



Western Edition

“Memorializing the West: Reckoning with Denver’s Memorials”

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(MUSIC – SUNDAY)

BILL DEVERELL (HOST): Hi, I’m Bill Deverell of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West. Welcome to Episode 5 of “Memorializing the West”, our third season of *Western Edition*. In today’s episode, “Reckoning with Denver’s Memorials”, we look to the capital city of my home state of Colorado. Back in the summer of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, a national reckoning with history and commemoration gained power and prominence, generating both heat and light across the nation. Small, medium, and large communities and cities across the country began to think about what to do with their problematic, too often racist, statues, markers, and place names. In the aftermath of that one tragic and shattering moment, amidst so many, Americans all over the place wanted the landscape to tell a different story, one that did not venerate racial violence. In some ways, this was not new at all: who and what this country and our communities choose to memorialize is part of a national conversation on-going since the end of the American Revolution. But this was different, this was more portentous, and all the strands of this reckoning are still with us, still being pulled here and there in fascinating ways. I know Denver, or I know Denver through my youth. So when, in that summer of 2020, Denver became the sight and scene of protests, of people in the streets making passionate arguments about where the past and present meet and what that means, I paid attention. I knew those places of

protest, I knew the Capitol Hill neighborhood, and I recognized those civic buildings and park spaces. I knew them as a kid. And now I thought of them, and what was happening, as an historian of the American West. It was a different Denver to me, or a mostly different Denver. We went to the Rockies to find out what happened and what it might mean. There, in Denver, an alliance of policymakers, historians, and activists have tackled this work with energy, thought, and creativity. To help us understand what the city has been doing, we turned to Jason Hanson. He's Chief Creative Officer and Director of Interpretation and Research at History Colorado.

JASON HANSON: During the summer of 2020 here in Denver, like elsewhere around the country and around the world, we had some pretty large protests for racial justice on the streets, and that meant centering on the Capitol. The Capitol has been, I think like many states, the place where Coloradans come to gather for generations. People have been gathering in front of the west steps of the state capitol to protest. It's the place where we come here in Colorado when large groups have something to say. And so in the summer of 2020, that was the focal point of the protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder. And standing out in front of the Capitol since 1909 has been an eight-foot-tall bronze sculpture of a dismounted Union cavalry soldier. Its formal name is "On Guard". It was created by an artist who was a veteran of the Union cavalry himself. His name was John Dare Howland, and he modeled it after no particular individual but the soldiers that he served with. So, this sculpture that Howland called "On Guard" has been standing sort of in the most prominent place in front of the Capitol, in front of those west steps. And people have memories of it. During protests, people have climbed on it, trampled the flowerbeds all around it, trying to sort of crowd in and hear whatever speaker is on the Capitol steps. And so, the sculpture had stood silent guard over the Capitol for more than 100 years, looking west toward the mountains until those protests in 2020. During the protests, unknown actors pulled over the statue. Everyone awoke in the morning to find it lying very unmonumentally face-down in the flowerbed that surrounded it.

(MUSIC – BEYOND THE LOWS)

<CLIP> CBS Colorado: A controversial statue at the State Capitol is torn down overnight. Protesters have targeted the statue which once stood on the west steps including spraying it with graffiti.

DEVERELL: While racial justice activists and protestors were toppling monuments to Confederate figures across the country in the spring of 2020, what was playing out in Denver was slightly different. The monument lying in the flowerbed outside the Capitol building was actually a monument to a Union soldier. City officials weren't sure who was

responsible but suspected that activists toppled the statue because of the role of Union troops in the Sand Creek massacre. The 1864 massacre against the Cheyenne and Arapaho killed over 230 Indigenous people, mostly women and children and the elderly. It was Colorado's deadliest day, and it was carried out by US Army troops under the American flag. A news broadcast from the spring of 2020 interviewed one activist about why protestors wanted the statue to come down. His response seemed to reflect the thoughts of those assembled that day.

<CLIP> CBS Colorado: The reason I'm happy about this is because I know my history and I know that that man is one of many men who were part of the Sand Creek massacre and many other genocidal acts that happened throughout Colorado's early histories.

HANSON: When the attack started, one of the tribal leaders went into his teepee and got out the American flag that he was given as a sign that this particular encampment was peaceful. But the soldiers didn't stop. So that Union cavalry sculpture was erected in 1909 in honor of Colorado troops who had fought for the Union during the Civil War. And men from Colorado had served with the Union all over the country. And so, the plaque on the bottom of the monument listed out all of the engagements where they had been present. And right at the very end, it listed the Battle of Sand Creek. Now, Congress had taken less than a year, as had the Army - and this is in the midst of the Civil War. They had taken time out of all of the other important things they were doing, both of these bodies, to investigate what had happened at Sand Creek and wasted very little time in pronouncing it a massacre. In fact, the congressional report in 1865 was the first to use the word "massacre" in relation to Sand Creek and. But the people of Denver had a really hard time accepting the fact that their fathers and brothers and friends had participated in something so atrocious. And so they continued to insist that it wasn't a massacre; that it was a battle. And this plaque on the bottom of the monument was just one more form of trying to litigate that point, even though as far as Congress and the Army and pretty much everyone else was concerned, this wasn't a point that was open for debate. The people of Denver continued to litigate it. And so, they included the "Battle of Sand Creek" at the bottom of that plaque. And over the years, someone tried to grind it off once; the monument has been splashed with red paint on occasion. This has been a continual point of contention. In fact, the state legislature was ready to create a new panel, a new plaque at the base of the monument, and reached out to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal representatives. And it was their preference at the time, in the early 2000s, to add an additional plaque clarifying that Sand Creek was in no way a battle, but rather a massacre. And so, there was an additional plaque added on the stone circle that goes around the monument, the sort of fence on the outer edge of the monument installation, very clearly stating that Sand Creek was a massacre. But the

original plaque, the one that was on the pedestal that the monument was on, stayed there and continued to list the Battle of Sand Creek.

<CLIP> CBS Colorado: Even before the statue was torn down, we witnessed many people climbing on it and defacing it, just one of many around this country now to fall during this time of national introspection.

DEVERELL: Rather than leave the toppled soldier face-down in the flowerbed or banish the statue to a state basement or warehouse, History Colorado had an innovative idea to reinterpret the statue within the museum. A team of public historians, they thought, could use the toppled statue to start thoughtful conversations about the significance of monuments, their shifting meanings, and how we might re-envision the narratives we tell about the past. History Colorado likely became the first museum in the nation to bring a controversial monument into a museum and reinterpret it. I asked Jason to talk more about the circumstances of bringing the toppled statue of a Union soldier linked to the Sand Creek Massacre, into the walls of the museum and how the public has received it.

HANSON: At the museum, we all woke up to the news just like everyone else, that the monument had been toppled. And I think for some people, it was confusing at first because it was a monument to a Union soldier. This wasn't one of those Confederate monuments. But I think, as everyone had a chance to think about it and learn a little bit about Sand Creek, that started to emerge as the likely reason it was toppled. At the museum here, our director Dawn DiPrince texted me that morning. I was actually on my way out of town for a vacation, but she texted me and said, "Do you think we could bring it to the History Colorado Center?" Because we had been talking about all of these suggestions we were hearing in the media, that controversial monuments and memorials belong in museums. And we thought, "Okay, here's our chance. Let's take them up on that suggestion." I reached out to some friends and got in touch ultimately with the Capitol Building Advisory Committee, who was responsible for the disposition of the monument. It had subsequently been taken to a secure storage facility. And so, it was just sitting there. It was covered with spray paint and graffiti from the protests and who knows what else had been splashed on it. And I just asked, you know, if you would like.

DEVERELL: You can have it?

HANSON: Yeah, if you would like someone to give it a home while everyone is figuring out what to do next. You know at the museum here, we think we can make something constructive out of this. And the Capitol Building Advisory Committee agreed, and in

October, the monument was ready to come to us. So, we originally looked around to see what are the precedents for bringing in controversial monuments to museums. We assumed someone must have done it, but we really couldn't find any, at least any contemporary examples to work from. There really seemed to be no playbook for this moment and this type of situation. And so we sat down - our exhibit team and collections team - sat down and came up with an interpretation plan.

DEVERELL: Jason and his team crafted an interpretative plan with three phrases. The first phase involved figuring out how to tell the history of the events and actions of Colorado troops in their service to the Union in the Civil War.

HANSON: And there was a lot to say about that. Like I said, Colorado troops had fought all around the nation, both far from home and near to home. But what's important to know about the Civil War and the West that we didn't think that a lot of our visitors would be familiar with is that out west here, the troops weren't just here to hold the gold, to make sure that the gold fields stayed in Union hands. And a Confederate force had tried to invade Colorado and was met by Colorado troops and turned back at the southern border. So, this was not a unrealistic concern by these troops, but there was a lot more that they were doing than just holding the gold. They were actually actively involved in seizing the moment to clear the land of Indigenous communities so that it would be available for settlement. And that's a big piece of what the Civil War did out West. There weren't as many pitched battles between North and South, but there were a number of engagements between Union troops and tribal communities.

DEVERELL: The second phase of interpretation by Jason's team involved interrogating the history from 1909 of the creation of the monument. What led to the creation of this statue and plaque? While there were numerous layers to unpack, one stood out.

HANSON: The most overt was that there had been an encampment, which is a national convention of the veterans' group, the Grand Army of the Republic in Denver earlier. And city leaders had been embarrassed to realize they had no monuments to the Civil War. And so when the GAR was coming back, they moved quickly to make sure that they wouldn't find themselves in that embarrassing position again. And they commissioned this monument to stand in a real place of honor in front of the Capitol. It was, of course, part of a nationwide wave of Civil War monuments being installed. A lot of them were Confederate monuments that we've all heard about, really advancing the myth of the lost cause or the narrative sort of rewriting the story of the Civil War in Southern states. But all of these monuments were advancing some kind of narrative. The one in Colorado was, of course, advancing this notion that Colorado troops had fought bravely for the Union in the Civil War. And because the people of Denver were still litigating the notion

that Sand Creek was a battle and not a massacre, they included Sand Creek on the list of those engagements.

DEVERELL: This leads us to the third phase of interpretation: creating a conversation about the meaning of the monument in this present moment.

HANSON: Here at the History Museum, we are probably more aware than most of this historical narrative that we are all being soaked in all the time, whether it's monuments or street names or roadside markers or the names of civic buildings. There are so many ways that the generations that preceded us have left us markers and signposts for what they thought was important and what they wanted us to hold on to. And so, it's just everywhere. And we really wanted to ask people in this particular instance because it was such a flashpoint, "What did this monument mean today?" And we knew that wasn't for our team to decide, you know, the days of the museum being the community's authoritative voice are long since over. And so, we reached out to a wide range of stakeholders, artists and historians, military veterans, tribal representatives, whoever we could think of, who we thought might have an interesting perspective. And then we made that our interpretation for this third part. We just asked them to provide us short statements and we surrounded the monument with them. And that really brought the multiplicity of meanings that a monument like this can have to the forefront. It is literally the first thing that people encounter. But we also wanted to make sure that this was the basis for a constructive civic conversation. And so, we asked visitors what they thought the purpose of monuments were and whether we needed them at all. And I have to say that's been the greatest, most pleasant surprise about this, is people have taken it so seriously. And because we're a museum, we use Post-it notes because museums love Post-it notes for whatever reason. So, we asked people to leave their answers on Post-it notes. And we have dozens and scores of them. We have to curate them every week just to make sure that there's room for new people to leave their thoughts. The really thoughtful notions printed in tiny little script so that they can fit their whole thought on a Post-it note. And then we'll see chains of conversations where someone will point to another Post-it note and respond to it. And these really wonderful dialogues and trialogues developing there. And that has been so heartening for me because that's what we hoped. The museum could provide a space for reflection and thoughtful conversation around monuments. And that seems to be at least in this sort of disjointed, Post-it note way, exactly what's happened.

DEVERELL: Well, it strikes me as a really elegant, graceful, and accessible way to have these dialogues, and as you say, trialogues. I think it's really kind of beautiful. But it also, it proves a point, which is sometimes when let's say, a monument, a statue, a horse-backed warrior comes down, there's this opinion that gets raised like, just stick it in the

museum. And sometimes I feel that that's a way to say, just hide it away, preserve it, care for it, but put it in your storage facility just because we can't bear ourselves to destroy it. But don't make it part of any contemporary discussion or ability to learn, etc. And you've proven that that's not what you're doing and in fact works very, very well to invite public thoughts and exchanges, right?

HANSON: Yeah. I mean, that's, I feel like this is a conversation that, at least in our experience, people want to have, and they want the right place to have it. We need good places to have these conversations. And I think, you know, that's one of the social purposes that museums can fulfill is providing those places.

DEVERELL: The ongoing public conversations about our collective past are at the heart of how we present history in monuments and plaques. Beyond the walls of History Colorado, Jason is working with other historians in the state to reconsider a long list of place names and monuments through the lens of racial equity and historical justice. Jason has been a part of this work, including being part of the Colorado State Historians Council. They are working to rename historical sites all over the state. We ask Jason about this work - proceeding on two fronts - and wonder if there's tension between the brick-and-mortar memorials and seeing the past as needing to be constantly re-examined.

HANSON: We have the statewide geographic naming board here in Colorado, and two of the state historians, Nicki Gonzales and William Wei, are working with that board that was appointed by the governor to review place names throughout the state. We're talking about mountain peaks and canyons, places like that, and just evaluate whether some of them might be appropriate to change. And then we have here in the capital city of Denver, the city government asked if we would help them review the 400 and something public named places, whether that's parks or city owned buildings, recreation centers, things like that. As historians, I think we all believe that it has some kind of impact. And this is a place where we want to make sure that when you put someone's name on a place, ideally you are imbuing that place with that person's character and their best qualities. And sometimes our notion of who is worthy of that kind of celebration or that kind of commemoration shifts as our generational values shift. And I don't think any of us, at least on the State Historians Council, believe that the people of a previous generation get to dictate what we think about the past. They certainly - we're respectful and deferential to their thoughts. And we're very aware that one day, generations from now, our thoughts about what deserves to be commemorated might be up for review. But I think that's a natural process and I think it's the right of people. I mean, what do we study all this history for? Unless it's to help

us illuminate a brighter future, discern how we got to now and where we might want to go from here.

DEVERELL: I'm curious about this whole movement and your work on it. Do you and your colleagues entertain the idea that the era of permanence with commemorations, a statue, a plaque, etc. is under reconsideration as well? In other words, given the cycles of time that you just reflected upon maybe sticky notes that are ephemeral and actually will probably go away or maybe ephemeral installations that can be relooked at or fade away, maybe that's the way to think about these things.

HANSON: Yeah, I think there's a lot of value in just accepting the ephemerality of some of this and embracing it. It feels like there maybe was some bargain made. You know, you erect a monument, and we promise never to take it down or we promise never to reconsider it. But I don't think that's ever been the case, nor should it be our expectation. I think it's really wonderful to try and transmit stories and values from one generation to future generations. That's kind of the whole project I'm engaged in at work, and you are too. But I also think that we need to have the humility to understand that our views may not be ironclad forever.

(MUSIC – DIGITAL SOLITUDE)

HANSON: But I think speaking for myself here - but I hope for many of my colleagues - people have to be able to draw meaning and inspiration and lessons from these historic reminders, big and small, that surround us everywhere. And when that history no longer serves those purposes, when new insights or interpretations arise, new information is brought to light, new views just become part of how we understand the world. I think the people of a community who really are the keepers of all history, the people of a community have a right to revise or replace the stories that we call upon for inspiration and guidance.

DEVERELL: As Jason notes, community members are an essential component of any effort or process to revise and re-envision the narratives we tell about the past. And we wanted to hear more from members of a grassroots movement to reshape historical narratives in Denver's public spaces. We spoke with Joie Ha and Kai Vong, community activists in Denver and members of the board of the Colorado Asian Pacific Union and part of the Denver Asian Pacific Islander Commission. They have been at the forefront of promoting a more accurate understanding of the history of Denver's Asian American communities and of the city's historic Chinatown. They began their work by launching a campaign to remove an inaccurate plaque in Denver's LoDo neighborhood marking an anti-Chinese riot that took place in 1880. Kai explains what happened that year.

KAI VONG: So, the anti-Chinese race riot is the first race riot to occur in Denver. You know, on October 31st Halloween, there were two Chinese individuals that were just hanging out, going about their day in a saloon off of Wazee Street. And then later on there were two drunken white men that kind of stumbled into the place, and eventually one of them struck one of the Chinese individuals. Now, here, the little scuffle had spilled out into the streets, and this sparked a massive riot. There's a mob of around 3,000 people, give or take, and they couldn't be tamed by the police. They even had the fire department come and help, and what they did was they sprayed fire hoses all over the mob and it didn't help. It actually made things worse; they got more angry. And so by the end of the attack, about hundreds of Chinese were arrested for what the police say was for protection. And there was one Chinese individual by the name of Luke Young who was beaten and hung from a lamppost. Lots of Chinese owned property and businesses were destroyed around a total of one and a half million dollars of today's money worth of damages. But no one was ever held accountable for it. In fact, there were some media that justified the attack or even blamed the Chinese population for starting the riot.

DEVERELL: This deadly event was part of widespread racial violence against Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans that took place across the American West in the late nineteenth century. But prior to the anti-Chinese riot in Denver, there was a thriving community, one that struggled to recover in the aftermath of the violence.

VONG: From our research and from my understanding, the Chinese community was very vibrant before the attack. After the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, which was being constructed nearby Denver, a lot of the population kind of migrated over to Denver and if you look around 15th and Blake and 15th and Wazee, around that neighborhood, it was just full of Chinese owned businesses and the Chinese population. And if you look today, there's very minimal physical evidence that a Chinatown even existed in Denver. That's why when we figure that when you have an opportunity to shed light about the history of the area and the history of that riot through a physical medium like a plaque, it's vital to embrace as much of that history as possible.

DEVERELL: In the years following the riot, many in the Chinese community relocated and the presence of Chinatown faded from the city's landscape. A group of white Denverites did eventually erect a commemorative plaque, but it told a lopsided and inaccurate story of the 1880 events.

VONG: The plaque was put up by the LoDo Walking Tours group. And so, you know, well, for starters, the title itself is problematic. The title was labeled as Hop

Alley/Chinese Riot of 1880. So to start, the riot was referred to as the Chinese riot, which insinuates that the Chinese were the ones who started the altercation. Additionally, the term 'Hop Alley' is used to identify the location of the event but Hop Alley is known to be a derogatory term due to the connotations towards opium dens that were present in the nearby neighborhood. But majority of the time they're only connected to the Chinese that were living there. Not only that, but the description of the attack didn't shed a light on the community that was actually impacted. It doesn't name Luke Young who was the individual that was unfortunately brutally beaten and hung after the attack. It also doesn't mention the thriving Chinatown or the Chinese community that was present before the attack. Instead, it mentions the white individuals who happened to save some Chinese individuals. While it's important to identify the good Samaritans that stepped in to help is equally, if not more important, to notice the victims and the community that has been impacted.

DEVERELL: As a result, a grassroots movement grew in the Asian American community to push for the removal of the plaque. Joie Ha reflects on the evolution of that community-based campaign. It resulted not only in the removal of the plaque, but also an important statement from the mayor of the city of Denver.

JOIE HA: What it started with was, there was a city committee that was going around and trying to review city assets to see what was an offensive name and to change it. And so when it came to us, we didn't know of any specific street names or anything of that sort that were offensive to our communities, but we did know that the plaque existed. And then so we had requested for the committee to think about the plaque, and then that's when we went through the rabbit hole of who actually owned the plaque because it wasn't technically the city. And eventually we met with other interested community members - so folks from different backgrounds, people who are historians and professors, people in marketing, to do a walking tour of the Chinatown. And we just continued to meet; and as we continued to meet, we decided that we should form our own organization, Colorado Asian Pacific United or CAPU for short. And that is basically how it got started. That was one of our first goals, as the newly formed CAPU, was to remove the plaque and unfortunately it was so difficult to get the go-ahead. We did get the go-ahead from the original folks that basically put it up and the folks affiliated and a lot of other organizations that were involved in some capacity or had some say. We got the go-ahead immediately from the city of Denver. What we really struggled with was getting the go-ahead with the building owner. So that was the final piece that we needed since the plaque was on the building, we had to talk to the owner of the building to get it removed. And this was incredibly difficult. We were emailing him - his personal and his work email. We didn't hear back; we sent him snail mail like packets and letters asking him to remove it and asking him to be on the right side of history. We

were calling him again on his business and personal phones and it got to the point where it was just taking so long, and our group just felt so stagnated and felt like we weren't making any progress that we actually moved on to different goals because we just did not see ourselves making any headway. We even got to the point where the media got hold of what we were trying to do, and they were calling him and asking him if we could remove the plaque. And it actually wasn't until the apology event that we had enough momentum and reach someone that knew him quite well personally, that she was able to convince him to remove it.

(MUSIC – LAST TRAIN TO MARS)

<CLIP> 9News: Today the city took down an anti-Chinese plaque from a building in Lodo. The removal is a follow-up to Denver's official apology to the Chinese community earlier this year for the riot in 1880 that targeted members of the Chinese community. Mayor Hancock says the city won't tolerate discrimination. He wants to take a step forward, fixing the wrongs from the past.

HA: And the apology event was something that we were able to do in conjunction with the city of Denver. And it was the first city to make an apology outside of California. It was very unique in the sense that in California, a lot of the places that made the apologies, they had relatively high Asian American Pacific Islander populations, some areas with up to 10 to 15% Asian American Pacific Islander populations. And in Denver, we're only at 4%. So, it's definitely something that we like to hang our hat on. We're really excited about that we were able to get something formal like this even with a relatively small community.

<CLIP> I, Michael B. Hancock, Mayor of the city and County of Denver, by virtue of the authority vested in me, and on behalf of our city, do hereby sincerely apologize to the early Chinese immigrants and their descendants, and acknowledge Denver's past role in nearly a century of violence and discrimination, including the dismantling and destruction of Denver's historic Chinatown.

HA: We held the event at a local university, University of Colorado, Denver, and the mayor, Mayor Hancock, issued a really well-written apology that talked about Denver's role in pushing Chinese immigrants out, making it an inhospitable place for migrants, of aiding and abetting the rioters, of not really compensating anyone afterwards for the businesses destroyed, not charging the murderers of Luke Young, and not helping the Chinatown rebuild afterwards. And it's really because of that and because of urban renewal that you really no longer have that Chinatown. It was because of city policies, and it was because of the way that city just did not offer any help. And in so many ways,

implicit and explicitly said that Chinese folks weren't involved. So, the mayor was able to acknowledge that and apologize and also commit to some actions.

DEVERELL: But the grassroots efforts of Kai, Joie, and the Asian Pacific Islander community in Denver and Colorado haven't stopped with the mayoral apology and the removal of the plaque. They're envisioning exciting new ways to work with the community and the city to interpret and share the histories of Asian American communities in my home state.

HA: We are relatively new, so a lot of what we're doing is crossing new frontiers, you can say. Currently what we're really focused on is the installation of three historic markers as well as a mural. So, the three historic markers are placed strategically throughout lower downtown to really give a better view of the history of the Chinatown, what happened at the riot, and about Luke Young's life. So, I really wanted to give a more thorough background for folks to read, a better way for us to sort of reclaim that space a bit for Chinatown, both in a metaphorical and physical manner. And then with the mural, we did select our artist, Nayle Lor, and she created this really vibrant, beautiful piece that shows a bit of our history, how folks got to be here, how they are continuing to live in our future, of how we will continue to be here and coexist with the rest of Denver and how at the end of the day, we are also Denverites. And it's a very beautiful piece that will also be going up in the spring and summer of this year. After that, we are going to be making a pretty big decision about what we want to pursue next. CAPU is at a very sort of critical juncture where we're moving slowly at first and then we're moving really quickly. The apology event sparked the plaque removal, sparked a documentary from the city of Denver. So, it's been incredibly amazing to see all of the things that we've accomplished and all of the folks that are interested. But at the same time, we grew really fast. So, we're at this critical juncture where we're figuring out how to build our capacity and how to scale and figuring out what we are doing next.

DEVERELL: There are even efforts to create an Asian Pacific Islander Museum in Denver, led by Colorado Asian Pacific United, or CAPU, and supported by Denver's mayor.

HA: We will help with the journey towards us attempting to create a museum, an Asian American Pacific Islander Cultures and History Museum, which would be the first and only of its kind in the Rocky Mountain area. And then potentially even assist in the goal of ours to re-envision our alleyway that the Chinatown used to exist in and have an international district. And to really create a space where folks can actually use instead of an alleyway where just trash goes in. And that is something that we are really excited to do, and we have two architects on our team that are working on putting those concepts

together and some of them are already online. For the museum, we're really interested in having an Asian American and Pacific Islanders History and Cultures Museum. We find that across the country, and of course also in Colorado, that our Asian American and Pacific Islander histories are not really known for a variety of reasons, you know, both implicit reasons, explicit reasons on why our history has been buried and hidden. However, the fact of the matter is that we have had roots in Colorado for quite some time now, and these roots we want to share with our communities and with the wider public. And the museum would really be an opportunity for us to formalize our history, to say in so many different ways that we were here and we are still here and we'll be here in the future.

DEVERELL: Kai also sees space for not only highlighting hidden histories but also for reinterpreting the past in important ways. And like Jason, he rejects the notion that history is a static narrative. Even when we're confident that the authors of a plaque didn't put it up with ill intent, Kai reminds us that we have to address inaccuracies to break cycles of ignorance and misunderstanding and to promote greater awareness. He embraces the dynamism of the current moment and rethinking how the past is marked on the landscape.

VONG: Histories change all the time, and that's okay. We find different information, we receive new perspectives, especially in this case with the Chinese population, the Chinatown finding out more about it. We recognize that the history hasn't been shared in the way it should have been, and that's just what history is. You always find out new facts, you always find different artifacts, whatever it may be. And that's why it's important that as a society, we keep an open mind about being inclusive. We provide opportunity and spaces for discussions and dialogue so that when it comes time to make and talk about and recognize maybe the troubled past of ours, we can move forward with a better conscience, a better sense of unity, a better sense of representation for everyone.

(MUSIC – SPRITE STAR)

DEVERELL: I'm Bill Deverell. Thank you to our guests Joie Ha, Jason Hanson, and Kai Vong. Coming up on the next episode, we move from Denver to San Antonio, and we'll ask, "How are digital technologies helping communities reshape public historical narratives?"

PAMELA WALKER: There is a democratization of what this allows for people who call San Antonio home, call these communities theirs, but don't see themselves represented in the landscape, that they have the power and the opportunity to

say, there is a story here. My grandmother owned this business, or my grandmother and grandfather owned this dry cleaner.

DEVERELL: If you're interested in seeing images related to this episode, please visit our website at dornsife.usc.edu/icw. *Western Edition*'s team includes Avishay [ah-vee-shy] Artsy, Katie Dunham, Jessica Kim, Elizabeth Logan, and Stephanie Yi. *Western Edition* is a production of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West. Thank you for listening and be well.