it was kind of weird, because I was like fixing my signature block on my Park Service email and I was like, "I'm going to add it." And it's been kind of—very liberating, because I feel like now, especially being here in Hawai'i, embracing my cultural heritage is something that I'm allowed to do, which I guess in other places—like when I was in Idaho, I didn't feel like I was allowed to do that. So yeah, that's been a new thing, even though I've had it as part of my name

ever since I was born. I just didn't embrace it until now. Which is unfortunate, but I'm glad I'm doing it now than not at all.

01-00:06:33

Tewes: Thank you for sharing that. That's really powerful to hear how you thought through identity through names. Well, related to the Japanese heritage that you have here, what generation would you identify as?

01-00:06:52

Wakatsuki-Chong: So I'm kind of a straddler, in a sense. I'm fourth generation and also fifth generation. On my paternal, paternal, maternal side, I'm fifth generation and on my paternal, paternal, paternal side, I am fourth generation. My great-grandmother was actually born here. Well actually, born in Honolulu, Hawai'i, back in the day. But my great-grandfather was an immigrant and they ended up getting married. So that's why I straddle those generations.

01-00:07:30

Tewes: Yeah. So like Yonsei/Gosei.

01-00:07:33

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah.

01-00:07:34

Tewes: Is there a similar title or designation you feel on the Korean side of your family?

01-00:07:40

Wakatsuki-Chong: Well, I guess I'll be second generation, because my mom immigrated from Korea. But I know sometimes people don't consider the immigrant population as like the first generation. So whatever that is for whoever. My mom is the immigrant, and I was born here. But within the Japanese American context, I would be Nisei.

01-00:08:06

Tewes: I'm also curious how your parents met.

01-00:08:11

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, that's a very curious situation. So my father's her second husband. My mom met her first husband in Korea when she was working for the YWCA, and eventually they got married and she moved to Puerto Rico and she had my brother and sister, and her husband ended up tragically dying in a car accident. And then my mom was trying to figure out if she's going to go back to Korea or try to stay in Puerto Rico. Then she ended up meeting my father, which he was working for Hewlett-Packard, and he was sent to Puerto Rico to help start up a new division. And then my mom saw him at a grocery market and was like, "Oh, there's an Asian guy." There's not a lot of Asian people there. So she just started to converse with him. And when I talk to my dad about it, it was love at first sight for my dad, and my mom was just like, "Oh, there's just another Asian dude." And so he knew that my mom is recently widowed and wanted to help her, because he had a car. And so when

she needed to drive around he's like, "Oh, I could help you go do stuff." And so he was really smitten with her, but she was going back to Korea to try, again, figure out what she's going to do. And he would write letters, and then I guess he asked her to marry him at one point in time and she said, "No, because I'm trying to figure out my stuff," kind of thing. And I think it really broke his heart. And then eventually—I don't know how much longer it was—but they still communicated and eventually they were dating and stuff. Like my mom always says [video freezes]—

01-00:10:03

Tewes: Ooh, looks like we've got some feedback here. I'm going to pause. [break in recording] Okay, we are back from a break. You were just telling a story about your dad feeling broken-hearted, your mother wasn't feeling sure she wanted to marry him.

01-00:10:18

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. And I can't remember, did you already hear about like my dad taking my brother and sister on their first date to the Virgin Islands? No? Okay.

01-00:10:26

Tewes: No.

01-00:10:27

Wakatsuki-Chong: So my mom was telling me that one of their first dates was actually he took them out to the Virgin Islands and actually brought my sister and my brother along, which my mom was like, "That was very kind of him," that he didn't have to do that. And after a while, I guess she started to fall in love and then they ended up getting married and then moving to California. So I had kind of a blended family because of that. But it was really funny, too. I don't know if this is even appropriate to say, but since my brother and sister, they're half Puerto Rican and half Korean, and then my dad is Japanese American, my mom is Korean. Even though I knew they had a different father, I would look at my dad, because he used to work in the fields when he was younger and I was like, "Oh, that makes sense." Because Cita, like my sister looks a little bit more like my dad. Even though I knew that they had a different father, my brain just didn't know how to really—yeah. So it was very strange, because when I was little, people would ask me my ethnicity, and I'll be like, "I'm half Korean, half Japanese, and half Puerto Rican." And my kindergarten teacher had to call my mom because she's like, "I think your daughter has like an identity issue, because she thinks she's 150 percent of a person, and where's this Puerto Rican thing coming in?" And so yeah, so that was really interesting.

01-00:11:49

Tewes: But I think speaks to the interesting cultural connections you've all developed as a family. That's really fun to hear. So you grew up in Boise. Can you tell me what the community looked—

01-00:12:12

Wakatsuki-Chong: I am not hearing you.

01-00:12:13

Tewes: Oh. Can you hear me now?

01-00:12:17

Wakatsuki-Chong: Still not. I see your— [break in recording]

01-00:12:22

Tewes: Okay, we are back from a break, and I was just asking you what it was like growing up in Boise in the eighties and nineties, especially.

01-00:12:31

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. It was kind of difficult, because we moved to Boise, I think in '93, and that was kind of an influx year. So in Idaho, we always talked about the great Micron migration of the late eighties, and then you had the great HP migration of the early nineties. And we were considered one of the "damn Californians" that's coming into Idaho. So it was kind of a double whammy, being from California and also being people of color. It was really hard to adjust. I do remember my father's supervisor was very, very kind. I think he understood that we were going to have issues kind of being accepted in our community, because I do remember him giving us movie tickets and stuff so we could go out and whatnot. And then whenever a new family of color comes in, it's always, "Hey, maybe you guys want to hang out." Which at first was super weird as a kid, because I recognized it, but then I understand that I think that it was coming from a good place, but it was also still kind of messed up. Where it's like: Why weren't they trying to integrate us within the general community, as well? But I think at the time this was their best effort that they made.

01-00:13:51

I do recall just the straight up racism that happened. Some of it I didn't understand at the time until later. Because I remember going to the DMV with my parents, and my dad had to have some major surgery, because he had a tumor that was in his nasal passage. So they had to actually cut from one ear to the other to remove it, so he had staples all across here, [points to neck] and so he couldn't move his head really well. And at the DMV I remember the woman—it's because it's a glass window and there's that little tray. She was throwing everything into the tray so it bounced out and onto the floor. So me as a little kid, I'm picking everything up from the floor. And at first, I thought it was just them being clumsy, but then I remember after we left my mom was really upset, because she's all like frustrated with how they're being treated. And so I was still a little bit confused. It wasn't until like later on when we talked about it that I understood my mom's frustration.

01-00:15:00

And then there's another instance I remember. Over by the mall at the Boise Town Square there was a Sizzler's. And we'd never been to a Sizzler's, so my

dad was like, "We should go here." And I remember we went in and they're like, "How many people?" And then we said, "Five," and there's five of us. And then I think it was another like waiter or maybe a manager came up and said, "We're full." And me as a child, I was like, "But there's tables." And he's like, "We're full." And then so my dad was like, "Let's go." And at the time I'm just like, "I don't understand. There are tables there, Dad." And he's like, "No, we're just going. Let's go." And I think I frustrated him, because he did raise his voice a little bit and we just went to another restaurant. But I didn't recognize it, again, until much later when I was just processing it out with my dad as, I think, a young adult. And he's just like, "Yeah, I was really frustrated." And it's funny, because we never went to Sizzler ever again.

01-00:16:04

Wakatsuki-Chong: But there was a lot of those straight up racism, aggressive behavior. And then also the microaggressions and stuff like that. But most of the stuff was very just straight up aggression. Idaho is predominantly white. I think it's considered as a whitetopia, and so there was a lot of issues that I had to deal with, with racism. I remember the first day of third grade I was told to go back to China. And this, again, led to another identity crisis, because I was like, "Mom, are we Chinese? This kid was telling me to go back to China. I didn't know we're Chinese. Is that a culture I need to learn about?" And then my mom's like, "No, that's what racism is." So she had to sit down and talk to me about racism, which I didn't completely understand at that time, because I'm like, "Why are people being mean?" And I remember my mom was like, "Well, this is taught, because no one would stay stuff like this unless they're taught it." Which again, I don't think I recognized that until much later in life.

01-00:17:09

But yeah, there's been a lot of instances. My mom had a small business in a small town called Middleton, Idaho. We were harassed by the neo-Nazis. Some of the members would come in and just stare at us, but we couldn't do anything, because they're not stealing, they're not really harassing us. But they would come in all tatted up with swastikas and they'll be like, "Yes, ma'am, Yes, sir." But then they'll just stare. And it was very strange. And then there's an assumption that the same group put swastikas on the back of the store, which they put it on all the Asian American businesses at that time, which there was three in the city. And I remember our landlord was horrified and immediately came and repainted it. And that happened, I think, twice. And then we were robbed, which we're pretty sure it was the same group of neo-Nazi folks. And one of the gentlemen, I think later on, he ended up going to jail, because he—I guess technically it was manslaughter, but he beat someone up and left them on the side of the road and that person died.

01-00:18:19

So yeah, I remember going up to do a dig up at Kooskia up in northern Idaho. My dad and I just had this conversation. It was just, "Okay, call me every hour and let me know what milepost you're at," because the realities were, I was going up into Aryan Nation territory and we know that people disappear,

and it was just a matter-of-fact thing to do. And I recall actually talking about this—I want to say it was like last year, because I was in this other diversity group and we're just trying to talk about: where you were raised, was it a benefit or a burden? And I was like, "I guess it's a burden," and I was telling them this story where I'm like, "Oh yeah, I was just letting my dad know, because then if I disappeared, they would know my last known location." And I saw my colleagues, they kind of had this horrified look on their face. And I was like, "Oh dang, that's kind of messed up." Because in my mind at the time, was like, that's just a reality. You just did that for safety, just in case, not like, "This is so messed up and I can't believe I have to do this." I was just like, oh, this is just a survival thing. Like my dad didn't have to set me to the side and be like, "Okay, this is the reason why we're doing this." It was just known. So that was a good revelation for myself that this is not a normal upbringing. [laughs]

01-00:19:44

And even when I was in college, I used to work at Home Depot and people would just come up to say the weirdest things to me. And some of it was like broken English. There was this gentleman, I guess adopted a child from China, like an infant, and he was just like, "You Chinese, she Chinese. You Chinese, she Chinese." And I'm like, "Okay. I'm not Chinese, though." And that was super weird. But then I always felt bad for the children who were adopted and then their parents making an assumption that I was also adopted, because I don't have an accent. And then they would come up and say, "Were you adopted? Because my kids were adopted, and they want to talk to another adoptee." And then I didn't know what to say, because I can't be, "Oh, sorry, my parents didn't give me up for adoption." You can't say that. I would just be like, "Hey, things are going to get better," blah, blah. And then I pulled the parent aside and was just like, "That's really messed up. You shouldn't do that, because I am not an adoptee. And you need to work harder as a parent to talk about these things and not rely on other people to do it, because you're the one that chose to adopt these children, and this is something that you're going to have to work with them through, but you can't put it on other people." And so there's always weird stuff that happens. But yeah.

01-00:21:11

Tewes:

Whoop. Lot to unpack there, but I appreciate you sharing all that. I'm curious: thinking back to the incident in third grade where a student asked you to go back to China, and your mom said, "No, that's racism," was that the first time you had a conversation about what racism is?

01-00:21:32

Wakatsuki-Chong: It's the first time that I at least recalled hearing those words. Because I remember when we moved to Idaho and I was in first grade and we were getting treated bad, it may have come up, but I think I was too young to recognize it. But that's the first time I remember where my mom pulled me aside, because I was crying, and I didn't understand why I was crying. And she's like, "It's because you know it's wrong." But I didn't want to think about

my feelings, because I'm like, "This fifth grader knows more, and he would know. Why would he lie to me?" Because I was still in that phase where it's like no one's going to lie to you, because everyone has good intentions, right? So yeah. But that's definitely the first time that I remember having a talk about that. I think that we talked about it in different ways, but I think I was also just too young to comprehend. And still at third grade, I believe I was still too young to fully comprehend. Because even as an adult when I go back and revisit these memories, I'm just like, Holy cow. Like WTF, on some of these things. But you won't fully understand until you're older.

01-00:22:48

Tewes:

In some ways, that is the benefit of the oral history process and thinking through some of these memories. Well, I want to speak more about the community you did find in Idaho. But perhaps before we move on, I should ask some questions about your family and: what values do you think you learned from them?

01-00:23:17

Wakatsuki-Chong: Oh, values. Interesting. Because none of it was ever verbalized. I'm sure as you do these oral histories, people are like, "Oh, shikata ga nai, gaman." Like my dad, he grew up after the war. He was born after the war, so he was the first child born free. But it was during that transition where they're just trying to rebuild their lives, right? But he never really used a lot of Japanese. But I do feel like, from our family, we had the perseverance and just trying to prove yourself through your work. I think that was also indicative for my mom's side, as being an immigrant, sometimes people don't know you. You don't have family to have a name to fall back on, but you have to just prove yourself through your actions. And the other thing that my mom always put into my mind, which I think it's really great, but I think at times, when my friends find out like how strong-willed my mom is, they're like, "Oh, I see where you come from now." Because my mom is always like, "Anything is possible. You just have to put your mind to it. Whatever you want to do, it's possible. You just have to find the way. And a lot of the times it's takes a lot of energy, a lot of thought or sweat equity, but you can make anything happen." So when I look at stuff, like I guess I see things always in the positive. It's like, "How can we make it happen," rather than, "That cannot work," right, where some people are more in the negative mind frame. And then she was always telling us about like, "We always have to plan for the future." And in one aspect, I think it's good, because I think that's why my career has been going the way it is. But I sometimes spend too much time in the future, and also as an historian, I spend too much time in the past, but I don't necessarily spend time in the present. I'm trying harder to live in that space. But my mom taught us about essentially: you could be lucky, and the way that you get lucky is as long as you're preparing yourself for opportunities, that's how you create your luck. Luck just doesn't happen out of thin air. It isn't just you buy a lottery ticket and you win something. You have to prepare yourself for something. And it could be anything. And

whenever those opportunities come, you have to be able to pick it out in a timely manner. Because sometimes you can have the opportunity, but you may not have the preparedness, and they could be running at the wrong times, and then eventually you miss those opportunities. But if you do it right and you're always prepared and then those opportunities come, then you can just pluck them out of the air. And that goes back to, again, anything can happen as long as you put your mind to it.

01-00:26:09

So that has helped me out to create who I am, because even with some of the programs that I've been able to do for work. Like Tadaima! with Kimiko [Marr], we did our after action and she was like—I can't remember if it was her or someone else—they said, "You guys never said no. It was just, 'Let's see how we could do it.'" And I didn't realize that that is so empowering. Because to me I'm like, "Well, there were some ideas that we weren't sure." But they're like, "But you never said no. We always tried to find a way to make it happen or if we couldn't find a way to make it happen, then it's like we tried kind of thing." I think that's the biggest value. Well, I don't know if that's necessarily a value, but that's a lesson that I carry on with me and I hope to tell other people, so people don't feel like they're powerless, because we're able to control our own future. Sometimes there's other issues, like socioeconomical issues and whatnot. But I think for the most part, if you're able to prepare yourself for these opportunities, you could always kind of move forward.

01-00:27:25

Tewes:

That's interesting, thank you. Did you all have a religious tradition that you followed?

01-00:27:31

Wakatsuki-Chong: I grew up in a vacuum of religion. My mom was raised Buddhist. My grandfather was a Buddhist monk. On my father's side, they were raised—I think it's many denominations of Christianity, but it's essentially Christianity. It's just whatever church was closest. Because I remember talking to my aunt, she was like, "Oh, I was baptized like Methodist or whatever," and someone else was Presbyterian, someone was Catholic. But they were very Christian and following the path of Christ. Because my grandmother was incarcerated at Manzanar, and the only time I was able to talk to her about her incarceration, obviously I was sixteen and I was a little bratty kid with a camera and I was like, "Grandma, tell me about the worst time in your life." Well, I didn't say it like that, but that's essentially what I was doing and not recognizing it, right? And I know she was deflecting. But eventually the only comment that she made about camp was, "God wouldn't give me a task that I couldn't handle." So that's what she carried with her. And up until she passed away, she actually had this framed picture of Jesus that on the back [she noted it] was given to her by Sister Bernadette, which I think a lot of people know from Manzanar. And then she had pictures of all her kids and then the older cousins in that. So I think there was a certain time where she stopped

putting pictures, because it didn't fit. But yeah, she was very religious. My dad, I think he identified himself as Christian.

01-00:29:05

But they didn't impose religion on us. So me growing up as a child, I was in that vacuum of religion. All I know about like Christianity was a commercialization of Christianity. So it's like there's Santa Claus, there's this Easter Bunny. It wasn't out of the canon that I was learning about Christianity. I don't know if this is an interesting thing, but I think it's funny, at least on my part. But one time my mom went back to Korea, my dad didn't know what to do with us kids, and he's like, "It's Sunday. I'll take you to this local church." So we go to church, and it had to be around Easter, because they're talking about the parables and then also like, you know, how Jesus was both the lamb and the savior... As a kid, if you're not indoctrinated in this, I was like, "He's a lamb, but he's a savior? What is a savior? Why is he an animal? I don't understand." Not understanding the sacrifice aspects, right? I was interrupting service, because the only thing in my world at the time was Harry Potter, so I'm like, "He's an Animagus and the lamb is his animal, right?" And then they took me away, because I was disrupting service, and then they disinvited us from future services. And I do recall, as they're taking me away, in my mind I was super dramatic. I was reaching out for my sister, like, "No!" Yeah. And then I was put with the other children and then we never went back. [laughs]

01-00:30:44

So that's why, in a weird way, when I was in high school, there's a huge LDS [Latter Day Saints] influence in the area I was born at, and there was seminary. And again, not being raised in a church setting, I didn't realize seminary is a very churchy thing. I just thought of it as another class people would come out of and they're always happy and sometimes they had cupcakes. And I'd ask them what they'd do, and they won't tell me. So I tried to join seminary, and I remember my counselor is like, "Are you Mormon?" And I was like, "No." And she's like, "No, I'm not going to let you sign up for that." And I was like super disappointed, because I was like, "Well, I want to learn." And then eventually when I got to college, there was a lot of like these courses about Constantine and his conversion, early Christianity, reading the Bible kind of as literature and stuff like that. So I started to take those classes. My degree in history is actually in late antiquity, early Christianity, early medieval history, even though all the papers I presented were on the Japanese American incarceration. Because it was a fascination, where I'm all, "Well, I don't know anything about this, and I don't think my peers would try to understand me, so I should try to understand my peers by learning about this text that greatly influences them." And so that was an interesting thing. Yeah, anyways.

01-00:32:10

Tewes:

Wow. Well, given that you didn't have a religious tradition, what did holidays look like for you? What were the special holidays that come to mind?

01-00:32:22

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. I guess to us, because we did Thanksgiving and Christmas, but that was usually more for like—because Thanksgiving we usually did it in Idaho. But it was just our version of what we think was supposed to be for Thanksgiving. But our family didn't like turkey, so we always did a ham. And I remember my uncle one time got mad at us, because he's like, "Oh, how's your turkey?" I'm like, "Oh, we have a ham." He's like, "Ham's for Christmas." I didn't understand that, but I was like, "Okay, whatever." But we would do our version, or we'll always make kimbap, which is kind of like Korean sushi rolls and all this stuff. It was like a mixed Korean [holiday]. I'm not trying to be offensive, but we just called it white people's food. So we got mashed potatoes, the yams, we would get that stuff and the stuffing, but then also had our Korean food with it.

01-00:33:18

But Christmas was more to celebrate my grandmother. So my paternal grandmother, she lived in Las Vegas with my aunt, and her birthday was December twenty-second. My mom usually sent my dad and I early to celebrate my grandmother's birthday. And then on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, my mom, sister, and brother would come, because they had to close down the store. But usually Christmas Eve is a busy day, because everyone's like doing last-minute shopping. So then they'll come either that evening or the next day, and then we'll spend Christmas with our family.

01-00:33:56

But I know the most important day, I feel like, for my family was Lunar New Year. So Koreans celebrate Lunar New Year. So we'll do normally New Years with my grandmother in Vegas, but what we always celebrated was the Lunar New Year. And it was always sometimes end of January to February, depending on when it lands, but that's when we're like cleaning house and everything. My mom will probably be horrified if I say this, but we always had our family arguments, sometimes during the day, and I remember I caused an argument one time. I think it was at a Thanksgiving where we didn't—it was either Thanksgiving or Christmas, one of the times we didn't go to Vegas. And halfway through the day, it was three o'clock, I was like, "Wow, we haven't had our family argument yet." And my mom's like, "What, you think we're just an angry family?" and then we had our argument. And then I was like, "Ah, there it is. We now have our holiday." And then my mom got really mad at me, [laughs] because I was missing that. And usually the argument's something stupid, about like—because my chore was we had this cupboard that my mom had these little like animals or crystals, and my sister and I would have to dust everything off and then we get to reset the scenes. And so that was always the best thing that my sister and I got to do. But most of the times, we didn't do it correctly, because we had too much water on the wet towel to dust things off, so it's leaving stains on the lacquer. And then suddenly me and my mom are like, "They didn't do it correctly for us." It's like, "Oh, you guys need to do this right." Or my brother says something dumb, and then she yells at him to go do whatever he needs to do.

But it kind of became a tradition. So I was, I guess, happy that I caused the family argument for that holiday, but I know my mom was really pissed at me about that. But I was like, now our holiday's complete.

01-00:35:51

Tewes: Traditions come in all shapes and sizes.

01-00:35:57

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah.

01-00:35:57

Tewes: It's interesting to hear about the Korean traditions that you're following here. And you did mention that you had some connection to the Korean American community in Boise. What did that look like then?

01-00:36:12

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. Back then it was actually really interesting because my mom really wanted to find community, a sense of community, because I know it was really hard for her; she does have an accent, and so she was looking for a community. It happened to be that there was a community there. We participated in it. But then it got really religious and then we stopped participating in it, because it became too much. Because to us, it's fine to be respectful of people, what they believe in or even respect in their home, but there was a point where an individual came to our house and was like, "You need to get rid of that Buddha, you need to get rid of this and that." And my mom's not a practicing Buddhist, but those are like relics that her father gave her. Who goes into someone else's house and says that, right?

01-00:37:04

So there was some other issues that kind of came up, that we just kind of stopped going and participating in the community, because it got really religious focused rather than culturally focused. And originally when we started, it was more as a cultural aspect, because a lot of the next gen, we weren't really involved in Korean cultural stuff, especially language-wise. So my mom kind of helped start this Korean language school. But then some of the teachers only wanted to work out of religious books, and then my mom was like, "Well, can we just have stuff that isn't religious?" And then there were some arguments—disagreements there, I should say, rather than arguments—and my mom was like, "Okay yeah, I'm not into this. We can participate in our culture in different ways without having it prefaced around religion." Because some of that became political, because who's talking to which pastor kind of stuff. And my mom's like, "No." When she got involved, it was more to center her children, because she wanted us to learn about Korean culture and language, not just having church religion stuff.

01-00:38:25

Tewes: And you've already said there weren't a lot of opportunities to engage with Japanese American culture. But were there any things that your father, in

particular, or the rest of your family felt were important to share with you, be it language or particular traditions?

01-00:38:41

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, not really. I don't think my dad knew about the Japanese American community in Idaho. Again, I found that out later. I think we knew in Ontario, which is in Oregon, it's a community right on the border, that they did an Obon. But I knew that was something Japanese-y, but I didn't understand what it was, because, again, we didn't really grow up in that until later on. That's when I was like reconnecting with that side and that culture. So we didn't really do much. I remember my dad used to joke, saying he knows enough Japanese to read a menu and that's about it. But even him growing up as a child in the projects in Long Beach, because after the war they didn't have a lot of money and they weren't economically stable. He was kind of living in more of the areas that's poorer, and a lot of his neighbors were actually like Mexican Americans and Latinx. And he would go over to their home and spend time and people come over to his home. So in his mind, when he thinks of comfort food, he wants tamales, he wants Mexican food, and then some— [video freezes]

01-00:40:03

Tewes: Oh no. I'm going to pause again. [break in recording] Okay, we are back from a break, [laughs] and you were speaking about your father and his comfort food being sort of Mexican American dishes.

01-00:40:16

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. I remember growing up, my dad would ask my mom, he would like some tamales. And at the time we didn't know of the carnicerías or any of the Mexican stores out there. And so my mom would just actually make tamales by hand. So we would help her out, mixing the masa by hand with the manteca, the fat, and preparing everything. And she even went so far as the ugly horn husks—We'll soak them, and we'll have to pull out all the ugly ones and cut them into strips, because we would wrap the bow on them with the ugly ones. And I used to be like, "Mom, no one does this." I was like, "Some people do with twine." And she was like, "No, we're going to do this this way." So we would always do the work. But yeah.

01-00:41:12

Tewes: I also want to take a step back and think about the era in which you were growing up and the consequences of the earlier historical moments. And I know you weren't alive for either of these—well, for most of this—but I was wondering if these are things that had impacted you and your family's discussion [about racism]. In 1982 Vincent Chin was murdered in Michigan, and considering the racism you encountered firsthand, I wonder if that came up for you all growing up.

01-00:41:54

Wakatsuki-Chong: Not specifically like a reference to Vincent Chin, but I could see like some of the anti-Asian sentiment is probably from that time and carried on. It could actually be from the time of pre-World War II and all of that, where the anti-Asian sentiment existed well before the Japanese American incarceration, and it still exists today. But there are all different forms of it. But I could kind of see how that could have been an issue. Because I do remember, I think in the early nineties or late eighties, Japan was kind of rising. But then I want to say, was it the nineties or early two thousands, is where their economy crashed, right? And so I do recall that that was always this friction, whether it's, "Are you going to get a Honda, a Honda Civic or an American-made car?" There was a lot of that going on. I remember in school hearing people say, "Well, of course they're going to get American cars. Why would they get an Asian car? We need to support America." So I think there's a trickle-down effect. But I've never been confronted with, "Hey, Vincent Chin's murder. How is this affecting you?" Or specifically about the auto industry or something like that, that's related to that.

01-00:43:19

But it's really interesting, because this year was the fortieth anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin, and seeing how we still have these issues. You think about Vincent Chin was in '82. After September eleventh you had this Sikh community that was suffering, because they wore a turban and people were getting murdered. That's essentially the same thing, where it's like there's this misidentifying someone. Even if they were ethnically or religiously from whatever appropriate group that was trying to be targeted, no one should be murdered because of just an association of looks. Because again, this is exactly what happened with the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans and happened to other people. So yeah, it's just interesting to see how history kind of repeats itself and rhymes. It may not be the same community, but it's the same almost exact story, just different people.

01-00:44:24

And that's why I'll just put in my plug, where this is why we need to educate people. Because if we cannot look at ourselves as an American public, look ourselves in the mirror and see who we are, how could we build a better future if we don't even want to understand our past? There's no way for us to pivot to try to create a better future. And I'm kind of talking future oriented, but we need to know our past to have a better present, too. We have to have both past, present, and future in mind if we want to change things. And if we're not willing to understand it, there's no hope for us to try to pivot or at least try to change. I'm not trying to be too much of an optimistic, where it's like, oh, everything's going to be perfect in the future, but we could start making little tweaks through our actions and how we communicate with people and how we actually understand ourselves and those tweaks. Then kind of go towards, what was it, MLK talking about the "arc of justice," where it's not a straight line, but we have to find different ways to pivot from our current trajectory. And then if we could just slowly make these pivots

over the course of time, we could get towards the direction we want to go. It's never going to be a straight line, but we need to do something to change, because if not, we're going to still be doing the same thing that we've always done, and we know where that ends. I'll just leave it at that. [laughs]

01-00:45:56

Tewes:

I appreciate hearing that perspective, because I want to talk more about your foray into public history, and your motivation therein. Quickly, before we move on, though, I also want to acknowledge that the redress movement was in full effect during the early years of your childhood. Did you ever hear from your family about their perspectives on that moment in history?

01-00:46:26

Wakatsuki-Chong: No. I've never heard from family about that. But I do recall, I must have been between the ages of nine and pre-teens, like twelve, at my grandmother/aunt's house in Vegas. When you would walk up the stairs, my grandmother would have the family altar where those who passed, she'll kind of do the prayers. And even though that's very much a Buddhist thing, she's very spiritual, but she was also very Christian, but she just kind of did everything. But when you go up, I remember she had the apology letters from Clinton and Bush. And I remember it was really weird, because I was just like, "Oh, Grandma has a letter from presidents. That's cool." Not really thinking much about it. And it wasn't until well after my grandmother passed away, but when I started to work for Friends of Minidoka studying this history more, I realized, Holy shit, those were the two letters. And I got thinking about it, where I'm all, Okay, so she never talked about it, but yeah, she had these letters up. And so to me—and this is just my own interpretation of it—that probably justified and gave her meaning of the years lost in the camp. Because my grandmother was twenty-six years old. She had my Aunt Patty, who was an infant, and then during the course of the war ended up having my Uncle George, Uncle Woody, and Aunt Joanne in prison. Yeah, and then her husband gets drafted into the war. So she's essentially a single mother of four. And then she also took care of her younger in-laws to provide support. Of course, she didn't want to talk to me when I was younger about, "Hey, Grandma, tell me about this terrible time in your life," when I was trying to record her. But it also made me recognize it meant a lot for her to just have that up. And over the course of interviewing people and talking to survivors, those letters meant a lot to people. They didn't need the money, the money wasn't the thing; it was that apology, to just be seen. And I think that that's what a lot of people, just in general, any person wants to just be seen and heard, and that was that validation that this did happen. Because there was a lot of people who were denying that the incarceration happened. But that was the extent of the Civil Liberties Act that I was aware of within my family and how I heard about it. Yeah, that was about it.

01-00:49:15

The only other reference to camp that I had was we all knew that my [Great] Aunt Jeanne wrote *Farewell to Manzanar*, my great aunt. And so I just

remember it's the coming-of-age book, when you're in third or fourth grade, you're handed this book, and this is your family history. But you're so young at that age. In my mind, it's, oh, I read a story, but it didn't really connect until later. Because maybe if I did it in school and then there was lesson plans around it, maybe I would have got more out of it. So I knew about that, and I knew around Christmastime the *Farewell to Manzanar* movie would show up on Disney. And so I do remember we'll be like, "Oh, let's see Auntie Jeanne's film." And then I did remember my dad, because they used a lot of Japanese Americans as extras in that film, and then my dad was like, "Oh, that's my scene. That's your Uncle Woody and I and Uncle George beating up this guy." And then I found out later that guy was Frank Abe. I was talking to Frank Abe, and he was like, "Oh yeah, I played in *Farewell to Manzanar*." I was like, "Oh, what was your character?" And he's like, "I was that JACL [Japanese American Citizens League] guy that was getting beat." And I was like, "Oh my God, that was my uncle and my father beating you." So it was one of those really small world kind of things.

01-00:50:41

Tewes:

I do want to speak more about *Farewell to Manzanar* in our next session, because there will be a lot to unpack there. But what you have said just reminded me that for many, *Farewell to Manzanar* is actually curriculum in schools. Did you encounter any of this history in school?

01-00:50:59

Wakatsuki-Chong: No. Honestly, I think when I was in AP history in eleventh grade, and it was really interesting, because the books that we were using were actually from the seventies. Which now, when I think about it, I'm like, I was in school, I was a junior in 2003. So that's thirty years old, right? But I think there was a paragraph with incarceration. I do believe my history teacher, Mr. Seifert, mentioned something about Minidoka, but I didn't see the connection. Because I think he was like, "Oh yeah, and then there was a camp in Idaho." But at the time, you're just a high school kid. You don't understand really what's going on. So that's what I remember. But I do remember later on my cousins, who are teachers in California [told me that] Cruz Bustamante, I want to say it was, in 2003, he was a lieutenant governor, made it a mandatory curriculum for everyone in the State of California for fourth grade and, I think, eighth grade or something.

01-00:52:06

So somehow, I was sent the teachers' packet. So I'd walk around with it, showing it to my teachers, but then they're, "Well, this is California," and not really understanding why I was doing it. But I was [showing them], "Hey, look." And then later on, as I got into Friends of Minidoka, then it starts clicking and it was, oh okay, this is what Mr. Seifert was talking about, about Minidoka. Because at first, that word sounds familiar, but I don't know where it's from. And then after thinking about it, I was like, oh yeah, I remember he said it in class one time, right? So that's the extent that I had of that in the curriculum.

01-00:52:51

I only got reintroduced to it when I was in college, because there was a professor at Boise State University. He ended up becoming my mentor and passed a while ago. I was kind of staying with this classmate of mine, because I'd just moved to Middleton, which is very rural. It'd either take thirty minutes to get to Boise or two hours, there was no in between. Because if you got stuck behind a tractor, you're just SOL. And so my history teacher, so this is my—what was it called? It was my research methods class. She was like, "Hanako, I've been counting all the minutes that you've been late." And she said, "If you're five minutes late, I'm going to have to fail you." And she's like, "I already have to drop you one letter grade by the amount of time I had." So then I was staying with my friend so I could just get to the class. Because it was a 7:15 class. I didn't want to fail this class. And so I was talking to her one time, this classmate here. Her name is Victoria. She was all, "Oh my God, I've been talking to my boyfriend too much. I didn't do my homework." And I was like, "Well, what's your homework?" She's like, "I was supposed to read this book." And I was like, "What book is it?" She's like, "I don't know. Something like *Farewell to*, I don't know, *Manzana* or whatever." And I was, "Oh, *Farewell to Manzanar*?" And then she's, "Yeah, you know it?" I'm like, "Yeah, let me tell you about it." So obviously I don't think she retained everything that I told her, but she went straight to her teacher to get bonus points. She's like, "I know this chick who is the great niece of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston." So that got her some bonus— [video freezes]

01-00:54:35

Tewes:

Oh no. I'm going to pause again. [break in recording] Okay, we are back from a break, and you were just telling a story about *Farewell to Manzanar* and your college friend.

01-00:54:49

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. Victoria got points from her professor since she didn't read the book and didn't really retain what I was telling her. So she basically said, "I know this chick. She's the great grandniece of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, and here's her phone number," because he asked for my number. And she like, "Yeah." And she actually texted me. She's like, "I'm sorry, but I just gave your number to this professor," because basically she needed the points, because she couldn't remember any of the stuff that I said. So that was Dr. Errol Jones. And then he ended up giving it to his colleague, Dr. Bob Sims, who in Idaho and at Boise State University was seen as a preeminent scholar on Minidoka, and he used to be the former dean of my college. So he actually gave me a call on my phone and he was like, "Oh, how long are you here in Idaho?" because I think he made an assumption that I was just passing by or something. And I was like, "Oh, I live here, and I go to Boise State." And he was like, "Oh, that's wonderful. I want to get ahold of you, because I want to work on a couple projects with you." And he's like, "And maybe we could get your aunt out." He's like, "Do you know anything about Minidoka?" And so at the time, I didn't really know what it was. It sounded familiar, but knowing

that he was a former dean of my college, I didn't want to sound stupid, so I said yes. And he's like, "Great. We'll set up a time to meet." And then I went online and googled it and I was like, WTF. There was one of these Idaho. And then that's where slowly I'm like, oh, I think Mr. Seifert mentioned this years ago, but it just didn't click. Yeah. This Dr. Sims ended up saying, "Hey, Hanako, come out to a board meeting. Maybe give me your résumé so I can just see what you've done." And then all of a sudden, I go to this meeting, and this is where a lot of Japanese Americans get trapped, where I ended up joining a board and was voted as vice chair and I was just like, "What just happened?" Because at the time I was just twenty-one. In one aspect I'm, oh, I'm honored, but I'm like, I'm twenty-one. Why am I running an organization? I don't know what I'm doing. But then I had a lot of good mentors and they're like, "Hey, you're just vice chair, and then in two years you're going to be chair." But they helped me kind of hone my skills and find direction, which was nice. But at the time, it was very scary. So never go into a board meeting if you don't know what's going on, because you're more likely going to get voted on to a board and then into a position.

01-00:57:41

Tewes:

And what did your work with the Friends of Minidoka, what did that look like?

01-00:57:44

Wakatsuki-Chong:

Yeah. So that was very interesting, because I'd never been a part of a board and didn't know what they really do. But their mission is to support the Minidoka National Historic Site. So I started, I want to say, in 2007. So the Park Service itself was designated in 2001, and then I think the Friends of Minidoka was created in either 2002 or '03, I want to say 2003. So by the time I came on, it's a 501(c)(3), it was still very new. There's always been people kind of watching over Minidoka, but this is their first time trying to actually work with the Park Service on developing the site. So I was in charge of several different grants. One was just closing up a grant, where I didn't write, the Honor Roll Project. That was one of my colleagues, and he did all the research behind it. And so I guess what you'll call the executive or administrative people changed, so then by that time I was the president, I had to close out that grant. And then I was given three days to write a grant for the guard tower. I don't know what I'm doing, but somehow, they awarded \$380,000 to us and I was just like, Okay. So we did that. I got a grant for \$20,000 to do an education program. And then the last grant that I wrote was for the Issei Memorial within the now-Visitor's Center in Minidoka National Historic Site. So I wrote the grant, but I didn't get to complete it. But I helped to complete it as a Park Service person, because by that time I had to roll off the board, because I was hired as a chief of interpretation over there. And then I was able to at least work with Mia Russell, who at the time was executive director of Friends of Minidoka but ended up having to close out a couple of grants that I started. And then we worked on that together to get that done. So that was a lot of preservation efforts on the site itself, but then

also working with the Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee on doing site programming and provide staff help for their pilgrimage, and then also just bringing awareness about Minidoka to other institutions locally and in Boise. At the time, when I was not Park Service and was Friends of Minidoka, there was a lobbying component. So I would go to D.C. every once in a while to go talk to staffers on the Hill about the importance of the Japanese American Confinement Site grants. But once I became Park Service, I stopped engaging in all that.

01-01:00:30

Tewes:

Let me ask, because I think at this same time you're studying political science and history at Boise State: did you see this as public history work?

01-01:00:42

Wakatsuki-Chong: That's interesting. I guess at the time I didn't know what public history was, because I think I always saw history as like the ivory tower kind of history, where you're just disseminating information. I actually wanted to be a high school history teacher. I kind of mentioned Mr. Seifert was my AP history teacher. He kind of got me thinking about history in a different way. I guess maybe I was super naïve, where I'm like, "These are our teachers. They have all the information. They're going to grace us with all this info, because they know it all," right? And I just remember coming into his class, he's like, "Yeah, I have to teach to a curriculum, but all this history we're doing is top-down. We're only learning from the victors. We have to understand who's not at the table. What are the other stories? And the way you find out the real story is, yes, you have to kind of look at this top-down approach, but you really need to look at the bottom-up. So you need to find all these other people's stories, hear it so you can have a better picture of what actually occurred." And I just remember that totally blew my mind and I was like, I've been lied to my whole life. I was just super shattered. So that's why I wanted to be a history teacher.

01-01:01:53

But then I ended up doing this program back in 2008, 2009 for students. What I was going to do was graduate and then start my teaching credentials. But it was for People to People International, where essentially, I was a glorified babysitter teaching people about law and ethics. And then I realized, Yeah, it takes a very special person to be a teacher, and I am not that special person and I needed to find another career. So I was freaking out. At the time I was working at an archive. Didn't necessarily like the work, but I was like, I guess this is what it means to be an adult. You just get a job in the field. And then one of my colleagues, she's like, "Hey, you should intern with the museum. I did an internship at the Idaho State Historical Museum. You should do that." And I was like okay. And then I realized, oh wow, you could get students and then they go away. You're not in charge of them. And I think this is what it is, it's the happy medium for me. And so that's how I kind of learned about that notion of public history, and then through that I tried to incorporate some of those things into the programs that we were doing with

Friends of Minidoka. Because I was more leading stuff, I wasn't really necessarily doing like programs. When we got the grant for the guard tower, they created this course around the guard tower.

01-01:03:27

So it was a construction management course with one history student, and that history student was Mia Russell, who ended up becoming our executive director. And I was a little bit confused, because I remember she came up and introduced herself and she was really excited and was talking fast so I couldn't really catch everything that she was saying. But from there we ended up becoming really good friends, and she's one of my best buddies. But through that class, they invited me to speak about cultural preservation and why we're trying to do this on the site, what does that mean to the public and what does it mean to the descendants and those who are survivors and trying to contextualize it isn't just we're doing a historical replica? It's that this has meaning that's going to help facilitate people's experience as they go through. And then over the years, I kind of honed that a little bit more, because I was also working at the old Idaho Penitentiary State Historic Site. So going from the museum to the Old Pen and trying to facilitate people's experiences but also making it education, that helped me get more into the public history realm and then to solidify everything. Then I went and got a master's and then got into the Park Service, where I could physically help curate people's experience not only from the practical implementation of programs, but also from the general management planning side and the long-range internal plans where we could kind of create that structure, more of a management guide that solidifies it as part of the values of the Park, to institutionalize it. So yeah, I don't know. Did I answer your question? I hope I answered it.

01-01:05:17

Tewes:

Most definitely, definitely. I think what I find most interesting about this is, again, thinking about you as a young person in the field, you also have this family connection to incarceration. How much of that were you thinking about when you were doing this early work?

01-01:05:41

Wakatsuki-Chong: It was always on my mind. If I'm being honest, I felt like a poser. I was like, I'm doing this stuff for Minidoka. And then I rationalize it in my mind, where it's like, well, it's because I'm in Idaho and I can't do it in California. Because at that moment, I knew I had family at Manzanar, that's the camp that my family was at. But then over the course of several years later, I found out—because I always knew I had family in Ontario. And then I'm all like, Okay, but were they at Minidoka, or were they just settled there and didn't go to the war? And doing research, I find out, Oh, I did have family at Minidoka. So that kind of gave me a little bit more ownership to not feel like I'm just posing. But then I always did work with Manzanar. I did their public archeology programs. I think I did four or maybe five of them. But then I spent a lot of my time, obviously, with Minidoka and Bainbridge Island, especially when I started to work for the Park Service, as well.

01-01:06:44

But then I started to find that sense of community within the work, because like what I said earlier, I didn't really have a Japanese American community to belong to. And so starting to get involved with Friends of Minidoka, that was the first real Japanese American community that I was able to engage with, with preservation work. I think at that time, maybe a year or two before, I joined the JACL. But that's more of a social organization at the time. And so Friends of Minidoka really helped me explore my Japanese American identity, and then also feel comfortable to deal with the broader preservation and trying to get this history out. When I interact with other people who grew up in a Japanese American community, you could tell that there was kind of a—I don't want to say—disconnect is not the right word, but there's a different way that we are brought up, right, and I never got to integrate with that community. So now I'm trying to integrate, but it's also like, "Oh, you're that person from Idaho. Did you play basketball in the JACL? Did we meet that way?" And it's like, "No, because I only just joined a few years ago." So it was really interesting, but it definitely did help with me and my identity. I kind of lost my train of thought. Is there anything that you want to follow up on? Sorry.

01-01:08:13

Tewes:

Well, you mentioned joining the JACL, and I know you were also in the Japan Club at Boise State. How did you get involved with that, and what was that organization?

01-01:08:23

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. Well, Japan Club, I was looking for a civic organization or club to kind of join on campus, and I was taking Japanese language courses. The faculty really wanted to restart this Japan Club. So I was like, "Oh, I could do it." But I also was kind of a stickler on certain things, because if we were rebuilding Japan Club, I really wanted to be language based and cultural based and dealing with politics and history, and not become an anime club or something else. And so I remember when I was talking to the faculty member, I was like, "I don't want it to be that. So I'm happy to join if it's focused on this more narrow scope." And so he was fine with that, because he's like, "There's an anime club." Not that I was trying to be super exclusive. I really didn't want to fall into those other more cultural—cultural is not the right word. It's like the pop culture—there we go—the pop culture world and stuff. I wanted more academically focused, and so he allowed us to do that. And that actually helped out a lot with me gaining a lot of my management skills on stuff, because we were working with the Idaho State Tourism Department and also with the Consul General of Japan in Portland, that they would give me a budget of between 2 and \$5,000 to organize this thing called Japan Week. And so we would have a full week of programming, like we'll always have a history, culture, politics side of stuff. So we'll have lectures in the evenings and then cultural entertainment for usually the last day of the program, where the Consul General or the Deputy Consul General will do a speech and then we'll have some sort of musical performance and some stuff.

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So that actually helped kind of me develop into Friends of Minidoka and all that stuff, with managing budgets and organizing those skills and basically doing community based and intergovernmental communication. Because here I was nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, working with the Department of Tourism people and basically a foreign nation to kind of do this. And I was literally the driver for the Deputy Consul General, who was amazing. So it was Deputy Consul General [Junko] Ochi. She worked at the UN for the woman and children stuff, and she did all this amazing stuff. I just remembered I was amazed by her. I'm like, oh my gosh, here's this woman who doesn't show off. You know how there's some people that have an ego and they're just always like, I'm in the room and I want other people to know I'm in the room. She was just always super chill, kind of goes under the radar, and then when I hear her talk to people when they're asking, "Oh well, what were your previous positions?" She would say all this research that she was doing. And I'm just all like, I am so unworthy to even be at this table. But it has been good to see other women in different positions like that to allow me to think that I could have a place in management, as well. So yeah, that's the Japan Club.

01-01:11:47

The JACL I joined, because one of my friends who was in Japan Club, Stephen Hirai, was, "Oh, my uncle and my dad are part of the JACL." And I'm like, "What is that?" And he's like, "Japanese American Citizens League. You should join, because we don't have a lot of young people." So I got to meet a lot of cool people through that. And that actually kind of helped me with Friends of Minidoka stuff, too, because I didn't realize a lot of the people who are in the JACL had ties to Minidoka, because then after the war they settled into some of those areas, because there was already an established Japanese American community that didn't have to be forcibly removed. So that's how that community grew. And so I actually got a lot of research done from that community group.

01-01:12:42

Tewes:

Wow, what a great story. I do want to just put a marker down, because you've mentioned it. But you attended Johns Hopkins for your MA in museum studies, graduated in 2014. And what was your emphasis while you were studying there?

01-01:13:02

Wakatsuki-Chong:

Yeah. I guess my emphasis would have been more of the education and exhibition, so basically more of the audience focus. How are people going to experience stuff and how do we want them to experience things? And the one thing that I do have to say is I was already working in the museum field, as well. So it was great to take these classes, because I feel like museum studies is kind of a trade, but I didn't have the academic language to put to what I was doing. So actually, going through the program was nice, because even though I knew most of the subjects, I actually had the language now to say,

"Oh, we are doing this, because we are trying to be culturally competent as we're engaging with visitors who are coming in to learn about difficult histories." Because I used to work at an historic prison, and that's already complicated, because I remember we always wanted to humanize the experience. You know, I'm not trying to say you have to understand why someone murdered someone, but why were people in these prisons? And you could tell throughout history—so the prison opened up in 1872 and it closed down in the seventies, 1970s. I think it was open for 101 years. So 1973 is when it closed down. But you could see the trends in politics with the increase of people coming in. So it was like there was a huge anti-Asian sentiment in the 1880s, so you see a whole bunch of Chinese nationals or Chinese Americans being incarcerated, and some of the crimes was like frivolous stuff. One was a crime of an over "appetite of chicken." How is that even a crime? But then other people were blamed for murder, but then when you look at the documentation, it doesn't seem that they actually murdered anyone. But people were trying to just take other people's claims, so they were attributing deaths to people, because they're like, I want that mining claim. But then you'll also see the anti-LDS, the Mormon situation, where then you have an influx of people coming in for bigamy and polygamy, and then you also see all these other social issues there. So especially during the Great Depression, you see a lot of people coming in stealing poultry or cattle or bouncing a check, because they didn't have enough money to cover but it's because of the Depression. So we didn't want to say, "Okay, all these inmates were terrible people," because that's how we as a community think of prisoners: they're all bad people. But some of them it was situational. But yes, some people were jerks and it [for] was murdering people, yes. But we also wanted to talk about some of these other stories where just because it's a prison, it doesn't mean that they're all bad, right? And then understanding just our judicial system and how it all works. So instead of glorifying, this is a prison, look at this, go behind a jail cell, take a picture, and then that's it, we're actually trying to make it educational.

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Wakatsuki-Chong: So having that experience and actually learning the right terminology and stuff like that helped me become a better interpreter for when I went to Minidoka—and also working at Tule Lake and working for the Seabee Museum—because it helped kind of hone my skills a little bit more so I could effectively communicate it. Because before my boss and I were like, "Does that feel right?" And we'd be yes or no. But now we have the right words to be like, "Hey, is this actually educational and does this actually fall under our interpretive plan that we set up?" versus, "Yeah, that sounds good." Because there's been times when my boss and I, my old boss at the Old Pen, we reflected on a few of our programs where we're like, "Yeah, that was kind of cringey," when we look back on it. But it did have its time and place. But then as we professionalized over the years, we realized that was not appropriate. So yeah.

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Tewes: And certainly, the field changed.

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Wakatsuki-Chong: Yes, definitely, definitely.

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Tewes: So you mentioned a few places you'd worked over the years, and I do want to pull out Tule Lake again. How did you become involved with that site?

01-01:17:37

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, I guess that's just my genesis or origination story of how I got into the Park Service. So working with Friends of Minidoka over the years, one of my colleagues from the Park Service, her name is Anna Tamura, and she's like, "Hey, do you ever want to work for the Park Service?" And honestly my answer to her was, "No. Why?" And she's like, "Well, don't you ever want to have Carol [Ash's] job at Minidoka?" And I was like, "Oh, I don't know, because I don't feel like I would belong." Then we had this whole conversation of, "Why don't you feel like you belong?" And I was like, "Well, I feel like it's a white space and I didn't want to go into that space." Because at least when I was working at the historical society, there was another Asian American working with me, which now I don't think there's any people of color working at the historical society, which is really interesting.

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So she was just like, "I'm Japanese American, I work in this space." But I'm like, "But you're in Washington." And later she was like, "Okay, there's this job opening up at Tule Lake, and I think you should go after it." And I was, "What is it? Why?" It was a management assistant position, and it was the first position for Tule Lake that they were hiring. So she's like, "You should really do this. You should reach out to the superintendent." So the superintendent's like, "Apply for this historian position." I was like, "I don't think I qualify for it." Because at the time I didn't have my master's. And he's like, "No, just go through it, because the whole USAJobs [application] is so convoluted." Which I'm glad he told me to do it, because I had to spend about four hours to create a profile. And if I didn't go through that exercise, it would have been so daunting applying for the job that I was trying to get. So I was told that announcement came up, and then I had people help me out with my résumé. Because at that point, I never had to have a résumé, because it was kind of word of mouth. I was already interning at the museum when they hired me for this weekend job, and then I was already in that weekend job when they hired me for the Old Pen job. I used to be a tennis teacher or a tennis coach for the city; I didn't have to formally apply. It was like, oh yeah, she was on varsity at this high school. You should hire her. This is my first real making a résumé.

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Wakatsuki-Chong: Originally, I wasn't the first choice, because the administration didn't think that they could pass what they call the red face test, because this other individual had way more experience, specifically with the title "management assistant." And so I was like, "Oh okay, that's fine." But apparently that individual pulled out and then they're like, "Hey, do you want the job?" And so I was like, "Yeah."

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So that was really interesting, because I had to move out to Tule Lake, California. And then my supervisor, he's the superintendent, he really wanted me to engage with the Japanese American community, because I don't think at the time they had a really strong relationship, but they did have a relationship with the community. Also, I was kind of doing superintendent's review just to make sure that things sound right. Within that Friends group—I just call them Friends group; they're called the Tule Lake Committee—there were academics and folks who really study this history. And Tule Lake is a very complicated site. If there was only one site to tell about the Japanese American incarceration history on the continent, I believe it would be Tule Lake that we would have to choose. At first it was just a war relocation authority site, right, just one of the ten camps. It was also a Bureau of Reclamation site that was used for the Homestead Act afterwards, but then it also became a segregation center after the loyalty questionnaire. And then it was also the site of the renunciants. Yeah. There's all this layered history, that they have more of that layered history than any other one site has. So it's a very complicated history, where sometimes people get confused with the loyalty questionnaire, the renunciants—so the "yes, yes," "no, no"—and then conflating them with renunciants, conflating them with the draft resisters, where there are actually three separate groups. So kind of my role was just to make sure that as things were getting developed, it isn't causing to that confusion. But just trying to be as accurate as possible but also culturally competent in how we're explaining it. And so that was my role, yeah.

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And it was really interesting, because there was not a lot of people of color working there. And then I also had disagreements with some of the staff there, which actually led me to—sorry, I don't know why the sun is coming out all of a sudden. But that's what led me to then find my other position with the Navy, because I needed to get my permanent status within the federal government, but then also I had some disagreement with educational programming. Not that they had to know my work history, but I don't think people knew that I used to do educational programming when I was at the Old Idaho Penitentiary. And so when I was trying to provide feedback, I think that they just thought that I was just trying to control their program. But again, coming through the lens of cultural competency, I'm all like, what is here?

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I didn't really tell you the exact example, but I said when I was working at the Old Pen, sometimes my boss and I will think about our programs and they were kind of cringey, they were doing some cringey things. It would have been probably okay like twelve, fifteen years ago. And they said, "Well, this was a program that this other place has done, so we're going to do it." I'm like, "But it's not appropriate now." And I'm trying to tell them it's not appropriate, but then they didn't want to listen to me. I'm not a person that says, "Hey, this is bad. Now go fix it." I'm like, "Hey, this is bad, but here are three other potential things that you could do." And then they got really upset that I was trying to provide programming that I didn't understand. But I'm like, "Well, you said the targeted audience is six to twelve. This program that you're putting together is actually really too abstract for kids, unless you modify it to do it this way." Then they got obsessing, "Well, now you're just trying to control it. And why didn't you provide your comments earlier?" And I'm like, "Well, you never told us your final program. You only gave us opportunities to comment on the potential program, but not the final one, and I'm trying to provide final comments. And I understand that you already advertised it, but I do think that we need to address some of these issues, because our constituency group, if they caught wind of it, may be really upset." But literally, that led to a huge disagreement. And that night I just applied for the two jobs that I found that said "education specialist," because basically they were saying, "You're not an education specialist, so you don't know how to do this job." And then I ended up getting a job, which was good, because it was a promotion, and it was also a permanent. So that's why in this aspect it was good to have this conflict, because it actually helped me move forward in my career. Because if not, I probably would still be a little bit stuck in a position. I don't know if I would have gotten the motivation another way to actually go out and apply outside of the Park Service.

01-01:25:26

Tewes:

Yeah. Well, you mentioned cultural competency. And one reason you were hesitant to apply to the NPS was thinking about a lot of white interpreters telling histories that are not always their backgrounds to tell, I suppose. How have you been thinking about cultural competency in your own work?

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Wakatsuki-Chong: So a lot of it is just trying to come in with an open mind and an open heart. Because I didn't grow up within the Japanese American community, so I know that there are some aspects that I won't understand, because I wasn't raised in that community. But that's the thing, where it doesn't matter who is doing the interpretation; it's all about the intent, right, and then the impact that's made. And when people come in with the right intent, and then the outcomes of the impacts are appropriate, then I think it's fine.

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Because I know sometimes people look at Minidoka and they're like, "Oh, Hanako was just hiring Japanese Americans, and that's it." Well, that's not

actually true, because I've been recruiting interns of all different demographics and backgrounds. My first intern that I hired was a local kid, he's a white kid from Jerome. To me, his diversity is that he is coming from a different socioeconomic background and from a very rural community. And then my next intern was Brenda, and she was actually from Nevada, northern Nevada, and she was a DREAMer. And she's like, "When I get my US citizenship, I want to see if I want to be in the feds." And I was like, "Absolutely. Let's do this." And then she realized that she didn't want to be an interpreter, that she wanted to go to law school. So then I created a project for her to look at some of the *Korematsu*, *Hirabayashi*, and *Yasui* cases, and then the *Endo* case, so then she could put together an article and then use that for law school. I don't know if she actually used that as a sample paper, but trying to help identify stuff for her. And then we had other folks. Then I had Kurt Ikeda, who is now the Director of Interpretation Education at Minidoka. So he was actually my intern three years ago and replaced me. And then we had Emily Teraoka, who we recruited from California, who happens to be Japanese American. But then one of our other interns is Camille, where she's local from Boise and she's actually helping out with our administrative history. So we got diverse candidates, but people just now see Emily and Kurt, and so they think that I only hire Japanese Americans, which is not the case. I've been trying to hire Camille into a permanent position, but she doesn't want to move to Twin Falls. And now she started a master's degree, where I'm like, "Hey, do you want to do more research for us?" Because she's an incredible researcher. She is one of the fastest readers I have known. And so whenever she was bored, I'm like, "Could you read this book and could you do an annotated bibliography?" Because she would read things so fast, and she retains it. But there's ways to do mindful recruitment, to bring people in, but there's also ways to educate people on how to do proper interpretation.

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Wakatsuki-Chong: So it isn't that we are telling an official story and it's coming from the top-down or it's like a colonized way of telling the story. We would go through basically cultural competency training, but then also get them as educated as we can on the history, and then coming more from how people experienced it. Because within interpretation, base level interpretation is understanding and that's what we want. But then the next level is sympathy. But the highest level of interpretation is empathy, where you could literally put yourself in other people's shoes, and that's how we try to get people to connect if we have the time and if the individual is willing to do it. But if not, we're just going for understanding, right? But there's different levels of where people want to come in to learn about stuff, but we always strive for the empathy, for people to better understand the situation. And I do believe that anyone could do it, as long as they're coming in with an open heart, an open mind to tell these stories and not being like, well, I know this story, because I have researched it. But I do know sometimes it's powerful when people who have a familial connection says stuff. But other people could have other connections, as well. Because Camille and Keegan, they've been at the

pilgrimages. They get to meet people and they could say, "I know this person who used to work in this building, Mr. Tanabe. And he only worked here for eight dollars a month." Then it becomes their story. And that's the one thing that I always try to do with history, is even though we have these ethnic histories, that doesn't mean that it's only for one population. And this is a quote that I love from one of my mentors, Frank Kitamoto, where he says, "This is not only a Japanese American story, this is an American story with implications for the world." But it's like we have to understand that.

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So this is a Keegan issue, where one day he just came up to me and he's kind of looking sheepish and he's like, "Do I look Asian to you?" And I'm like, "Whoa, what happened? This isn't coming from nowhere." And he's like, "Well, this is the third time this week that someone asked me if I'm Asian." And I was like, "Well, you look like a generic white guy. [laughs] But the reason why people are telling you this is because they don't understand why you think that this is important, that you must be Japanese American, because you want to be here to tell the story." And I was like, "Why do you think this is important?" He's like, "Well, I grew up here and I didn't really learn more about it until this internship, I knew about it, but not really. We always knew that there was a camp." And I was like, "Because it's your local history and you want to talk about it." And he's like, "Yeah." And he's like, "And it's important." I was like, "So that's what you tell people." But he didn't know how to process it. And it's funny, because I asked him, I was like, "How long has this been going on?" And he was like, "Several weeks." And I was like, "You should have come to me earlier." But he didn't know how to do it. And it was really funny, because normally when I'm recruiting people of color, like when I recruited Brenda, Emily and Kurt, I would definitely go through, "Okay, there's going to be identity issues. There's going to be all this stuff, potential racism and stuff like that." But then I realized after Keegan came up to me, I was like, I also need to deal with the white staff and the white interns. Because I didn't know until he came up to me that this was going to be kind of a backlash, as well. And then I asked Camille, and I think she said that she was asked only a handful of times. But yeah, that at least helped me out to try to figure out cultural competency isn't always going to be like just us to the general public, it's also us as interpreters to each other. And it isn't just only for white folks or folks who are not part of the community to understand, but also even within community, because we have different competencies within our own core culture and because we all come through with a different lens. And it's just trying to understand where we're coming from to make sure we could take out our biases, if we can, as much as we can, to then tell a story.

01-01:33:16

Tewes:

That is really well put. Thank you. I do want to say, because we've been alluding to your work here, that after your time at the US Navy Seabee Museum, then you returned to Minidoka as the Chief of Interpretation and

Education. You were there from 2017 to 2021, I think. That's the moments we're talking about in your management here. Well, you've alluded to some of the challenges in working with this history. What were the public understandings you were encountering or maybe reactions to the history that you were telling in Minidoka?

01-01:33:56

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. I think the reaction was locally within the town of Twin Falls and Jerome is that people knew about the history, but it's trying to clarify the history. Because sometimes people knew it as the derogatory term, the j-a-p camp, but not necessarily because they disliked Japanese Americans or whatever; it's taught to them, right, and that's how it's just called. You've got some people who just need to be educated on terminology and also like, "Hey, it wasn't a POW camp," because there was actually a POW camp about fifteen miles away where German POWs caught on the frontlines were brought out to work in the fields. So some of that got mistranslated to people, where they thought that the people who were at Minidoka were Japanese soldiers who were brought in, not recognizing that they were not POWs, they were civilians. But some people knew that they were civilians, so there was just this hodgepodge, kind of the gamut of people's understanding of the site.

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And so I felt like our role was to first let people know that we exist, right, and to kind of clarify these things, and not in a way where it's like, "You guys are all wrong," but it's just like, "Let's just recenter ourselves." A lot of people have been learning different things, whether it's full of misinformation or not. I don't think there was any malintent. I think it's just stories that are passed down, right, which may not have been verified. And so a lot of our programming within the community is just kind of recalibrating to just kind of talk about the facts and getting people to understand. I never felt a huge pushback from the local community. There was actually a lot of support, specifically with the local neighbors in the area. Even some of the farmers. They were really like, "Oh, this is part of our history. We need to learn about it." Like actually one of the local farmers, his kids would volunteer with us during the summertime, or we'll just chit-chat with them when they come on their bikes and just hang out. But then in the local community, as in like school groups, a lot of teachers were interested and wanted to come out to the site. And it was kind of a long, didactic kind of tour. Because to me at the time, I didn't feel comfortable doing certain programming like the Park Service is used to, like ACE, which is Audience Centered Experience, because most of the time with that, it's sometimes out of context, where they're like, "How do you feel about this?" And if they don't know the background, they're just only going to make assumptions. So to me, I would only do the ACE programming at the end, where I'm all like, "Hey, we're going to do a walking tour and you're going to learn a lot of history. But we're going to then talk about these other things afterwards." It's now raining

so hopefully you don't hear it in the background. So I'm blinded by light and now it's pouring rain.

01-01:37:02

Wakatsuki-Chong: So yeah, with the school groups, it was just really good to get the teachers to come out to learn, and then we kind of do more of a didactic tour of like these are the historical milestones. And depending on the school group, we'll talk about different things. So if it's kind of fourth grade history, we're kind of doing the state history stuff. So we're not overwhelming them with too much information, but we're telling more the person's stories so they can connect with it. And then the older they are, sometimes we'll go a little bit more in a deeper dive on some of the policy and issues, especially if they're the US government classes and whatnot. So we can talk about those issues, so we try to flex within. But then at the end, it's always about: are you a bystander or are you an upstander? Because there were very few people who were actually speaking out against this. We talk about different moments in time, because usually I'll ask the students, "Was there another time—" sometimes civil rights, especially like Little Rock Central High, whatever, right? So just get them thinking. I didn't actually get a complaint myself, but I heard it through my lead interpreter. Because sometimes the school groups just like appear on the site and I'm like, "Oh, if you guys give us notice we could give a tour." And so she went out and talked to the teacher. Then the one teacher said, "It seems like you guys have a political agenda, so I'm going to do my own tour." So I'm like, "Okay." But that was only one teacher that we heard from, because most of the time people want the tour from us. And there was actually one teacher who would always come out in the dead of winter. And at times I'll be like, "Are you sure?" And she's like, "Yeah, I'm sure." Because she's like, "People had to live like this for three years. They can deal with a one-and-a-half-hour tour." And I'm like, "Okay." [laughs] So that was really cool, where she just wanted to really make sure that students understood the realities and stuff.

01-01:39:05

So it's always been great that the local community's been supportive. I don't know if it's proper to say the outer communities. So we have Ketchum and Sun Valley, which is about an hour-and-a-half away; Boise, which is two hours away, where they were always willing to host stuff. We still do a civil liberties symposium, but it's kind of changed over the years in format because of COVID. I don't think that they did it last year. But usually, we get a conference with academic speakers, and we'll go to different sites, talk about it. The City of Boise used to hold us with the Fettuccine Forum. We've done it at Boise State University, we've done it at the College of Southern Idaho, and we have done it over at Ketchum Community Library. And then, oh, we did one in Idaho Falls at the Museum of Idaho. So we've always had supporters.

01-01:39:59

Wakatsuki-Chong: And then every once in a while, you get people who are like, "We're going to have to agree to disagree, because you couldn't tell the difference between someone who's loyal and someone who wasn't." There's different aspects to address issues and disagreements with people. You have to find out what truth they're coming at. So you have a forensic truth, which is just like facts, right? Then you have personal truths. Then you have community truths or social truths, which sometimes may not be accurate. Kind of like the Berenstein Bears versus the Berenstain Bears. I always thought it was Berenstein Bears, but then it's Berenstain. And so we create these social truths that may not be accurate. And then there's reconciliatory truth. So this individual came in, and he's coming from a personal truth. "Well, it's unfortunate that this happened, but it had to happen." I was like, "Why is that, sir?" And he's like, "I'm a Vietnam vet, and when I was in Vietnam, you couldn't tell the difference between the Vietnam and the Viet Cong." So hearing him with his personal truth, I came back with my personal truth, where I was like, "Well, I disagree with you, sir, because my father fought in Vietnam, as well. And he was in the Navy, and he was in communications and intelligence, and he was communicating back to the people on the ground who was a Vietnamese and who was Viet Cong. So through intelligence, we do have that." And then he was like, "Well, we're going to have to agree to disagree." But I was like, "Well, same like during World War II. There was actual intelligence that said we didn't need to do mass incarceration. The Japanese Americans go through the FBI and the Office of Naval Intelligence." Again, he wasn't receptive on it and ended up leaving. And I don't know if I would have been able to actually communicate with him; I thought that that was going to be an effective way. But hopefully he thought a little bit more about that. But if not, I tried. [laughs] But there's different ways to try to address some of these issues with folks, because they're coming from these different truths.

01-01:42:06

Like another example was a, I guess called, controlled correspondence, where an individual wrote a letter to President Trump at the time about not liking the title of our park film. Our park film is called *Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp*. And at the time, we just had these little flyers saying you could purchase these DVDs online at this featured date, because at the time we hadn't released it. And we weren't even screening it anywhere. We were getting ready to screen it in the communities, but we haven't screened it at all. And so it went all the way up and it came back down for us to respond. So I helped provide a response for them. We're following academic protocols. Academia has been talking about terminology for a while, the community has been talking about terminology for a while, Park Service has been talking about these terminologies. And we chose to use these words, because that is how the incarcerated were identifying these sites. So there was three instances. The most powerful one was basically a woman, her name is Karen Hirai, and she's like, "I was born in an American concentration camp," she just straight

up says it. And that's why we decided to use it, because throughout the film it's used. And plus, the US government used this terminology at the time in different situations. The President used it, the Governor of Idaho used it—"concentration camps"—even the Secretary of Interior used "concentration camps." So we felt it was appropriate, so we wrote a response back. We invited the individual to come and watch the film, but I don't think that individual saw it. But then we did get a question of: why did we choose this? And we had to talk to region, our regional folks about it, and then brief them on it. So I did film screenings in the regional office so people understood why it was done that way. But we never got any real pushback, other than just one person was really upset because his father fought during the war on the European Front and saw the Holocaust and the death camps, and after seeing where "concentration camp" is also a euphemism for the death camps that was going on in Europe. I know that the Jewish community has been discussing terminology, as well. So anyway, that was a long, little thing about your original topic, sorry.

01-01:44:37

Tewes:

No, thank you. That was really informative all the way through. I especially appreciate hearing about how you interact with the public in a history that is sometimes difficult to understand or accept, perhaps. We're nearing the end of our time today, so I think this might be a good topic to end on. But is there anything you would like to fill in from what we've already discussed or that we've missed from those early points in your life?

01-01:45:10

Wakatsuki-Chong: I don't know if it's necessarily filling in, but maybe kind of contextualizing a bit, where it's been great working with the Japanese American community to help me become the leader and the person I am. Because things don't happen in a vacuum. I was coached and mentored by many different people who have greatly impacted my life, and also helped me with the ethics and the values of interpretation and in history to make sure that we are doing right by our community and telling this in a very accurate way as we can. So we're not perpetuating misinformation, right, because there's a lot of that that exists. And it's with the help of the community and these mentors that just have always been there that set me up for success. There's a lot of folks that have passed on, but there's a lot of folks who are still there that I call upon when I need help. And it's people not only from the Japanese American community, but also adjacent communities. That's the thing I guess I want to just express, is that it takes a village to basically grow an individual, but then also to produce this work. It doesn't happen in a vacuum.

01-01:46:36

And I have a great colleague who's been very supportive of my crazy ideas and then I've been supportive of theirs, and I feel like that that's where the magic happens. And I've been talking about this a lot with people, about just dynamics of power. And you can say knowledge is power, as well. I think the American normative, I guess, white heteronormative standards are we need to

be an individual, we're focusing on ourselves. So in one aspect, hoarding power is the power, because you're able to control things, whether it's knowledge or power or whatever it may be, and that's how you move ahead. But to me, the real power is redistributing that to the community. Because if you could empower people, whether it's with the knowledge or the power to produce their own content, then it's going to exponentially grow, and everyone has that, and they're empowered to then empower others. And it's better that way. But maybe I have an unusual way of looking at that. But I do feel like it's more of a community growth aspect, rather than centralizing the power. And so my whole goal in my profession, because I know I can't do it all; no one could do it all. And we have to create a community to get it down, whether it's to gain the experience or gain the feedback or whatever. No one does anything by themselves, right? But then we need to rely on each other and work with each other to kind of get the story out. Because if we don't have people like you, Amanda, with Berkeley, or people like Kimiko Marr with Tadaima! and the Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages, or like people at the Smithsonian, we're not going to get the story out. And it's through all of us combining our powers—I feel like Captain Planet—we're combining our powers and we're able to then have this growth of power that is beyond what one individual could have, no matter how much they're holding on to the knowledge and power. So yeah, get off my soapbox now.

01-01:48:59

Tewes:

Thank you. I think that does contextualize not only the trajectory of your career, but perhaps also an approach you'd like to bring to this work. And we'll continue more discussion about the work you're doing and the future work in NPS in our next session. So thank you so much, Hanako, for bearing with me, even through delays here. I appreciate it.

01-01:49:20

Wakatsuki-Chong: All good.

01-01:49:20

Tewes:

Thank you.

Interview 2: August 9, 2022

02-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a second interview with Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong for the Japanese American Intergenerational Narratives Oral History Project, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on August 9, 2022. And Ms. Wakatsuki-Chong joins me this remote interview from Kaneohe, Hawai'i, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you, Hanako, for a second session. I appreciate it.

02-00:00:33

Wakatsuki-Chong: No worries. Glad to be here.

02-00:00:36

Tewes: When we left off last time, we were speaking in depth about your public history career, because it so well aligns with Japanese American incarceration history. And indeed, you took a new job in March of 2021, continuing this work as the first superintendent of Hono'uli'uli National Historic Site. Can you tell me a little bit more about that site and its new presence in the Park Service?

02-00:01:05

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. No, absolutely. And I now apologize. I don't know if you can hear the ambulance in the background. So Hono'uli'uli was designated back in 2015 under President Obama. And the reason why I was selected was it's supposed to tell the story of the Japanese American incarceration in Hawai'i, and a lot of people, they're unaware that there was an incarceration in Hawai'i. It was definitely not to the same scale as on the continent, but it impacted the local community. So in Hawai'i, there are seventeen different sites that were associated immediately after attack on Pearl Harbor, and Hono'uli'uli was actually not one of those sites immediately where Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals were taken away to. It was actually a response to closing of Sand Island, but it became the most permanent and longest serving site in Hawai'i that held folks, but eventually became a prisoner of war camp later. So there's also potential opportunities of conflation, so we need to make sure people understand that, yes, there were POWs there, and there were actually Okinawans, Koreans, Taiwanese, and also Italian POWs who were caught on the frontline who was brought here; but then there were also civilians like Japanese Americans, Japanese nationals, and other Italians and Germans who were incarcerated there, as well, but they were not all POWs. And so originally in the designation was to focus on the Japanese American incarceration, but then later on in the Dingle Act in 2019, it kind of expanded our purview to also talk about the POW experience, as well. And so Hono'uli'uli is essentially supposed to be the demonstration site to talk about all the other Japanese American incarceration across the islands, and then also the POW experience, as well, but mostly focusing on Japanese American incarceration and tying it into the continental incarceration site.

02-00:03:16

Because one thing—we could talk about terminology—is that Hawai'i was illegally taken. It was a sovereign nation, and it hasn't necessarily been resolved. So a lot of people are saying, "Well, whose mainland is it?" So they do say "continental US," which makes sense, because we always use CONUS, so might as well adopt that language. But there were a lot of intersectionalities there where people on the big island were taken to, whether it's KMC, the Kilauea Military Camp or Haiku Camp. Some folks got then transferred to Sand Island, who then got transferred to the immigrant station, and then sent through Angel Island to the continental sites of like Rohwer or Topaz or Tule Lake. So there is there connections to our story in the continental story, and I think we have to teach the stories side-by-side so we could fully understand the whole Japanese American incarceration experience and not just only in like a vacuum of the Hawai'i incarceration experience or the continental, because there's so much going on. And some of those other facilities like Santa Fe and New Mexico and others, there were Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals from Hawai'i who are taken to those facilities. So there's a lot of overlap, and you kind of see a lot of it—well, I shouldn't say a lot—but you do see references to it in different kind of primary sources or other secondary sources where I think recently—I think it's called the *Tule Lake Stockade Diary*. There's a reference in there about a gentleman from Hawai'i who ended up passing away. And I believe the author, which is one of my friend's—I believe it's her grandfather—was writing how they wanted to reach out to the family in Hawai'i to let the family know that this individual—I think he was a husband and a father—passed away, but the folks at Tule Lake wouldn't allow that. And so in his diary, he was feeling really bad that this family won't have closure on this situation. So there were like little snippets that you'll find in other continental sites that touches on these stories. Kind of like Fort Sill, where there was that one individual who just kind of had a mental breakdown and was trying to get back home and who was shot. And that individual was white, as well.

02-00:06:12

Tewes:

You mentioned how this connects with other sites of incarceration. How are you seeing it fitting into larger World War II history and even civil rights/social justice history?

02-00:06:28

Wakatsuki-Chong:

Yeah. It's definitely part of the narrative that not a lot of people know about. And even folks in the academic world, a lot of people know more about the Japanese American continental history, but not necessarily Hawai'i. And it's a little bit complicated out here in Hawai'i, as well, because the territory at the time went under martial law, and there's some confusion of what that meant. And some people are confused, were like, "Oh, are they even Japanese Americans?" It's like, "Yes, they were." Because some people aren't sure about what would citizen status be like as a territory, right? And so I feel like it's good to talk about this story, because we could kind of expose some of these uncertainties that people may have that may be clouding how they

perceive the history. Because they're not sure and they're just like, "Oh, these are all Japanese people." But the reason there was a mass incarceration in Hawai'i is because the majority of the population had some sort of Japanese ancestry. And even within some of those reports—like the Pringle Report was like, "There's really no need to do it. The FBI already identified the ABC list, so we'll just pull from those groups of suspects." And so understanding this kind of helps to me break down some of the stereotypes and the misinformation that continues to exist, right? But then also clarifying this World War II history. Because nearby is Pearl Harbor National Memorial. That is definitely the catalyst of the United States entering World War II, but yet we don't really talk about the home front aspects here, other than the naval history. And this is an opportunity to then talk more about the civilian side and hopefully open up more dialog amongst how people in Hawai'i experienced World War II, because it's very much through the lens of the military at this point. And hopefully Hono'uli'uli could kind of expose that from the civilian side of people getting incarcerated and being removed from the community, and talking about what that meant, and the communities that were essentially—I don't know if this is the correct word—like left behind as some of these business leaders and religious leaders were taken away.

02-00:09:00

Tewes:

Thank you. That's a great explanation. I don't want to put you on the spot here, but when can we look forward to seeing this in action, seeing the park open?

02-00:09:09

Wakatsuki-Chong: Well, I can't give an exact date and time, but I can at least let you know what the process is. So right now, we are going through what we call a land acquisition process, where we're trying to acquire an additional twenty-two acres of the historic property. We're hoping that there's some sort of road infrastructure there that could potentially be how the public could get to the site. We are doing a transportation study right now, which should conclude by the end of the calendar year or beginning of next year, that would kind of give us options of how visitors can come to the site. And then once we get that transportation study, then we can enter into what we call a general management planning process, where then we go out to the public and we ask them, "Hey, what would you like to see at the site?" Some people like to see trails, some people want to see a building, or some people want to talk about the different themes that they want told. So we'll go out and we'll gather all that information, we'll collate it, and then the National Park Service will have different alternatives that they will choose from, to be like, this is going to be basically the blueprint of how this park is going to get established. And you can see this with Minidoka National Historic Site, which had a GMP [general management plan] done. I'm pretty sure Manzanar has one that was completed. Tule Lake, I worked on that one; that one's completed. So you can kind of see how there's this vision that's kind of laid out, and that would be how the park would evolve. Usually we call that between like a fifteen- to

twenty-five-year plan, because it takes a while for us to get the funds, and we have to do some internal grant funding if it's like construction or rehabilitation.

02-00:10:55

So currently we do have a couple of projects that is coming underway and is stabilizing some of the historic structures that we have on site. So we have the historic retaining wall that's there. It's kind of bulging, and we need to stabilize that. So that project, I believe, is going to start sometime next spring. And then we're going to stabilize that, get it all kind of straightened out so it's all good to go. And then another project I'll be following the following year is our aqueduct project. So there was an historic aqueduct that was built during the plantation period that was kind of used during World War II, but then also as a barrier from a couple camps, because there were all these different compounds between the POWs and then also between the civilians. So that was kind of one of the demarcation lines. But one of the buttresses fell and we just want to stabilize that, so that's going to be the next project that we're working on. So we just recently—I want to say it was three weeks ago or so—our partners over at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i decided to host a blessing ceremony, knowing that we're having all this construction being done. So they invited a few folks, and then they had representatives coming out to do a blessing ceremony, which is really beautiful just to let our ancestors and the folks who lived off that space know that we're coming to disturb the site, but it's in good faith for preservation, just to be respectful culturally.

02-00:12:39

Tewes:

Thank you. I'm looking forward to seeing how that develops over the years. You mentioned Pearl Harbor is close by, and close enough, in fact, that I know you did some work with them recently, including over the eightieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. I'm really curious what interpretation was like around that anniversary and what the visitor response was to that story.

02-00:13:10

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, that's a really good question. So the previous year I started this other program called Beyond Pearl Harbor, because I wanted to utilize this platform working at Pearl Harbor, because obviously there's a lot of history buffs, a lot of people who are very interested and knowledgeable about this period and place in history, right? And so to me it's like, well, we already have this built-in audience. How could we actually get them to holistically kind of see a little bit more outside this very narrow scope of the attack on Pearl Harbor? And so for the seventy-ninth anniversary, we started off this Beyond Pearl Harbor, trying to introduce different narratives like the Manhattan Project, Tuskegee Airmen, trying to include other World War II sites. Because I truly believe that Pearl Harbor, at least in Hawai'i as a tourist destination—it's, I think, the number one tourist destination as of today—sometimes we get about 7,000 visitors, sometimes it's more. We get quite a few people who come out, and then there's already this online presence of

people who are interested. So I wanted to kind of push the envelope to kind of educate folks more to make those connections. Because we at the National Park Service, we have 423 park units—there's twenty-fourth coming online—but sometimes we don't really do good connecting with other sites. And coming from Japanese American confinement sites, I'm like, well, we should use this as a platform to try to get people to know the other historical sites out there, but then also to broaden out their understanding of World War II history. So again, we did some programming. There was some feedback online where they're like, "We shouldn't have to apologize for these things," kind of the general response that I would have gotten from Minidoka when sometimes we put stuff online. I don't necessarily think it's based out of racism, but I think a lot of it is out of ignorance, right, where people were just kind of upset, because we had like the Minidoka Park film on there and other Japanese American incarceration history. Because this is us coming from Tadaima! and we had all this content that was created for the 2020 Tadaima! So that was the initial feedback. But when the eightieth came around, we used that model again, and I think it was fine, because it's still trying to get people to understand this larger narrative.

02-00:16:05

Wakatsuki-Chong: And for the eightieth anniversary, I was working with Erika Moritsugu, who is currently my supervisor, because I'm on a detail with the White House. I was working with her, so we got a statement from President Biden and then a proclamation for the eightieth anniversary, which was really cool, because we were able to get prints of that proclamation and give it to survivors who came to the programming, which, because it was during COVID, we had to limit the amount of people who could come out. But we really wanted to make sure that those who are Pearl Harbor survivors were able to get one of those proclamations. And then we even had David Ono from Los Angeles. He's a journalist out of, I believe it's KTLA. He came out and he was our emcee and did a phenomenal job doing that. It's interesting, because he is Shin Nikkei, so he's multiracial, but then he also doesn't have the history of Japanese Americans and the incarceration in his history, but he's interested in preserving this history.

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So to me it kind of grabs on these different threads where it's all like, yes, you don't have to be part of the community to want to learn this history; you can be adjacent, you can just be interested in it. Because no one ever questions anyone who's like, "I'm a Civil War buff," or, "I love medieval history." But then when it comes to ethnic history in the United States, I feel like people just make an assumption that the only reason why you're interested in it is because you're ethnically associated. And I actually had an intern who was a local white kid that we hired, who had this identity crisis, because I think within a week he was asked five times if he was Japanese American. And then I had to sit down with him. It's like, "Oh, that's what racism is. They

don't understand why you think this is important." And so I had to coach him on that.

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Within the Pearl Harbor eightieth anniversary we're trying to touch on all these subjects. I was doing this kind of as a collateral duty and didn't have all the support that I wish I could have had, but it's because the park was going through some transitions. So it isn't anything like no one was trying to not give support, it was just circumstance. But I think we did our best to try to reach out to different audiences. And then now the capacity has grown at the park that I think that they're taking it on again to do an online program to try to expand the Beyond Pearl Harbor narrative. So again, we could try to touch base with other park units and get people to think outside of this narrow scope, because, yes, it's Pearl Harbor National Memorial, but there are other stories that can be touched on that isn't just about white naval history.

02-00:19:15

Tewes:

Thank you. You were at the right place at an interesting time. [laughs] I wanted to hear about that. You mentioned the Japanese American Confinement Sites Group within the National Park Service. Is there anything you want to mention about what that group is and your involvement?

02-00:19:33

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So I guess my involvement right now is that I am the lead for the—and now it's been recategorized as the Japanese American Confinement Sites Working Group, because it's been like—I don't know what's the correct terminology—like blessed by regional directors, and that's the official name, because apparently there's different qualifications for different names. So we were stuck with the "working group," which is great, so now we have this recognition. So we have an executive committee and that's based off of people working in different fields. So like interpretation or cultural resources, administration and whatnot. But then we also have subcommittees within to work on different kind of issues, whether it's like if there's threats to these sites, or if it's interpretative or educational issues, or wanting to create like a subcommittee to kind of work together on different stuff.

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So basically, we're just kind of this smaller working group within the Park Service that doesn't just include the Japanese American confinement sites. So we do have representatives from Pearl Harbor; Manhattan Project; from Alaska, because there's like Fort Richardson up there, which is a little bit different because it was Department of Army, but then also separated Native Americans who were affiliated. If there were mixed children, the males were sent to Minidoka, but then the women and girls were kept at these different facilities. But then it was also conflated with you had Japanese nationals who were in the military, who were caught with kind of POW status. And I don't think I'm exactly stating it correctly, but there's information out there that I look at. But we also have people from the National Mall, because there's the National Japanese American Memorial to patriotism out there. So it isn't just

only like Tule Lake, Minidoka, Manzanar, Hono'uli'uli, it's a wide variety of folks. And even some of our partners. We have the Wing Luke Museum. They're an affiliate, and so they participate in this program.

02-00:21:56

Wakatsuki-Chong: So usually whenever there's a public concern, like sometimes I'll get emails from the community that want us to address something, I'll bring it up to that. And then sometimes when there's legislation or something that's going on within that higher level, then like the Washington office will reach out to us and say, "What do you guys think about XYZ?" and we'll provide our comments there. So it's a good opportunity, at least for us, to first be organized, and then be recognized and then sought for our advice, which is something that in the past we didn't necessarily have all of those components, right, where there are certain people who are recognized and their advice was sought after, but it was never seen as a collective working group. It's always individuals, right? So at least we finally got the bureaucratic stamp of approval so we can move forward on that.

02-00:22:59

But then we have other programs that came out of it, kind of like our dealing with the websites and trying to get terminology all figured out. And then we worked on the terminology paper, which was interesting, because when I first started off in the Park Service, I want to say it was back in 2013 we started it, and then life happens, people transition out. I left the Park Service. I know that this network—because at the time we called it a network—I think that they tried to work on it and brought it up. Again, life happens. Sometimes you have capacity issues with work. But when I came back to the Park Service at Minidoka, I was like, "Hey, where's this at?" So we were able to work on it, push it through, which was great, because now it's been adopted by our Harpers Ferry Style Guide, which is the Park Service Style Guide, and then we're able to have the white paper online as a resource.

02-00:24:06

And I feel like because we're able to finally get a government entity to recognize the importance of terminology and why words matter, I feel like it's trickling down. Because recently I worked on the Day of Remembrance Program for the eightieth anniversary this year with the Smithsonian and Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. And I was assisting with some drafting of language, but then also sent our terminology paper up to the White House. You could see how it's been reflected in the presidential proclamation. So if you look at the presidential proclamation from this year and even compare it to the—I don't know if he did a proclamation last year, I think that was maybe a memorandum—you could tell that the language has shifted, because now you have a government agency that is helping, providing comments and education on terminology to the executive arm, and then it's more representative of the community. So I've gotten a lot of feedback from a lot of community members of how they actually felt seen, because they could tell that the language that was used, that there was a lot of

research had gone into this proclamation. And it's because it was a labor of love by a few, and we just wanted to make sure that it was going to be accurate. And we didn't get everything that we wanted, but it's the best that we ever had. So yeah, so this working group kind of helps out with some of these larger issues at the higher level, I should say. But then we could also deal with the leaks. So if there are issues that come up, we could deal with those specific ones, too.

02-00:26:05

Tewes: That's a good example. I suppose we should state specifically what the terminology was that's changing in this paper.

02-00:26:12

Wakatsuki-Chong: Oh yeah, yeah.

02-00:26:14

Tewes: Go ahead.

02-00:26:16

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So a lot of it is because I think a lot of people have heard the use of "internment." And we know at the academic level—I shouldn't say level—but through the academic lens, it's like that is actually an inaccurate use of that term. And the US government also used "concentration camp" during World War II, and eventually the terminology kind of transitioned. And why it transitioned, it could be speculative, but it could be like the atrocities out of Europe was coming to light or they just wanted to use different terms to make it more palatable for the community. It's like there are different theories out there why it started to change, but I don't think that we've been able to actually find the exact reason. But I think it could be some of everything, the reason why. But it's like when I talk to incarcerated, if they are using the term that they're an "internee," that they were "interned," obviously we're not going to correct them, because it's their lived experience, they could say whatever that they want to say. But coming from now a government official where we're preserving this history, it's like we need to be mindful of the words that we're using so we're not trying to provide that misinformation. Because even in Idaho when I was working at Minidoka, there was a whole bunch of confusion where there was literally a German POW camp about fifty miles away. So a lot of the people who were around that area assumed that Minidoka was a POW camp. So they're like, "Oh, these are Japanese people who are caught on the frontlines," not recognizing that they were civilians from the West Coast, right? And so using accurate language is helpful, it helps clarify misunderstandings. And it also, I think, just acknowledges what occurred.

02-00:28:08

And again, the only new terminology I would say that we're using is "incarceration," because we're using that more as a bridging term, because obviously there's a lot of emotions surrounding the term "concentration

camp," because a lot of people, when you hear that term, there's an association to the death camps out in Europe. I've had conversations with the US Holocaust Museum where they also realize that they've been using euphemistic terms to talk about this history. And at one point in time, I want to say it was back in 2012 or so, they said that they wanted to eventually transition to using accurate terms, where if it was a gulag, it was that; if it was a ghetto, it was that; if it was literally a concentration camp where they're concentrating a lot of people, they'll call it that; if it was a labor camp, they'll call it a "labor camp"; if it was a death camp or an extermination camp, they'll label it as such. Since we use that language so much, there's always that identification of the European Front.

02-00:29:19

Wakatsuki-Chong: And so like personally and within Minidoka, we were using the bridging terms of "incarceration," "incarcerees." And I know sometimes people would copy edit, they're like, "'Incarcerees' is not a word." But I'm like, "Well, but if the community chooses to use the term, they could create whatever word that they want." And I know that some people want to use the "term prisoners," as well. So there was just this whole discussion that was done about twenty-five years or so ago within the Japanese American community. And actually, it's probably more close to thirty years ago, because it was when the Japanese American National Museum was doing their exhibit called—I think it was *American Concentration Camp* that was over at Ellis Island. Yeah. And if you guys find our white paper, we do have all of that, part of our discussions. So if you need a link to everything, you could see that. But that was this discussion that happened between the Jewish community and Japanese American community. And I know I'm distilling this down, hopefully not too much, but essentially was like, hey, no one owns these terms, and as long as we describe and qualify that's helpful. And that's why the Minidoka Park film, it's *Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp*, to kind of show the difference. And we actually got a complaint about that from an individual. But we wrote a response and that individual never responded back to that. But I also invited the individual to watch the film, because at the time we weren't even showing it. We just had a little card thing, if you would like to pre-purchase this DVD you could buy it. And the complaint was their father was in World War II and he would be rolling in his grave if he saw that we were calling these sites the same thing, which we're not.

02-00:31:17

So I know that there's a lot of emotional baggage around the word, but I think the more we talk about it and we could understand, I think that that will help us move on in the future. So this whole terminology paper is discussing some of these issues, and then how the Japanese American community has been discussing this for a really long time and actually adopted language, I want to say, in the early 2000s. So we, as the National Park Service, are literally behind academia and the community. Between our different park units, we were talking about different things, using different terms. And not that we

had to all use the same term, but we should all have a same baseline understanding. So it was an opportunity for us to just kind of recalibrate on how we do our own interpretation. We have our own autonomy, but then it's good to have some kind of baseline documentation of where we kind of move on from. Hopefully that kind of covered what—

02-00:32:26

Tewes:

Thank you, that was very helpful. Obviously it's a very complicated issue, but it is interesting to hear from someone who's been working on this and pushing this forward from the NPS side.

02-00:32:37

Wakatsuki-Chong: Can I at least make one comment? I don't know if there's any correlation at all, but it was actually really interesting. I want to say it was a few months ago the AP changed their style guide to no longer use "internment." So that's something just to think about, where that's the journalistic style guide for the Associated Press. To me, that's a big win, because now when people are seeing in the media, especially in journalistic news sources, and if "internment" is being used, they could immediately say, "Look at the AP." Because before it was all like, "Okay, look at the JAACL [Japanese American Citizens League] Power of Words." And it's like, "Oh, that's a community thing." And then it's like, "Oh well, look at the Harpers Ferry Style Guide." It's like, "Ah, it's the Park Service." If there's any naysayers, they can't really refute it if it's the Associated Press, because, again, they're the ones that set the stylistic guide for the press. And so now there's an opportunity for us to then help change how other people, specifically journalists who end up touching a lot of people because of the exposure, that we could help maybe have another wave of education to try to use more adequate terminology as we talk about this history.

02-00:34:06

Tewes:

That's great. I hadn't realized the AP had changed their style guide. But I wouldn't downplay the work that you put into that and the work that many people have put into changing the language over the years.

02-00:34:18

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. There's a few people who headed this. And one person, her name is Mako Nakagawa, she was really trying to do this, get the terminology not resolved, but talk about it. And she was the first one that actually introduced me to this. But she passed away several years ago. And a lot of my mentors throughout the years, I just wish that they were around to see it, because I know that they've been working so hard. So it isn't like I was working in a vacuum; I'm working off of many giants' shoulders, where they did a lot of the work, and whether they were former incarcerated or other descendants. But so many people have been pushing towards this, so I'm just happy to be part of the process. But yes, it was basically a community initiative that finally came to light.

02-00:35:13

Tewes: Thank you. An excellent point about mentorship. Well, speaking about the influence that this work can have, [laughs] and one can have on this work, you are also doing some work now with the White House as a policy advisor on—let's see if I get this right—AANHPI [Asian American, Native Hawai'ian, Pacific Islanders] policy.

02-00:35:40

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah.

02-00:35:41

Tewes: All the acronyms in here. Is there anything you want to say about that particular project?

02-00:35:46

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. Well, there is some intersection with the work that I did with the Japanese American Confinement Sites. Being this policy advisor is great, because I'm focusing on Asian American Native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders to talk about these stories. And more specifically for the JACS sites, we recently went to Heart Mountain Pilgrimage and working on some other issues kind of revolving around some of these Japanese American Confinement Sites. So one of the things was with Amache. You know, the White House was involved—I shouldn't say involved, but they were keeping tabs on it as it was going through Congress to get passed and whatnot. So I wasn't in this detail then, but I've heard since. But there's a lot of intersections, because we are trying to be representative of all the AANHPI communities.

02-00:36:47

But there's other stuff that's been amazing that doesn't have to deal directly with the Japanese American Confinement Sites, but some of my portfolio is dealing with the insular areas. So learning more about the territories and the Freely Associated States and the COFA Compact and trying to make sure how are we supporting these communities that needs assistance and just identifying issues that we could potentially see if we could help out with it or not. I'm working on hiring issues within the federal government, so working with the Office of Personnel Management. And then hopefully, like once there's an Asian Pacific American Museum, that Congressional study, as that starts moving along, it'll be interesting to see what happens there and the involvements of trying to find people to help assist or provide different inputs on our stuff. So I think that there will always continuously be some aspects of the work, of this policy advisor position in the future to deal with the Japanese American incarceration history, and at the larger level just the general AANHPI communities to make sure that they're represented, and if there are issues that come up again, we could try to assist. Sometimes we're not able to find solutions, and sometimes we can't and sometimes it takes a whole bunch of people to find a solution. But if we don't know about it, we can't move forward on it. So yeah, so that's that in a nutshell.

02-00:38:29

Tewes:

Thank you. I want to transition from your personal work and your life here to thinking about the historic version of this and your own family's connection. We've spoken a little bit about that, but I want to remind us about your paternal family's experience during World War II as a Japanese American family. Can you remind us where your family was living at that time?

02-00:39:02

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So I come from a really large clan, but my great-grandparents were living on Terminal Island and my grandparents were in Santa Monica area. And I think that some of my great aunts and uncles, the older siblings of my grandfather, they were in the LA area, as well. So immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, like my grandfather was a fisherman, so he was taken away by the FBI, and then there was also the exclusion from Terminal Island. So the first group of people to be excluded from their place of living was Terminal Island. But then sometimes people get it confused with Bainbridge Island. They were the first people removed from their homes into an incarceration site. So that's the separation when you hear those being used. But anyway, so my grandfather basically had my grandmother and her mother, so basically, I had four generations of my family incarcerated. But he had basically had his grandmother and his mother and then his younger siblings move in with him in Santa Monica. And he at least had the foresight of putting as much of the family under one family number. So you see that our family list, most of them are the same family number, other than a few of my aunties who are already married; then they went under their husband's last name. Yeah. I'd say it was like fourteen or something people.

02-00:40:39

So after my great-grandfather was taken away by the FBI, people didn't know where he went. And then my great-grandmother tried to not only take care of her elderly mother but is also trying to take care of her kids, but also worried about her husband and where he's at. And then here's my grandfather who's trying to figure out like, Okay, I need to be the head of household, because his older brother has his own family to take care of, and then he's the next oldest son and then he's trying to also take care of his younger siblings. So basically, my grandmother tried to help with that situation, too, while he's trying to figure out what's going on. So it seemed like there was a lot of confusion in that aspect. And then our family went to Santa Anita and then eventually to Manzanar, and eventually my great-grandfather was reconnected with our family. He was held at Fort Lincoln. And essentially the FBI or whoever was interrogating him, they kind of worked him and he kind of came back a little bit broken, a bit alcoholic, which caused conflict within the family unit.

02-00:41:58

When I talk to my Great Aunt Jeanne [Wakatsuki Houston]—a lot of people know her as the author of *Farewell to Manzanar*—she remembers my grandmother, so that's Chizu, as more of a motherly figure during those

times, because her mother wasn't emotionally necessarily there for the children, because when her father was reintroduced back into the family there was that conflict. So she talks fondly of my grandmother and how she was always there to support her. I didn't realize how much my grandmother took on during that time, because my grandmother always had an infant—that was my Aunt Patty—then she ended up having three children in camp. So that was my Uncle George, Uncle Woody, and then Aunt Joanne in camp. But then on top of that she's taking care of the younger in-laws. So essentially, she's kind of like a single mother, because my grandfather, he was drafted into the military and there's this whole discussion within our family about how my grandfather wanted to prove loyalty so he wanted to enlist, but then my great-grandfather was like, "Look at what your country did to me. I don't want you to die before you have to." So they came to an agreement that they'll just wait until he gets enlisted.

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Wakatsuki-Chong: So I think about all of that. Because right now I'm thirty-six. My grandmother was twenty-six or twenty-seven when she went to camp. First of all, I can't even imagine being a parent, let alone being a parent ten years ago. But then thinking about, oh, my aunt was ten years younger than me right now. She had a whole set of children and then also taking care of her younger in-laws and trying to manage through all of this. That's a lot, right? I can't even imagine what it would have been like, there's nothing in my life that could equate to even a small notion of that. And then you just amplify that, where this isn't just one story, there's like 100,000 people who experienced this, as well, in different ways. And then even the children who are born in camp. Many people are like, "Oh, I don't remember anything, it doesn't mean anything." But they're carrying this, because their parents internalized it. And that's why we have these weird Japanese American works where we hear stories about saving tofu containers and all these rubber bands. It's all a derivative from camp, but I guess you could say from World War II, because I know other people from different cultures have similar hoarding practices because of the availability of resources. But it does trickle down.

02-00:45:27

Yeah, it's really interesting to see how people, whether they overcome it or not. Because my grandfather, originally he was recruited into the 522, so that's an armored tank battalion. But eventually got pulled to the Military Intelligence Service, so he actually was in Japan and then did a little bit during the post-occupation, as well. And then came back home and as a vet couldn't find a job, so he ended up becoming a Nisei wrestler. So there's like this small contingency of Japanese American men who ended up going on the wrestling circuit, because white wrestlers needed an enemy to fight. So my grandfather performed under the name of Professor Sugi. So he did that for a while, but he was still kind of part of the wrestling circuits, I want to say all the way up until the sixties, seventies kind of thing. I don't think he was

wrestling towards the end of his life, but I think he was still part of that group.

02-00:46:40

Tewes: Wow, Hanako, so much to unpack here.

02-00:46:44

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, sorry.

02-00:46:48

Tewes: No, it's just so much interesting information that you're sharing. I do want to just note that your family lived in the LA area and on Terminal Island and they're a fishing family. And you mentioned your grandmother's name, and what was your grandfather's name?

02-00:47:08

Wakatsuki-Chong: Woodrow Mann Wakatsuki. And I guess one little tidbit is our family never went back into fishing, because our family had two fishing boats and it was all confiscated. So afterwards, there was no way that they could afford it. You think about the economic impacts that it has on people afterwards. Because you have people who owned property where they either sold it pennies to the dollar or they just abandoned the property or gave it away, asked friends to watch over property and they never got it back. And some people did get it back. So there was a whole variety of experiences. But seeing the economic devastation is pretty high. I don't think I'm quoting this exactly correctly right now, because my brain is kind of foggy, but I want to say in 1948, I think they called it the Evacuee Claims Program or something, where people who were incarcerated could file claims on property lost. And I think at the time there was over \$300 million worth of claims, and then I believe that they distributed, I want to say, between 3 and \$5 million. So that's why, when redress came along, they're like, "Look at this." And these aren't even all the people who tried to make claims. But then it was that. So that's why with redress—I think originally Senator Inouye and Norm Mineta was trying to go for a bigger paycheck, but it's because they're like, "Look at this. If you include inflation, it would be this." But \$20,000 is something that we could settle on.

02-00:48:51

But that economic impact is huge. And there are academic articles that talk about a lot of these economic impacts, because when you look on the West Coast when people are being taken away, it's interesting that most of the time the removals was right before the first harvest. And I can't remember, I'll have to go back and try to find this paper, but someone wrote an article on this. Because there was one individual whose family was trying to actually harvest, but it wasn't a good time, so they set their farm on fire. They're just like, "Whatever. If I can't reap the benefits, no one's going to get it." And I think that they sold the property or something. But people were mad at them for doing it and they're just like, "Oh, so you wanted it for the money. This

wouldn't be an issue if it were just for the land." And no one ever said, "I'll harvest it and I'll give you half of whatever it is." So that's why they did that. And there were several farms that did that, where families were just like, "If I can't have it, no one's going to have it," kind of thing. But there was a lot of economic motivations, and that's the reason why the whole mass incarceration on the West Coast happened. The Farmers Association, the Sons of the American West, people were upset at some of the Japanese American families who were actually able to farm these lands at a more productive rate than others. Yeah, anyways. So there's a correlation there, I would just say.

02-00:50:39

Tewes:

The last time we spoke, you mentioned your grandfather's service and the complication of the loyalty questionnaire for the community and for your family, in particular. I want to pivot, though, and think about: what do you know about the community your family was able to build at Manzanar, if at all?

02-00:51:08

Wakatsuki-Chong: That's a really tough question, because none of my family talked about it, right, so I don't know. Only from my aunt's experience as documented in her memoir. There's that. But it didn't seem like it was a strong community. And I don't know if this is accurate, but to me, the way I always took it, was they were just trying to survive as a family unit. So there wasn't a lot of time and investment made to create that sense of community. But I do know that my grandmother, Chizu, she was very religious, and that's what helped her get through the camp. And I know that she befriended Sister Bernadette at Manzanar. So I don't know what kind of community that was, if it was just a friendship relationship or if she kind of consistently went to church or whatnot. But I know that that lasted after camp, because some of my aunts recall, "Oh, there's this Mary Knoll nun who would come over." And then when my grandmother passed away, we were going through her stuff and then we found this picture of Jesus that was kind of a paper printout. So I don't know if it was actually from camp or if it was later on, but on the back it had Sister Bernadette's name, that she gave that to my grandmother. And so my grandmother kept that, and she put all of her children's pictures in it and some of my older cousin's before it got too full and she couldn't shut it. But I know that helped her get through. But the community aspect, I don't think that they were super active, or I just haven't heard stories. I think that they were just trying to survive, but that's just speculation.

02-00:53:07

Tewes:

Thank you. Well, it's interesting. I was thinking about your grandmother's religiosity. I know your Great Aunt Jeanne spoke about in *Farewell to Manzanar* her interest in converting to Catholicism, and so it's definitely something that was happening in Manzanar at that time. And we also spoke last time about the family's return to the Los Angeles area, and their diminished economic circumstances and that your father grew up in public

housing. But I'm curious: do you know why they wanted to return to LA, if fishing didn't look like it was going to be a part of the atmosphere anymore?

02-00:53:51

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, I don't know exactly why. I think it's also because it's home, because my grandmother was born in Los Angeles. And they eventually made their way to Long Beach, and I think it was just a little bit cheaper out there. But then I also think going back to the fishing ties was something, as well. Because fishing doesn't really cost much. Well, nowadays it costs a lot, because you have to get a permit and all this other stuff. Because I remember my dad told me the stories. This is when he was ten or twelve, so it had to be in the fifties, where he said that this is when he realized that they were poor, because he always thought that they were well off because they always had more than their neighbors. But when he reflected back, he's like, "So I guess maybe we just didn't really have much at all." But he went out fishing. Because he does remember fishing a lot as a kid and I guess it was with his older brother. So it's Woody, Jr., and then George. They went out, but they had so much fun that they just kind of stayed out all night, they had a little bonfire on the beach. And he remembers his mom was pissed when they got home, because she was trying to call to see did something happen to them or trying to figure out if anyone saw the kids. I think she went out and then either found them or somehow, they both met up back at the house. And apparently there was a wall in the house where apparently they got in trouble a lot, that she'll just knock their heads up against the drywall, and so there's dents. So they had to line up, and then that was a day where they got knocked in the head. And he remembers my grandmother specifically saying, "Your sisters went to bed hungry." Basically, "You guys were being selfish about it." And he told me that he reflected from that day, that he's like, "Shit," he didn't think that he was poor, but when his mom said that he's like, "Oh, I'm going to be on time next time and I'll make sure I bring the fish." And that was his recollection of when he realized that they were living in poverty, and what he thought was recreational was actually a source of food for his family, and it didn't click until that time. I talked to my aunt, his younger sister, Aunt Christina, and she's like, "Well, I think that maybe mom was just trying to freak us out." And I was like, "I don't know. It really impacted my dad."

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And I look at what my dad did. He made sure that he paid for one of my aunt's college. I found out actually on a pilgrimage to Tule Lake, there was a woman who apparently dated my dad. I had no clue. And so we were talking and she's like, "Yeah, we all wanted to go on a date with your dad, because he was such a gentleman." So my dad went to community college, but was working for IBM at the time, so he was one of the guys that actually had a real job. So he would take my aunt and her girlfriends out. So the dating wasn't like dating, like dating, it's like going out for dinner. And my dad would be like, "Okay," he'll pay for the meal, but then he'll ask them to get something to go, so then they have food for the next day. And I see my dad—well, he passed away a few years ago, but he would do stuff like that. And

then I wonder if that goes back to that and that moment in time where he realized he was poor and he doesn't want to see other people like that, tried to give opportunities. So anyways.

02-00:57:48

Tewes: That's a really vivid example of the intergenerational impacts of incarceration. I suppose I should ask when your father was born. Was it after the incarceration?

02-00:58:00

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So my father was the first child born after camp, free, so 1948. And then his sister, his older sister, Aunt Joanne, was the last child born in camp in 1946. Of my family, not of the whole camp experience.

02-00:58:22

Tewes: We just mentioned one example, but if you had to characterize the impact that incarceration had on your particular family, what would you say that is?

02-00:58:42

Wakatsuki-Chong: Well, I think it spans to other families in different ways, but I do definitely think the biggest thing that I feel—so this is only a "me statement"—is that the loss of identity I think is the biggest thing. Because I'm still trying to find my identity, and it's because I feel like you couldn't be proud of your heritage during camp, and afterwards it was basically like Americanization. And so it's really interesting, because I didn't grow up eating any Japanese food, and I think I mentioned it last time, where it's like my dad wanted more Mexican food. And a lot of the food I now think about, like my grandmother made when I was younger, was either Mexican food or I guess I'll just call it generic white American food, was eggs and stuff like that. Yeah. We'll have a pot of rice, but it wasn't like, oh, we're going to make this very specific Japanese thing. Just like, oh, we got rice with whatever we're eating. So I think that loss of identity and culture, the food aspects and the language aspects and then just in the general self-identity, is part of the generational trauma that I experience. I don't know if my cousins experience the same thing.

02-01:00:17

But then I also felt like I couldn't be proud being Asian in general, and I'm also half Korean. And so it's only been recently that I actually used both my last names. Because even working within the Park Service, I felt that I'm the professional Japanese American and I made this narrative up in my mind where it's like, Well, people know me professionally with my first last name, so I don't want to confuse them with my second last name. But now working with the White House Initiative and specifically now within the White House in the Office of the Chief of Staff, I'm like, I could be all my identities at once and it's okay. Which, for some reason, it never felt like I could do that until now, living in Hawai'i. [laughs] Because before it's like I was always trying to not stand out, trying to justify my Americanness; and now over here it's

like no one cares, [laughs] which is super liberating. But I feel that's probably the biggest thing, at least for me and my family, that I have, is just that loss of identity and then trying to find it.

02-01:01:29

And now it's hard to find it when you've lost a lot of your elders. So it's like I have to create a pseudo family through my pilgrimage experiences and doing other community-based things and adopt people. I remember I made this super weird for one of my friends who was in his eighties, and I was like, "Hey, George, can I adopt you as my grandpa?" And he's like, "What? I already have grandkids." I was like, "But I don't have any grandparents left." And he's like, "Okay." Maybe I was too forward. He's probably like, "Does this kid want money?" And all I wanted was just a grandpa to hang out with. At the time I was living in Tule Lake. I'd go home, and then I'll go meet him at his nursing home and take him to Walmart, go get his hair cut, normally we'd get dinner, then take him back. Because at that point, I didn't have any grandparents left. And I never got to spend any time with a grandfather figure, because my grandfather died before I was born, my paternal grandfather, and then my maternal grandfather, he passed away when I was relatively young, so I never had that. But I got to spend time with my grandmothers, right? I just remember his face. But then I'm glad that he was cool about it. [laughs] But yeah, that's how I tried to find some aspects of my identity through other people, which may or may not be appropriate. [laughs] It's like anyways.

02-01:03:03

Tewes:

Thank you for sharing that. I will say one thing that I feel is a bit unique about your family history is that many people don't know very much at all about their family's incarceration experience, but as we've alluded to, your Great Aunt Jeanne wrote *Farewell to Manzanar*, and she really chronicled this experience pretty closely—albeit from her perspective as a child, but also looking back a bit. And you mentioned that you first read this around third or fourth grade on your own?

02-01:03:39

Wakatsuki-Chong: Mm-hmm.

02-01:03:40

Tewes:

Did your family talk to you at all after you'd read it?

02-01:03:43

Wakatsuki-Chong: No. It was like, "Here's a book about your family. Read it." And it's like the coming of age and then that's it. "Did you read it?" "Yeah, I read it." "Okay," and then that's it. We just moved on. Even from a child's perspective, if you don't have any dialogue afterwards it's just kind of in a vacuum and you're just like, "Well, I read something," but you can't really comprehend it without the assistance.

02-01:04:08

Wakatsuki-Chong: And then none of my family really talked about it. My grandmother didn't talk about it. I tried interviewing her about it without recognizing the trauma that she endured. And so that was kind of a bust at the time. But when I reflect back upon it, I feel terrible, because I remember my dad's like, "Grandma's not doing good. You should talk to her about camp." And then I just set up a camera and I'm like, "Grandma, tell me about camp," not really having any sophisticated questions other than very broad things. And her initial response was, "Yeah, when I was a little, I used to play tennis in the street." It's like, Oh okay. Well, maybe she's going senile. I was sixteen at the time and I was just making assumptions. But reflecting now it's like, who was I? And shoving a camera in someone's face and not really even asking for consent. I didn't even ask her, "Hey, can I talk to you about camp?" It was like, "Oh, Dad told me to set up this thing and I'm going to do this." So it helped me become a better person, especially when I'm dealing with incarceration history, because I've been in weird situations, but this at least helped me understand some people are still processing and it's okay wherever they're at in this and we can't force it. If they're not ready to talk—and some people will never be ready to talk, and I think she was one of those people. It gave me a better look at how people respond to stuff, and then having like a little bit more empathy and compassion if they don't want to talk about it.

02-01:05:54

Because I've been in a situation where when I was a volunteer with Friends of Minidoka. One of the pilgrimages, we were doing a tour, and I was over by the swimming pool. And usually, we'd tell a story about the reason why they created the swimming pool was because several people died in the canal. And it wasn't until the last two deaths—they were actually adults—but there was a child that actually drowned. So I just said that story. I didn't think I was super flippant, but I was like, "Well, and this was the response, was this." And then I'm like, "Okay, we're going to go back on the trails, so let's all walk." And there was a gentleman just hanging out. I noticed he was going through something, so I just said, "Hey, what's going on? We're going to continue on." And he's just, "This is all wrong." And I was like, "Okay. You want to talk about it?" And he's all like, "Yeah, this is messed up." And I'm like, "Okay." I'm trying to figure out what is the context. And he's like, "I'm a parent. You talked about a kid dying. My friend died there. The administration made me go tell his parents that he died." And he's like, "I was a kid, and now as a parent, I would not want my kid's best friend to tell me that my son died." And so he's like processing this all out loud and I realized, Oh okay. I didn't want him to have a giant meltdown. And maybe he needed it, maybe he didn't, but I was like, I didn't even think about it at that time, because it was the first couple years I was doing tours. After that incident, I tried to get the skills and tried to find ways to figure out if people either needed space to process—because I did ask him, "Do you want to stay here by yourself or do you want to follow?" And I can't remember what he chose, but I realized, I am so ill-equipped to deal with people who are coming

back—most of the time it's their first time ever coming back to these sites. So I at least try with my interns and folks to at least prepare them when they come up with these. Not come up with it, but when things like this happen to them, that they know that they need to take the time to help stabilize the situation so we don't do more damage, right? Yeah. So it's just one of those things. And I'm sorry, I think I kind of went way off course here, because I can't remember the original question, but I swear that it probably ties back.

02-01:08:52

Tewes:

It does, it does. Because you were talking about how your family didn't really discuss the history still. But I'm curious, considering your [Great] Aunt Jeanne put this out in the world, if she had talked to you personally about it. Was she open to conversation?

02-01:09:09

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. So we did a couple road trips. But most of the time she didn't really want to talk about like that. We talked about other stuff, because she wanted to do more research in the Owens Valley and stuff like that. Because I also didn't want to retraumatize her. And there was actually a situation where—I'm trying to figure out how to say this. So we went back to Manzanar and know some folks who wanted to do an oral history with her. They kind of forced her into it, because in her mind, she provided three declinations, but I think it's just like cultural competency. They didn't hear it, because she was being very passive about it. And then at the end it was like, Fine, I'll do whatever you want kind of thing. And she did tell me, she's like, "Come get me in fifteen minutes," because she's like, "I am not prepared for this." And I knew that she doesn't like living in this space all the time, because it retraumatizes her. And so I knew not to really ask her anything, because she would just provide information to me once she feels like it. When we would talk about my grandmother, she's always like, "Oh yeah, Chizu was so great. She would do this for me. Oh, in camp I remember she did XYZ. She took me here." So I never prodded her on that, because she made it very clear when I kind of got reconnected with her as an adult that it's not necessarily a space she wants to live in, but she knows it's important to talk about it. And the book was a healing process for her. She never said it in these terms, but this is how I view it. I think she sees it as her responsibility to kind of take on this burden of emotional baggage to help educate people about it. So I try not to add to that baggage by asking her, if that makes sense.

02-01:11:15

Tewes:

It does. I'm wondering, though, if that has an impact on how you were able to process this.

02-01:11:27

Wakatsuki-Chong: I guess. I don't think it impacted me, because, again, being in community at all these other pilgrimages and kind of adopting a family of folks who are open to talk about it, even though it's not my experience, it's still our experience. Not even within the Japanese American community, but in

American history, right? I don't necessarily feel like I need to know all the exact experiences of my family to understand this experience as a whole. And I've been provided really great opportunities to meet amazing people who have helped me process through some of these issues. And I'm still, like what I said, still processing about my identity in many ways, too. But I don't feel like, because I don't get to hear my immediate family's history and all that I've heard, I don't think it's impacting me to process this, because there's other ways that we could process it. I'm fortunate enough that at least I have something documented. And then I actually pulled my family's records from the National Archives and learning a little bit more about that. I showed it to my [Great] Aunt Jeanne because I was like, "Did you know you got your tonsils taken out?" She's like, "Yeah." She's like, "I don't remember it bothering me," which makes me think she's probably one of the few people that had this unnecessary surgery, because there was an individual who was doing unnecessary surgeries at the camp. And then there's like her grades in there, stuff that she doesn't really remember, too. So there's other ways to piecemeal the history without actually having oral histories, that there are primary resources that you could still tap into and still kind of piecemeal together the history that occurred.

02-01:13:28

Tewes:

As a historian yourself, do you feel like you're better equipped than others to do that research?

02-01:13:38

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, I guess so. I'm probably not as well equipped as a librarian, because I feel like librarians are on a whole different level; they're able to find things out of nothing. But yeah, I think so, that that helped, like having the research skills. And also, just the practice. Because I used to work for an oral history center, and I realized the first couple oral histories I did probably wasn't really culturally competent, but I'm also learning from other people who don't work in community spaces. So it's like I learn things kind of the hard way. I just take all of that into how I interact with people, because it's like ultimately you don't want to further hurt people, you don't want to cause harm and damage, but it's always good to get information. But if people aren't willing to do it, I'm not going to force them to do it, because that's not right. Because I do believe there are some ethics that we should be abiding by, but some people don't necessarily see it as such, because some people see it as a zero-sum game, where it's like you either get the information or you don't and it's lost to time. And it's all like, well, but is it really lost to time? If they talk to a niece or a nephew or a kid or the neighbor, it's still going to live on. And damaging or causing harm to someone in the moment is not worth preserving it. Because in the grand scheme of everything, it's like we could just all disappear and none of it would really matter. And I'm not trying to be a huge nihilist, but it's just I want to protect people's experiences on earth, and you don't want to get them really frustrated where they're not able to live in the moment anymore and they're stuck in the past. I don't know if that's where

the compassion comes in and the ethics, but it's like we could always find different ways to gather this information without harming people.

02-01:15:54

Tewes:

Great observation. Is there anything you want to add about *Farewell to Manzanar*, either content or your experience reading it or living with it these many years?

02-01:16:11

Wakatsuki-Chong: I don't think so. I guess kind of going back to the identity thing. For the longest time, I never really associated myself with *Farewell to Manzanar*, because I didn't want to be like—you know how there's people out there that's riding off of other people's coattails? And so I got actually the biggest compliment a few years ago. I don't know if you know Nancy Ukai Russell. She reached out to me. I want to say it was in 2018, because I went to all the pilgrimages, and she wanted to interview me for an article. I was like, "Oh okay, I'm not important. There's other people to talk to." And so somehow she did ask. She's like, "Wait, your last name. Are you related to Jeanne?" And I was like, "Oh yeah, she's my great aunt." She's like, "No, shit." She may not have cussed, because I don't think she's a cusser. She's like, "I didn't know." She's like, "Did you not tell me for a reason?" And I told her, I was like, "Well, I just wanted to kind of make my own name and do what I do without being seen—" I don't know. Maybe it's an ego thing, but I also just didn't want people to have these expectations of me. Because I do recall in Idaho when someone found out, they're like, "Oh, I want you to bring your aunt for this and this and this." At the time I wasn't really close with her, so I was like, "Oh, that's kind of weird." But then I ended up getting pretty close with my aunty since then. But she did say, she's like, "Yeah, you've made a pretty good name for yourself. I didn't even recognize it until I wrote your name out and I'm like, Oh, that looks like the author from *Farewell to Manzanar*." So I was like, "Oh okay, that's really great." So yeah, so that was really nice feedback that I got. Not that I was trying to separate myself from my aunt, but I just didn't want to be seen as I'm going to use that to influence my work.

02-01:18:17

Because I truly am doing this—it's for the people that I've interacted with from Minidoka and from Tule Lake, and also, it's a way for me to kind of find myself. But then it's also a way for me to honor my ancestors, but in my own way. Kind of sound a little hippy-dippy and a lot of feelings there that I'm not really expressing. But this is a personal thing for me, it isn't something that I'm trying to showcase, because I do this for a lot of people. And people don't need to know that I'm doing it for them. I'm just trying to preserve the history so that others eventually could learn from it. But if not, that's fine, too. I guess maybe it's selfish. I'm doing it for myself. Yeah.

02-01:19:22

Tewes:

That's important, too, recognizing what it means for you, why you're connected. I'd like to think about the memorialization of incarceration history. You've mentioned pilgrimages, and it sounds like you've worked a few professionally. Have you gone on any in a personal capacity?

02-01:19:48

Wakatsuki-Chong:

In a personal capacity? That's an interesting concept. I think probably at the beginning I was doing things on a personal capacity. I was with the Friends of Minidoka starting in 2007 when I first started, and I always feel like I was representing whatever organization I was a part of. So I would say probably those first couple of times it was more personal. And this last time I guess Heart Mountain was kind of a mix of personal, but work, too. But yeah, it's definitely a cross where—I don't know if this is actually getting to what you're asking; I guess maybe what you ask could be a yes or no question, but I'll just continue on—where it's no longer just for me to go to these things. I've met so many people and friends and people who I consider a second family. I don't want to make it sound terrible, but some of it's kind of an obligation to go, to check up on our elders, to see folks. This last time, right, to Heart Mountain we saw our community uncle, Uncle Shin, and he's this really interesting man who likes to hitchhike across the United States. He goes down and spends his winters in Mexico. I met him twelve years ago where I used to work at a historic prison. I don't know how he got connected, but he came over, we talked for about an hour and he's like, "I'm going to hitchhike to Heart Mountain." And I was like, "Oh my gosh, let me see if I could get you a ride kind of closer." So I think I dropped him off in Twin Falls, and then one of my other friends took him to Pocatello, and then eventually I saw him at Heart Mountain. Because he was going through the Grand Tetons. And I was like, "Oh, I was going to go through Yellowstone." And then a few years later I see him again in Twin Falls and I was like, "How about this? I'll meet you up in Idaho Falls, and I'll take you the rest of the way." So there are these people who come in and out of our lives. But I always wonder, oh, I wonder how Shin's doing? So there's that. But then it's also I like to go, because sometimes things happen and they need assistance—whether it's your pilgrimage or someone else's pilgrimage. And I always like to just flex and help out, because I've done so many of them that it's like, Oh yeah. You need someone to move chairs? I could move chairs for you. Oh, you need me to go grab something out of the printer? I could go do that. Because I know how stressful it is being in the moment. You're like, oh my God, I need to do all these things. But yeah, personal, professional, all of the above.

02-01:22:48

Tewes:

When you mentioned just being at so many different pilgrimages, I wondered if you could draw a comparison between the different experiences, be it geography or interpretation or emotional impact for folks.

02-01:23:07

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. Well, and I could definitely do it from just a personal lens. I do think that each pilgrimage has its own feel to it. And I don't know if it's created this way, or this is just how I perceive it. Obviously I'm a little bit partial to Minidoka, because it's probably the pilgrimage that I have attended the most, and to me it feels like a family reunion. They do karaoke. Most of the time we're closing down the hotel bar. So you stay up until two o'clock, you close down the bar, we all drink a whole bunch of Pedialyte, we wake back up at six o'clock and we start it over for four days a row. And the Pedialyte's not only for the alcohol, but just the dehydration, being out in the high desert. [laughs] And it's like family. It's just so much fun.

02-01:24:04

And then you have Tule Lake. It's like an emotional conference where you're getting so educated, but then you're also empowered, where you're like, I need to go write a letter to my senator and burn my bra. But you're just like, I want to make a statement. And I think it's because a lot of the folks came from the Berkeley area, so you have that activism, right? And it's so empowering being in that space, because being in Idaho, it's always like, don't be seen, just try to stay low, don't have anyone look at you. They're just like, Let's do it. We need to talk about this. So it's always inspiring going to the Tule Lake pilgrimage. And plus, I also have a super soft spot in my heart, because I didn't think I was qualified for grad school, because it was really hard for me with my undergrad, because I had to work all these part-time jobs, so my grades weren't good, and I didn't ever think I would get accepted into grad school. But the last day of the 2012 Tule Lake pilgrimage, I got my acceptance letter and it was so funny, because there was all these people in the bus because I took the bus from Seattle. So Paul Tomita, he calls himself a pilgrimage junkie; he's definitely the original gangster there. So it's like him and his wife. So I remember I was like, "Oh my gosh, I got accepted." So he's like, "Oh, that's so exciting. I can't wait to see what happens." And then literally two years later I completed my master's and he's like, "How's school going?" I'm like, "I got my master's degree." So I felt like I grew up in that community and then eventually I worked out there, too. So that holds a special place in my heart, just kind of like how Minidoka holds a special place in my heart.

02-01:26:09

And then Heart Mountain just feels definitely like a conference, a little bit more structured, in a way. I guess the only way I could kind of relate to it is it's kind of more business conference. You're there, but it's still really good, because you get to meet up with a whole bunch of people. And this last time, there was this whole contingency of Yonsei, Gosei, so that was super empowering.

02-01:26:41

But then you have Amache. I've only been to Amache, I think once, for a pilgrimage. But it's very remote driving out there. You're at this high school

where this teacher, John Hopper, he's been preserving this site, and it's really cool to see descendants come out and other people from the Japanese American community out of Denver. It's this really wholesome event, because he'll cook the food and they have the students trying to show people around. It just feels really nice, you know, it's the local community. I don't know how to really adequately express those feelings.

02-01:27:32

Wakatsuki-Chong: Manzanar, it's also a unique thing, right, because originally it's just a one-day event, but they've been expanding a little bit to do some cultural events the day before. And that's really cool, too. You can kind of see it's more structured around the LA lifestyle. And I remember I was talking to one of my friends who's like, "Well, I want to wake up in my bed and I want to go to sleep in my bed." So I'm like, oh, now I understand why it's just like a four-hour thing mostly in the day, because then people could drive in from LA and they could go back home. But it's still super powerful, because it's one of the largest pilgrimages where sometimes they'll have a thousand people or more there. And you just get all these people together and there's a lot of youth engagement and a lot of allyship with other BIPOC communities, which is kind of really cool. And seeing the Nikkei Student Unions, where I'm all like, I didn't even know there was such a thing. I wish I would have gone to a school in California. I had no clue about all these resources out there.

02-01:28:46

Gila River doesn't necessarily have a pilgrimage, per se, but twice a year the JACL will coordinate a cleanup day and you get to go out to the site. You hear from tribal leaders about the history and the significance of the site, and then we do a cleanup and then it's just a way to connect with the site in a very somber, non-invasive way. And then the JACL usually hosts a luncheon afterwards, which is super cool and very intimate, because it's a lot smaller.

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And then you have like Poston. I think now they've been doing it for several years. I went on the first one, which was really cool that they're doing engagement with the local tribe, with the CRIT, the Colorado Indian Tribe, or Colorado River Indian Tribe. And it's just getting people together over there, going to the site. So there's a memorial out by a highway and then there's kind of this historic area. I think it's the schoolhouse. And they had one barrack that was moved over there, but I think that burned down within the last couple of years. But it's one of the few areas where the school was made out of—I think it was adobe bricks or something like that, which is very unique compared to the other camps. So that's really cool just to be a part of that group, yeah.

02-01:30:20

And then you got Topaz. I don't know if it was officially a pilgrimage or not, but we're in Salt Lake and then you take a bus out there, you go see the site, go to the museum. And the site is just incredible. I'm not a religious person,

but this is the only way I feel like I could actually describe it: it's like the rapture happened. Things just disappeared, but you could walk on the paths, because you could kind of still see it delineated, but then there's stuff on the ground like pottery or pennies and stuff like that, as if people just disappeared. And it's a very eerie sense, but it's also incredibly—I don't know what's the right word. It just makes you feel really small, but it's also haunting at the same time. But then you're able to connect with the site. But it's just incredible being out at that site. Yeah. And then the museum is cool, too, because that was actually sponsored by a JACS grant. So it's always good to kind of see all those things.

02-01:31:33

Wakatsuki-Chong: And then Rohwer and Jerome, recently that pilgrimage has been started by Kimiko Marr. I was on the first pilgrimage, and that was super cool. I think we were mostly out of a Comfort Inn, but I was a bus monitor so that was really interesting to go out to these sites. It was my first time going to these sites and just seeing the remnants. And again, that pilgrimage was really cool, too, because there's education sessions. And I think most of the pilgrimage has some sort of educational component and then community building component to it. But it was just really cool how Kimiko organized that to go to both sites. And then also in town in Little Rock, there was—I think it's like a gallery. They had some stuff. And then going out to McGehee to look at that small museum that's out there that talks about Rohwer and Jerome.

02-01:32:31

Did I cover all the sites? [laughs] But yeah, all of them have a different feel, and I would never say one is better than the other, because they all give you something different. It's just a different experience that I believe that everyone should experience, because sometimes people don't need to live in that emotional space. Sometimes people need to just connect with the land and understand: why were these places chosen, or, what is happening on these lands now? Because over at Rohwer and Jerome, it's being cultivated. But it's also like Minidoka, Heart Mountain, and Tule Lake, that was all ag. That was from BLM [Bureau of Land Management], so it turned over for the Homestead Act. But then that's why at Topaz and Manzanar and other sites, sometimes nothing was actually built over. And then you hear the stories from the elders at Gila River. That site that was chosen is actually a very important site to the Gila River Tribe. And so there was a verbal agreement with our elders where they said they will not develop that site unless they absolutely have to. And so far there isn't any development. And so hearing those oral histories being passed down is really powerful, especially when you're right there. So there's a memorial for military folks up there. And I think his last name—it was Mr. Shorthair, I think—he kind of was telling us these stories, and it gave me chicken skin hearing that theme there. And then it also makes me sad, where it's all the government just decided to build there. They kept on asking the tribe, "Hey, can we build this prison here?" And then they're like, "No." And then after the third time they're like, "Yeah,

whatever. Okay." And then it became front page news, where it's like "tribe agrees." But they reluctantly agreed, but then the government was trying to make it into something more. And then just to hear the sadness about how the tribal community didn't even like seeing it, because they knew what was happening. So yeah, it adds all these layers to the story. Sorry, I'll just stop talking.

02-01:35:06

Tewes:

That was wonderful, thank you. And I was especially interested in your connection to place, and the power that place has in telling these stories and connecting people to that history. As we move towards the end of our time together, I do want to make sure I give you space to talk about the eightieth Day of Remembrance event this past February. You had mentioned that you worked on it, but is there anything else you'd like to say? It was a rather big event, and well done, I should say.

02-01:35:44

Wakatsuki-Chong: Oh, thank you. Yeah. The only thing I could kind of comment on is there's just so much synergy, where it's like everyone saw the importance of this milestone. And to me, our planning committee was mostly—so it was Noriko Sanefuji, Julie Abo—so Noriko is from the Smithsonian, Julie Abo is from Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation—and myself. And then we also had Dakota Russell from Heart Mountain participate later on. Where originally we're like, we just need to go big or go home, because this is the eightieth and we've been in COVID for so long, and we need to provide something for our community and we really wanted a community event and a space. Because this is originally a Smithsonian event. So they invited me to participate on behalf of the Park Service, because normally they hold an in-person event in D.C. And they're like, "Well, it's the eightieth. We want to make something bigger." So I was like, "Okay." I like to plan events and I'm always like go big or go home. Well, when we draft things out, we are going for all of our number ones. Because there's people who are like, "Well, we need to have backup." I'm like, "We will get to those backups when we need them," because I'm all like, "Because then we can spend all this time, where it's like, who else do we need to get if this person can't come?" So I'm like, "Let's just go with our dream team and let's see what happens." And it was pretty incredible. We got our dream team, because it's working with Erika [Moritsugu] out of the White House, those interests. And then the interest was, "Do you want the President? What would you like?" I was just like, "Well, could we get a presidential letter?" Because I'm like, "Erika, you're one of the highest-level Japanese Americans in the White House, and it will be great if you can participate in some opportunity, and I think that that would be great." But then I'm like, "I would really love to have the Vice President," because she is an Asian American woman, right? And I'm all like, "It would be great if we could have you, we could have Vice President Harris, we could have Krystal Ka'ai from the White House Initiative on Asian American Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders, because she's the executive

director." I'm like, "I just really want a powerhouse of Asian American women and just people of color." We got Norm Mineta to do a little talk. Yeah. We got Brian Niiya. It was really interesting, because it all came together rather nicely and it was really interesting, because I did get one comment where someone's like, "Wow, that was the most people of color I've ever seen in a government program." Because they're like, "There was just one white woman." And Anthea [Hartig's] amazing. She's the director of the American History Museum. But I was like, "Yeah. We kind of want to curate that to show that we are visible." And then we had Lonnie Bunch, who's the secretary of the Smithsonian, and he's Black.

02-01:39:06

Wakatsuki-Chong: We wanted to curate that feeling of, this is a celebration of us. It's a somber thing, because the executive order really f-ed up with a lot of families, right, and caused a lot of trauma. But we need to acknowledge that, but we also need to find a way of: how are we moving forward? Because we've had six panel discussions. We are trying to curate all these topics, because when we did Tadaima! it's like we don't want to cover another topic, but our first one is about museums and: how are we challenging ourselves and telling the story correctly? Because it's like, Yeah, we've had other museum panels, but we wanted to actually have different subjects talked about. So we went through our list. Originally we had fifteen topics, and then we decided to combine stuff or take things out and every single one of those panels were highly curated. We wanted to be representative. So we have people talking about Japanese Latinas. We also have the Black community representative with their redress program that they're trying to do. We're trying to get people from different demographics of the Japanese American community, because we're not just a monolith, right, there's so many different stories and threads out there that people are touching on.

02-01:40:31

And so again, this is our dream team, this is what we want. And every single person said yes, and we were just floored because we're like, there has to be at least one person who's going to be like, "No, it's good," or, "Oh, I'm busy." But everyone showed up, and it was just so incredible just to see the community coming together and it was nice to kind of roll off of Tadaima! Because with Tadaima! Was it Frank Abbott or someone was saying, "This is probably the largest gathering of Japanese Americans," because we had over 100,000 participants. And then this last program for Day of Remembrance, I think the last time I checked all the numbers, we had about 10,000 participants for that weekend program. So it's really incredible that we're able to elevate at such a high level, because recapping: we got the presidential letter; we got the Vice President to make a speech; we got a presidential proclamation; we got Erika Moritsugu, the deputy assistant to the President and the senior AANHPI liaison; and then we had the executive director of the White House Initiative; and then we even had Norm Mineta; we had Lonnie Bunch. It was an all-star piece. And even Brian Niiya from Densho kind of

giving us the history of DOR in a little nutshell. It was just incredible. It's just awe inspiring that people are willing to come together for these special events and put aside their egos and they just do it, right? That's a really awesome thing.

02-01:42:36

Tewes: Thank you. I will say it was really special to be there and to see the representation, but also the interest that people were showing. So I'm glad to hear it was 10,000, that's amazing.

02-01:42:52

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah.

02-01:42:54

Tewes: So we've been speaking in our conversations about many sites of Japanese American incarceration. But Manzanar seems to be the one that many people hold up or lives large in popular culture. I'm curious as to why you think maybe it has such a large role in the public consciousness.

02-01:43:17

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. I would say a lot of it probably has to do with pop culture and media. Because with the book *Farewell to Manzanar*, I think that's a lot of people's entry into the Japanese American incarceration story, because there were many states that actually had it as required reading for a really long time. And then I know, at least *Farewell to Manzanar*, then there was a made-for-TV movie. Because when I used to live in California, it was always around Christmastime. My dad would be like, "We need to watch *Farewell to Manzanar*." So we'll find it on Disney and then we'll watch it. Because they would always play it on the Disney cable station. So I think that that's probably why. And a lot of people from the LA area went to Manzanar. And so if you think about it seeping into pop culture, that that's where a lot of it is—like I have this dream one day to do an exhibit on pop culture references to the incarceration. So I don't know if you watch *Man in High Castle*. There was a reference to Manzanar. In the *Star Trek Enterprise*, there's a mention of Manzanar. And most of the time it's always Manzanar that you hear, right? There's several different songs. Like Mike Shinoda with Fort Minor, there's Manzanar. But then there's also this country singer, and I can't remember his name, but he sings about Manzanar but he calls it *Manzanar*. It's really interesting. But there are some people that remember that song, and that's how they got introduced to Manzanar.

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So I feel like a lot of it is because population base and dominant culture is around the LA area, where most people were sent out. I feel like a lot of people now know more about Heart Mountain, because they know about Norm Mineta's story and Alan Simpson when they talk about working across the aisle in the political realm. So I think that that's starting to gain a little bit more attention.

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But it's also regional based, too, because Minidoka's coming into pop culture, because you had *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, and that's based out of Minidoka and that's turning into a film. There's a couple of plays about Minidoka and Bainbridge Island and stuff like that. But that's all coming out of the Seattle area. So I think it just depends on who are the content creators and where their influences are. But then you got some folks like Willie Ito. I think he was incarcerated at Topaz, but he was a Disney artist. He did that famous drawing of Lady and the Tramp where the meatball drops in the noodles and they have a famous kiss, that's his thing. And I think there's been more talk about that, because actually David Ono from LA, he did a segment on Willie Ito, and I feel like more people are getting to know that. That's why it's a little bit more in the background in our thoughts, more so than before. But I do think a lot of it is just whoever the influences are in the areas where the references are being made.

02-01:46:53

Tewes:

And I think I'll just end by asking: what do you see for the future of interpretation around incarceration history?

02-01:47:05

Wakatsuki-Chong: Like what do I see or what do I want to see? [laughs]

02-01:47:08

Tewes:

Well sure, Hanako, let's go with A.

02-01:47:11

Wakatsuki-Chong: Okay. Well, I'll start off with what I want to see. I want to see more people from the community being able to work on these topics and feeling comfortable without feeling that they're being tokenized. And that's a really tall order of feeling respected to do the work, but then not also like tokenized where it's like, well, of course you're doing the work. And I think that that would be super meaningful. Not saying that if you are not part of the community, you can't tell the story. I'm not saying that at all, because I do believe people don't have to be from the community to tell it, But I think that there's a huge opportunity for community members to be able to do it, and I think that a lot of it is us as community members needing to work through our own issues to feel comfortable doing it. This is kind of off-point but on-point. But it's like when I was younger, everyone assumed that I would like to watch *Mulan*. I specifically never watched it until I was an adult, because there was that expectation. And so sometimes we reject things, because there's this assumption that we should like it. And I felt very much like that at times. But then I'm glad I leaned into it, because it definitely has given me a lot of perception and a lot of awesome experiences and I got to meet a lot of amazing people who helped make me who I am, right? But I just don't want to dissuade other people who are interested in the story to tell it, because I do think that we need other people. We need everyone. Everyone needs to just

tell the story. [laughs] But if we could just create some space for people from the community to tell it.

02-01:49:09

Wakatsuki-Chong: And there's some people who feel that this is not their history, but it is. It's going back to my intern, the one that was asked if he was Japanese. It's like he's a local kid from Jerome, Idaho, and he remembers his dad saying, "Yeah, there was a j-a-p camp there." And it wasn't derogatory, because that's just how people talked. And then I got to get to know him and he's like, "Yeah, it's really important. I want to learn more about it." And this is part of his history, it's part of his local history, it's part of his history. But then also being able to recruit people who are Japanese Americans, like Kurt Ikeda. He was my intern four years ago and now he's the director of education and interpretation, he replaced me at Minidoka. And his lead interpreter is Emily Teraoka, and her family was incarcerated, I think, at Rohwer or Jerome. And so having descendants being able to tell these stories is great, but then also with the local kids, where this is also their history. There is a balance we can have, and it makes it more meaningful rather than you just hire people who are, oh, this is a job, and let me just do this 8:00 to 5:00. I'm not trying to say that we need to abuse people, where it's like this has to be your whole living and your existence, but finding that balance where you get people who want to preserve these stories, but then also trying to create the space for people who may not feel as open to readily get involved, because of stereotypes and stuff. So that's my dream.

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But I think where we're going as a profession is to be more, I guess, academically sound in how we're presenting this history, where it isn't full of misinformation. And I'm not saying it's not full of emotion, because we want to trigger the empathetic reaction. And I know that this is a really crude statement to say. We're not going to just pour out a story just to get the sobs, right? You're doing it in a tactful way, where you could still convey a story that is sad, that it isn't always trying to get tears. There's a point where, yeah, that's okay to do that. But that's not always like the interpretive way. We need to embrace the new interpretive way of interacting with people. I know everyone loves ACE, like the Audience Centered Experience, but you can't really do ACE if people don't have a solid background in something. I could go up to the general public and be like, "Hey, what do you think it's like being imprisoned here?" And if they have no context, we could get a whole range of stuff. But I do think that there has to be a mix of the old school stuff, of the didactic aspects, where they get the context, but then you could still do the ACE programming at the end when they have enough information to speculate. But do we also want to speculate? To me it isn't always about now you have to imagine yourself in this person's shoes. Because I also feel like that's like an older model, where they really want to place you in some issues. But you could still be emotionally in someone's shoes without physically being in their shoes. And so it is part of the models of interpretations, where

it's like baseline is understanding and the next level of interpretation is sympathy. The highest level is empathy, but you're building upon that to get people to fully understand all aspects of the incarceration. Not like, oh, this is only affecting family life. Oh, this is only affecting identity. Oh, the food sucked. It's like, no, holistically, this impacted people in all these different ways. Where it's like not only did the food suck, there were reproductive rights issues.

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I don't know if you know, but at Minidoka, there was a whole spread of gonorrhea, because they weren't even sterilizing equipment correctly, and then that's what led to the facility finally ordering an autoclave so they could sterilize equipment. So there's this whole other research that we need to do about medical malpractice in the camps. But it's all just something basic on cleanliness of medical instruments impacted many different people. I want to say it was ten or twelve women ended up contracting that, and then giving it to their spouses because of this issue. So it isn't just like, oh, we're only going to focus on this and that, and it's all going to be in these nice little bundles that we're going to look at this or that. It's like you had to look at it holistically. And then that's how you get the empathy, where it's like, oh my God, not only was this f-ed up, that was pretty f-ed up. Oh my gosh, how did, you know, people managed to process this? And it's all like, Yeah, you're feeling overwhelmed in this instance and there are people who lived this for four years. And it continued after the four years of incarceration. It continues down these generations where it's like—I don't know if I'm explaining this well, but it's showing things in a more holistic way, rather than when I see different models of interpretation they're only focusing on these little topics and that's it. Which in one aspect, maybe they did it for simplicity, but then it does a disservice to telling the story.

02-01:55:01

Tewes:

So it sounds like you see more emphasis, as well, on the intergenerational impacts, too.

02-01:55:07

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah, absolutely. And not only intergenerational, but intercommunity. Because I know we still need to work within the Japanese American communities to talk about it, but I see, especially at Minidoka, some people in the local community, they don't feel like they could adequately connect to the story, because they feel like it's that community's story. And then you get all this weird stuff. But technically it's *our* community, [laughs] and to help break down those barriers where people could then process some of their stuff out. Because it's like, again, this history, yes, it kind of belongs to a community, but it also belongs to all of us, right? But it's finding that balance where you're not appropriating the history, but you're providing space for people to connect and process the history within their own families. Because it could be that they're a local white family. There was this gentleman at Minidoka, he was one of the few white kids in camp, because his parents

were like, "This is f-ed up. We want you to see how messed up this." And he ended up becoming Idaho's attorney general. And this definitely impacted him in trying to fight for justice. So that's a good story. But then there's also people who remember their parents were like super racist and then that impacted them, where they're like, "So this must be wrong." [laughs] And that's also a valid experience, but they didn't want to talk about it due to the shame. So there's different aspects that we could feel as a greater community by having these conversations, having the space to have these reflections where we're not going to be judgmental, so then we could just start healing within our communities and we could just be—maybe I'm being too bold—but just within American society, we have so much hurt and we just need to find the spaces so we can talk about it. We can't fix everything, but if we could at least try to heal ourselves, it may help out with fixing some other issues. But ultimately, we only can control what's within our sphere. And to me, it's always like, if I could help heal myself and help other people who need that space, that would help me out, too. And maybe that's a selfish way of thinking.

02-01:57:44

Tewes: No, it's valid. Thank you so much, Hanako. Is there anything you want to add that I have not asked, or you want to add to something we've already discussed?

02-01:57:54

Wakatsuki-Chong: No, I think I'm all good.

02-01:57:58

Tewes: You probably got more areas than you thought you knew you wanted to discuss. [laughs]

02-01:58:01

Wakatsuki-Chong: Yeah. It's been interesting, though. Yeah.

02-01:58:04

Tewes: Thank you again so, so much. I'm going to close us out now.

[End of Interview]