

Arnold Maeda Manzanar Pilgrimage Grant Essay 2025

The Venice Japanese American Memorial Monument at the corner of Venice and Lincoln Boulevards designates the place where 1,000 Japanese Americans from the West LA area were forcibly removed and sent to the Manzanar incarceration camp in 1942.¹ That April, fifteen-year-old Arnold Maeda and his family were torn from their home and nursery in Santa Monica, sharing the same story as the other 125,000 incarcerated during WWII. Seven decades later, Maeda championed the establishment of this monument to ensure that the story of these resilient Japanese Americans would not only remain alive but continually told. His commitment to this pursuit inspires me to follow in his footsteps to commemorate this critical chapter of history and fight to make sure that it never repeats itself.

Many pieces of my families' history share similarities with Maeda's, from my grandmother's extended side being taken to Manzanar from Santa Monica likely from the same street corner, several members of my grandfather's side serving in the U.S. Army in Washington, and my great-grandfather Kamekichi Tokita designing and painting the Honor Roll structure paying tribute to veterans from the Minidoka incarceration camp² just as Maeda fought to found the VJAMM for incarcerated from Manzanar. But these are just three stories out of 125,000 — others of which have been lost completely. As such, much of my college journey has been devoted to finding and keeping these stories alive just as Maeda did: connecting diverse Nikkei speakers to university students in Japan as an intern for the U.S.-Japan Council's Japanese American Storytelling Program, writing stories for the Japanese American community as an editorial intern for Yo! Magazine, promoting ethnic studies as a member of the UCLA Asian American Studies Department's Undergraduate Leadership Committee, and spreading cultural

¹ "Home - Venice JAMM." *Venice JAMM*. January 3, 2025. <https://venicejamm.org>.

² National Park Service. "Minidoka's Honor Roll." *Minidoka National Historic Site*. <https://www.nps.gov/miin/learn/historyculture/minidokas-honor-roll.htm>.

resilience as a performing member of Kyodo Taiko at UCLA. Connecting with others and working to share the infinite amount of Japanese American stories has given me a sense of purpose and fulfillment, knowing that by doing so I can strengthen bonds between communities and partake in a larger fight for justice. I strive to give back to my community in the way that Maeda selflessly did, representing spirit and resilience.

And Maeda did not tell these stories solely for remembrance: he represented “the willingness to have a clear understanding of our present, a deep and abiding respect for our past, a full recognition of the bonds which connect us all as one community and the determination to forge ahead into the future.”³ The monument thus stands not only for a chapter of history that is being read, but also for a chapter that is being written — as a part of the ongoing Asian American movement, it is our responsibility to stand with others in the face of present injustices. Thus, working with the Manzanar Committee for the Pilgrimage this spring, I hope to carry on Maeda’s legacy by sharing the many stories of Japanese American incarceration and ensuring it never happens again, to any community.

³ “OBITUARY: Arnold Maeda, 94; Leader of Venice JA Memorial Effort.” *Rafu Shimpo*. September 29, 2020, <https://rafu.com/2020/09/obituary-arnold-maeda-94-leader-of-venice-ja-memorial-effort>.

Bibliography

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