Yuri Kochiyama

Who?
Yuri Kochiyama was an American civil rights activist. Influenced by her Japanese-American family's experience in an American internment camp she became a fierce advocate for social justice.

Personal life
Yuri Kochiyama was born Mary Yuriko Nakahara in 1921 and raised in San Pedro, California, in a small working-class neighborhood. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, the life of Yuri's family took a turn for the worse. Her father, a first-generation Japanese immigrant, was arrested by the FBI. When President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9066 ordering the removal of persons of Japanese descent from "strategic areas," Yuri and her family were sent to an internment camp in Jerome, Arkansas. Due to these events, Yuri started seeing the parallels between the treatment of African Americans in Jim Crow South and the incarceration of Japanese Americans in remote internment camps during World War II. Subsequently she decided to devote her life to struggles against racial injustice.

Activism
In 1946, Yuri married Bill Kochiyama, a veteran of the 442nd Regiment. The couple moved to New York City where her political activism would flourish. They had two girls and four boys; most of them would become actively involved in black liberation struggles, the anti-war movement, and the Asian-American movement. In 1960 the family moved to a low-income housing project in Harlem. Yuri and her family invited many civil rights activists, such as the Freedom Riders, to their home gatherings. They also became members of the Harlem Parents Committee, a grassroots organization fighting for safer streets and integrated (unsegregated) education.

Yuri's interest in equality and justice led her to work for the sake of political prisoners in the U.S. and other parts of the world in her later years. Yuri was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for her tireless struggles against imperialism and racism.

Interethnic Solidarity
In 1963, Yuri met Malcolm X and they created a friendship that would strongly influence Yuri's political career; her politics became more radical after meeting Malcolm X. On paper, they made an unexpected pair — a Japanese American mother of six and a radical Muslim minister and Black nationalist. But their brief friendship, interrupted by his assassination in 1965, sheds light on the multi-racial cooperation of the civil rights movement and the broader fight against racial injustice around the world.

They met on October 16, 1963 at the Brooklyn criminal court. As Malcolm was flooded by a crowd of young supporters, Kochiyama was hesitant to approach him, unsure how he would respond to an Asian-American woman. Eventually, Yuri gained the courage to approach Malcolm, asking to shake his hand. She was immediately "overwhelmed by his charisma and his warmth." After their first meeting, Malcolm X accepted Kochiyama's invitation to address Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors and peace advocates at her Harlem home.

"You were bombed and have physical scars. We too have been bombed and you saw some of the scars in our neighborhood. We are constantly hit by the bombs of racism — which are just as devastating." –Malcolm X,

addressing Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors at Yuri Kochiyama's home.

"He opened my mind, like opening a door to a new world. He helped me to start thinking, studying, listening, and observing and seeing contradictions," Yuri later recalled. Kochiyama worked behind the scenes in Harlem, supporting the Black liberation movement in New York City. Malcolm was a leader of the Black liberation movement while Kochiyama focused on anti-racism education, however, they stood in solidarity with each other. Their friendship went beyond the boundaries of race.

Just months after their meeting he would break up with the Nation of Islam due to tensions with its leader, Elijah Muhammad. In the spring of 1964, he embarked on a tour of Africa and the Middle East that had a profound impact on his thinking, as he began to shift away from his more militant positions that had encouraged African Americans to battle racism with "any means necessary" to the openness to explore peaceful resolutions to the nation's racial problems. He corresponded with the Kochiyama's during his trip, sending them a series of postcards documenting his travels.

Shortly after his return, he visited the Kochiyamas' Harlem apartment, where he met with a group of Japanese survivors of the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who were part of an international group of peace advocates. He spoke of the devastating effects of both racism and American imperialism around the world, noting, "You were bombed and have physical scars. We too have been bombed and you saw some of the scars in our neighborhood. We are constantly hit by the bombs of racism — which are just as devastating."

On February 21, 1965, just 16 months after their first meeting, Kochiyama attended a speech Malcolm was set to deliver at New York's Audubon Ballroom. Rumors and threats against Malcolm's life had become common, and Kochiyama would later recall that tensions in the room were high. A scuffle that broke out in the crowd is believed to have been a planned diversion, which successfully distracted the attention of the guards hired to protect Malcolm.

As he stood on the stage to begin his speech, multiple men rushed forward and began firing, shooting him repeatedly at close range before fleeing the room. The shocked crowd, which included Malcolm's pregnant wife, Betty Shabazz, and their children, broke into bedlam (mayhem), and when Kochiyama saw another man running towards the stage to help, she followed him. A *Life* magazine photographer quickly captured the now-iconic photo of Kochiyama cradling Malcolm's head as people struggled to save his life, and as she urged him, "Please, Malcolm, please, Malcolm, stay alive." Kochiyama would make an annual pilgrimage to Malcolm's upstate grave every May, in honor of their shared May 19 birthdate.

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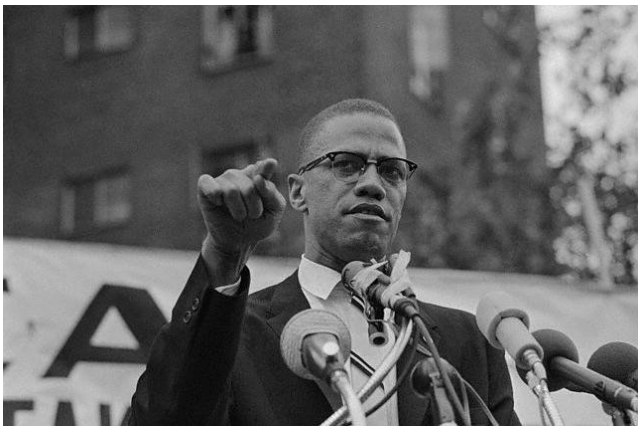
Malcolm X



Who?

Malcolm X was born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska and a famous African-American activist. Malcolm supported Black nationalism and was also a religious minister for the Nation of Islam. Black Nationalism is the idea that in order to secure freedom, justice and equality, Black Americans needed to establish their own state entirely separate from white Americans. His experience with the KKK influenced his viewpoint.

Personal Life

At the age of 13 Malcolm was kicked out of school and sent to a juvenile detention home in Mason, Michigan. He attended Mason High School where he was one of only a few Black students. A turning point in Malcolm's childhood came in 1939 when his English teacher asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up and he answered that he wanted to be a lawyer. His teacher responded, "One of life's first needs is for us to be realistic ... you need to think of something you can be ... why don't you plan on carpentry?". After feeling like the school system did not believe in him, Malcolm X quit school shortly after and did not return.

In 1946, Malcolm X was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in jail. While in jail he read constantly, devouring books from the prison library in an attempt to make up for the years of education he had missed by dropping out of high school. He changed his name to Malcolm X and converted to the Nation of Islam before his release from prison in 1952.

Activism

Malcolm X believed the only way to achieve Black liberation (freedom) was through any means necessary. He encouraged Black people to cast off the shackles of racism "by any means necessary," including violence. "There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution," he said. His advocating for violent change often disagreed with Martin Luther King Jr. 's view of peaceful protest. The Black Panther Party would also adopt Malcolm's militant viewpoints.

As a prisoner in 1950, Malcolm wrote a letter to President Harry Truman in spoke against the Korean War. This brought him to the attention of the FBI, which began surveillance that would last until his death. In one document that has since come to light, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover told the agency's New York office to "do something about Malcolm X."

In 1964, Malcolm X embarked on an extended trip through North Africa and the Middle East. The journey proved to be both a political and spiritual turning point in his life. Malcolm X returned to the United States less angry and more optimistic about the prospects for a peaceful resolution to America's race problems. "The true brotherhood I had seen had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision," he said. "America is the first country ... that can actually have a bloodless revolution."

Interethnic Solidarity

In 1963, Malcolm X met Yuri Kochiyama and they created a friendship that would strongly influence Yuri's political career; her politics became more radical after meeting Malcolm X. On paper, they made an unexpected pair — a Japanese American mother of six and a radical Muslim minister and Black nationalist. But their brief friendship, interrupted by his assassination in 1965, sheds light on the multi-racial cooperation of the civil rights movement and the broader fight against racial injustice around the world.

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"You were bombed and have physical scars. We too have been bombed and you saw some of the scars in our

neighborhood. We are constantly hit by the bombs of racism — which are just as devastating." –Malcolm X, addressing Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors at Yuri Kochiyama's home.

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Source: https://www.biography.com/activist/malcolm-x
Source:https://medium.com/jasleen-articles/revolutionary-friendship-of-malcolm-x-and-yuri-kochiyama-3af640643016

Cesar Chavez

Who?

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona on March 31, 1927. Born into a Mexican-American family of farm workers and a life of intense poverty, Chavez dedicated his life's work to improving working conditions of farmworkers who kept fresh food on the tables across America.

Personal Life

In order to help provide for his family, Chavez dropped out of school after eighth grade and began working in the farming fields full time. In 1946, he joined the U.S. Navy, serving for two years. After serving in the Navy, Chavez returned to working in the fields with his family.

Laboring in fields is back-breaking work for little pay. For example, in 1939 two hours of picking peas in the hot sun, bent over the entire family might earn 20 cents total. Chavez knew he had to do something about this. 1962 Chavez formed the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which later became the United Farm Workers (UFW).

Chavez was inspired by the nonviolent civil disobedience pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi in India and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. which inspired his lifelong activism. Chavez knew firsthand the struggles of the nation's poorest and most powerless workers, who labored to put food on the nation's tables while often going hungry themselves. Not covered by minimum wage laws, these workers made as little as 40 cents an hour. For this reason, Chavez became a hero to the most poor people in the country, living his life in solidarity with them.

Activism

The Mexican-American labor leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez dedicated his life's work to what he called *la causa* (the cause): the struggle of farm workers in the United States to improve their working and living conditions through organizing and negotiating contracts with their employers.

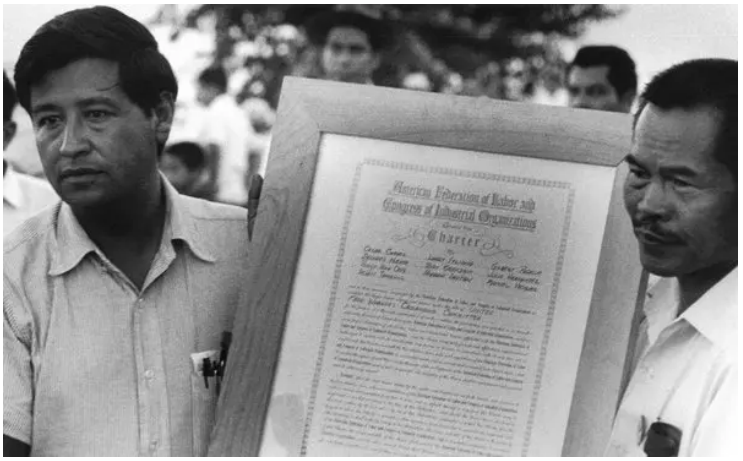
Even in the face of threats and actual violence from from police or others, Chavez always remained committed to passive resistance. For example, in 1966 Chavez led protesters on a 340-mile march from Delano, CA to Sacramento,CA to bring awareness to *La Causa* of farmworkers. In 1968, Chavez began a 25 day fast. A fast is the refusal to eat in protest of something. He lost 25 pounds, but Senator Robert F. Kennedy of California joined Chavez at the Mass where Chavez broke his fast, and Kennedy called the labor leader "one of the heroic figures of our time." At the end of his fast Chavez was too weak to speak, but a speech was read on his behalf:

"...we must admit that our lives are all that really belongs to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find

life. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice." - Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez would commit to 2 more 24-36 day fasts later in his life. Each time, Chavez was successful in creating change.

Interethnic Solidarity



Grape workers in California, led by Larry Itliong, a Filipino worker and activist, began protesting for better pay. In 1965, Itliong asked Cesar Chavez and the Mexican farmworkers to join their grape strike. Chavez understood that all workers had to stand together in their fight for justice and so Chavez took Itliong's request back to the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), and the Mexicans joined the Filipinos in their fight and they formed the United Farm Workers (UFW).

The Delano Grape Strike lasted for five years, and the strike garnered international recognition. Individual households stopped buying grapes, and people who transported grapes let them rot in port rather than load them. Eventually, the grape industry could take no more, and the grape farm owners decided to meet with the UFW. In July of 1970, most of the major growers in the Delano area agreed to pay grape pickers $1.80 an hour plus 20 cents for each box picked, contribute to the union health plan, and ensure that their workers were protected against pesticides used in the fields. Together Filipinos and Mexicans combined the labor movements that changed California farming and were essential to the civil rights movement.

Chavez died in 1993, and in 1994 President Clinton awarded Chavez the Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian award.

Source:
https://www.npr.org/2016/08/02/488428577/cesar-chavez-the-life-behind-a-legacy-of-farm-labor-rights

Larry Itliong

Who?

Larry Dulay Itliong was born on October 25, 1913 in the town of San Nicolas, Pangasinan Province, Philippines. Larry Itliong immigrated to the United States in 1929 when he was 15 years old. Itliong spoke 13 languages including Ilocano, Pangasinense, Tagalog (Filipino), and six other Philippine languages, he also became fluent in English, Japanese, Cantonese and Spanish. He was often heard saying "Let's go, don't be scared! I'll be in the front— just follow me" to empower those around him. His energetic personality along with his passion to help the poor, Larry Itliong became a social justice warrior.

Personal Life

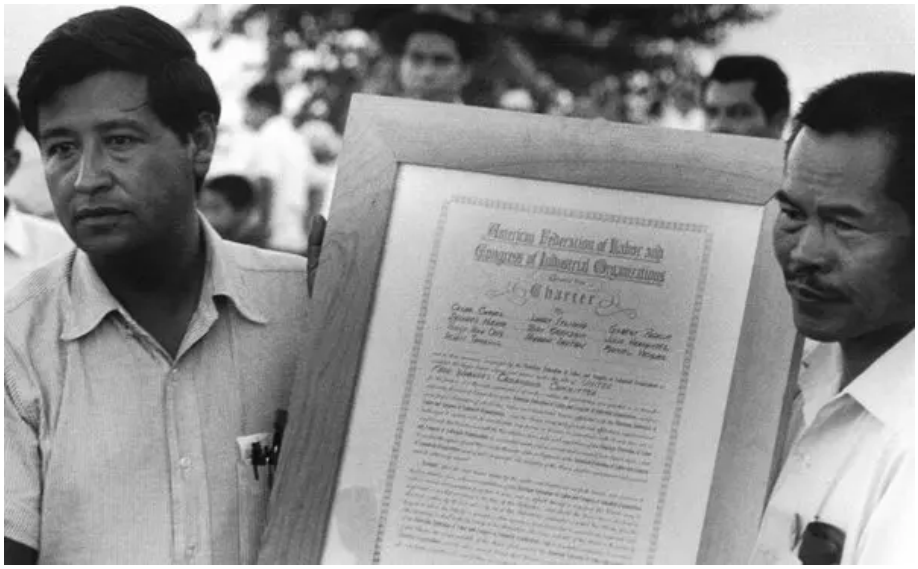
Itliong served in the U.S. Army from 1936 to 1943. He later gained U.S. citizenship in 1944 for his service in World War II. After returning from the war, he wasted no time in resuming his fight for worker's rights. Itliong eventually settled in Stockton, CA in an area known as "Little Manila ". The Central Valley city was once home to the largest population of Filipinos in the 20th century. His heart was set on becoming an attorney and seeking justice for the poor. But the poverty he lived through and violent racism he and Filipinos encountered all but barred him from getting the education he initially sought. He never became an attorney, but he became an important Filipino-American leader.

Activism

He called Stockton his hometown while he recruited more than a thousand new members to join the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). The goal of the AWOC was to increase wages for farm workers, and increase job protection & safety. Itliong was so good at what he did, union leaders asked him to leave Stockton, CA to head to Delano, CA to organize Filipino grape workers. It was there in Delano on September 7, 1965, a small town four hours outside of Stockton, that he convinced the grape workers at Filipino Hall to vote to go on strike. A strike is a legal practice that includes workers refusing to work until their demands are met. At this time, workers made 40 cents an hour. The next day, the Delano Grape Strike began, and more than 2,000 Filipino farmworkers, members of AWOC, marched off the vineyards and refused to work until their demands were met. The Farmers wanted increased pay for $0.40/per hour to $1.40/per hour, and additional pay of $0.25/per box of picked grapes, and the right to form a union.

Interethnic Solidarity

In 1965, Larry Itliong contacted Cesar Chavez and asked Mexican farmworkers to join the Delano Grape Strike. He understood that all workers had to stand together in their fight for justice. Chavez took Itliong's request back to the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), and the Mexicans joined the Filipinos in their fight. A year later, these two groups formed the United Farm Workers (UFW).



The Delano Grape Strike lasted for five years, and the strike garnered international recognition and was supported by major celebrities and politicians of the time, with people from across the U.S. donating money, food and clothing to the UFW. Individual households stopped buying grapes, and people who transported grapes let them rot in port rather than load them. Eventually, the grape industry could take no more, and the grape farm owners decided to meet with the UFW. In July of 1970, most of the major growers in the Delano area agreed to pay grape pickers $1.80 an hour plus 20 cents for each box picked, contribute to the union health plan, and ensure that their workers were protected against pesticides used in the fields.

In the end, Larry Itliong fiercely negotiated for higher pay, but also a retirement home for retired farm workers, medical insurance plan and established controls over toxic pesticides. Teaching Filipino-Americans—specifically the youth—about our collective history is about "battling for the Filipino-American soul,"Our immigrant histories heal and empower us to give back to our communities. We learn the importance of standing together, to recognize the need to work in solidarity with other immigrant and marginalized communities. We must make sure to carry it to the youngest in our communities.

Source:https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/why-it-is-important-know-story-filipino-american-larry-itliong-180972696/

Grace Lee Boggs

Who?

Grace Lee was born above her father's Chinese restaurant in Providence, R.I., on June 27, 1915. Her father, Chin Lee, later owned a popular restaurant near Times Square in Manhattan. Although illiterate in English, her mother, Yin Lan Lee, was a strong feminist role model. She grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens

A brilliant scholar, she enrolled at 16 at Barnard College, graduated in 1935 with a degree in philosophy, and in 1940 earned a doctorate from Bryn Mawr College. Influenced by the German philosophers Kant and especially Hegel, a precursor of Marx, she resolved to devote her life to change in a nation of inequalities and discrimination against minorities and women. In 1941, discouraged about prospects for a college teaching position, she found a library job at the University of Chicago, and she was soon organizing protests against slum housing.

After finishing grad school, Boggs struggled to find work — any work, she told a group of students in 2012. "Even department stores would say, 'We don't hire ~~Orientals~~,' " she recalled. So she moved to the Midwest, where she found a job with the University of Chicago's philosophy library. It paid only $10 a week, a stipend so low she was forced to find free housing in a rat-filled basement. But even the rats had an upside. (continued in the interethnic solidarity section).

Personal Life

In the 1940s, she moved to Detroit to help edit the radical newsletter *Correspondence*. There, she met a charismatic auto worker and activist named James Boggs. "When he rose to speak his mind, he would speak with such passion, challenging all within hearing to stretch their humanity ... he would often bring down the house," Boggs wrote in 1998 in her autobiography, *Living For Change*. They married in 1953.

Activism

Though many of the Boggs' ideas centered around revolution, her personal philosophies were guided more by human experience — and the individual's own ability to transform his or her world — than overthrowing a system. Ms. Boggs eventually adopted Dr. King's nonviolent strategies and in Detroit, which remained her base for the rest of her life, fostered Dr. King's vision of "beloved communities," striving for racial and economic justice through non-confrontational methods. As Detroit's economy and population declined sharply over the years, Ms. Boggs became a prominent symbol of resistance to the spreading blight. She

founded food cooperatives and community groups to support the elderly, organize unemployed workers and fight utility shut-offs. She devised tactics to combat crime, including protests outside known crack houses, and in columns for a local weekly newspaper, The Michigan Citizen, she promoted civic reforms.

With her husband James, the couple became two of Detroit's most noted activists, tackling issues related to labor and civil rights, feminism, Black Power, Asian Americans and the environment. In 1974, they wrote *Revolution And Evolution In The Twentieth Century*; in 1998, she published an autobiography, *Living For Change*; and in 2011, she co-wrote *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism For The Twenty-First Century* with Scott Kurashige, a professor and author.

Interethnic Solidarity

One day, as Boggs was walking through her neighborhood in Chicago, she came across a group of people protesting poor living conditions — which included rat-infested housing. This, Boggs recalled, connected her with the black community for the very first time. "I was aware that people were suffering, but it was more of a statistical thing," Boggs said. "Here in Chicago I was coming into contact with it as a human thing."

When living in Detroit with her husband James, the city, with its large black population, racial inequalities and auto industry in its postwar heyday, seemed poised for changes, and the couple focused on African-Americans, women and young people as vanguards of a social movement. For years they also identified closely with Black Power advocates across the country. Malcolm X stayed with them on visits to Detroit. The FBI was said to have monitored their activities. When arson fires and rioting erupted in the city in 1967, Ms. Boggs described the violence as a rebellion against rising unemployment and police brutality. “What we tried to do is explain that a rebellion is righteous, because it’s the protest of a people against injustice,” she told Mr. Moyers. But the violence, she said, also became “a turning point in my life, because until that time I had not made a distinction between a rebellion and revolution.”

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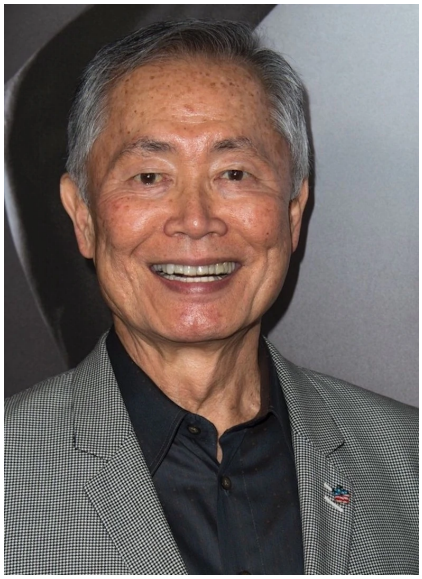
George Takei



Who?

George Hosato Takei was born in Los Angeles, California in 1937 to middle class Japanese-American parents. From a childhood spent with his family wrongfully imprisoned in Japanese American internment camps during World War II, to becoming one of the country's leading figures in the fight for social justice, LGBTQ rights, and marriage equality, Mr. Takei remains a powerful voice on issues ranging from politics to pop culture.

Personal Life

On February 19, 1942, during World War II, shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 with the intention of preventing Japanese spies on American shores. Military zones were created to "contain" Americans of Japanese ancestry regardless of US citizenship. These military zones were known as internment camps. This affected the lives of about 117,000 people—the majority of whom were American citizens.

George Takei was 5 years old when he and his family were taken from their Los Angeles home at gunpoint and forced to live in Japanese internment camps in Arkansas and northern California. He recalled gazing out the front window with his brother as their parents packed their belongings in another room, and spotting two soldiers marching up the driveway with rifles in tow. Four years later, when the war ended, the terrors of internment continued to haunt Takei and his family, as they'd been left impoverished and were forced to find a home in downtown Los Angeles' notoriously crime-ridden Skid Row.

In 1966, Takei became one of the few Asian Americans to be featured prominently on TV when he starred as Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu on the science-fiction series Star Trek. He was one of the first Asian American actors in Hollywood. Prior to the hiring of Takei, it would be common for Hollywood producers to hire a white actor who could "pass as Asian" rather than actually hiring an Asian actor.

Activism

Over the years, Takei has become an outspoken activist. He protested the Vietnam War, was outspoken about the dehumanization of Japanese-Americans during the war, and stood for immigrant and LGBTQ+ rights.

In 2005, George finally spoke his truth and he publicly came out as gay and introduced his fans to his partner of 18 years. "I was silent, and it was totally against my character," says George, who notes that he was always vocal about his beliefs, including protesting the Vietnam War. Prior to 2005, George had been told that if he came out as a man that he would lose his job. "The one cause that was the most personal to me, I had to stay quiet on because I wanted my career."

Interethnic Solidarity

Actor and activist George Takei hopes his own story of being sent to a Japanese internment camp as a child will motivate others to stand up for Muslim Americans in an era of Donald Trump. Former President Trump signed an executive order banning immigrants from "certain" Muslim countries and to create some sort of database of Muslims. This database/registry would list every Muslim-American in the US regardless of citizenship. As a result, Takei created an online petition, calling for people to stand up in support of Muslim Americans. Takei explains: "It starts with a registry, with restrictions, with irrationally ascribed guilt, and with fear," reads the petition. "But we know well where it might lead (referring to the Japanese Internment camps)." "We are standing in solidarity with the Muslim community," Takei said. "Never again must this happen again in the United States."

Supporters of the Muslim registry, like political influencer Carl Higbie, responded to Takei saying that internment camps were "horrific," but Carl Higbie did not shy away from his claim that a registry of Muslims would be illegal or morally wrong. "You have to register your car. Most states, like Connecticut, my own, we have to register our guns," Higbie told MSNBC's. "We have to register a ton of things."

Later, Takei wrote a passionate essay calling for the end of the Muslim ban. He writes: "Let us all be clear: "National security" must never again be permitted to justify wholesale denial of constitutional rights and protections. If it is freedom and our way of life that we fight for, our first obligation is to ensure that our own government adheres to those principles. Without that, we are no better than our enemies."

While the Muslim registry was never enacted, the "Muslim Ban" lasted until Jan 2021 when President Joe Biden was sworn in.

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