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Title: Donald K. Tamaki Interview
Narrator: Donald K. Tamaki
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
Location: San Francisco, California
Date: September 28, 2015
Densho ID: ddr-densho-1021-10

<Begin Segment 1>

NW: So, um, please, uh, start with telling me a little bit about yourself. Uh, first of all your name, and your, um, where you're from, and uh, your work, today. Um, your career, and uh, whatever else that you wish to share with me.

DT: Okay. My name is Donald Tamaki. I'm a third generation Japanese American. Um. . . born, uh, 1951. So . . . about, um, you know, postwar . . . just a few years after the internment camps closed.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And um, I'm now a partner in a law firm. . . called Minami-Tamaki LLP here in San Francisco, California.

NW: And, uh, the reason why I got to know you first was, uh, because of my work that I started in 2010, uh, that involved oral history interviews with survivors . . .

DT: Mhm.

NW: . . . and their supporters here in America. And one of them—well, actually more than one person, uh, mentioned your name to me, uh, as somebody who helped out their activism or their community, uh, to put it more broadly, in uh . . . organization called the Friends of Hibakusha. Could you please tell me a little bit about your involvement in the organization?

DT: I don't know that I did that much. So, I'm—I am um, just, you know, cautioning you how—as to how useful this interview might be. But . . . we were, um . . . the topic interested me because these, um, survivors of the A-bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or, the last living witnesses to nuclear warfare.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, I—we thought, among people I was working with, we thought that they had an important message to convey.

NW: Mhm.

DT: So that was one reason and then the other reason was, uh, Japan . . . Japanese government of course—was sending uh, teams of doctors and researchers every other year, I think it was . . . uh, to the United States for medical examinations. And so they needed some practic—they—logistical assistance on getting the word out, coordinating with hospitals and facilities, and so on. So there was a two-fold purpose. One was, um . . . you know, a policy or political message about A-bomb survivors living in the United States. And, um, the other was more practical in terms of just treatment and, um . . . allowing the researchers to study the after effects of, uh . . . radiation exposure.

NW: Mhm.

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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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<Begin Segment 3>

NW: Um, you mentioned this, uh legal case that involved the—uh, well civil rights cases, um, involving the former internees, and uh, I'm wondering if you're willing to tell me which specific case you were talking about. There are few cases that came to the attention of the Supreme Court before 1945.

DT: Yes. Okay, so the three main ones were, um, Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui. And, [clears throat], all three involved, um . . . American citizens by birth. And they lived in different locations. Fred was located in the Bay Area. Min was uh, a lawyer in Portland, Oregon, and Gordon Hirabayashi was a, uh, student at the Uni—University of Washington.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And without knowing each other, as American citizens, each felt that the, uh, rounding up of American citizens was wrong, without a showing of disloyalty or wrongdoing.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And so individually, in their separate locations, they refused to obey.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, um, challenged the authorities. They suffered for it. And, um . . . this was in 1942. And, by 1943 and 1944, um, the cases made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Hirabayashi case and the Yasui case arrived at the Supreme Court in 1943 and Fred's case—Fred Korematsu's case was decided in 1944.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And the court ruled against them.

NW: Mhm.

DT: The court basically said that . . . this is not a case of racial discrimination. This is a case of military necessity. And, the army tells us that these people are dangerous and their disloyal, and they're spying. That, um, uh . . . and to justify the rounding up, and uh, the court basically took the position of who are we to challenge the military during time of war. So that's the essence of the decision.

NW: Mhm.

DT: But the dissenters in that case, especially in Fred's case, in 1944, said, um, the court was divided six to three.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And the three dissenters . . . a guy named Justice Jackson wrote, um, that the court, for all time, has validated the principle of . . . the relocation of American citizens and of racial discrimination.

NW: Right.

DT: He said the principle lies around like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority who could put forth a plausible claim of urgent need.

NW: Right.

DT: And, in essence that means that . . . the army—the military, without evidence, without trial, without charges, without, um, any showing of wrongdoing, could declare an entire population—men, women, and children . . . healthy and infirm, old and young, as people that, um, can be rounded up and imprisoned.

NW: Mhm.

DT: We thought that was a really dangerous precedent. And, um, these three individuals that challenged the court, um, could not believe that the court had ruled against them.

NW: Mhm.

DT: So those decisions unfortunately, um, stood for the next 40 years.

NW: Right.

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<Begin Segment 4>

NW: So when you say that your law firm—including individual lawyers—including yourself, have a long history of, uh, sort of, you know, engaging with civil rights issues, do you mean, then, to reverse that decision that's being made in 1944 and 1945, so that it could lead to the redress movement.

DT: Well—

NW: I'm trying to get the sense of exactly what kind of involvement that your law firm had. Because I realize that—so you are born in 1951—

DT: Right.

NW: So, um, I'm not sure in what year you started this, uh—

DT: Uh, this was in 19 . . . um, '82 we started.

NW: Okay.

DT: And it was quite by accident. A researcher-professor by the name of Peter Irons, um . . . basically stumbled upon secret wartime justice department memos.

NW: Uh-huh.

DT: Uh, written by . . . the people responsible for defending the government . . . against the challenges that Fred, Gordon, and Min were making.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And among them were memos basically saying, you know, we've, we've checked with every intelligence agency that had any responsibility over the so-called Japanese American problem.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And they all basically said what—that the Army's claims that Japanese Americans are engaging in espionage or sabotage are false.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, we have a duty not to lie to the U.S. Supreme Court, what do we do? And there's this back and forth among, um, Justice Department lawyers and there's one group that wanted to, um, uh, just say, you know, we . . . this was wrong, and it was a mistake. But, there are another group of lawyers, um, in the Justice Department, uh, that engaged in a cover-up . . . of those, of that

evidence. So, these were, were reports from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Army, Na—uh, Naval Intelligence, Federal Communications Commission. Uh, even Ar—Army Intelligence, and um, all of which basically said that Japanese Americans aren't doing anything wrong.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And al—and some said that the . . . rounding-up should never have happened, and um, they're no more dangerous than the German American or Italian American population, and should be treated no differently.

NW: Mhm.

DT: Uh, at the end of the day, in 1943 and '44, the government decided to—to suppress that—those findings.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And so, the Supreme Court never received this information. And so, that was discovered in the eighties, and it led to our—our ability to reopen those cases.

NW: Mhm. Mhm.

DT: And so, um, from there, we—we worked on that, and we've worked on other . . . matters of civil rights and human rights. So . . . yeah.

NW: Okay.

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<Begin Segment 5>

NW: Yeah, it's very—in many ways exciting part of the Japanese American history to go through this era of redress and eventually leading to the formal apology and compensations by the U.S. government, but also I think you're right to point out that there are some remaining elements that um, uh, they don't really necessarily involve the straightforward acknowledgement of how the entire decision to—to round up Japanese Americans—including U.S. citizens—and placing in concentration camps. Um, so, um, I'm very, um—as somebody who teaches Asian American history, I think it's a very important component of what we all have to, sort of, know as part of our nation's past. But, uh, let me ask you, uh, a question about the reason that you mentioned as your second interest in your involvement with the Friends of Hibakusha. Um, so you say that in addition to policy and political reasons there were logistical or practical assistance that you were able to offer. Um, I'm somewhat familiar with this, uh, because I understand that for instance, you know, uh, medical license in Japan does not translate into a doctor's ability to practice medicine in America. So, I understand that there are some arrangements that need to be made. But could you tell me, uh, from where you stand based on your experience? What kind of logistic, um, assistances that you were able to offer to your survivors.

DT: So I'm not the most qualified to explain this, because, um, it was some time ago, and my memory is a little, um . . . weak on it. But, um, my recollection is that, uh, the medical examinations took place at UCSF, University of California—San Francisco Medical Center. And uh, of course, there were teams of people visiting from Japan . . . uh, researchers and doctors. Um . . . and so, there were others in our group, and survivors among them that were principally responsible for arranging for the local contacts. And that probably was done in Los Angeles and . . .

NW: Yes.

DT: Seattle. You know, I just don't know where the locations were, but in San Francisco, I believe it was UCSF. I think.

NW: Mhm. Yes, I think it changed a little it over time, but yes.

DT: So, um, you know, hospitals are busy places, so in order to get examination rooms ready and then . . . um, have coordination with the, uh, the local medical staff and . . . and I'm sure there was an interest on the U.S. side about, you know, the impact of . . . impact of radiation exposure over time.

NW: Right.

DT: There probably was, um, and I'm speculating because I don't remember. I mean, there was probably some interest on the U.S. side as well. But I think principally it was the Japanese government's commitment to um, provide services to A-bomb survivors and to study the impact of radiation and the legacy of uh, the World War II. So, um . . . just the facilities arrangement and um . . . I presume that the doctors and staff visiting had their own, um, accommodations for travel, but . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: Um . . . I presume there was some coordination that would be needed.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And then, um . . . of course people here, um, had to be contacted.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And their families, and depending upon what physical condition they were in, they could either get there on their own or they needed transportation.

NW: Right.

DT: So, there was coordination on that side and when these, these were happening there were hundreds of people in my recollection. Now, it's pretty much dwindled. People have passed away. But, um, when these started, uh, again, I'm not sure at what point I got involved in this, because . . . maybe it was going on for some time. I just don't remember. But . . .

NW: Well, Friends of Hibakusha itself was established in 1982 and the medical checkups started in 1977.

DT: Ok, so I was not involved. Good. Yeah, I'm glad you know, because I was not involved in 1977. So our involvement, if it started in '82, we were doing the internment camp cases, so I was too busy.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And then so, uh, my recollection is probably '84, '85.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And so I was involved maybe two or three years in that . . . area. And only locally. And so, um, getting back to the activities, so, I think . . . the, among the, um, Mariko Lindsey for instance, I'm sure was, who you've probably interviewed, was doing the coordination among the, um, survivors themselves. Contacting the family, making sure they got there. There was a certain amount of fundraising that had to go on to, to provide for that. And the I, I think I was more involved in, uh, um . . . the press releases and . . . you know, public education.

NW: Mhm.

DT: That, you know, this is a significant event, and, um, a newsworthy story.

NW: Right.

DT: So, I was helping.

NW: What kinds of public education programs did you become involved?

DT: I think these were just mainly press conferences.

NW: I see.

DT: Where people like Jack, uh, Dairiki and um, Mariko Lindsey and others participated, and, and . . . just to let the public know that, in their midst, you know, there were these A-bomb survivors who are willing now to talk about their experience. And, that generated a certain amount of interest.

NW: Mhm. Right.

DT: Because for most people, of course, it's . . . it's an academic, historical . . . you know, footnote really, to World War II. It's not a, something they realize. So…

NW: You'd hope not. [chuckling]. Um, yes, teaching American students nowadays, it's quite a challenge to even . . .

DT: Yeah, it's very abstract. Yeah.

NW: . . . impress with them that World War II was a world war and that's something to be remembered.

DT: Right.

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<Begin Segment 6>

NW: Um, what it's like to work with U.S. survivors? I'd like to sort of get a sense of what you remember in terms of your interactions with them.

DT: Uh, well, you know, they were, uh . . . very, uh, grateful, really that, and of course we were . . . happy to be of any help at all.

NW: Mhm.

DT: But I, you know, I thought they were courageous, um. There's a certain amount of stigma involved in being an A-bomb survivor. Maybe more so in Japan than here. But, but um . . . still, you know. Um . . . takes a certain amount of courage to say, kind of expose your medical problems or issues or potential for . . . to be . . . to develop cancer, you know. And to say yeah, I was exposed. I saw the blast. Um . . . I walked through the remains of the city with all the uh, black rain and other things. And uh . . . you know, you're, they're telling their friends and neighbors who they are. I, I thought that was worth supporting. If they were willing to be that courageous, then we ought to put in the time to, um . . . help them convey that message. And they were—they were very, um . . . adamant about um . . . their feelings about nuclear warfare. Uh, against nuclear warfare. And I thought, that's per, that's courageous and that they, that story should be supported. You know.

NW: Right. Do you think it mattered to you that most of them—well actually, more than half of them—were—even back in the 1980s—U.S. citizens? Not all of them were born in the U.S.

DT: Right.

NW: Many of actual U.S. survivors that we count as U.S. survivors today are born in Japan and maybe because their marriage because there's education or jobs—migrated to the U.S. after the war was over. I wonder if that distinction, um, mattered to you in any way? Or maybe it didn't?

DT: Well—it, uh, mattered to us . . . well, of course, like us, they lived through some of the most anti . . . anti-Japanese, um, attitudes. So . . . after the war, uh, Japan was a very poor country and very defeated. And there was a certain amount of intermarriage that happened postwar that probably was, uh, not looked upon well by either Japanese or Americans.

NW: Exactly.

DT: So, I think they were, um . . . Uh . . . there were certain amount of outcast, kind of, attitude. And then of course, um, following the war, um . . . Americans did not distinguish between Americans of Japanese ancestry and Japanese nationals. And they, the feelings against Japan was

uh, pretty strong. So, um, lots of housing discrimination, job discrimination, um, and some of this stemmed back to early days of, of, um, the West Coast in particular in California.

NW: Mhm.

DT: I mean . . . as you know, you know, from the mid to late eighteen hundreds, there were lots of anti-Asian legislation on the West Coast . . . in California, Washington, Arizona, in particular.

NW: Right.

DT: And so, um, those laws, uh, caused these communities to be pretty much, uh, cloi, cloistered together, um, in areas that are otherwise known as Japantowns. But that was due to discrimination. You know, imm, Japanese immigrants could not legally own most kinds of property.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And uh, so, uh, people were just basically, you know, eking out a living . . . uh, under, under those kinds of conditions. So . . . when, um, the war happened, I mean, the single most unpopular, unwelcome group on the West Coast were Japanese Americans.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And then after the war was over, um, Japanese Americans were, um, had been relocated because internment camps. And many ended up in different parts of the United States, on the East Coast and Midwest. But some of the . . . a lot of the people came back to the very communities that they were exiled from in the first place.

NW: Mhm.

DT: So their, their message was keep your mouth shut and . . . be . . . as American and as white as you can, as fast as you can.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And it just was a survival message. And so, the people who emigrated from Japan postwar, that's the environment they came into. So . . . we, we had a common, um, historical experience in that regard. But they were . . . very unique individuals because of their status as A-bomb survivors.

NW: Right.

DT: Which I didn't—was not aware of, uh, you know, until quite a bit later. So . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: When, when, uh, it came to our attention that there were A-bomb survivors in the Bay Area, that was interesting to me. And I thought, um, they would have a good, an interesting story to tell. Not a good story, but a story that was newsworthy and important.

NW: Mhm.

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<Begin Segment 7>

NW: I find it just, very fascinating that uh, um, the way you describe this Asian American history, not something that happened, only something that happened during World War II, but also something that continued on as anti-Asian or anti-Japanese sentiment in U.S. society, especially on the West Coast, even long after the war was over. And that was an environment that somebody who was a Japanese citizen at the time of the bombing stepped into as they became, uh-uh, immigrant of this country. Um . . . one thing that's also very interesting to me is that um, a majority of U.S. survivors are women an, uh, not only in U.S. society in general, but also within Asian American community, women are often silenced or made invisible, and I think that's one interesting aspect of U.S. survivors' history that they're majority of women. And so you mention Mariko Lindsey for instance. Um, did you feel that there's an interesting, um, dynamism at work? I'm not sure if I'm using the word, the best word here. Between men and women, both among survivors, but also among, uh, people like yourself, who contributed to work for survivors.

DT: I—I don't know if this answers your question at all. Um, you know, I wasn't particularly aware of that demographic statistic that most of the survivors were women. Uh, looking back, I guess that's true, you know. Um, I, I thought that, again, in general they were courageous to . . . to put themselves out there. Um . . . I think one of the interest—the good things about um, America in the late sixties and early seventies, is that there was a social transformation of the country as the culmination of the Civil Rights movement, which was, of course, led by African Americans from the fifties.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And that created an environment, that, um, women . . . and other, um, minorities, uh, began to, uh, assert, you know, their rights. So . . . when we talk about the late sixties, early seventies, the women's movement toward equality in America was pretty much new. You know, they were . . . in, not in the sense of um, you know, basic rights, which, of course, was a problem in America and a problem in every other country. You know. But, like, the right to vote, for instance. That goes way back. But, you know, the um . . . you know, Sandra Day O'Connor, Supreme Court Justice, uh, Stanford Law graduate, started out as a secretary. Couldn't get a job as, even though she's brilliant as an attorney. And so . . .

NW: I wasn't aware of that.

DT: My class was at Berkeley was the first time that there were 50 percent, half the class, the entering class were women.

NW: Mm.

DT: So that's a—it's common now. But that was a big deal.

NW: Yes. Yes.

DT: And very few women lawyers.

NW: Uh-huh.

DT: And very few minority lawyers. Hardly any Asian American attorneys.

NW: Right.

DT: So, the whole country went through a huge change, and um . . . the fact that, that at least when people became active in this area that there were women A-bomb survivors who were willing to speak out. That's good timing. It was good timing. Uh, um . . . because it was . . . just right after—Well, and the Civil Rights movement is an ongoing phenomenon. But um, after the laws began to change, in particular, and the focus was on, um, affirmative action and then also being conscious of um, excluded people.

NW: Mhm.

DT: That that, I think that was good timing. And, um, in Japan it's probably very different. You know. And, and, uh, very male-dominated society, obviously.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And um . . . Uh . . . so America's changing faster than Japan. So that sense that they're here . . . allowed them to be able to stand out more without getting hammered down.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: So . . .

NW: So the environment was, in some ways, historically reaching a right point to be able to hear, at least, survivors who wanted to speak out. Yes.

DT: I think so. And I think people were more, um, the war was now, we're talking seventies or eighties, so. It was well after World War II and people were more receptive to . . . um . . . and these were, you know, in the middle of nuclear arms treaty talks. So, so it was quite relevant.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: And, um, the importance of, uh, limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. And so who do you go to? I mean, well, some of the main . . . people that can deliver the message are people that actually lived through the only nuclear warfare.

NW: Right.

DT: Ever. So, I think timing-wise, politically, and timing-wise for, you know, sort of, equality, women being heard, uh, was good.

NW: Mhm.

DT: Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 8>

NW: Why do you think that U.S. survivors failed in terms of their, um, effort to push some bills, both through the, um, the California, um, legislature, and U.S. Congress at the federal level. So there are two bills. One is Mervyn Dymally minority, um-um, Senator, and um, uh, Roybal, Edward Roybal, who is the first Latin American representative from the State of California. Uh, I think first California bill came up for consideration in 1974, and another one was '78. So that's before your era of getting involved . . .

DT: Yes.

NW: . . . with survivors. But given how you're describing how it was, in some ways, a good timing for survivors to start to talk about their concerns and their needs, um, i—it sometimes uh, still surprises me, that uh, despite the fact that they belong to the U.S., both in terms of their citizenship, but also the way that they live lives—they were not recognized by the U.S. government in the way that Japanese government does.

DT: Oh, are you talking about on—Oh, I see. In terms of medical treatment that was provided?

NW: Yeah. Right.

DT: And the bills by Roba—Roybal and, um . . . Dymally. Refresh my recollection. What were those?

NW: So, they wanted to use essentially taxpayer's money either in the State of California or in the national government, so that their medical needs . . .

DT: Oh, okay. Yeah.

NW: . . . treatments, health check-ups, can be covered.

DT: I do remember that. Yeah. Well, um . . . now you're asking me to just . . . speculate. And to just kind of ramble on. But I'll give you my thoughts.

NW: Yes.

DT: But they're not . . . based on any . . . any expertise. But, um . . . You know, in the seventies, and even now, uh, they're, they're in American culture, um, how World War II history is viewed remains controversial. Except for instance at the Smithsonian . . . about the A-bomb, or the Enola Gay exhibit. You know, people are re-litigating [?] World War II and . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: . . . there is this underlying sentiment of who started the war and, you know, it was Japan that should bear the blame on this. And um, then it goes on to, you know, and if the A-bombs had not been dropped, it would've resulted in greater bloodshed. You know, with, um, American forces having to invade Japan and . . . culturally, the sense that people would fight to the death, you know. So I think that's part of it, um, that this is a World War II legacy, and we're not responsible and their kind of thing. I think that's part of it. I think the other part is healthcare in, in America, has been hugely controversial. In general. And, until Obamacare was passed, you know, for thirty to forty million Americans uninsured. And, um, huge resist—you know, despite . . . um . . . among the developed countries, uh, America having that many people uninsured, uh, and the cost of healthcare. Hugely expensive. And the way it's so balkanized in terms of every group having its economic interest, you know. Whether it's taxpayers, whether it's healthcare providers, whether it's um . . . uh, doctors, nurses, healthcare plans . . . I—it's hugely complicated and hugely expensive. And . . . this whole thing of anybody getting free medical care is always, has always been controversial. I'm so surprised that—that the Affordable Care Act passed.

NW: [chuckles]

DT: And that the Supreme Court upheld it.

NW: In the reduced form, but nevertheless it . . . passed. [chuckles].

DT: So, that may have been a part of it. You know.

NW: Interesting.

DT: And so, uh . . . and California's changed a lot. You know, now in, in the . . . 1970s, it was demographically a really different state.

NW: Mhm. Mhm.

DT: And far more conservative than it is now.

NW: Mm.

DT: You know, Nixon came from California. Reagan came from California. Deukmejin. And so, the idea of providing social services—social services . . . um . . . and um . . . you know, the, the feeling that the more social services are given, it becomes more of a welfare state. That is, um . . . there's been, there's been a shift, you know. And so, now, there's no single group in California that constitutes a majority. We're all minorities in the state. That's remark . . .

NW: Mhm. Including white.

DT: They're remarkable. It's a remarkable turn of events. And the other thing is, um, you have a democratically controlled legislature, you have a democratic governor. It's a very blue state. But in the seventies that was not the case. And there are other issues going on. You know, Vietnam war was, um . . . just ending and um . . . uh . . . if you talk about the Carter years, you know, in the seventies, uh, was that . . . I guess that's the eighties. But the, the interest rates were well

over, you know, 17, 18 percent. I mean, people were, the state's economy was going up and down too, so, I think that's probably a factor about, you know, are we going to give, give away free medical care. So. I don't know. Those are just kind of random thoughts.

NW: No, but it's interesting. I think it makes sense to me that um, the environment, historically speaking, but also politically and culturally speaking, that they were trying to, you know, make their claims really heard back in the seventies was probably very different from . . .

DT: It's um . . .

NW: It's an issue of timing that we're looking.

DT: It is an issue of timing and, you know, uh, with all due respect to uh, the A-bomb survivors, and all the horror, you know, they went through, with 40 million Americans can't even get medical care. They can't even get to see a doctor.

NW: Right.

DT: The idea of singling out one group for treatment, probably is not a popular thing.

NW: Yes. Yeah. Right.

DT: So . . .

NW: Right.

DT: Timing is everything.

NW: It's very interesting.

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<Begin Segment 9>

NW: Um, tell me, now about your, uh, the other organizations that you were involved, uh, you mentioned Asian Law Caucus and I know that, uh, US survivors sometimes communicated with Japanese American Citizens League and their attorneys to sort of, you know, make their cases more visible. Um, could you please give me a sense of which organization that US survivors work together? Including the organization that you were a member of?

DT: I think you'll have to talk to, um, Mariko or Jack, you know. Or Karen. I—I don't really remember. The . . . whether we did any work when I was, I was executive director of the Asian Law Caucus from . . .'80 to '83. And we were principally consumed with . . . the internment camp cases. And then I went into private practice with my current group here, like in '84, '85.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: And so, um . . . . There were issues we were working on. I mean one of them was, um . . . A-bomb survivors. Another was uh . . . Dan Lungren. I don't know, it's kind of a side issue. But during the um, hearings of a reparations . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: Dan Lungren, Congressman from California, was point-person opposing . . . a rep—redress and reparations bill.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And, um Dan Lungren he felt he could do this without any consequence. You know. Japanese Americans are nothing, and Dan Lungren et cetera. And, and then in doing so, he, he um Dan Lungren he raised these arguments against the bill, and you know, about Japanese Americans being disloyal and evidence of spying and, which were all discredited. They were all false. And so he was circulating Dan Lungren basically um, false information. And we—we had just gone through explaining, um, no, even the FBI, the Office of Naval Intelligence knew none of those charges were true. And, he's resurrecting these. I think it was um, intercepted cables from Japan during World War II. And one of the cables was Dan Lungren well, you know maybe there are Japanese Americans who might be . . . express some loyalty to Japan and maybe we can recruit them. And uh, even the Japanese government concluded no, that's not going to work.

NW: [chuckling]

DT: [chuckles] And, here Dan Lungren is saying, you know and the cables were magic cables they were being called. And they were in his evidence they there were disloyalty, disloyal and the, um, internment was justified. So anyway, as politics happens, you know, he, um, a guy named Jesse Unruh died in office. He was Treasurer of the State of California. You know, very liberal, democratic guy. And, Deukmejin, the Governor at the time, wanted to appoint Dan Lungren to be Treasurer, and then Dan, with the idea that he would be eventually Governor and maybe a presidential candidate someday.

NW: [gasp]

DT: And so we went after Deukmejin

NW: [laughs] Somebody has to. [laughing]

DT: And uh, we organized up and down California. And um . . . and we lobbied, uh, the uh, senators in the State Senate.

NW: Mhm.

DT: About why this guy should not be appointed. And his record was really at the extreme right. Didn't fit with California anyway. But on top of that, he led the fight against reparations. Which was a bipartisan issue. I mean, it passed because of so much Republican support for that. It was both conservatives and Dem . . . liberals saw that there was a civil rights issue. There's something wrong with imprisoning American citizens for no good reason. Except Dan Lungren.

And so we, we um, publicized this whole thing and uh, he lost. He lost by like one or two votes. And then, he then tried to resurrect his political career. He spent another stint in Congress, but we, we never forgot that. And so, uh, we were doing that. And uh, because we thought there was a point to be made. And um . . . somewhere in between there it was Friends of Hibakusha. And then I got involved in a, you know, couple of other uh, lawsuits on other things. And so, FOH was just kind of in the middle of that.

NW: Yes.

DT: So, that—that's what I was saying. I'm not the, the authority, you know, on this. You know, there are other people that were a lot more involved than me.

NW: Mhm. Yeah, but what I'm seeing—learning, really, by talking to people in my project is—is that there's no single authority about any event. Because people have different memories and recollections. And, um, so that's part of the reason why this project is very, um, interesting to me. Um, 1982 and uh, a few years to come after that were uh, when U.S. society was very much engaged in a mass level, uh, with the anti-nuclear, um, nuclear freeze movement. And there were huge marches [at] many locations including Washington D.C. Were you involved in any of that?

DT: No, I was not. I mean, you know, like I've said, I've forgotten a lot of that stuff. Um . . . but I do remember that the—it was timely. It was timely. Because there was interest in A-bomb survivors at that time. And it did get, um, local coverage. This is before the internet, really. And um, so people depended upon television news and . . . and um, newspapers. So, um . . . in getting the message out is no social media so it's a lot more difficult.

NW: Right. Right. Yeah. So you have to have a institutional support and organizations to actually give visibility.

DT: I think so. Yeah. They organized and actually talked to the press. Get them interested on the story. Give them an angle. Convince them that, you know, that this is worthy of news time. So that was a lot of what we did.

NW: Right. Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 10>

NW: Um, in terms of uh, your work for Asian Law Caucus and uh, I'm not sure if you belong to other Asian American, um, organizations including legal, attorneys' organizations? Um, was there a sense that um, of course the internment camp issue is hugely, uh, central to Asian American history in many ways, but um, the nuc—anti-nuclear uh, movement was also something to be considered as a community?

DT: Well um . . . you know, the issue of social change is so huge and so difficult that if you can find an issue where you can move the needle a little bit, you know, change around the margins, then certain issues have greater potential than others. And um, some have a very limited shelf life, to put it mildly. Like uh, the message of A-bomb survivors is as long as they're living. You

know, once they're gone, they are gone. So, like it was—I think was important to um, get their message out while they're willing to do this, as long as they're here. Uh, and um, my way of thinking is, um, is to how social change happens, at least in America is—is that great mass in the middle. That's where the change happens. And uh, um, how do you reach that? How do you get on that radar screen? That's the issue. And so . . . what we are doing—what we . . . it's a, my view of how social change happens is that the symbolic . . . uh . . . um . . . results are as important as the concrete ones. So, when I was at the Asian Law Caucus, we were doing poverty, providing poverty law services for the San Francisco area. And . . . of course it was limited funding, limited funding in the organization. And it just occurred to me, you know, that we could triple our staff and triple our budget and we wouldn't make a dent in the legal problems just in Chinatown, let alone in all of the Bay Area. And so, um . . . you know, Chinatown itself has the highest concentration of tuberculosis, and the greatest level of, of um, housing density. And at the time, you had uh, Asian, Chinese women, uh, working in sweatshops, garment factory, earning fifty cents to a dollar an hour. You know. Um, and then you have, you know, there's the garden-variety cases like um . . . that are serious, but, uh, endless domestic violence. Um . . . people getting evicted out of their housing. Uh, uh . . . being cheated and different kinds of things. Um, and so on. So, the question was, are there . . . are there cases that are better . . . and more susceptible to changing values than others? And so, we used to, at the Law Caucus take everybody that came in the door. So if they had a divorce that they wanted to handle and they couldn't afford a lawyer, maybe we'd do that. But, the question is where, where do you focus your precious time and your money? And so, um, we found that there were cases that had more potential for organizing, that after the legal case would be over, there would be an institution, you know, working away. And so, for instance, um, labor law, laboring was good. Like, you, we could do a compelling case like representing garment factory workers working in sweatshop conditions, being cheated out of minimum wage, not being paid overtime, working at a dollar an hour, and we definitely could get the public's attention.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And then after the case is over, there would be a labor union . . . that would continue to fight.

NW: Right.

DT: Um, immigration was another area we thought that, that had the ability to change . . . hearts and minds in the middle. And housing was another one. So, um, one of the housing lawyers at the Asian Law Caucus at the time was, uh, Ed Lee, who's now the mayor of San Francisco.

NW: Mm. Ah.

DT: But, um, I—I remember Ed as suing the city—the city that he is now the mayor of.

NW: Mm.

DT: Multiple times for, uh, dangerous and just terrible housing. So, um . . . you know, we're looking for issues that would have, ok, you can do a little bit here, but the symbolic value, the education value is greater. So, same with Koramatsu Hirabayashi, Yasui. It's just one guy, you know, fighting the system. But, the overall goal is to make sure this never happens to

anybody . . . ever again. And how do you educate that people . . . at that level? How do you get to the middle? Well, if you have a case . . . that allows that, uh, that's a better case than something that just one person, and the impact is just that one guy, so.

NW: So do you think helping out U.S. survivors was one of those cases that had the value, or?

DT: Yeah, sure. You know, I mean, to the extent that uh, you can further the um, discussion about why um, proliferation is not a good idea. Um nuclear weapons, and . . . um . . . I mean, of course, if they can get medical care along the way, great. But the bigger message is, you know, nuclear war shouldn't—is obsolete. It's an obsolete concept.

NW: Uh-huh.

DT: So, um . . . I think that was the more, the rest of it.

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<Begin Segment 11>

NW: Speaking of bigger message, I think, uh, as a historian, one big message that I usually talk about when I teach, you know, '60s and '70s history, uh, of Asian American community, is that, um, there was a lot of interracial, interethnic collaborations. And it sounds like, uh, Asian Law Caucus is one of those organizations that really brought, uh, you know, not just singular ethnic group, as in Japanese Americans, or ethnic Chinese Americans, but . . . both of them. Or maybe more of them. Uh, do you—I know you feel—It sounds like you were engaged with Chinese American housing issues and labor issues as much as you were.

DT: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

NW: Do you think that was reciprocated other—by other participating ethnic groups?

DT: That was?

NW: Reciprocated.

DT: Oh, I see. Well . . . you know, it just depends on what their focus was at. I mean, there are some, some groups that are just completely dedicated to their one group and the betterment of their one group, and. . . that, that's a good thing, you know. I'm not criticizing that at all. But personally, I'm more interested in. . . in issues that happen to arise out of communities that have access to, and being Japanese American I have access to the Japanese American community. But. . . they genera—they—there are bigger issues involved, so, Fred. . . Fred Korematsu is Japanese American. . . because he's at a—well, I was at the Asian Law Caucus at the time, it was very convenient. But it really raises a question about civil rights generally. And so, whether it involves, um, disabled people, or women, or um, lesbian or gay folks, uh, just the idea of being uh, or rounding people up or excluding them on a wholesale basis. It's very relevant. And so, um, similarly with the Asian Law Caucus, they're, uh, of course, it involved Japanese Americans who were interned, but ultimately, the issue is national security. How is national security policy formulated?

NW: Mhm.

DT: And that's particularly relevant today toward Muslims and Arab Americans. And so the Asian Law Caucus of today has um, lots of Indian Americans, um, Arab Americans, other people involved. And, Yeah. They, they've furthered this legacy of Fred's case, but the issue is ultimately national security. I mean in, in, um. . . in the case itself, it was described as military necessity, you know. But that really, in today's, you know, terminology, it's really national security. And uh, um. . . uh. . . things that were justified under military necessity which were false and, and uh, really uh, racism, and for no good reason.

NW: Mhm.

DT: You know, is it—are you really more secure by um. . . you know, depriving people of their ability to fly, for tickets that they bought, just because they're the wrong color? You know, I mean, that's got nothing to do with national security. So, so—the—these, um. . . you know, the. . . the. . . you know, the government's right to, um, figure out what uh, you know, books people are reading in public libraries. Uh. . . things like that. I mean, those are really national security issues? So, um, the—it's policy but it just happened to be generated, at least in one case by someone who was Asian American or Japanese American. But. . . leads into broader issues.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: But I'm—you know. But the fact that—if you can ke—provide a job or housing or healthcare for a person, I think that's a good thing, you know, to the extent that it impacts a particular racial group. I think that to have a group that solely deals with that group or the rights of the disabled or gay students, or whatever. I think that's a good thing. But. . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: . . . I think ultimately the goal is to change policy in the middle. And um. . . so that's. . . if you can only do a little bit, 'cause, you know, you have very limited resources, then there are some cases that have better. . . potential than others. There are some issues that have better potential than others. FOH was one of those issues.

NW: Um, so, I—I really see how you sort of think about both what happened at the micro level in terms of what betterment can happen to an individual, as well as macro level, in bigger picture, how can you move the middle of the country politically. Um, speaking of that, one thing I was, uh, sort of curious to have your take on, if any, um, was how, um, survivors themselves thought about their standing in the country but also uh, vis-a-vis Japanese anti-nuclear movement?

DT: In Japan?

NW: In Japan. And, and I guess where my question was coming from is a few comments I received from people I interviewed, uh, that had something to do with how survivors themselves were cautious about not tangled up with politics. . . within the Japanese anti-nuclear movement. So they're a socialist party-supported group and then communist supported-groups and then I'm sure there are people in America who are Communist Party members, and in support of U.S.

survivors. So, to me, there are this, you know, group of U.S. survivors who are not, you know, particularly skilled—many of them anyway—in dealing with those politic—politics of—both in America and Japan, and suddenly finding themselves in this very complicated, charged area of political issues. Have you ever encountered any of that tension. . . in your work?

DT: I don't remember, to be honest with you. It happened so many years ago, so. . . Um. . . I—you know, there were—my recollection was that they were just interested in telling a human story.

NW: Mm. Yes.

DT: And um. . .

NW: That's my impression, too. But yes.

DT: Yeah, so they were probably wary of any—any group that had an agenda. You know.

NW: Mhm.

DT: But, um. . . Yeah, I'm not the right person to answer that question. I just don't know.

NW: Ok. Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 12>

NW: Um, we've been spending some time by now, and um, I appreciate that you've been answering my questions, including things that, um, you feel that you don't particularly remember too well. It's a long time ago. But I do really appreciate that you're really answering my questions and, um, it's very useful for me, and. . . inspiring to me as well. Um. . . Do you have anything that you felt that I should be asking you, but didn't ask you?

DT: No. I, you know, I'm glad people are—you're doing this research. I think that's really important. And um. . . I'm glad that there's still . . . well hopefully there's still interest. One of the things I'm surprised about—like I give a lecture on the Korematsu case twice a year at Berkeley.

NW: Uh-huh.

DT: And it's been a long time since we reopened that case. But there's still a very high interest level. And um. . . it's uh, regrettably, probably more relevant now than it was even when we. . . when we reopened the case. And um, I think, you know, depending upon the political scene, what happens with the uh, Iran . . . and U.S. nuclear treaty. What happens with Japan's decision to, um, militarize international, more internationally.

NW: Mhm.

DT: These issues will come up. So. . . the. . . the fact that there are going to be less and less survivors around, I think is important to—to do their—to do the writing now. You know, to memorialize their story now, because the issues are going to get hot again. And they are, you know, as tensions develop with um, Russia to now be a, to reassert itself as a world power, is going to come up. And uh, with China in particular. Um . . .

NW: Very true.

DT: So, it's very relevant. And, like I said. [Laughs] I think it's very moving to have the peace museum in Hiroshima, but it should probably be—every one of these countries should have one of those museums.

NW: Interesting. Yes. I was in Hiroshima just this past summer, and um, of course there are people from all over the world participating in commemoration and, yeah, it's a very powerful, special place to, uh, find yourself in. So you feel that there's a future for—effort to remember? Especially with regard to US survivors because they have been forgotten in many ways.

DT: I think so. They've been forgotten. Um . . . and it's an effort to keep getting their story out there. But the issue is not going to go away. And, in fact, it . . . you know, the world just gets . . . you know, more dangerous in that regard. Um . . . so, you know, just looking at the controversy over the nuclear deal with Iran in the U.S. and um . . . as a campaign issue. You know, um, Republican candidates are saying the first thing they would do is unwind that deal. But, what's the alternative? The alternative is, they're going to develop a nuclear weapon. Period. And then you have to go in and start a war. Um, so . . . you know, um . . . the issue is going to be there, and uh, so I think it's important to humanize the story. And the—ultimately the people that get humanized at are these survivors. So.

NW: Mhm.

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<Begin Segment 13>

NW: Well, I'm coming up with more questions, but let me ask just one more question.

DT: Uh-huh.

NW: So, um, you were born in 1951, so I guess by the time you went to university you probably didn't experience the Berkeley campus to experience the, uh, the Third War Strike in 1968, 69. Um, do you see—do you think that you yourself growing up as a Japanese American person, um, in the sixties and seventies, and going through the era that you did, influenced your interest in . . .?

DT: Oh, there's no doubt about it.

NW: Yes.

DT: I mean, the . . . well, put it this way. Without the African American Civil Rights Movement I would not have been a lawyer. I mean, Martin Luther King, to me, is a huge hero.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And uh, you know, one of these, these kinds of people come along once every hundreds, couple hundred years. And so . . . he opened, and other people, you know, changed the whole landscape completely. And uh, and then from there, there were just these offshoots. Like Asian American Studies at UT, it's had a huge impact on America, but in particular Asian Americans. And they all go on to different, people all go on to different careers.

NW: Mhm.

DT: Um . . . but in terms of diversity and attitude and tolerance and cultural lessons learned, Asian American Studies has huge impact. And so, um, we are, I know there's less and less funding coming from the state to support.

NW: Very true.

DT: Like the one at Berkeley—UC-Berkeley. And so they're doing their own private fundraising and we're donors to that. Because it's been so impactful.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: So, yeah. I mean, it's shaped all of our careers, our thinking, what we got involved in. Yeah, that whole, I feel so fortunate to have been born during that time. To be alive during that time. So.

NW: Right. Right.

DT: Yeah.

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