



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Patricia Kiyono

206-320-0095, patricia.kiyono@densho.org

***IN THE SHADOW OF MY COUNTRY* -- AWARD-WINNING WEBSITE LAUNCHED BY DENSHŌ: THE JAPANESE AMERICAN LEGACY PROJECT**

SEATTLE, September 2003--One Japanese American family's memories of living behind barbed wire during World War II are captured in the new bilingual multimedia website *In the Shadow of My Country: A Japanese American Artist Remembers*. Created by Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project, the website *In the Shadow of My Country* (www.densho.org/shadow) has received the Outstanding Website Award in the 2003 WebAwards competition. The acclaimed artist Roger Shimomura, who was held at Minidoka, Idaho, as a three year old, found inspiration in the journals of his grandmother Toku Shimomura for the painting series *An American Diary*, which traveled to major museums around the country. A virtual exhibition, *In the Shadow of My Country* displays the thirty ironic paintings tempered by the grandmother's patient, hopeful words.

Complementing the central images are excerpts from Toku Shimomura's diary, historical photos of the incarceration camps, thoughts of Japanese Americans who were incarcerated as children, audio clips of South Asian children who suffer discrimination today, an interview with the artist, and the poignant series *Memories of Childhood*-- barbed-wire festooned depictions of the artist's earliest recollections of life. This array of images and voices recalls the harsh conditions, improvised diversions, and years lost in America's prison camps for innocent civilians.

"Today marks one year since the outbreak of the war between the United States and Japan. Those of us that share the virtues of both countries pray for the earliest possible peace."

--December 7, 1942, diary entry of Toku Shimomura, written while she was incarcerated by the U.S. government at Minidoka, Idaho

Accompanying the website is a teacher resource guide containing curriculum suitable for upper elementary and secondary school students (grades 5-12). The guide provides historical context, classroom lessons, and additional resources. In multidisciplinary activities, students are asked to think critically about their sources of information, and to weigh claims of national security against threats to civil liberties. Both the website and teacher guide are offered in Japanese (see www.densho.org/kage for the Japanese-language version).

The website *In the Shadow of My Country: A Japanese American Artist Remembers* was made possible by a generous grant from the United States - Japan Foundation. This project is funded in part by grants from the Washington State Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Denshō Archive and Website

In the Shadow of My Country is the latest addition to Denshō 's principal website (www.densho.org), recently redesigned to showcase the organization's content-rich digital archive of video oral histories and documents focusing on the unjust incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II. Denshō's online archive of more than 100 indexed and transcribed visual life histories and 1,000 captioned documents grows larger every year. At present, 50 more interviews and 1,000 additional documents are being processed for the archive. The Denshō website is exceptional in offering a wealth of primary sources supported by historical contextual material and curriculum for elementary through high school grades. Students, teachers, and the general public may use the resources free of charge for purposes of research and education.

Among those interviewed are U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, World War II veteran and recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor; Walt Woodward, editor of *The Bainbridge Review* and model for the main character in the bestseller *Snow Falling on Cedars*; and Gordon Hirabayashi, one of the Supreme Court challengers of the exclusion orders. Denshō preserves these irreplaceable testimonies and images not only to preserve the legacy of one ethnic group, but to caution against violating the civil liberties of any people in the name of national security.

While the archive covers Japanese American history from immigration in the 1800s to the present, most visitors use it to research the causes of the World War II incarceration. Video excerpts from the archive enhance a section on the true motivations behind the incarceration as stated in 1982 by a congressional commission: the mass removal was not justified by military necessity, but was rooted in racism, war hysteria, and failure of leadership.

Visitors listen to the memories of those who lived through this traumatic episode in American history. Their personal, often emotional recollections bring to life dramatic events that standard textbooks barely mention. The supplementary primary sources -- newspaper articles and photos, propaganda posters, government memos -- help people understand what these Japanese immigrants and their citizen children endured and eventually overcame. A free online curriculum for upper high school students, co-developed with the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), examines civil rights in relation to the Japanese American experience.

About Denshō

The Japanese word *denshō* means "to pass on to the next generation," or to leave a legacy. The legacy Denshō offers is a story of crucial relevance to post- 9/11 America. The Seattle-based nonprofit organization was founded in 1996 with the goal of collecting oral histories from aging Japanese Americans who were incarcerated by the U.S. government during World War II. This goal evolved into a mission to educate, preserve, collaborate, and inspire action for equity.