

HISTORY

What Japanese American History Means to Me: Part 4

By Yuki Kanazaki
The North American Post



Photo by Yuki Kanazaki / The North American Post

Sharon Tomiko Santos gives a speech in the pilgrimage's closing ceremony at the Victory Garden on the Minidoka site on June 24.

The annual Minidoka Pilgrimage may not share the same story every year, but each participant finds new views about the World War II Japanese American incarceration experience.

George Lauer, a Seattle University graduate, said that he found different views through his two-pilgrimage experience in 2011 and 2012.

"I thought those who experienced the incarceration were indefatigable and strong," he said, "because they spent the time in the severe environment of Minidoka under the irrational order 9066 when I joined this tour in 2011.

"I heard funny and enjoyable stories many times from Nisei who experienced the wartime incarceration during the tour," he continued. "I guess those stories imply people were not always pessimistic in the camp, but they had optimistic or positive views for their future."

Lauer, who grew up in Japan, added that he wants to share his experience about Minidoka and the local community with Japanese youth. He plans to reflect on the Minidoka tour through his blog and make films for Japanese youth to understand and learn what happened to their ancestors.

"I hope more Japanese youth can learn the legacy of Japanese Americans who experienced the incarceration, especially their passion," he said. "We, the young generations, have a similar passion like what the Japanese Americans had during the World War II."

Yasuko Takezawa, a professor at the Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University, found a generational transition in the community through her pilgrimage experience this year.

"I was impressed that there was a good number of young people, including hapas, and non-Japanese," she said. "The Japanese American society seems to be becoming more open than before."

She reaffirmed that the oral history of surviving individuals is very important to learn the legacy, some of which she never read in books or heard before until she joined the pilgrimage this year.

"I introduced the whole program of this tour and some interesting issues like the project to preserve the Minidoka concentration camp," she said. "I also talked about how one Nisei spoke up when an incorrect explanation

was given during a tour as an example of the importance of living witnesses."

Takezawa, who earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of Washington in 1989, currently works with co-editing an anthology on Japanese Americans based on a joint research project between Japan and the United States with Gary Okihiro, a professor at Columbia University.

"I want to refer to what I learned from the Minidoka Pilgrimage in my future writing," Takezawa said.

As a Nikkei who has a family of incarceration survivors, State Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos explained her philosophy as a policy-maker saying, "I serve in the Washington state legislature for one reason only. I serve to honor the sacrifices and hopes of my grandparents and parents. The sacrifices and hopes of my community. The sacrifices and hopes of my country."

Santos was a keynote speaker at the pilgrimage's closing ceremony at Victory Garden in the Minidoka historic site on June 24. She encouraged participants to bring these lessons forward to the present day.

"70 years is long enough passage of time to forget, unless we make an effort to remember the lasting legacies of our fore fathers and our fore mothers," said

Santos, who has been a key figure in the Day of Remembrance held at the House in Olympia every February 19 with State Rep. Bob Hasegawa and other representatives.

"Our parents and our grandparents gave greatly themselves and sacrificed their own dreams and hopes to ensure that we, our children, our grandchildren and many generations yet to come would have not just the right but the ability to live the American Dream."

"Never forget that principle on which this country was founded and by which has always been governed is that Americanism is the matter of mind and heart. Americanism is not and never was a matter of race or race history."

Through the first experience of the Minidoka Pilgrimage, one of the most impressive things I learned was that the legacy of Japanese and Japanese American ancestors has inspired many passionate people. Their energy has not decreased even though 70 years have passed since Executive Order 9066 was issued.

Now, what does the Japanese American history mean to me? I actually have not found my answer yet. But I will continue to reflect on the question.

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Jefferson Park



presented a plaque to Mayor Mike McGinn celebrating the history of the U.S.-Japan friendship.

"We have a long history of Japanese Americans," McGinn said. "Beacon Hill was a center for their community as well. We get to celebrate their history, we get to celebrate the depth of the long standing relationship with Japan as well. Cherry trees are a symbol of relationship we have between Seattle and Japan."

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George Nakashima Exhibition

Sponsored by Antonin Raymond, an American architect and former boss of Nakashima, the Nisei and his family moved to New Hope, Penn., and later opened his studio.

The exhibition displays his world renowned Conoide Chair and other designs, and also pieces from George Nakashima Woodworker, S.A., where

Nakashima's legacy is passed on by daughter Mira. Nakashima's life experiences are all portrayed to find "his fine detailing, finishing and spirituality, stemmed from a deep kinship with nature."

The exhibition will run until Jan. 20, 2013. More information can be found at www.wingluke.org or (206) 623-5124.

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