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LEGACIES OF EXCLUSION AND REPEAL:
IMPACT ON PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY.

Clifford Uyeda

Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the repeal, in 1943, of the **1882 Chinese Exclusion Act**. In America, Asians are not distinguished by race. We all look alike to non-Asians. Therefore, legal and social discriminations against one Asian group was practiced on all Asians. We are here to present the impact of racial exclusion in the United States on Japanese Americans.

"Exclusion" was the word which best described Asians in America for most of its history. It was not only exclusion from entering the United States but exclusion of immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens. It was also an exclusion of Asian citizens from fully participating in the American dream.

The first **Naturalization Act of 1790** granted naturalization rights only to "Free white persons." By 1900 the only other people given the privilege of citizenship were the Black Americans, in 1873. Asians were excluded in both immigration and naturalization.

It was ironic that even Native Americans could not become U.S. citizens in the land of their ancestors until 1924.

There were few exceptions that snuck through. In 1858, a Japanese immigrant named Hikozo Hamada, also known as Joseph Heco, studied in Baltimore, Maryland, and became the first Japanese naturalized as an American citizen.

Several Japanese had become naturalized subjects of the Kingdom of Hawaii, but in 1900 the U.S. Territorial Government refused to recognize all such naturalization. Two Japanese, one (Buntaro Kumagai) honorably discharged from the U.S. Army and the other (Namyō Bessho) from the U.S. Navy were both rejected for naturalization, although some 40 years earlier in 1882, the U.S. Congress had enacted a law which provided that "any alien" honorably discharged from U.S. Military Service was eligible to apply for naturalization.

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In 1921 a Japanese immigrant (Tokutaro Nishimura Slocum) had his naturalization certificate cancelled. He was a sergeant major with the U.S. 82nd Division in France during World War I and was severely wounded.

The final blow for the Japanese came in 1924 when Congress passed the Asian Exclusion Act.

In 1935 a congressional Bill finally granted citizenship to approximately 500 Asians who had served honorably with the U.S. armed forces during World War I.

Asians from certain countries that were allies of the United States during World War II were granted the right to naturalization as a gesture of good will (Chinese in 1943. People from the Philippines and from India in 1946.). The last two Asian groups to gain naturalization rights were the Japanese and the Koreans, in 1952. (McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act)

What were the consequence of these exclusion laws? They were used to deny protections guaranteed U.S. citizens. They were also used to pass legislation which placed restrictions on Japanese who had settled in America. The California **Alien Land Law of 1913** prohibited Asians from owning land, and the leasing of land was limited to three years. The revised California **Alien Land Law of 1920** prohibited Japanese immigrant parents from serving as guardians of property for their minor citizen children, and also prohibited any leasing of lands to aliens.

For many Japanese immigrants struggling to survive in America, it was very difficult to afford the cost of returning to Japan to seek a bride. The so-called "Picture bride" marriages became a common practice since approximately 1910. But this was stopped in 1921 at the insistence of the U.S. government.

Although Americans considered the "picture bride" practice immoral, nothing was said about the **Mercer Girls**. Asa Mercer brought boat loads of young women from Boston and from New York to Seattle to pair them off with young lumberjacks to populate the Pacific Northwest. These girls did not even have photos of their prospective husbands. The newspapers headlined: **Petticoat Brigade** and **Cargo of Heifers**. Some women were sold off at the dock to the highest

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bidder. Boat loads of women from Australia were also being shipped to Vancouver, British Columbia, in Canada. Asa Mercer had been the first president of the Territorial University in Seattle.

During World War II, Japanese Americans faced exclusion from the West Coast of the United States and were sent into concentration camps in the interior desert and swamp lands. In the military, into which Japanese Americans were being drafted, they were in segregated units. The Japanese Americans established brilliant military records. But at what cost? Their casualty rate was five times higher than that of the overall American forces.

Henry Goshu, one of the volunteers into the famed **Merrill's Marauders** which fought behind the enemy lines in Burma, said to me: "When I volunteered from behind the barbed wires at Minidoka camp in Idaho, I felt more like a prisoner-of-war. An armed soldier sat next to me on the train all the way to the port of embarkation at San Francisco."

Any male American citizen enrolled in a Class A medical school during World War II was also enrolled into the Navy or the Army specialized training program. All medical school expenses were paid by the government and living allowances were granted. I was the only qualified student in my class that had to pay my way through medical school.

The War Department specifically reviewed my application and stated that they were not going to train anyone of Japanese ancestry at government expense. My folks were sent to a concentration camp in the United States, my brother had been drafted into the U.S. Army just prior to Pearl Harbor. I obtained an evening job so that I can continue school. Returning to my room around midnight each day, it was difficult to prepare for the next day's lessons. Upon graduating and the completion of my internship, however, I received the same order as my classmates to be inducted into the armed service. I served in the U.S. military, just as did my classmates.

For our parents, the ban on naturalization was not repealed until 1952, seven years after World War II ended. By the time the Japanese immigrants became eligible for American citizenship, most were over sixty years of age. However, many went back to school to learn American history in order to pass the citizenship test.

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How has our experience affected our present status? In the face of oppression and exclusion, Japanese Americans became quiet and uncomplaining. Our parents emphasized scholastic achievements as a ticket to acceptance by the majority society. Our parents' generation and the following generation had presumed that someday the Japanese Americans will be accepted in America if they continued work hard, study hard and never complained. It was a behavior totally inappropriate in America where the quiet American was a misunderstood American, an ignored American.

The third generation of Japanese Americans, the Sansei, grew up in America which was just awakening from their centuries of slumber toward the oppressed minorities. The open expression of protests by some Sansei was a behavior unacceptable to most Nisei.

There is a recent phenomenon in the Japanese American community, although the incident was half a century back in history, that has awakened the Japanese American consciousness as never before in its history. It is the story of the Nisei draft resisters during World War II.

We are not talking about those who questioned the loyalty oath for various reasons, or about a group of Japanese Americans who had become so disenchanted with their American citizenship for imprisonment only because of their ancestry that they had lost faith in their country and our constitutional promises. We are talking about the young Nisei who stated that they would serve anywhere in the world as U.S. soldiers if their rights as U.S. citizens were first restored to them and their families released from concentration camps. They were all sentenced to federal penitentiaries.

President Harry Truman pardoned and cleared their military records in 1947. But they have not been cleared by the members of their own ethnic community. During wartime the leaders of the Japanese American community had labeled them "disloyal" and "unpatriotic" Americans for the stand these resisters took in 1944.

Although the American government had admitted the wrong and apologized for treating the wartime Japanese Americans as aliens rather than citizens, the Japanese American community leadership is still reluctant to admit their error in labeling these resisters as "disloyal Americans." The Japanese American community remains divided even today.

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These young Nisei resisters took their citizenship rights seriously. They were willing to risk prison for principle. There were Nisei among the resisters who would never have passed the induction physical examination due to physical handicaps or illness; but they felt strongly about supporting their friends in protest, and were also sent to federal penitentiaries.

For fifty years now, these former draft resisters have been and are still misunderstood and ostracized from the Japanese American community. The major mass protest for civil rights of the modern era was begun by the Nisei two decades before the better known civil rights protest and demonstrations of the 1960s. That fact is little known because the protests by hundreds of Nisei were behind the barbed wire compounds of the American concentration camps. They are the unsung patriots of America.

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