

Filipino American Farmworkers Oral History Project

Oral History Interview  
with  
**Isao Fujimoto, PhD**

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Welga! Filipino American Labor Archives  
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RODRIGUEZ: First of all, I just wanted to thank you so much for giving us your time, Isao. So just to give you a background to review it: what we're doing today is an oral history that's part of a project that's called The Welga! Project, Filipino American stories of the great grape strike of 1965. Really, the aim of the project is to bring Filipinos leadership and participation and the strike to light because, of course, we know it's not something that lots of people know about. In fact, part of what inspired us to launch this project is that, it was maybe last year or two years now, when AB 123 was actually signed into law that was a piece of California legislation that basically mandates the teaching of Filipinos' contributions to the farm workers' struggle. So part of what we want to be able to do is to actually create a digital archive that houses all sorts of material related to the strike: strike pamphlets, any kind of articles about the strike during that period of time, pictures of buttons, as well as oral interviews with people who were inspired by the strike - people who participated in the strike so that we can have a repository for educators to be able to go to. Something that's completely public and accessible so that educators can really have these resources at hand. Actually what we're going to be doing, in addition to building the archive, is that we're going to create a teacher's resource guide. So we got on our team a teacher who's been teaching at the high school level, actually at Gerald and my old high school, Logan High

School in Union City. So he actually was one of the people behind the renaming of our middle school. So the middle school where we both went is now being renamed Philip Vera Cruz - Larry Itliong Middle School. So we have a teacher on board who's going to also help us make sure we can create a resource guide that conforms with the whole new common core that everybody has to conform to.

RODRIGUEZ: So I wanted to talk to you, especially I know you've been really supportive of migrant worker's rights for a very, very long time. And I got really excited when you talked about the fact that Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong had actually come in to speak in some of the early classes. Before we go into some that, part of what we want to be able to do is just start off having you talk about yourself. Just a little bit about your own background: when you were born, where did you grow up, and, ultimately, what made you decide to teach Asian American Studies?

FUJIMOTO: Alright, sure. I grew up on the Yakima Indian reservation.

RODRIGUEZ: Oh, you did! Washington.

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, this was in southeastern Washington. The reason I grew up on a reservation because of Alien Land Laws. The Alien Land Laws were passed to stop farming by immigrants in Japan. Immigrants in Japan were very successful farmers, but instead of being praised they got attacked and then it came into the form of these laws that said people who could not qualify for citizenship cannot lease or buy land. No immigrant from Asia could become a citizen of the United States until 1952, because of the

McCarran Act. So this meant Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese - those are the main Asian immigrants to the Second World War. So on the Yakama reservation area, there are about over a hundred immigrant families of Japan. And they were farming on the reservation land around the town of Wapato, Toppenish and Yakama. There were a lot of Filipinos in the area also, there were doing most of the farm labor work. Today, I've been back there a number of times and the big Filipino hall, there's a big Filipino community in the Valley. So that's where I grew up.

RODRIGUEZ: Do you mind telling us when you were born?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, I was born in Wapato, Washington in September 1933. So I'm 81, I'll be 82 this year. When the war came, all the Japanese families in the area got evacuated and sent to different camps. We got sent to the Portland Assembly Center, then we got sent to Hart Mountain and later our family got sent to Tulelake, California. So that was my introduction to California.

[5:05]

FUJIMOTO: People come for all kinds of reasons to California, but I came into a concentration camp. Instead of going back into the Yakima Valley, my father got a job on the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and we came to Pleasanton, CA. Pleasanton is in Alameda County. My parents live in San Ramon now so I know very well where it is.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, my parents live in San Ramon now so I know very well where it is.

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, so we started there and then started getting the Japanese ethnic papers published in San Francisco and there was an ad for farmers, share

crops, strawberries in the Santa Clara Valley. And so my father responded to that, we ended up in a little town called Madrone, its south of San Jose and the next biggest town is Morgan Hill. There was a Driscoll's strawberry company and almost all the farmers were people who got released from the concentration camp. There must've been, easily, a hundred Japanese families just released into camp working for Driscoll's strawberry. So I went to 8th grade in Madrone, then went to high school in Morgan Hill. After high school I went to UC Berkeley, I was there from '51 to '55. That was my first experience being in a place where there's a big mixture of people because, from the town of Yakama reservation to the camps to the strawberry farms, it was pretty much all Japanese immigrant families.

FUJIMOTO: And then when I went to Berkeley, things just opened up because I met all kinds of different people. I got involved in a lot of projects and one of them was a project that was started at Berkeley to make contact with a student movement in Indonesia. So I got in on that, I was the chair of the delegation, and that was my first opportunity to go to another country.

RODRIGUEZ: Why Indonesia? Why was there interest in Indonesia?

FUJIMOTO: Well, because Indonesia was a new country. They had, just after the war, a revolution against the Dutch. It was a new country in Asia. In fact, many of the new places in Asia became independent of their colonial rulers. Like India became independent, and Burma also was part of it, there was war going on in Vietnam. In fact, when I went to Indonesia I went by way of

Europe because there were five of us on a team plus a professor. One of my colleagues was very active in a program called World University Service. World University Service was a project that was raising funds to help out college students in many war-torn countries, especially in Europe. They had a conference in Oxford University so he invited me to come along. So I went to Oxford with him and I got to travel, I was hitchhiking around Europe and the rest of the team arranged a meeting in Singapore.

FUJIMOTO: So after I finished the conference and traveled around Europe, I got on a plane and the plane stopped in Rome, this is 1954. There was some kind of athletic event in Europe. The entire gymnastic team from Japan got on this flight, they were very boisterous. I sat next to a man who was crying and when he calmed down I asked him if I can get him something like water or something. He said, "No, I'm okay." I asked him what was upsetting him and he said, "I just came back from a conference in Geneva. I'm now going back to a country that's been divided into two". His name was Truong Von Do, he was the representative for the southern part of Vietnam - the northern part was represented by Ho Chi Minh. So 1954, what was happening was that the French got defeated at Dien Bien Phu; Vietnam was another country that was becoming independent. So all of this is happening in the '50s. When I went to Indonesia as a new country, they had defeated the Dutch - so now they're independent. So there was real interest in terms of all these changes going on in the world, particularly in Asia. And I remember UCLA sending a team to what was called Pakistan, India and

Ceylon, which is now Sri Lanka. So people in Berkeley also was interested in making these kind of contact with the student movement. It's called the Cal-Indo Project, I got involved in the Cal-Indo Project. I didn't realize, but I was the chair of the delegation. That experience really opened things up for me. I went to Europe medical school after my junior year, but I realized I was in the wrong field.

[10:00]

FUJIMOTO: And so, mutual agreement, I left medical school and I went back home. When I went back home, I coached little league and a coach from the little league said, "Why don't you apply for a job? We have a grammar school in the country, it's called [Machado]. It's a one [room] school house and they wanted a teacher who was also a principal." So I applied for the job, and it turned out I went to another conference and when I came back they had to hire another person with a credential, I didn't have a credential at all. So that made me decide to go to San Jose State (University) and get a teaching credential. So from '55-56 I was working on a credential, but I had to get a job so I became a probation officer for San Mateo County. The probation juvenile hall, it was a night shift for me, 11 at night till 7 in the morning. My job: kids get picked up for crime, I have to book them and find a place for them in juvenile hall. I did that for a whole year and then I got my credential, but then I got drafted, a notice came. So I ended up in the army and I got sent to a number of places. And I became a medic, trained at the port in San Antonio, Texas. I spent a year and a half, two years, in Korea as

a U.S. Army correspondent. When I came back, because I had a science background, I was going to Stanford for a masters, but I got a job at San Jose High School teaching Chemistry and Biology. The important thing that happened while I was in Korea, in 1957 the Soviet Union sent Sputnik. When Sputnik went up and I came back home, I found people scared. They were saying, “What are we going to do to beat the Russians?” And the answer was, at the national level, “We’re going to have to beef up our science programs in high school.” And because I was teaching hard science in high school, I got all these brochures about universities all over the country running institutes for science teachers so we can improve the program.

FUJIMOTO: There are three different biology programs color coded red, blue or yellow; ecological approach, molecular approach and regular natural-science approach. There was an effort to teach in UMass (University of Massachusetts) and Physics and Chemistry was being changed. 1960, I got this brochure and one of the things I remotely remember was when I was in the concentration camps. One group that was really helpful was the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), that’s a Quaker group. I remember how important civil rights was and social justice. So even though there was a revolution in science because space age was opening up, there was also an effort to work on social justice. And I felt that, in addition to learning science, it was just as important to learn about civil rights. So among all these brochures, I decided to go to a black school, I

went to Howard University, it's in Washington D.C., I was in a program, it was all Afro-American teaching in segregated schools in the south with an exception of two or three people.

[15:07]

FUJIMOTO: There are two, ones from Chicago, I think there was another guy from New Hampshire, and myself. We were the only non-blacks and every day I would learn something about what was a situation that people were really up against. I met this one guy who was an All-American football player, he went to Langston Hughes, a black college in Oklahoma. He picked up a guy in Texas and I said, "How did you get here?" He said, "We drove non-stop from Texas to Washington D.C.".

FUJIMOTO: That's like 1500 miles or so. I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Well we stopped for gas and we asked for a restroom and the guy said, 'There's one for you guys over there, but it's busted'." He said, "We didn't want to raise any questions because if he didn't like us, we would've been framed for rape." So that was the climate of the country in 1960. I learned a whole bunch of other things from other people there. They were recycling litmus paper. Litmus, here, you just throw away, but in black schools they had 1/25th the funds for teaching at the same school non-black schools had in the district - this was in Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. I went back home and the next year, this was my 3rd year at San Jose High (School), and I applied for a one year program. Cornell had a program in Biology, so I applied for that. So I could say that it was Sputnik that got me into

Cornell because all these change going on in the country and these institutes opened up for science teachers. I went to Cornell. When I was at Cornell, I was teaching there for one year, but during that one year I got to know a lot more. First of all, it's the east coast. East coast is very different than west, people are much more formal. I found people wearing neckties to class, you never do that in California. There was a lot to learn by sticking around.

FUJIMOTO: I got involved in a project to take Cornell students to Honduras, Central America, on a literacy project. It was the 2nd year of this project, the project went on for about 5 to 6 years. I would say a good 150 people took part of it altogether. We had a team of 8 in this one village. On my way back, I decided there's a lot more to learn if I stay at Cornell. So I wrote back to San Jose High and told them, "I want to say, I want to resign my position." And so I stayed at Cornell and I got into a different program, it was in Rural Sociology. And they had a program in the Philippines—

RODRIGUEZ: I almost went to that program for my PhD.

FUJIMOTO: Is that right? Oh, Wow. What got your attention to that program?

RODRIGUEZ: Well, you know, I was interested in Rural Sociology also. I've had an interest in land issues too.

FUJIMOTO: Is that right? Okay. So that was a year, when I went into the program for a couple of years that's when Cornell started a program in the Philippines. They were going to get people, especially from Los Banos because the College of Agriculture was there, they come to Cornell to get the PhD. And

in return, they would send Cornell students to do fuel work in the Philippines and finish up their PhD.

FUJIMOTO: I was in the first group of people and I lived in Los Banos for about a year and a half. My project was how to get a measure of where any community was in terms of its growth or develop stage. And so I ended up studying every town in three provinces: Mindoro, Initao and Laguna in Cotabato and then I got the information from every city. At that time in 1964-65, there are about 35 incorporated cities in the Philippines. So I got to know the whole country very well. I came back to Cornell to finish up, but what happened was Davis connected with me, I got recommended by a professor who knew a professor at Davis who was starting a new program. They wanted somebody to start teaching Community Development. So I got recruited and asked to come early and I came in the spring of 1967 before I finished up my dissertation. When I got here, one of the first things I did was try to get a sense of the valley.

[20:00]

FUJIMOTO: So I took a trip making contact with different organizations and the ones I really wanted to see was the American Friends Service Committee because I knew they were doing very good work with community action and social justice. The FSU was very involved in the Delano grape strike and so I went to Delano also. At that time in '67 the grape strike was in the 2nd year already because it started in September '65. They were picketing Giumarra grape yard and somebody gave me a sign. I don't know if it was Dolores

Huerta, somebody gave me a sign. So I was at the picket line.

RODRIGUEZ: So you were on the picket lines?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, Giumarra. As a result, when I got back I got called by a union organizer, Pancho Botello in Yuba City, Marysville because Davis was not seen as friendly to farm workers. It was seen as “on the other side”. So when I came down there, right away word got around that somebody at Davis who was helpful.

RODRIGUEZ: Was he a farm labor organizer?

FUJIMOTO: Farm workers organizer, yeah. So I got this call and I had this conversation. Pancho was saying, “Can you help us out? We got a problem.” So I was like, “What’s the problem?” He said, “Well the school board in that area stopped the bus service to the farm labor camp. So our kids have to walk - it was highway 99 - a major highway and is very dangerous.” So I said, “Give me a couple days to find out what kind of resources are around here and I’ll get back to you.” I was new here, this was very early. It must’ve been ‘67 - I came here ‘67 so it could’ve been ‘68. There was no transportation system in Davis, public transportation.

FUJIMOTO: There’s no taxi company either, but there was some creative student body leaders, Bob Black was the student [by] president. So I called Bob up and told him about the situation. At that time Bob Black and Rich Creck, who was the vice president, were working on developing a public system transportation for Davis because students were being spread out. Instead of going the conventional route, they called London up and they ordered used

double decker buses from London. They got about a dozen of them. Along with the buses, a mechanic was hired from London. The job was to tune up the buses. They said it wasn't being used so I asked Bob if it was possible to help out the kids so they don't get hurt, release one of the buses. He was very supportive, he said, "Yeah, sure."

FUJIMOTO: So he sent out a driver, newly hired, a guy named Bud Johnson. Bud asked me "Hey, can you get someone to come with me? I don't want to go on a major highway because I don't know if the bus will gain that kind of speed. So I'll take the back roads, but I don't want to hit any low-hanging wire, telephone electric wire." At that time, there was a director at the university extension, his name was Glenn Birch. We were training Peace Corps volunteers from Nepal and when I came to give a talk for my job, I was being interviewed to start new courses in Community Development. Glenn Birch was really enthused, he said, "Dr. Grave, that's what we need." He wants to get Peace Corps volunteers involved too. So he said, "If there's anything you need, let me know. I want to help you out." So I told him, "Well it will really help if I had a teaching assistant to help me work these courses I'm developing." And he said, "Sure". So he got the funds and with the funds he hired a graduate student in Sociology named Molly Freeman. Molly was hired to help me out. So I told Molly what the situation was and asked, "Would you be interested in going with Bud to help out the kids in Yuba City/Marysville?" She said, "Sure", she was very enthused. Now, what happened next was very explosive because the bus attracted a lot of

attention because it was red, double decker and it still had the destination of Buckingham Palace.

FUJIMOTO: So the local radio showman found out about Molly and asked Molly to come on the program. So Molly got on the program and she was asked “Explain why you’re here.” So she told him the nature of the conversation I had and that they didn’t want the kids to get hurt so that this is one way they can help out. So that’s why they were there. What happened was, the growers in the area really got upset that they called the chancellor, Emil Mrak was the chancellor. At that time [the building] was called Administration. Mrak was alive, it wasn’t named for him yet.

[25:10]

FUJIMOTO: Mrak got upset, he had to pacify the growers so he ordered Molly fired. I didn’t hire Molly, it was Glenn Birch. So he got a hold of Glen and told him he better fire her. Glenn was very reluctant, but he had to fire her. So Molly got fired, but Molly didn’t go off crying. In fact, she got mad and she got her friends to organize a picket around the administration building. They had signs saying UC Davis should be helping; research should be developed to help everybody, not just one group of people. That led to a debate in Wyatt Pavilion, it became very controversial because a lot of faculty were very pro-grower. Here, we’re trying to help out farm workers. So the debate had three people, one was Roy Bainer. Roy Bainer was chair of the [Agricultural] Engineering department, and they had just developed the mechanical tomato harvest here, and then Molly and me. So 3 of us

were on this program of 100 different faculty, mostly from the College of Agriculture tuned in. The discussion got reported on the Ag Press, like the California Farmer and other papers. The stories gave lot of credit to the [agriculture] engineers and people working on new technology.

FUJIMOTO: They say this is really advancing harvest for agriculture. Molly and I also made comments that it is very important to have these new technological advances, but we also said that there's also very valuable to pay attention to the social impact of any kind of technology. For example, for tomato harvester not only did it cut down the labor force, but the labor force changed. The people who were sorting tomatoes on the harvester were all women, so it became an all-female workforce. And secondly, the plant breeding department had to develop different kind of tomatoes that were tough enough to not break when the claws hit them. These are examples we gave. So what the Aggie Press said was that our comments were against progress and we're holding agriculture back. And I got poison-pen letters, the director of Ag Extension in San Joaquin County wrote me a letter saying, "You are a persona non grata, don't come to our county." So I say, "Hey, we're on the same faculty and the guy say I can't go to the valley." So that was the situation, I had this connection with UFW, AFSC, all these other groups. This all happened within the first 2 years of my stay at Davis. So from the very beginning, I was in a very rocky place. So that's some background to what happened. At the same time, besides starting the Community Development course, the department, by the way, made a big

change.

FUJIMOTO: When I came for an interview it was still called [Agriculture] Education because Ag Education was a department training people to become high school [agriculture] teachers, but they wanted to broaden it. So it became Applied Behavioral Science. Applied Behavioral Science, then, included the other parts that were in the ag school: Child Development, Home Economics and we're going to start this new Community Development program. So that's what happened. In addition to working on new courses, in 1968, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King got assassinated. So what happened was Mrak called a moratorium, it's 4 days of no classes at all. Everybody got out into the Quad and Wellman Hall to have all these discussions on "What's UC Davis' response". UC Davis is somewhat different from (UC) Berkeley because Berkeley was really involved. They're caught up in issues much quicker, Davis is considered an ag school, more rural and things got done more slowly here. It was rural, it had rural identity. Given this still, Davis has a responsibility to respond to this kind of a crisis. Especially because after King got assassinated, there must have been over 100 cities in America burning up, there were riots and everything. It was called the "Urban Crisis". So what should Davis do to respond to the Urban Crisis?

[30:00]

FUJIMOTO: Out of it came proposals for new kinds of approaches and courses. And out of it came proposals that developed Women Studies, Environmental

Studies, and Ethnic Studies. In 1960, I think it was, different campuses in California started responding. For the Asian Americans, the campuses that really got going were UCLA, Berkeley, San Francisco State and Davis. The reason Davis got involved was we had a conference in Berkeley and I attended that, mainly because I was one of three speakers. A law student named Bryan Tom was in attendance, and he came up to me after I spoke and said, "Look, can we get together and do something, start something in Davis?"

RODRIGUEZ: What was the name of the conference?

FUJIMOTO: It was called-- I don't remember the name of the conference. I think it was called, something like "Asian American Conference" or something like that. In other words, up until that time the word "Asian American" was not used, it was called Oriental Americans or whatever. It was different ethnic groups had their own name. Even at Davis, I should say that unlike today where we have 40-50 different Asian American groups, there's only one Asian American group that I can think of. It's called Sangha club, it was mainly Japanese American Buddhist that was it. So "Asian American", I think it was Yuji Ichioka who made it up. They had a conference and I was asked to come and speak there.

RODRIGUEZ: So the conference had "Asian American" in the title already.

FUJIMOTO: Something like that. The guy that knows is with Ethnic Studies at Sacramento State, he's the one that organized that conference. He knows all about it because he was the one, along with the committee, [who]

invited me to come and speak there.

RODRIGUEZ: So you're saying Brian Tom was a law student at the time.

FUJIMOTO: Brian Tom was a law student.

RODRIGUEZ: At Berkeley or here?

RODRIGUEZ: At Davis. Law School was also very new, it was about the 2nd or 3rd year of the Law School. In fact, I had worked with the first law review because they were doing an issue on farm labor. I was already identified with farm labor, so they asked me for input. Brian said, "Let's get something going." The head of the Sangha Club was a guy named Ray Yokomi. Ray and Brian got together and Ray was very supportive of trying to bring students of Asian background together to a meeting. The meeting came out with a proposal to start one course on just Asian American issues. The group that was formed was called AAC: Asian American Concern. The Asian American Concern then went ahead and organized a class on a whole bunch of issues of Asian American immigration history and all that. That class, to do that, we relied on a number of different people as guest speakers. That course, by the way, had three co-sponsors. The sponsors are Kenny Chang in Anthropology, I'll have to think of this guy's name in History, and myself. The students worked together and we came up with whole bunch of topics. And we had different guest speakers.

[34:29]

FUJIMOTO: I proposed that we get people, also, from the farm labor issue. So that's

where we got both Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz to come to speak. They were in the 3rd year of the strike. That's how I got to know them. Larry did most of the speaking. We might be able to find the first syllabus... I don't recall who the others were, but the first class had the UFW in the program. And the other things that were done that was very interesting was that Jun Olto she organized a field trip to Tulalake concentration camp, this is 1968 - '68 or '69. I think the first class was winter of '69 quarter. Also, out of that class, a group of students organized a field trip and fortunately the class included a person, a Caucasian whose family lived in Tulalake. So they were able to stay at her house and they reported back on it. So it was a very interesting way to get the program going. The other thing that happened was the organization of the Asian American Conference on Davis campus, I spoke at it, and Brian spoke at it. We had a number of people. There was a guy who was a supervisor, he was a Chinese American supervisor for the city of San Francisco. That also happened in '68 or '69. The third thing that happened was a proposal written to the Urban Crisis Fund. See, part of the reaction of a UC system was that all the campuses needed to get involved in dealing with Urban Crisis. So they set up a fund to encourage people to do research on this. Brian wrote it up, we requested funds to develop curriculum material and do research on issues that will be useful for the class. Among the research project was the contribution of Japanese to California agriculture and the impact of the Filipino American community in Stockton. So you can get

information from Lillian Galado.

RODRIGUEZ: Was she a student in doing that research project?

FUJIMOTO: She was a first of many juniors or seniors at the time. She was in my Rural Sociology class also. She's head of the Filipinos for Justice, right?

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, she was my mentor.

FUJIMOTO: Yeah. We had enough money to hire 17 kids for the research. It was called AARP: Asian American Research Project. We had a lot of different people working on different-- including Paul Ong. Paul Ong was very active in the UCLA Asian American Studies. So Paul Ong and Lillian Gallado were 2 of the 17. So that came out of it, so that's the whole background in terms of my experiences in the start of Asian American Studies. Another thing that we did was to start integrating faculty for Asian American Studies because we had funds. One important meeting was between the four people identified with the start of the Ethnic Studies program. It was Jack Forbes, Native American Studies, Ed Turner, he was in Psych, but Afro-American Studies, and there were no Latino professors here so they had Jesus Selabo who was working for the War on Poverty in the Yolo County. He came on as some kind of, I don't know what kind of title he had - field representative. Four of us got together and right away the four of us came up with an agreement. There'd be money coming down and one thing that we noticed that the system does with minorities, they try to make them fight each other. We wanted to avoid that.

FUJIMOTO: The main thing to do was if money comes we divide it equally. Nobody

says it better than the other, we all operate and that's how we did it. So that's why, I think, the beginning of the relation was very good, and we tried to maintain that. And then, I think it was 1970, we had several hires. One was Ben Sol to start teaching Chinese, or I forgot what course he offered.

[40:01]

FUJIMOTO: He hired Peter Leung to start teaching Cantonese because that was a language used in communities. Then we went for a full-time person, and that was George Kagiwada. He was teaching in Canada and he came on board in 1970. I noticed people refer to 1970 as the starting point, but it was important to recognize all the work that was done before 1970 because we're talking about the conference that was held here, the Urban Research Fund, the first class, all that occurred before 1970.

RODRIGUEZ: So the farm workers struggles seems to have been a key part of the curriculum.

FUJIMOTO: It was definitely part of understanding Asian American issues. In other words: they were included in the very beginning. And then, of course, the Filipino issue was very important because that's what Lillian (Galado) and Cabanero worked in the Filipino Stockton community because that's where big concentration of Filipinos were at the time.

RODRIGUEZ: So what was your sense? You know, they have this display of the third

world news and it seems like students were concerned about the strike.

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, that occurred very early too because the ABS (Applied Behavioral Science) department was all in the building, Walker Hall. Oliver Thompson was a chair and he'd get an entire section to Asian American Studies. One of the people who came to see me wanted to start a college newspaper on ethnic issues, his name was Kirkman Lok and he started Third World Forum. So all those things you see are stuff coming out of there. I don't know how long he was editor, maybe 1 or 2 years, but other people took over. There was a guy, Afro-American, Sakura Kone and then helping him was a grad student who graduated Stanford and came to Davis for his masters. He is back teaching at Delta Community College so you can check and see what kind of archives we have on Third World News. There was one of the first hires along with George was Jovina Navarro. I don't know if she's still alive or where she is, but she and George, there were a couple of other people who were among the earlier hires, I don't recall what her interest were. The reason why I got involved with UFW was because my area was Rural Areas so I paid attention to all the rural communities and that was a critical rural issue.

RODRIGUEZ: Was there a lot of student involvement in supporting the strike and then later the boycott? What was your sense?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, I remember a number of conferences. I don't remember when Cesar Chavez came to campus. Right away, I just remember the flack I got, anything UFW I would get the attention and they thought I invited Chavez.

It was somebody else that invited Chavez to be on campus and I don't recall the year he came. There were so many things that happened. Also, I was under a lot of pressure because of the flack I was getting. So I wasn't really as close to all the issues because in 1977, that was 10 years after I came, I was going to get fired along with George (Kagiwada), Peter Leung and David Risling. So the four of us were on the firing block. These were covered in the Third World News, I don't know if there are any old issues that might mention those. So these may not relate directly to UFW or farm workers, but as part of understanding the contribution of the different groups one comment I think worth making about farm workers strike is the example of cross-ethnic solidarity because most people associate the farm workers strike with Mexicans, but that's not the case. It was started by AWOC. AWOC is Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and it was mainly Ilocanos and Pangasinan workers because they were the dominant group of workers. The Mexicans were kind of hesitant, but once the Filipinos got it going the National Farm Workers Association, NFWA was the Mexican group, got together and eventually that union got symbolized as United Farm Workers. But there was a 3rd group, there was a guy in Sociology, Ed Frelander, wrote a story about it. He told me that the first strike signs that went up were not in Ilocano or Tagalog or Spanish or English, it was in Arabic.

FUJIMOTO: There was 7,000 workers from Yemen here also, and they were also part of the strike. So here is an example of cross-ethnic coalition of people working for social justice, not just one group. And of course, it has its ups and downs. I know some of the lawyers who were very active with UFW, they had disagreements with UFW leadership and they got removed - it got identified pretty much as Mexican. The Filipino leaders were (Larry) Itliong, (Philip) Vera Cruz and (Andy) Imutan. My main comment was about my beginning of association about them. Later part, there was a lot of disagreement that had fallen out. I wasn't as close to that. I kept in touch with AFSC because I was on their number of committees for 50 years. Visalia office were the ones that organized the work with Cesar on the march to Sacramento. I don't know what year that was, it was still in the late 60's.

RODRIGUEZ: Was your feeling that the UFW and the farm workers struggles had some kind of impact on Davis students during the period?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, there were different student organizations that were formed in supporting farm workers.

RODRIGUEZ: Really? So on campus there were farm worker support groups?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, I think so. The interesting thing is what to watch for this year because this is the 50th anniversary of the start of the strike, 1965 - 2015.

RODRIGUEZ: I just got contacted by somebody who teaches over at Bakersfield Community College. The project is going to be featured alongside the film

that Marissa Aroy did of the *Delano Manongs*.

[49:20]

FUJIMOTO: If you can, you might contact people at the AFSC because those people included staff members who were active at the UFW. Graciela Martinez is one of them. I work with the Central Valley Partnership (CVP) for about 10 years after I retired and there were a number of people. CVP is still in existence. It's very small, but I know the people who were involved in that were also active in the UFW. They were working pretty much full time. Graciela would be very good, I think she lives in Visalia.

RODRIGUEZ: She used to work with the AFSC?

FUJIMOTO: Yeah, AFSC had a number of directors and she became one of them. See, the first people I knew [were] Herb Foster, Chuck Garnier. These people are dead now, but Chuck Garnier I knew him very well. Then they had some Mexicans who became directors of the AFSC office in Visalia. You can get hold of a guy named Pablo Espinoza, he was also on staff in the AFSC. Pablo ran a radio program and it would go to all the farm workers. He was so popular that when you go to a UFW meeting they would introduce Cesar and they would clap for him, but when they introduce Pablo the whole group jumped up. That made Cesar very jealous and there was a falling out. There was another guy who went to Texas and he said something on a radio program accusing Cesar having affairs or something. He had blamed it on Pablo. Pablo had nothing to do with it, but that attitude of friction between Pablo Espinoza and Cesar Chavez and his wife.

Pablo was on the AFSC staff also and he ran the radio broadcast out of the AFSC office. But that was very popular. The whole farm worker movement in San Joaquin Valley. So if you can get a hold of Pablo Espinoza or Graciela Martinez that can be very helpful.

RODRIGUEZ: This is very very helpful because it speaks to how the farm workers struggles was so central to Asian American Studies at this campus.

FUJIMOTO: I don't know if it was central, but it was recognized at the very beginning. The Asian American Research Project also recognized the role of the Filipinos. Just go to Lillian (Gallado) and Laurena Cabanero, I put them on the project on doing the Stockton community.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, well I wonder if we can even find their findings from this project in the [George Kagiwada Reserves] Library.

FUJIMOTO: You know, that was written up. Lillian wrote up the Stockton Filipino community. That's one of the publications.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I wonder if we can find it. We're trying to get our archivist to come in and actually look some of the old stuff and preserve it because it's falling apart. A lot of this stuff is just not preserved properly.

FUJIMOTO: They wanted to help on that and Jun Alto offered to help organize because we're looking for the Tulelake Crypt documents. That all happened about the same time - the class, Tulelake project, the conference - all of these. It was a very intense time, '68-'69. That launched Asian American Studies, it was all part of it. You can say the Filipino involvement of UFW was part of the Asian American Studies curriculum. It may not have got in depth,

but from the very beginning that was recognized. And then it followed up in terms of the Asian American Research Project too, the Filipino involvement was very important.

[54:30]

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you so much. You've given us a lot for even just to start doing some additional research. All the conferences that you've mentioned on the farm workers struggle that took place on campus and some of the controversy that seems to be something we should probably look into, the farm worker's support organizations that were set up here.

FUJIMOTO: That part I can't comment on as much because I was really spread out because I had my own tenure situation. All these hassles, I didn't have my PhD done, I had to go back to Cornell several summers. I was so distracted I couldn't finish it. So I got my PhD 50 years after I started it, 2010. In fact, in 1977 I went to Butte, MT to help start up the-- it's called NCAT, National Center for Appropriate Technology. That's when I broadened the outreach because now I was working with low income communities all over the USA. The whole idea was NCAT, it was supported by the Community Service Administration, the CSA was set up to ... CAA, Community Action Agency, there are about a thousand of them all over the country and it was really to help low income communities to improve their lives. And one of them was to save on the energy and set up to cut cost on energy because in 1973 OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries) raised the price of oil 4 times, 400%. And so that's how we got interested in alternative energy and the appropriate technology movement. So my home became a center for about 5 organizations. So I was involved in that, I was involved in NCAT. George and Jovina were here so they were developing the Asian American Studies program, that's why I wasn't paying as close attention to what was going on in here or the farm workers. I was more involved in the Davis Energy Program. The part of the work was the people who lived with me started Davis Farmers Market and Davis Food Co-Op and Ecological Farming Conference. We had all these meetings at my house because, again, so much hassle here.

RODRIGUEZ: What was the situation that led you and George to be on the chopping block on 1977? Do you think your politics had something to do with it?

FUJIMOTO: I'm trying to remember the issue. Unfortunately, all the people I can comment on are dead. Forbes could comment on Risling, but Forbes is dead. Peter and George are no longer living. It rolled around the Applied Behavior Science department and I think they were getting attacked. So Thompson, unfortunately, had to write negatives reviews for us. Then Leron Mayhew was a chair, not only in Sociology, but he was in charge of the Student Academic Center Committee and they reviewed our situation. When I was in Montana I got a letter saying, "You have," what's called, "Security of Employment". So I can come back to Davis. I thought I didn't have a job anymore. George went through a big hearing and his argument was that community service could just be as important as publication. So

that's how he got tenure. I forgot what happened to Risling and Peter. Peter was a lecturer. There is one person that can shed light, his name is Marc Pilisuk, he was chair of the Applied Behavioral Science department when I was in Montana. When all these 4 cases came up, he told me that he couldn't understand why Peter got Security of Employment because Peter didn't have any background. He came from Hong Kong and he was in [] culture, something like that, and Risling was teaching at community college at Stockton, Delta Community College. George had a PhD from UCLA, I didn't have a PhD. I think they were getting at us because we didn't have our degrees completed. So George went the route of using community service as a way to justify tenure.

[1:00:03]

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, that's actually really interesting. You've given us a lot of stuff to work with, thank you so much. We'll probably be in touch as things go along. I don't know if you got to see it, but we do have some material already on the archive. So there's photos on there, oral history--

FUJIMOTO: You know, I'd be interested if you do find the first course syllabus. That would help me, then I'll refresh my memory more. And if you find anything about the first conference that was held in Davis, that would help also.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, hopefully. You know, as I said, after they finish the renovations of the library, our archivist is going to go in there. Because I'm a little

concerned that things are deteriorating.

FUJIMOTO: Brian Tom can be very helpful. He identifies himself as the founder of Asian American Studies. I said, “Okay, go ahead and claim that. That’s not important,” because a lot of people think I’m the founder of it. I work with him very close from the very beginning. So I said, “Go ahead and give the credit to Brian.” The beginning situation is something that I know quite a bit about because that’s the time I was really active.

RODRIGUEZ: This is really great. Thank you so much, Isao, I really appreciate it.

FUJIMOTO: Okay, you’re welcome.

[1:02:00]

[End Audio File: Fujimoto Interview]