



THE FROMM INSTITUTE  
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

# FROMM FOCUS

The Newsletter of the Fromm Institute

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## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: PROF. SONNY BUXTON

*This week, as we start African American Music Appreciation Month, we feature longtime Fromm Institute Faculty member Prof. Sonny Buxton who this session is teaching “The First Lady (of song): Ella Fitzgerald - Sammy Davis Jr., G.O.A.T. (the greatest of all time) - The Goddess; Lena Horne.” Prof. Buxton has had a varied career. He has worked as a musician for Peggy Lee, Billy Eckstine, and Bill Strayhorn. He has produced shows for B. B. King, Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, and Miles Davis. He is a Northern California Emmy Awardee and he hosts “Saturday Mid-Day Jazz” on KCSM. More importantly, he has taught for over a dozen years at the Fromm Institute. Below, we learn a little bit more about the man.*

### **WRITE A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF YOUR CAREER AND/OR YOUR LIFE.**

What will you do now?” Lenny Strang; teacher, mentor, friend, really expected an answer to his question. I had just completed my armed services duty; had a degree in my pocket, and enough money to buy a house, with the help of the G.I. Bill. I would soon be working with a couple of jazz bands, playing drums. Did I need more? My uncle Lawrence had given a gift to me for my tenth birthday. A rock? A rock. It was one of those smooth, flat rocks, just right for skipping across the lake. He was a fisherman and thinker. “Young Buck - you put this in your pocket, and next year, I’ll give you another...bigger.” I was not impressed. A rock? I told my dad that uncle Lawrence didn’t have it all-together. Another rock - next year? In my pocket? I was fifteen before I understood the symbolism of the rock. Uncle Lawrence explained: Each year the load will get heavier. They’re not going to let up on you because you have a nice smile; because you can run with a football. “Are you ready?” Here was the same question, with a twist. Lenny Strang, or Dr. Strang, had been thinking about his young friend. “How about this?” “You don’t have any serious obligations; you have loads of talent - let’s try it out. Take the next ten years, do it all: Write, play ball, play music, use your degree in psychology. Do it all!” He added: “Time is on your side.” I went past ten years. It has been quite an odyssey. I was born and raised in Seattle, attended college in Eastern Washington, Southern California and Berkeley. Lived in New York, Paris, New Orleans, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

### **IS THERE A PERSON LIVING OR DEAD THAT HAS HAD A GREAT INFLUENCE ON YOUR LIFE?**

My dad. He only went as far as the eighth grade. When he stepped into a room full of people, everything paused for a moment. Thurgood Marshall... the first Black Supreme Court Justice. Are you kidding? He had the whole package.

**WERE YOU EVER INCLINED TO FOLLOW A DIFFERENT CAREER PATH?**

Yes. My early work was in psychology. I had interned during the fifties, in Los Angeles at KFWB. In 1961, in the Bay Area, I thought, “Why Not? “Radio stations, white owned, staffed, were not hiring Black announcers. It became my crusade. In more than four decades, I covered radio disc jockey, Classical, Blue Grass, Pop and Jazz, to management, tv news to award winning documentarian. I spent eighteen years in the Bay Area operating Jazz clubs and restaurants. That just about drove me off the cliff.

**WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST?**

Time. Time with my son. Time.

**WHAT DO YOU VALUE LEAST?**

Having my time wasted by someone getting a free lunch.

**IN A TIME MACHINE TO WHAT PLACE WOULD YOU TRAVEL?**

Harlem, U.S.A. My time frame would be 1920 to 1930. They called that the time of the “New Negro,” not accurate, but I can live with it. What an exciting time. I think I was there.

**HOW DOES TEACHING AT THE FROMM INSTITUTE COMPARE TO PREPARING FOR YOUR RADIO SHOW?**

The preparation is similar. I think U.S. history first. Where does the music fit? What historical references can I make? How do I present the most enlightening track. In other words; can I talk about it without putting everybody to sleep? Pace, pace, pace. Keep it moving.

**TALK TO US ABOUT THE PROCESS AND PUBLICATION OF YOUR BOOK,  
MEMOIRS OF A JAZZ JUNKIE: MY FIRST TWO-HUNDRED YEARS?**

This has been my toughest assignment. I write, re-write. I’m disgusted, happy. I’ve had people with me. Thank goodness, they believe in the project. Maybe they will ride with me for another ten years. In the bye & bye...



This week, longtime Fromm Institute student Charlotte Prozan ruminates over Covid and our city's experience in trying to navigate anti-Asian sentiments throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Submissions to **Express Yourself** are accepted on a rolling basis and can be articles, opinion pieces or notes, written by you, the students or others in the Fromm Institute family, who want to share something with the larger community. Email your submissions to **Scott Moules** in the Fromm Institute office ([moules@usfca.edu](mailto:moules@usfca.edu) or [fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)).

## A PIECE ON COVID

*By Charlotte Prozan*

Covid has been a tragedy for thousands and a shock for many of us to witness on TV — young men physically assaulting elderly Asian residents of San Francisco and Oakland. How great to see an old Chinese woman defending herself by hitting a young man with a plank of wood and injuring him. It has heightened our awareness of the discrimination against Asians and the common degradation that they experience. Our former President helped by repeatedly referring to it as the “Chinese virus.”

As San Franciscans, we are very familiar with the World War II removal of Japanese American citizens to detention camps far away. They were losing their homes and businesses. There was such a national sense of fear that there was hardly any opposition. It was clearly motivated by racism because there were just a few Germans and Italians being locked away. We needed big loans from the Bank of America to pursue the war, so we needed to stay on the good side of A.P. Giannini. Even FDR favored it, as did the National ACLU.

There was one source of resistance that, as San Franciscans, we can all be proud of though hardly anyone knows about it. The Northern California Chapter of the ACLU opposed the National organization and defended the right of their Japanese client Korematsu, who refused to go. He was a hero to the Japanese community and was honored at an ACLU meeting here some years ago. My husband was staff counsel of the ACLU, which is how I came to know about it. Now you all know too.

**MORE ABOUT KOREMATSU & HIS LEGACY ON PAGES 5, 6 & 7.**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On Friday, May 21, the **Conversatory On Racism** featured Karen Umemoto in conversation with Mara Kolesas. The topic of the discussion was *Perpetual Foreigner - Anti-Asian Hate and What We Can Do About It*. To view the recording of the **Conversatory** please click [here](#).

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## VIRTUAL SOCIAL SESSIONS, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND YOU

*By Linda Marks, one of your FISA representatives*

Have you attended any of the Fromm virtual social sessions before morning classes or after afternoon ones? They're a way for us to stay connected while we're not able to meet in person. You still have time to participate if you haven't yet. You can just drop by when you want to.

We don't know yet what things will look like in the Fall at Fromm, but at least some of us will still be taking classes via Zoom. That got me thinking of how and when we used to socialize at Fromm and here's my latest thought.

For next term, instead of the morning and afternoon social sessions, how would you like to have a "Virtual Lunchtime in the Atrium," available for drop in every day when there are classes.

***M - Th 12 - 12:30 (or 12:45)***

Grab your lunch and come socialize. If sessions get too big we can divide up into tables (a.k.a. breakout rooms).

We could also have Special Interest Groups — student-led groups that are focused on a common interest. These could either be breakouts from a larger lunch group or at other times. Some possibilities are:

- Play Reading
- Book Club
- Photography
- Grand-parenting
- Poetry Writing
- Poetry Reading
- French Conversation
- Spanish Conversation
- Anything you'd like to talk about!

***We'd love to hear your thoughts about these possibilities. You can write to me at [lindamarkssf@comcast.net](mailto:lindamarkssf@comcast.net).***

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## FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY TASK FORCE



### REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF FRED T. KOREMATSU

*By Irene Minabe and Hector Esparza*

The Diversity Taskforce would like to pay tribute to the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islander (“AAPI”) community leaders and organizations. We are fortunate to have had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Karen Korematsu, an important civil rights advocate and national speaker, who has carried on her father’s legacy through the Fred T. Korematsu Institute (“Institute”), which she founded in 2009. Fred Korematsu was a Japanese American born in Oakland, California who in 1942, at age 23, refused to go to the United States government’s incarceration camps for people of Japanese ancestry. His objection to Executive Order 9066 (the forcible relocation and internment of all persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast) led to his arrest and conviction for defying the government’s order. The legality of the internment order was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Korematsu v. United States* (1944). However, Korematsu’s conviction for evading imprisonment was overturned four decades later in U.S. District Court, after the disclosure of new evidence challenging the necessity of the internment, evidence which had been withheld from the courts by the U.S. government during the war.

***We spoke to Dr. Karen Korematsu about her father, the Fred T. Korematsu Institute and his legacy:***

“I’ve learned that even to this day, people don’t know about the Japanese American incarceration and there are some that don’t believe it happened. There is so much information on the inhumanity of the

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incarceration that people don't know. My father gave me the charge five months before his passing (March 2005) to carry on with education about his story and the Japanese American incarceration during WWII. He didn't want something like this to happen again. Starting in 1983, my father crisscrossed the country to tell his story.

My father was ostracized and vilified by his own Japanese American community. At Tanforan Racetrack (Assembly Center in San Bruno), no one wanted anything to do with him. He didn't have support, even from his family or the Japanese American Citizens League. My father was determined to right a wrong. On November 10, 1983, a U.S. District judge granted the petition for a writ of error coram nobis (a fundamental error of fact in a trial after the defendant has been found guilty) to overturn Fred Korematsu's conviction.

In 2010, "The Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution" was signed into law in California for January 30th (Fred's birthday), a day in perpetuity of recognition, honor and education. Because education had not changed much from the 50's and 60's on how history was taught in our schools, the Institute focused its direction on creating materials about my father's fight for justice and the Japanese American incarceration during WWII. The Institute created K-12 educational toolkits which included lesson plans and segments from my father's documentary, "Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story". Due to the pandemic, the Institute created digital materials for teachers and parents which are available online through their website. Also, I've been working on the AAPI history for Ethnic Studies in CA High Schools. The CA Board of Education recently approved the Ethnic Studies model curriculum framework. I believe in partnering with other organizations as we can't just stay in our silos. We need to have an intersection of our commitments and work among all communities.

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The student's reaction to my father's story and then hearing my personal story is both heartwarming and encouraging. Students learned about one man's fight for justice in the face of adversity and how one man can make a difference and so can you.



On January 15, 1998, President Clinton awarded Fred T. Korematsu a Presidential Medal of Freedom. (This is the highest honor bestowed upon a civilian who has made a particularly meritorious contribution to the nation's interests). In June 1998, he was the first recipient of the California Senate Medal.

Fred Korematsu was an activist throughout his life, standing up for Muslim Americans and other marginalized groups. The Fred T. Korematsu Institute carries on his legacy of education and social justice.”

The Diversity Taskforce would like to thank Dr. Karen Korematsu for taking the time to share her father's legacy with us. If you would like to learn more about Fred T. Korematsu or support the Institute and its programs: [www.korematsuinstitute.org](http://www.korematsuinstitute.org)

For FISA Diversity Taskforce Resources see our YouTube playlist at <https://tinyurl.com/5cey97sn>