By Tomi Eijima

Why would Japanese Americans be punished for something they couldn’t control? What was life in “camp” like for them? What foods and flowers did they grow? How did they maintain traditions? How did they find hope in such uncertain times?

I was raised to know this history and to seek justice and kindness. Recently, I participated in the University of Denver (DU)-sponsored archaeological dig at the Granada Relocation Center in Colorado, my grandfather’s former concentration camp. I was able to explore these questions with my classmates, some of whom were unaware of the mass incarceration of American citizens during World War II.

We spent five weeks doing field survey, performing ground penetrating radar and digging for artifacts and other evidence of life. Objects were geographically tagged using satellite technology. We also cleaned, identified and cataloged artifacts. In addition, we interviewed survivors for context as well as clues to structures and life. We had evening discussions on the history of Granada, also known as Amache; camp terminology; community engagement; garden archaeology; and its potential future as a National Historical Park. The hands-on instruction was accessible and relevant, and our research will lead to scholarly interpretation and dissemination.

I explored American history — my family’s history — in a tangible, perhaps once-in-a-lifetime way. To enhance my class’s understanding, I talked about my own lived experience as a Japanese American and Amache descendant. My goal was to provide space for discernment and community building. I lived with and learned from my fellow diggers — people from all walks of life — from across the country and around the globe. My heritage influenced my study of my grandfather’s wartime home, and around other Japanese Americans allowed me to easily inherit such traditions. Anthropologists call this “intangible cultural heritage.”

Living expressions such as these provide communities a sense of identity and continuity. Going to Amache provided the setting for me to pass these customs and values on to others. Seeing Anne’s happiness upon successfully completing her crane was unexpectedly rewarding. As small as this may be, it helps build a kindred society.

When the History Colorado group came to hear about our research, each survey group gave a tour of their block. I gave a short introduction to my focus block, 9E. I explained the effects that the block’s topography had on the prisoners’ privacy, and the reason for the lack of barrack foundation remaining today. I also engaged local residents, showing our excavation findings and archaeology techniques. Increased awareness may translate into expanded involvement. In addition, these guests might be more vested in the future of this National Historic Landmark.

As the program neared its completion, Amacheans and their families congregated to walk the grounds and observe our work.

Children’s concepts were also taken on by undergraduate students Kimberly Campuzano of Adelphi University and Maghan Monnig of the University of Missouri. Kimberly led origami-folding, while Maghan prepared a scavenger hunt. We gathered our rough drafts and contributed feedback.

I taught Kimberly how to fold a crane, and I also suggested that Maghan include a section on camp sports. She encouraged me to include a picture of a child at Amache on my booklet cover. Better results came about through collaboration.

In the near future, I would like to ask Anita Miyamoto Miller and Charlene Tanigoshi Tinker about their experiences growing up at Amache. Anita’s family lived in Cortez, Calif., before the war, while the Tanigoshi family hailed from Los Angeles.

The two have been volunteering at the site for each of the six digs that have taken place every other summer since 2008. I would also ask about their thoughts about Executive Order 9066, once they became aware of it, and how their perspectives might have changed over the years. Their insight can inspire ideas to further enlighten young people on the realities of this period.

During a museum session, I showed Anne Amati, a museum registrar with the university, how to make an origami crane. I noted that this was something I did while attending a Japantown after-school program. Growing up around other Japanese Americans allowed me to easily inherit such traditions. Anthropologists call this “intangible cultural heritage.”

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of propaganda, used as a form of persuasion to influence the emotions and opinions of a target audience for ideological or political purposes. Although some art historians have resisted the idea of propaganda as art, the power propaganda holds on people's psyche is undeniable, and that power hold is achieved through the basic human response to art. Wars have been won in people's minds through the arts.

Elaborating on the specific subject of anti-Asian propaganda that is displayed in the “American Peril” exhibit, Sheikh continued, “Propaganda art preaching hate against a perceived foreign threat has always contributed to the creation of an imagined enemy, nurturing a culture of contempt and intolerance. The target may change, but the practice continues to this day.”

Nevertheless, this exhibit will not be for all people. People may question our judgment in showcasing these artifacts in a gallery setting, but I believe it is for the greater good. In an era of fake news and alternative facts, I would like to think that a primary source artifact is perhaps one text that no one can argue with. However, investing in a collection such as this does raise certain ethical questions that must be contended with. I must admit feeling guilty at times, knowing that we have contributed to the resale economy of objects that have brought great pain and sorrow to our Asian American communities.

In my capacity of mine whose research involves collecting postcards and photographs depicting the lynching of African-Americans discussed this issue at length. While I personally draw the line at paying money for an image of a dead body or other active violence being perpetrated, he raised a valid point that there are many who would seek to purchase these vile images for reasons beyond scholarly research. Ultimately, we agreed that it is better for these objects to be in the hands of educators and activists where they can be studied and/or exhibited for public benefit rather than hidden away as a trophy on someone's mantel.

At the 2018 JACL National Convention, a subset of these anti-Japanese artifacts was showcased in the exhibit room, where they sparked much critical dialogue around the role of propaganda today. I have every confidence that the full collection will prove even more effective in starting conversations around popular media's role in shaping our society's perceptions of immigrants and other historically marginalized groups.

I would like to highlight a few of the special events taking place during the monthlong run of this exhibit. On Nov. 2 from 5:30-8:30 p.m., we will host the exhibit's opening reception, which will be the first time the collection in its entirety will be shown to the public. On Nov. 9 from 4:30-5 p.m., myself and Cathy Matsos will give a brief talk about the process of collecting these artifacts and expand upon some of the ethical concerns explored earlier in this article, followed by a guided tour of the exhibit.

The main exhibit event is a program titled “Propaganda Film Night,” which will take place on Nov. 14 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. This event will include the screening of clips from a dozen or so WWII-era propaganda films and one short documentary produced during U.S. territorial rule by Interior Minister of the Philippines Dean Conant Worcester. The former will be introduced by myself, and the latter by Penn Museum Film Archivist Kate Pourshariati, followed by a guided viewing to help contextualize their historical significance. Works by both Hollywood and independent filmmakers shown here will demonstrate how motion picture have been used to shape the opinions of the American public during times of war and subsequent occupation of conquered territories. Like the printed materials in the exhibit collection, this content is offensive to many of our Asian subjects but important for understanding the causes of anti-Asian sentiment in previous generations of Americans. Additionally, this program will illustrate the central role that cinema plays in the way that Americans understand and consume conflict.

We must be ever vigilant over the use and abuse of media to convey propagandist messages. This exhibit is one small step toward educating the public on how to tell the difference between fake news and genuine fact.

“American Peril: Imagining the Foreign Threat” was funded in part by the Japanese American Citizens League Legacy Fund and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Project Stream.

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- Kelly Marie Tran, the newcomer who had a featured role in the latest “Star Wars” movie, was a delight because the franchise had stubbornly avoided AAPIs except as weirdly stereotyped alien bad guys and the occasional doomed starfighter pilot, and here she was as a fully-formed character with a feisty personality and a future in the final episode.

- Awkwafina, who was a blast of fresh air in “CRA” as well as “Ocean’s 8,” was recently a host on NBC’s “Saturday Night Live,” the first AAPI woman host for the show since Lucy Liu headlined it in 2000. In fact, Liu, who still holds her own as Watson on CBS’ “Elementary,” was the role model that inspired young Awkwafina to go into showbiz.

- Tamlyn Tomita is the timeless and dependable AAIP star who’s been in a slew of TV shows and movies (including “The Joy Luck Club” 25 years ago). She’s been terrific as a hospital administrator in Daniel Duc Kim’s powerful ABC medical drama “The Good Doctor,” which just started its second season.

- And finally, I’m in the middle of bingewatching “Marvel’s Agents of SHIELD,” which showcases the talents of two fine actors, Ming-Na Wen and Chloe Bennett, in butt-kicking roles fighting evil-doers. With five seasons already available to stream on Netflix, and a mind-numbing 22 episodes per season, that’s a whole lot of bingeing! Like I said at the start, I could be mistaken, but I sure hope I’m not. We might be looking at a golden era for AAPIs in mainstream pop culture!


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as well as to meet others with ties to this place. I was fascinated to see how many people made the long trip.

Over dinner, I sat with Nisei Cookie Takeishi and Mas Takano of Alameda, Calif., and Mas’s three children. Their connection to the camp is something to be present made me really appreciate this day. The Nisei recalled camp memories, while I told school stories. We drew connections to one another and found that we know many of the same people.

The community engagement aspect showed me how intertwined community archaeology not only added value to the studies, but also allowed others to cherish the moments with one another, as well as the exploration. Furthermore, I gained a greater respect and appreciation for those who have endured discrimination and responded with dignity and resiliency. To the Issei and Nisei, I offer, “Watashi no tameni anata ga shitekudasai” (I appreciate everything you have done for me).

Tomi Ejiima is a senior at Lowell High School in San Francisco and a youth member of the San Francisco JACL. Her grandfather, Frank Suzuki, and his family lived in block 9H7B at Amache. Frank and his wife, Marion, are members of the Livingston-Merced chapter of the JACL. She is currently attending UC Berkeley and is a UC student member of the JACL. Ejiima is a former JACL District 10 student member. She joined the JACL in 2012.

**SCRAPING**

Scraping an excavation unit at Block 11F at Amache on July 6, 2018.