

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview Transcript: Colleen Woods

Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there are significant errors. The times noted are taken from the unedited audio files and do not match the edited videos.

Colleen Woods [00:00:05] I'm from Oklahoma, but I moved 13 times before the time I was 13, so I lived in New York and Appalachian North Carolina, but I went to high school, middle school and high school in Michigan, and then I went to University of Michigan out here. I didn't decide to be a historian till quite late. I went into college thinking I was going to be a doctor. Studied biology, but I thought it was really boring and that there was just one answer for everything and I continue to take history classes, so I switched my major and I mean, I did. I just had a general interest in it. I liked stories about the past, basically. But I once I started learning about primary sources and essentially what historians do, I found it to be like a puzzle and that you can't always find the answer, but you can get close to the answer and it can lead you down different trails. And that, to me, just felt really exciting.

Colleen Woods [00:00:54] Now I consider myself a US historian in a global context. So my I have a book manuscript coming out in May that's about the transition to independence in the Philippines. So I write about US empire in Southeast Asia, but essentially from the thirties to the nineteen sixties with this moment of decolonization and why the Philippines is so important to the United States at that moment, I went to grad school wanting to do wanting to work on us. Empire wasn't quite sure what I was committed to being a US historian. I thought I was going to be a labor historian for a little while. And then I ended up the University of Michigan. And when I got there, I discovered that the University of Michigan has one of the largest, if not the largest archival collection on colonial Philippines in the United States. So I started going up to the archive and sort of looking, you know, poking around basically, and decided that this was something I wanted to know more about, because it was at a moment in twenty six when they were just starting to be a couple of books about the US and the Philippines, a couple of books about empire. As you know, after the 2003 Iraq war, they became more and more sort of studies of U.S. empire.

Colleen Woods [00:02:00] But there are still relatively few studies of us in the Philippines and even less after independence. So I really sort of moved my study forward to kind of answer questions and I couldn't find answers to elsewhere. Spanish American war happens in eighty ninety eight. Right. And it involves the US being Filipino, sort of independent independence activist. And then of course, there's the Cuba and Puerto Rico story as well. The US really roots the Spanish quite quickly, but then essentially discovered that there's a Filipino resistance movement movement and Filipinos have declared the Philippines independent. So that's the birth of the first Republic of the Philippines. The thing is, the United States does not recognize that Declaration of Independence. And so what ensues is essentially a war against Filipino Filipino activists over the next seven

years that last much longer. And the South. But the US really had to conquer the Philippines in order to take it as an imperial possession. There was a very sizable anti imperialist movement in the United States. So there is a really strong push to not annex the Philippines and that that sizable portion of the population never quite goes away in the United States. The push to annex the Philippines comes from a couple different sources. One is the sort of access to China and the China market. And this is a moment when essentially all European powers are rushing into Southeast Asia. Right. The French conquered French Indochina in the eighteen eighties. The British are in Burma. And so the United States is really not out of step with what other empires are doing. The official reason for why the the US annexes the Philippines, if you're if you're listening to the president at the time, it's to Christianize. It's to modernize. It's to train Filipinos in the art of self-government.

Colleen Woods [00:03:54] But there are, I think, more reliable explanations for why the US and the Philippines that have to do with trade and competition among sort of great empires at the time. The major thing that happens is in nineteen thirty five, the Philippine Commonwealth is established and what the Commonwealth is, is over the course of the previous two decades, the US had shifted towards giving Filipinos more greater roles in the colonial state so they could participate in government more. It's still completely under US sovereignty, the establishment of the Commonwealth. There was a constitution that was written right, and it essentially said that there will be a 10 year timetable to Philippine independence. But the Commonwealth changes the structure of the colonial state. So there's no longer a governor general, which used to be the US's highest position. And it there is now a high commissioner. Right. There's a Philippine president. Check that right. And the Philippines starts to create its own national army. I mean, that is they passed something called the National Defense Act. And so they start to train, recruit and train a what would essentially be imagined as an independent Philippine army after independence would be granted once a 10 year timetable was up. The terminology can get confusing because the US Army in the Philippines was called the Philippine Department. So it often gets stated as the Philippine army. And there are Filipinos who serve in that in that US army. Right. So there's Filipinos who serve in the US Army. The National Defense Act in nineteen thirty five or thirty six that's passed by the Philippine Commonwealth is going to be an all Philippine army. Right. And it's going to be completely run by Filipinos and will be the army of the Independent Republic.

Colleen Woods [00:05:40] But at the time World War Two starts, there's a very sizable number of US soldiers in the Philippines as part of the US Army's Philippine department. Some of those are Filipinos. The Philippines scouts are, I believe, a division of the US Army that is created much earlier in this century as an all Filipino unit within the US Army shortly after Pearl Harbor. Essentially, it happens on the same day, but because of the international dateline, it's the next day the Japanese attack US military installations in the Philippines. That's the start of the war in the Philippines. And like I said something like 18 hours earlier, the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. The US forces in the Philippines are relatively quickly overrun by Japanese forces. And I think the thing that most people are familiar with of the World War Two story is sort of holding out MacArthur holding out on the island of Corregidor and also the Bataan Death March. Right. These are the two things I think Americans are most familiar about with World War Two in the Philippines. Should I stop there? Yeah, OK. I mean, so MacArthur Lee is ordered to leave by Roosevelt and essentially regroup US Army forces and the Far East in Australia. So the Philippines is essentially kind of I mean, I think abandoned would be a strong word for it.

Colleen Woods [00:07:04] But something else that I think even specialists of World War Two don't recognize is that the Philippine president at the time, Manuel Quezon, repeatedly asked Roosevelt to declare independence so that he could declare the Philippines as a neutral country. Right. He is very clear that he understands that the Philippines is essentially caught between two imperial powers, imperial Japan, and they're in the United States, which is their sort of imperial overlord at the time. And FDR is like, no, that's that's not going to happen. And in all honesty, it's likely that Quezon realized that that that is not going to happen. But I think it's important to remember that there's this recognition that the highest levels of the Philippine government recognize that they were going to be caught between sort of imperial powers. And we're looking for a way to essentially spare what would happen to the Philippine people. And it was it was denied. As you can imagine. It's a very scary time, right, for the sort of everyday person, the things that Japan institutes quite quickly are essentially trying to take radios and trying to cut down to tamp down communication. It never fully works, right. I think there is some sense from. It wouldn't say that it's uniform, but there is some sense that the US has abandoned the Philippines to some extent. I mean, certainly I think that that's kind of what Quezon is actually quite upfront about it, right? That the United States has retreated from its colonial possession and have left the Philippines open to Japanese invasions. But it is a sort of tumultuous time. Its people are scared about what's going to happen.

Colleen Woods [00:08:52] So I think it's at most a sort of a very terrifying time for most people in the decision of what do you what do you do next? Is this a difficult one? So a resistance movement formed immediately right before the United States, before MacArthur even essentially leaves. There's a resistance movement made up of either people who were Philippine ROTC cadets or some of the first organizers. There is Americans who essentially escaped Japanese capture. There's Filipinos who escaped Japanese capture. And then there was a individuals who escaped during the Bataan Death March. Right. And so there's a number of individuals who essentially kind of slip behind enemy lines and the sort of most prominent one of the early years, he ends up being captured and executed by the Japanese in nineteen forty two or forty three, I think. Thorpe says that MacArthur has given him this order to essentially regroup American troops behind enemy lines. And so this individual set goes sort of northern Luzon, like the main island of the Philippines, and starts to attempt to sort of communicate with other resistance groups that are forming. I should also say that either way, the Philippines is divided geographically. You have this big sort of Northern Ireland, which is most populous island, Luzon, and then there's a bunch of little islands called División Islands. And then there's a big southern island, Mindanao, and there's guerrilla groups that form on each on each sort of geographical divide. Right. And they do end up taking somewhat different courses. So I know the Luzon story best. I don't know the Mindanao story very well. Right. And so whenever I speak, I'm mainly speaking about the resistance movement that forms on those on. So the resistance movement, it forms really territorially.

Colleen Woods [00:10:48] So certain groups are strong and other in their sort of locales around where they are based. It is very quickly, it's large quickly. But you have to remember there's a limited amount of supply. Right. And so it's not abnormal for a guerrilla army to just have a couple of guns over the course of the war. They might collect more by having ambushed Japanese troops and in whatnot, one of the first guerrilla armies to form actually the followups forms in nineteen forty two. And it forms out of essentially the Communist Party in the socialist prior to the war, had been the first to say we are antifascist. Right. And there they have a very clear anti fascist united front program like Communist Party sort of world wide. And so once the Philippines falls to Japan, this is the

group that forms in nineteen forty two and they are sort of the best organized. Right, because they are already organized. And so the ups are one of the biggest, best organized guerrilla armies from the get go. But there's other ones like the ROTC cadets who were not essentially inducted into the army who also form their own guerrilla armies. I mean, there's literally hundreds of them, right, that are forming across Luzon. And they range in size and they range in organization and they range in what they're sort of willing to do. So the hooks are very willing to sabotage. The Japanese are very willing to break people out of prison. They're very willing to essentially kind of take on the Japanese right away. There's other groups that are more organized around making sure the population doesn't suffer. Right. So that could mean like raiding Japanese rice stores and stuff like that. So there is like there's a wide range of things that civilians and I would I would call them all civilians. Right. Because even like the RTC, they're not they're not officially inducted. And they're certainly the individuals who did escape Japanese capture who are military officers. The most people are civilians. Right. Who decide to join this resistance fight. And they do a wide range of things over the course of the year, men and women, too. I mean, that's why I think one of the most interesting things that there's a number of women who participate in this resistance movement. There were female commanders, right? There would be a female commander of a particular regiment. I mean, that was not uncommon. Other sort of more typical things. I mean, it also depends on where you live in the Philippines, because the Japanese occupation, I think when people hear occupation, they imagine it to be sort of like a blank. That covers everything, but that's not how it works. The Japanese were not everywhere at all times. Of course, they're very strong in Manila, right in the areas around the. That was a very dangerous place to be a guerrilla. But in other locations, the Japanese hold on power was actually quite thin. So it really depended on where you were in relation to Japanese force. Some of the things women might do, again, provide food that food for guerrillas act as messengers.

Colleen Woods [00:13:51] So there is a moment when guerrillas start communicating quite a bit with each other and even with the American cloth. Thorpe, who is trying to essentially make a military hierarchy out of all the guerrillas, is on. That never really quite holds and that becomes one of the points of tension is sort of who is control and control of all these individuals, right. For the most of the war. And again, this is what makes those on Mindanao visits and Mindanao a little bit different because they make contact with MacArthur's command in Australia much sooner than Luzon. And so there is this sort of jostling for position. And in terms of who who's calling the shots and Luzon throughout throughout the course of the war, there is an effort early in the war to try to institute some level of military organization. Right. So who is in command? Who who who takes orders? Who follows orders in some guerrilla armies do join that effort. The hooks never join that effort. And they are not the only ones that don't join that effort. And so and also die. Right. I mean, so the other thing is people are being captured and executed by the Japanese. So there's a strong level of distrust. And so this military hierarchy never quite holds in Luzon. And part of that has to do with the inability to make contact, radio contact with MacArthur's command, because nobody can say, like the supreme commander in the Pacific told us, that we're in charge. Right. The war ends in the Philippines. I mean, officially, with the US reinvading the Philippines, it takes quite a long time. They essentially come in through the stuff that goes on in the north of Luzon and they fight alongside guerillas. So guerrillas join the what's called the liberation of the Philippines campaign. And they're Filipinos who are a guerrilla armies that are adopted into the US Army and brought into essentially this fight. The Battle of Manila is, I think, seen by most, including sort of US commanders as the sort of signal defeat that says the war with Japan, at least in the Philippines, is over. It doesn't stop. The violence doesn't end there. And essentially they have to run what they

call a mopping up campaign through throughout the islands. But with the reinvasion of the US, it sort of gradually retaken. This is one of the things that becomes really complicated and causes a lot of points of tension is that essentially your proximity to the US Army meant your proximity to supplies. Right? I mean, these are guerrillas who are operated without essentially medical treatment. Right? I mean, if you think of things like nine or any anything like bandages, those were in short supply in. These were one of the things that they would share with each other.

Colleen Woods [00:16:50] But even basic things like food or weapons, ammunition certainly are up there. Making contact with the US Army was a prime goal for guerrillas after once liberation is happening. And essentially, how did the US Army decide who they would induct? Will they have that sort of series of kind of tests that essentially they're like, is this group kind of fit enough to be part of a US regiment or to join the US fight? When the Japanese conquered the Philippines, they immediately put Filipinos in positions of power and even I think it's in nineteen forty for the Philippines, Japan to declare the Philippines as independent, because you have to remember that Japan's entire sort of ideological campaign in the Pacific War was to say that Asia was for the Asians. Right. And that they were a liberating power, liberating essentially Asian colonies from a century of Western colonialism. It doesn't have much traction in the Philippines, but there are a host of people who serve essentially and in the Japanese state. And they tended to be people who served in the colonial state right through the people who had wealth and power. Right. But there are a number of individuals who essentially kind of did not have a choice. Right. So the Philippine Constabulary was the national police force of the Philippines during the colonial period. It's taken over by the Japanese. Right. And so it essentially becomes a police force for the Japanese empire. And so those individuals who are working for the constabulary are technically working for the Japanese Empire in one of the things they do during the war is guerrillas. And so the question of who to trust at the end of the end of the war is a big one. And so it's this moment of liberation and kind of joy, but it's also this moment of an enormous uncertainty. Right. Did that individual serve for the Japanese government because they were compelled to because they were forced to or did they choose to? Did it benefit them? And there's a number of individuals who, after hearing that the US has liberated who has really arrived in the Philippines. Drop out of the Philippine Constabulary and quickly become guerrillas, right? And so there's guerrillas who are frustrated that they've served for three years as guerrillas and all of a sudden in the last two months, there's there's a whole new slew of people who are like, no, we served in the resistance movement throughout the course of the war. It's hard to know how, based on your primary sources, how widespread that is.

Colleen Woods [00:19:43] Certainly in central Luzon, where there's the most tension between guerrilla armies, it is very widespread. Yeah. This sort of tension over who who is a collaborator and who is a legitimate resistance fighter, I think they see them as pretty essential from the beginning and they are careful about what they instruct the guerrillas to do. Right. They essentially don't want anybody to kind of take the fight into their own hands, but they certainly communicate with the guerrillas to cut Japanese communication lines. And that's major by the time US forces arrive, they are essential in pairing with the US Army. They're also essential in establishing reestablishing civilian control in liberated towns. So the Philippine civilian affairs unit is a division of the US Army, and it's, from what I can tell from primary sources, mainly Filipinos. And what their job is, is to their their soldiers. Right is to go into liberated towns and help re establish a civilian government there. Again, those are all primarily Filipino positions. Right. So the US leans quite heavily on Filipinos, not just guerrillas, but also Filipinos are doing things like dredging the heart.

They're doing a lot of the sort of construction type clearing work that US Army needs to be done. Right. Those are largely filled by Filipino workers. The Filipino guerrilla movement is also a challenge for the US Army. I mean, that is very clear from the get go that the MacArthur knows that there's two hundred and fifty thousand guerrillas potentially and central Luzon. And if you think about how do you sort of kind of harness and control that population, that that is a challenge. Right. The US Army has the question of collaboration to deal with as well. So they are both an enormous benefit to the US Army, but they also they pose a series of kind of troubling questions, management issues to some extent that the US Army has to negotiate and oftentimes not as not quite as well. So the Philippines is going to be independent in nineteen forty six. And one of the things MacArthur is aware of immediately is avoiding what he calls the appearance that the US is there to essentially recolonize or be an imperial power. That sort of hands off attitude does not help the negotiation of how to manage these guerrilla armies. And the US US Army, I should say, does not occupy the Philippines for a long time.

Colleen Woods [00:22:28] So the US occupies Japan for seven years. Very quickly, the US Army gives the Philippines back to civil authority, back to the Commonwealth government very quickly, and they very quickly turn over. Essentially, the counterintelligence corps is the division of the Army that's tasked with investigating who is a collaborator, who is not a collaborator, and they very quickly turn those files back to the Commonwealth. So now the Commonwealth. Which is comprised of a number of individuals who also served in the Japanese occupation state is back in control and they are left to negotiate this question of who is a collaborator, how to punish these individuals. It's a complicated story because that story is made worse by the fact that Roosevelt and MacArthur both promised the Philippine population that anybody who served in any capacity in the Japanese occupation, including did you own a company that sold materials to the Japanese and made a lot of money, would have no place in public life. Right. So very quickly, there's this again adds to this uncertainty about what is the future going to look like for these guerrillas who had spent two and a half or three years fighting, really fighting for Philippine independence, but fighting on the behalf of the Philippine Commonwealth and on behalf of the United States? There's a number of guerrillas who had been part of the US armed forces in the Far East, and those individuals were made promises about once they were inducted into essentially called up by FDR into the army. If you were if you joined, so if you were a guerrilla army that was incorporated on liberation, I'm not sure actually what sort of promise was in terms of certainly your paid right. But the promise in terms of benefits. Right. The a number of guerrillas fight as part of the resistance, not because the US has necessarily promised something, but because they believe their contribution to the effort will give them sort of greater rights in the Philippine postwar state. Right. And prior to the war, the Philippines is deeply, deeply unequal in terms of sort of wealth.

Colleen Woods [00:24:53] Right. And so there's a number of peasants who participate and they think that their participation will essentially garner them greater input and the promise of democracy after the war. It's a very choreographed transition. In fact, it's it's the US president doesn't doesn't come, but he broadcast a sort of the Philippines and the United States have this Democratic partner friendship that the pattern that the rest of the world should follow. It's very clearly already looking towards decolonization or the question of what do empires do with their colonies? And that's sort of broadcast around the world. Right. So there is very clear from independence that the US is going to be like this is this is a model for decolonization or what should happen to colonies after this war for democracy. Right. We we shouldn't forget that at the forefront of World War Two, particularly in

Southeast Asia, was the question of imperialism. Right. And that was a question that France, the United States, the Dutch and the French are all going to have to grapple with after the war. The United States takes a bit of a different track because they had already promised Philippine independence. But certainly they're sort of speaking to that question when it comes to the Philippines. I would say that the period up to nineteen forty six is not at all a smooth period. Right. The Philippines, I think most people don't know that the Philippines is outside of Poland, the most devastated allied country. It is entirely its industry is devastated. One third of all work animals are killed. Right. I mean, it is destroyed by World War Two. Manila is essentially flattened during World War Two. And so the Philippines has this enormous reconstruction problem to face. Right? I mean, that is actually sort of front and center. And I think one of the reasons why the guerrilla issue, I mean, it doesn't take a backseat in terms of, you know, kind of everyday Filipinos. Right. But it is somewhat considered a secondary for the government in terms of what they really need is reconstruction aid. And they need to get it from from the United States. Right. And eventually, the United States does give reconstruction aid, but it comes with a number of strings attached. The Philippines has to amend its constitution so that US businesses can have the same rights in terms of access to natural resources as Filipinos. Right. It had been the Philippine constitution had stated a company had to be I think it was 60 percent Filipino owned.

Colleen Woods [00:27:32] So this thing called the Bell Trade Act is pushed onto the Philippines and it allows it continues essentially kind of a colonial political economy when it comes to the main export goods for the Philippines. So it allows free trade to continue for sort of a set number of years. It's deeply unpopular in the Philippines. And so the first president of the Philippines has to really sort of push it through, push through the amendment. Yeah, that's one of the strings that are attached to a couple of the other strings are the US wants to retain its military bases in the Philippines. So that's high on the list and military aid starts. So, you know, the sort of two things we identify with the Cold War are US military aid and the establishment of US military bases and those the place that happens first is in the Philippines for the United States. The US gives military aid and nineteen forty six to the Philippines, and it's entirely to defeat the sort of guerrilla problem. And the US establishes its base rights. And there's twenty three US military installations in the Philippines after the war. So the rescission act occurs in the United States. There is certainly a push for a downward trend in defense spending. You know, I don't actually know who pushes the I would imagine is the Republicans that are pushing the rescission act and they are interested in you have to understand that the number, the amount of money the US spent during World War Two is entirely unprecedented. Right. And people sort of common. The assumption is that the New Deal is what made the sort of US big government right, and it's really World War Two, right? The differentials in spending are just incredible. And there is a sizable portion of the generally Republicans who want to actually try to revert the national security state down to the sort of smaller earlier model. Right. And so they are looking to cut defense spending quite a bit. That would be my guess. I'm not actually sure. I have not done primary primary source research on the sort of origins of the recession. That would be my guess. The impetus for where the recession that comes from a second guess would be the immigration piece. And that the reason, one of the big reasons why the Philippines is granted independence or granted this 10 year timetable for independence is that it falls smack in the depression. And there's just a.. Nature. There's anti-immigrant fervor. Right. So there's a number of violent attacks against Filipinos, primarily in California, an agricultural economy. And so there's an argument that historians have made that I find quite compelling is that the real push for independence comes through this desire to want to limit Filipino immigration, because once you get the

Commonwealth, there no longer US nationals. They can't move between US territories. They're now subject to the nineteen twenty four immigration act in their quota is like 20 or something. It's very, very small. And so I might sometimes be that the other piece of the decision that comes from the sort of fear of a mass Filipino migration.

Colleen Woods [00:30:50] I mean, it was just really like the happiest coincidence, it was my first semester at University of Maryland and we had a military historian in our department who has since retired. And he came up to me one day and he's like, hey, I have this meeting with Major General Tony Taguba about Filipino veterans or Filipino guerrillas during World War two. And that's really your topic and not my topic. Do you want to come to the meeting? And I was like, great. Yes. And so I showed up at this meeting and Tony sort of gave his sort of spiel about why he's interested in this project. And I was like, oh, my gosh, this person has just said everything that I've spent the last six years sort of studying. So I immediately was like, hey, I've done a ton of research on this. I'm happy to help in whatever way I can. So I ended up writing the historical portion of the bill. The National Archives has this enormous collection on the Philippines. It's actually segmented Philippines in order to actually segment it off as its own collection leaves called the Philippine Archives Collection. So I took the research I have as kind of a starting point, and I went back through looking for other sources of information that I thought might help our case. Right. So I went back and I discovered that the Japanese army is very invested, in fact, have created their own unit to spend the war tracking down guerrillas, anything that could make a case that this really mattered. Right. To not just to the story of Philippine resistance, but this really was part of the US war effort and it really affected the way Japan was able to wage its war on Luzon. And then I went back and I wrote down, I found everybody who has received any kind of medal for it. So I had a sort of list of that, anything that I felt that it could substantiate our story even more. Going to Congress is such an eye opening experience for me, I would go with Marie is really our sort of congressional guru and I would go with her to sort of meetings with the staff of so-and-so. And, you know, I'm a US historian, but it was still eye opening to me as to sort of what arguments stick. Certainly making a case for veterans is easier than I think many other types of claims one might make on the US government.

Colleen Woods [00:33:12] I think the sort of. Thing that people forget is that this was passed over, the rescission was passed over Truman's veto. Right. And in fact, at the time Truta Truman saw it as a sort of a really shameful thing that the United States had done. Right. I mean, it was recognized and certainly military commanders did as well. Right, that this was very clearly the United States turning back on the promises it had made. Right. And so I also think that had a sort of was able to gain traction. I also think disaggregating it from any question of immigration, to be honest, and any question of money made it easier to design, essentially to build, to build support. But even that was surprising. I mean, it's surprisingly difficult to get. Congress members to do what seems so obvious to many people, right, and this was just about recognition, this had no money attached to it, it had no promises of immigration. It was just let's recognize these individuals that are in their nineties and one hundreds and even that it felt like a substantial challenge. The group that I've been able to work with, the field, that rap group has just been amazing. And I've learned a lot about the sort of activism that the Filipino American community has done over the course and really since the war has ended up the story. But it's really the Philippines. And so I have studied Philippine activism in the Philippines, but I had no idea the sort of push for recognition in the 90s and on. I think the number one reason it's been sort of left out of the World War two story has to do with the Empire piece.

Colleen Woods [00:35:00] You can't understand the Filipino guerrilla movement and the Recision Act without understanding that it was a product of the US empire. Right. That the Philippines was a colony of the United States that was completely under US sovereignty in terms of foreign policy decisions to go to war, not go to war. So I think in the ways that the sort of history of US imperialism has been erased from our popular narratives about the trajectory of the United States, that this story has fallen victim to, that it still remains surprising to me because of the World War two is not an understudied under documented history. Right. I mean, there's just hundreds and hundreds of histories and even documentary feature films about World War two. And yet this one seems to still be under a fly under the radar. I think it runs entirely counter to what Americans think of as the things that define them as different from other nations. I mean, every nation has its sort of exceptionalism, right. What makes you French or what makes you American? And I think for Americans and certainly American history has been taught around the ideals of democracy, freedom and equality. Right. I mean, we all know that those those haven't been fully lived up to really any moment in US history. Right. But in the same way that the history of the civil war was very great, the slavery and civil war was buried. Right. And it became a narrative about states rights rather than a war over slavery. I think it's been uncomfortable, difficult for Americans to confront an imperial past. Right. In what that has meant is really not just a race in the World War Two story in the Philippines, but really a race in the 50 years of American colonialism and the Philippines.

Colleen Woods [00:36:49] I think Americans should care. About this piece of history, because. Oh, I mean, I think Americans should care about housing, why should Americans care about this piece of history? Because I think it. It complicates what is otherwise a sort of romanticized notion about World War Two, right? I think most Americans don't realize that World War Two in the Pacific was not simply about Japanese aggression, that it was about which empire the United States of Japan was going to have imperial control, whatever form that took right. It might not take the form of direct colonies or both. The US and Japan sort of experimented with different forms. That was what the war was about, right? That it wasn't about Japanese aggression and it wasn't simply one by the US commitment to democracy. Right. There is a story about geopolitics and power here that I think looking at this Philippine story helps us sort of come to terms with. We really can't understand the history of World War Two in the ways that I think popular narratives have framed it so far and so many things to say about the of that group. I mean, what this group has pulled off in terms of really organizing a self consciously grassroots movement at the national level has just amazed me. Right. It is not something that's easy to do with a group of people who are all volunteers. This is none of the individuals who work for this group are paid by the organization. They all do this as volunteers and to orchestrate an organization that pulls opinions from Filipinos in Hawaii and Washington and Florida and everywhere across the country, having sort of wash the organization, take shape and gain momentum has just been an amazing experience for me. So I got to go to the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony at the Capitol. And it was really a once in a lifetime experience.

Colleen Woods [00:38:52] It was amazing. And then I went to there was a gala that night which family members, either vets, if they if they could make the travel right or their family members could come. And prior to that gala, they did a presentation of medals for individuals who could come, who could make the trip to Washington, D.C.. Yeah, I mean, it's it's just incredible. Yeah. You people have been waiting for so long for this. I didn't quite understand, you know, cognitively understood, but I didn't emotionally understand what Tony was saying when he talked about recognition. Right. And how important just being acknowledged for what you sacrificed in what you did during the war, just having the US

government say, like I see you, how important that was for individuals and certainly for their family members. Right. I mean, it's to me, it's really it's not just tragic. It's criminal that a lot of these family members have either lost their father, father or mother who would have been eligible. Right. And so they it's really moving for them to to get their relatives gold medal. But it's also very tragic that that recognition didn't happen in their parents or their uncles lifetime.