American Visionaries: Immigration Innovation & Freedom

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[00:00:36] I'd like to welcome you to tonight's program. American Visionaries: Immigration Innovation and Freedom. My name is Teresa Fujiwara. And I am a Seattle Public Library Board of Trustee.

[00:00:48] And during the day I have my other job is as Associate Vice President at United Way of King County. We'd like to begin this program. By acknowledging we are on Duwamish land and hope this program honors the first people of Seattle. We extend tremendous thanks to our community partner Pecha Kucha Seattle and the community leader who is with us tonight.

[00:01:15] Honore Pinto de Silva for helping us organize tonight's program the American vision would be incomplete if immigrants are not celebrated as freedom fighters visionaries and builders of the American dream. We are also a country made from many different joys and sorrows. We know and understand many things come from being part of America. America is a country created by histories that interconnect American Indians Alaska Natives with their ancestral lands. Africans who were kidnapped during the trans-Atlantic slave trades and then subjected to prejudice and discrimination on their American journey and by European settlers who came from many shores to help make up the American fabric. On behalf of the library we really welcome this kind of programming being inclusive and welcoming is an assignment that the library takes very seriously. We simply believe one thing must be true. Libraries are for everyone and always for everyone when to quote our city librarian who recently put in an email letter to our patrons. Quote “While the world around us changes every day there is one constant that is here for you. The Seattle Public Library. Our doors are always open.

[00:02:42] No visa membership or ID is required.”

[00:02:55] So we're lucky our city has made a commitment to being a sanctuary city. We have that same vision too of being a welcoming and inclusive space. Also is the place if you want to frequent you can and care about. You can find ways to separate fact from fiction and fiction from non-fiction. It has been a tense time with many eyes on the West Coast this week. Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson recently issued a stay on President Trump's executive order banning travel

from Iraq Syria Iran Libya Somalia Sudan and Yemen. A San Francisco court of appeals just yesterday upheld that and recently refused to reinstate the proposed travel ban. So we're in good company at this point. Yeah. This is not just about immigrants and refugees. It is about actively supporting efforts that combat prejudice stereotyping and discrimination. For African-Americans American Indians Alaska Natives LGBTQ and others who systematically been denied access to opportunities and threatened by recent actions of the current administration. Yet every day community members live outside of these headlines making lunch for school heading to work or looking for work finding ways to attend to their hopes and dreams. Tonight's programming looks at the human dimension of immigrant experiences be at the first generation one and a half generations or many generations over time. On a personal note next week is the seventy fifth anniversary of Executive Order 9066 that resulted in the uprooting and unlawful detention of 120000 Japanese Americans mostly U.S. citizens. I'm a third generation Japanese American therefore the daughter and the granddaughter. Of people who were victims of that fear mongering and racial discrimination. The history must have a purpose to build a unified voice for the protection of targeted groups today. So how can we use this storytelling to create space for showing that we care and the unity that exists amongst us to be historically accurate in this polarizing time. Tonight's presenters were asked to use their personal and lived experience to offer a meditation on inclusive city. We will have nine different presenters who will be introduced shortly.

[00:05:46] I'm going to tell you a little bit about our event. We have brought together a wonderful roster of speakers from across our community to share their stories and their singular narratives of surrounding immigration in our region in the United States and around the world. New Americans immigrants and the children of immigrants are a central part of the American story. We are a vital part of the Washington state's history. Our present and our future. Some people have said that the ‘I’ in America stands for inventor but I think what it truly stands for what it truly stands for is immigrant. The people who had the courage to embark on a journey of transformation with generational consequences who chose to move away from the intimately familiar towards the unknown away from comfort and towards a sense of sometimes ambiguous promise. Embarking on a journey journeys that are sometimes harrowing isolating and dislocating but that are also graced with the hallmarks and

[00:06:55] a friendship family and the tremendous gift that is creating new community.

[00:07:01] Very excited to introduce Luis Ortega. Luis is the founder of storytellers for change in Seattle and I'd probably say hands down he's one of the best facilitators and youth workers I've ever made. I'm very delighted to have him kick off the program. So please welcome Luis. Yahoo.

[00:07:21] {speaking Spanish} these are the words of my grandmother Caetano Saldanha. We become the stories we tell about ourselves. So what story will you tell. I've been telling this story for the last 11 years about my journey as an immigrant in this country. It's a narrative about empathy and apathy and shame and dignity and resilience and vulnerability, affirmations and contradictions. My family and I are writing this country 2001 but my journey as a storyteller began in the fall of 2005 when I was invited to return to my high school Roswell High School to speak to a small group of

students about my experience going to college and if I could just choose one word to describe why accepted these invitation. You see at the time I was at University of Washington and I had no idea that I would ever return to that high school. And I say that because they weren't what I would choose this anger. I say anger because despite finding academic success at Roosevelt I also found a great deal of apathy. People making fun of my accent. And perhaps most painfully what I remember the most the senior year of high school. When my counselor told me that someone like me could not go to college because I was undocumented. People like you don't go to college Luis. So I had to show I was angry I had to speak up. So I went and I deliver a terrible presentation. It was awful. I sweating profusely. I forgot to read my notes and the students were just looking at me awkwardly begging to get out of there. They wanted to go back to class. That's how bad it was.

[00:08:55] So the students left but one remained behind and even though I was deeply embarrassed before I could do or say anything to this wants to think he simply rushed towards me and hugged me and then began to cry. And I'm just standing there and my arms are up and this is awkward and weird and I'm sweating and I just want to get out of here and yet I know eventually the only way I can get out of this is by hugging back. So I do. I call him and think he goes down and finally takes a step back.

[00:09:21] Looks up at me and just simply tells me your story changed my life.

[00:09:26] And I just have to tell you like I've never experienced anything like it before because my first reaction was one of disbelief. You see I've been conditioned the narrative I keep telling about myself up to that point is I don't matter. And I could not escape the sincerity of his words. A lot of things happen over the next five years in my life. I became a student activist at the UDUB. I work with many other undocumented students and many other people in the community to advocate for my community. I also saw my family go back to Mexico so I stayed by myself. I spent two years homeless. I struggled to stay in college. But what really kept me going during those five years is the 300 schools I traveled to across the state to share my story. All of it because in the fall of 2005 one student whose name I cannot remember. Told me that my story made a difference for him. Well he changed my life. You see whenever I think about this story this particular story in this moment I think about this concept ‘In-Lakech.’ It's the timeless Mayan precept that roughly translates to You are my other me. And there is a point by that title written by Luis Valdez, In-Lakesh, Tú eres mi otro yo {Spanish} You are my other me. Si te hago daño a ti, {Spanish}. If I do harm to you, Me hago daño a mi mismo {Spanish} I do harm to myself. Si te amo y respeto {Spanish} If I love and respect you, Me amo y respeto yo {Spanish} I love and respect myself.

In-Lak’ech I think how my counselor was my other me and she deeply hurt me. In-Lak’ech. I think about how the student was my other me and he made me feel loved and respected. In-Lak’ech, I think about how these students talk he's older than me when he saw me. In-Lak’ech, I think about how these counselors saw me and just saw other well eleven years have gone by

[00:11:03] I've travelled to a thousand schools and communities across the state and the nation of Kenya with Pascal Wenatchee Yakima Vancouver Bellingham Long Beach San Francisco San

Antonio Omaha Ames and what I can tell you what I can truly tell you about what I've learned in 11 years in a journey as a storyteller is that yes storytelling matters with what's true transformation is a story listening because the reality is that there's no such thing as on told stories but there's many unheard stories. You know that they're not being told is just that we are not listening. We've been conditioned to marginalize and forget and even alter the stories of other people so they will feed our own narratives. And from an equity perspective from an inclusion perspective it is not storytelling that we should be lifting up as a story listening. This is how we forget history. We end up romanticizing some immigrant stories while conveniently leaving others behind. We are the stories we tell about ourselves. Well maybe it depends what you think about when you hear the dreamer and undocumented student or an undocumented mother when we speak about the American dream. Do we do it at the expense of acknowledging how it was founded on genocide slavery and sustain over the years through immigrant labor. Do you see what not only the stories we tell about ourselves we are the stories that we shame. We are the stories that we forget. We are the stories that we don't want to listen to. And when we listen to each other. We become strangers it's not that we were to be stopped being part of a children's world. In-Lak'ech you are still my other me.

[00:12:35] But what does happen.

[00:12:38] Is it becomes easier to hate and fear. It becomes easier to accept colorblindness as a solution becomes easier to proclaim all matter when they don't. Black lives matter. So we need a counter inclusive narrative with those of those who have been on her at the front and center leading this movement and he's going to be uncomfortable.

[00:12:55] It's gonna be uncomfortable because yes we're going to want to fight against walls and borders and we should but not at the expense of dealing with the isms and phobia that live in silos that live among us. And then I think about what he's going to take to actually make a difference.

[00:13:10] I cannot stop thinking about radical empathy I cannot stop thinking about what just fine moment one moment with one student did for me and it's gonna be challenging because In-Lak'ech for my over me you're to have to acknowledge some privilege. And In-Lak'ech what my other me. We've been waiting so long and yet we still have to be patient. And at the same time I cannot help but to wonder that in this time in the history of our country if one of the most radical things we could do is to have the courage to listen to each other.

[00:13:41] My name is Luis Ortega. I'm undocumented, unafraid and a storyteller for change.

[00:13:53] I had the pleasure of introducing Shankar Narayan who is a poet and technology and project director of the ACLU of Washington in Seattle.

[00:14:02] So welcome to your six minute guided tour of the current state of surveillance and immigration and why you should care about it. The first thing you probably know is that the stakes have gone up around all kinds of surveillance whether it's federal whether it's state whether it's local the Trump administration is likely to be much more aggressive on all kinds of enforcement and

surveillance and these executive orders we've seen around Muslim exclusion and the border wall are just the start. There'll be increased funding for border surveillance. There will be tools developed for the military use in that. We have actually started CBP the Border Patrol agency asking ideological questions that perhaps they've not done much of before that have no relationship to someone's violent tendencies. So we will see more of this at the border. You've probably seen this in civics. It means that each of our three branches of government are supposed to keep each other accountable. Congress doesn't seem to show much inclination to do that right now. And even if you get a judicial order it's not always followed. So local is the way to go right now. This is the way surveillance used to happen right. People used to follow activists. They actually used to wiretap them intercept their letters.

[00:15:19] They create dossiers. They put them in filing cabinets which you've probably seen a museum somewhere right. It was very labor intensive and expensive. But now there are a lot of different points of collection of information. There are drones like this one. There are still cameras body cameras mesh network devices CCTVs license plate readers even cell site simulator devices that connect to your cell phone without your knowing it. Many many ways that the information is hoovered up. And by the way we also leave this trail of digital debris just by living in the modern world nowadays. So carrying your cell phone around using apps driving your car your key card at work. Alexa and Siri and Cortana right. Talking to them actually or talking to the entire internet and big brother. Remember that all of this generates fine grained data and lots of it. And as it turns out the more data sets you have the more inferences you can draw from those datasets just by comparing them to each other so that even information you have taken steps to keep private. Such as perhaps your immigration status may become public simply because if the hemorrhaging of all of this data the end result is maybe you don't even need those individual modes of surveillance because you can rely on the information that's already out there to attract people.

[00:16:45] One tool that's relevant here is social media monitoring systems such as acquired by Seattle police department without public process. These tools have been used to monitor protesters. The Black Lives Matter movement. It's only one of many tools that SPDC has acquired. You can also throw in drones still cameras video and audio based gunshot locator technology. That's just one example of one department which is one agency of our city and the amount of surveillance it's doing locally. And it turns out this matters more because at the state level not only are state agencies surveilling. There are also mechanisms for state agencies to give information to the Washington State fusion center which then Hoover's it up to the federal level without much accountability and without much ability to actually pull it back. Once it's there that's a big challenge. An even bigger challenge perhaps is that the federal government also surveillance. You've probably heard of the Snowden revelations. This is a splitter right which is installed in a major Internet company where the Internet traffic is mirrored and the government surveys it without as much as a warrant.

[00:17:59] A lot of information again going to the government and a lot of information sharing between federal agencies that was already accelerating before the Trump administration came in. It's likely to accelerate simply because we have heard that announced one of the first Trump executive orders was actually to strip non-citizens of rights under the Privacy Act. To be able to share that information

more freely and with less record keeping. Another thing to expect is collaboration between immigration enforcement and local police departments local cops can't be forced to enforce immigration law but they can be forced to share the information they do have about someone's immigration status. So if we want to protect immigrants locally we should not collect information and we should delete what we don't need quickly at the border you going to see a lot more harassment. This is a drawing control console but you will also see more aggressive vetting of people even at border checkpoints so you'll see laptop and device searches you'll see people being asked for their social media passwords and a level that we haven't seen of that kind of vetting. It also depends on what you think the border is. CBP thinks it extends 100 miles inland including from the ocean. So this is a place where two thirds of Americans live. We dispute that CBP has the power to to circumvent the Constitution in that zone but it's still it's still a question. The point of this graphic is to show that the courts are really a backstop. They're not the end result. They differ broadly in how they interpret protections against surveillance and for privacy. The law isn't necessarily where we need it to be. And of course if you don't know you're being surveilled how can you bring a lawsuit. So this is all terrifying and scary. What should you do. Well this is a good start right. A good offense again at the local level is the best defense right now. Legislatures are actually in a position to put strong, accountability regimes and transparency regimes in place for each and every single piece of surveillance technology.

[00:20:09] The Seattle surveillance ordinance is a great example. An update to that is going to be introduced by council member Gonzalez. We urge you to support it even in Olympia. Urge transparency around the fusion center. Support the license plate reader bill that's out there right now and demand privacy with every single new piece of surveillance technology that's propose. The money shouldn't go unless there are strong safeguards around the technology itself. And of course support welcoming city ordinances like the one we have here. Those things can also take hold at the state level. It will take constant scrutiny to ensure that local police departments are not enforcing federal immigration law and real barriers put between those two kinds of enforcement and make sure your policymakers know that you support that because they forget very quickly. So in conclusion it's more important than ever to get engaged right now. Immigrant communities are in the crosshairs. They may actually not have the luxury of being able to be activists. The way you all have and you have the opportunity I think to stay engaged right. It's been three weeks. There's four more years almost and we're going to need each and every one of you for this long fight.

[00:21:21] Thank you. So as a gentle reminder we would absolutely love it if he would use our hashtag.

[00:21:28] It's P.K. underscore immigration. It is my pleasure to introduce our next presenter Jasmine Xu. Jasmine is a consultant with the City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

[00:21:43] Hello everyone name's Jasmine I'm going to talk a little bit about holding space.

[00:21:47] So on January 20th I woke up at 6 a.m. I slept for three hours. Ok.

[00:21:55] So on January 20 when I woke up at 6 a.m. I slept for three hours and all I could think about was oh my god and all those print jobs get in is my PowerPoint slide to work out okay. And counting to myself. How many laptops do I need. Where at what time. And that was all I could think about. But on January 20th the city of Seattle put together an event to provide legal services to immigrants on the entire spectrum of immigration and so many volunteers showed up that we had to turn people away. And it was a day in which Seattle declared itself to be a welcoming city and all I could do is count how many laptop was needed where and sometimes you lose sight of what you're doing things for. When you get caught up in technicalities. But this is my reason. I once told my mother when I was in elementary school that I don't really think I'm Chinese.

[00:22:49] I think I'm American and this is before I understood the difference between ethnicity citizenship and nationality she said to me. Daughter you can kid yourself but you cannot choose the way you appear and other people's eyes and look. She's right. Today I wear my immigration status and my ethnicity proudly.

[00:23:05] But sometimes I think about the 90 percent of the time I spent in the United States and the 10 percent of time I spent in China. And I wonder why do so many people hear that 10 percent. Keep screaming over and over that I don't actually belong here in social sciences we call this concept the other

[00:23:25] And for me other is being told by some guy at Starbucks oh my god your english is so good. It's like being told by my ex-boyfriend when his parents came to visit we should go get some real Chinese food and roast them out. And for me it's all those times I just laughed it off and internalized the blame for myself as if I forgot to clear a threshold. Being other. Is something that makes you two dimensional and invisible at the same time because some one took a singular aspect of your identity and made that your totality. Someone is determining your identity and you lose that power. In able to determine who you are yourself. And being other is having the onus to prove to people that you are innocent that you are not too angry not too docile not too lazy and when this happens you get so tired because you spend your entire life defending yourself to people on an identity that you didn't even really choose to identify yourself by. And that gets really lonely sometimes when things clear you ask yourself oh my gosh where do my true self disappear to the middle of all this.

[00:24:35] Because if you take a singular aspect of someone's identity and force them to to then use that to justify their entire value of a human being you turn them as an enemy against themselves. That is dangerous when there's fear because when you are afraid. That one thing. That you can't erase that has dominated your identity that becomes a crime that you've somehow commit because you're being punished for and it may not happen to you directly if you see other people also bring that badge and think attacked you are in some ways attacked as well. And we really don't get to choose where we're born and how we are born but we are all united by the human condition in which we all want something better. Look into your history you will find someone who has changed their surrounding for something better and if we criminalize that then we are diminishing entrepreneurship then we are taking away so much because we need to hold space for things that are disruptive for

things that are uncomfortable because only in accepting complexity do we allow people to bring their whole selves and their ideas into the into this discussion.

[00:25:44] And only by doing that do we create space to have that kind of innovation to have that kind of presence.

[00:25:51] And so this is me and this is from me. When I was still young and when I was in elementary school and college and you know all the versions of me in the future that's going to ask the question does something about my minority and immigrant identity make me and my values inherently valueless. Is there something about me that has to be small. And thank you for telling me no. On January 20th Seattle you did not turn away. You defended people like me. You defended me and trust me. We saw this and we will remember this and we'll be a spot of warmth that is as we continue to try to keep the United States as a place in which the content of character shines through and a place of innovation.

[00:26:35] So right now I want to take you guys back with me to that day that day where I'm thinking about logistics and it's the end of the day and I'm tired and I'm looking for that last laptop and so I end up being a know your rights presentation and it's still going on and I have my laptop so I had to sit there in the back of the room and watch. And I'm glad I did because they're the presenter was giving this presentation about what to do if someone comes and knocks on your door at 3:00 AM in the morning for the third time. And she said and she pulled up a slide. Said this is a real warrant. And then she pulled up another Slider said this may look like a warrant but it's not a real word if it shows up do not open the door and I saw someone in front of me stand up. It was a man. He was there with his wife and his kids on an 8:00 p.m. evening on a Friday and they had just come back from work and you heard on a bus that this event was going on and I saw him stand up take his phone out. And take a picture of that warrant and suddenly that moment shook me. It was humanizing because it's no longer about the logistics. This is about some man sometime in the future. 3:00 a.m. in the morning being woken up at night with loud knocks on the door and he's scared.

[00:27:52] And so is his family. And all he can do is fumble around in the dark for his phone and I can in my mind see him just turning it on and. And just flipping through all the photos trying to remember oh my god what day did I take that photo. Trying to find that picture he took so he can see what a real warrant looks like he'll be talking to his wife and they'll be arguing in hushed whispers saying things like oh my goodness is this real and how are we going to handle this and do we open the door. I have fumbled for my phone in the dark so many times in my life. And I think you have to. But I want you to take that moment and think of yourself as a husband. Think of yourself as a father and think of yourself as a human being that has walked for so much of your life being identified by that otherness that has marked you something that you're not even really sure you're ashamed of. And maybe then it's too late because there's danger knocking at the door and it demands to be let in. And you're out of time but all you can really do is flip through your phone and try to find that picture that might keep your family safe.

[00:28:59] Seattle please keep speaking out.

[00:29:03] We need you. Hey everybody. My name's Katie Murray I'm a library associate here at the downtown library and I have the pleasure of introducing our youth and family library services manager here at the Seattle Public Library. Give her a round of applause for Rekha Coover. I come from hardscrabble joyful people people with backbones of the hardest rosewood and iron

[00:29:28] With observant eyes and loud laughs. Our history is one that moves and shifts and so our grounding resides within. For the last 150 years all of our hearts beat with the sound

[00:29:41] Go. My great grandparents were Indian, Hindustani-Punjabi-Nepali. Each of them taken against their will by the British when they were children put on boats and shipped to the Pacific. I often think about their journey. I think of their families who never saw them again. I think of their parents calling for them. Sons

[00:30:06] Daughters.

[00:30:08] Two generations later a schoolteacher visited a Fijian village that doesn't show up on most maps where my dad then a young child lived. He was offered school enrolment and his parents said yes. Even though it was a great sacrifice to their subsistence and so he walked several hours there several hours back each day in colonial Fiji.

[00:30:29] The British were more interested in people working the sugar fields and less interested in ceding political or educational power. Under this system they chose one student per year out of the whole country and sent that student overseas to university. In his year my dad was chosen like. This like many things was a mixed blessing. He got an education overseas which was a great privilege but agency was removed from this privilege. He was told where he would go what he would study what his job would be and that he was required to come back to Fiji when he was done.

[00:31:07] He left his village to get on a boat and leave everything he had ever known behind. Not far from his mind the last time his people had been put on British boats they had been lied to and many of them never saw their families again or died. Tamping down the fear in his heart. He said goodbye to Fiji for the first time in his life. After his studies. He returned and met my and married my mom a rabble rousing Sikh feminist leading the way for girls education and the first stage of decolonization brown and black people took back the right to represent themselves locally and dad was elected mayor the first non-white person to hold that office there. Dad you go!

[00:31:52] Eventually for their children's education sake. My parents sold everything which didn't convert to much and left for America.

[00:31:59] Dad went east for work and for financial reasons mom and kids stayed on the West Coast. They missed each other. Living conditions weren't good. The kids struggled. My dad worried but my mom encouraged him go she said. We'll be ok you go. Then Dad was offered a job in Flint, Michigan

where the family was reunited. The apartments where we stayed were a gorgeous mix of families Swedish, Korean, African-American, Danish, Italian, Indian, Kenyan, Iraqi, Lebanese, Trinidadian.

[00:32:30] These families are still our friends even now. What you probably know about Flint is about poverty or about a high murder rate or blight or abandoned factories or Roger and Me or bad water

[00:32:43] Or simply that the residents have been struggling to keep their city afloat for the past 30 plus years.

[00:32:49] These things are all true things but for our family it was a place of welcome, of community of friendship, of home. Flint loved me and my family and Flint people are our people. It was and is our community and my parents chose it.

[00:33:08] With all of their hearts. At the same time that this choice was wholeheartedly made there have been ways in which America has whispered and sometimes yelled at us all along the way that we were not welcome.

[00:33:22] One of my first memories as a kindergartener was a salesperson in a mall telling me and my brother to go back to where we came from. This was my one of my very first memories in life. This is a photo. Of a sticker that some white people in Flint used to put on their doors or windows in the late 70s during a time when Flint's population was becoming more brown and black. The sticker conveyed a commitment to neighborhood stabilization which was a coded way of signaling that those folks wanted Flint to stay white.

[00:33:55] Then there was the time that a police officer Drew his gun on dad as he stood in his own driveway. There were the tense moments we always had returning on road trips to Canada at the border. Then there was the time I watched my dad get shoved in a parking lot for being foreign. The list goes on when these things would happen. I remember how Dad became very still. Very regal and very tall. This talk is about immigrant visionaries and innovators and I could tell you many things that my dad brought to the United States in his 43 years in Flint. I could tell you about his career about his civic engagement about his sweat. All of the things that he poured into this country. These are the things by which immigrants are asked to prove themselves. But the thing that he gave to the United States the most was his open kind heart. When he died I got messages one from my high school boyfriend who found safe refuge in our house talking to my dad during a period when he was conflicted about his gang life. Another from a boy my age. My dad was his family's doctor and he came out to my dad when he were in 11th grade.

[00:35:03] Before he had told anyone else because of the trust he had in him. All of the families on the block were my mom still lives to tell stories about his generosity of spirit all of the kit all of his kids friends including my friends so many of whom call him their second dad. All of the people who when I go home to Flint still come up to me and say your dad. We loved him. When I went to release his ashes into the ocean it was amazing to me when I scattered them how quickly they disappeared. They touched the water for the smallest of moments before vanishing particles didn't float. Remnants

didn't hang in the air in the time it took for a few heartbeats to pass. All that my dad physically was the share of the reminisce of him was gone. My family history is one of migration. There have been voices that have embraced us and voices that have told us that we do not belong. We have been stolen told where to go and what to do and we have fought for a new place. The rhetoric that is now commonplace tells us that our migration should continue that we should not be here. When I hear these calls for immigrants to leave I think about my parents and those that came before them who always sometimes with consent and sometimes not have picked up to leave.

[00:36:17] I think about how my parents work to make this place finally belong to me and so it is mine. My pops I promise you I'm staying.

[00:36:27] I'm happy to introduce our next presenter Natalie Morales. Natalie is the Greater King County director for the Office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray in Seattle. Welcome Natalie.

[00:36:40] Today I'd like to talk about intersectionality.

[00:36:43] This is a concept that I've really come to value and cherish in spaces like these where I'm given the space to highlight certain parts of my identity and I want us to explore why it's necessary that we apply an intersectional lens to public service work in particular all levels of government. But before I get to that I'd like to share a little bit about myself. My name is Natalie Padro Morales.

[00:37:11] I'm a Mexican immigrant to the United States and I am queer. I was born in a town outside of San Luis Potosí to see my uncle my parents and I immigrated to the U.S. when I was a baby and we landed of all places in East Tennessee. Growing up I knew that there was something pretty unique about my family but it wasn't until we went through the naturalization process that I realized just how policy could affect us directly. I realized we were unique because in my mind we were essentially applying for permission to live here. Yet it didn't seem like many of my friends or their families had to do the same. The memory of my mother staying up until 2:00 a.m. studying for her GED and then later being able to proudly walk across a university stage as a registered nurse stayed with me as I moved away to college to study journalism. I wanted to make a career out of listening to other stories and writing about how policies affected them too. It was during my final year at Middle Tennessee State University that I started volunteering on President Obama's re-election campaign a few days after graduating. I had to break the unfortunate news to my parents that I was moving far away to Washington to work on his campaign and then I quickly had to clarify that I meant Washington state and not Washington D.C. Watching moms walk in with their children's after a 10 hour shift at work just to make calls for the campaign because they wanted to do everything that they could do to secure a bright future for themselves and for their children and for the first time really understanding what it was like to have community all of this and so much more and made my time in Yakima, bestly by faith that I and decision that I've ever made and literally the best move I've ever made.

[00:39:00] That's what brought me to Seattle. It's what helped open my eyes to so much more. This is where I first heard about the term intersectionality. And it's also where I could no longer avoid looking

inward and acknowledging how I even as a Mexican immigrant and even as a queer brown person was perpetuating anti black systems.

[00:39:23] This quote by Audre Lorde really speaks to me because it shows me that immigrant justice is Women's Justice, is gender justice, is reproductive justice, is black justice, is native justice, is economic justice, is climate justice. You see even though my and my family's story is part of the immigrant struggle. I still have privilege as myself like being able to be up here tonight and tell my story without fear of being deported and taken away from the only home and family that I know

[00:40:42] Intersectionality not only requires us to look at where our struggles and systems of oppression intersect but it also requires us to look inward and study our own privileges.

[00:40:55] Being part of the Women's March for example and seeing this sea of pink pussy hats everywhere was incredibly powerful and such a strong message but I couldn't help but wonder as I was overhearing conversations about how women were gathering their friends and their family together to have pussy hat knitting parties in preparation for the march. I wondered if in that room they acknowledged that not all the women present that day necessarily have pussies. Did the knitters pause and ask themselves is this truly an inclusive and intersectional message. We have to speak up. And we have to speak out but we have to do it together. Systems of repression were meant to pull us apart. Social constructs were meant to confuse they were meant to frustrate and they were meant to distract from acknowledging where our struggles actually do intersect. We need to embrace the resiliency and the knowledge that our ancestors passed down to us and we have to create multigenerational spaces where we can combine their experience and their wisdom with our grit and tenacity. Now more than ever. It's incredibly important to say that reproductive justice doesn't just mean assist gendered woman's right to choose but it also means a trans woman's right to comprehensive care. And the right to have inclusive language in their health care policy. Now more than ever it's important to fight back so that we don't go back to the time to a time before Roe V. Wade and. So that we don't go back to a time but during the Jim Crow era. It's important that when we talk about the injustice of a U.S. border wall on our Mexican land

[00:42:11] We also acknowledge the injustice that people of Flint are still experiencing. It's important that we also acknowledge that injustice the injustice that trans men and women face when they are detained at the border entered and are denied access to medication that's essential to their livelihood.

[00:42:29] It's important that we call out the injustice of trespassing that native peoples are still fighting back today intersectionality matters. Empathy is essential to our movement bringing two unlikely worlds together to fight back. It's so much more powerful than any policy. Than any ban Than any wall than any tweet ever will be. I truly believe that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. Tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one. Affects all indirectly. Lately I've been really moved by a quote that's been going around on social media. And it says I am my ancestors wildest dreams. And yes I am. And yes you are too. We collectively are our ancestors wildest dreams.

[00:44:21] Let's shout that out loud. Let's be proud about that and let's continue the fight for justice. And let's do it together.

[00:44:30] Next Next will be MyTam Nguyen. Thank you. All right let's do this. Good evening everyone.

[00:44:35] So I'm here with three messages There'll be twenty slides but I'm just going to speak with you for me. So the first thing that I really want you remember if you don't remember anything else today is that there is no better entrepreneur than an immigrant

[00:44:50] The second message is that we really need to bridge as much as I love all of you and nodding with all of you. This is where we need to not be right now. There's a lot of work to be done so that my second message is to bridge. And the third is to pay attention to this presentation because there's going to be a lot of really good food tips in here. So these lads are going very quickly. I'll start here. I grew up in a fishing village in Vietnam. The first eight years of my life and emigrated to very cold Ronkonkoma Long Island New York when I was eight years old to a very different climate because my mom thought that there would be better opportunities for me here. And. I'm like these dishes you might have seen some of these dishes in Vietnamese restaurants. The one on the right as Pho which most of you have seen but what you might not know is that the dish originates from colonization from patafa or the French dish that's made of beef stew. So I feel like immigrants are like the migration of this dish where we evolve and adapt and like Bahn Mi. How did you know it had Bahn Mi.

[00:45:57] That comes from baguettes and our people made it differently when I grew up in Vietnam I used to go for a fresh baguette in the morning right across the street from my elementary school. And this just shows that in major challenges even after something like colonization we're able to evolve and rebuilds and there's no better entrepreneur than someone who's had to rebuild from the rubble over and over again. This is the scene from when I grew up. Every morning when I would wake up we walk outside and there'll be 20-30 different vendors each specializing in a single amazing dish that they make their entire livelihood from. And the reason why I made these circles is if you notice the Aunty’s face with the first photo verses the Aunty’s face on this photo at 12th and Jackson. That focus on making your food delicious.

[00:46:50] They'd brought that over here for you to share with you our culture and our deliciousness. And what she's making is a lunch plate.

[00:47:00] I highly recommend you going to Saigon Vietnam deli at Charlton and Jackson and why circled here to the prepared dishes. Anything in here is from two to five dollars that we're selling you are a piece of our culture our history and our pain for so cheap that you can taste all of this and that's available like six blocks away from here its amazing. And these are some of my other favorite dishes that you can get. At these delis. And one of the left is shrimp that's been braised in stewed for about three hours. And the one the right is deep fried shrimp and sweet potatoes and these are for me a bridge and a narrative that carried me from the front yard of my fishing village to Little Saigon and all

through our community here and I don't know of you know how these dishes get here but these recipes are passed down from generations and our people have carried it the diaspora has carried it after a war and we rebuilt and we put it on a platter for you. And it's here in our neighborhood. This is another section you can find in your local deli.

[00:48:10] This is the cold case on the top are our pickles and the middle are some really good sausages. There's blood in there and it's delicious. And on the bottom are some steamed and fried. Sausages that you can just whip up and make into a weekday meal for three dollars. This is something to not miss the next time you're in Seattle deli or Saigon deli it's called Patty showed and it's pretty much the flakiest crumbliest French pastry filled with sausage. And I just feel that you know the people that I come from we've struggled, we built from the rubble and then we built beauty again in this new place and it all collides right here. How many of you are at the Women's March raise your hand.

[00:48:54] So I don't know how many of you actually knew that the women's march was actually a bit of a tragedy for the little Saigon and Chinatown I.D. because the organizers did not know how important that weekend was for our culture it's the shopping weekend for lunar new year and this is one of my favorite pictures because what we ended up doing is organizing a bunch of Vietnamese community leaders to give a food tour in Little Saigon. And that's my friend Jen on the left. And that's an auntie who was shopping for her new year. And like my friend Jen's pussy hat. Salt Jen gave it to her. And I feel like you know these are the moments we need to really pause and bridge and have a little grace for each other because it's easy to be angry but it's harder to forgive and give a little grace to our friends who are really trying to understand. And even though they show up a hundred and seventy five thousand of them they just had no idea that they were pissing your people off and didn't know it. Your people are here to share the deliciousness and their pain and you know sometimes you just gotta give each other a little break. This is what my favorite photos in the past two weeks. This is down at MLK and Graham. This is at my temple. This is an anti Buddhist nun who just came over here a few months ago. She's hustling like six different pans of Ban Xeo which are Vietnamese crepes another form of French crepes turned into Vietnamese deliciousness. And this is the facade of Viet Wah. They had this setup on Jackson because they knew that this was going to be a disruption so our people are also real adaptive and made some lemonade. Out of lemons with some fried bananas which I use we didn't I didn't have electricity or running water in my village when we grow up. But I had one thought brought back and the one thing that we made was we're five bananas and he had it that day at the march. So that brought me back.

[00:50:37] So I really really want us to think how we are grateful to each other and bridge. These are photos from a 12 course vegan meal at my temple that was made by the nuns and photos of us going through the food tour. And this is photos of my little cousins. Praying for an ancestral ceremony at midnight because I was the only time all of us could all meet in a Renton Washington to worship our ancestors which in Vietnam there were hundreds of us who arrived at any given year to honor my grandfather and after cheerleading practice. That's all you know that's the only time we had that week to see each other. So there is no better entrepreneur than an immigrant. And I really love Louise's message of going across this darn country and all of us should be telling a thousand times what

happened in this room and that you know we should not be talking to each other because I think for the most part we all agree we need to be talking to the people who don't feel like we belong there and share these stories and show them the value of why we're here and what we've given to be here.

[00:51:44] And I'm happy to give another tour of Vietnamese food so come talk to me. There's a Seattle food lover's Vietnamese food lover's group and there's a lot of deliciousness and it's just a few blocks away so the next time you're there just not only look at the food but just remember how much struggle it took to get all of that here just for you.

[00:52:18] Thank you very much.

[00:52:20] I didn't get to properly introduce MyTam Nguyen who is an urban planner political consultant. And next to the microphone is Yurij, here he is.

[00:52:31] So I'm I'm Yurij I'm a Soviet emigre. I'm also an attorney. I practice in civil rights and economic justice and my experience has really been informative for my work. And I want to share that experience through two tellings of really the same story of immigration. The first is a simplistic one. It's I was born behind the Iron Curtain in a land where free expression was quashed. Civil rights were unheard of. And my parents as soon as they could in the mid 80s gathered their four children took the five hundred dollars that they had to their name and they went to this land of opportunity. This Technicolor Utopia where hard work and bootstrapping led to social mobility and where my father could provide all these opportunities for his children that would not be available

[00:53:41] in the Soviet Union. And we took advantage of them because we were good immigrant children and we went to top colleges and pursued postgraduate education and coming out from enjoying these bounties that American life

[00:53:58] Could offer.

[00:53:59] I wanted to work to preserve the system to perpetuate the system and to just show my gratitude for America. And there is a lot of truth to this telling of the story without a doubt. These are things that I think about and carry with me.

[00:54:16] But there is also a lot of nuance that's missing there and it comes from the privileged status that I have as a white immigrant.

[00:54:26] And as in the cultural status of me as a Russian person and as a Soviet emigre and so going back to the beginning of the story I was born during Perestroika in the 80s when there was liberalisation in the Soviet Union and American scientists. During this time started going to Moscow to recruit people who worked in mathematics and natural sciences. And my father was one of the people who was recruited by a man named Charlie Janeway who was a professor at Yale. And so we came over on a J1 visa an academic visa. We were recruited. My parents were recruited to come to the United States. We were part of the brain drain and we land in JFK and we drive to New Haven.

[00:55:05] And when we get there it's not a Technicolor Utopia it's a place that's marked by deep social issues by segregation by economic inequality. And we are thrown into it. And I did not know why we moved. Moscow seemed so decent and so fine and New Haven was totally different and I was kindergarten at the time and I go to school and I have no English capacity whatsoever. And the white kids shun me. My only friends were black kids in this public elementary school. And this is not something I gave any thought to at the time but eventually after my father finished up his post-doctoral fellowship he became a professor and we came out to the University of Washington and we moved to the suburbs outside the city and that's where I first experience truly being the other being white. I should have fit in. But in this space that was all white. Being an immigrant was enough to be the other. And so at the same time

[00:56:20] It was also an inundation of popular culture and narratives of what it meant to be Russian and having such an identifiably Russian name and always being the villain always being evil always being the ones that needed to be taken down antithetical to the way of life here.

[00:56:38] I began to develop a real distaste for the popular narratives for the dominant narratives they're told in America because I looked at myself and I was like I did not see myself in the villains and yet I found myself rooting for the villains just to prove a point. At the same time. I wanted more than anything. As any kid does to assimilate and I had so many thoughts about what if my name was Joe.

[00:57:10] If my name was Joe. People would like me girls would like me. Life would be easier.

[00:57:16] I'd be less embarrassed to invite people over to my house and of course that began to change because as a white person you lose your accent and you can fit into the dominant culture as long as I don't introduce myself. And at that moment. At that moment I began to reject that identity that I so deeply desired to have.

[00:57:39] And this coincided with a deeper understanding and a deeper study of the history of this country and I know it's been mentioned a couple of times before but this had a profound impact on me during my formative years in early high school and taking this critical lens and learning about the Monroe Doctrine and thinking about what was this country truly founded on. And then thinking about our own city here. This progressive bastion and the types of ugly legacies that existed here in our own community the deep inequities really impacted me really profoundly. And then thinking about my status and my family's status as an immigrant family who came here for work and thinking about other immigrants and other communities from communities of color who were coming to this country also to work for opportunity. And how different that experience was for them than it was for me stuck with me really profoundly.

[00:58:40] And so as I went through college and beyond. I have been so shaped by my perception and my experience of America and I intend to return the favor and try and shape America to try to address the inequities that I witness and for my dismount. I think the thought that I would like to leave

you all with is that. It's incredibly important to have this critical perspective that there is no greater patriotism than being critical of the way our system is at home.

[00:59:21] Thank you. Next presenter is Scott Kurashige.

[00:59:31] Scott is the professor or a professor at the University of Washington, Bothell and a longtime activist also a co-author with Grace Lee Boggs. Welcome.

[00:59:45] Thank you so much. I'm honored to be here. Just want to say the most legendary activists in Japanese American history was named Yuri. It's a great American name. The USA is a nation of immigrants. So we've all been told but that really only started about a hundred years ago the melting pot idea was designed to promote tolerance and assimilation oftentimes forced assimilation of the new European immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Expanding whiteness and citizenship to include these new Europeans simultaneously meant drawing a new line of non-white exclusion during the early 20th century. The solidification of Jim Crow, cultural genocide of Native peoples and repression of immigrant radicals where Jews, Asians, Mexicans now but this time Congress had shut off immigration from China way back in 1882 Chinese and Asian immigrants were banned from U.S. citizenship. Democrats and Republicans united behind white nationalist sovereignty. But Frederick Douglass we all learned about him this week called Chinaese exclusion a human rights violation. More and more Frederick Douglass fleet in 1924 amid a national KKK resurgence. Congress passed a sweeping anti-immigration law and established the Border Patrol Southern and European immigration was highly restricted to preserve the so-called Anglo-Saxon stock of America but Japanese were totally excluded inflaming anti-American sentiments and right wing nationalism in Japan. Like the laws in Washington and other states banning Asians from owning land. Congress technically said the 1924 immigration ban was on quote aliens ineligible for citizenship rather than a Japanese or Asian ban. But polite racism will lead to premature death just as surely as overt racism. When he issued the executive order authorizing Japanese incarceration during World War 2 President Roosevelt instructed his lawyers to draft a plan that would pass as constitutional.

[01:01:54] Their solution don't say it's about race. Just say it's about national security. Japanese immigrants were declared enemy aliens. Two thirds of the incarcerated Japanese Americans during World War Two. Were American born citizens. That included my uncle who was born in Seattle two days after Pearl Harbor still deemed a threat to national security. Racist fear served to nullify the citizenship of these U.S. citizens. Hitler declared a race war but the U.S. believed it could ally with the good Germans in Europe the war against Japan was a race war driven by the notion that the enemy was subhuman. And like this picture of the Japanese enemy as. Lice must be quote completely annihilated civilians were deliberately targeted one hundred thousand killed in two days of firebombing of Tokyo. Race war propaganda spread throughout American culture hating the Japs was deemed the highest form of patriotism. It was all part of the mobilization for total war at home and overseas. Bugs Bunny was part of it too. There were fake news accounts of sabotage but there was also an official report headed by Supreme Court Justice Roberts that led politicians and military officials to the entirely false conclusion that Japanese Americans in Hawaii had aided the attack on Pearl Harbor very famous artist named Theodore Geisel also known as Dr. Seuss was one of many

white Americans who argued that Japanese Americans on the West Coast were part of a fifth column made up of sleeper cells that would spring into action when Japan launched a second Pearl Harbor style attack invasion.

[01:03:46] This time right here on the West Coast to justify total incarceration therefore law abiding U.S. citizens were declared the sneakiest and greatest threat the general in charge of the West Coast on DeWitt said quote The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken in order to prove to the government they were loyal Japanese Americans were sent on the most dangerous missions in Europe in the all Nisei 440 second regimental combat unit. They were the most decorated unit as many now know because so many were wounded and killed. This was the price of citizenship during an age of overt racism. The long fight against the injustice of the wartime incarceration led the U.S. government to conclude. That it was based on racial prejudice rather than national security. President Reagan finally signed into law a formal apology and a small monetary reparation only for those that were still alive believe it or not. However there are some Americans even to the right of Ronald Reagan who want to revive the discredited argument for racial profiling mass internment and incarceration. Fox News bright Bart News and right wing media have given them a loudspeaker and since 9/11 racist ideas of the war on terror as a class of civilization. Have taken off spreading moral panic and fear of the other. In November 2015 a Democratic mayor of Roanoke Virginia invoked Japanese incarceration as justification for his call to reject Syrian refugees.

[01:04:30] Now Trump's surrogates have invoked the Japanese American Carson Nation to as precedent for anti-Muslim measures such as a registry. Trump himself won't say whether he believes Japanese American internment and incarceration in World War 2 was wrong. His Justice Department just argued. That the president has unchallenged authority to decide who is a threat to national security. Trump supporters are so riled up that they want to bomb the fictional city of Aqaba. The same survey however found that almost as many Republicans 28 percent nationally support the Japanese American incarceration. In fact when you single out the Trump supporters the majority actually a plurality more supported Jeb is more incarceration than opposed it during the GOP primaries. These are dangerous Orwellian times. Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past. But there is a counter history of resistance and solidarity. I want to leave you with that we must all know people of conscience of all races opposed incarceration not as many as there should have been. But let's recognize people like Mexican-American teenager Ralph Lazo who went from his home in Los Angeles to live in Manzanar to support his Japanese American friends and Japanese American activist since that time have built alliances with war refugees and Arab Muslim and South Asian Americans fighting for civil liberties and civil rights. I heard a saying the other day from a Jewish community leader said we used to support the refugees because they were Jewish. Now we support the refugees because we are Jews. Thank you.

[01:06:13] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.