

U.S. Attorney Ed Kubo
Keynote Address – Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
Robert F. Kennedy U.S. Department of Justice Great Hall Auditorium
May 28, 2008

Aloha, and thank you very much for allowing me the privilege to address you today, as we celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. I am very honored to be speaking in the Great Hall, --- at this historic location, where I personally saw President Bush address our U.S. Attorneys, and where many of our Nation’s Attorneys General have spoken throughout our history.

“Malama Pono” is a term used in Hawaii which means “to take care of justice or to ensure that fairness and the right thing is done.” Each of you working in our Department of Justice have the responsibility for taking care or ensuring that Justice is done. And, I want to thank all of you for your dedicated service to this Department and to our country.

I speak to you today as a person of Asian ancestry, who is serving my community, my State of Hawaii, and my country with the pride of being an American. At the same time, living in Hawaii, I am a Pacific Islander, and proud of living in the 50th State.

And, I am sure this feeling of pride is shared by others living in our important U.S. Pacific Island territories, like the federal Districts of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands.

In the District of Hawaii, we have 73 employees, and approximately 75% of them are either Asian or Pacific Island Americans. Each of them are hard working individuals who try to

make a difference every day in Hawaii. I am proud of their work ethic; I am proud of their professionalism, and, I am certainly proud of their dedication to this Department and to our country.

I would like to start today by stating that I am a “Sansei,” or a 3rd Generation - Japanese American living in the United States. I am the son of Edward Hachiro Kubo and Rose Kubo, who were both born and raised in Hawaii. My father’s middle name designates that he was the 8th son in the family – He was the youngest of 10 children.

I am also the grandson of Kumashichi Kubo and Teki Shimoda Kubo, who immigrated to Hawaii from Kumamoto Prefecture in Japan, a little over 100 years ago --- in the early 1900s.

Like many other immigrants from Asia or Europe, my grandparents came to America seeking a better life for them and their families. This was truly the land of opportunity and it was fully understood by all that in order to seize opportunities in life --- you were expected to commit yourself to a life of hard work with long hours.

And so it was. During the 1800s and 1900s, hundreds of thousands of Asians came to America, and this first generation got what they expected. The Japanese worked mainly in the sugar cane fields of Hawaii, the Chinese worked on the railroads on the West Coast, and the Koreans worked on the farms and in the mines.

Yet, their culture and values did not allow them to fail in their new lives. This first generation --- or in Japanese “Iseis,” like all Asians were extremely proud people, and they were determined to succeed. --- Failure was never an option.

Love, Respect, Loyalty, and Honor for parents, family, and elders were a part of their foundation. They were very proud of who they were; their culture and heritage, – and their mantra was always pounded into their children “to never bring shame to their family.”

And, as they adopted America as their new home, they passed down to their American born sons and daughters to be proud of America, and its way of life --- but, also to continue the cultural and family expectations --- to work hard, to strive, and to be successful in life.

And, as we know, life was not easy for the “Nisei” or this second generation either. In 1941, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, this country entered World War II.

At the same time, because of our country’s suspicions about the loyalty of Japanese Americans, approximately 120,000 of them living in the United States were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to approximately 10 internment camps spread out across 7 Western States.

Half of those interned were children. And for the next five years, they would live behind barbed wire fences and under the watchful eyes of armed guards.

But, despite the tremendous sorrow in their hearts, and the harsh and cruel conditions and treatment, the yearning to show our country that we were loyal Americans was so strong.

And so, when the military asked for volunteers to serve our country in war, over 10,000 Japanese American men would step forward to answer the call to fight for the United States of America.

This was how the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed, --- which was an Asian American unit composed mostly of Japanese Americans. They knew what they needed to do to prove their loyalty to this Nation, and they knew that failure was not an option. In combat, no matter how fierce or bloody the battle might be, and even if they were the last man standing, -- - they were never --- ever to bring shame upon their family.

And so, they fought valiantly and bravely throughout the war with honor and distinction. In almost three years of combat in Italy, France and Germany, --- and while suffering tremendous loss of life, they earned 21 Medals of Honor, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, almost 5,000 Silver and Bronze Stars for valor, and almost 10,000 purple hearts for wounds received during battle.

These American heroes became the most decorated military unit in American history, and rightfully received the name of the “Purple Heart Battalion.”

Yet, after the war, they returned home only to find many in the United States still bitter towards them because of their race. However, as Asian Americans, they were now even more determined to show that they were loyal Americans, and so they set out to create better lives for their families, and to serve the people in their communities. All the while, passing down to my generation the cultural expectations and responsibilities of being a person of Asian ancestry.

I know of these family expectations of me because I am the son of an American Nisei Soldier. In 1950, my father graduated from High School in Hawaii, and immediately joined the

U.S. Army. He heard the call for duty and within a few months of his graduation, he was sent to Korea to fight a war for this country. Again, in 1965, my father fought in the Vietnam War.

Throughout my youth, my parents taught me to love my God, to love this Great Country of ours, and that no matter who you were, --- hard work and compassion for others always paid off in the end. Above all, as the oldest son in my family, I was expected to succeed, and not to bring shame to my family.

Today, I am thankful for my parents sacrifice and for these Asian values instilled in me. Yet, at the same time, and in many ways, our up-bringing and the values of our families were not that different from any family across America.

As you know, I was nominated by our President on September 4, 2001. As the first Asian American U.S. Attorney appointed by him, I was filled with pride and happiness which suddenly disappeared one week later.

On September 11th, we were all shocked by the Terrorist Attacks upon our Nation, and we knew that our world would never be the same for Americans again.

Two months later, in November (2001), all of the U.S. Attorneys were summoned to Washington. One night, we were taken to the National Mall by then Attorney General John Ashcroft. Beginning at the Washington Monument and ending at the Vietnam and Lincoln Memorials, he explained to us why each monument was so important to America.

Stopping at each monument, we read the words inscribed, and each inscription proclaimed how important our democracy was, and how so many brave Americans had given

their lives (including Asian and Pacific Americans) so that people like you and I could live our dreams in freedom.

The very next day, we were bused to Ground Zero at the Pentagon. While there, we were briefed on how the plane had hit the building; where the evidence and bodies were recovered; and the status of that investigation.

We were then motorcade directly to the White House where the President personally addressed us. He gave us a very passionate speech about what America stands for, and our obligation to defend and protect our country from future Terrorist attacks. We then went to the FBI Building, where Director Mueller gave us a briefing on the on-going Anthrax investigations.

Our generation of Americans is now called upon to meet the challenges facing our country today, --- and no matter what our ethnic background is, --- in serving our country, we will continue to show the world our values and our virtues, because this is the basis for the longevity of this country.

And this continues to be a Great Nation because of the mixture of races and cultures living in harmony and peace in the United States, --- and all proudly proclaiming ourselves to be Americans.

The United States is truly a melting pot. And, as each nationality has made its substantial share of positive contributions to this Nation, the Asian and Pacific American community stands proud for its contributions as well.

We are very proud that President Bush has appointed more Asian and Pacific Americans to important positions of trust within his Administration than any other president before him. This historical point for us has never been forgotten.

Thus, we are extremely proud of Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, a Chinese American, and for Former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, a Japanese American, for their service to this country.

Additionally, many have contributed in Congress, like the late Senator Hiram Fong, who became the first Asian American to serve, Hawaii's Senior Senator Daniel Inouye --- a Medal of Honor war hero with the 442nd Regiment, --- and, the late Congresswoman Patsy Mink, who was instrumental in the passage of Title IX which ensured gender equality in our schools.

We have also had a number of Asian and Pacific Americans working in the Department of Justice with honor and integrity. I have had the pleasure of working with Guam's U.S. Attorney Lenny Rapadas, a Pacific Islander, and with Former U.S. Attorney Debra Yang from Los Angeles, and Former U.S. Attorney Carol Lam from San Diego, --- who are both Chinese Americans.

Finally, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, Grace Chung Becker, a Korean American, is also a great addition to our ranks of leaders in the Justice Department.

Each of them, along with others working in this Department, are fine and outstanding Public Servants who have served, or are serving our country to the best of their ability and with class, --- and I thank them for their service as well.

However, not only in law and in Government, have we contributed. --- Many other Asian and Pacific Americans have contributed significantly to the greatness of America as well:

- In the Military, we have war heroes Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki, and Tammy Duckworth (Thai American);
- In Space, Astronauts Ellison Onizuka and Charles Lacy Veach served our country well;
- In Business, we have Jerry Yang, the founder of Yahoo, and Fashion Designer Vera Wang;
- In Entertainment, there was Singer Don Ho, and Actors Bruce Lee, and Pat Morita;
- In Sports, we have Tiger Woods, a Thai American, and Olympic Champions Kristi Yamaguchi, Duke Kahanamoku and Bryan Clay;
- And, in Beauty, Miss America 1992 Carolyn Sapp, Miss America 2001 Angela Baraquio, and Miss Universe 1997 Brook Mahealani Lee.

And, these are just several names on an endless list of Asian and Pacific Americans who have stepped forward to contribute to the greatness of the United States. Each of them, and others, are legacies for the next generation of Asian and Pacific American leaders in our country.

And so, I am very conscious that I am but one person trying to make a difference in our world today. --- One Asian or Pacific Island American, who is proud of my culture and my

heritage, --- and building upon the accomplishments of those who came before me; --- all the while, striving to do my part to make our communities and this country a better and safer place to live in this world. --- And, in my continued quest, I will always be mindful of not bringing shame to my family, --- or to you, my federal family in this Department.

And so, it is with this deep sense of cultural obligation and responsibility, --- that I can stand here before you today to say that I am of Asian ancestry, --- but, I am proud to be an American.

In closing, I say to all of you again, “Malama Pono” --- to continue the hard work you do in ensuring that justice and fairness is done in our world.

Thank you for having me here today, good luck to all of you in your endeavors, and may God Bless all of you and this Great Nation. Aloha.