

Let's Talk: The Art in Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Audio Transcription by Eunsoo Kim

[intro music plays]

Akemi: Welcome to another episode of Let's Talk, a podcast where we feature individuals and organizations in and around Oakland Chinatown who are working hard to bring our AAPI and Black communities together. By highlighting their stories, we hope to encourage inclusive, intergenerational, and anti-racist perspectives in all spaces. I'm Akemi Chan-Imai, the Program Manager at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center and this is "Let's Talk." Today we will hear from Pallavi Sharma and Tomye Neal Madison, two visual artists in the Bay Area who have collaborated to present cross-cultural exhibitions featuring Black and Asian artists. Hear how they use visual mediums to explore solidarity, cross-racial advocacy, and resistance. Please note that this episode features a companion slideshow of Pallavi and Tomye's artwork. You can visit this slideshow on OACC's website at oacc.cc. Joining us as facilitator is Pamela Ybañez, OACC's Facilities Coordinator who is also a visual artist herself.

Pamela: Well, thank you so much for joining this talk with Pallavi and Tomye. I thought we could start off with introductions. Pallavi why don't you go first?

Pallavi: Okay, yeah sure. Thank you so much Tomye, Pam, Akemi, [and] Jaide for having me. My name is Pallavi Sharma, I'm a practicing artist, curator, and educator. I teach at California College of the Arts in Critical Ethnic Studies program. I have lived in San Ramon, California for the last 18 years. For the last two decades, I have been making art on the topic that speak about my experiences as an immigrant, cultural identity, memory and loss, and I am founder and director of a non-profit organization, Inner Eye ArtS, which is in San Ramon, California.

Tomye: Well, thank you. And thank you everyone else. I also am a visual artist; I have been doing that for quite some time. Sometimes people will ask me how long have I been doing my art. I have to say that my mom reminded me that I actually started at 6 years old, which I don't remember, and that I was very much given a watercolor set as my first gift when I was 6 years old because I was so good. So I'm quite sure I was one of those precocious children that people hated, because of that. It's just one of those things— you can't be knowing what you want to do in life so early in age and stick to it, not a lot of people have that capacity or gift to do that, their journey, that way. And I have been involved in various aspects of the arts, I'm a mentor and I teach. My oldest student is 81 years old; he just had a birthday and he turned 82. He has dementia, so it's a very challenging situation. We're just now giving him kind of strokes, so he stays involved in his art and it's been proven that visual art does help with when people have dementia. So that's been a very good thing for me, as I get older, to understand what those kinds of things can affect. The political aspect that we're going to be talking about is very important to me because at a point in my life, instead of just doing lovely paintings, I decided that our situation as a human race was being challenged too much and I switched into doing things that are more applicable to people being— what they now want to call "woke," which is a very interesting terminology, I find.

Pamela: Thanks, Tomye and Pallavi.

Tomye: You're welcome.

Pamela: So, I'll just do a real quick introduction myself. I'm Pamela Ybañez, I am new to the Oakland Asian Cultural Center as the Facilities and Rentals Coordinator. I've been in Oakland since 2007 and I'm a practicing artist. I struggle to keep making art, but it does somehow keep going. And I feel really blessed to have the history that I have in the Bay Area in the arts. I've worked with Pallavi in the past and I'm super excited to get to know Tomye more. I was very curious, you know, as an Asian – I'm a Filipina that was born outside of the US, and I've been in, my favorite thing— why I chose the Bay Area to live in— was because of its diversity. So I'm very curious about the history between how Pallavi and Tomye met each other and if you guys could talk about that.

Pallavi: I'm a first-generation immigrant from India. When I moved to San Francisco Bay Area in, I think 2001, I immediately started looking for like-minded people, creative people. And it was at this time that I joined a few art organizations, I became a member of [the] National Pen Women Bay Area chapter, which included a group of very accomplished women artists and writers. I met Tomye there and immediately became friends with her. We were part of several art shows together at that time. In her company I have learned a lot about America—being an immigrant, a first-generation immigrant— about her lived experiences of the time even before when I was born. She also curated one of my solo shows in the past – it was titled "Traveling Tale in Oakland". And then after that I got busy with my life, raising two boys, with my art practice. But when [the] pandemic hit and I was conceiving the second iteration of my curatorial project, "Dhai Akhar: Seeded in Love," which centered around radical power of love and Asian American solidarity, I reached out to Tomye again, I reconnected with her and invited her to be my collaborator. I have gained so much in her loving company. Thank you so much Tomye for everything I have learned from you and your kindness and humanity which you carry with you.

Tomye: Thank you Pallavi. It's mutual. As Pallavi said, we did meet at the Bay Area branch of the National League of American Pen Women and unfortunately, typically, not too many people, women of color are in the branch. And I think it's a natural thing that people kind of gravitate towards people who are somewhat like themselves, so that was a very much definitive thing that I did when I saw Pallavi. And as she said, she's probably, perhaps, two decades younger than I am, maybe three. [laughs] And just looking at a younger woman who was so involved in wanting to learn more about American culture and I had no idea she was a first-generation immigrant here, because my family's been here for a while, and their family, and so on so forth. But I think that what really, more so than just being a person of color, was just— she is so enthusiastic about everything, and I just gravitate towards people who are so involved and so wanting to learn so much about what's going on, and not just doing lip service but actually getting in there and getting involved. And as she said, she's done a number of shows, and I also curate shows, and so we've kind of been back and forth with each other in curating a show that she may be in, a show that I've done, and I may be in a show that she's done. But her work, I find, is so insightful and fantastic. She does installation artwork and it's really a must see. Any time you see her name associated with a show, that she's showing her artwork, people should go to it.

Pamela: I would love to hear more about the work that you two do.

Tomye: I'm very much into portraiture cause I find it fascinating to look at people and realize that we talk about billions and billions and billions of people and yet none of us looks exactly alike, not even twins. And I just recently stopped teaching youngsters, I had been teaching youngsters for forever, and I was actually employed with the City of Oakland as a visual artist for 18 years. And it was primarily for youth and adults, and a Studio One art center in Oakland. And one of the things I found very fascinating

was when I retired from there, I was also teaching at a community center, and we had twin boys that were about eight or nine years old. And kids, being kids, as I said when I was precocious, I don't remember it but I'm quite sure I got picked on. And so these kids, these two boys, they're sweet, they're cute, the whole package, but kids invariably said things trying to figure out which one was which. And sometimes they weren't kind. So I would teach the kids specific things to look for so that they wouldn't do such non-wonderful things to these boys. So I said, don't say "oh that one has on a blue shirt and that one has a green shirt so that must be that one and that must be that one," talking about their names. The thing to look for is how they look, you know, look at their features, look at what's different about their features. One had a tiny little mole, and the kids finally recognized, "Oh yeah, such-and-such one has a tiny little mole." Things you can't change that readily. And so that's the kind of thing that I like to have people be aware of as we develop and see. Don't just look at the surface, don't look at what we are wearing, and conclude that somebody is whatever because of what they have on, but really get to know people. I think that this whole movement of people being in solidarity and understanding the way that we get to be more humane is to look into people's hearts and heads. Not just what they physically present to us, you know. So being a portrait artist has kind of eased me into a very interesting – now it's more about collaboration with people like Pallavi and other people and other groups who are really trying to make sure that we don't just go down the rabbit hole of all of the nonsense that's happening, you know? We really need to step back, reeducate ourselves, and embrace one another, because basically we all want good things for ourselves and for other people.

Pamela: I'm also curious, like in terms of the—you also make paintings, I've seen some of your paintings, and you work in other mediums as well?

Tomye: Yes, I work in gouache, which is like a thicker watercolor, and also in fused glass. What I do is called coldworking, you take solid glass that you usually see in church windows, and you take that glass and cut it up into whatever you would like as far as a design, and put it in a kiln. And you turn on the heat and decide how long it's going to be in there and how much heat it requires and then let it cool off. And a day later you open it up and see what you have.

Pamela: Yeah, thank you for sharing that. Pallavi, would you like to share about your work?

Pallavi: Also, just like Tomye said, I have been working in different art mediums from very early on. I was born in a family—my mom is an artist, she's a theater actor, my father is a print maker, and the whole family, we were involved in theater from the very beginning. So when I came to [the] Bay Area, when I came to [the] US, there was a sense of loss, loss of community. I started thinking more about home, nostalgia, and started thinking "what is the meaning of home?" from [the] very beginning. And there was a dire sense of finding a sense of belonging. And that's why in most of my work, you'll see that there is a collaborative aspect to it where I collaborate with my neighborhood people, my community, people who are struggling, people who have stories to tell. In many of my works, I gathered shoes, I gathered stories from people. I tried to learn about their immigration stories and tried to create a community where I can have this sense of belonging. I, at the same time, joined different art organizations, different collaborative groups, different collectives. AAWAA, Asian American Women Artist Association is one of them. Very early on in coming to [the] Bay Area, I joined AAWAA and to [this] date, it's a big part of my everyday life. AAWAA has a big role in making me who I am today. And also, by creating a collaborative work, creating a socially engaged art practice, it was also to create a space for each other where we can love, nourish each other. And the result was very transformative and healing. And [the] same stance for

my curatorial work and pedagogy. Love is essential, as we all know, in building humanity. It's crucial to create space for stories to be shared and discussed. Almost eight years back, I founded Inner Eye ArtS, it's a nonprofit art organization in San Ramon where I live. It works for the visibility of Asian American multidisciplinary artists. Since 2014, we collaborate with artists, our local community, by curating art shows, performances, lectures, and workshops to create a safe space for critical conversations and connections. But I want to make it clear that when I say visibility, I mean it must include complexities of what it means to be Asian American and Asian American narratives, which continuously— it should dismantle the stereotypes and confront the mainstream perspective which often projects Asian Americans as a monolith and timeless. So with that intention, I founded Inner Eye ArtS, and we are curating shows and programs which can dismantle and understand what is “otherness” and how it perpetuates differences and wedges between communities.

Pamela: I wanna kind of talk now specifically about arts and activism as combined. You know, it's hard for us, I think as artists, to separate our lives out. Things we're passionate about seem to just seep in together. And I wanted to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement and also the hate crimes that have been going on, and just kind of your relationships with both of those things that are happening simultaneously.

Tomye: I just wanted to start out with saying that, you know, it's interesting when I talk about referencing. How does one learn what is accurate or truthful or what we're being told? It's, I think, very important for all of us to not just get involved on social media—which is taking on such a strong hold with a lot of younger people— [and] that you go deeper and look through, even if it has to be books, or if you're going to use the web to look for something that's more credible and held up as a reliable source to understand what truly is happening. Because we can be misled so easily because of the reliance on so much of what has become popular, and this whole movement of popularity versus reality. Or I shouldn't even use the word reality anymore because that's been co-opted. But just the idea of: we really need to learn about the basics of what's really going on. So one of the things that was an impetus for me was when I first learned about the Grapes movement—well, I shouldn't call it a movement— I thought that Cesar Chavez was the main person involved with that whole movement of getting correct amounts of money for the people who were picking grapes, giving them lodging, all of the things we take for granted that we don't even think about when we're buying a bag of grapes. And when I started reading other information, it turned out that it was a Filipino man who started the whole thing, Larry Itliong – if that's the correct way to pronounce it.

Pamela: Yep. Mmhm.

Tomye: And I thought, I've never heard of him. And this is the thing that happens with a lot of movements. Someone is raised up to be the voice, the face, the everything about a movement, but then you don't know all of the people who are behind it, who really started it, who really propelled it, and who put it, basically, in legislation on the map. So it's one of the key things that helps me to when I do my projects, even though some of them might seem lightweight as far as the paintings or the glass references. I try to make sure they have some credibility, that someone will be more engaged and look at it and go beyond it and say “Wow, I wonder why she put that in her painting” and actually look it up and find out information. And so that's that, and there was a reference of Vincent Chin in our more recent history in the 1980s, which is when I moved here in the Bay Area in 1974. So that's pretty current for me, 1982. And if I think about what I was doing in 1982, the one time that I had a job that had

nothing to do with art was from 1980 to 1990, when I was working as a receptionist in the law department of PG&E. But I still was doing my art. Like you said Pamela, sometimes it becomes challenging to do your art because you have to do other things. Working at PG&E, which was the only time of 10 years of my lifetime that I had a job that had nothing whatsoever to do with art, but I was able to show my art. PG&E- this is the San Francisco site, the main headquarters of PG&E. I was working as a receptionist in the law department, and it afforded me access to attorneys, which consequently afforded me people who had more discretionary money so I could show my art and sell it. So that's kind of a byproduct of what we're talking about, but just the idea of how every situation that you're in, if you stay open you learn something that actually can enrich your art. And that was a very wonderful thing for me, even though I never expected it, that lawyers are human beings too and they have their various approaches to life and their biases and their whatever, and you start to learn about people and how can you persuade people. And visual art is such a great way to persuade people to change their minds. That is one of the best gifts I have ever really believed that God has given me, is the ability to do art and then use it in such a way that it can make people open up and think about different ways that people can interpret things.

Pamela: Can you give us an example of that? Like of how visual art has changed people.

Tomye: Well even right now, with this thing about COVID and vaccinations. I don't think that it's a great thing for us to divide ourselves as a people—have different camps as they like to call us— and say that these are vaxxers, these are non-vaxxers. These are people who don't believe in science, these are people who do believe in science. Because ultimately, we're all still working on other people's stories, other people's histories, and that word itself – his-stories, which has now become questionable, we should not give people a hard time if they think that there's been a manipulation of truth. Because we know – that we know, we know people don't always tell the truth. With a society that tries to be democratic, which is what we're living in, there is the knowledge of knowing if you tell a people too much that's negative, it's going to disrupt their emotions. People have to hold back on different things, people have to manipulate what they say to you. So ultimately, all that wraps up to say that I have done a couple of images to just say that we just need to be at peace and stop all this division. And for some people, they feel comfortable telling me that they're not going to get a vaccination. Getting the message out is basically what we do. We're tellers, we're visual tellers of story, as opposed to performers or other people that they now lump in and call artists. What's needed—we need to understand that most people are trying to live a life and be in the present, understand the past, use what's useful from the past and move their life forward in a positive way. And that's mainly where I am.

Pamela: Pallavi, would you like to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement and the anti-Asian hate crimes?

Pallavi: Yes, yes, most definitely. You know I totally, as Tomye was saying about her art practice, I totally align with that — that my art practice is also my tool to understand protest and align. As I said, I came to America almost 25 years back with my own set of prejudices, fear[s], hopes, and dreams. I needed to educate myself, dismantle and decolonize through a set of practices, and still keep checking myself every step of the way so that I don't repeat the same mistakes. This also means that to keep myself open to receive, learn, and also share my own experiences to heal from my own wounds and be loving and kind to oneself. I read somewhere— it was a long time back—that the things you do for the society, you also do it for yourself. And what you do for yourself, you also do it for your society. So during the

pandemic, I did two projects: “Dhai Akhar: Seeded in Love,” which we just talked a little bit about. It was a visual art showcase featuring [the] work of 12 Asian American and African American artists at Lindsay Dirx Brown Gallery in San Ramon, which was inspired by the writings of medieval Indian saint-poet Kabir Das and writings of bell hooks on [the] power of radical love. It created space for people who are on margins to dismantle stereotypes, prejudices we hold against each other. It included collaborative and participatory art project by youth and community to curate spaces to talk specifically about issues which impact both Black and Asian people. Along with “Dhai Akhar: Seeded in Love,” I also coordinated a community event and project last year which was titled “Breathing Free Together” by San Ramon Social Justice Collective. This portable art showcase [is] regularly displayed at local schools, justice fairs, and public spaces. It included artworks by residents of San Ramon. It was so heartwarming to see artworks by a small kid of 5-years-old as well as [an] 80-year-old grandma talking about what race, equity, and justice means to them. And the whole organization, San Ramon Social Justice Collective, was born, inspired by the BLM movement and thinking [about] anti-Asian, the hate crimes, which were emerging, was rapidly growing at that time. So I think both the projects were kind of creating a platform, to talk about, align myself with BLM, as well as talk about anti-Asian hate crimes and how to create that space where we can, again, understand the complexities of the problem and not avoid them. But kind of a very healing and transformative space where we can listen to each other more, and also like speak up to give a voice to everybody. So, kind of, again, community building. It was true art. So art becomes a tool for understanding each other.

Pamela: That sounds really powerful to create a space for that. That show that you organized and Tomye also took part in sounded so great, and I wish it could have been moved around and shown in different locations and gotten more visibility, right? But that is the key, is to start in our own communities and then go outwards. And when it grows organically like that, it’s wonderful. I am curious about this model minority myth and how, Pallavi, you feel that it may have harmed our community.

Pallavi: I’m always definitely, oh my god [laughs]. Yeah, I teach [an] Asian American Narratives class at CCA in [the] Critical Ethnic Studies program. As you said, it’s a myth. A myth that government and media started perpetuating during the Cold War to point out how Asian American communities are model minority citizens who are portrayed as smarter and more successful than other minorities groups such as African Americans who are portrayed as not doing so well. This narrative, this whole narrative, kind of harms not only African Americans but also Asian Americans. It creates a wedge between them. And also, it ignores the racial violence and discrimination that Black Americans have faced in this country. It suggests that Black Americans could be just as successful as Asian Americans if they were law-abiding, peace-loving, courteous people living quietly in society. Secondly, it’s also harmful to Asian American communities who are not doing so well. As an example, if you see the statistics, many Asian American communities are financially lagging behind. They face poverty. Model minority myth lumps all Asians into one group and portrays them as a monolith, which ignores, again, intra-ethnic diversity. I think we need to understand that there is a great educational, linguistic, cultural variability which Asian American communities hold. When we talk about [the] model minority myth, we overlook all of these problems, which impact adversely Asian American communities. We need to understand that when we talk about Asian American communities, it entails ethnic groups from more than 40 countries, I believe. Making them homogenous is to deny their identity, to ignore problems specific to their communities. These groups do not receive any kind of help and support, which they need and deserve. Also we know that any kind of social stratification can impact individual lives—the sheer pressure to fill the mold, to live up

to the mark— it can create social pressures and can impact the mental wellbeing of individuals, and also create stigma to not talk about it. For example, that “all Asian American groups are high achievers,” prevents some from receiving necessary resources and support, particularly within the academic setting. This can cause great psychological distress. I have seen this firsthand during my career, right, teaching in academia.

Tomye: Well I was just thinking Pamela, when I mentioned Vincent Chin and the one paragraph that I want to reference is: in 1982, the senseless murder of Vincent Chin while doing what would have furthered his life journey by getting married, okay, he was going to celebrate with somebody. A few white men mistook him for Japanese. Now, this is 1982 that this happened. And the Japanese war had not just ended then. It had happened long ago. And yet the hatred that people would harbor for years and years and years after certain things have happened and not rationalize what they were about to do. I think that’s the most heinous thing that a human being can do to another human being. That because you think that somebody is something. As Pallavi said, that you talk about one particular group of people, but if you say Muslim, that doesn’t— you’re embracing a whole lot of different cultures, a whole lot of different people, from a lot of different countries. And people are so limited or allow themselves to be so limited in their scope, that they would harbor ill-will for something that makes no sense. And here’s this man who’s going to get married, and they kill him, and they get off, they get a small fine and they get off, and it just reminded me of the Black Lives movement, and Black Lives Matter, because it’s nothing new. It’s the interesting thing when I mentioned social media and cellphones [laughs]. If it wasn’t for cellphones, it would still be things going on like this that would be hidden. We now have practically every other person having a cell phone that can whip it out and take a video and that has been a saving grace for a lot of people. And that shouldn’t be. That just should not be. But it is fortunately existing, and it has created not only Black Lives Matter, but you have Asians for Black Lives, you have different groups who are grouping together and they’re making a point of ‘We need to stay in solidarity and change the mindset of a lot of people.’ It’s not just one person. We have one person in a country who decided that he wanted to take over another country, this is happening right now. One person. But that one person would not have been successful if the other people who got into the tanks, the trucks, the airplanes, said ‘No. We’re not going to do this.’ So unfortunately, we have a lot of people whose minds we have to change. Pallavi said it very well. It’s not lumping everybody together and saying, ‘Oh yeah, the model citizen.’ If you’re going to say someone’s a model citizen as a person of color is the Asians. Because there’s a lot— there’s Koreans, Japanese, all these different countries all jammed up together and called Asian Americans. And they’re not all the same. They don’t act all the same. They don’t look all the same. There’s a lot of education that has to be done, and our visual art is one powerful way of doing it.

Pamela: Yeah, I agree with that. And I have to think about living in— when I lived in Hawaii, just learning the history of how when those workers on the plantations, they would divide up the groups of people, right, and in [doing that], that’s how they maintained their power. And then they created this Hawaiian pidgin English language that kind of united them and they could communicate together, and that’s when their lives began to be able to improve because they worked together. It’s just so obvious and yet with having that knowledge and then putting it into practice, and working towards that goal, is really important. And so I think about the police reform versus defunding the police, and I’m just curious what your thoughts on this topic are.

Tomye: For me, there needs to be a level of defunding because anytime you have a city, and I'll use Oakland as an example since I worked for the City of Oakland for years. If a city has 80% of its budget going towards one entity, which is the police department, there is something wrong with that. I mean, you might as well say that it's a police state. If you have 80% of your budget going to one entity and that entity happens to be the so-called security of the people, what does that say? And I have always found that a very hard swallow. There is the need to drop that somewhat. I'm not saying they should be like totally no money; I mean obviously we need police. Because I was just looking at— this is going to be an aside, but I was just looking at a Netflix, I only subscribe to one streaming. I don't have a lot of money; I don't want to spend a lot of money supporting companies, so I have Netflix. And I was watching a movie, and the guy even said – Why is it that people, when something happens, the first thing they think about is calling 911 and the police? And yes, naturally, if you're in a situation where you feel like you're threatened, who you gonna call? The police. So I'm not saying that we should not have police, we have some horrible, horrible people existing amongst us. But what I'm suggesting is that where we can alleviate some of what we know is going to be ongoing situations. With people who are even more with situations that they can't handle, and they stress out and they conk out and do things that they don't deliberately want to do, then we need social services to take care of that. If we perpetuate war like we keep doing, and I'm saying we globally, people are going to come back warped. You can't watch that kind of scenario and come back and still be a whole person. So they need social services. There's so many other situations that we are perpetuating. We've got men that go to jail and men, as people know, men have a difficulty with not wanting to let themselves go, as far as sexually or whatever. And it seems like it's off topic, but if you put men with men, they have to have a release. So we're creating a situation that doesn't make sense— to put a whole bunch of men together and we don't really consider what natural outcomes are going to happen. So then you have men coming out of that situation and they need help. Because they were, more or less, they couldn't afford a lawyer, or they did a petty job, but they got some ridiculous something as far as their guilt put on them, and they spent more time in jail than normal, or in prison, than normal for that particular crime. So they come out and they're warped. So we have all these different situations that we're creating that [are] not aligned with what should be a humane and just type of community, and we're aggravating it by having the police be the ones to supposedly take care of it when they can't take care of it. That's not their job. So that's my thing about the funding that they use.

Pallavi: And I do feel the same, that we do need not only to reform, but to restructure and relocate funds to the community-based organizations, agencies who have deeper understanding of the problems and who deal with people with more kindness and love. I don't have expertise in this, but I do see [the] viability and importance of it. Maybe like, interracial solidarity, restorative justice, you know the groups who are geared towards that, they can be of great help in another kind of structure, which is not so much white-centered.

Pamela: If those resources are used in other ways, right, then you create much more support for the citizens, and creating jobs and housing and healthcare, everything gets better. And then the crises can decrease. I feel like it's continually using a failed system that just keeps not working. Most of you have this history together, and I think it's wonderful that you have this continued friendship, and you work together making art and doing shows. Where else do you see in our communities, directly or even at large, where there are Black and Asian communities coming together?

Tomye: Sorry, similar to what Pallavi was saying, there's lots of organizations who are making an effort to cross the border, collaborate, and understand. The Asian Cultural Center reaches out and does various things with various communities. There's different Hispanic and Latin places, like Eastside Alliance, who are working in reaching out and understanding that we need to not just be aware of our own. Because it's now almost in the face of anybody who is conscientious, as far as community, community organizations, there's a lot of cross-collaboration going on right now. If it's a Latino group, they're doing Latino and something else, some other obvious different culture, and mixing it up. It's needed. Because we're living in these silos, and it allows for you to think that these things are only affecting your group but they're not. What's happening with Asians— when Asians started migrating over here, the government was not kind to them either. I mean, it's a horrible history. It's not just Blacks, it's just terrible. And some people are trying to make a point of rectifying it, thankfully, in the political arena, but it's happening very slowly, there's not enough being done soon enough. So that we have these things that are happening where if people had been very attentive— what's happening with Ukraine and Russia would've never happened. That's just unconscionable. We should have learned our lesson, but the unfortunate thing that as I grow older, I'm realizing, is that it takes three decades for a baby to become what is considered an adult. That means that every third decade is being repeated because of that. Because that child, as they grew up and became an adult, depending on where they are with regard to if they want knowledge or not, and whether they want to seek their knowledge, they will either be dependent on their immediate family, and that means passed down stories and activities and whatever of that family. So, if you have a family that's racist, and that's where that that child is getting their arc of knowledge, then you've perpetuated it. It's not going to change. Because once somebody's thirty, it's very difficult to switch unless they consciously decide to do it. Outside forces are really hard to penetrate— it's like taking a hose with a spring of water just coming gently out and hitting a rock. It's just lightly touching the rock. It's not going to penetrate the rock. The rock has to decide it's going to move or relocate or whatever, or allow itself to break down and that kind of thing. That's why we always see these cyclical situations. We're having new people come aboard, and depending on where they're getting their information from, it really colors their thoughts. It's a very interesting process, and I think that as you get older, and you can spend more time thinking about things as opposed to when you're younger and you're just out there doing stuff, it really makes a difference of what conclusions that you come to.

Pallavi: To me, it's also everyday learning and practice to create deep connections in the neighborhood. In our backyard, along with historic moment[s] which [have] happened in the past, which shook and impacted, and at times, overturned the racist policies which barred Asian Americans— 'no Asian immigrants coming to this country' — many of such facts are overlooked and not remembered by the mainstream media and policymakers and government because it's not beneficial for them. I would love to hear more such stories which can heal the wounds and bring both the communities together. You know, during the pandemic, we saw the trope of Black and Asian conflict, it reignited. So fortunately, we are seeing more and more Asian American collectives, [organizations] working and supporting each other, coming in solidarity with each other and setting aside their differences. And most importantly, also working to understand the history and the systems of inequality that positioned them there in the first place.

[outro music plays]

Akemi: This podcast was produced with the support of the Gingko Fund, the Asian Pacific Fund, and the Awesome Foundation. Special thanks to Jaide Lin for recording and editing this episode. Wanna suggest future guests? Email us at programs@oacc.cc.

[outro music concludes]