

Chronological: Honoring Japanese-American Patriotism: Looking to the Future, 1999-05-19

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**Honoring Japanese American Patriotism: Looking to the Future
Asian Pacific American Federal Foreign Affairs Council
Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Keynote Speaker
May 19, 1999**

My fellow Americans and ladies and gentlemen.

Although this gathering is one of Asian-Pacific Americans to discuss our past, our present and our future, I would prefer to look upon this gathering as a celebration of America. A celebration of the goodness of this nation.

In my case, it began 100 years ago. It was early in the morning, in the first week of June of 1899. A fire somehow began in the village of Fukoyarna, in the Prefecture of Koka. The fire destroyed and demolished three residences. A few hours after the fire, the village council got together to determine the cause of the fire and to decide upon who would pay for the damages. After a few hours of deliberation, the village council came out with its decision and said that the Inouye residence was the cause of the fire. It started there and therefore called upon the Inouye clan to pay for all the repairs necessary and that was it.

Soon thereafter, the head of the clan called upon his eldest son, Osakiji, and said that we have a crisis in the family, a crisis that involves the matter of honor. We have three choices, two of which are unspeakable. One would be to leave the village in the dark of the night and forever suffer the curse of shame. Our names would be crossed out of the village book, the Kosecitoran. No one would marry our sons or our daughters. The other is to remain in this village and not pay the debt but no one would talk to us. None of their daughters would marry our sons and none of their sons would look upon our daughters. The third choice is the only one and that is to pay whatever is necessary. It was calculated that at that time the repair costs would be slightly less than three hundred dollars. Well, three hundred dollars a hundred years ago was an amount that was almost unattainable. So, Osakiji was instructed to take his wife, Oyo, and his eldest son, Itaro, and go to Fukoka City because there were recruiters there from a strange place called Hawaii. These recruiters were looking for able-bodied men and women to work in their cane fields, and he said as soon as the debt is paid I will let you return to the village.

They began this journey in September of 1899. They landed in Honolulu and from there transferred to Port Allen, the island of Kauai. They signed a contract within the first hour of their arrival, pictures were taken of them and the amount was a

substantial amount. Osakiji, my grandfather, received fifteen dollars for sixty hours a week, one month. Fifteen dollars for a month's work, sixty hours a week. The contract called for four holidays: Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving and the Emperor's birthday. My grandmother received ten dollars a month for sixty hours a week, same terms. But deducted from both of them were two and a half, two dollars and fifty cents a month for transportation costs. They worked in the fields until 1924, the debt was paid at that time.

Well, times have changed since then but that beginning was the beginning of my journey. Twenty-five years after the arrival of my grandparents, I was born in 1924. My mother was the daughter of immigrants who came to work in the fields. She was born in Hawaii but a few things happened before my arrival. In 1922, the Supreme Court of the United States rendered a judgement and declared that Japanese were not qualified for citizenship that was a rather strange decision where one ethnic group was singled out. In 1924, the Congress of the United States passed its first Immigrant Quota Act, which included a provision that said if you are unqualified for citizenship then that nation cannot have a quota. So, Japan was singled out as the one country without a quota and there were many other laws. For example, along the West Coast they said that only citizens may hold title to land, but it applied only to the Japanese. If you were Italian and not a citizen, you could still buy land, or German or anybody else, but not a Japanese. As a result, when my parents got married my mother lost her citizenship because she married an alien who happened to come to Hawaii when he was three years old.

Then came December 7th and all hell breaks loose. Soon thereafter, a couple of months later, the White House issued an Executive Order authorizing the United States Army to construct ten camps. They were euphemistically called internment camps but in essence the description is that of a concentration camp. Ten of them located all over the United States, in Montana, in Wyoming, in Arizona, in places like Arkansas. In these camps, 120,000 Japanese, most of them American citizens were herded off with whatever they could carry on themselves. You can imagine all of the property that had to be abandoned in places like California, millions of dollars worth of property had to be either sold. I had a friend of mine who had to sell his brand new Chevy for one hundred dollars. It either was that or abandon the car.

About a month after the Executive Order, the Selective Service System issued a directive declaring that Japanese citizens or otherwise would be considered 4C. 4C is a frightening designation. 1A, as you know, is physically fit, mentally alert. 4F, something is wrong with you, physically or mentally. 4C, you are enemy alien. All

of us, many of you here, were declared to be enemy alien, which was the insult of all insults. Many thousands of us petitioned the government and the President of the United States and a proclamation was issued saying that "Americanism is a matter of mind and heart; American is not and never was, a matter of race." The formation of the 442nd was authorized. They were looking for 1500 volunteers from Hawaii, instead over 8,000 volunteered, which represented about 85 percent of the eligible men. The same thing happened in these camps, there were ten camps and to the surprise of the American authorities, thousands volunteered. They were in prison, but they volunteered. Well, the rest is history.

This unit, as the Secretary indicated, was the most decorated in the history of the Army. Furthermore, they were involved in the battle to rescue a battalion of Texans. Texans are huge men. They were rescued by small men. This battalion somehow got surrounded by German troops, numbering about a division, 20,000. They first sent a regiment of Texans. They were pushed back. They sent another regiment of Texans and they were pushed back. We were in the vicinity, so they called upon the 442nd. The 442nd was already decimated to about half its size, but we were asked to do this job. Many of us knew that we were expendable that's why we were called, but we looked upon this as the ultimate opportunity. In five days the rescue was successfully carried out, but it was costly. The casualty rate exceeded 800, of that number 300 were dead. The General, the Commanding General of the 36th Division, General Dalquist, was not aware of the casualties. All he knew was that his men had to be rescued. Well, he was so grateful that he called upon our Colonel, Colonel Pes, soon after the rescue was made known and ordered him to assemble the men of the Regiment so that he could personally thank them. The next day the Regiment assembled in a field, an open farm, and the General was so angered that in the presence of other officers scolded our Colonel. He told the Colonel, "I directed you to have the men assemble here. You have decided to disobey me and sent most of your troops on pass." Well, I can understand that because when the troop commanders reported the adjutant's call and reported all present and accounted for the company I served in, E Company, was the largest, forty-two officers and men. Our table of organization calls for one hundred and ninety-seven officers and men, forty-two were standing. There was another company, K company, with ten men and the company commander was a staff sergeant. You can imagine the General's chagrin saying that you let all of the men go on pass. The colonel looked at him and said "That's the Regiment. That's the cost for rescuing your Texans." When he realized that this was all that was left over, he couldn't deliver his speech. He gave the Colonel a plaque, which incidentally was lost and discovered about twenty years ago. It's ironic in a sense, but it also demonstrates the greatness of this country.

In 1953, the law was amended so that Japanese were included as part of the quota and my parents were able to get naturalized, together with many hundreds of Japanese throughout this land. The G.I. bill made it possible for many of us to study at the taxpayers expense and get all of the degrees that we would have been denied were it not for this opportunity. But then something else happened, the United States Army, about twenty years ago, commissioned a committee of historians, military historians, to select ten most important events and battles that were somehow part of the United States Army history. One of the ten happens to be the battle of the Lost Battalion. We are now together with battles like Guadalcanal, the battle of Saratoga. We did pretty well, but we were paid the ultimate compliment about a month ago the president of the United States nominated a man from Kauai, General Eric Shinseki. He is the number one Army man, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army. About ten years ago, the Congress, the President, with an overwhelming vote, declared that the action taken by the Executive Order in 1942 was wrong. The establishment of the camps was wrong. The internment of these men and women in these camps was wrong. They apologized, the President personally apologized, and each one got a 20,000 dollar redress which was just token. Today there are members from these families that serve in the Congress of the United States. At one time there were six of us.

Therefore, I'd like to call this a celebration of America. Often times in gatherings of this nature, one speaks only of the hardships and the evil that may have been rendered upon us but when you look at it, I can't think of any other country as powerful as the United States that had the courage to admit wrong and to apologize. You think about that. No other country has ever apologized for its past sins. The United States has done so. Just a few days ago the House and the Senate met in Congress and we declared that what we did to Latin American Japanese was wrong also. We have as part of a law, an apology of this nation to those men and women who were wrongfully incarcerated to be used as prisoner of war exchange. So this country is a great country, yes, it does wrong. We have to remain vigilant at all times because we do make mistakes. Bureaucracies always make mistakes. We can't get away from that, but whenever the mistake is made known this country it is great, it apologizes. So here I am, proud to be an American. Thank you very much.

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