

# Redress at Columbia Law School

By Grant Ujifusa

*Remarks deliver on November 8, 2017. Grant Ujifusa was Strategy Chair for JACL's redress effort. In 2012, he was knighted by the Japanese Government for reversing Ronald Reagan's opposition to HR 442.*

I want to thank my friend Mimi Zou for inviting me to speak to you today. As you know, Mimi is an accomplished scholar and just a terrific person. It saddens me to know that she'll soon be leaving Columbia to become a Professor of Chinese Law at Oxford. I wish her all the best.

I'd like to talk about two things today. First, about why I think Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, ousting Japanese Americans from the West Coast, and second to talk about how Ronald Reagan, who for two years had publicly opposed the Japanese American redress bill, changed his mind and signed HR 442 on August 10, 1988.

That Reagan signed our bill might make you think that the experience of internment had a happy ending of the conventional sort. Not entirely. No, maybe even not really. Most Japanese Americans in camp had lost everything, which meant that some Nisei who aspired to become mechanical engineers spent their lives as garage mechanics.

Now why were 110,000 perfectly ordinary Asian Americans given 36 hours to abandon their homes, work, and schools and then to be sent by the United States Army to 10 prison camps in the country's desolate interior?

My view is perhaps to the left and harsher than the judgment the Commission looking into the internment reached in its 1982 report *Personal Justice Denied*: race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. For me, the political failure was not, as the last term might imply, one of passive omission, but one of active commission. FDR wasn't asleep at the White House switch only to find one morning that

tar paper barracks were going up at Heart Mountain. Only the President could decide to sign Executive Order 9066. And that he affirmatively did. Why?

First, FDR knew that competition in the truck farming business had for many years fed racial bigotry of a political potent variety on the West Coast. As one white farmer put it, “The japs came here to work and stayed to take over.” By 1940, Japanese American farmers controlled 30% of the local fruit and vegetable market in California. This was something substantial that we had that others wanted.

So first, it was about money. You know, follow the money. And you know, when they say it’s not about the money, it’s about the money.

Second, the camps were the final installment of bigotry and political calculation of the usual sort. To put a brutal point on it: From the time just after the Gold Rush, the chinks and the japs to come later were the n-word plural of the West Coast. So it was simply good politics to run against the japs, just as in the American South it was (and usually still is) good politics to run

against the n-word plural. And FDR was a gifted, manipulative politician, enjoying near unanimous support from the immigration restrictionist labor unions and the small, land-grabbing and left-leaning farmers of Grange.

In 1942, Roosevelt was looking for an unprecedented fourth term in 1944, and he knew that for many white voters on the West Coast, internment was as almost good as sending a bunch of racially undesirable foreigners back to their own country.

Third, after Pearl Harbor, mass and elite opinion, both hysterical about the Japanese Army poised to invade Long Beach, came together on what needed to be done. If there was no time or way to separate the loyal from the disloyal, the only answer mass incarceration.

Among the most bigoted figures in the drama was Army General John DeWitt, deputized by Franklin Roosevelt to make the decision to remove the spies and then to remove them physically. In his report to the President, DeWitt wrote:

*“In the war in which we are now engaged racial affinities are not severed by immigration. The Japanese race is an enemy*

*race ... and the racial strain is undiluted. ...Along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today. There are indications that they are organized and ready for concerted action at a favorable opportunity. (Now this is the good part) The very fact they no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken.”*

Among the elite policy makers who agreed with DeWitt's assessment were FDR himself of course; with some misgivings, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, a true WASP Brahmin. Then there was Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, who grew up a poor in Philadelphia, who then later okayed Mike Masaoka's idea for the creation of the 442, and who then after the war rose to become called the chairman of the American Establishment – the old one based inside the big New York banks and law firms. And then there was finally and famously California Attorney General Earl Warren, who wanted to be elected Governor in 1944 and was. Would he have been had he opposed the camps? I don't think so.

Then there were the shapers (and reflectors) of mass opinion: Walter Winchell, an often rabble-rousing radio commentator; the infamous William Randolph Hearst of the nation's tabloids; worse yet, V.S. McClatchy of McClatchy papers of the Central Valley; and the somewhat less virulent *Los Angeles Times* of the Chandler family and the *San Francisco Chronicle* owned by the de Youngs.

The shapers of mass opinion, which included *Time Magazine*, were later joined by Walter Lippmann of the *New York Herald Tribune* – the esteemed Lippmann delivered the cruelest and perhaps the decisive blow -- and Edward R. of CBS radio from whom the country's elites took their cue.

Finally, at the edges of elite opinion, there was Harold Ross, editor of the now fashionably progressive *New Yorker Magazine*, and, oddly, an ardent young Stalinist who was later to become Dr. Seuss.

Not many disagreed with General DeWitt, but among them were J. Edgar Hoover (only a few needed to be watched); the always valiant American Friends Service Committee

and the great Eleanor Roosevelt, who, I might add here, suggested to her husband that they adopt a Nisei couple to keep them from going to a camp.

Sadly Roger Baldwin of ACLU chose to sit on his hands. He had a couple of fellow travelers on his board and Stalin got the word out that he liked the idea of the camps because Japan was the Soviet enemy in East Asia.

When mass and elite opinion makers converge on something very bad, something very bad will happen. They did in 1942. Today, it seems to me unlikely that the two will converge about the place of Muslims and Latinos in American life advocated by Donald Trump, a spokesman for notable segment of mass opinion. As we know, elite opinion furiously opposes him on just about everything.

And so it may be that the camps of 1942 have had a lasting, immunizing effect on the politics and conscience of our country, one especially powerful on our nation's elites.

Now let's go back to the fall of 1987 after Barney Frank had pushed our bill through the House and Spark Matsunaga

was putting together an astonishing, 69-vote filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. As Dan Inouye put it, Senate passage was 10 parts Sparky and 1 part the other Senator from Hawaii.

But after clearing the Senate, we still faced a veto from the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, who as I've said for had publicly opposed HR 442.

Let me tell you how Reagan, the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge, changed his mind and signed our bill.

The hero of our story is Kazuo Masuda of Fountain Valley, California -- small town where Kaz grew up on a modest truck farm in then agricultural Orange County.

On August 27, 1944, Kaz was killed in action on the banks of the Arno River in Italy while serving as a member of the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Sergeant Masuda was 24 years old, and was to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Already in the Army on Pearl Harbor day, Kaz volunteered for service in the 442. From Camp Shelby in Mississippi where he was being trained, he would visit his mother and father and



his sisters Mary and June, who were imprisoned not far away in the Jerome, Arkansas, internment camp. Kaz said to Mary that if anything happened to him, he wanted to be buried in his hometown cemetery back in Fountain Valley.

After Mary learned that Kaz had been killed, she received permission to leave the camp for Fountain Valley, where she went to City Hall to make arrangements for her brother. But the town fathers there said to Mary: "We're sorry, but we don't bury Japs in our cemetery."

Somehow word got to General Vinegar Joe Stilwell, back from the China-India theater, where one of his subordinates was Colonel Frank Merrill of Merrill's Marauders - a group of 2700 men, including 15 Japanese Americans of the Military Intelligence Service, who could read, write, and speak Japanese. All of the men, all of them volunteers, fought and died and distinguished themselves behind Japanese lines in Burma. For a year, Merrill's Marauders tied down an entire Japanese division. The Marauders suffered an 80% casualty rate.

Vinegar Joe loved the Japanese American soldier. So he got

himself to Orange County and confronted the town fathers.

The General said, "This soldier is going to be buried here, and we're going to make an example of you SOB's and make a big deal of it. I am going to present Kaz Masuda's mother the Distinguished Service Cross at a nice ceremony."

The town fathers said, "Oh, we're sorry."

Invited to speak at the ceremony was a 26-year-old movie star, Army Captain Ronald Reagan.

But there was a big problem: Kaz's mother refused to accept the medal. What she felt was this: "They push us off our farm and into a scary camp next to a swamp. Then they take my son, and he comes back in box. And they want to give me a medal? No thank you."

"But a general, General Vinegar Joe Stilwell, is coming to present the medal to you," Mary said.

"I don't care who he is," Mrs. Masuda said. "No thank you."

Finally, it was arranged for Kaz's sister Mary to accept the medal.

After Stilwell spoke, Ronald Reagan, then an FDR Democrat,

got up and said:

*The blood that has soaked into the sand is all one color. America stands unique in the world, the only country not founded on race, but on a way - an ideal. Not in spite of, but because of our polyglot background, we have had all the strength in the world. That is the American way.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Masuda, as just one member of the family of Americans, speaking to another member, I want to say for what your son Kazuo did - thank you...."*

Many Japanese Americans knew that Captain Reagan spoke at Kaz's ceremony, but how could we get word into President Reagan to remind him of what he did in 1945 and perhaps move him toward changing his mind about our bill? I went to see Bill Bennett, a college friend, to ask for help; then Ed Rollins, Reagan's 1984 campaign manager of his 49-state landslide; and then Richard Wirthlin, Reagan's pollster.

None of them could do anything.

After a meeting in the White House, Wirthlin called me and said that the top aides around Reagan were dead set against us.

Wirthlin suggested that we hold off for a year. I said we couldn't. We had been working for more than ten years, and we were running out of gas.

At that time, the summer of 1987, I was book editor in New York, and one of my writers was New Jersey Governor Tom Kean, and I turned to him. Tom said that the President was coming to New Jersey to campaign for Republican state legislative candidates in the fall. The Governor said he would bring up redress with the President as they travelled around the state together in the back of a limo. This they did on two separate presidential trips to New Jersey.

Reagan said to Tom that he thought Japanese Americans were sent to camp for protective custody, because that's what conservative California Senator S.I. Hayakawa was telling the President and his most trusted aide, Attorney General Edwin Meese, who had jurisdiction over our bill inside the White House. Tom said, "No, no, it wasn't protective custody."

The next day, Tom called me and said, "Write me a letter speaking to that point and I'll get to it the President using a

special line of access reserved for Republican governors."

I said, "I can also get a letter from Kaz Masuda's sister, saying please sign HR 442." Tom said, "I'll get her letter into him too." June Masuda Goto wrote:

*Dear Mr. President:*

*Perhaps you recall a very special day for our family, December 9, 1945, when you came to a ceremony honoring my brother Kaz Masuda at our farm house. The presence of you and General Stilwell led to a better life for our family. [For example,] many times I have been asked to speak at the Kazuo Masuda middle school. I speak to the history classes, and quote your words to the students. If our legislation comes to you, I hope you will look on it favorably.*

Reagan read June's letter, called Governor Kean, and said, "I remember that day at the ceremony for Kaz Masuda. I think redress is something I want to make happen."

White House visitor logs and records show that on February 14, 1988, White House Chief of Staff Ken Duberstein

told me in his office that Ronald Reagan was going to sign HR 442.

On August 10, 1988, the President made our bill the law of the land, and said he did it because of his admiration for the valor shown by Sergeant Kaz Masuda and the Japanese American soldiers of the 442. June Masuda Goto, Kaz's sister, was then led up to the podium to meet the President. Ronald Reagan leaned down toward her, and asked, "Are you Mary?" June answered, "No, Mary is dead. I'm her sister June."

The President then clasped June's right hand in both of his. A photo of Reagan with June appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day.

Long ago, a Buddhist priest served our family while I was growing up. He once said, "Where there is gratitude, there also is civilization."

I think that all of us here today can be grateful to Kaz Masuda for his heroism on the battlefield, and grateful to Mrs. Masuda for her defiance of authority of the most imposing kind, and to Mary Masuda for her acceptance of life as it has to be,

and grateful finally to General Stilwell for going many miles out of his way to honor a fellow soldier.

We are the beneficiaries of the civilization that these four Americans helped to create.

*For more on Ujifusa's experience of redress, go to: [grantujifusa.org](http://grantujifusa.org)*