

Transcript – Julie (Uhm) Kao, Class of 1993

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Interviewer: Mala Yee
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Track 1

Mala Yee: [00:00] This is Mala Yee, Brown class of 1991, interviewing Julie Uhm, Brown class of 1993. The date is November 27th, 1989. And the interview is taking place in Applegate Lounge of Hope College, on the Brown University campus, in Providence, Rhode Island. Okay. [laughter] So, I'm just going to ask you first if you could talk about your background, high school life. In terms of, you know, your identity as –

Julie (Uhm) Kao: Well I'm a Korean citizen. I was born in Korea and came over when I was 18 months old, so I've spent most of my life here. I went to a predominantly white high school, small private state school in Montclair, New Jersey. I live in Clifton, New Jersey. It's northern New Jersey, about 20 minutes from the Lincoln Tunnel. Let me see. [01:00] High school was, there were about five to ten Asian Americans in each class, class was about 100 to 120 students. We had an Asian American students association, but it really didn't do anything. And we went – we just basically tried to – it was founded when I was a first-year in high school. And I was involved in it as an officer, but basically what we tried to do is build money so we can start doing some activities, but we never really got to a point of being that organized. And people just really didn't matter much to them. And I would get frustrated with it. So, it really – we didn't really seem to have a focus. The founders really wanted to, like a lot of Asian Americans, became white. And a lot of people thought, you know, nobody knew about their culture, their language. Nobody really cared, nobody thought of themselves as being Asian, they thought of themselves as being American or, you know, I mean there was no difference between being, you know, Korean, or being white. [02:00] There was really very – the difference, because in high school there was a kind of segregation or kind of, everybody noticed the differences between the Afro

American students and the white students. But the Asian students seemed to mix in really like, easily and there was kind of an Asian clique, but it wasn't that predominant, it was very small, and it wasn't very strong. Everybody had predominantly white friends. So it was no big deal.

MY: Were you very active in the group? Or were you –

JUK: Not very.

MY: You weren't one of the founders, were you?

JUK: I was – no, I was an officer, like secretary, treasurer, the first two, three years. And then like, vice president, kind of president, we didn't really have elections or anything, we just whoever did whatever was basically the officer.

MY: Did you consider yourself part of that Asian clique of friends?

JUK: Not really. I didn't get along that – very well with most of the Asian American students in my school. So, my closest friends were always white. The only time [03:00] I really came into contact with a large group of Asian Americans were in summer programs. I went to Andover Phillips Academy summer program, and Harvard summer school. And there, there were – at Andover, I didn't hang out with the large Asian clique. And then in Harvard, I knew a lot of people, and I knew most of the Asians at Harvard summer school. But it didn't really – it really didn't, it was more a social clique than it was anything else, and so what I basically came into contact with was noticing that there were some similarities in family backgrounds in the Asian Americans, that when – and I saw this from Andover too, but it really hit me at Harvard, that when you enter a new environment, it's just a lot easier to start affiliating with people of your same color or same ethnicity than it is to somebody – I mean even if you live on opposite ends of campus, just always wind up at least knowing of the other person. But, because [04:00] it was so – you're in a new environment, and people of the same color just seem easier to approach, I guess. And so I saw a lot of that. And after a while it really becomes like, suffocating. You know, and so towards the end I really started pulling away from all of them. Because I mean,

there was like one where they were predominantly Chinese, and there was another one that's predominantly Korean, and I mean even though they're different cultures and everything, I mean when you have Asian Americans in their clique, and they just go out together, it's all basically the same. And –

MY: This was at Harvard?

JUK: This was at Harvard summer school. And aside from that, I really didn't know any Asian Americans.

MY: Why, you know, you said that you didn't get along with the Asian Americans in your New Jersey high school. Was that just coincidence, or did it have to do with –

JUK: I think it was coincidence. It was personality conflicts more than it was because they were a certain way. I mean they were more Americanized than some of the Asian Americans I had met at Andover and Harvard [05:00] that I got along with better. But they also had different – I mean that wasn't really anything, because there are a lot of people I know who are very not into the Asian culture or anything at all like that, but they're Asian American and I get along with them well.

MY: Yeah.

JUK: So, it's not necessarily that, it was just I think personality conflict.

MY: Do you think that that – when you decide, you know, when you become friends with someone, is that a strong deciding factor for you? Or just coincidence that they are, if they're not?

JUK: If they're Asian?

MY: Yeah.

JUK: I think it's coincidence, but what I've noticed here at Brown is that the Asian Americans just seem to all have some sort of ties towards each other. So, if you know one person, it's easy to meet all of them.

MY: It's true.

JUK: And so, I mean most of the people I know outside of my unit are Asian American, you know, of different classes. You know, '91, and everything. And it seems that, I mean making friends with people, after a while you start having most of your friends being Asian American, all of your closest [06:00] friends being Asian American, sometimes when you get into an environment where you're the only Asian person in a group, you really feel self-conscious, because you really don't notice it for a while. And then when you're just thrown out there, you know, and so, a lot of people feel more self-conscious, and they have trouble getting along with white people after a while, because they're so used to, you know, being able to joke in their native language or, you know, just having all these Asians around them, so.

MY: Yeah.

JUK: I don't really see that yet, but I can see how it can happen easily.

MY: What made you choose Brown University?

JUK: Let's see. I really didn't want to come here, because I didn't think it was the kind of school I wanted. It was in Providence, which I wasn't too thrilled about. I had never visited Brown before I came to TWTP. I was all set to going to Princeton, and I sent in all my forms. I was waitlisted for Brown, I kind of blew off the application and all that stuff. [07:00] And it really didn't bother me, but I kept on the waitlist because my counselor just said it might be safe, if you change your mind in May, you know, at least have somewhere else. And I visited Princeton, and it really seemed that it was very WASP-y, very White Anglo-Saxon, male-oriented. And that kind of bothered me. I didn't see any people who were like, Afro American or Latino. There

were, I mean I saw maybe two. And I was down there several times. It was in New Jersey and everything, so I had a lot of problems with it. I'm engineering, and so the program was very rigorous, and I didn't know if I wanted to make the kind of commitment at this point. And then, I found out about Brown, talked with some people. I knew that they had a very strong Asian American community, and I knew there were like, going to be problems with that, because a lot of times when they have a strong ethnic community, people look at it as a huge clique, and being separatist. [08:00] I knew that would be a problem. But I also knew that it was also a different kind of support group that was at least available if you decided to choose to join the group, or to get to know people like that. But in Princeton, there really wasn't that option, I didn't feel. So, in the end of May, like after just thinking about it for like a day or two, I decided to take the risk and go to Brown's, you know, school I didn't know very much about.

MY: And so then, you decided to come to TWTP?

JUK: Yeah, I didn't – I had not visited Brown, so I wanted to see the campus and to get more familiar with it as soon as possible. And also, I had a lot of problems with the name, Third World Transition Program. And I didn't know what it was about, or anything like that. And like, I had been involved in, you know, fighting apartheid and all these other causes against racism. Mostly against black African American people, and [09:00] so, when I heard about the program and it seemed to cover all different ethnicities, I really didn't see – I didn't really see the racism against Asian Americans, and they had discussed it in this paper they had sent. So I decided it might be something that I would at least want to like, observe and figure out why they called it Third World Transition – like people of Third World nations.

MY: So when you came here, you were kind of – you weren't really necessarily all into it, you were kind a little bit more curious about the whole thing?

JUK: Yeah. I mean I really didn't like, being called like a Third World nation, like coming from a Third World nation. I mean, if, you know, our nation's a Third World, we're the first too, you know? I mean are we third-class citizens? And so, I didn't understand the terminology. And then when I went through the program, a lot of things became clearer.

MY: So did you change your opinion about the name?

JUK: I think that it's [10:00] a name that can be easily misinterpreted. But it's a name that can – is not as misinterpreted as say minority or, you know, people of color. There are a lot more problems, I think, that are more basic than Third World.

MY: So would you – you would have suggested to change the name then?

JUK: I think if you can find a better name, you know, but I mean a lot of people thought about it, and there really is a – it's really hard to find a term that would fit. And Third World is kind of as close to being PC as you can get, I think. You know?

MY: So, let's talk about TWTP. How you felt about it, what kind of bad things or good things came out of it.

JUK: I think TWTP, the program's very good. And I mean, for some people, it's really, I think, a very personal kind of thing, what you do with it, what you get out of it, and how you approach it. Because for a lot of people it was like shoving [11:00] racism down your throat. You know, this is racism, everything is racism. You have to see this, and being exposed to it 24 hours a day for 5 days continuously, right before you're supposed to go to college, when everybody's anxious, it's kind of tough. And it's a lot to think about. And some people choose not to. And others, it winds up becoming – I know some people who talk about it all the time, and it just really disturbs them. And they don't get anywhere with it. And so, a lot of people just, they go to it. And while they're there, they observe a lot, but afterwards, you know, it's really easy when you go there to make friends of, you know, the same color, and then when freshman orientation week comes along, you know, it's hard – you have to make friends all over again. And some people really don't – choose not to.

MY: It's just easier not to.

JUK: It's just easier if you already have gone through that awkward period with people. And you've gotten to a point [12:00] where you're fairly comfortable. I mean, it's easier to stick with that than to change and try to go through that period again with other people.

MY: So, how did you feel about it? When, in terms of, you know, talking about being bombarded with, you know, this is racist, everything is racist, did you feel that personally?

JUK: I felt that it was a lot to think about. And that, I had just come from Korea, I had visited relatives, so I was very jetlagged. And I just stayed home for like three days and then I went to the program. And so, I mean, a lot of things like really hit me. Because I had moved around a lot. And from what I feel, I feel as though I've been aware of racism and experienced racism from a really young age. I mean, the first time I can think of was when I was four. And a lot – people really don't even think that they've ever had a racist act against them, especially Asian Americans. And so, I thought, I think I came into it with a different kind of background. [13:00] I mean, it was a lot, and it was really, I mean you felt like it was totally surrounding you. I mean, all the seminars are around one sort of racism or another. But I think in the end, sometimes people need that. Because it's such a thing that it's really put under the carpet a lot in the media, and in society, and it's just something that's not really all that discussed, especially in high school. Or at home. So I think that it was important for some people to really experience that.

MY: I wanted to ask you some more about TWTP. You've been sparking all these things. First of all, I noticed that you used, you know, terms like African American and Latino. Did you use those terms before you came here, or what was that –

JUK: I used African American and Asian American before. I didn't use Latino. I just always, it seemed Hispanic was the term that I [14:00] had been told was like, fairly broad, and I never – I mean, it seems Latinos more accepted, because it covers a lot more, and – but people in New York / New Jersey area are just generally called Hispanic. And not in a racist manner, it's just the term they use. Because most people are from Puerto Rico, or from Cuba. And so, it kind of fits more specifically with the region. I started, I had a friend in Yale last – senior year in high school, and he was from – I used to say Oriental, that was the term my parents used, that's the

term all the people I knew used. And then he made me aware of how British people who had come and tried to open up ports in China called people Oriental, and it was a derogatory term. So, when I became aware of that, that's when I decided Asian American, it seemed to fit more. And after a while, [15:00] I mean it was – it's a longer term and it's more tedious, but Oriental, after a while, really began to disturb me. And African American, I use that more than I do black often, but I mean people are referred to as being white, and for a long time you said Caucasian, but Caucasian also covers Southeast Asians. I mean not Southeast, South Asians. So, there are a lot of things that, I mean –

MY: Overlap?

JUK: Right. So it's really hard to find a term that really fits. So, I mean usually people know when you say black. I mean I know a lot of people who prefer to be called black than African American. Because, you know, why try to cover it up? I mean I'm black and I'm proud of it. You know? And that's, I mean it's really something that's personal and a lot of the time, seems like in general, African American seems a term that is more accepted or something that won't be offensive.

MY: Yeah. You know, the thing about the term Oriental, did they address that at – they must [16:00] have addressed that at TWTP also, did they?

JUK: Yeah, they did.

MY: Did you find – did you know anyone who – or did you find anyone that was using that term until they, you know, that experience changed them, did you find?

JUK: Yeah well, TWTP and other Asian Americans, like people who had not gone to TWTP, Asian Americans would point that out to them. And a lot of people at first would have a hard time with it, which is understandable, it's a term you never really think twice of. All of the sudden you find out oh, it's a dirty word. And with Oriental, a lot more people use Asian American I think now who had gone to TWTP. Or at least they did in the beginning. What I've

seen is like, a lot of people become PC, they like, you know, use a lot of terms that are more accepted, and after a while, you know, it's just hard to keep up sometimes, especially if you're not aware of it, and you just don't think about it all that often. So, you know, Oriental comes back, black comes back, freshman instead of first-year. Stuff like that. [17:00]

MY: You seem to be at an advantage over a lot of, you know, the average people coming into TWTP in the sense that for instance, in your senior year of high school, you learned about the term Oriental, and you were really active in, you know, apartheid and racism. You seem a lot more aware than let's say the average person coming in. So that must have been a little bit easier for you to transit into a program.

JUK: I guess so, yeah. I mean, it's just something that, I mean I grew up in the Bronx for a while. I lived there for three or four years. And there, there was this really big problem that I noticed, I mean you couldn't avoid, between the white population and the black population. And a lot of white people did not know any Asian Americans. I mean, Asians just were not really existing in the public schools. And so, and that had happened, let's see, my first experience was in nursery school. I had gone to a, like, it was all African American children. You know, nobody was white. [18:00] Nobody was Asian, nobody was Latino. Everybody was African American. And I had stayed there for a week or two, and I had a lot of problems there. And it's something that I never really noticed. And see, I changed nursery schools three times. I had problems finding a location of a school that was convenient for me to get to. Convenient for my mom to walk me to. And so, the first one I had gone to had been predominantly white, and had been (inaudible) playground, you know, everybody was white, no big deal. And then, I went to the school where the teacher was African American, the students were African American, and I first got a lot of weird stares that – I had gotten some stares in the other schools, but after a while, you know, people knew – I mean I didn't have an accent, and I didn't dress differently.

So, after a while I just became the same thing. Because my skin color, I mean, it's – Asian Americans aren't that far off from whites, not as far as say most African Americans. But, [19:00] you're further far off from having the color skin tone of an African American than a white. So, I mean you went to school, the differences are at first a lot harder to come by. Especially if they've – they're used to having – seeing white children, you know, from a

distance. And never seeing an Asian student, and never seeing an Asian student in the classroom. And so, for a while nobody would speak to me. And the teacher kind of, she was very understanding. I mean, she tried to make the transition a little easier, but at times she also had problems, you know, she had – she didn't ever have to deal with an Asian American. And then I started fitting in, this one person after a while, she and I started hanging out. And I used to draw all the time, black people. Like I would like, take a black crayon, and all my people were black. And I'd bring this home and my parents were really shocked. I mean, most kids draw white people, you know? And why is this person drawing black people, you know? [20:00] And so, after I was pulled out of the school, and – but before then, I had told my mom how I had started, I saw how a lot of people dressed differently than the white kids I'd grown up with. I had played, you know, lived in my apartment complex. And they had their hairs in like a lot of barrettes and they were all braided and everything. And I started wanting to look like that. And that disturbed my parents. And that was like my first conflict with color that I remember. Just like in the Bronx, it just got more intensified and more violent. You know, there were like, kids would come up to me and like, in broad daylight, and just like, try to like, push me over and steal my bicycle. And, you know, they'd call me chink and stuff like that. And I mean, I don't – I think people have experiences with that, but they become so immune to it.

MY: You forget also (inaudible) yeah.

JUK: You forget. But with me, a lot of that really hurt me for a while. And [21:00] so, and I had gone back to Korea and that's when I began to realize that I really was Asian. Like, I went back the summer before my first year in high school. So, like all these different experiences just sort of made me – it was just too much to like, run away from, or like avoid, basically something that – by being a new student in a lot of schools that were predominantly white, and being the only Asian American in the schools, I mean you can't deny that you're experiencing this racism, you know, if you experience it 10 times in your lifetime. But most people who are Asian American go to one school, they deal with it, they become accepted, and then they go on.

MY: You said your parents were disturbed when you were drawing black people. Would they have been as disturbed if it was white?

JUK: No, they weren't. Because before and afterwards, I drew mostly white people. And then, well no. Afterwards, when I – after a while I started drawing only Asian people. [22:00] I didn't even know that many Asians, it was just something that I started doing. They weren't that disturbed, it was more like, see they had come from Korea, lived in Korea until they were, you know, late twenties. And so, there are like no black people in Asians, so they come with a lot of prejudices. And it took them a long time to overcome it. And when I was four, they still had been – they'd only been here for three years, had problems with the language, and had a lot of problems just dealing with white people and black people, and Latinos just were something that they just weren't ready to handle, I don't think.

MY: Do you – have they changed a lot now?

JUK: I don't – I think my mother is more just kind of out of the scene. There's nothing that concerns her. It's, I mean she doesn't – she basically only knows Korean American wives that come over. So I mean, she basically [23:00] is still very into the Asian mode. So, I don't – I think she's changed a little bit. Like, you know, it wouldn't disturb her if I dated an African American guy, but I think that it would be something that she had to learn to accept. While my father, he's a doctor, so he's exposed to a lot more people on a daily basis. Mostly more Latino than he is African American. But, I think he's changed a lot.

MY: Do you have any conflicts with them because of –

JUK: Well I'm a lot more liberal and like, racist jokes have always offended me. And while my father often like, a lot of the doctors he knows are very racist and very sexist. So those are the jokes he heard, and those are the jokes he found funny. And so after a while, I mean he just learned that certain things that were just really – I was sensitive to. And I'll point it out to them, and he'll be like yeah, that is racist. [24:00] And then, he'll just go on. You know?

MY: Yeah. Do you think that you have a greater conflict with them than, let's say, someone whose parents were white, who is white, you know, because you have a cultural difference

versus this issue with racist and sexist jokes? Do you think that might happen to someone whose parents weren't raised in a different culture?

JUK: I think that being brought up in an American culture while your parents were not, I mean there are a lot of conflicts that come that most like, white students never have to face. And I think that's one of the things Asian Americans first find they have in common with others of the same generation, and I think that with racism, for the most part, from what I've seen, is just something that usually isn't brought up. [25:00] And when it is, it's kind of more about – I think my parents are a lot more sensitive about racism against Asian Americans than they are against – I mean they know it exists, but it affects them more. And they see it a lot more than I do, than I see it in the first and second generation, because they have problems with the language, and so when they came over, they experienced a lot of racism from people making fun of their accents, and making fun of their culture, while first generation, second generations really don't experience that. So they're more sensitive to the racism against their culture, their color. But, when it comes to other people's color, it's something that they've been brought up with. And something that since they've been exposed to it at such a late age, that's something very hard for them to accept, I think. So, like in a white family, I think that often, it's something that really doesn't matter that much. I mean, [26:00] my friend's in the same position as I am, her parents are very conservative. And they didn't want her to go to the prom with an African American guy. You know, they told her she was not allowed to go with him. And she and I have a lot of similar opinions, and she had a lot of problems with that. A lot of people in my school, their parents really put down interracial dating when it comes to white and black, not when it comes to white and Asian.

MY: Yeah.

JUK: So, they had a lot of problems with that. But I think usually, from what I've seen, high school students, it only comes up when it comes to dating. And that it really doesn't come up in a more global or more societal, things that are society-oriented.

MY: Okay. So let's get back on our college track. One last little bit about TWTP, I was wondering, have you felt [27:00] – if you were talking to someone who's on their way now to Brown, would you suggest that they should definitely participate in it, or?

JUK: I think you should definitely participate in it, because even if you don't get anything out of it, you meet some really great people. And I think that if – I think the things that you can get out of, from the program, are, is worth like sitting down on the floor and being uncomfortable for five days, being woken up at seven o'clock in the morning every day. And I think those things are worth it, but I think you really have to go in with an open mind. And if you don't, you're really just, I mean it's just really going to be a social kind of scam week. You know, a lot of people call it – people told me, I knew a couple of students here, and they were white, and they said basically TWTP was considered a scam week. And so, that was one impression I had of it. And I mean, it really is basically in your approach to it, I think.

MY: Do you feel, you know how a lot of people argue that because of TWTP, that is why we have more – most black people staying, you know, hanging out together, most Asian people hanging out together. Do you feel that that's true? Did that happen to you?

JUK: I think it happened to me to a certain extent, but I think that these groups would have formed eventually, or just as quickly, but maybe not as strongly, and maybe not as noticeably. And I think with TWTP, you actually have a program to blame. Because I've seen this happen in Harvard Summer School, and Andover Summer School. And these people are put on different ends of the campus, they didn't even have classes together. It's kind of like, I know at least with the Asian Americans, there's this kind of like [29:00] grapevine chain that goes up, you know, across the nation. And through that, I mean, you know, oh you know so and so, I mean we went to church together, you know? My father went to school with your father. So, things like that. I think that with TWTP, it's just some – like, I said, I mean you form friends with – but TWTP, within the program, a lot of people stick with their own color. And I think that's because a lot of people, I mean, are just not used to dealing with people of different colors. I mean, they're used to white, and they're interested in getting to know their own ethnicity, and their own color. People of their own color. But, when it comes to different colors, there are a lot of roadblocks

and barriers, and I think most of them were not overcome during the five-day program. And [30:00] because, from what I've seen, like at least this year, the Asian Americans were very quiet in the program. The African American students were the loudest. They didn't dominate, it wasn't like they took over the program. But they participated a lot more, and they got a lot more unified than I think the Asian American community did. And they got unified on a totally different wavelength than the Asian Americans, so it was like they were separate. And because my roommate was African American, and I spoke to her and a lot of people who are African American, because a lot of them are really disturbed when they leave a small group, and the Asian American students never said anything, and I'd be the only one speaking. And they would all nod when I spoke, but none of them would really say anything. And so, they really felt disturbed. And some of them would come up to me and ask me why. Are they afraid of us? Do they not like us? Is there something wrong with us? [31:00] You know. And when people do that, I mean people react to shy people in a really like offended manner. You know, and I don't – I'm not saying all the Asian Americans were shy, I'm saying that I think that there are some – there is premise for the stereotype of the shy, quiet, Asian American, because that's the culture really puts that on the children. And when you're in a foreign environment, you go back to what you learn. And I think that's what happened. And with the cliques, I think you see it a lot with the Asian Americans, at least a lot of Asian American roommates this year, and that helped a lot. And then, there's also –

MY: Just the network.

JUK: Just the network. And then there's also, you know, meeting each other at TWTP, but I think it's basically what you – I mean, [32:00] I know people who went to TWTP and decided that they wanted to stick with the Asian American friends, and they were really comfortable with that. And now, they're just like, you know, well I only know Asian Americans, this is really strange, this is something that, it gets to be a very tight group, and it gets to be very gossipy, and it gets to be very, you know, constraining. And people really feel that after a while. Especially when times get tough. And I think people regret it later. But it's something it's hard to get out of. And so, I don't think that – I think that these cliques, I mean they're good in having, in that people are exposed to people of their own color, which is something they'd been denied in high

school often. But I think it's also bad, because after a while, people feel they have no other choice. And that's not always true, but it does get harder to meet people middle of the year, we've already formed friends, like unit mates [33:00] will get really close. If you've never been involved with them, and you try to get involved in that, it's really hard.

MY: Yeah, that's very true. What were some of the first things or first feelings you had about when, once TWTP was over, and orientation week was over and, you know, real, everyone came back and like, real Brown life started, did you notice some different things about the Third World community here? Some things that you didn't expect or, do you remember some of those feelings?

JUK: Well a lot of people were really surprised, because all of the sudden, all these white people came. And it was like, people began like, looking around. And I did this too. And looking for the people you knew. And the people you knew were people of color, so that's when you started getting that in tune to see people of the same color, or people who weren't white. And [34:00] it seemed that a lot – I didn't, I knew that people would have problems with it, but there was some really strong resentment against our having the opportunity to come here five days earlier and having TWTP. And I wasn't prepared to have to defend it, and to have to defend myself, because I really felt it was a really good program, but I mean I was so confused and it was, you know, something that really gave me a lot to think about. And then first unit meeting, people were just like yeah, why are you given that right? You know, we should all – I mean, that's reverse racism, and everything. And I mean, you're sitting there like, you know, trying to defend yourself but it's really hard. Especially when these people don't – like, white people in general really don't understand your need to be in contact with your culture and your ethnicity. It's something that they've never been denied. It's something that they've never been aware of. And to try to explain it to somebody who just can never have that background that you have, [35:00] is really difficult. And it's not just, you know, white Americans growing up in white America. It's white Americans growing up in Hong Kong are still never denied their history, they're never denied their culture. And they always say they don't have one, but there definitely is an Anglo-Saxon culture that is predominant in the United States. And it's something that's never labeled. It's something that's never presented in like, a defined format. But it's there. And so they have a lot

of problems with that. And I think that's when the resentment starts between, you know, having – that's when people start saying oh this is separatist. I mean society may be pluralist, but that doesn't mean that people get along together of different color. And I think that there's definitely communication problems. And even when you try, it's really hard because people just don't know where you're coming from. And so, [36:00] I mean I find it a lot easier to talk to like an African American or Latino person about racism than I do a white person. And that's in general, and that's gone across the board. And I think that the Third World community itself is very separatist. Not separatist, but it is very separated. I think that's a big problem.

MY: Do you mean the community is separated from the white community, or within the community there's –

JUK: I think both. I think that both people of different colors, are very ignorant of each other's culture, and similarities that do exist, because there are a lot of similarities, but they're just never communicated. And I think a lot of people are scared of people of different color who are considered, you know, quote unquote, "minorities." You know, at least that's what I've heard from Asian Americans, that's what I've heard from African Americans. And with the white community, I think [37:00] a lot of white people I've noticed are very threatened by a strong ethnic community. It really just, I mean something they have never had to deal with, something they've never noticed. And when it comes out like that, it's something that, I mean they don't realize it, but they do have power, and they do have a stronger voice in anything. And to have that voice even threatened is something that really makes them insecure. And that's the biggest thing I've noticed is that people who have problems with the program really are just not insecure, but they notice that something's changing, and something's not going in their direction. And that scares them.

MY: Definitely. Did you, when you – well, are you, do you consider yourself sort of [38:00] very involved AASA right now?

JUK: I think I'm more involved than most first-years. But, I don't think I'm nearly as involved as a lot of people, especially the core people in it. I really don't think I should ever be expected

to be, unless I hold a position. I think after TWTP, I noticed that I knew very little of my own culture and history. And that a lot of Asian Americans didn't understand Asian racism when it came to them, and I didn't totally understand it. But, I felt that I had experienced it, and that it did exist in a, you know, systemized manner, institutionalized manner. And that was something that really became important to me. That has always been important to me, but I never had the opportunity to actually enact upon it. And AASA seems to kind of function in a political sense. [39:00] I mean, they don't really necessarily go out into community or anything. They're not that vocal on campus, I think. But, I think within the Asian community, and you know, having programs like Friends of Southeast Asians, which I'm involved in, you know, having a little sister, little brother, and also this new program they're having with Central High School, helping the Vietnamese and Hmong immigrant students trying to get into colleges, those are really important. And those are things that I can relate to. And so, I mean people say I'm really involved, but it's just something that I never really thought about, really, and tell people. So I didn't mention it.

MY: Do you – I totally blanked – do you feel that – I'll go to the next question. I can't remember. Okay, so how did it come about that you became the speaker at the congregation? [40:00]

JUK: That was totally by accident. That was like, I got the thing in the mail saying, you know, have dinner with David Henry Hwang. I saw *M. Butterfly* this summer. And I – that really, I thought it was a really strong piece, and I saw a lot of symbolism in that, and kind of want to see it again, because the first time you see anything that really has a lot of metaphors in it, it's hard to read it all. And so I wanted to meet him, because you never hear of Asian American artists, you never hear of Asian American playwrights, and when I saw the credits under the program of like where he had gone to school, and his accomplishments, it really impressed me that an Asian American this like, you know, Asian American had basically just been here, like this generation, for 20 years. And to have accomplished, and to have gone beyond the stereotypes the way he has, [41:00] really impressed me. And so, I wanted to meet him. And I kind of blew it off, because I never really thought, you know, I mean what could I write about it, you know? I was like embarrassed about handing it in. And, you know, what would – and I had no idea what to

write about and so I just sat down, and just wrote it out in like an hour, like an hour before it was due. Because I'd forgotten about it, and I was procrastinating, studying for chemistry. So, you know, I'd kick myself if I found out somebody got it and they really, you know, had no idea what they're talking about, and not that I knew what I was talking about, but I mean if they were as clueless as I am, I mean, you know, and they got to meet him I'd be like, you know, kind of mad. So, decided, you know, give it a shot, and Jay [Schat?] called me Sunday night, it was Wednesday, it was a Wednesday, the competition was on Wednesday. And so, I thought he just wanted me to help set up, I thought he wanted, you know, me to go there and like set up chairs. So I called him back the next day and the day after just asking him, [42:00] you know, what time should I show up to help set up? And he got through to me on Tuesday, and I had a chem. exam that evening. And he called me, and he was just like, I was like in the middle of studying, and he's like, oh, would you like to speak tomorrow night? And I was just like, speak to whom? And he was like, speak a convocation, you know, the essay you wrote. And I'm like, you're kidding me.

MY: The essay you wrote wasn't for that though, right?

JUK: Yeah, my speech was based on the essay, I took the essay, it was a really – it wasn't that great of an essay, it was an okay essay according to him, I didn't like it, and so I took it, and elaborated on it, and made it into a speech form. And I did that all day Wednesday. And so, he's like well, you know, you won – well, I read your essay, and [43:00] you know, would you like to speak tomorrow night? And I was like sure, when do you want me to be there? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Yeah. And he's like well okay, meet me at, you know, TWC, we'll go over your speech, and then you'll do it. And I brought it over, and he read it, and he's like wow, you changed it a lot. And I think that he really didn't think that I would put that much into it, since I found out that [David Barn?] had a chem. exam. And so I read it out loud to him and Mimi [Chao?], and they really thought that I had a lot of points that they didn't think would have been hit. So I mean, I don't think it was that great of a speech, and I didn't like, execute it that well, I don't think, but I think that it made me think a lot, and I think some people, it made them realize that it was important to me, and made them think. And so in some ways, I had a couple friends who were there.

MY: Can you talk a little bit about what you said in that? [44:00]

JUK: Let me think. I opened up with somebody during freshman orientation week, like when I first met them, I didn't even know who they were, I just like went up to a friend who happened to be talking to this person, and they said to me, wait, let me guess, you're either an engineering or premed major, your math SAT score is 100 or so points higher than your verbal. And you're very science oriented. And he said, am I right? And I was like, total shock. I was like, this is Brown liberal pluralistic student, like no way. Coming from TWC and having a white person say this to me was really just like, you know, where are you coming from? You know, get off. And I was like, so dumbfounded that the best thing I came up with was no, it was only a 90 point split. And afterwards I just was like, that was the stupidest thing [45:00] you could have ever said to an ignorant person. And it just – and then from there, I just talked about, like, you know, I walked – about how that affected me, how it got me thinking, you know, I mean it's true. Most Asian Americans are either premed or engineering. They're very science-oriented. Most Asian Americans do score 100 or so points higher on their math SATs than verbal. So I mean why did this person who was stating a statistical fact, why did that offend me? And it offended me because he was making me into a category, and a nonhuman, when I'm an individual who has the right to not be prejudged or assumed, and no white person is prejudged or assumed like that. And no person should ever be forced to either deny or accept a stereotype. And people who hand those out who never have to experience it, [46:00] it just really makes you more ticked off. And then, talked about how, you know, I mean how like, society and the people – I mean, even people at Brown, who are supposed to be more educated, are just as ignorant, and that people who are Asian American are just as ignorant about what's going on. I mean, there's a lot of racism out there, it's just really covered up, or it's just denied. And it's just so much easier to deny it than to face it. Because when you have to face it, you have to start looking into yourself, and deciding, and trying to figure out who you are. I mean I considered myself basically white for the longest time, and I mean I didn't think I had a right to call myself Korean or Asian American for a while because I mean, I didn't know anything about Korean culture. I knew the language. [47:00]

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