



Minoru Yasui awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom

The highest civilian honor in the nation

Minoru (Min) Yasui has been selected by President Barack Obama to receive a posthumous 2015 Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the nation. In 1942 Yasui violated the racially discriminatory military orders that led to the forced removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast during World War II. As a young attorney at the time, his deliberate intention was to initiate a case to test the constitutionality of the military curfew upon Americans of Japanese ancestry. As he himself said in 1986, the last year of his life:

“This is the United States of America, founded in liberty, dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.... As an American citizen, as a lawyer, I felt that we owed at least the obligation as a citizen to tell our government they are wrong! That is the sacred duty of every citizen, because what is done to the least of us can be done to all of us. I KNEW we had to protest it.”

- Minoru Yasui in Never Give Up! Minoru Yasui and the Fight for Justice

When he lost his case at the U.S. Supreme Court in 1943, Min Yasui did not give up. He continued all his life to defend the human and civil rights of all people, not just Japanese Americans, as reflected in the endorsements for his Medal of Freedom nomination by diverse organizations such as the NAACP, National Council of La Raza, the ACLU, the American Friends Service Committee, the Japanese American Citizens League, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

“I know what the Constitution says, we know the Declaration of Independence..., I believed then and I believe today that indeed ALL – MEN – ARE – CREATED – EQUAL. That there should be equal justice under the law.”

- Minoru Yasui in Never Give Up!

The nomination of Yasui for the Presidential Medal of Freedom was made by U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono (Hawaii), and bolstered by bipartisan support in both the U.S. Senate, led by Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon and including senators from California, Oregon, Washington state, Wyoming, Colorado and Hawaii; and in the House of Representatives, championed by Representative Mike Honda of California, with 25 other U.S. Representatives endorsing the nomination, including Rep. Greg Walden of Yasui's hometown of Hood River, Oregon.

The awarding of the Medal comes at a timely juncture as the Minoru Yasui film project is currently conducting a fundraising campaign (www.minoruyasuifilm.org) and the Minoru Yasui Tribute committee is gearing up for centennial celebrations to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of their namesake in 2016. Co-founders Holly Yasui, Min Yasui's daughter, and Peggy Nagae, Min Yasui's lead attorney in the reopening of his case in 1983, were deeply appreciative of the groundswell of support for the Yasui nomination, with committees in Oregon, Colorado, California and Washington state working to get endorsements from over 115 elected officials, 46 state and regional civil rights organizations and individuals.

“My sisters and I are deeply honored that our father has been awarded the Medal of Freedom for his profound commitment to the ideals of democracy and justice for all, and the legacy he has left to us,” says Holly. “So many people helped with his nomination, all of whom we thank from the bottom of our hearts, but in particular, I want to thank Peggy Nagae. Without her leadership, this process would never have been initiated nor come to fruition. From our first conversations in 2013 about working toward a centennial celebration for Min Yasui until today, Peggy, like my dad, persevered and never gave up!”

Says Homer Yasui, Min Yasui's youngest brother: “I received news of this event with highly mixed emotions. I am so pleased and proud that this great honor will be conferred on my older brother by the President of the United States; yet at the same time, I feel bad and sad that Min did not live to receive this award in person.... he is the one who should have had the privilege of shaking the President's hand.”

“We are honored that our brother, Minoru Yasui, has been recognized for his fight for the rights of all Americans not just Japanese Americans,” says Yuka Yasui Fujikura, Min Yasui’s youngest sister. “Wherever he saw injustice he faced it with courage and conviction. Although Min has been gone for nearly 30 years, in many ways he is still with us in the civil rights work that others are carrying on in his name and in his spirit.”

The Presidential Medal of Freedom awards ceremony will take place on November 24, 2015 at the White House.

The Minoru Yasui Tribute committee requests that expressions of support for this great honor be directed toward the 2016 Centennial celebrations, currently planned to take place in Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho, Washington state and California. For more information, please see the Min Yasui film website, which is currently the focus of a fund-raising campaign, www.minoruyasuifilm.org and the Minoru Yasui tribute website www.minoruyasuitribute.org.

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