

# MASUDA FARM FAMILY

## Conclusion, Part 6 of 6

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...One additional chapter to the story of the Masuda family and its war hero son, Kazuo, was developed in relation to the culmination of the historic Japanese American redress and reparation movement. That movement began in the 1970s when community activists began to campaign for some kind of “redress” for their wartime incarceration. This campaign led to President Jimmy Carter signing a bill in 1980 creating the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) to determine whether any wrongs had been committed in the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

This blue-ribbon committee held hearings across the nation, and it was in these hearings that hundreds of Nikkei survivors of the wartime camps told their stories, often for the very first time. In 1983, following its detailed investigation, the Commission found that a grave injustice had been done to Japanese Americans, and the Commission recommend that the federal government should formally apologize and that each survivor should be granted a tax-free payment of \$20,000. Five years later, after the House of Representatives and the Senate had voted to support these recommended redress measures, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 still needed to be signed into law by the then president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. In the years since his 1945 talk at the Santa Ana Bowl Ronald Reagan had moved substantially from the left to the right of the political spectrum.

Thus, there was a widespread fear among the bipartisan Congressional supporters of redress that President Reagan, who, among other things, objected to the \$1.3-billion price tag involved, would veto the Civil Rights Act legislation. Press reports indicated that a veto was coming.

On November 19, 1987, June Masuda Goto, Kazuo’s youngest sister, wrote a letter to President Reagan reminding him of his words at the Santa Ana Bowl on December 8, 1945, and urging him to look favorably upon redress legislation should it arrive on his desk. The letter had been drafted by Grant Ujifusa, JACL redress strategy chair, and was delivered to the White House by Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey via a special line of access used by Republican governors. Ujifusa was Kean’s book editor in New York. After reading the letter, the president called Governor Kean and said that he remembered being at the ceremony for Kaz Masuda, that he had changed his mind, and that he was going to sign the redress bill.

# New York Times

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 1988



President Reagan shaking hands with June Masuda Goto, whose sister was mentioned in Mr. Reagan's speech, before signing bill to compensate Japanese-Americans interned in World War II. From right were Representative Patricia Sisk and Senators Ted Stevens and Daniel K. Inouye.

[Click to enlarge.](#) President Reagan shaking hands with June Masuda Goto

At the August 10, 1988, signing ceremony, in which June Masuda Goto was present, President Reagan recounted the Masuda story, placing special emphasis on the events in Talbert and Santa Ana on December 8, 1945. He then repeated the words that day of someone who he referred to as “a young actor,” after which he said: “The name of that actor, and I hope I pronounce it right, was Ronald Reagan. And yes, the ideal of liberty and justice for all, that is still the American way. Thank you and God bless you. And now, let me sign H.R. 442, the redress bill for Japanese Americans, so fittingly named in honor of the 442nd. Thank you all again, and God bless you all. I think this is a fine day.”

The late Clarence Iwao Nishizu, the person most responsible for the construction of the Orange County Agricultural and Nikkei Heritage Museum, was at the signing of the Civil Liberties Act. According to his oral history in the archives of the CSUF Center for Oral and Public History, this is the memory that Clarence Nishizu took away from this event: “The President then signed the bill. I noticed that the first person whose hand the president shook after that was June Masuda Goto’s. He used both of his hands, holding his left hand over her hand to indicate sincerity. It was a very special moment for me.” It was also a very special moment for American democracy and fair play.

(END)



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