

Injustices documented in the Boston Asian American Film Festival

By Peter Keough

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As seen in two documentaries screening at the 10th annual Boston Asian American Film Festival (Oct. 18-28), putting immigrant children into camps is nothing new in US history. In 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed executive order 9066, uprooting 120,000 Japanese-Americans, many of them citizens, from their homes in western states and transporting them to bleak locations across the country. This despite the findings of a government investigation that the Japanese-American population was overwhelmingly loyal and posed no security risk.

The siblings profiled in Antonia Grace Glenn's "**The Ito Sisters**" (screens at the Brattle Theatre Oct. 28, at noon) were among those relocated. Interviewed while in their 80s and 90s, Natsuye (Nancy), Haruye (Lillian), and Hideko (Hedy) Ito relate charmingly and without rancor their experiences as daughters of a determined and successful Japanese immigrant. Their father arrived in California penniless and despite a hostile environment and many hardships managed to provide his family with a home and security. That ended when they were sent to a camp with whatever belongings they could carry.

The sisters' testimony, supplemented by archival material and interviews with historians and other experts, reveals that the internment was no direct response to wartime conditions. It was the culmination of decades of racist activism and legislation curtailing immigration and depriving Japanese-Americans of their rights of citizenship and property ownership.

These policies were motivated not just by hatred, fear, and ignorance but also greed and envy. The hard-working Japanese newcomers and their descendants faithfully pursued the American dream, only to have the fruits of their labor, and their liberty, taken from them.

Dianne Fukami's "**An American Story: Norman Mineta and His Legacy**" (Bright Family Screening Room in the Paramount Center Oct. 27, 3 p.m.) profiles another victim of the World War II internments. Norman Mineta, however, would transform his experience into a political career that

would take him to the US Congress, where he ultimately achieved some restitution for this injustice.

Mineta was 11 when he and his family were torn from their home in San Jose, Calif., and imprisoned in the Heart Mountain concentration camp in the middle of a Wyoming wasteland. In an interview Mineta recalls that day — the barbed wire, the watchtowers manned by soldiers with machine guns, the cold, the blowing sand, and his dog, whom he had to leave behind.

He also remembers meeting a future Republican US senator from Wyoming, Alan K. Simpson, a member of a local Boy Scout troop brave enough to visit their fellow Scouts in the camp. Their friendship and collaboration would prove a key to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which recognized the injustice of the internments, apologized for them, and paid \$20,000 in reparations to the survivors.

In addition to his service in Congress, Mineta, a Democrat, was a cabinet member in both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. In an interview in the film *Bush* credits Mineta, then secretary of transportation, with inspiring him after 9/11 to ensure that Muslim-Americans did not experience the same injustices as did Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Mineta retired from public office in 2006, leaving a legacy of bipartisanship, tolerance, empathy, and a respect for the rights of others.

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Peter Keough can be reached at petervkeough@gmail.com.