



# JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JAACL

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## PRESS RELEASE

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## WHITE HOUSE INITIATIVE ON AAPI'S REESTABLISHED

**Washington, D.C.** – President Barack Obama, at a special White House Ceremony, signed an Executive Order to reestablish the President's Advisory Commission and White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). This was first established by President Bill Clinton ten years ago. The Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL), the nation's oldest and largest Asian American civil and human rights organization, joined with other groups from within the AAPI community in praising this action.

The President spoke about the industry and entrepreneurship of the AAPI people who helped build the nation from the early days. He talked of the competitive spirit of athletes like Wat Misaka, who was the first non-white player in the NBA. Misaka had a special invitation to the White House Ceremony and had made the trip from Utah with his son Henry to attend. Misaka was born and raised in Utah where he was a star high school basketball player. He played basketball two years at Weber College in Ogden, Utah, and was voted the MVP of the post season tournament during his freshman year.

After two years at Weber, Misaki played basketball during his junior year at the University of Utah where they won the NCAA tournament. Upon returning home from that tournament, he received his induction papers drafting him into the U.S. Army. He was in the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) for two years and served with the occupation forces in Japan after the end of World War II. He then returned to finish his engineering degree and was the star forward on the University of Utah NIT Championship team during his senior year. He was drafted by the New York Knicks in 1947. Although his time in the NBA was short, he has the distinction of being the first ever non-white player in the NBA. A documentary film has recently been produced on Misaka's life and accomplishments.

Floyd Mori, National Executive Director of the JAACL, who is a personal friend of Wat Misaka and who was also in attendance at the White House ceremony, voiced strong approval for the reestablishment of the initiative. He stated, "The White House Initiative on AAPI's will play a key role as a liaison between the AAPI communities and the various agencies in the Government. This has been missing for some time, and this will give us access and impact."

The President made reference in his speech to the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team which showed bravery and courage during World War II when the world was against them. Terry Shima, Executive Director of the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA), was singled out and thanked. Shima, who was a member of the 442 and who was wearing a veterans' hat, stood and saluted the President.

Making reference to the Asian roots within his own family, President Obama mentioned his sister, Maya, his brother-in-law, Konrad, and their daughters. He talked about his upbringing living in Indonesia and in Honolulu. He commended the prominent members of the AAPI community who

serve in his Cabinet and in other leadership positions, including Secretary of Veterans Affairs, General Eric Shinseki, who was in attendance at the ceremony.

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