



Compassionate Action: Helping the Japanese Americans

"We never got the property back. I keep dreaming about that place all the time, because that was our home, and I always felt that we should have been able to come back to it. I left all my good things with my neighbors, and of course they were all gone when I came back. They said, 'Well, I guess it got stolen. We don't know what happened to it.' That's the case of many, many others that left things in care of other people."

— Peggie Nishimura Bain, *Densho* interview

"What impressed me was that when we were in camp the Quakers sent gifts to us kids so we would have Christmas presents. I remember that. I thought how very kind of someone, because we thought we just were kind of lost, but that was...it was very impressive."—Fumiko Uyeda Groves, *Densho* interview



The World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans remains a dismal passage in our country's history. Accounts abound of bargain hunters descending on panicked immigrant communities after Pearl Harbor, purported friends stealing land and businesses nurtured for a lifetime, and civilians deriding decorated nisei soldiers as "Japs."

But the stories of bigotry and greed are mitigated by memories of brave individuals who opposed the mass injustice with quiet actions. Speakers in the *Densho* archive of video interviews recall gestures of kindness—friends tearfully saying goodbye as Japanese Americans boarded buses and trains, bringing gifts and necessities to them in camp, and lending aid when they came home destitute after the war.

"That's what helped a lot of us, that she was such a loving person."

In addition to scattered supporters, several religious groups assisted the Japanese Americans, most notably the Society of Friends, or Quakers. May K. Sasaki, as a first grader behind barbed wire, was consoled by a caring teacher:

"I remember I learned to say the Pledge of Allegiance while I was in camp, and it was ironic because the teacher who taught me was a German teacher who chose to be there. I believe she was associated with the Quakers, and she wanted us to know what it truly was like to be an American.... We were in this camp but we're not to worry about it—we were okay people. I do feel that's what helped a lot of us, that she was such a loving person."

Peggie Nishimura Bain started over from scratch in Chicago after being released from camp. She remembers landlords saying the room was rented upon seeing her face, but also being accepted by her employers at a photo studio:

"It was very, very interesting. We had so many Catholic weddings. We prepared coffee and had refreshments in the morning for the wedding group that came, and we really had a lot of fun. This was almost an all-Jewish outfit; the owners were Jewish and the workers. But I had found that the Jewish people were the ones that helped us initially, from the time we first arrived in Chicago. It always seemed like it was the Jewish people that helped us."

While too many Americans during World War II were consumed by fear of enemy attack, swayed by anti-immigrant propaganda, or preoccupied with their own difficulties, the brave humanitarian few who tempered prejudice with small acts of compassion set a standard for us even today.



Nishimura family farm, Des Moines, Washington, April 1921. Courtesy Bain family collection.

DEAR FRIENDS,

For Densho, 2004 was marked by new partnerships and renewed goals. The digital archive offers 50 additional video interviews from diverse viewpoints. We will add search features to help researchers, and work with affiliate organizations to preserve more precious memories for future generations.

In the new year, Densho will launch an educational initiative. Friends and supporters urge us not only to collect more oral histories from elders, but to advance awareness of the real causes and effects of the Japanese American incarceration. Teachers ask for easy-to-use curricula for history and civics classes. With the help of generous donors, we are enriching and expanding our classroom resources, which we will offer to educators around the country.

A recent highly publicized defense of the Japanese American incarceration (and of ethnic profiling today) reinforces our deep commitment to civil rights education. As Fred Korematsu recently wrote: "No one should ever be locked away simply because they share the same race, ethnicity, or religion as a spy or terrorist. If that principle was not learned from the internment of Japanese Americans, then these are very dangerous times for our democracy."

Broad-minded supporters like you make all the difference in protecting civil liberties for us all.

Tom Ikeda

Executive Director



From the Archive



Children in Minidoka, Idaho, incarceration camp, circa 1943.
Courtesy Wing Luke Asian Museum.

Densho recently collected a series of video interviews with people who were not themselves incarcerated but who witnessed the “evacuation” and life in the camps. We captured stories of principled individuals who attempted to assist the banished Japanese Americans. These visual histories respond to teachers’ questions about how the larger community reacted to their Japanese American neighbors being taken away. Other interviewees in the series cite the World War II incarceration in their pursuit of social justice today.

Emery Brooks Andrews is the son of Reverend Emery Andrews, the Japanese Baptist Church minister in Seattle for many years. After the Japanese Americans in Seattle were taken to the Minidoka incarceration camp near Twin Falls, Idaho, Reverend Brooks moved his family there so that he could minister to his congregation. His son, five years old at the time, recalls visiting his friends at Minidoka:

I have vivid memories of driving up the road to the guardhouse, to the gate there and seeing the barbed wire fence stretching, it seemed like for miles around the camp. And the soldiers in the guard towers with guns, always pointing in toward the camp, never out. Every weekend we’d come there. They knew my dad. But we always had to stop at the guard gate, and they would ask why are we there, what are we going to do today. They had to search through any bags or gifts that we brought. Oftentimes we brought items of food. Sometimes if we had a request from someone in the camp to buy an article of clothing or something from a store in Twin Falls, then we could purchase that for them and bring that into the camp. Just daily needs of sustenance and maybe a little frivolous thing now and then to cheer us up.

As an adult and a minister himself, Brooks Andrews reflects on the camps and concludes, “I think the redemption, for everybody, *isei*, *nisei*, me, anybody, the redemption comes in being able to go back and remember those experiences and then we start telling stories to each other. It’s cathartic, but it’s also a heritage or a history that we pass on to the next generation so they don’t forget.”

After the attacks of September 11, when hate crimes escalated against Muslims, Arabs, South Asians, and East Africans, immigrant advocate Pramila Jayapal founded Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington to defend these targeted communities.

“We cannot let this happen to somebody else.”

I think in those times of crisis, you define yourself by what you do or don’t do. I think that the very few people that stood up for Japanese Americans during the internment, they did so in spite of the fact that nobody else was standing up, and they had that to hold on to for the rest of their lives. And so I don’t necessarily think it’s about what you do successfully or not successfully. I think it’s about do you do what’s consistent with your own belief in how the world should be? It wasn’t so much that I knew I was going to make a difference. I just felt that I would never be able to look at myself if I didn’t act.

There were so many amazing organizations that really came together after September 11th. I remember very vividly at an early meeting a *nisei* standing up. He had, I think, fought in the war and he said, “We cannot let this happen.” He was very emotional. He said, “We cannot let this happen to somebody else.” The Japanese American community really jumped in, which I think is a very courageous and brave and generous thing to do, because it’s easy to say, “It’s not as bad as our experience, you know. There were 120,000 of us who were in camps.” But that’s not how the Japanese American community portrayed it. It was really that they were a part of this group that needed to speak out.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the declaration of war against Japan, December 8, 1941. Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration.

Historian's Talk: FDR's Fateful Decision

President Roosevelt's decision to exclude all Japanese Americans from the West Coast and incarcerate them without trial still has supporters, decades after the congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians declared the camps unnecessary and unjust. To advance understanding of Roosevelt's actions, we are pleased to welcome Greg Robinson, assistant professor of history at the University of Quebec, author of *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Harvard University Press, 2001). Publishers Weekly calls his book a "lucid, comprehensive and balanced examination" of Roosevelt's decision and the influences upon him: "Conscientious arguments and meticulous documentation movingly clarify a little-understood failure of American democracy."

Robinson will speak at a free public program at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, January 12, at the University of Washington Ethnic Cultural Theatre, 3940 Brooklyn Avenue NE, Seattle. More information is available at www.densho.org, 206-320-0095, or info@densho.org. We are grateful to the University of Washington Department of American Ethnic Studies and the Elliott Bay Book Company for assisting with this event. A percentage of the proceeds from book sales will be donated to Densho.

Double Impact Programs: Conserving and Collaborating

All our work this past year has served a dual function: historical preservation and democracy education. Assisted by grants from the California and Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program and the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, we gathered interviews from diverse narrators such as women who raised families behind barbed wire; a Japanese Peruvian who was kidnapped and incarcerated at Crystal City, Texas; War Relocation Authority employees; and Caucasian friends who decried the forced removal of Japanese Americans.

These varied perspectives will bring to life lessons we are developing for middle- and high-school students. We want students to understand that the mass detention affected not a monolithic, anonymous group but 120,000 souls who experienced fear, discrimination, loss, anger, hope, and redemption. The new teacher resources will feature excerpts from the Densho archive.

Seattle-area educators are consulting with us as we develop classroom materials about the causes of the incarceration and its relevance today. To more efficiently collect national interviews, we are working with the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, and other major cultural institutions. With help from the National Park Service, which monitors the former camp sites, Densho is producing an educational website that will provide data about all the World War II incarceration facilities.

The "all-camps" website and teaching materials will be available in summer 2005. As with all the primary sources and curricula on the Densho website, these new resources will be offered to the general public free of charge. In the coming year, we will market our educational materials nationwide to ensure the greatest impact.

Sign up for Densho E-Newsletter and Online Auction!

Beginning in 2005, Densho will produce periodic electronic newsletters to communicate with our friends around the United States and beyond. If you would like to hear about upcoming programs, events, and organizational news, please send your e-mail address to info@densho.org.

We will be happy to inform you of updated offerings on our website and send announcements when new educational resources become available. And we will notify you when broadcasts of past Densho programs are shown as free streaming video on the Internet. For example, our November 2004 event "Community Ties: Memories of Japantown," a touching commemoration of Seattle's Nihonmachi neighborhood, is currently available as video on demand. To view the program, visit www.seattlechannel.org, Viewing Room, Special Programming, Town Hall Presents.

In 2005 we will also stage our first online auction, featuring an enticing array of art, jewelry, luxury trips, lodging, dining, and entertainment. Just register at info@densho.org and you can join the good-natured competition that will benefit Densho's historical preservation and education work. Be a winner without leaving home!

Staff Notes

Congratulations to Executive Director Tom Ikeda for winning the 2004 Humanities Washington and JACL Japanese American of the Biennium awards.

After seven years working as Interview Programs Manager, Alice Ito has left Densho to become a program officer at the Marguerite Casey Foundation. Alice developed our oral history program, which will continue. We benefited greatly from Alice's insight, sensitivity, and integrity. We wish her all the best.



D E N S H Ō

Board
Scott Oki
Chairman

William Kazuo Bryant
Brenda Handley
Mari Horita
Tom Ikeda
Tomio Moriguchi

Staff
Tom Ikeda
Executive Director
tom.ikeda@densho.org

Dana Hoshide
Production Manager
dana.hoshide@densho.org

Leslie Arai
Operations Manager
leslie.arai@densho.org

Patricia Kiyono
*Communications and
Development Manager*
patricia.kiyono@densho.org

Geoff Froh
Technical Manager
geoff.froh@densho.org

Jill Ohara
Special Projects Manager
jill.ohara@densho.org

Preserving the past, inspiring the future

Denshō is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization founded in 1996 with the mission to educate, preserve, collaborate, and inspire action for equity. Densho (meaning “to pass on to future generations”) is building a digital archive of life stories and historical images that document the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. The archive and related curriculum on the public website (www.densho.org) promote respect for the civil liberties of all people.

Visit the Densho website at www.densho.org.



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

1416 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98144-2023

Phone 206.320.0095
Fax 206.320.0098
info@densho.org
www.densho.org

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