

Why The Camps Happened

Remarks delivered on November 8, 2017, by Grant Ujifusa at Columbia Law School in a forum sponsored by NHK. Ujifusa was Strategy Chair for JACL's redress effort. In 2012, he was knighted by the Government of Japan for reversing Ronald Reagan's opposition to HR 442. He lives with his wife Amy in Chappaqua, NY.

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.

Flawed like other human beings, Americans must be careful when they say they live and always have in a City Shining on a Hill. Tragedy is also part of life in that place.

The question for us today is why were 110,000 perfectly ordinary Asian Americans stripped of their rights and dignity, then given 36 hours to abandon their homes, work, and schools, and then escorted 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 reached by 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. Franklin Roosevelt 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 of the United States 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 what 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 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

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. Murrow of CBS radio, two men from whom the country's elites took their cue.

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.

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

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 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

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.

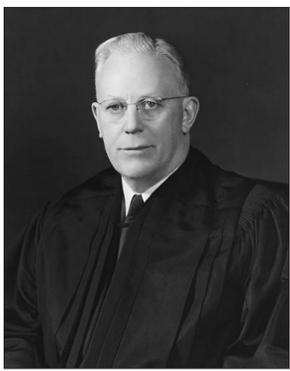
We are the beneficiaries of the civilization that these four Americans helped to create.

For more on the writer's experience of redress, go to: grantujifusa.org. And then click on: *Brokaw, Simpson, and Mineta*, then on: *Brokaw*; and then on: *Rose*; and then on: *Denny and Rose*.

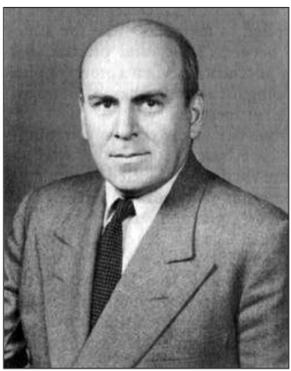
Advertorial



FDR Signing War Declaration with Japan 1941



Earl Warren



John J. McCloy



General John L. DeWitt



Walter Lippmann

Coast, internment was 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 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 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's assessment were FDR himself, perhaps the most liberal president in our history; 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 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

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 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.

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 a 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 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.

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."

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

From Robert Merry's Wall Street Journal (12/22/17) review of Robert Dallek's *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Political Life*:

"...Neither does Mr. Dallek give his readers a clear picture of the diplomatic brutality undergirding U.S. relations with Japan after Roosevelt pushed that country into a position of near desperation—and forced a confrontation—by barring exports of raw materials to that country in 1940, then expanding the embargo to oil in 1941. Having placed Japan under a crushing economic strain, Washington showed no willingness to negotiate a way out of the impasse short of Japanese humiliation. That FDR knew this policy would likely lead to a Japanese attack in Asia is attested to by the fact that he initiated a program to collect the names and addresses of all Japanese Americans, whether born in Japan or the United States. Thus began the infamous internment program—11 days before Pearl Harbor...."

In 1925, Franklin D. Roosevelt for the Macon (GA) Daily Telegraph: "Anyone who has traveled in the Far East knows that the mingling of Asiatic blood with European or American blood produces, in nine cases out of ten, the most unfortunate results."