

From the Director: Tom Ikeda

We start the year with the sad news of Gordon Hirabayashi's passing. Twelve years ago I remember feeling nervous about doing an oral history interview with Gordon Hirabayashi. In preparation I studied his story of opposing the government's World War II racial curfew and exclusion orders targeted at Japanese Americans and I couldn't help but put Gordon on a pedestal. As a college senior at the University of Washington his reasoning was crisp and courageous to oppose the mass removal and incarceration based on democratic ideals and using a non-violent, direct approach grounded in his confidence in the Constitution. I knew I would soon be talking with a historical giant who took a principled stand and fought to improve civil rights in America.

To my surprise, instead of finding a fiery civil rights activist, I discovered Gordon Hirabayashi, the teacher, who used intelligence, humor, and moral integrity to guide me. At first, in awe of him, I was unstructured and overly deferential which led to a rambling conversation, whereupon Gordon gently prompted me to clarify the purpose of the interview. A second interview went much better with Gordon suggesting ideas to discuss. By the fifth session I finally felt much more relaxed and confident, and now realize how much Gordon helped me not only to become a better interviewer, but to enjoy the process.

Thank you Gordon.



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Quest for Justice: A Profile of Gordon Hirabayashi

"I felt that during the war it would be hard to get justice...
During the war nothing that the army said was questioned."
-- Gordon Hirabayashi

(Republished from December 2007) Over the years Densho has interviewed hundreds of Japanese Americans and others who offer diverse perspectives of the World War II incarceration. Among the interviewees are individuals who played key roles in the fight to prove that the forced removal and detention were unconstitutional, and that the government's justification of military necessity was false. One of those key players is Gordon Hirabayashi, who as a twenty-four-year-old college student, schooled in his constitutional rights, went to jail rather than obey the "evacuation" orders. His challenge became one of four test cases to reach the Supreme Court.

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Gordon Hirabayashi Obituaries

Below is a sampling of press notices of Gordon Hirabayashi's death.

- [New York Times, January 3, 2012](#)



- National Public Radio, January 4, 2012
- *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 4, 2012
- *Rafu Shimpo*, January 4, 2012

Looking Back at the Supreme Court Case of *Hirabayashi v United States*

In 1943 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a racial curfew imposed on Japanese Americans during World War II. The government lawyers argued that the curfew was a constitutional response to the serious threat of a Japanese invasion of the West Coast. In 2010, Professor Eric Muller of the University of North Carolina School of Law published an article demonstrating how government lawyers made misrepresentations to the U.S. Supreme Court about a possible Japanese invasion.

A year later, Neal Katyal, the Acting Solicitor General of the United States released a Confession of Error by the Solicitor General for its role in the *Hirabayashi* and *Korematsu* cases.

- >> [Professor Eric Muller's article](#)
- >> [Confession of Error by the Solicitor General](#)

Conference Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the *Hirabayashi coram nobis* case

The Fred T. Korematsu Center for Law and Equality will host a conference Feb. 11, 2012, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Ninth Circuit opinion in the *Hirabayashi v. United States coram nobis* case.

The conference will celebrate Mr. Hirabayashi's courage in resisting military orders that imposed curfews on Japanese Americans and ordered them to report for incarceration; reflect on his 1943 Supreme Court case that upheld his convictions and the extraordinary work of his legal team in reopening of his case nearly 40 years later; and use his case as a springboard to move forward in the struggle for civil rights.

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