

Daniel K. Inouye: a Fight Against Hate

There are seldom dates known by nearly every citizen of the United States. September 11, 2001 will forever be associated with the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York City. June 6, 1944 will forever be known as the beginning of the allied invasion to recapture Western Europe from the facism. The last, is December 7, 1941 - the day Imperial Japan attacked and bombed Pearl Harbor, as well as a litany of other pacific islands. One lesser-known date, which should be branded into the temporal lobe of every American is February 19, 1942, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Over the course of the next six months, one hundred thousand men, women, and children of Japanese descent living on the West Coast of the United States were removed from their homes and placed into internment camps (National Archives).

Daniel K. Inouye was the son of Japanese immigrants at a time there was rampant anti-Japanese sentiment spreading throughout the nation. An American, and native Hawaiian, Inouye felt an insatiable desire to serve his nation - even when they didn't want him. Recounted in 1999, as a member of the United States Senate, Inouye said "Here I was, though I was a citizen of the United States, I was declared to be an enemy alien and as a result not fit to put on the uniform of the United States" (Roll Call). Inouye's service is proof of the indomitable human spirit in the face of extreme adversity. For most young Americans who enlisted in the war, it was a fight against facism, to liberate our overseas brethren, and to further the fight longer than anyone else as we pushed the Japanese back to their mainland. For Inouye - and for the other Japanese-American soldiers in his regiment - it was a fight for personal freedom.

Political cartoons created by Theodore Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) instructing Americans to "Wipe That Sneer Off His Face!" overhead a drawing of a stereotypical Japanese man defines the

American zeitgeist immediately going into the Second World War (Library Digital Collections). Inouye - a man who lost his right arm fighting for freedom overseas - found that his later success in Hawaii, in the House, and in the Senate made American openness more important to him than ever, and so disdainful at "...anti-Japanese racism and hatred of 'Nips' after the war" (The New Yorker). Despite the clear and articulable evidence of rampant racism drifting its way throughout the nation, Inouye always fought for the ideal version of our nation's original framework - even fighting for Hawaii to become the 50th state, despite fierce resistance from congressmen who feared the large non-white population of the territory (Academy of Achievement).

As a newly-elected senator in 1962 (senate.gov), he sought to bring awareness and reparations after the internment of Japanese people during the war. Inouye, being interviewed live by CBS 5 said "I would like to, as just another American, to see that this unhappy and black page in our law book is just torn out" in reference to president Roosevelt's executive order 9066. Later in the same interview Inouye refers to the camps as "A blotch in our democracy that has no place in our books. And I for one ... will do everything possible to have it erased." (Bay Area Television Archive). Inouye's promise would be kept, though it was not for another twenty years that Japanese-Americans would see proper reparations for acts committed a generation previously.

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan granted every living, or ancestor of a United States legal resident or immigrant who was incarcerated as a result of their nationality a presidential apology and \$20,000. This act was only passed due to the work of Daniel K. Inouye alongside three other Japanese-American members of congress who, in 1979, called for a study on wartime incarceration (Densho Encyclopedia). In 1980 The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Incarceration of Civilians was signed into law, finding

that the incarceration was the result of “racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” (National Parks Service). Inouye would serve the remainder of his political career in an attempt to combat all three of these.

In June of 1963, while giving his famous “Ich Bin Ein Berliner” speech, president John F. Kennedy remarked “Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in, to prevent them from leaving us” (JFK Presidential Library). This was only five months after Daniel Inouye was sworn in as a Hawaiian senator, fighting for reparations of Japanese-Americans who were walled-in across a catalog of mainland states. Despite the confused history of our nation, and acts we have committed, Inouye would have not ruminated on the past, or the perceived hypocrisy of the quote, but worked towards a better future. There is no sense in bashing one's fellow Americans for looking towards a more prosperous democracy - and by doing so combatting hatred. (C-SPAN) During a 2005 commencement address given at American University, Daniel K. Inouye said “Democracy is an imperfect concept slowly seeking perfection,” echoing the words of John F. Kennedy forty-two years previously.

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