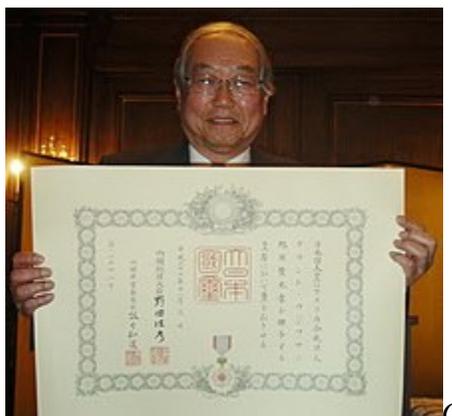


# ROOSEVELT AND REAGAN:

## The Camps and Kaz

By Grant Ujifusa

*(Remarks delivered at an elite men's club,  
founded in 1787, in New York City)*



I am pleased that you have invited me to speak at Holland Lodge, one to which Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, once belonged. Even so, you asked me to pull no punches about a notable member of your Lodge, and so I won't.

I'd like to talk to you today about two things. First, why the Japanese American camps happened. Why it came to be in February of 1942 that 110,000 ordinary Americans on the West Coast were given 36 hours to sell all that they owned and were

then soon enough escorted by the U.S. Army into 10 prison camps in the nation's desolate interior,

Second, I'd like to talk about how Ronald Reagan, perhaps the most conservative president of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changed his mind and in August of 1988 signed into law HR 442, a bill that redressed in some substantial measure the grievances of Japanese Americans who once lost their rights, dignity, and property,

So why did the camps happen? There was of course understandable hysteria after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Was Los Angeles next? But those with power to contain the hysteria did not. Instead, they fanned it. Whereupon constitutional guarantees for a frightened group of people collapsed even after Franklin Roosevelt, perhaps the most liberal president of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, learned from J. Edgar Hoover and others that the overwhelming majority of Japanese Americans were loyal Americans, most of them citizens. Then why did Roosevelt issue the Executive Order that sent them into the camps?

First, because 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 what others wanted. So first, it was about money, which, as you know, you need to follow.

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 sometimes still is) good politics to run against the n-word plural. And FDR was a gifted and shrewd politician, enjoying near unanimous support from the immigration restrictionist labor unions and the small, land-grabbing and left-leaning farmers of the 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, prison camps were almost as good as sending a bunch of racially undesirable foreigners back to their own country.

Third, after Pearl Harbor, mass and elite opinion, both wild with fear 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 was 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 110,000.... 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 that 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, there was of course FDR himself; then there was, with some anguished misgivings, Attorney General Francis Biddle; then with no misgivings, there was Secretary of War Henry Stimson and his protégé, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy.

(But McCloy later okayed Mike Masaoka’s idea for the creation of the all-Nisei 442 Regimental Combat Team, a small unit that won 22 Congressional Medals of Honor fighting Nazis in Italy and France. McCloy, who grew up poor but who after the war became known as the Board Chairman of the American Establishment, said that the most notable public decision he ever made was to put guns in the hands of young men thought to be traitors and saboteurs.)

And then among other public officials who back removal, there was finally and famously California Attorney General Earl Warren, who wanted to be elected Governor in 1944 and was.

Would he have won had he opposed the camps? I don't think so.

Then came 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 newspaper of the American elite. The esteemed and powerful Lippmann delivered the cruelest and perhaps the decisive blow. He was later joined by another member of the elite media, Edward R. Murrow.

Finally, in a small corner 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 who said only a few needed to be watched; the American Friends Service Committee; and Eleanor Roosevelt, who suggested to her husband that they adopt a young Nisei couple to keep them from going to a camp. Sadly, Roger Baldwin of the 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.

So why did the camps happened? Because when elite and mass opinion converge on a very bad idea, something very bad will happened. They did in 1942. For me, it's better when elite and mass opinion in our country produce another kind of check and balance.

Now let's move to the spring of 1988 after both the House and the Senate had okayed HR 442 We were still looking at a veto from Ronald Reagan, who had publicly opposed our bill for more than two years. Let tell you how he changed his mind and signed our bill on August 10, 1988.

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.

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, prison 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 2,700

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, when 15% is regarded as astronomical.

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. We made a mistake, General."

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 a 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, young Ronald Reagan 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 in 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 graduate school 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.

Reagan said to Tom that he thought Japanese Americans were sent to camp for protective custody – something California Senator S. I. Hayakawa told both the President and Attorney General Ed Meese. And "Sam," as he was affectionately called

by both men, also told them that upright, middle class Japanese Americans would never come to the government asking for money – only the group’s far left, like the campus radicals he pulled the plug on at San Francisco State. No Republican should give the radicals anything, Sam said.

In the limo, Tom said to Reagan, “No, no, it wasn’t protective custody and mainstream Japanese American support redress.” The next day, Tom called me and said, “Write me a letter speaking to both points and I’ll get it to the President using a special line of access 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:*

*Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.*

*Perhaps you recall a very special day for our family, December 9, 1945, when you came to a ceremony honoring my*

*brother Kaz Masuda in Fountain Valley, California.... The presence of you and General Stilwell greatly affected the community, and led to a better life for our family.*

*Many times I have been asked to speak at the Kazuo Masuda middle school. I speak to all the history classes, and quote your words to the students....*

*If HR 442 comes to you, I hope you will look upon it favorably. All of us in our family – and I believe Kaz as well — would be greatly honored if you would. I also believe that America, through you, would honor itself.”*

The President read June’s letter, called Governor Kean, and said, “ I remember that ceremony for Kaz Masuda. I’m asking our people to reconsider everything.”

After the President signed our bill, June Masuda Goto was led up to the podium to meet him. The President 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 Buddhist priest served our family while I was growing up.

He once said, “Where there is gratitude, there also is civilization.”

As we’re here together today, I think we can be grateful to Kaz Masuda for his heroism on the battlefield, and grateful to Kaz’s mother for refusing to bend to authority of the most imposing kind, and grateful to Mary for accepting life as it is, as it has to be; and grateful finally to General Stilwell for going the last mile to honor a fellow soldier.

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

*The remarks here were well received by the current members of Holland Lodge*

*Grant Ujifusa, Redress Strategy Chair of JACL from 1982 to 1992, was knighted by the Government of Japan for reversing Ronald Reagan’s opposition to HR 442. For more on Grant’s experience of redress, go to: [grantujifusa.org](http://grantujifusa.org).*



*William H. Butler 33°      Jerome L. Cheney 33°      Frederick W. Gebhard 33°      John G. Clute 33°  
Harry C. Walker 33°      Franklin D. Roosevelt 32°      John B. Mullan 33°*

*Initiation of Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor, State of New York,  
in Scottish Rite Freemasonry, Albany, N.Y., February 28th 1929.*



