

[Go to Content](#) | [Home](#) | [Forums](#) |



## Recalling the U.S. Internment of the Japanese With Congressman Robert Matsui

**John F. Kennedy Library and Foundation  
Responding To Terrorism Series  
November 4, 2001**



**Robert Matsui**

**JS:** John F. Kennedy Library. We're just delighted to have such a large audience here on a Sunday afternoon for one of our series, one of our 15 programs responding to terrorism, which is a series of programs that, as I'm sure you all know, seeks to address the burning questions of our time, the issues that are on people's minds as our country and the world struggle with the challenges to democracy, to basic stability and work to try to overcome the dangers of terrorism.

This is a program that Deborah Leff and I, the Library Director, and I'm John Shattuck, the CEO of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. Together we are very pleased to be putting on and we have some important cosponsors here which allow us to project this program far beyond the walls of the John F. Kennedy Library, to people all over New England and all over the nation.

*The Boston Globe*, National Public Radio's flagship station WBUR, Boston.com, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Lowell Institute are all cosponsors of this series, and as a result, we feel that we can have a town meeting with people as far away as we've discovered as California, or Hawaii, or Texas. We're getting e-mails responding to questions raised by some of these programs, and certainly people are getting to see them. We're very pleased that CSPAN tonight, of course, is filming this one.

This afternoon we will explore one of the challenges and dangers in responding to terrorism, perhaps the most serious challenge in many ways, and that is the challenge of protecting security without destroying our own precious liberty. The challenge of maintaining our principles of equality and justice for all in times when often they are under severe stress.

Four times in the last century and a half we have taken this kind of challenging moment, and when we have faced a threat to our national security, four times we have taken steps that by hindsight, I think we have regretted. Let me just quickly review those for you, and then come to the one that we are discussing here today.

In the middle of our Civil War, a grave conflict, of course effecting all Americans in the most terrible way, we suspended the Writ of Habeas Corpus, which is the most basic freedom that people have coming straight from

the oldest liberties from the Magna Carta, whereby people can be freed from prison if there is no cause to hold them.

We regretted that, we did it, and we of course restored the Writ of Habeas Corpus very soon after the Civil War.

In the 1920's, there was the first of a series of so-called Red scares, where we rounded up thousands of immigrants and deported them, without much process, simply by putting them on boats. We regretted that very soon thereafter.

Of course, in the early 1950's the anti-Communist hysteria that took the name of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who in many ways gave it that name, resulted in a great deal of excessive pressure against Americans who were accused of being, without much evidence, friendly to the communist cause. There was a lot of suffering that was done there.

But the fourth and perhaps most powerful and serious example of this suspension of liberty in the name of national security occurred during the Second World War, when Japanese Americans were rounded up and placed in internment camps in three states in the west. This is the subject that we will look at today, and we have an extraordinary leading speaker who will help us explore this and see what it means in the context of today's crisis.

This happened as a result of a frenzy of anti-Japanese hysteria that swept the country after Pearl Harbor, when there was a perceived danger of a fifth column in the United States, a greatly inflated danger in that respect. The executive order 9066, which was signed by President Roosevelt ten weeks after Pearl Harbor, and in less than two months 110,000 Japanese Americans were interned in prison camps in three western states.

The executive order is extremely broad, and I think shows the danger of authority being extended beyond the immediate need in times of national security, endangering the liberty of many, many people. I will read it very quickly to you so you can see what we're talking about.

President Roosevelt, on February 19, 1942, declared "Now therefore by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War and the military commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe the military areas in such places and of such extent as he, or the appropriate military commander, may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate military commander may impose in his discretion."

Hard to imagine a broader, and in that respect, more dangerous order, and particularly dangerous, of course, to the 110,000 Japanese Americans who were directly effected by it.

The terribly irony of this order was that the war record of heroism by Japanese Americans who fought, and many of them died for this country, was exemplary. It was, in many respects, that war record that I think we

should be remembering today, even as we condemn the executive order that rounded up Japanese Americans.

We're going to look at this, the implications of this terrible problem and terrible order in terms of today's climate, the danger of discrimination against particular racial or ethnic or religious groups, particularly the danger of discrimination against Arab-Americans. And here I think we should remember President Bush's very courageous and strong leadership shortly after the September 11 bombing when he visited mosques and urged Americans to exercise a very good judgment, and to protect the rights of all Arab-Americans.

We will also look at the issues of homeland security as it's been defined in general, and how to protect it without stepping on civil liberties.

To lead us in this discussion, we are very grateful to have with us Congressman Bob Matsui. Congressman Matsui has earned a national and international reputation as an effective and strategic leader on far reaching and complex public policy issues, and he is regarded as a leader in public health, social security, tax policy, and international trade.

He was also a very young child, as he will tell you, in the internment camps. He will tell you the experience that he and his family had in that terrible time.

He is serving on the powerful Ways and Means Committee of the Congress, which in many respects is the most important Congressional committee, which steers virtually all domestic legislation through it.

Congressman Matsui, after founding his on Sacramento law practice in 1967, was elected to the Sacramento City Council in 1971. He won reelection in 1975, and became Vice Mayor of the City of Sacramento in 1977, and was then elected to Congress in 1978, and has been serving and reelected ever since in this period of time.

Moderating the discussion will be Professor Kenneth Oye, who is an associate professor of political science at MIT. Professor Oye works in the fields of American Foreign Policy, International Political Economy, International Relations Theory, and Technology Policy, and he has edited and contributed to a large number of books on U.S. foreign policy.

He has served on the faculties of Harvard, the University of California, Princeton and Swathmore College, and has been a guest scholars at the Brookings Institution. So let me welcome Congressman Matsui, Professor Oye, and please all of you join in welcoming them to this outstanding panel.

(Applause)

**RM:** Thank you very much John, for those very, very moving remarks. We appreciate them very much. I want to thank you and the Kennedy Library and the contributors and the sponsors of this set of forums that we have here on our response to terrorism. I am very honored to be invited and be part of this very important dialogue.

I want to just make one personal comment, if I may. I've known John Shattuck for years, and years, probably 23 years, ever since I've been in the United States House of Representatives. He was with the ACLU in the late 70's and early 80's, and then went to Harvard University as their top public affairs individual. Then from there he went on into the Clinton White House in the State Department as the human rights chief, the assistant secretary in charge of human rights, and really is an outstanding states person, and we appreciate very much your public service over the years. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

And I would just like to say also that coming from Sacramento, California, I would imagine many of you probably don't know where that is, being from the East Coast. We do exist, and it's the state capital of California. We have about one and a half million people in our county. Twenty-five years ago the mayor called it a sleepy little river town, but it's a large metropolitan area at this time.

Given the state of the economy, if any of you are in the high tech business or have some businesses that you may want to relocate, we'd be happy to --

But as I was in Sacramento and I went on to school to the University of California at Berkeley, I was a student there in 1959 and 1960, and graduated in 1963. I was inspired to become a lawyer by reading when I was a young person an autobiography written by Clarence Darrell (?). That was my goal in life, and I did become a lawyer.

But during the 1960 campaign that John Kennedy ran, and when he made the commitment for young people to be involved in public service, I recall sitting in the house that I happened to be in at Berkeley and saying "I want to go into politics."

When I came back to Washington years and years later in 1979, I met with people like Gary Hart, and Dick Gephardt, and a number of others who were my contemporaries. Each and every one of them said it was the inspiration of John Kennedy that actually motivated us to get into public service.

So this library is a living monument to America and obviously its future. I'm just very honored John, and to all of you, to be part of this this evening.

I'd like, if I may, to take a moment to read something that I was able to get through the Freedom of Information Act in 1992. Individual number, 25261C. File number 405986. Your birth, '41, relocation center Tule (?) Lake, assembly center Pinedale. Home address, Sacramento, California.

Country of birth of father U.S. mainland, country of birth of mother, U.S. mainland. Birthplace, California. Year or arrival, American born, never in Japan. Marital status, single. Languages, not applicable.

Race, Japanese and no spouse. Highest grade, no schooling or kindergarten. Military service, no military nor

naval service and no physical defects, and no public assistance or pension program.

Alien registration and Social Security number, none. Did not attend Japanese language school. Has neither alien registration number, nor the Social Security number.

Length of time in Japan, none. Age in Japan, never in Japan. Schooling in Japan, and number of years, none.

That happened to be my file that is still in the defense Department of the United States government. I was six months old at the time that I was taken, with my mother and father, from Sacramento, California, and placed in internment camps in the United States.

I was never given a trial. I never went before any magistrate, nor did my parents. To this day, I do not know what the charges that were lodged against me or my deceased parents at this time.

I spent approximately three and a half years of my life there, although I have no personal memory of it. I do know that many of my friends of Japanese ancestry suffered a great deal.

My mother and father refused to talk about it with me until they were nearing their death, separately, obviously. I remember when I was in the fourth grade at William Bland School in Sacramento, California, I was asked by a very well intentioned teacher, because we were studying American history and World War II. She said, "Bob, weren't you in one of those camps, those camps for Japanese during the war? And maybe you can describe this to the classmates."

I'll never forget it. I shuddered. I must have turned color and I said "I don't know what you're talking about." She says, "Are you sure? You were in one of those camps. I know your mother and father were." I said "I don't know what you mean."

Then we went out later in the playground and I remember one of my friends, a very good friend, going like this to me as if it were a gun or something, and saying, "Were you a spy? Was that why you were in jail?"

What our problem was was that there was this specter of disloyalty that hung over us as Americans of Japanese ancestry, those of us that were interned during World War II, 115,000, Americans, basically, of Japanese ancestry.

I think what's very interesting in telling about this is that Edison Uno who was a scholar at Cal State University San Francisco in the 60's probably described it best. He said that a victim of a rape in the 60's could not talk about the experience because the mere articulation of what had happened to her would bring out a question about whether she was responsible for the act.

And that is exactly what happened to me and my parents, and 115,000 other Americans. We could not talk about it because the mere raising of the issue brought into question our loyalty to our own government.

Over the years I've had an opportunity to think about this and talk with a lot of people who were in the camps. I have come to the conclusion that there is not much more in terms of charges that can be lodged against an individual, than to be accused of being disloyal to one's country.

Think about it for a minute. If you are disloyal to your country, that means you're disloyal to your state, your local government, and your neighbors, and perhaps even those relatives and loved ones of yours. It's probably one of the most heinous accusations one can make against an individual.

I think that's why McCarthyism has been so imbedded in the American psyche because charges were lodged about the patriotism of many people; some in the State Department, some in Hollywood, many throughout the United States.

Now, many people have said, "Why did this happen, Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, the day of infamy?"

When I came to Congress I went to the Library of Congress and I had the opportunity to go through some of the newspapers and records throughout a one hundred year period. And I have to say that I would take issue with anyone who would say that Pearl Harbor was the triggering event of what happened to Americans of Japanese ancestry.

Let me quote the San Francisco Mayor, James Phalen, who later became a U.S. senator, at a labor union rally in San Francisco in 1920. Quote: The Chinese and Japanese are not bona fide citizens. They are not the stuff of which American citizens can be made. Personally, we have nothing against the Japanese, but as they will not assimilate with us and their social life is so different from ours, let's keep them at a respectful distance.

An east coast author, Madison Grant in 1920, the same year, said "There is no immediate danger of the world being swamped by black blood, but there is a very immediate danger that the white stocks may be swamped by Asiatic blood, unless the white man erects and maintains artificial barriers."

Virgil Stuart McLashy (?), V.S. McLashy, who was the owner then of the McLashy newspapers in Sacramento, California, made a statement to the United States Senate on July 21, 1921, a statement that was endorsed by senators Hiram Johnson and Samuel Shortage (?) and the entire California congressional delegation, democrats and republicans alike.

He stated "Japanese immigration is a steady growing menace that is no longer a state problem but a national one. The immigration of Japanese is not only undesirable but dangerous to American interests, because the Japanese are not assimilable, and even were born here, they are unfit for responsible duties of American citizenship.

The extraordinary birth rates of such aliens would cause inundation of the white population in this country by the yellow race. Whites would be speedily driven out of their communities.

Then in 1935, some 14 years later, in the Committee of a Thousand, which became a very powerful kind of anti-immigration group in the United States, stated "Wherever the Japanese have settled, their nests pollute the communities like running sores of leprosy. They exist like yellowed, smoldering, discarded butts and over-filled ashtrays, vilifying the air with their loathsome smell, filling all who have the misfortune to look upon them with wholesome disgust and desire to wash."

And of course, after December 7, it changed. The attorney general of California, then Earl Warren, who later became a great Chief Justice, he stated "On February 21, 1942, some three months after Pearl Harbor, I want to say that the consensus of opinion among the law enforcement officers in this state is that there are more potential dangers among a group of Japanese who were born in this country than from alien Japanese who are born in Japan."

And the U.S. general, John L. DeWitt, who was in charge of the internment and incarceration of the Japanese Americans, stated a few months later "The Japanese race is an enemy race, and while many second and third Japanese born in the United States soil possessed of U.S. citizenship have become Americanized, the racial strains are undiluted. It therefore follows that along the virtual Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today."

And the reason I call your attention to this, and what happened in the comments and before December 7, is because there was an anti-Asian sentiment. There was a strain throughout the West Coast, and particularly the state of California. Pearl Harbor merely triggered the sentiment to become a sign of action. It is my believe that the internment was for that reason. It was the triggering event of deep seated feelings that existed in the state of California, and Washington, and the entire west coast of the United States.

As I said, this was something that we had a very difficult time talking about, and it wasn't until 1981 when the Congress of the United States actually set up a commission to look into the causes of the internment, and also whether anything should be done, such as apologies, or redress, or reparations for those that were interred.

I was personally stunned, because of the seven or eight hearings throughout the United States, many Americans of Japanese ancestry who at that time were in their 60's, began to speak out. And it was stunning because as they were testifying, they would immediately break down and begin to describe their ordeal; the fact that they were isolated and ostracized from their own communities, their own state, and obviously the nation.

I recall going back and finally having the opportunity to talk with my parents. And my mother, who was at that time dying, said that yes, she woke up all of the time in the middle of the night thinking that she was in one of the camps.

My dad finally began to speak about it. It was an event that kind of opened up for us the opportunity to begin to discuss what had actually happened. Instead of saying that it was our fault, we were then able to finally say that it wasn't our fault. It was the government, a failure of leadership in the United States that caused the internment.

Because J. Edgar Hoover, believe it or not, did not want the internment to occur. There was never any case of

disloyalty or espionage lodged against any American of Japanese ancestry before, during, or after World War II.

I want, if I may, to contrast that with what is happening today. In *The Washington Post* today there was an article on the front page. Those of you that can use your computer, I would urge you to pick it up off the Web, because the story indicates one thousand one hundred Arab Americans that have been detained over the last couple of months, since September 11. Many on charges for reasons that were somewhat questionable.

One, for example, was going after a renewal of his driver's license and it just so happens a few hours before one of the terrorists who committed the heinous act of September 11, had sought a driver's license a few hours before. So this individual was detained and actually held for a number of days. He is still under suspicion, mainly because he sought a renewal of his driver's license around the same time that one of the terrorists did. So this is an ongoing problem.

Now, I do not believe that the United States would incarcerate Arab Americans today. I think there are a number of contrasting reasons for that. One is that I don't believe that there is such an anti-Arab sentiment that has existed prior to September 11, although there is some anti-Arab feelings, but it's not as prominent as it was of the Asian American community prior to December 7.

But most importantly, it's because our political leaders in America, starting with President Bush, immediately spoke out and challenged the American people to make sure that citizens of Arab ancestry were not at all attacked, or treated in intolerable fashions.

In fact, I think as John Shattuck mentioned, the president went to a mosque a few days after September 11. The attorney general, John Ashcroft, has spoken out numerous times over the last two months, about making sure that we treat all citizens in a decent way, no matter what their ancestry or religious beliefs might happen to be. At the same time, we've seen it all through the political system.

In fact, one member of Congress from Louisiana, many of you may have seen the story on this, suggested that anyone that wore, he used the word "diapers" around his head, should be immediately stopped and questioned before going on an airline or any kind of transportation.

The president spoke out against him. Many of his colleagues spoke out against him, and he was immediately put in his place.

So I think things have changed somewhat, but there still is, obviously, the danger of incidents and profiling that undoubtedly could and will occur. This situation will go on for months and perhaps years, and as a result of that we, as American citizens, have to be very vigilant in making sure that we watch for and protect the rights of individuals that are residing, or are citizens of our country.

Let me conclude, and then we'll have questions and a discussion, if I may make one other observation, if I may. This is a great and wonderful country, because what happened in 1987 is that the House, the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate passed legislation for a presidential apology for the

internment for the surviving Americans of Japanese ancestry who were interned, plus compensation of \$20,000 per survivor.

President Reagan signed the legislation, and I have to say that I brought the letter from the president, by that time President Bush, Sr. had signed the letter and given it to my father, who was 21 years old at the time of the internment, and he broke down and cried, and he indicated what a great country we had.

I have to say that it's very few countries that are willing to look back at its past and apologize for its act, or make amends for its act, as the United States had one. Hopefully as a country, that we learn from our mistakes of the past. That's why it's my strong belief and my strong hope that what happened to us will not happen to any other American or resident alien in this country, and certainly not to the Arab American community in America.

In fact, three weeks ago when I was back in my home district in Sacramento, I asked leaders of the Arab American Sikh community to come and visit with me. We brought the U.S. attorney into the, from the eastern district into my office, and we had a meeting, in which case the U.S. attorney said look, if there are any incidents or anything of that nature, we want you to call our office because we do have laws on the books that we can offer you help and protection.

The sheriff's office in Sacramento, the police department in Sacramento, and frankly throughout the country law enforcement agencies have been on the alert for this. I have to say that things are different, but we still need to be vigilant, and we still need to watch for possible anti-Arab treatment in the months and years ahead. Thank you.

(Applause)

**KO:** Thank you very much, Bob. First I'd like to express my appreciation for a chance to be serving on such a distinguished panel; between John Shattuck's experience working with ACLU and certainly at the Department of State on these issues, and Bob Matsui's leadership, not just in looking out for let's call it the interest of Japanese Americans who suffered under this, but also working very, very hard to see that it does not happen to others. Looking at your voting record and your concern on Civil Rights over the years, it's clear that a portion of what's drawn you to these issues comes from your past.

The reason why I think that we should thank the Kennedy Library for setting this up as a forum is that we do have to look back at the past, and to relieve it, painful though it may be at times, to perhaps understand a little bit better the dangers that we face today.

The situations that Bob described, the official actions that Bob described, in fact do represent a low point. We've heard now that Bob believes that it is unlikely that we will see something like a direct repetition of the same.

And what I'd suggest in terms of maybe a few minutes of informal dialogue before we turn to the questions, that we explore, just a bit, the similarities and differences between the situation after Pearl Harbor and the situation that we confront today.

Let's begin with the unofficial for a moment. There is now, and what I'd like to do is to cut back and forth between problems that Arab Americans and others have faced, and problems that Japanese Americans face. If we start not with public action and official discrimination but with vigilantism. In the week after September 11 there were hundreds upon hundreds of incidents directed against Asian Americans, sorry, against Arab Americans and against Sikhs.

And in the years or the days after Pearl Harbor, individuals were often singled out.

The question that I'd pose on this would be as your parents were discussing what happened to them after Pearl Harbor in terms of, perhaps, being singled out for discrimination, or perhaps even being picked up or pursued rather aggressively by official law enforcement, did they mention problems, either with private action, vigilante action, or problems with law enforcement itself effecting them individually?

**RM:** My father and mother really wouldn't talk about this subject until the early 80's. So this is something that really wasn't discussed. But after '81, they did open up a little bit. I would have to say that what they said was very minimal. I mean, it was not something that they would freely discuss. I think pretty much the entire Japanese American community, with the exception of a few -- I think Ken, your parents may have been an exception to that rule -- But there were times when they spoke.

My dad mostly spoke of government actions. He was, he and his brother owned a little produce business in Sacramento, and he was up in the northern part of Sacramento County buying produce, and it got late one afternoon. As he was driving down he missed the curfew, so he was stopped and put in the local jail for over night.

The one thing he remembered was the fact that the fruit and vegetables were pretty much ruined, and as a result of that, he lost the entire day. But it would be mainly governmental actions.

My mother didn't talk much about it at all, except anecdotally, as I mentioned.

But others had. There were actions taken by private citizens, things were scrawled on homes and a lot of vandalism occurred and things of that nature, immediately after December 7.

I look back on that now in terms of what happened after September 11, and I don't know if I really fully appreciated how isolated they must have felt, until I saw what happened right after September 11. Because how do we as Americans respond to that kind of terrorist activity of September 11 and what happened on December 7, 1941? I mean it was a very traumatic event, both were.

Your immediate reaction is to obviously comfort those that were victimized by the action, and on the other hand, there is a level of anger that has to be out there against perpetrators of a violence, or the Japanese during World War II.

Again, I just find it incomprehensible now that I see what happened on September 11, how my parents were able to really get by day to day.

**KO:** My father actually spoke of this. The official actions we'll get to in a minute, but the reactions of ordinary citizens are something that I think should not be discounted in difficult times like these.

My father went to work on Monday after Pearl Harbor, and his boss called him into the office. I'm sure that his feelings at that point, he was working for the State of California as a bookkeeper at the time, were not all that optimistic.

His boss called him into the office to tell him that he wanted my father to tell him if anything bad happened, if he ran into any difficulties or any problems. His coworkers in fact were fine, and his experiences were, in fact, so good, that he wasn't that worried about bad things to come. We'll get to that in a moment.

But the point here is that individuals as well as political leaders can have and exercise some responsibility for how people feel when they are regarded or viewed with suspicion. These small gestures, and acts, in fact are something that can be remembered many, many years later. It may be one of the reasons why he felt free to talk about the internment, perhaps a little earlier than many of the others.

But in terms of still continuing on the theme, if you will, of the private, the reactions of people who are viewed with suspicion, if you look within the Japanese American community after Pearl Harbor, there were a variety of points of view, and in fact, there are still controversies to this day in terms of how to react and respond.

Could you go into some of those controversies a bit, and perhaps we could slide into equivalent or similar situations that Arab Americans and others might face now, in terms of how do we react and respond? What's a good strategy if you are viewed with suspicion?

**RM:** You mean in terms of, Ken, are you talking about in terms of how the community responded?

**KO:** How the community responded.

**RM:** This is the aftermath now. We became super Americans. It's very interesting. I mean, the Japanese American community essentially had nothing to do with Japan as a nation, and quite understandable, even in the 50's and the 60's and 70's, if that's what you're suggesting.

There was no way that my parents were going to teach me how to speak Japanese, and I still can't to this day. In fact, in my one visit to Japan I had an interpreter who happened to be white. (Laughter) ... how that was.

I think they did that to humiliate me as a member of the Congress, but that's beside the point, I guess. You know, we were just made to be super Americans.

In fact, what was interesting my son, who by that time when he was nine years old he was going to Sidwell Friends in Washington, D.C. The teacher wanted each one of the children in the class to bring something that kind of brought back their heritage.

We had a helmet, a Japanese helmet that my grandmother had given Brian when he was born. And I forgot all about it, it was up in the attic someplace. He said we're supposed to bring something that tells where we're from. He's fourth generation so I said, "What Sacramento?" He said "No, no, from where we're from." I go "Okay."

He said, "What about the helmet that great grandma gave me?" I said, "What helmet are you talking about?" Well, it was a Japanese -- And I was stunned. It just struck me as odd that this nine year old would want something from Japan, or something that related to Japan. Because that was something that was totally away from me. It was not something that I was at all to be involved in.

I know a lot of my contemporaries, people my age, a little younger, a little older, pretty much felt the same way as well. I mean, I marvel at the fact that here in this state Irish Americans can talk about Ireland so freely, because that's something that certainly the Japanese American community, my contemporaries, would not do under any circumstances.

**KO:** And it's interesting now. If we look within the communities of our Arab and Moslem brothers and sisters --

**RM:** I'll say this if I may, and I want to be careful when I say this, but 15 years ago I wouldn't be able to stand before all of you, or sit before all of you and talk about this. There would have been no way that I would want to even share a moment of this experience with you. I would not want you at all to think that this had happened to me.

Obviously, I think the signing of the redress legislation and all of that had gone a long way into kind of closing the circle, so to speak, and kind of cleansing the specter of disloyalty that hung over all of us.

**KO:** There must be equivalent or similar feelings running through the communities of our Arab brothers and sisters at this point as well.

**RM:** What I'm most worried about, and this wasn't pre-rehearsed, what I'm most worried about is -- You know, again, I think individual vigilante action will be taken with the Arab American community, but no government action will be. In fact, the government, I think, will be the protectors of the community when all is said and done. But it's probably the young people.

You know, K thru 7, K thru 6. They are the ones that will probably suffer. Because children can be insensitive without even knowing it.

What we've done in Sacramento, and I hope people throughout the country are doing this, or will do this, or have been thinking about this, is set up a little speaker's bureau at our local public school so that people could

speak of this particular issue. So that perhaps there could be some sensitivity during this period of crisis that we're facing at this time.

**KO:** There were also interesting issues, if you looked to other Asian American groups in California, as the internment was taking place. Chinese Americans, for example, were sitting there watching Japanese Americans during the internment.

Again, during that period of vigilante action, the ability of many Caucasian Americans to differentiate among Japanese and Chinese tends to be a little bit limited. (Laughter)

What was the reaction of Chinese Americans during the period after Pearl Harbor?

**RM:** Well, I mean, I couldn't speak for all of them, but obviously they were very concerned, and they needed to make sure that they were not associated with the Japanese American community, as you can well imagine. So there was some distance that was created there that was normal and natural.

That doesn't exist today, but it certainly was a concern at that time. I mean, without being too specific, I can see that even in the Arab American community now, where there is some effort to, you know, distance itself from the main Arab countries.

**KO:** If you look at one example, that I think that's what fits this rather well. The Sikh community in the United States has often been running into great difficulty. If you have a turban and you have a beard, the usual association is to think Osama bin Laden, and they've been running into more than their fair share of violence.

I ran into a Sikh leader, (Indaret) (Singh) from Westborough here. He was working with his people on exactly the problem that we were discussing earlier; the natural tendency under those conditions if you run into someone who is giving you a hard time, honking the horn or threatening to beat you up is to say what? I'm a Sikh, I am not a Moslem, and to say it with great emphasis.

What he was trying to do was to actually work with his fellow Sikhs so that they would not say that. Given the history of, at times, violent conflict between Moslems and Sikhs, it was really quite remarkable that he would be asking this of his fellow co-religionists (?).

But he was saying that it was a bad idea to say that because what it tended to do was to make acceptable the notion that violence against Muslims would be okay. He said he wasn't having total success in convincing, particularly the middle school children that this was something that you should say when someone was pushing you around on the playground. But still, it's remarkable to run into someone with that kind of sensitivity, even under very difficult times.

Should we move towards the official acts of discrimination, at least a bit more?

If we look at the current period, and you mentioned *The Washington Post* article on the one thousand one hundred detainees, what do we know of their condition at this time? Why were they singled out? Have they had the right to talk to counsel? Again, to go back to earlier periods after Pearl Harbor I had one uncle who, in fact, I believe he was living within your Congressional district at the time. He also was a leader of the Japanese community. He spoke good English and spoke Japanese, so he was the fellow that people would come to for help. That put him onto the list of suspect folks. You could see that in terms of the form that you were describing, your own file.

So he had a nice six months in Bismarck, North Dakota. My aunt was, at that time, I think pregnant with her fifth child. So they were having a pretty tough time. But he spent six months there, and then was reunited with the family in Fresno. No charges were ever filed. He was cleared. And at the same time, the idea of six months of, if you will, preventive detention away from family, was something that they found somewhat disturbing.

What do we know of what's going on today in terms of those one thousand one hundred detainees?

**RM:** I would recommend that you pick up on the Web *The Washington Post* story today, the Sunday edition today, because it basically says that many of these people are now being held without a lot of information being impaired. One is because there is a gag rule that has been imposed on both the prosecution and the defense side of the situation. As a result of that, there is just very little information.

If you look at the article it's somewhat sketchy, but we have been hearing about this over the last couple of weeks now. Again, I think it's not so much to find perpetrators of September 11, but it's for preventive purposes of future action.

And you know, that does raise a very interesting issue under our Constitution. Again, I think John mentioned in his opening remarks about the role of the state versus the rights of the individual. There is always that balance that must be maintained, and I think you've mentioned Habeas Corpus during the Civil War, and a number of other things, when these rights, obviously, during the internment period in World War II, were suspended.

And the question of how far can you go to protect America, and at the same time when you go beyond that line and violate individual rights? It's a very tough question. I think we're all trying to deal with that right now. We haven't had to deal with it, frankly, probably in our generation, and we're dealing with it at this particular moment. This is a great example, this one thousand one hundred people that are being, or have been held or are being held, is a great example of that.

Now I have to say again, and I want to emphasize this, is I think the attorney general, and I'm a democrat, so the attorney general, and the president, and the law enforcement agencies throughout the United States are trying their very best to make sure that given the circumstances, that these individuals are treated with a degree of decency that is required.

On the other hand, we do know that there is a need to make sure that we protect the American people, because there is a lot of hysteria and a lot of concern out there. So it's a classic example of fundamental rights. I don't

know if there is a real answer to it. The Constitution gives us guidelines and case law gives us guidelines. On the other hand, each case is a separate situation, and it's, as I said, a very, very difficult issue to resolve and deal with.

**KO:** Your own voting record, when we go back to periods of crisis, after the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1996, you voted to preserve Habeas Corpus. You also voted against provisions to allow government to use secret evidence to deport immigrants. So your record has been quite straight forward in terms of defense of civil liberties during periods when conditions lent themselves to taking away rights.

At the same time, the question I want to pose, unlike most of us, we all have the luxury of ducking on hard issues because we don't have to cast hard votes. But you have to vote, and the anti-terrorism legislation that came before the House recently towards the end of October, the legislation here is called the USA Patriot Act, if you haven't followed it.

It had a large number of propositions built into it. It was a long and complicated bill. Some of the stuff going on in that bill was unproblematic, the idea of, for example, tapping cell phones. Others have come under at least some criticism from Amnesty International and from other organizations, as being at least threatening to civil liberties in the United States. It's not an easy vote. I mean it when I say I'm glad I didn't have to vote, but what is your view on that piece of legislation?

**RM:** As you stated, I supported it. And I have to say it was one of those pieces of legislation that it moved within two months. Very rarely does a major piece of legislation like that move within two years. Two months is unprecedented.

But there was a feeling among my colleagues and myself that we were under such a national security situation that we had no choice but to move the legislation, get it to the president as quickly as possible.

We do have, in fact this was a saving grace and it's not an excuse, but we do have one provision in there that there is a four year sunset on the legislation. I think that's what made members feel more comfortable about supporting the legislation. But I have to tell you that there are some elements in that bill that, I think it was an omnibus (?) piece of legislation, that undoubtedly will be reviewed by the courts, the U.S. Supreme Court hopefully, and the Constitutionality of some of these issues may be in question as well.

But it was one of these things where we needed to move very quickly and expeditiously, and we did. But I think the attorney general and the law enforcement agencies had to have some kind of additional powers. That was our vehicle.

**KO:** This piece of legislation was about 136 pages long. How much time did you have to study it?

**RM:** I wouldn't want to, I wouldn't want people to become discouraged. (Laughter)

It was one of those where because of the time constraints that we had, the House and Senate Judiciary Committee members, and along with the leadership of both parties and the White House, had to meet privately and discuss these issues.

We probably had less than five or six hours before the Bill was completed and brought to the floor. Again, it had to be moved very quickly, and there was a rationale for that too. Undoubtedly, those of you that have followed legislative process know that when you have a very controversial bill like this, you move it as soon as you disclose it, because you don't want people to start analyzing it and putting holes through it, because then it could just be stopped.

It was one of those things where I think we needed to move expeditiously, so I don't blame the managers of the legislation for moving it as quickly as they did. They had to move it. If we would have turned it down, I think it would have created a major crisis in this country about whether or not the government was capable of dealing with the prospective terrorist activities that might be occurring.

**KO:** Perhaps we could draw John Shattuck in at this point. We could ask John to put on his old hat as Assistant Secretary of State, with responsibility for Human Rights, and democratization and labor. As part of John's job there, you had to prepare country reports. The country reports included categories like arbitrary arrest and detention, denial of fair public trial, arbitrary interference with the privacy family, home, or correspondence.

You were often writing up these reports on countries that actually faced genuine terrorist threats; Algeria with waves of violence, Peru, Columbia, many others.

The hard question, and I know it's grossly unfair, particularly with a 136 page piece of legislation, and a set of initiatives and actions that we're fumbling around with right now and trying to improve on, with a real security problem in the United States right now.

But John, if you were writing the country report on the legislation that Bob Matsui signed and voted for, what would you say?

**JS:** Well, first of all, I'd repeat everything that I said earlier about Bob Matsui and what a hero he is, privately to him, of course.

Well, let me say several things about the legislation which I think is something of a mystery to all of us because it hasn't yet been fully analyzed. But I think as, and I will get to the point of what I would say about it in a country report in a minute.

But I think it certainly reflects the same fervor, I think it's important to note this, as executive order 9066, which is what we are talking about here today. But it's different, and it does have one major difference that, it has several differences, but one major difference that I think we need to focus on. That is, unlike the executive order internment Japanese Americans, this legislation is, if you will, non-discriminatory. It applies to all Americans and all people in the United States within the jurisdiction of the United States.

So it is not a racial or ethnic or religious weapon that is being used to try, as 9066 was, to strike at a particular part of the population in a way that was completely unacceptable, and that we now, and even then, saw, in many cases, as unacceptable.

But I think what I would say about it is that it was enacted under extraordinary procedures which didn't allow it to be considered very carefully. That it certainly was enacted in a circumstance where there was a lot of pressure from the public to take action with respect to issues of terrorism and U.S. law enforcement. That it contains a wide variety of measures that on their face appear to be inconsistent with basic civil liberties. That it does have a sunset provision that puts it out of business within four years, so it is not looked at as a permanent piece of legislation.

And that above all, what it's going to take is a close scrutiny of how it's applied. That's why what's happening in these thousand plus cases that Bob Matsui has identified as a real thing to watch closely, why that's so very, very important.

But I think it's very, it is important for us to assess our own human rights, just as we assess them for those who are friends or not friends around the world. In that sense I think any report that's written on it has to be very candid and honest, but it also has to be based on facts, and has to be, we have to look at how the legislation is applied over time.

I think, personally, that the biggest problem in the area is not a question of the authority for law enforcement agents to do what they need to do to investigate cases. It is a problem of the lack of coordination among all the various agencies that exist. In this respect, I think the biggest crisis we have is one that's not being addressed at the moment, which is how do we really pull together these agencies, under Governor Ridge and his Homeland Security activities, in ways that make them cooperate with each other, so that we can actually get the job done.

I don't think there is any lack of authority before the legislation was passed to do the job as it needs to be done. There is just a lack of coordination.

**KO:** Bob, do you have any thoughts --

**RM:** No. I agree with what John has basically said. It has a way to go yet.

**KO:** In your remarks, you mentioned that you thought that, with reference to Japanese Americans, citizens and non-citizens alike, there was a good deal of preexisting prejudice, and the Arab Americans are in a slightly different position, that there isn't as well developed or well formed opposition against going in.

The question I'd like to pose would direct --

END OF TAPE SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE SIDE B

**KO:** ... like Congressman Matsui. His parents, my parents and my grandparents. But the citizens and non-citizens who are lumped together --

If we look at the current situation, the problematic pieces of legislation, the suspect, detentions tend to be focused very heavily on non-citizens. Is there, in fact, a preexisting tendency or movement, or mood in the United States right now that would be directed not so much against Arab-Americans, but against immigrants? Is there a reconsideration of the open door there that might well be accelerated and intensified by bad economic times that could feel this?

**RM:** I don't think there is any question that we're going through a period now, particularly with the economy being as it is, and given the recent what happened on September 11, you're going to see a greater restriction of immigration. Obviously our immigration policy, when we do take it up, will be significantly changed in a way that would reduce the flow of immigration in this country. There is just no question about that.

Now, I would say that up until September 11 and before the economy was weakening, and we started to see that in December of last year if you recall, many people were actually talking about increasing the immigration flow into this country. I think it's been an abrupt (?) change, and it's been almost overnight that that shift has occurred.

In fact, if you recall early in President Bush's term, the first three or four months or so, he was talking about reexamining the immigration policies to allow greater immigration in the United States. Now that's all gone. No one is even talking about that now.

**KO:** We have about 20 minutes left. What we'd like to do now is to welcome questions. There is a microphone, I believe, up here. We will not do the Oprah Winfrey/Phil Donahue approach, so you will be asked to go to the microphone if you can.

Also, there were a few questions which came forward, I think from the other room. Perhaps what we could do while folks are drifting towards the mike, is to begin with some of the questions that I have in hand now.

You have to be at the mike in order to be heard.

**Q:** Yes, thank you. When you were talking about the 1987 Congressional apology that was, presidential apology that was going to be given to Japanese descendants of the internment, I was struck by a particularly troubling question that directly relates to what's currently going on with Arab Americans.

I wonder how the U.S. government can continue to try to claim this moral high ground in its fight against terrorism, when it has yet to acknowledge, never mind apologize or compensate, for what is probably arguably the most, the largest and most grotesque crime against humanity, which was the African Holocaust of

enslavement, in which as many as tens of millions of African Americans were enslaved and murdered.

I was wondering if you had any ideas of why that has yet to be acknowledged by the U.S. government.

**RM:** I think that's a very legitimate question. Congressman John Conders (?) of Michigan has actually introduced legislation now for the last, I think four or five terms, so the last eight to ten years, on setting up a commission to actually study the slavery and what should be the consequences of it.

We haven't been able to move that legislation, but a number of us are cosponsors of it, and we have been at least wanting a commission set up to actually investigate this.

I might also say that what we did in our legislation is to limit it to survivors. We wanted it to be somewhat similar to a tort claim. In other words, only those that were alive on the date of enactment of the legislation would qualify. My mother, as I mentioned, passed away before the bill became law, and so she was not obviously eligible, nor were her heirs eligible to collect the money or receive the apology, because we wanted it, as I said, to be seen as a tort claim and not a precedent for any other aggrieved group in the United States.

So we attempted to distinguish it that way, but the broader question you asked is a very legitimate one. I think a commission set up to examine slavery and the consequences of it, would probably be a very fruitful, important dialogue for the United States to be involved in.

It wouldn't be a situation where it would be self criticism, no more than the commission that was set up on the internment. It was actually more to just kind of look at the situation and find out why it happened, what were the consequences of it, what it did to individuals and groups of people. And I think it's a very legitimate issue that we need to address one day in our history.

**Q:** Why wasn't there any internment of Americans of German descent, and did JFK, J. Edgar Hoover asked for that?

**RM:** What I understand is that there was some arrest, similar to what's happened in the Arab American community, significant arrests, of both the German Americans and Italian Americans during that period. But there was no mass incarceration of them as there was with the Japanese Americans.

But there was, as I said, a mass arrest, and a lot of hysteria against German Americans and Italian Americans.

Again, I want to be careful when I say this, but I think again, there was an anti-Asian sentiment that was triggered from Pearl Harbor. It wasn't Pearl Harbor that created this problem, it was already there, that was triggered by Pearl Harbor. And I also believe that it was pretty easy to identify Japanese Americans, unlike maybe the other two groups, in terms of the assimilation into the communities that we were all involved in. So I think that had something to do with it.

I know in Hawaii for example, were approximately 40% at that time, 1941-42 of the population was Japanese American, or Japanese. There were arrests and mass detention over time, but there was no incarceration as there was on the West Coast.

**KO:** Thank you very much. Yes?

**Q:** Hello. I am Bobby Fodget (?) from the Northridge Middle School and I am researching Japanese internment for National History Day. I would like to address the Congressman or the professor, if you could talk about the conditions in the camps as your parents or friends described them?

**KO:** Okay. I'll go very quickly. My mother and her many brothers and sisters, and her father, were moved from a place called Watsonville, California, to an assembly center in Salinas California. They lived in one room in this assembly center for six months.

They were then shifted to a place called Posten (?) in the desert in Arizona, and they lived there under pretty tough conditions for about three more years. The conditions that she described were again, to be clear, not death camp conditions. These were concentration camps. There was food. There was water. There was clothing, but they were pretty spartan.

My father's conditions, his experience, he took a grand tour going from California, again, leaving from Congressman Matsui's district, to Jerome Arkansas, which was a pretty swampy little area, and then off to Hela (?) Arizona. These were not located in wonderful places. Your parents were in Tule Lake, weren't they?

**RM:** Right.

**KO:** And again, the conditions were spartan. But again, to be clear, although there was barbed wire and there were machine guns, we're not talking about camps that were set up to exterminate populations. Bob?

**RM:** If I might, and let me say this. I appreciate what you're doing. I think it's wonderful that young people are putting down a historical record of events of American history, so I want to thank you for your work.

My mother, to the extent she described it, said it was a total lack of privacy. What happened at Tule Lake is that they were just given horse stalls and they basically made their living conditions out of those stalls.

The one thing she kept talking about when she was able to talk about it, was a lack of privacy, and again, the spartan conditions they had there.

Let me say this, because this issue came up during the redress debate. It's off what you're talking about, but I want to mention this. I've had a lot of people during the debate on the bill back in 1986 and 1987 when the legislation was passed, and then 1988 when President Reagan signed it, say "Everybody suffers during war time. People go off to war, they lose their families, they lose their loved ones, families break up." We had GI's

that obviously had to give up schools and their livelihoods, left their communities. That's a very legitimate issue that they raised when we were talking about this issue of internment, and redress and reparations.

My answer to that, and I think I'm right about this, is that in time of war, I have a responsibility to fight on behalf of my country. I have an absolute responsibility as a citizen of the United States to defend my country and its people. That's an obligation of citizenship in a democracy like the United States of America. It's a great country.

On the other hand, I don't have an obligation, in a democracy, to give up my liberties, to give up my freedoms. To be incarcerated by my government, without any charges being filed against me, or any knowledge about why I'm incarcerated. That is not an obligation or responsibility of citizenship.

And I really distinguish the two events in that way, and what was interesting is that the conservative members in the House of Representatives felt very strongly about that argument, as much as the liberal members. They felt that it was an issue of citizenship and individual responsibilities and rights, and one had not any responsibility to be incarcerated by one's country without charges being launched.

Thank you for the work you're doing.

**KO:** We'll help you with your term paper after the session.

(Laughter)

**KO:** Yes sir.

**Q:** Yes. Thank you for coming Congressman Matsui. You have an interesting perspective, having this both happen to your family, but also being a Congressman. It's with that perspective that my question follows.

I coincidentally was in the Eastern Sierra when September 11 occurred, and had the opportunity right after to visit Manzanar, which is one of the Japanese internment camps. And one of the things I did while, I spent actually two days touring there. There is a museum there, and I'm going to mention it after this gentleman here, because they have a lot of primary research in the Eastern California Museum in Independence, California.

But one of the books that I picked up there, you may be familiar with it. It's called *Adios to Tears*. What it is, it's about a gentleman, his family were actually deported from Peru to the United States. They were not U.S. citizens. This was at the request of the U.S. military. They subsequently went from Peru to Panama, and then were, like your family, actually, put in these internment camps in Louisiana, I mean, I'm sorry, in Texas.

At the end of the war no one knew what to do with them. They were sort of not accepted, and the immigration authorities actually asked, "How did you get to the U.S.?" Well, they were considered illegal aliens at the time. Many of them subsequently became United States citizens.

There is an epilogue to this book, and it's a very well written book, by the gentleman who I think just recently passed away, talking about you know, the reparations. Again, I say you have an interesting perspective, that was given to people who were U.S. citizens at the time who were interred.

My question relates to, because I'd like to sort of focus on whether the concept of has justice been served in that, and to the extent what hasn't it. These families, and there were many still living when your legislation went through, have never seen any sort of compensation or reparation. It's an interesting perspective, and I'm wondering if you can comment on that.

**RM:** That's a very important question. It's kind of interesting. Because I think we in Congress erred by not including the Peruvians. We probably didn't understand the factual situation that resulted in the incarceration of the Peruvians.

We thought that the Peruvian government -- this is a mistaken our part -- we thought the Peruvian government actually was the government that actually asked the U.S. to take these Peruvian Japanese citizens, or Japanese Peruvian citizens in the United States, and incarcerate them. We felt that that would, at the time, undermine our ability to deal with the bill because we were talking only about U.S. citizens, and a violation of their constitutional rights. That would have added a dimension, because these weren't U.S. residents or U.S. citizens.

Since it was the Peruvian, what we thought to be the Peruvian government that sent them into the United States, we thought it should be the Peruvian government's responsibility to provide the apology and obviously the redress.

Subsequently we have discovered, which would have been very easy had we spent time on it, but we just didn't spend the time on it, I'm sorry to say. We thought that it was the U.S. government itself that asked that the Peruvian Japanese be sent to the United States because they were worried, the U.S. government was worried that the Japanese Peruvians would be a threat to the entire western hemisphere.

So it was actually, the action by the United States, not the Peruvian government, and so we erred. Now what we're trying to do, and I don't know if we'll be successful because obviously there are timing issues with all legislation, legislation has been introduced to provide the same kind of relief to the Peruvians, Japanese Peruvians as we did with the Japanese Americans.

The bill, we've been promised that we'll get a hearing on the bill. I don't know if we will, and we're a long way off from resolution of that legislation at this time. But it is another event in American history that is tragic, and again, were it not for a misunderstanding, I think they may have been included. I have to say that I, along with other of my colleagues, just erred from a factual perspective.

**Q:** Are you one of the sponsors of that legislation?

**RM:** Yes. It's a bill that was introduced by Representative Javier Bersara (sp?) in the Los Angeles, California

area who has a large number of Peruvian American citizens who were from a Peruvian, initially Peruvian families. I am a cosponsor of it.

**Q:** Thank you.

**KO:** Thanks very much. Yes ma'am?

**Q:** Good afternoon. My name is Catherine Harkin (sp?) and I have really enjoyed your dialogue tremendously. I thank Dr. Shattuck for providing a forum for us.

My question is this. It seemed as though Tony Blair seized the reigns when we got into the situation we are in. I am Irish by descent, and from Northern Ireland actually. I know a lot about what is considered terrorism. What is terrifying me now is that I am seeing the same thing in America happen that the British did to the people of Northern Ireland. And if our country should ever end up being as cruel to, and not sharing power -- I don't mean that we should be sharing power, but if they -- If we so closely allied with England, how are we going to be treated ourselves?

Also, I'd like to know what America and Osama bin Laden consider as an end game, and is there a strategy to the end? Because the IRA were in business for well over 100 years, and I would not like to see us be fighting 100 year war. Thank you.

**RM:** You raise a very important issue as to what commitment the U.S. is making at this particular time. Again, I think it's too early for us to go through the analysis, because obviously everyone must stand behind, and with the president, and what he is doing.

But there are a lot of questions being raised at this time, and people are beginning to think them through in terms of some of the alliances we're making throughout the world.

But again, I believe, and I believe very strongly about this, and I think almost all of my colleagues do as well, that this is a debate for another occasion.

In terms of your other question which was the --

**KO:** On the IRA --

**RM:** The IRA and the strategy we're using at this particular time, it's my understanding that the administration's position is that we must deal with bin Laden and the Taliban, and then we are going to be looking for other countries that are hosts to terrorist cells. Obviously Iraq is potentially on the list, and the Philippines and Indonesia as well. I think it will be done on a systematic basis.

Again, I think that the is a subject that time will have to tell whether or not we will engage in a debate on it, but I

think it's too early at this particular time for that debate to ensue. As a result of it, I think most of us are standing behind the president, or standing with the president.

But the issues you raise are legitimate issues that undoubtedly, over time, will be discussed and will be analyzed.

**KO:** If I could take one minute on that.

**RM:** Please do.

**KO:** A moment of optimism, at least one moment of optimism in a session is probably appropriate.

The shift or change in the IRA's posture or stance on its tactics, moving towards disarmament, is actually one of the most encouraging, in fact, maybe the only encouraging thing that has come out of this mess. They did so, probably, in part, in anticipation of American legislation which would then take individuals who contributed to them, and place them in jeopardy.

Within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts there are a lot of people that would fall into that category.

In fact, what the IRA did was it reacted to the legislation and to the change in environment, and the fact that acts of terror were likely to be less acceptable, by doing what they were inclined to do all along, but hadn't quite gotten around to, which was to accept disarmament. And that's something which I think leaves me with at least this much optimism.

Next question?

**RM:** You know, in Boston I wasn't going to talk about that issue. (Laughter)

**KO:** We'll make arrangements for your ride back to the airport afterwards. (Laughter) Yes.

**Q:** Thank you. Good afternoon Congressman. I appreciate very much that you took the time to elaborate the history that preceded Pearl Harbor, and that it wasn't just Pearl Harbor. I feel that the same fuse has been building with regard to Arab Americans. Since 1991 we've been talking about the risk of a possible internment.

And with the Arabs being detained, as you said, again, it's a newspaper article. The FBI grabbed the Japanese, held them for a while, took them here and there, took my grandpa. All right, nothing big had happened yet. The hyper patriotism of the Arab Americans today, which we saw with the Japanese.

Frankly, in light of these parallels, I don't share your confidence or optimism that internment is not going to happen again in this race-based case if you will, and I'm wondering if you could elaborate on why you think it's

not going to happen here.

**RM:** I appreciate your question, because I think it's a very legitimate one in terms of where we may end up. I do have a different point of view, as I mentioned, but I think it's mainly because the political leadership in this country is united about making sure that we don't discriminate. That we don't flam (?) the flames of prejudice and racism. I don't think that occurred in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. I mean it was, again, reading back the clips, and the stories, and then the stories that others have talked about, it was really the political leaders that were out there talking about how we needed to incarcerate these people. How they couldn't mix into the United States, and how they could never become loyal American citizens.

I think that's where the distinction is. That's why it's so important that the political leadership continue to speak out on this issue, in as many opportunities as we possibly can.

That's where I think the distinction really ultimately is. If that changes, then I think that we have a different situation, and we could reach a different conclusion. It's going to be up to all of us to make sure that the political leadership remains as they have been in this case.

As I said, it was immediately, two to three days after the September 11 terrorist act that President Bush spoke out and talked about the many loyal American Arabs in this country.

**JS:** I ... point to that, because I think it relates to the strategic interest that we have now in avoiding this kind of discrimination.

A lot of what's at stake now is the way the world perceives us, and the way, particularly, the Islamic world perceives us. I do think that whatever one may say about the policies that are being pursued now, and there is plenty of room for debate on them, I do feel, as Congressman Matsui has said, that our leadership recognizes the importance of avoiding falling into the very trap that some terrorists would like to put us; which is to have us start rounding up Arab Americans, and then inflame, even more than is already inflamed, the Islamic world.

**KO:** There were a number of questions that came from the other room written on the cards, and I'd like to actually pose a few of them to you in our closing moments.

One asked what changes, if any, do you feel should be made to our national immigration laws as a result of September 11? The 30 second version of the answer, or the two minute version as you see fit?

**RM:** I don't even know if I can even start to answer that question. I think -- that's a tough one. We've been working on immigration for 23 years, since I've been in Congress, anyway.

I don't know if there have to be any changes in our current immigration law. I think we ought to let things settle for a while, and then perhaps when the stress of the country is relieved somewhat, we can then reengage ourselves.

But you know, my belief is that we need to focus on a couple categories. Obviously the family reunification issue, I think that's a very important one, and secondly, you know, labor that is hard to find in the U.S., and obviously in a time of recession, it's very difficult to even justify.

The scrutiny, I think we need to make sure that there is a larger, a greater effort in making sure that those that come in have records that are not, no criminal records. We have to do a little bit closer check on them.

What criteria, I think we need to develop that profile yet. I couldn't tell you what that should be. Maybe John or somebody could add to that, but it's a very difficult question.

We're looking at this issue in a totally new light in terms of where we may end up taking immigration policies in the future.

**KO:** Another question from Brian in the other room. Should Arab American and other American leaders, political leaders, take a more prominent role to raise awareness in America of the different cultures, and to fight for rights of Asian, Arab-Americans and other minorities, condemning racial profiling ... (inaudible)? What role can Arab-American politicians play, and can they do it alone safely?

**RM:** I think this is an opportunity, frankly, for the Arab-American community to play a significant role in terms of American history in the civil rights area. Because there is a focus on them at this particular time, and they ought to begin to have a larger profile and speak at some of the schools, perhaps, and begin to engage in a more significant way than they are in the community.

I think, frankly, that again, this could pose an opportunity, or offer an opportunity to them because there is a focus that did not exist before.

**KO:** The next question actually follows on that in a peculiar way. What would you say to the average American - it's always dangerous to be saying things to average Americans -- who wants to honor the presumed innocence of his or her fellow citizens, but because of the current stage of siege, may feel, or may suspect potential acts of someone based on looks or behavior? In other words, someone who adheres to the idea that maybe we ought to act on the presumption of innocence, but they're sitting there, they're looking at people, and they're scared because of the way they look. They're making inferences on the basis of appearance?

**RM:** What I would tell the average American in this situation is to close his or her eyes, and then have, say describe a Japanese citizen, and you can describe a Japanese citizen. Describe a Frenchman, and you can describe a Frenchman.

Describe an American. You can't describe an American today because we're a multi-ethnic society and we come from all parts of the world, and we're enriched by that. Frankly, that's what makes our society and our country so great. I think it's really important that we call attention to that as much as we possibly can. That you cannot describe an American citizen by physical characteristics anymore.

We have to look upon that as a very positive sign in our moment in history.

**KO:** I think on that note, we should thank you for not following your parents, and speaking. Thank you.

(Applause)

**JS:** I want to thank Congressman Bob Matsui and Professor Kenneth Oye for that really wonderful and difficult, but really moving, I think, effort to come to grips with something that we need to discuss. As several of the questioners brought out, we need to remember our history. That's of course what history is all about, so need I say we need not, we will not repeat it, or will not repeat those versions of it that shouldn't be repeated.

But I think we've also really appreciated both your candor and your far-reaching comments on many, many aspects of the current situation. So for that I want to be particularly grateful.

I want to just point out a couple of scheduling things to the members of our audience here, others who may be planning to attend.

Tomorrow night we will have another really very exciting panel on the roots of terror, with Moorhead Kennedy, who is a former hostage and a U.S. State Department official from, hostage in the Iran hostage situation, and others.

Then I also want to point out that a forum previously scheduled for November 28th with Michael Beschloss on American presidential thinking, has been postponed until January 30th.

So with those two announcements, let me once again thank you for being with us today.

---

**John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library - Columbia Point - Boston, Massachusetts 02125**  
Local: (617) 514-1600; TTY: (617) 514-1573; Toll Free: 1-866-JFK-1960; Fax: 617-514-1652  
Email: [kennedy.library@nara.gov](mailto:kennedy.library@nara.gov)

**John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library Foundation - Columbia Point - Boston, Massachusetts 02125**  
Tel: 617-514-1550 - Fax: 617-436-3395  
Email: [Postmaster@JFKLFoundation.org](mailto:Postmaster@JFKLFoundation.org)

[www.jfklibrary.org](http://www.jfklibrary.org)

Visit [NARA](http://NARA)

*Page created February 01, 2002 / updated January 13, 2005*