

Carolyn Kameya interview  
March 25, 2025  
De Anza College Winter 2025 quarter  
Steve Nava interviewer  
Spaces of Belonging Project: Hidden in Plain Site/Sight  
NEH Grant  
Link to interview:

Zoom link recording:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/recording/detail?meeting\\_id=YX7jr4oqTL2Bro7tWnh3eg%3D%3D](https://us06web.zoom.us/recording/detail?meeting_id=YX7jr4oqTL2Bro7tWnh3eg%3D%3D)

Summary:

**Carolyn Kameya** is a local activist and master gardener who dedicates her time to preserving the [Emma Prusch Park orchard](#) and the [Guadalupe Community Garden](#) and serving as a member of the council for the Urban Growers Network. Kameya also joined and remains active in the grassroots San Jose Nikkei Resisters community movement in San Jose Japantown she joined early in Donald Trump's first administration when she became concerned about the Muslim Ban and Immigrant family separation policies. In this interview Kameya reflects on the meaning and purpose of this work as well as the struggle to support Japantowns' efforts to stay vibrant in the face of gentrification.

Kameya reflects on her lineage and places their experiences within an historical context of socio-economic change outlining a vision of community change through work and activism. She focuses on cultural tensions within social justice efforts and the challenges they face. As she reflects on her life growing up in [Decatur, Illinois](#) where her bi-racial identity was not understood and how this shaped her sense of belonging. She emphasizes the need for social and cultural understanding as a solution to the problem of social exclusion.

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Oh, that's great.

00:00:02.000 --> 00:00:10.000

Steve Nava: All right. Thank you for agreeing to be the interview for this spaces of Belonging or Histories project for the California History Center website.

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At De Anza College. And your interview will be part of a database of oral histories of community builders like yourself that provided kind of generational insight into history and social change and community.

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And... My name is Steve Nava. I'm a sociology instructor at De Anza College.

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And I'm really happy to be part of this. And so the very first question for this oral history has to do with your own background And I'll start with that question.

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Pull it up here. All right, so the first question: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself and the work that you've been involved in, especially with the Guadalupe Community Garden and some of your advocacy work?

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Carolyn Kameya: Okay, so... Let's see.

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The activities or the things that I'm involved with now. One, I'm a master gardener and so we do lots of well, so that's so I'm... kind of the lead for the Guadalupe Historic Orchard which is... under the [San Jose airport] flight path when the flight path when

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San Jose Airport wanted to expand. They picked up and moved out houses and then that used to be there and then. But now it's parked But it's in different sections like there's a rose garden there's an orchard. And the orchard is kind of being redone right now. And so,

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so I volunteer there. I do another (I've been lead for many years. And I just handed it over to someone but I still volunteer there at Prusch Park on the east side

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Mm-hmm.

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Two different high density and an international orchard there.

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And, and... Well, and then do stuff in the community garden, the Guadalupe community garden. That's the gardening kind of stuff and then, and then, well.

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There's also this Urban Growers Network that's trying to bring together different organizations that do similar things.

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And I'm part of community advisory council of that of the Urban Growers Network.

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Let's see, these are the things that I'm doing now. And then there's San Jose Nikkei Resisters or kind of based in San Jose, Japantown and formed.

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During at the early Trumps first administration, especially with the family separation well the Muslim ban all Well, I guess it started early and then and then there's lots of things we're trying to pay attention to then the last

00:03:57.000 --> 00:04:15.000

Administration we're really looking at San Jose, Japantown and gentrification and building a sustainable Japan town. But now it's back to resisting!

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But... Oh, and I also have been meeting with people I don't know if you guys have ever heard of "donut economics."

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Have you ever heard of that you? There's a woman that wrote a book several years ago and called it *Donut Economics* [by Kate Raworth].

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And, you know, the typical you know growth is required for the typical economic models. And so she came up with a new picture and that's a donut, and the sweet spot for things is in that donut in the inside.

00:05:05.000 --> 00:05:14.000

The whole that's not enough for people to live. That's not enough to sustain people.

00:05:14.000 --> 00:05:42.000

And then outside the donut isn't sustainable for the planet.

00:05:42.000 --> 00:05:43.000

Mm-hmm.

00:05:43.000 --> 00:05:53.000

So the donut is the donut is the well, instead of endless growth a different metaphor, if you will for how economic and sustainable and social justice kind of model. So there's some people that are trying to do it in California and some of us are trying to

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Do that in San Jose. And...

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Steve Nava: Yeah, that's a good, that's an interesting point, because it seems as though you're right it's like a lot of our social problems are centered on growth without a sense of how to sustain it.

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Carolyn Kameya: Yeah.

00:06:16.000 --> 00:06:25.000

Steve Nava: In terms of the environment, but also in terms of human need. So in other words like the *needs* are being superseded by the *wants* in a sense, the desire for more wealth.

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Steve Nava: And so I can see, you know, I can see how that's related back to the *gentrification* question.

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Steve Nava: How do you see that playing out in terms of growth?

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Steve Nava: And gentrification.

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Carolyn Kameya: You know, as you're saying, you know, that that that needs or what you know, it's a fine line between need and greed, for example, you know, and how much is enough and how much and how much who... who can tell for themselves and who, you know, we really kind of have a

00:07:03.000 --> 00:07:18.000

Carolyn Kameya: a society that's kind of based around fear and scarcity. And I think that's how Well, I think that's how we bamboozled lots of people.

Carolyn Kameya: 00:07:18.000 --> 00:07:29.000

But um So this whole thing about building community seemed to me goes against some of that.

Carolyn Kameya: 00:07:29.000 --> 00:07:32.000

And... Anyway.

00:07:32.000 --> 00:07:47.000

Steve Nava: So would you say the building community was the motivation for getting involved with the community garden work in addition to the advocacy work.

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Carolyn Kameya: It turns out it's been a really good space for building community but but But I think it's really... I don't know.

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I think of it as... Part of sustainability for us to know where our food comes from, for us to be able to to do some of it for ourselves, get our hands dirty and And maybe stay a little grounded.

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Steve Nava: Hmm. Is there any follow-up questions that the students want to add for this question about The work?

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Naman Nair: Yeah, you know, talking about sustainability, culture, and community and such, can you share a bit about more of your family history with that and how it influenced your values and such.

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00:08:56.840 --> 00:08:57.670

Carolyn Kameya: Well.

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00:08:57.820 --> 00:09:10.120

Carolyn Kameya: I guess both of my parents grew up on farms, and my dad grew up in Hawaii. His parents immigrated there from Okinawa.

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00:09:10.460 --> 00:09:33.629

Carolyn Kameya: and my mom grew up in the Midwest, us in Illinois, on a farm. You can't even well, it wasn't even a small town. The nearest town, I think, had one stop sign, no stop lights. But but she wasn't in town. She was, you know.

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00:09:34.330 --> 00:09:50.000

Carolyn Kameya: farm, and I think we almost always had a garden, a vegetable garden, and like that. I

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00:09:50.820 --> 00:09:55.289

Carolyn Kameya: let's see. I'm not sure that that answers your question, but but

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00:09:55.560 --> 00:10:06.311

Naman Nair: It. It does, in a way, and I appreciate you, no matter what you you did. A great job. Thank you. Following up about gardening and such, since you said that both both your parents

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00:10:06.670 --> 00:10:18.430

Naman Nair: were, you know, born in different types of farms, right one all the way in Hawaii, while the other ones in middle you, said Illinois, Illinois. Right? Am I? Am I right about that?

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00:10:18.480 --> 00:10:38.589

Naman Nair: Yeah. So you know, there's obviously I feel like to a degree. There's a i would say, cultural clash there! Did that ever, you know, affect like how your perspective or your you know the way you saw gardening and such change? Or was it like it? Just? It was just relatively the same way for both

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00:10:45.163 --> 00:10:46.893

Carolyn Kameya: I'm not sure.

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00:10:47.820 --> 00:10:59.580

Carolyn Kameya: you know, the gardening was really, you know, just hands on, and and it provided food

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00:11:00.818 --> 00:11:11.029

Carolyn Kameya: but there were lots of things with culture clash, and and how people saw us, and

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00:11:11.210 --> 00:11:18.509

Carolyn Kameya: and that probably had more of an impact or influence on.

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00:11:18.810 --> 00:11:26.240

Carolyn Kameya: I'm really being interested in social justice, and like that

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00:11:26.240 --> 00:11:26.960

Naman Nair: Got it.

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00:11:27.830 --> 00:11:28.530

Naman Nair: Got it.

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00:11:28.980 --> 00:11:30.280

Naman Nair: That was great. Thank you.

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00:11:38.520 --> 00:11:42.910

Steve Nava: Does, Ethan? Ethan, did you want to unmute for the question? 3

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00:11:45.750 --> 00:11:46.643

Ethan Guerrero: Yeah. So

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00:11:47.200 --> 00:11:53.369

Ethan Guerrero: when you were a child, were there any like significant places that gave you a sense of belonging?

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00:11:53.510 --> 00:11:59.989

Ethan Guerrero: And or were there any places that made you feel connected or shaped your sense of identity?

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00:12:01.420 --> 00:12:03.749

Carolyn Kameya: I think, where I grew up.

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00:12:03.950 --> 00:12:16.380

Carolyn Kameya: So. I was born in Decatur, Illinois. So this was really a town. It wasn't like the small town with the one stoplight. It wasn't. It's not big.

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00:12:16.520 --> 00:12:27.740

Carolyn Kameya: you know, but but but it had like three factories, and you know, it was. It was really a town.

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00:12:27.900 --> 00:12:31.059

Carolyn Kameya: but we were really.

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00:12:32.100 --> 00:12:40.159

Carolyn Kameya: I got the message there, and in the farming communities that I didn't belong, that

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00:12:42.600 --> 00:12:45.279

Carolyn Kameya: that I didn't belong, that

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00:12:45.720 --> 00:12:54.740

Carolyn Kameya: sometimes often that I wasn't wanted, or sometimes it was just curiosity. "What are you? What are you?"

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00:12:54.950 --> 00:13:11.330

Carolyn Kameya: And or you know all the constant. Where did you learn English, or I don't know. And where are you from? And if I? Said Decatur, then obvious, then I was obviously lying

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00:13:11.500 --> 00:13:21.170

Carolyn Kameya: to whatever adult asked the question, and that was really, you know, for a little kid to be so

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00:13:22.672 --> 00:13:27.730

Carolyn Kameya: impertinent, anyway. So that was all. And then

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00:13:28.510 --> 00:13:42.749

Carolyn Kameya: but the first time. I think my dad's youngest sister was getting married, and that was when our family went to Hawaii for the first time, and that was like

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00:13:43.100 --> 00:13:59.219

Carolyn Kameya: a whole new thing. I mean, lots of people, you know, like it. It's tropical, it's you know. But it was so different to me to not have people

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00:13:59.520 --> 00:14:12.690

Carolyn Kameya: for the first time, you know. Let you know that you weren't. You didn't belong, and you did. You weren't wanted. It was just family there, and it was just

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00:14:13.630 --> 00:14:23.574

Carolyn Kameya: Well, the absence of you don't belong, and that was my first taste.

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00:14:29.050 --> 00:14:45.330

Steve Nava: So. To go further into your past. Tell us about your teenage years. What was it like for you to navigate the period of life. And were there particular groups or spaces, maybe cultural, creative or community based spaces that helped you feel grounded as a teenager

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00:14:48.870 --> 00:14:53.380

Carolyn Kameya: You know, the teenager question is kind of hard. I don't. I don't.

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00:14:55.590 --> 00:15:02.639

Carolyn Kameya: Sometimes it's hard. That's kind of a hard time. And I, you know, it's

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00:15:03.010 --> 00:15:05.849

Carolyn Kameya: I think it's a great.

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00:15:06.630 --> 00:15:18.929

Carolyn Kameya: It would be great for people to feel grounded, and it seems like some people that are really into sports have that, or some people that have. I didn't really

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00:15:19.570 --> 00:15:25.139

Carolyn Kameya: have that, but was looking

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00:15:26.720 --> 00:15:32.879

Carolyn Kameya: Tried different things, and was looking really.

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00:15:34.150 --> 00:15:42.159

Steve Nava: Was there things that you did as a teenager that you feel like you're still doing in your adult life. That kind of the seeds for that were in their teen years?

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00:15:42.340 --> 00:15:46.930

Carolyn Kameya: Oh, I was. I was pretty active, you know.

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00:15:47.130 --> 00:15:52.549

Carolyn Kameya: physically, and I try to still do that.

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00:15:53.268 --> 00:16:01.369

Carolyn Kameya: You know, like I had a bicycle. I rode my bike everywhere. And

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00:16:06.940 --> 00:16:16.569

Carolyn Kameya: uh, it was just, I guess, physically active. The other thing when I was a teenager there were.

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00:16:19.700 --> 00:16:23.720

Carolyn Kameya: Now this is it.

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00:16:28.190 --> 00:16:38.580

Carolyn Kameya: It just felt like there was a sense of *possibility* in a way, this was a time of upheaval. There was

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00:16:38.950 --> 00:16:44.099

Carolyn Kameya: the Vietnam war was going on and *people were resisting*

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00:16:45.020 --> 00:16:54.660

Carolyn Kameya: Civil Rights Movement was going on, *people were resisting*, and it was.

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00:16:55.230 --> 00:17:02.600

Carolyn Kameya: And so for me, as a teenager, it was like you didn't have to.

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00:17:03.360 --> 00:17:13.089

Carolyn Kameya: You didn't have to just take what people told you had to take, because all around or all around.

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00:17:13.859 --> 00:17:21.440

Carolyn Kameya: the country people were fighting and saying, No.

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00:17:21.609 --> 00:17:25.790

Carolyn Kameya: we're not gonna go, you know, meaning they're not gonna

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00:17:25.910 --> 00:17:35.679

Carolyn Kameya: go fight in a war that they don't believe in or we're not, gonna you know, whatever it is, whether it's [lunch counters](#) or

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00:17:36.150 --> 00:17:41.880

Carolyn Kameya: like that. And that was, you know.

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00:17:43.690 --> 00:17:50.400

Carolyn Kameya: Maybe if I had a

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00:17:50.620 --> 00:17:58.350

Carolyn Kameya: a regular job, and children *then*, and like that, that, that

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00:17:58.480 --> 00:18:02.330

Carolyn Kameya: all that was going on might not have

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00:18:04.180 --> 00:18:09.889

Carolyn Kameya: seem like there. It held so much possibility, but because I was a teenager, and I

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00:18:10.000 --> 00:18:14.829

Carolyn Kameya: I didn't have those things. You know it. It did

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00:18:15.780 --> 00:18:16.360

Steve Nava: Hmm!

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00:18:16.740 --> 00:18:25.979

Steve Nava: So do you feel like the spirit of the times has changed a lot since then, and how would you describe, like nowadays in terms of the spirit of resistance?

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00:18:29.100 --> 00:18:32.850

Carolyn Kameya: Well, it seems like

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00:18:36.470 --> 00:18:43.310

Carolyn Kameya: I kind of think of it, especially here in Silicon Valley, you know, like

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00:18:45.250 --> 00:18:56.479

Carolyn Kameya: there's screws that feel like it's gotten tighter and tighter, you know, like it seems like they're they're

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00:18:58.920 --> 00:19:10.460

Carolyn Kameya: like, economically, you know, people are really stretched to live here. And and

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00:19:11.050 --> 00:19:17.110

Carolyn Kameya: so that that's changed things, and then and then

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00:19:18.810 --> 00:19:28.110

Carolyn Kameya: there's I, you know. I don't know if it could be that just

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00:19:28.260 --> 00:19:31.909

Carolyn Kameya: from those times like my teenage years.

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00:19:32.160 --> 00:19:36.350

Carolyn Kameya: I just didn't have as much exposure.

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00:19:36.480 --> 00:19:41.790

Carolyn Kameya: But but I really think that that there's

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00:19:42.610 --> 00:19:58.600

Carolyn Kameya: IA much, much greater inequality a difference in in income, in, you know, like there.

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00:19:58.830 --> 00:20:15.919

Carolyn Kameya: there are statistics, and you guys probably have them closer to the top of your head than I do. But there, you know, it used to be that it was a big deal, you know. You would try to get corporation heads

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00:20:15.920 --> 00:20:33.130

Carolyn Kameya: to not make more than say, eleven times the lowest paid worker, and then and then now, oh, my God, it's completely, completely off the charts. And you know there's just that that income.

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00:20:33.900 --> 00:20:42.839

Carolyn Kameya: Inequality is so vast now the it's like it *knows no bounds*.

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00:20:43.020 --> 00:20:50.570

Carolyn Kameya: And and so and then the floor, the it

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00:20:52.430 --> 00:20:58.617

Carolyn Kameya: I I don't know. There's it's there's not a

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00:20:59.670 --> 00:21:04.129

Carolyn Kameya: We're not set up to make sure. Everyone has enough.

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00:21:04.690 --> 00:21:08.514

Carolyn Kameya: you know, and isn't falling in that donut hole

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00:21:12.820 --> 00:21:14.639

Steve Nava: Naman has the next question.

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00:21:14.640 --> 00:21:31.409

Naman Nair: Yeah, so how did transitioning from your teenage years to your adult years, shape your participation, or like your perspective on communities that matter to you, and then what aspects of your engagement changed, and what stayed the same

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00:21:32.520 --> 00:21:33.120

Carolyn Kameya: Hmm!

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00:21:33.880 --> 00:21:42.069

Carolyn Kameya: I think I did. I started participating more. I started doing more things.

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00:21:42.180 --> 00:21:46.340

Carolyn Kameya: I didn't move to San Jose till after.

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00:21:48.840 --> 00:21:55.239

Carolyn Kameya: Actually it was after I finished college, and then I came to San Jose.

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00:21:55.970 --> 00:22:14.519

Carolyn Kameya: and I went to San Jose State for a couple of years, and did a master's, and but it was all in that time then, just getting to know the San Jose community, and it was in there that

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00:22:14.680 --> 00:22:17.529

Carolyn Kameya: that I got in touch with

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00:22:17.710 --> 00:22:24.570

Carolyn Kameya: people in Japantown and things that were going on in Japantown.

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00:22:25.316 --> 00:22:26.589

Carolyn Kameya: I think

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00:22:27.500 --> 00:22:36.759

Carolyn Kameya: I think, I went on an early. Maybe it was 1980 or something. [Tule Lake](#) pilgrimage.

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00:22:36.920 --> 00:22:58.049

Carolyn Kameya: and it was we rode buses up to like near the Oregon border, and Thule Lake was was a camp where people were put where people of Japanese ancestry were put during World War 2,

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00:22:58.580 --> 00:23:04.109

Carolyn Kameya: and it had been one of the ten regular camps. But then

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00:23:04.680 --> 00:23:18.549

Carolyn Kameya: the Us. Government tried to find out who was loyal and who was disloyal by asking these really ambiguous questions that were really hard for people to answer.

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00:23:18.660 --> 00:23:21.820

Carolyn Kameya: and anybody that didn't

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00:23:23.270 --> 00:23:31.490

Carolyn Kameya: anybody that had a no. In their answer to one of those questions got moved to Tuley Lake.

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00:23:31.650 --> 00:23:33.959

Carolyn Kameya: and it became a

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00:23:34.330 --> 00:23:43.870

Carolyn Kameya: you know. Well, a segregation center with like more, more guards, more martial law kind of

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00:23:44.290 --> 00:23:53.580

Carolyn Kameya: thing. And so, anyway, it was. It was a long bus ride up there, and and

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00:23:54.130 --> 00:24:13.169

Carolyn Kameya: lots of time to talk with people. The experience there. The long bus ride back, and and then I started going to meetings, and, like that with the [Nihonmachi Outreach Committee](#) had was just forming, and

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00:24:13.440 --> 00:24:19.729

Carolyn Kameya: and I think I think that whole effort

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00:24:22.770 --> 00:24:27.720

Carolyn Kameya: they didn't call it gentrification. Then what did they call it?

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00:24:28.887 --> 00:24:34.480

Carolyn Kameya: I don't any I don't remember.

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00:24:35.160 --> 00:24:39.860

Carolyn Kameya: Nihomachi Outreach Committee were, was worried about

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00:24:40.480 --> 00:24:54.850

Carolyn Kameya: about changes in Japantown, in San Jose, Japan town, partly because both San Francisco and Los Angeles were kind of being bought up by

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00:24:55.130 --> 00:25:04.810

Carolyn Kameya: Japanese corporations, and their Japantowns were really being transformed, and San Jose's was really like

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00:25:05.940 --> 00:25:13.499

Carolyn Kameya: family or legacy small businesses, and like that, it was very different.

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00:25:14.432 --> 00:25:26.949

Carolyn Kameya: And but then Knox? really started working with the whole Redress Reparation campaign and joining with the

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00:25:27.370 --> 00:25:33.529

Carolyn Kameya: national coalition for redress and reparations, and, like that

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00:25:35.686 --> 00:25:45.479

Naman Nair: Sorry. Just a follow up question to that. So throughout, you know, the experience of going all the way up to the border of Oregon seeing the camp and stuff.

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00:25:46.910 --> 00:25:58.629

Naman Nair: How'd you feel about it throughout? Like if you don't mind me asking like what were the emotions you were feeling throughout the thing that made you feel like, yeah, this is this is what I gotta do to, you know, like "help out my community" and such.

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00:26:02.600 --> 00:26:08.830

Carolyn Kameya: You know it's I guess

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00:26:12.310 --> 00:26:17.030

Carolyn Kameya: it's you know.

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00:26:17.340 --> 00:26:21.150

Carolyn Kameya: I'm not sure it that it

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00:26:21.430 --> 00:26:24.000

Carolyn Kameya: I mean. I think it was personal

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00:26:24.000 --> 00:26:24.560

Naman Nair: Person.

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00:26:24.560 --> 00:26:26.410

Carolyn Kameya: In in that.

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00:26:28.940 --> 00:26:33.779

Carolyn Kameya: It just seems wrong when anyone is not treated right.

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00:26:36.250 --> 00:26:39.079

Carolyn Kameya: I mean, at that point I didn't.

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00:26:39.600 --> 00:26:43.729

Carolyn Kameya: I mean I married someone who's

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00:26:44.010 --> 00:26:54.200

Carolyn Kameya: whose family was incarcerated during the war. But at that point I you know it hadn't

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00:26:55.220 --> 00:27:16.509

Carolyn Kameya: hadn't touched my family in the same way, because my family was in Hawaii, and they weren't whole. They weren't rounded up wholesale the same way that that people were on the West Coast. So it it sounds funny to say it was personal.

185

00:27:16.690 --> 00:27:25.450

Carolyn Kameya: although if if I was alive I would have been rounded up. But but but

186

00:27:25.900 --> 00:27:43.060

Carolyn Kameya: you learned more about what happened, and the effects on those people, and you saw how wrong it was, and then you started seeing some of the effects of

187

00:27:43.340 --> 00:27:56.039

Carolyn Kameya: of their children or their children's children, and and it just seemed wrong

188

00:27:59.130 --> 00:28:00.670

Naman Nair: Okay. Thank you.

189

00:28:01.720 --> 00:28:14.909

Steve Nava: I have another question that I forgot to ask earlier. I should have asked you. But can you tell us a little bit about your own identity in terms of your you know race, you know why you see your race in your class and your, you know, sort of national identity?

190

00:28:16.490 --> 00:28:25.329

Carolyn Kameya: So my my mom is white and European descent.

191

00:28:27.850 --> 00:28:33.800

Carolyn Kameya: And my dad is Asian.

192

00:28:35.950 --> 00:28:52.919

Carolyn Kameya: His parents left Okinawa and came to Hawaii to work in the plantations there, and Okinawa

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00:28:53.310 --> 00:28:58.835

Carolyn Kameya: I mean, I don't know. Maybe this is a diversion, but Okinawa

194

00:28:59.810 --> 00:29:08.329

Carolyn Kameya: was taken over and colonized by Japan. It was an independent nation in independent

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00:29:11.100 --> 00:29:22.409

Carolyn Kameya: string of islands, although the name Okinawa is of the largest island, but they there was a whole. It was a nation

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00:29:23.290 --> 00:29:24.300

Carolyn Kameya: and

197

00:29:24.470 --> 00:29:37.399

Carolyn Kameya: Japan took it over and does what colonizers always do, you know, treat the people badly and

198

00:29:37.760 --> 00:29:40.079

Carolyn Kameya: try to make them

199

00:29:40.250 --> 00:29:50.151

Carolyn Kameya: lose their language and culture and become something else. And so there's still lots of

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00:29:51.930 --> 00:30:02.320

Carolyn Kameya: well, remnants of that today, I think. But anyway, so that's

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00:30:04.750 --> 00:30:21.449

Carolyn Kameya: and so I grew up, partly, maybe because I grew up or I was born. I lived the first nine years in Illinois, you know. Race was the big thing, because

202

00:30:21.940 --> 00:30:32.039

Carolyn Kameya: everyone you know, *you had to be white* or *you had to be black*, and and

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00:30:33.970 --> 00:30:35.320

Carolyn Kameya: I didn't fit.

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00:30:35.740 --> 00:30:38.689

Carolyn Kameya: My sister didn't fit. And

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00:30:39.430 --> 00:30:46.820

Carolyn Kameya: so that was. And then when we moved to California, we moved to Southern California.

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00:30:46.930 --> 00:30:53.010

Carolyn Kameya: and there it seemed like class was the bigger thing.

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00:30:57.500 --> 00:31:02.290

Carolyn Kameya: Yeah, I there was a lot more.

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00:31:05.040 --> 00:31:07.359

Carolyn Kameya: Seemed like there was a lot more wealth.

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00:31:07.660 --> 00:31:14.870

Carolyn Kameya: or what seemed to me as a wealth. And and so.

210

00:31:15.715 --> 00:31:24.115

Carolyn Kameya: you know, there were just lots of chances to be to feel on the outside and

211

00:31:25.810 --> 00:31:41.080

Carolyn Kameya: but it really gives you an appreciation of, of, I think, justice, or what.

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00:31:41.970 --> 00:31:48.089

Carolyn Kameya: how, how things should be, or how or when they're not

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00:31:49.730 --> 00:31:53.870

Carolyn Kameya: like they should be, or, you know, like that.

214

00:31:54.380 --> 00:32:01.310

Steve Nava: Yeah. And I also didn't ask you about your age, because you know, you mentioned that you were not, of course, alive during or not

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00:32:01.770 --> 00:32:04.880

Steve Nava: in the in camp or the incarceration camps.

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00:32:05.329 --> 00:32:09.220

Steve Nava: How old are you? And like what do you consider to be your main occupation?

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00:32:11.000 --> 00:32:14.040

Carolyn Kameya: Oh, I I've done different things.

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00:32:14.590 --> 00:32:23.200

Carolyn Kameya: but I'm 71, and so now I do most. I

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00:32:25.730 --> 00:32:38.540

Carolyn Kameya: I I'm so I'm retired from, you know, regular paycheck work, and and

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00:32:38.820 --> 00:32:48.470

Carolyn Kameya: and instead, I do these volunteer things in these gardens and orchards, and then lots of community things.

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00:32:49.730 --> 00:32:56.420

Carolyn Kameya: lots lots of well unpaid stuff that

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00:32:56.600 --> 00:33:00.489

Carolyn Kameya: that I mean, that I kind of think of

223

00:33:01.230 --> 00:33:16.719

Carolyn Kameya: in a way like parenting is, you know, all of this. There's a lot of glue that holds things together or makes things work, but doesn't get acknowledged and doesn't get paid

224

00:33:18.290 --> 00:33:24.149

Steve Nava: Yeah. So you see the the value of that, you know, for your life, and you see the need for it.

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00:33:24.620 --> 00:33:26.120

Carolyn Kameya: Yeah, yeah.

226

00:33:26.660 --> 00:33:35.089

Steve Nava: And how how different is it from your work that you were doing for pay like your regular pay work! How different is life now

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00:33:35.770 --> 00:33:39.030

Steve Nava: from the kind of work you were doing before and then. Now

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00:33:39.700 --> 00:33:42.922

Carolyn Kameya: You know I did different things.

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00:33:44.869 --> 00:33:54.059

Carolyn Kameya: you know, maybe one big chunk. I taught English as a second language for a while. For a long time

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00:33:54.710 --> 00:34:03.039

Carolyn Kameya: to adults, and they were in different situations and like that. But that was a real

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00:34:05.680 --> 00:34:15.479

Carolyn Kameya: Important experience, you know, because so like, when I was teaching in Castroville

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00:34:15.739 --> 00:34:20.559

Carolyn Kameya: that you you you were the English.

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00:34:20.690 --> 00:34:26.900

Carolyn Kameya: you were the teacher, but you were also. You were the link to

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00:34:28.179 --> 00:34:31.699

Carolyn Kameya: everything. So some of it was

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00:34:32.600 --> 00:34:43.730

Carolyn Kameya: maybe social work. Some of it was maybe you know, translation. Some of it was just

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00:34:44.110 --> 00:35:02.950

Carolyn Kameya: you were the tie to how things worked here, and so there were lots of lots of other things that you well, that I ended up doing with that. So that was one chunk another chunk was. I worked for IBM for

237

00:35:04.780 --> 00:35:10.570

Carolyn Kameya: a good chunk of time, and

238

00:35:12.180 --> 00:35:17.000

Carolyn Kameya: that was really different. That was really hmm.

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00:35:17.840 --> 00:35:24.079

Carolyn Kameya: But it let me see people in a

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00:35:24.550 --> 00:35:39.391

Carolyn Kameya: office and corporate environment in a more human way, and and and it also gave me some.

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00:35:41.500 --> 00:35:47.810

Carolyn Kameya: Well, it was helpful for me, for

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00:35:49.970 --> 00:35:58.039

Carolyn Kameya: you know it. Let me do the next chunk of stuff that because I started getting some

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00:35:59.269 --> 00:36:06.100

Carolyn Kameya: past a certain age, you know, just like you get social security. I have a little bit of

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00:36:06.470 --> 00:36:15.435

Carolyn Kameya: of pension, so that that most places don't have anymore.

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00:36:16.040 --> 00:36:16.780

Steve Nava: Right.

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00:36:16.780 --> 00:36:24.339

Carolyn Kameya: So so, and and then the next chunk of things I I worked as a

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00:36:25.376 --> 00:36:31.010

Carolyn Kameya: a gardener for, for I don't know twelve or

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00:36:32.000 --> 00:37:00.049

Carolyn Kameya: fifteen years something like that, but it they called it. They call it like fine gardening. I didn't do this stuff that the mow and blow guys do, but pruning well, just all everything else, anything else. So lots of my clients had *mow and blow* guys that would come and do that. And then I would come and do other things

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00:37:01.960 --> 00:37:09.421

Steve Nava: Alright. So Ethan has the next question. We're gonna probably move a little quicker, because I know you have an appointment, so we'll we'll kind of have speed round now.

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00:37:09.670 --> 00:37:10.160

Carolyn Kameya: Okay.

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00:37:11.360 --> 00:37:23.489

Ethan Guerrero: All right. So over your lifetime, what were some like major historical events that may have like impacted your communities and your advocacy work? Or maybe your experiences in San Jose

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00:37:24.460 --> 00:37:37.269

Carolyn Kameya: Oh, well, San Jose's been the backdrop the last. I don't know forty something years, but but

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00:37:38.370 --> 00:37:46.870

Carolyn Kameya: I think I think World War II had an effect, even though I wasn't born yet.

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00:37:47.877 --> 00:38:02.020

Carolyn Kameya: You know, just because that carried on. And then, while and then the Vietnam, I guess we already talked about or mentioned the Vietnam war and civil rights

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00:38:03.070 --> 00:38:12.649

Carolyn Kameya: that that had an effect. And then I, you know, watching people.

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00:38:14.660 --> 00:38:25.730

Carolyn Kameya: Maybe it was in the eighties with Reagan and I, you know, kind of turn in on themselves, and just try to

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00:38:27.610 --> 00:38:33.270

Carolyn Kameya: think about themselves and get ahead, and then and then more and more. It seemed like

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00:38:35.290 --> 00:38:43.080

Carolyn Kameya: greed was okay, or just normal, or something, and

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00:38:45.330 --> 00:38:50.469

Carolyn Kameya: And then, boy, the last this last while with

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00:38:50.680 --> 00:38:59.309

Carolyn Kameya: with trump and this this coming down hard on immigrants, on, I mean

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00:39:02.910 --> 00:39:08.070

Carolyn Kameya: right now it. Things are happening so fast it's hard.

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00:39:09.060 --> 00:39:11.510

Carolyn Kameya: It's it's hard to.

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00:39:12.720 --> 00:39:18.209

Carolyn Kameya: It probably won't be till hindsight, till we even really

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00:39:18.630 --> 00:39:27.219

Carolyn Kameya: get a picture of all what what's going on? But lots of things are unraveling fast, and

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00:39:29.880 --> 00:39:39.720

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know just to say, equity has looks like has become

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00:39:40.180 --> 00:39:43.530

Carolyn Kameya: a bad thing in in this

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00:39:43.900 --> 00:39:50.330

Carolyn Kameya: current admin administration, and that just seems wrong.

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00:39:51.680 --> 00:40:00.140

Steve Nava: So you did answer one of my questions that I was going to ask. I'm going to skip to Number 10, which is in terms of culture, ethnicity, and race. Have you noticed any shifts.

269

00:40:00.260 --> 00:40:08.260

Steve Nava: and the demographics of Japantown? And how have these changes influenced your perspective on Japantown itself?

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00:40:10.330 --> 00:40:13.820

Carolyn Kameya: Cause you've been working around Japantown for how many years was it?

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00:40:14.130 --> 00:40:15.379

Carolyn Kameya: Yes, it is.

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00:40:16.190 --> 00:40:19.010

Carolyn Kameya: I guess it 40

273

00:40:19.010 --> 00:40:20.900

Steve Nava: About forty or

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00:40:20.900 --> 00:40:31.849

Carolyn Kameya: so if you just had a round number, maybe a little more. But you know the whole reason that there's a Japantown

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00:40:31.920 --> 00:40:51.280

Carolyn Kameya: is because people weren't welcome elsewhere, and it started out as a Chinatown because the two previous Chinatowns had gotten burned down. You know there was one. There was a Chinatown by

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00:40:51.640 --> 00:41:02.830

Carolyn Kameya: well, like where the Fairmont it's now called Fairmont. Signia is there now, you know, downtown by Plaza de Cesar Chavez

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00:41:03.400 --> 00:41:14.040

Carolyn Kameya: That was the last Chinatown that got burned down, and so then a guy named Heinlen let

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00:41:14.300 --> 00:41:15.270

Carolyn Kameya: let

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00:41:15.790 --> 00:41:27.979

Carolyn Kameya: displaced. People lived there, and they had a fence around it, and like that he got lots of he's he was a German immigrant, got lots of death threats. And so

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00:41:28.310 --> 00:41:32.820

Carolyn Kameya: so that was became Heinleinville.

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00:41:33.450 --> 00:41:39.299

Carolyn Kameya: That was mostly Chinese. And when Japanese immigrants

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00:41:39.760 --> 00:41:46.110

Carolyn Kameya: arrived. That was where they came. And then Filipino

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00:41:46.220 --> 00:42:00.880

Carolyn Kameya: immigrants, that's where. And so I mean it. So that's what it was and why it was there, because they couldn't live anywhere else. And then. And now it's

284

00:42:01.330 --> 00:42:08.419

Carolyn Kameya: I guess this is the worry that with the big, you know, those.

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00:42:09.320 --> 00:42:14.760

Carolyn Kameya: the the housing that they just built, is really it? They just

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00:42:15.290 --> 00:42:18.170

Carolyn Kameya: finished it. And it's it's really

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00:42:18.410 --> 00:42:35.149

Carolyn Kameya: quite expensive, and they haven't gotten tenants. They intended to have stores on the bottom floor. But they're asking really high rents, so they haven't filled any of those spaces.

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00:42:35.690 --> 00:42:43.089

Carolyn Kameya: But but it's I guess that's the

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00:42:44.510 --> 00:43:00.073

Carolyn Kameya: that has been a concern with gentrification. If somebody can afford that, they won't, they will really have an appreciation of the community, this community that

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00:43:02.010 --> 00:43:06.109

Carolyn Kameya: tries to look out for each other that tries to.

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00:43:06.220 --> 00:43:09.820

Carolyn Kameya: you know, make certain things happen. And

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00:43:12.090 --> 00:43:13.040

Carolyn Kameya: But

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00:43:15.100 --> 00:43:30.679

Carolyn Kameya: but yeah, so that's some of the concern, just because of what's just been built. And as and as legacy businesses go away, you know. What will they be replaced with and like that?

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00:43:31.426 --> 00:43:38.019

Carolyn Kameya: The real estate prices are just so off the

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00:43:38.190 --> 00:43:43.119

Carolyn Kameya: off the charts now. But but Japantown.

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00:43:45.460 --> 00:43:55.269

Carolyn Kameya: I've seen it be a welcoming place for lots of people, of lots of backgrounds, and just like

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00:43:56.480 --> 00:44:01.230

Carolyn Kameya: well with the Twin Towers, and even before that

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00:44:03.690 --> 00:44:12.140

Carolyn Kameya: Was it [US Senator] [Hayakawa](#) who wanted to incarcerate Muslims?

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00:44:12.420 --> 00:44:13.889

Carolyn Kameya: Was was that.

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00:44:14.100 --> 00:44:26.130

Carolyn Kameya: anyway? But that certainly happened after the [Twin Towers](#), you know, and the Japanese community has been really.

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00:44:28.040 --> 00:44:34.010

Carolyn Kameya: really reached out to the Muslim community. And and

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00:44:35.540 --> 00:44:39.360

Carolyn Kameya: and they've been very appreciative that that

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00:44:40.690 --> 00:44:49.800

Carolyn Kameya: well, when they were when they were vilified so thoroughly.

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00:44:50.170 --> 00:45:02.019

Carolyn Kameya: Yeah, the Japanese community would, you know, reached out to them. But you but it's it's been.

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00:45:02.700 --> 00:45:04.370

Carolyn Kameya: It's changed.

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00:45:04.940 --> 00:45:12.339

Carolyn Kameya: But it's still a community of people

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00:45:12.490 --> 00:45:16.099

Carolyn Kameya: really trying to make a safe

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00:45:16.310 --> 00:45:20.909

Carolyn Kameya: space for lots for lots of different people.

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00:45:28.520 --> 00:45:30.550

Steve Nava: Naman has number eight.

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00:45:32.200 --> 00:45:54.869

Naman Nair: Yeah, I was just judging by from what you were saying. They basically answered my question. But you know, obviously, let me ask. I'll just ask it again. Since becoming involved with Japantown and its organization, have you noticed significant changes in the community, and how those changes, such as the impact of COVID-19 affected your sense of connection or your work in the area

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00:46:02.820 --> 00:46:11.579

Carolyn Kameya: You know, Covid was really hard for lots of things, and that separation, you know

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00:46:11.880 --> 00:46:22.180

Carolyn Kameya: where it looks like it was so hard, was with families and and young children, and the

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00:46:23.970 --> 00:46:29.349

Carolyn Kameya: the community in Japantown has started

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00:46:29.830 --> 00:46:41.350

Carolyn Kameya: well doing you their usual things again. You know they'll have this this run or this

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00:46:41.800 --> 00:46:53.050

Carolyn Kameya: this festival or this, you know, they'll they've been doing their their started doing their their

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00:46:53.560 --> 00:46:58.370

Carolyn Kameya: typical things again. And people have been really

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00:46:59.250 --> 00:47:13.109

Carolyn Kameya: appreciative that that it's happened. It's happening again in person, you know, instead of I mean, they tried to do. I think they tried to do an open

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00:47:13.460 --> 00:47:23.710

Carolyn Kameya: over zoom, and they tried to do, you know, but it's not the same, and people are glad that

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00:47:23.940 --> 00:47:25.680

Carolyn Kameya: it's happening again.

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00:47:26.740 --> 00:47:36.829

Naman Nair: Would you? Would you say that it was relatively a harder time for you, too, in general, with, you know, dealing with the stuff in the community, and such

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00:47:39.220 --> 00:47:41.690

Carolyn Kameya: Think I think we're.

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00:47:41.800 --> 00:47:56.890

Carolyn Kameya: You know we're human, and we like to be together, or we like to, you know, and Zoom has been great zoom has allowed access to people far and wide and like that.

323

00:47:57.180 --> 00:48:09.259

Carolyn Kameya: But it's not the same as when you're in the room together, or you know you have a meeting in person, and then people can bring.

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00:48:09.430 --> 00:48:10.562

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know.

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00:48:11.100 --> 00:48:18.599

Carolyn Kameya: Snack treats I something to share. It's just so different.

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00:48:19.550 --> 00:48:20.430

Carolyn Kameya: Yeah.

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00:48:21.590 --> 00:48:22.859

Naman Nair: Okay. Thank you.

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00:48:23.370 --> 00:48:26.136

Carolyn Kameya: But so it's coming back

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00:48:27.730 --> 00:48:28.500

Naman Nair: Yeah.

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00:48:28.500 --> 00:48:31.569

Steve Nava: And Ethan has the next question, number nine.

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00:48:33.410 --> 00:48:35.679

Ethan Guerrero: Yeah. So as a result

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00:48:36.000 --> 00:48:46.260

Ethan Guerrero: of maybe Covid or over time, have you seen any legacy businesses close in Japantown? And how did that affect? Maybe your sense of community

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00:48:46.500 --> 00:48:49.029

Carolyn Kameya: Hmm, you?

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00:48:50.060 --> 00:48:52.100

Carolyn Kameya: Well, it's

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00:48:53.380 --> 00:49:03.340

Carolyn Kameya: yeah. Little by little, it there's been a lot of legacy businesses that the children haven't wanted to take over

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00:49:05.030 --> 00:49:09.820

Carolyn Kameya: and we were. I was just down

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00:49:10.300 --> 00:49:20.770

Carolyn Kameya: last month in Little Tokyo, and there's a manju shop, that's is it the third

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00:49:21.330 --> 00:49:28.090

Carolyn Kameya: generation now, I mean, really, it's been, and they're trying to

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00:49:28.680 --> 00:49:49.310

Carolyn Kameya: to pass it on to the next generation. And it's but maybe maybe San Jose Tofu was the last one. I think of that that went away. There's but there's new ones. There's new ones that are coming, and I mean new

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00:49:50.720 --> 00:49:58.539

Carolyn Kameya: new businesses like Roy's used to be a gas station, and now it's a coffee shop, and it's really a hub.

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00:49:58.700 --> 00:50:20.270

Carolyn Kameya: And there's a place across the street that used to be a gas station mechanic, and it's changed a couple of times. But now the the guy that's running it really wants to be part of the jtown community, I mean.

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00:50:21.920 --> 00:50:26.370

Carolyn Kameya: So I guess

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00:50:26.660 --> 00:50:41.849

Carolyn Kameya: maybe the difference is that these are small businesses rather than chains. I don't know if it would be the same if it was a Starbucks, or if it was.

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00:50:42.080 --> 00:50:43.590

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know whatever.

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00:50:44.080 --> 00:50:48.330

Carolyn Kameya: Chick-fil-a, yeah.

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00:50:49.510 --> 00:50:51.510

Steve Nava: Naman has number eleven

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00:50:52.640 --> 00:51:07.189

Naman Nair: Okay, so has your experience in Japantown changed. How you define what it means to belong to a community. Has it shaped, how you view other places or sparked a connection to new spaces outside Japantown that you'd like to share

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00:51:08.930 --> 00:51:13.720

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know if it's changed, but but really it's

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00:51:16.060 --> 00:51:34.280

Carolyn Kameya: I think it's been really good. Part of it is Yu-Ai Kai and Akiyama, you know, Akiyama does lots of exercise and fitness kinds of things. Yu-Ai Kai has lots of programs and and

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00:51:36.920 --> 00:51:48.280

Carolyn Kameya: it it, those. Well, those. And and maybe Roy station is kind of a hub with

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00:51:49.260 --> 00:51:57.599

Carolyn Kameya: for community gathering. And and so then it's like you know.

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00:51:58.150 --> 00:52:13.104

Carolyn Kameya: to have that. Then then it's almost like a measure you could look at other places, do they have something? And and sometimes well, I guess the churches are

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00:52:13.970 --> 00:52:25.760

Carolyn Kameya: a a hub, too, for for the community, and and and then, of course, the museum is is really

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00:52:26.230 --> 00:52:32.310

Carolyn Kameya: important. But, I don't know if it's changed.

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00:52:32.760 --> 00:52:46.809

Carolyn Kameya: how I think about it, but it. It gives a good. It's a good example of what's possible and engaging people at different stages of life. I think

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00:52:49.560 --> 00:52:50.889

Naman Nair: Okay. Thank you.

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00:52:56.580 --> 00:52:59.589

Steve Nava: And then see the next question.

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00:53:02.790 --> 00:53:09.910

Steve Nava: Actually, I think I'm gonna ask the question about the future of Japantown. So

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00:53:10.750 --> 00:53:16.630

Steve Nava: what do you see as the future of Japantown. Given what we've reflected on, or you've reflected on

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00:53:21.360 --> 00:53:24.770

Carolyn Kameya: I I guess that's what we have to.

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00:53:25.210 --> 00:53:30.830

Carolyn Kameya: That's that's what we have to figure out. Some of

362

00:53:31.420 --> 00:53:44.059

Carolyn Kameya: some of I mean, I think anytime. What really works is is relationships and and and

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00:53:44.960 --> 00:53:54.840

Carolyn Kameya: having things that facilitate lots of different relationships, I think is really important.

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00:53:55.780 --> 00:54:09.594

Carolyn Kameya: If we can keep doing that we can keep talking to each other, and we can keep thinking about each other and each other's situations, and then hopefully, we can keep

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00:54:11.674 --> 00:54:22.139

Carolyn Kameya: a heart in Japantown. What? Whatever changes, whatever comes down the road

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00:54:23.040 --> 00:54:26.380

Carolyn Kameya: that we don't expect, or or

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00:54:26.880 --> 00:54:30.939

Carolyn Kameya: yeah, or don't necessarily want. But if we can keep.

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00:54:32.350 --> 00:54:33.570

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know

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00:54:34.470 --> 00:54:47.920

Steve Nava: yeah, so we kind of ran out of time. And we have one min left. But I, I just wanted to give you a chance to ask us any questions about this project, or anything that we didn't cover, that you'd like to share anything that you feel. Is you kind of want to leave

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00:54:48.340 --> 00:54:50.960

Steve Nava: leave with us

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00:54:51.270 --> 00:54:59.380

Carolyn Kameya: I don't know. I wanted to ask have you done other interviews, Ethan and Naman, or I mean

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00:54:59.380 --> 00:55:04.339

Naman Nair: No, this is our very first interview, and it was. It was great. Thank you.

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00:55:04.340 --> 00:55:05.130

Naman Nair: Thank you very much.

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00:55:05.470 --> 00:55:10.490

Carolyn Kameya: Well, well, thanks. I was just wondering how you know if it's

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00:55:10.660 --> 00:55:17.040

Carolyn Kameya: made you think about something differently, or thing or

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00:55:17.390 --> 00:55:24.280

Naman Nair: I think for me. The one thing that really stuck out was the camps you told me about, because I had no idea about any of that.

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00:55:24.390 --> 00:55:33.669

Naman Nair: And so, you know, I was also gonna go to Oregon. And so so I'm definitely gonna see if I can visit the historical site or something whenever I get the chance.

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00:55:33.990 --> 00:55:34.940

Carolyn Kameya: But yeah.

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00:55:35.736 --> 00:55:48.999

Naman Nair: Another thing was the groups. While I was researching I actually did not know any of these. I actually never went to Japan until maybe, like two weeks ago, I, you know, just going there and then, knowing about these groups is really interesting and super cool to me.

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00:55:49.450 --> 00:55:50.000

Naman Nair: Yeah.

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00:55:50.000 --> 00:55:52.130

Carolyn Kameya: Thank you.

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00:55:52.820 --> 00:55:53.480

Carolyn Kameya: Hmm.

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00:55:53.783 --> 00:56:01.059

Ethan Guerrero: For me, at least, I kind of like I have. I've watched a couple other interviews from other people have been involved in Japantown

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00:56:01.250 --> 00:56:12.309

Ethan Guerrero: and I've never been to Japantown, but for me something is like I'm I myself. I'm Mexican, and for me it's like I I never go to like East Side, I guess, and

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00:56:12.430 --> 00:56:28.639

Ethan Guerrero: I guess when I do go over there on rare like occasionally I do feel a sense of community, and so I kind of learned, like through the importance of hearing other people talk about their own community. I've learned the importance of keeping like those small communities alive. I guess

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00:56:28.640 --> 00:56:44.540

Carolyn Kameya: Yeah, yeah, I mean, really, it's what makes things so interesting. And so, yeah, by rent, yeah, oh, nice.

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00:56:45.082 --> 00:56:49.789

Steve Nava: Well, thank you so much for your time. Really enjoyed it. Carolyn.

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00:56:49.980 --> 00:56:54.089

Steve Nava: and I appreciate Naaman and Ethan for being part of this.

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00:56:54.250 --> 00:57:08.590

Steve Nava: so this will be part of posterity, you know. We'll have this record here for researchers or community members that want to learn more, and we might call on you again one day to come. Talk to us again. But we really appreciate your time today.

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00:57:08.590 --> 00:57:13.790

Carolyn Kameya: Great, great. Thank you. Thank you. Good luck with your work.

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00:57:13.790 --> 00:57:15.140

Steve Nava: Yes, bye, bye, everyone

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00:57:15.140 --> 00:57:15.770

Naman Nair: Great Day.

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00:57:16.030 --> 00:57:19.100

Carolyn Kameya: Alright! Take care! Bye.