



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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Gordon Hirabayashi: A Civil Rights Legacy

San Francisco -- The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is saddened by the passing of civil rights pioneer, Gordon Hirabayashi. For the Japanese American community and Asian American communities in general, Gordon Hirabayashi always comes to mind during discussions of civil rights. Hirabayashi is a hero in the national civil rights arena, and his fight for justice is chronicled in college text books and law classes throughout the nation. The current issues before national legislative bodies, such as Constitutional due process, racial profiling, and hate crimes have their roots in the battles fought decades ago by Hirabayashi.

While a 24 year old student at the University of Washington, Hirabayashi defied the curfew law that was instituted to control all people of Japanese ancestry along the west coast. He was arrested and took his case all the way to the Supreme Court, which justified the curfew as a military necessity. This case, along with the cases against Fred Korematsu and Min Yasui, have been chronicled as among the worst legal decisions by the high court. After new evidence was brought to light, these cases were overturned in the U.S. District Court in California. The current debate regarding due process of suspected terrorists has a similar ring as the arguments used against Hirabayashi.

“Gordon was a personal friend, and his passing has been a loss for the Nation,” said Floyd Mori, National Executive Director of the JACL. “He was a humble person who never glorified in the international notoriety he received. His legacy will continue to motivate civil rights activists for decades to come and will give us the strength and courage to continue to carry the torch for justice. The principles for which he stood are very relevant in today’s fight to maintain and uphold the basic due process rights of citizens and non-citizens alike. His fight, like today, pointed out that race alone should not be criteria for guilt. We offer our sincere condolences to the Hirabayashi family.”