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Statement opposing the inclusion of the words and name
of Mike Masaoka on the Memorial

The Words

"I am proud that I am an American of Japanese ancestry. I believe in her institutions, ideals and traditions; I glory in her heritage; I boast of her history; I trust in her future."

This excerpt from the Japanese American Creed, written by Mike Masaoka as a young man of 25, drops the clause that ended the first sentence: *"for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this Nation."* With the clause included, the use of "her" has the antecedent "this Nation." With the clause absent, the antecedent of "her" is implied and ambiguous. "Her" could refer to "America" as implied in "an American" or to "Japan" as implied "of Japanese ancestry." Obviously, the latter is not the intended antecedent. Still, this unintended antecedent lingers. This ambiguity could be removed by deleting "of Japanese ancestry." Or the first "her" could be replaced with "America's," thus making the subsequent uses of "her" unambiguous. This would make the quote not completely accurate. Or the deleted clause could be restored.

A fourth alternative is simply to delete the entire quotation as well as the name of Mike Masaoka. But this is not the only reason for this sweeping deletion. I believe the quotation should be dropped because it completely misinterprets America's "institutions, ideals and traditions" of that period for Japanese-Americans, as well as "her heritage," "her history," and most emphatically, "her future."

America's institutions, through much of Japanese-American history, were hardly things of which one could positively affirm, glorify, or boast. U.S. immigration law of 1924 forbade further immigration by Japanese. Moreover, the Japanese immigrants who were here were ineligible for naturalized citizenship; they were not allowed to marry whites in certain states; they were not permitted to own real property -- their homes, shops, or farms; their communities were segregated by restrictive housing covenants; they suffered from job discrimination and just plain social ostracism.

If there was any trust in America's future, it was betrayed resoundingly with the events that followed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While I am as patriotic as the next American, I do not believe that patriotism requires this turning a blind eye to the unpleasant facts of life. Most Americans did not look kindly at Japanese-Americans. The pejorative "Jap" became a commonplace in newspaper headlines, radio news, and popular songs, as well as in the jokes of standup comedians and speech of political leaders. Though this eruption of and immersion in racial hostility was bad enough, it got much worse when the leaders of our Government violated their oath of office and trampled on, rather than supported and defended, our Constitution and ordered, without due process, without even an arrest, the mass exclusion and detention of all

persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast and southern Arizona into ten detention camps.

The Man Behind the Name

While it is conceivable, even probable, that many Japanese-Americans did trust in their future as Americans, only a fool would wish to have memorialized this tragically flawed faith and the man who defended his creed throughout his life.¹

Yet there are a substantial number of Japanese-Americans who insist on memorializing these words of Mike Masaoka. Among these is Melvin H. Chiogioji, chairman, National Japanese American Memorial Foundation. In his press release of January 5, 2000, Mr. Chiogioji comes to Masaoka's defense by stating, ". . . *in the frightening weeks after the outbreak of war . . . Japanese American leaders were fighting desperately to avert mass imprisonment.*" [emphasis added] But Mike Masaoka's testimony in February 1942, before the House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration or Tolan Committee, says otherwise. He first enunciates three reasons for his organization's opposition to "the evacuation"²:

"1. We are opposed to the principle of evacuation, unless it is ordered by the military as a national defense measure and is applied to all persons, citizens and aliens alike, indiscriminately and without reference to race, color or creed.

"2. If the military authorities believe that national safety requires the removal of 'enemy aliens' from any regions or areas, we believe that all 'enemy aliens' from all countries with which the United States is now at war should be removed, and that no one group or nationality should be singled out for special attention.

"3. If it becomes necessary to remove citizens from these areas or regions, as designated by the military, we believe that all citizens should be treated alike and that no single block of citizens be singled out for special consideration or attention."

Then, quite remarkably, he capitulates:

"4. Even though our beliefs may not be recognized by the military and they should single out the American citizens of Japanese extraction, as they have done, for special attention, we believe that, as good American citizens, we ought to accept the word of those charged with the responsibility of national safety and that we should cooperate with them to the best of our abilities, trusting that our cooperation will inspire a reciprocal cooperation on the part of our government in the humane and reasonable treatment of our mutual problem."

¹ In his autobiography, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka*, 1987, he writes of his creed: "The idealism of youth runs like a golden thread through the credo. . . . I wrote in all sincerity; and never have I had occasion to change my mind about the meaning of America."

² The term "evacuation" is an official euphemism for mass exclusion and detention and remains firmly embedded in the language of most of the victims of this event.

This is hardly "**fighting desperately.**"

There were three young men and a young woman who did challenge the mass exclusion and detention program through the Courts: Minoru Yasui violated the curfew; Gordon Hirabayashi violated the curfew and exclusion orders; Fred Korematsu violated the exclusion order; and Mitsuye Endo challenged her detention with a petition for habeas corpus. Mike Masaoka, as National Secretary of the Japanese American Citizens League, opposed such test cases in principle with Bulletin #142:

" National Headquarters is unalterably opposed to test cases to determine the constitutionality of military regulations at this time. We have reached this decision unanimously after examining all the facts in light of our national policy of: 'the greatest good for the greatest number'." [emphasis in original]

I think I do not exaggerate when I say that most Japanese-Americans regard these four persons among those who truly challenged the wartime debacle. All four cases went to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court's positive ruling in the Endo case coincided within a day of the Government's decision to rescind the mass exclusion orders and to begin the lengthy process of closing the detention camps.

In early 1944, when Selective Service was reinstated for Japanese-Americans, the challenges broadened and escalated: 315 young male inmates of the camps resisted conscription. They were willing to pay the price of imprisonment to challenge, not to cooperate with, a government that had failed to protect their basic rights of citizenship. In my judgment, these 315 plus the four were our true leaders in this unfortunate time.

Masaoka ends this bulletin with this, "*we are not giving up our rights as citizens by cooperating with the government in the evacuation program,*" thus revealing the blind eye of his faith. Suppose the NJAMF had proposed *these* words for inscription. Surely, most Japanese-Americans would be appalled. Yet, they are closer to the character of the Masaoka wartime legacy than the youthful hyperbole of his creed. The choice seems obvious: drop the words and the name.

William Hohri, January 10, 2000