

A young Japanese American who appeals to the conscience of America



Washington's Most Successful Lobbyist

Condensed from *The Sign*

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TWO YEARS AGO Mike Masaoka did not know beans about lobbying. Today he stands without peer among the thousands of lobbyists in Washington. His record in the 80th Congress was monumental — the passage of five public and 12 private bills for his Japanese-American constituents.

Mike Masaoka practices a kind of personal lobbying that is entirely new. He can't promise votes or money. His success is bound to his maxim, "Sell yourself first and then sell your cause."

Of his unbelievable record Mike says with characteristic modesty, "Anyone can sell fair play and justice." Prodded by Mike, the 80th Congress passed bills to provide the following: financial relief to 110,000 Japanese Americans for losses suffered when they were evacuated

from our West Coast in 1942; payment for fire damage in evacuation camps; permission for GIs to bring their Japanese brides to the United States; cancellation of deportation orders against deserving Japanese aliens; American citizenship for Japanese aliens who served honorably with our armed forces during the war. The 12 private bills which Mike obtained for individual Japanese Americans required almost as much effort as these more inclusive public bills.

In his work Mike feels that deep down he is the conscience of America; he typifies all minority groups in their struggle to win acceptance as equal partners in America.

The fourth eldest in a family of eight children, Mike was born in Fresno, Calif., of Japanese parents. A few years after he was born, his

family moved to Salt Lake City, where his father, a fish-peddler, was killed by a hit-and-run driver.

Mrs. Masaoka, left penniless, managed to support her family by running a fruit and fish stand near the state capitol. Mike came to know many of Utah's chief politicians who were her customers. They fostered in him a deep interest in civic affairs. Today both the Mayor of Salt Lake City, Earl J. Glade, and Senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah feel personally responsible for Mike's success.

Working his way through the University of Utah, Mike still found time to become an exceptional student, public speaker and debater. On a trip to the West Coast after graduation he realized for the first time the unhappy living conditions of most Japanese Americans. College graduates worked at menial jobs. Restrictive covenants created Little Tokyos. Influential newspapers directed propaganda against the Japanese Americans, who, they said, were in cahoots with Japanese warlords.

Shocked, Mike realized that the problems of Japanese Americans on the West Coast could not be solved without organization and direct representation. He became active in the Japanese-American Citizens League (JACL). In 1940 he was elected Japanese American of the Year.

On December 7, 1941, in a meeting hall in North Platte, Neb., Mike was urging a group of Japanese Americans to pledge loyalty to the

United States, when police entered, guns drawn. Pearl Harbor was already a fact and these were Japanese. Mike was hustled off to jail. Three days later, after Senators Thomas and Murdock of Utah burned up the wires to North Platte, he was released.

The darkest moment of Mike's life came in 1942, when the evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast was ordered. More than 110,000 persons, including Mike's mother and his fiancée, Etsu Mineta, were taken to inland prison camps. Two thirds of the evacuees were native-born American citizens.

Mike went up and down the coast urging the evacuees to cooperate with the Army in the evacuation, even though their Constitutional rights were being violated. His listeners had misgivings. And when they found themselves in wretched camps behind barbed wire, with little to keep them occupied, they blamed him personally for their plight. Some camps hanged him in effigy and one camp erected a Masaoka tombstone.

Mike was not evacuated. In return for urging their people to cooperate in the evacuation, several JACL leaders were given permission to do what they could to improve the lot of the evacuees. Mike traversed the country, explaining their loyalty and persuading church groups and others to urge their re-establishment as a going part of the nation. In the process,

he was thrown into jail eight times and was often roughed up by police. Radio Tokyo broadcast that as soon as Japanese troops landed in San Francisco Mike would be the first American hanged.

In 1942, Mike went to Washington to ask that Japanese Americans be permitted to leave their camps and volunteer for the Army. Not until January 1943, however, were Japanese Americans permitted to do so — and then only because Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy took up their case. The Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team was activated as a unit in Camp Shelby, Miss. Mike was the first continental volunteer.

When the 442nd originally went into action in Italy, it had a complement of 3000 men. After four months in the line, its casualty rate was over 300 percent. The 442nd won more major decorations for time spent in combat than any other comparable unit. Its men won more than 9000 combat medals. General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell best summarized the war record of the Japanese Americans: "They bought an awful big hunk of America with their blood."

From her bleak prison camp Mike's mother advised her sons to volunteer "because this is my country." Five Masaoka boys saw service in Italy and France. Four were wounded; one was killed.

When the war was over and Mike was mustered out, he knew his job had just begun. The Japanese Ameri-

cans had dropped their resentment against him when he turned down a commission to become an enlisted man. Later the feeling had become general among them that cooperation in the evacuation had been wise.

Some time before the 80th Congress went into session in January 1947, Mike and Etsu, whom he had married just before going into the Army, moved to Washington. They opened an office in their two-room apartment. Then they walked over to the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate and gingerly registered as lobbyists. The JACL had decided that writing letters to Congressmen and sending petitions to the President were not enough. Mike's job was to convince a majority of the 435 Representatives and 96 Senators that his proposals were worthy of passage at a time when the international scene was cloudy and inflation, housing and labor problems loomed large at home.

His most important assignment was to remove the racial discrimination still remaining in our immigration and naturalization laws. Mike's mother and Ginzo Nakada, for example — who had come to this country decades ago, and who between them had had 12 sons in the Army — were ineligible to become U. S. citizens. Mrs. Nawa Munemori, mother of Sadao Munemori, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, not only was unable to become a citizen but was unable to receive a

California old-age pension because of her alien status.

Many of the evacuees from the West Coast were now destitute. The farms of some had been foreclosed while they were away. The Government had not stored their belongings as promised. Some had been forced to sell their property for practically nothing.

About 2000 Japanese were awaiting deportation because their temporary visas had run out. Many had worked for OSS, OWI or the War Department. They had drawn most of the maps by which our B-29's bombed Japan. Many had taught in our military language schools. Others had broadcast or monitored radio programs to and from Japan. By helping us they had committed treason to Japan. Deserving European aliens could have their deportations canceled; these Japanese aliens could not.

Such matters constituted Mike's "must" legislation. Usual lobbying procedures were useless. The people he represented had no effective voting power, political influence, money. Mike looked about for a new approach. He read everything he could lay his hands on pertaining to the legislation in which he was interested. In a month he knew more about both sides of his proposals than anyone else in Washington.

He directed his first attack at the sub-committees. Few members saw Mike the first time he called. But he got to know the secretaries of the sub-committeemen, and when they

found he had something worth while to say they scheduled appointments.

There were lucky breaks too. One secretary had just turned down Mike's request for an interview when the Senator shouted from his inner sanctum: "Wait a minute. Mike's an Irish name."

"Yes, sir," Masaoka replied quickly. "I'm part Irish — at least I have Irish blood in me."

The Senator's eyebrows climbed, and Mike hurried to explain. "When the Germans shot me up overseas I got a transfusion at an aid station. An Irishman from Boston gave me his blood."

The Senator laughed and invited Mike into his office. When they emerged an hour later, the Senator had his arm around Mike's shoulders and was saying: "Now don't worry, son. We'll do everything possible to help your people."

Mike drafted many of his bills himself, then looked for Congressmen who would sponsor them. It was a matter of selling himself and then his cause.

While he was busy with sub-committeemen and sponsors, Mike was also presenting his cause to church, veteran and other groups. At hearings his speeches were gems of clarity, logic and delivery. Many Congressmen affirmed that they dropped their last lingering opposition after listening to him.

Letters to Mike from Japanese aliens who had lived as long as 40 years in this country showed that state laws barred them from a great

variety of jobs. Many state laws permitted persons with first citizenship papers to work at some of these restricted jobs, but the Justice Department customarily refused to issue first papers to Japanese aliens on the ground that they could not eventually become citizens.

Here again Mike decided on personal lobbying. He went to Ugo Carusi, then Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization. Among the data he presented was the information that the 442nd had liberated Carusi's home town of Carrara, Italy. It was not long before Japanese aliens were permitted to take out first citizenship papers.

In recent weeks Mike has seen his lobbying successes crowned by House passage of the bill which, from the beginning, was his top priority—a bill permitting some 85,000 long-resident Japanese aliens (including his own mother) to become eligible for American citizenship.

Though the JACL, supported by contributions, pays him less than \$5000 a year, Mike has turned down as much as \$1000 a month just to advise other groups. To his supporters he is known as "Messiah" Mashaoka. No matter how much he protests that he cannot promise success, they scoff at him. And no wonder!



Children's Version

» THE Lord's Prayer has had to withstand considerable abuse, especially from children trying to learn it from poor enunciators or from mumbling congregations.

One little boy was heard to pray, "Harold be Thy name." Another begged, "Give us this day our jelly bread." A New York child petitioned, "Lead us not into Penn station." — St. Louis Cathedral *Bulletin*

» WHEN Umpqua, Ore., pupils were told classes would be dismissed because of teachers' institute, Lonnie Leonard, eight, startled his parents with: "No school tomorrow. The teachers are going on an innocent toot." — AP

» A FIRST-GRADER in a Kirkland, Wash., school volunteered to recite a nursery rhyme. "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet," he intoned, "eating her curves away." — Contributed by Hazel M. Berto

» THE CHILDREN were singing "Oh, Susanna." Suddenly we realized three-year-old Billy had a version all his own as he sang lustily, "I come from Alabama with a bandaid on my knee." — Contributed by Edith G. Hansen