



# YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

## COMMUNITY, COLLABORATION AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

By Tomi Eijima

**W**hy 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 unsure 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 of 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 classmates' understanding, I talked about my 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 the study of my grandfather's wartime home, and this research reinforced my commitment to the goal of justice for all.

Each student of the DU Amache Field School Project was asked to develop an outreach project. Although many children visit the museum with their families, the Amache Museum lacked an interactive activity targeting this age group.

I found it difficult to portray this dark part of our history to a younger audience. I wanted children to understand the obstacles faced by the incarcerated, but also the ways in which they made the best of their situations.

Therefore, I designed a booklet with Amache-related activities, including a crossword puzzle, word search, comic strip, origami directions and an image of an empty barrack with suggestions to beautify the structure, such as internees did with their barrack gardens during their incarceration.

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."

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,



**Charlene Tanigoshi Tinker (left) and Anita Miyamoto Miller screen for artifacts at Amache during summer 2014. Both women were toddlers during the incarceration.**



**Former Amache residents and descendants gathered with members of the University of Denver's Amache field crew to share stories and food at the Granada Community Center on July 6, 2018.**



**Cover art for the "Amache Activities for Kids" booklet by Tomi Eijima. Artwork by Kumiko Homma Hasegawa, age 8, Amache circa 1943. The image is on loan to the Amache Museum by Mitch Homma.**



**Children play with marbles at the Granada Bristol Days on June 15, 2018. Playing with marbles was popular at Amache during World War II.**



**(From left) Ikuko "Cookie" Takano Takeshita, Ken Kitajima and Mas Takano returned to their wartime home in Amache, Granada, Colo., on July 6 of this year.**



**The University of Denver Amache field crew in front of the recreation hall of Block 11F in July 2018. This structure was returned to its original site in Amache in May after serving for 72 years as a utility building in the nearby town of Granada, Colo.**

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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 this 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.

A colleague 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 Matos 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 pictures 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 in its port-

rayal of 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.

#### 'AMERICAN PERIL' EXHIBIT INFORMATION

**Runs Nov. 2-30 at Twelve Gates Arts, located at 106 N. 2nd St, Philadelphia PA 19106. Exhibit hours are Tuesday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Wednesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Sunday-Monday, By Appointment.**



**Factory Fires Help the Japs poster, 1944**



**Arizona war worker with Jap skull, Life magazine, May 22, 1944**



**Bontoc man with paper-mache head in 1912 Worcester footage**

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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 AAPI 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 Dae Kim's powerful ABC medical drama "The Good Doctor," which just started its second season.

•And finally, I'm in the middle of binge-watching "Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.,"



**"Crazy Rich Asians" stars Michelle Yeoh (left) and Henry Golding and Constance Wu.**

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 Takeshita and Mas Takano of Alameda, Calif., and Mas's three children. Their enthusiasm to be present made me really appreciate this day. The Nisei recalled camp memories, while I told field 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 interconnected we all really are despite different passions and backgrounds. The shameful and unjust evacuation brought all of us together and has allowed us to preserve something so significant to the early Japanese American generations.

Working with different groups brought life to my family history. Carrying out 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 shitekudasatta subete no koto ni kansha shimashita*. I appreciate everything you have done for me.

Knowing our collective history should inform our actions. The current Muslim travel ban, "zero-tolerance" U.S. border policy and family separation of migrant families are inhumane and remind us of the wholesale World War II imprisonment of Japanese Americans. Former NFLer Colin Kaepernick's silent protest against

police brutality and racial injustice highlighted our country's cultural divide.

We are moved to take action, whether to protect history or to defend those who are scapegoated or otherwise marginalized, so that we don't commit the same mistakes. Understanding one's own history and culture improves cross-cultural competence and global perspective and hopefully will lead us to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of "an oasis of freedom and justice."

*Tomi Eijima 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.*



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