

## THE JAPANESE AMERICAN STORY OF INTERNMENT AND REDRESS

By Dale Ikeda

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*Minna-san, Konnichiwa.* My wife, Debbie, and I are pleased to join you at Kochi University. It is an honor to address members of the Kochi University community. Thank you. As Co-Chair of the Fresno-Kochi Sister Cities Committee, I thank the people of Kochi Prefecture for being warm and gracious hosts of the Grassroots Summit. We are having a wonderful time. *Arigato gozaimasu.*

My topic is “The Japanese American Story of Internment and Redress.” The main focus of my remarks and the photos relate to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. It is a story not well known even in America. Please raise your hand if you knew that the American government imprisoned over 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry, mostly American-born citizens, for three years during World War II.

The Empire of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. America declared war on Japan and the Axis Powers the following day. World War II is a time in Japan’s militaristic past that many Japanese would like to bury and forget. Until recently, that was a period most Japanese Americans who were interned tried to do the same. Their lives would be forever changed by war with Japan. They became prisoners of war in their own country because they looked like the enemy.

I learned about internment as a boy. Although my parents recalled some of the happier times in “camp” with dances and baseball, I felt it was wrong for them to be forced to leave their homes and communities. It was wrong that they were forced to live in a distant state surrounded by barbed wire fences and soldiers in guard towers with machine guns pointed at them. I wanted to understand how this could happen in America, “the land of the free.” I studied history at Stanford and law at King Hall School of Law at the University of California, Davis. The law school is named in honor of the great Martin Luther King, Jr., winner of the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 35.

**Photo 1 of Parents and Brother:** This photo is of my parents, Hifumi and Kikuye Ikeda, and my oldest brother, George Kenji Ikeda. It was taken in the Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas, where my family was imprisoned during the War. I was born after the War. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, General John L. DeWitt, Commander of the Western Defense Command, imposed a 9 pm to 6 am curfew and 5-mile travel restriction on Japanese Americans. My dad was dating my mom at the time. He told us how he would hide in the back seat of a car while his Caucasian friend drove him from Clovis to Fresno to see my mom at night.

My parents were married just before my mother's family, the Arases, were ordered to report to the Fresno Fairgrounds, which had been converted to a temporary internment site called an "assembly center." The Ikedas reported to the Fresno Assembly Center with the Arases to keep the families together. They lived in hastily-constructed barracks made of tarpaper. Others lived in horse stalls. After a few months, they were sent to a war relocation center in Jerome, Arkansas. They were taken by train under armed guard with shades drawn.

My family and other Japanese Americans were given less than a week's notice to dispose of their farms, businesses, homes, cars, pets and belongings before reporting to internment sites. Careers and educations were interrupted. Families were split apart. Family structure and discipline was disrupted. In Jerome War Relocation Center, a gang of juveniles were starting to cause trouble. Some of the young men, including my father, decided to put a stop to it. The two groups met and decided to settle dominance by a battle of champions. My dad was selected to fight for the young men. The juveniles selected a tall, heavy youth. The fight lasted less than a minute. My dad, who was *sumotori*, picked up his opponent in a bear hug and jammed the boy down hard, doubling him over. The boy quickly resigned and order was restored.

My parents complained that living in barracks without walls or a ceiling with other families provided little privacy. However, they managed to conceive George. We have a saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way."

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Selective Service reclassified Japanese American men "4-C, enemy aliens," ineligible for military service. Later, the Army formed an all-Japanese American military unit. The Nisei soldiers proved themselves to be valuable soldiers. The draft was re-instituted for Japanese Americans and my dad was drafted to serve in the Military Intelligence Service. He was stationed in Japan during the American occupation under General Douglas McArthur. He remembered how devastated Japan was after the War. He remembered giving his food and candy to the Japanese children as did many of the American soldiers.

My uncle, Fumio, was in the Army at the start of the War. After the War, he and my dad returned to Clovis and started a fig ranch. Eventually, they went into the custom tractor work business. They were active in the community. They helped start the Clovis Judo Club and raised money for student scholarships. My dad became an elected member of the Clovis Veterans Memorial District in the 1950s, perhaps the first Japanese American elected to public office in Fresno County. They were both inducted into the Clovis Citizens Hall of Fame. I say this because, despite the hardships of

internment, many Japanese Americans were able to resume their lives after the War and became accepted and respected members of their communities.

Those are some of my family's personal stories. To tell the broader story, I would like to take you on a photographic tour of the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial in Fresno, California. I served as chair of the committee of the Japanese American Citizens League that created the memorial. JACL is the oldest and largest Asian American human and civil rights organization in America.

**Photo 2 of Memorial:** The Pinedale Memorial is an out-door plaza on land now owned by the Clovis Veterans Memorial District. The focal point of the Memorial is an original fountain sculpture. It sits in a rectangular fountain basin, surrounded by a circular concrete walk, Japanese landscaping and an interpretive wall. The wall serves as a pedestal for 12 porcelain storyboards. The memorial is dedicated to the *Issei* and *Nisei* whose sacrifices, perseverance and patriotism paved the way for a better life for their families and future generations. Their stories of triumph over adversity serve as an inspiration to all. I owe much of my success in life to the *Issei* and *Nisei*.

**Photo 3 of Landmark:** This is a photo of California Registered Historical Landmark Number 934. It reads, "This memorial is dedicated to over 4800 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were confined at the Pinedale Assembly Center from May to July 1942. This was an early phase of the mass incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II pursuant to Executive Order Number 9066. They were detained without charges, trial or establishment of guilt. May such injustice and suffering never recur."

**Photo 4 of Fountain Sculpture:** The fountain sculpture was designed by Gerard Tsutakawa in the style of his late father, George Tsutakawa, a world-renowned fountain sculptor. It's based on an *obos* theme. *Obos* is a Tibetan word referring to a vertical stone monument created by travelers who have completed a difficult passage. Each traveler adds a stone representing safe passage from a path of danger to a place of safety. It symbolizes the hardship and discrimination that the *Issei* and *Nisei* endured before, during and after World War II and their ultimate acceptance into mainstream America.

**Photo 5 of Storyboards:** This is a photo of the storyboards. Ten storyboards tell the history of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the 20-year effort to achieve redress, a Presidential apology and financial compensation. The storyboards are in the style of Asian scrolls. On the left side, there is a theme in English, which is translated in Japanese on the right. Each storyboard has a quote on the bottom.

The theme of **Storyboard 1** is "Pursuing the American Dream" ("*Yume o motomete Beikoku e*"). It depicts life before the War years. Japanese started immigrating to America in the 1880s. Most of the

early *Issei* were male farm workers. Women later immigrated, many as “picture brides.” The *Issei* came to America seeking a better life. The quote on the bottom of the storyboard is from the Declaration of Independence, which declared America’s independence from England on July 4, 1776. It represents one statement of the “American Dream.” It says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Despite the promise of liberty, *Issei* were not permitted to own land or become naturalized citizens. Some states prohibited Japanese Americans to marry non-Asians. They were prevented from entering many professions such as law. Despite these obstacles, Japanese Americans optimistically pursued the American Dream before the War.

**Photo 6 of Yoshiebei Takahashi:** This photo is of Yoshiebei Takahashi, taken in 1937. The Takahashis were successful farmers in Clovis, where I grew up.

**Photo 7 of Yoshito Takahashi:** This is a photo of Yoshito Takahashi, Yoshiebei’s son, taken in the 1960s. Yoshito served on the Board of Trustees of the Clovis Community Hospital. Yoshito was named Clovis Citizen of the Year in 1977. The Emperor of Japan also conferred upon Yoshito the rank of Fifth Class, Order of the Sacred Treasure with Gold and Silver Rays.

**Photo 8 of Rose Bottling Works:** Small businesses developed to cater to the needs of the Japanese immigrants and eventually *Nihonmachi* evolved. This is a photo of Rose Bottling Works around 1920. One of the boys is Robert Kimura, whose wife was my wife’s secretary at Fresno City College.

**Photo 9 of Babe Ruth and Kenichi Zenimura:** Baseball was popular with Japanese Americans. This is a picture of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Kenichi Zenimura and others taken in 1927. Mr. Zenimura is considered the father of *Nisei* baseball. Baseball leagues were organized in the internment sites and served to make life more enjoyable and normal.

**Photo 10 of Buddhist Church:** Communities developed. This is a photo of the Fresno Buddhist Church before it burned down in 1901. Christian churches also were established.

The theme of **Storyboard 2** is “Isolated by War” (“*Sensou ni yoru Kyozeitsukan*”). On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order Number 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War and his military commanders to exclude “any and all persons” from prescribed military zones. The order was used by General John L. DeWitt, Commander of the West Coast military zone, to exclude Japanese Americans from California, Oregon, Washington and Arizona. “Assembly centers”

were used as temporary internment sites while 10 more permanent “war relocation centers” were built to confine Japanese Americans east of the Sierra Mountains in California and 6 other states.

Executive Order 9066 was justified on the grounds of “military necessity.” Yet not a single Japanese American was ever charged or convicted of sabotage or espionage before, during or after internment.

**Photo 11 of Wanto Co.:** This is a photo taken by Dorothea Lange of a Japanese American business that was closed because the owners were required to leave their home and business and report to an internment site.

The theme of **Storyboard 3** is “Far from Home.” (“*Kokyo o took hanarete*”).” It focuses on the Pinedale Assembly Center, which was located at the site of the memorial. It confined 4,833 Japanese Americans from northern California, Oregon and Washington. Some came from as far away as Seattle Washington. My uncle, Jack Hata, boarded the train from Tacoma, Washington, to Pinedale on May 17, 1942, his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He wrote a letter to the Fresno City Council in support of the Memorial. He wrote, “The Assembly Center was rows of tarpapered black barracks enclosed by barbwire fencing with armed guards in the towers. Each barrack was divided into a number of small rooms, a room to a family. There was no privacy as sound traveled easily. When the mid-day sun bore down, the metal bedpost would cause ones hand to burn when touched and the post would sink through the asphalt flooring. The bathing and laundry facilities were open. The food in the mess hall was very poor. But the most vivid recollection of our Pinedale experience had to be that of the strong, hot wind picking up every mid-afternoon blowing dust over the entire camp making seeing and breathing very difficult.”

**Photo 12 Girl with Bags:** This is a photo of a young girl carrying bags in each hand. She has arrived at the train station in Tacoma, Washington, where armed soldiers will take her to the Pinedale Assembly Center. The military orders only permitted internees to take what they could carry. Lawson Fusao Inada, a former internee at the Fresno Assembly Center and current Poet Laureate of Oregon, later wrote, “‘Only what we could carry’ was the rule; so we carried Strength, Dignity and Soul.”

**Photo 13 Behind Barbed Wire:** This is a photo of Japanese Americans at the Pinedale Assembly Center living behind barbwire fences. They were brought from their cool climates to the desert heat of the San Joaquin Valley. Some people fainted from the heat while waiting in the lunch line under the scorching sun. The living quarters were barracks, seen in the background. Family units lived in 20-foot by 16-foot rooms.

**Photo 14 of Mess Hall:** People lived in communal facilities. This is a photo of a mess hall where people ate together.

The theme of **Storyboard 4** is “A Shared Tragedy” (“**Wakachiatta Higeki**”). It describes some of the other assembly centers, including the one at the Fresno Fairgrounds.

**Photo 15 of Fresno Guard Tower:** This is a photo taken from a guard tower at the Fresno Assembly Center, where my family was interned. It shows the silhouette of a soldier in a guard tower in the foreground. The barracks are in the background.

The theme of **Storyboard 5** is “Enduring Sacrifice” (“**Gaman-shite taeru**”) The photos show life at the war relocation centers, where people stayed for approximately 3 years.

**Photo 16 of Mattresses:** Upon arrival, internees were given a cloth bag and told to fill it with straw to make a mattress to sleep on.

**Photo 17 of Parade:** This photo is of a Harvest Festival Parade in Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona. Boy Scouts carry the American flag. Despite being imprisoned for three years by their own government, most Japanese Americans remained loyal to America and made the best of a bad situation. One of the common themes during the War years was “**Shigata ga nai.**” Other enduring Japanese values were expressed as “**gaman,**” “**on,**” “**giri,**” “**enryo,**” “**haji,**” “**oyakoko**” and “**kodomo no tame ni.**”

**Photo 18 of Fence and Hand:** This photo was taken by Toyo Miyatake, a well-known Japanese American photographer. Internees were not permitted to take cameras or radios to internment sites. Toyo smuggled a camera lens into Manzanar War Relocation Center. He constructed a camera and began taking pictures. Eventually, the Superintendent permitted him to take photos without restrictions. This photo appeared in a 1944 Manzanar high school yearbook. My wife’s father, Reginald Shikami, was the yearbook editor. The photo expresses the internees’ desire to be free.

The theme of **Storyboard 6** is “Reclaiming Lost Lives” (“**Ushinatta Seikatsu kara Saishuppatsu**”). It’s about resettlement after the War. The War Department eventually rescinded the exclusion and detention orders in December 1944. People were free to leave the war relocation centers.

**Photo 19 of People on Trucks:** This is a photo of internees at Jerome waiting to go to the train station to leave.

**Photo 20 of Mrs. Matsushige:** The internees were given only \$25 and a train ticket to resume their lives. Many had lost all of their property. This is a photo of Yoshiko Matsushige receiving her resettlement money.

**Photo 21 of Gen. Stillwell:** Japanese Americans were now free to return to their homes on the West Coast. However, they were not always welcomed back by their neighbors. This is a photo of General Joe Stillwell presenting a Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest medal for valor in

combat, to Mary Masuda. Mary's brother, Kazuo Masuda, earned the medal fighting as part of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. He was killed in action. When the Masuda Family returned to Orange County, California, five men threatened them with physical harm if they didn't leave the county. When the Army heard of this, they sent General Stillwell and Captain Ronald Reagan to present the medal and calm down the people. Many years later, President Ronald Reagan signed the legislation apologizing to the Japanese Americans who were interned.

There are also many positive stories of neighbors helping Japanese Americans. Many neighbors took care of their farms and returned them in good condition after the War.

The theme of **Storyboard 7** is Duty, Honor, Patriotism (*Gimu, Meiyo, Aikokushin*). It's about the contributions of the *Nisei* soldiers. Much of the acceptance and success of Japanese Americans after the War was due to them. They proved their loyalty on the battlefields in Europe and the Pacific. The all-Japanese American 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team became the most decorated unit for its size and length of service during the War. They won 7 Presidential Unit Citations, the highest honor awarded to a combat unit, 21 Medals of Honor, the highest individual combat medal, over 4,000 individual combat medals for valor and over 4,000 Purple Hearts for combat injuries. Starting with approximately 3,500 men, the 442<sup>nd</sup> suffered more than 2,200 casualties, including 160 killed in action, in less than a month of fighting in France. Debbie's Uncle, Paul Kitsuse, was one of those killed in action. In just five days of fighting, the 442<sup>nd</sup> suffered over 800 casualties rescuing 211 men of the Texas Division. This has become known as the "Rescue of the Lost Battalion." It is considered one of the ten greatest battles in American military history.

**Photo 22 of President Truman:** In this photo, President Harry S. Truman presents the 7<sup>th</sup> Presidential Unit Citation to the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in 1946. He stated, "You fought for the free nations of the World. You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice and you won. Keep up that fight. Continue to win. Make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for, the welfare of all of the people all of the time." The *Nisei* veterans will receive the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest honor, later this year at a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

**Photo 23 of Merrill's Marauders:** Japanese Americans also served in the Military Intelligence Service as translators, interpreters and interrogators in the Pacific. This is a photo of Sergeant Herbert Miyazaki and Sergeant Akiji Yoshimura with General Frank Merrill. General Merrill said, "As for the value of the *Nisei* group, I couldn't have gotten along without them."

**Photo 24 of Lt. Tagami:** This is a photo of Lieutenant Kan Tagami. He was the personal interpreter for General Douglas McArthur during the American occupation of Japan after the War. In a

rare one-on-one conversation, Emperor Hirohito thanked Lieutenant Tagami and the Nisei soldiers for acting as a bridge between Japan and America. Thus, Nisei soldiers not only helped win the War, they also helped secure a lasting peace and friendship between our two countries.

The theme of **Storyboard 8** is “Seeking Justice” (*Seigi wo Motomeru*). In 1942, Minoru Yasui, Gordon Hirabayashi and Fred Korematsu challenged the curfew, exclusion and internment orders in court. Minoru Yasui, an attorney and officer in the Army Reserves, resigned from his position with the Japanese Consulate in Chicago after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He turned himself in to local police in Oregon to challenge the legality under the U. S. Constitution of the curfew restrictions imposed on Japanese Americans. Gordon Hirabayashi was a member of a pacifist Christian Church, *Mukyokai*, who withdrew from his last quarter as a senior at the University of Washington to work with the Quaker-run American Friends Services Committee helping Japanese Americans affected by internment in Seattle, Washington. He turned himself in to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, America’s national law enforcement agency, to challenge the curfew and exclusion orders forcing Japanese Americans to leave the West Coast. Fred Korematsu was arrested for violating the military order to report to the Tanforan Assembly Center near San Francisco. He tried to pass as non-Japanese while working as a welder in an Oakland shipyard at the age of 23 so he could stay with his Caucasian girlfriend. They were all convicted and sent to prison in three separate cases. They appealed their convictions for violating the military orders to the United States Supreme Court, America’s highest court. They lost their cases in the 1940s because the government successfully argued that the military orders were justified by “military necessity.” In the 1980s, they successfully petitioned federal district courts to vacate their criminal convictions.

**Photo 25 of Coram Nobis Team:** This is a photo of Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi and Minoru Yasui with their attorneys. It was taken at a press conference in the 1980s announcing the legal challenges to vacate their criminal convictions. The legal team succeeded by showing that internment was unnecessary and the government’s case was based on false information. A month ago, U. S. Solicitor General Neal Katyal acknowledged that his predecessor, Solicitor General Charles Fahy, withheld relevant evidence and lied to the U. S. Supreme Court in the wartime cases.

In vacating Fred Korematsu conviction in 1984, Judge Marilyn Patel stated, “Korematsu ... stands as a constant caution that in times of war or declared military necessity our institutions must be ever vigilant in protecting constitutional guarantees. In times of international hostility and antagonism, our institutions, legislative, executive and judicial, must be prepared to exercise their authority to protect all persons from the petty fears and prejudices that are so easily aroused.” Those words of caution remain



relevant in America after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, as the government tries to balance the interest of justice and due process on the one hand with the interest of national security on the other.

The theme of **Storyboard 9** is “Vindication” (*Kako eno tsugunai*). In 1983, a commission created by Congress and appointed by President Jimmy Carter concluded that the internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry was a “grave injustice” resulting from “race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”

**Photo 26 of President Reagan**: This photo shows President Ronald Reagan signing H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The bill provided for a Presidential apology and token monetary payments of \$20,000 for the surviving internees and creation of an educational trust fund. President Reagan stated, “The legislation that I am about to sign provides a restitution payment to each of the 60,000 surviving Japanese Americans, of the 120,000 who were relocated or detained. Yet no payment can make up for those three lost years. So what is most important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor. For here we admit a wrong. Here we reaffirm our commitment as a Nation to equal justice under the law.”

**Photo 27 of the First Redress Payments**: This is a photo taken in 1990 of the first recipients of the letter of apology and redress payments in Central California. The presentation was made in the federal district court in Fresno. The oldest recipient was Fuji Hashimoto, 102 years old. I was District Governor of the Japanese American Citizens League for Central California at the time and served as the master of ceremonies.

**Photo 28 (Mine Ikeda 1942)**: This photo is of my aunt, Mine (Matsumoto) Ikeda. It’s her Clovis High School senior class picture taken in 1942. My aunt was not permitted to attend her graduation ceremony because of the curfew imposed on Japanese Americans.

**Photo 29 (Mine Ikeda 2005)**: She later received an honorary diploma with the graduating class of Clovis High School in 2005 as part of the Nisei High School Diploma program. The program’s goal was to honor Japanese Americans who were not able to attend their high school graduations because they were interned or subject to curfew restrictions.

The theme of **Storyboard 10** is “The Dream Renewed “(*Atarashii Yume no Hajimari*). Despite many hardships before, during and after the War, Japanese Americans have established a place in America and have prospered. Some of our success stories and closing thoughts are in Storyboard 10.

**Photo 30 of Senator Inouye**: This is a photo of Senator Daniel K. Inouye receiving the Medal of Honor, the highest combat medal for valor, from President Bill Clinton when his Distinguished Service

Cross was upgraded in 2000. Senator Inouye, who was a Lieutenant in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, is the most senior ranking member of the United States Senate and third in line of succession to the Presidency.

**Photo 31 of Secretary Mineta:** This is a photo of Secretary Norman Y. Mineta receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, from President George W. Bush in 2001. Secretary Mineta served as the first Asian American member of a Presidential cabinet as Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration. He later served as Secretary of Transportation in the Bush Administration. As a teenager, he was interned at Heart Mountain War Relocation Center in Wyoming.

**Photo 32 of Ribbon Cutting:** We were privileged to have Secretary Mineta serve as the keynote speaker at the dedication of the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial on February 17, 2009. This is a photo of Secretary Mineta leading the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Memorial with former Pinedale internees.

**Photo 33 of Memorial Committee:** This is a photo of members of the Memorial Committee, Advisory Committee, members of the Clovis Veterans Memorial District and Consul General of Japan Yasumasa Nagamine. Congressman Jim Costa is holding the scissors. Consul General Nagamine is third from the right. Conrad Jimenez, the designer of the Memorial, has an arm around him.

**Photo 34 of Secretary Shinseki:** The last photo is of General Eric Shinseki presenting a Presidential Unit Citation to the Military Intelligence Service in 2000. General Shinseki, a four-star general, became Chief of Staff of the Army, the Army's highest officer. President Barack Obama later appointed him to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a cabinet position. It's ironic that General Shinseki was nominated on December 7, 2008, Pearl Harbor Day. A day feared by Japanese Americans was turned into a day of pride for one of its own.

The Japanese American story of internment and redress is part of a broader movement of a nation striving to fulfill its ideals of equal opportunity, treatment and justice for all. The Memorial Committee hopes the memorial will inspire those who see it to live righteously and treat others with dignity and respect.

The last storyboard closes with a quote from Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. He led the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s seeking equality for African Americans through non-violent civil disobedience. It brings us full circle to the concept of the American Dream as expressed in the quote from the Declaration of Independence in the first storyboard. It is from his famous "I Have a Dream Speech" at the Lincoln Monument delivered in 1963. Rev. King said, "And so even though we face the

difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"

***Arigato Gozaimashita.***

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