

Speech by Senator Daniel K. Inouye
Reception for “Enduring Communities” Project
Denver, Colorado
October 26, 2007

Thank you all for coming tonight.

Let me first add to what my friend and colleague, Secretary Mineta, has said tonight. I, too, remember that fateful day when President Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 into law. I, too, felt the monumental importance of that event to our Japanese American community, and to our country. I immediately thought of all the sacrifices our parents had made and also remembered their remarkable spirit and determination. As Norm said, the Issei had an almost unshakeable belief in the promise of America, and despite the events of World War II, they were determined that their children and grandchildren find their rightful place in this great country.

The passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 vindicated their belief. It showed Americans of Japanese ancestry that the letter and the spirit of our Constitution holds true for them. We demonstrated to the world that we are a strong people—strong enough to admit our wrongs. That is what makes us a great country.

These lessons are important for all Americans to learn and share. The question we have to ask ourselves is: how are young people going to learn these lessons?

In my long association with the Japanese American National Museum, I saw a project that suggests that there is a way to ensure that these lessons are taught to each new generation. The project *Life Interrupted: The Japanese American Experience in World War II Arkansas* provided an exemplary model for teaching these stories to young students. As part of the project, educators worked together with Museum staff to develop a curriculum specific to Arkansan history. Because two government-run camps at Jerome and Rohwer, holding almost 17,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, were located in Arkansas, this story was considered local history for both the teachers and the students. Because of that, the students embraced this little-known chapter of their state's history as their own.

I must tell you that the enthusiasm of these Arkansas students was a marvel. When almost 1,400 people met in Little Rock for the "Camp Connections" national conference in 2004, the students gathered around the former inmates as if they were movie stars. But, their sincerity in wanting to understand the Japanese American World War II experience was gratifying and, I believe, healing. Just as the passage

of redress helped to heal the wounds from the war, the desire of these Arkansas students to learn more about this experience seemed almost therapeutic in its effect.

Life Interrupted, then, can be a model for teaching generations of Americans about this chapter of our history. So it was natural that the National Museum would progress to the next step, organizing **Enduring Communities: The Japanese American Experience in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah**. That's quite a mouthful. And quite a challenge. As in Arkansas, the Museum is working with educators in each of the five states, developing curriculum that involves the war experience and their local history.

In July of 2008, we will have the opportunity to gather together for a national conference here in Denver. I expect many people from our Japanese American communities will participate as they did in Little Rock in 2004. But, to be truly successful, we must provide for as many Colorado students as we can, so they might embrace this history in the manner of the Arkansas students.

So, I thank you all here for coming and supporting this project. Your support is essential and I encourage you to continue to support the Museum and its efforts. The national conference is on my schedule and I look forward to seeing you all next July.

Thank you.