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Title: Donald K. Tamaki Interview
Narrator: Donald K. Tamaki
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
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<Begin Segment 2>

NW: Uh, let me ask you a further question about what you described to be the first reason for your, uh, being interested in this, um, group. So, policy or politically-oriented reasons. I'm aware that there were a lot of interest in the issues of nuclear destruction and, uh, sort of oppression of Asians by Americans back in the seventies and even early part of the eighties when you were getting involved in Friends of Hibakusha. Um, I wonder if you saw your relationship to survivors, or your interest in survivors' cause as related to this sort of overall, general interest that also was present in the US . . .

DT: Well, our, our law firm has a . . . kind of long tradition of getting involved in Civil Rights issues.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And so, um, we're probably best known for our legal representation and reopening the, um, US Supreme Court World War II cases, um . . . upholding the internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. And . . . those cases were heard in 1943 and 1944 and . . . 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestries—70,000 of whom were American citizens by birth—were rounded up and imprisoned. And, um, we thought that was a horrible precedent, because people were—they lost their freedom, they lost their property, a few lost their lives, um . . . simply because they looked like the enemy at the time when most of the people were loyal Amer—well, all of them were loyal Americans. Most had never even visited Japan, and yet they were caught up in this, um, in this um, civil liberties disaster, it was called. And too . . . you know, the challengers of that case, um, expected that, uh, they would see justice, and in 1943 and in 1944 they did not. The court uphold—upheld the legality . . . of rounding up American citizens, um, without trial, without evidence of any wrongdoing, without charges. And so, those cases stood for forty years until, in the eighties, we found a way to reopen them.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And so, um—and then we were involved in a number of um, local . . . issues and things. And, uh, um . . . someone approached us about working with the, um, A-bomb survivors.

NW: Mm.

DT: And I thought that was—they had an interesting story to tell.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And I had visited, um, the peace museum in, uh, Hiroshima numbers of times, and . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: I thought . . . was power—it's a powerful museum, but I also thought that that museum or something like it should be, uh, based in the, uh, superpowers of those countries that have nuclear bombs and nuclear capability.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, uh, because I—you know, most people are not aware of the destructive power and the lasting effects of, uh, nuclear warfare. Except, you know, the people who actually survived them.

NW: Mhm. Mhm.

DT: So, we, um . . . a number of us began working with the A-bomb survivors. Um . . . And, from a policy standpoint, uh, we held press conferences, and they were able to—every, you know, anniversary of the, um, dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. They were able to, um, explain, you know, that they were just trying to live their lives. They weren't . . . combatants, they were ordinary people.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, some were children. Um . . . some were not even born yet. They were in-utero when the bomb was dropped. Um . . . I think people who were old enough . . . to witness this describe the, um, utter devastation of the, um, of the surround . . . of their surroundings. And also the, um, mass destruction. And so we thought that was an important message, um, and it was not a message of who started the war, or who's responsible. It was just a matter—it was a message going forward that, um . . . um . . . the—continuing the arms build-up—

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, um . . . uh, among countries, is . . . is . . . is, um . . . not a, uh, viable option.

NW: Mhm.

DT: In today's—with today's destructive technology. And that was their message, basically.

NW: Mhm. So it sounds like you were seeing civil rights issues, especially around the history and the injustice done to, uh, former internees of concentration camps, in continuity with uh, the, some of the issues that US survivors were confronted with, um, in part because of their, uh, history of being U.S. citizens, and be also at the same time affected by the bomb. And also, uh, the fact that they were the witnesses to this sort of massive destructive power. Am I right to see that sort of continuity?

DT: I think so. I me—it—it's, it's a human rights issue, and um . . . the . . . warfare is awful. And terrible. But nuclear warfare is un—really unthinkable. And, um . . . But, policy makers, um . . . are engaged in, in these issues without really understanding on a human level what that means.

NW: Right, right.

DT: So we thought that message was important and, um, people who actually were there, um, when bombs, you know, fell, um . . . Their story is important and then couched within the context of . . . the destructive power of nuclear weapons, which by orders of magnitude is so much greater than the bombs that were dropped on Japan . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: . . . that their message is really an important one. So . . . in that sense, it's—it is human rights in the sense of just survival of the planet . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: . . . and so that was . . . I think our motivation for supporting these, uh, survivors.

NW: Yes, yes.

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