

Arnold Maeda Manzanar Pilgrimage Grant

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I am truly inspired by Maeda's wholehearted efforts to establish the Venice Japanese American Memorial Monument. His work shows the importance of teaching the wrongs endured by our own community so it is never forgotten nor repeated. Without the monument, residents and visitors may not have ever known about the area's connection to such an important event in American history. The bottom paragraph on the front side of the monument particularly resonates with me as it states, "The powers of government must never again perpetuate an injustice against any group based solely on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion"¹. Unfortunately, these words have been disregarded and violated many times during the Trump Administration. Namely, the deportation and separation of families within Latin American and Southeast Asian communities is hauntingly similar to my great grandfather's story. On the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, he was arrested by the FBI, thrown into various Department of Justice camps, and eventually placed behind barbed wire with the rest of his family. Maeda's work reminds me of the importance of sharing the connections between past and present with my friends and broader community to inspire advocacy against such issues and act as the ally our resilient oba-chans and oji-chans needed during WWII.

Furthermore, Maeda is remembered for his "positive sense of self-awareness; enhancing the lives of all he came to touch; sharing with them the precious gift of his infectious enthusiasm" despite coming of age in an era of wartime hysteria². Learning about Maeda's character amidst a global pandemic and heightened anti-Asian hate crimes reminds me that, no

¹ "Home - Venice JAMM," Venice JAMM, January 6, 2022, <https://venicejamm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/front-monument-sides.jpg>.

² "OBITUARY: Arnold Maeda, 94; Leader of Venice JA Memorial Effort," Rafu Shimp: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News, September 29, 2020, <https://rafu.com/2020/09/obituary-arnold-maeda-94-leader-of-venice-ja-memorial-effort/>.

matter the circumstance, I should carry myself with kindness and work to foster the energy I want to see in the world. In the past, I've done this by creating activist art to heal. Last year, after growing attacks on the Asian elderly community, I knew I wanted to create something for those being targeted. I gathered a group of friends and we brainstormed our ideas, then discussed them with an Oakland Chinatown community youth leader I knew from high school. We ended up producing dozens of large posters that included five different sayings in English, Chinese (simplified and traditional), Vietnamese, Japanese, Tagalog, Korean, and Mongolian. The posters were decorated with flowers symbolic to Asian culture and mounted in the windows of Oakland's Chinatown. The feelings of love I received from sharing smiles with community members reminded me that kindness is never wasted. Months later as I write this piece, Maeda's story reinvigorates me to create and lead with compassion. In addition to art, I know I can apply this lesson to my work as a co-Cultural Awareness and Community Service Chair of UCLA's Nikkei Student Union by making it a priority to advocate for social change from a place of empathy and love for those facing injustice.

Bibliography

“Home - Venice JAMM.” Venice JAMM. January 6, 2022.

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