

Abe

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of Mukai Farm & Garden, said the organization invited Abe and Nimura to speak in part because of the book's far-reaching meaning — the way people have been “othered” for centuries. “We want to acknowledge and recognize the anniversary of this very important day. It's also an opportunity to ... make sure it never happens again.”

Abe, 70, is a third-generation Japanese American whose father was incarcerated at Heart Mountain in Wyoming. But his father was a boy during that time; a quiet man, he never spoke of it. Like so many members of his community, Abe said, his parents (his mother, also a U.S. citizen, was in Japan during the war) wanted to put this chapter behind them and reclaim their lives as Americans.

But as a young man, Abe began to wonder why they didn't resist what was clearly a wholesale deprivation of their civil liberties, and he began to hear from his parents' friends — women in his mother's singing group, gardeners who worked with his father — that many did fight their imprisonment.

Abe, who later became a reporter for KIRO Radio, began interviewing

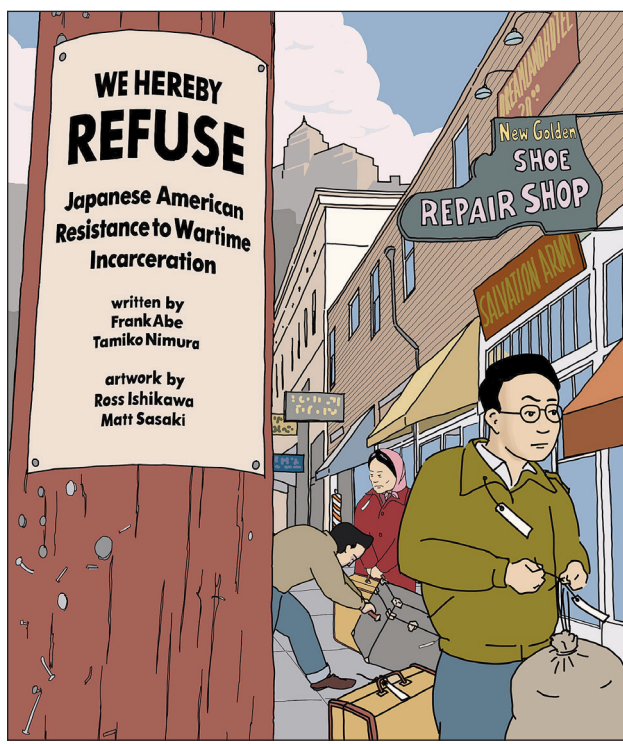
survivors of the camps, writing about what he learned. His investigation, he said, was both illuminating and upsetting. The stories of resistance were not simply ignored but actively suppressed, he said. “My parents' generation embraced the idea of being the good minority, and the idea of ... resistance did not fit that narrative.”

As he spoke, he held up a book, “Nisei: The Quiet Americans,” one of the few popular histories about Japanese Americans in the early 1970s. “It's fair to say I was outraged in reading this. ... It was not any kind of legacy that I, as a third-generation, a Sansei, wanted to have — that of quietly cooperating with the government. ... This book fueled my quest to reframe our history.”

And reframe he did.

Abe helped to produce the first-ever “Day of Remembrance” in 1978 — a gathering of thousands of people at the former Sick's Stadium, in Seattle, to begin the campaign to redress Japanese Americans for their incarceration. The Day of Remembrance is now a nationwide event hosted by the Smithsonian on Feb. 19, the date that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066.

He wrote and directed a one-hour film, “Conscience and the Constitution,” that



ROSS ISHIKAWA AND MATT SAGAKI ART
In a Feb. 19 event hosted by Mukai Farm & Garden, Frank Abe and Tamiko Nimura will discuss their graphic novel, “We Hereby Refuse: Japanese American Resistance to Incarceration,” a powerful, historically accurate look at three individuals who, in different ways, stood up to their captors.

told the little-known story of organized draft resistance at Heart Mountain — a story of people resisting not because they were anti-war or anti-American but because they could not fight for a government that denied them their rights as citizens. It was distributed nationwide on PBS in 2000.

He edited, with two others, “John Okada: The Life and Rediscovered Work

of the Author of No-No Boy,” a look at the man who wrote a novel about a Japanese American who refused to fight for a country that imprisoned him. Okada's novel — like the No-No boys themselves — was initially rejected and ignored. Abe and his co-authors' meticulous look at his life and works won an American Book Award.

He did all this as he was

Day of Remembrance Talk

Mukai Farm & Garden will commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Day of Remembrance with an online discussion with Frank Abe and Tamiko Nimura, authors of “We Hereby Refuse: Japanese American Resistance to Wartime Incarceration,” at 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 19.

Register for the talk at tinyurl.com/bdfd4uvc and find out more at mukaifarmandgarden.org. The event is free, with donations gratefully accepted.

also developing his career as a journalist and communications professional. After 14 years at KIRO, he worked as a communications director for King County Executives Gary Locke and Dow Constantine until his retirement in 2019.

Abe decided to work with Nimura and two artists — Ross Ishikawa and Matt Sasaki — on a graphic novel after the Wing Luke Museum put out a call for such a book and the four teamed up to submit a proposal. “I never planned to be a graphic novelist,” Abe said with a smile. The book was published by Chin Music Press in Seattle last spring. It's now in its third printing.

But as Abe discovered, the format is a powerful and moving way to tell three different stories, woven together as a compelling narrative of resistance.

Jim Akutsu, the inspiration for Okada's novel “No-No Boy,” was one of the young men who refused to be drafted. Labeled a draft

dodger after the war, he experiences a tragedy as a result of his stance. Hiroshi Kashiwagi, imprisoned at Tule Lake, refuses to sign the loyalty oath, renouncing his U.S. citizenship in the process. And Mitsuya Endo is both a reluctant hero and remarkably brave; imprisoned at Topaz, she refuses a chance at freedom so that her history-making civil suit could reach the U.S. Supreme Court and hasten the closure of the camps.

Abe notes that the suppression of uncomfortable truths is hardly new in America. “In our nation today, we're seeing a concerted attack on critical race theory, which in fact is nothing more than an attack on the teaching of history,” he said.

“This history of Japanese American incarceration falls squarely in that realm of American history that has been ignored or suppressed,” he said. “I'm pleased that our book has found its audience.”

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