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Justice John Paul Stevens

National Japanese American Memorial Foundation
10th Anniversary Gala Celebration

JW Marriott Hotel
Washington, D.C.
Thursday, November 4, 2010

Today I plan to say a few words about memorials, mosques, and monuments. Like Lieutenant Ichikawa, who is being honored today, I served in the Pacific theater during World War II. The Empire of Japan was our principle enemy in that theatre. Lieutenant Ichikawa, like literally thousands of other patriotic Japanese Americans - including residents of Hawai'i as well as residents of the Mainland - made a magnificent contribution to our war effort there.

During 1941, the dean of students at the University of Chicago, where I went to college, was an undercover recruiting agent for the communications intelligence branch of the Navy. He persuaded me to sign up for a confidential

correspondence course in cryptography. When I had successfully completed the course, I received a letter inviting me to go to the Great Lakes Naval Station to take a physical exam and to apply for a commission in the Naval Reserve. I did so on Saturday, December 6, 1941. Whether or not that application had any impact on what happened the next day, it was the beginning of an important chapter in my life.

When the commission came through, I reported for duty in Washington, D.C., and was assigned to what was known as "Op-20-GT", the traffic analysis section of Communication Intelligence. The job of a traffic analyst is, without decrypting the messages, to obtain information about enemy activities based on interceptions of their wireless transmissions. We examined the routing of the messages, the codes being used, and the identity of the naval units or commands that sent and received them. After a few months in Washington, I was

transferred to the naval base at Pearl Harbor, where I served until about a week before the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. For over two and a half years Pearl Harbor was my home, as well as the place where my waking hours were devoted to the defeat of our enemy.

Although I visited Hawai'i a few times after becoming a lawyer, I did not return to the naval base itself until 1994, when I met with students at the law school at the University of Hawai'i. On that visit, Admiral Retz took me on a tour of the harbor on his barge, pointing out changes that had occurred in the past 50 years. The most memorable and moving event during that tour was our approach to the Arizona Memorial - which spans the USS Arizona and the over a thousand American sailors still entombed in that sunken battleship. As we approached the Arizona I could plainly see that the dozens of visitors on board that day were Japanese tourists. My first reaction to that sight was more emotional

than you might expect from a senior citizen. Several thoughts flashed through my mind: "Those people don't really belong here. We won the war, they lost it. We shouldn't allow them to celebrate their attack on Pearl Harbor even if it was one of their greatest victories."

But then I realized that those visitors must also have been experiencing a number of mixed and conflicting emotions. Perhaps a few did remember Pearl Harbor with pride. Some of them may even have been descendants of pilots who participated in the attack. Others may have remembered relatives that died or were wounded during the war. Still others may merely have reflected about how horrible all wars are to all who participate in them and the costs that they impose on civilians as well as soldiers. Most significantly, I realized that I was drawing inferences about every member of the tourist group that did not necessarily apply to any single one of them. We should never pass judgment on

barrels and barrels of apples just because one of them may be rotten.

I suspect that many New Yorkers who lost friends or relatives as a result of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11 may have reacted to the news that Muslims are planning to erect a mosque or a religious center in the neighborhood much as I reacted to the sight of the Japanese tourists on the Arizona. Perhaps some of them may have thought: "This is no place for a mosque; Muslims killed innocent Americans here; they should build their places of worship in Afghanistan or Iraq or anywhere else, but not here."

But then, after a period of reflection, some of those New Yorkers may have had second thoughts, just as I did at the Arizona. The Japanese tourists were not responsible for what some of their countrymen did decades ago; the Muslims planning to build the mosque are not responsible for what an entirely different group of Muslims did on 9/11. Indeed,

terrorists like those who killed over 3,000 Americans - including Catholics, Jews, Protestants, atheists and some of the 600,000 Muslims who live in New York - have also killed many more Muslims who disagree with their radical views in other parts of the world. Many of the Muslims who pray in New York mosques may well have come to America to escape the intolerance of radicals like those who dominate the Taliban. Descendants of pilgrims who came to America in the 17th century to escape religious persecutions - as well as those who thereafter joined the American political experiment that those people of faith helped launch - should understand why American Muslims should enjoy the freedom to build their places of worship wherever permitted by local zoning laws.

A monument that is located a few blocks away from my office in the Supreme Court conveys the central message that visitors to the Arizona and participants in the debate about the New York Mosque

should heed. That message tells us to beware of stereotypical conclusions about groups of people that we don't know very well. Because a few Protestant extremists committed atrocities on Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland some years ago, we should not conclude that all Protestants are terrorists, or let that sliver of history affect our thinking about where the millions of peace-loving Christians in the United States may worship.

There are two parts to the message conveyed by the Monument, which you have probably already recognized is the National Japanese American Memorial. The first part tends to be especially moving to those, like Lieutenant Ishikawa and me, who lived through World War II. Much like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it is a listing inscribed in stone of the names of the hundreds of Japanese-American soldiers who were killed in World War II fighting for the freedom of their country. Like the Arizona, it is a poignant reminder of military

bravery and unselfish service: The predominantly Japanese-American 442d Infantry Combat Team, for instance, became the most decorated regiment, for its size and length of service, in the history of the United States Armed Forces. Its members earned over 9,000 Purple Hearts.

The second part of the message might well be described as a monument to stupidity. It commemorates the fact that fear of the possibility of sabotage by Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast led to the unnecessary internment of literally thousands of loyal American citizens for the duration of the War. The monument tells us that some 40 years after that tragic decision was made, President Reagan and the U.S. Congress made a formal apology on behalf of the country and authorized reparations payments of \$20,000 to interned citizens. Not only was the internment grossly unfair because large groups of citizens were deprived of their liberty without due process -

indeed, without any process at all and without any evidentiary basis for the decision - but it was also manifestly stupid because no similar precaution was taken in Hawai'i, where both the concentration of Japanese-Americans and the risk of sabotage were far greater than on the West Coast.

Our Constitution protects every one of us from being found guilty of wrongdoing based on the conduct of our associates. Guilt by association is unfair. The monument teaches us that it is also profoundly unwise to draw inferences based on a person's membership in any association or group without first learning something about the group. Its message is a powerful reminder of the fact that ignorance - that is to say, fear of the unknown - is the source of most invidious prejudice.

Thank you for your attention.