

Lesson 3: Individuals Making a Difference

Resource Card



*Gift of Carolyn Okada Freeman,
Japanese American National Museum
(96.118.5)*

Name: Mike Masaoka

Lifespan: 1915-1991

Home: Salt Lake City, UT

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THIS PERSON FACE?

Because I believe in America and I trust she believes in me, and because I have received innumerable benefits from her, I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places; to support her constitution; to obey her laws; to respect her flag; to defend her against all enemies, foreign and domestic; to actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without any reservations whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a great America.

Mike Masaoka, quoted above, was an advocate for the very controversial World War II decision made by the Japanese American Citizen's League (JACL) to cooperate with the U.S. Government. The U.S. Government eventually mandated the forced exclusion and removal of 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast to concentration camps located in the interior of the United States. Masaoka felt it was his duty as a loyal American to comply with the government's wishes.

HOW DID HE HANDLE THESE CHALLENGES?

In his testimony before the House Select Committee, Masaoka made the following statements, with the intent of proving, beyond a doubt, the patriotism of the Japanese Americans:

REP. SPARKMAN: But in the event the evacuation is deemed necessary by those having charge of the defenses, as loyal Americans you are willing to prove your loyalty by cooperating?

MR. MASAOKA: Yes. I think it should be...

REP. SPARKMAN (interposing): Even at a sacrifice?

MR. MASAOKA: Oh, yes; definitely. I think that all of us are called upon to make sacrifices. I think that we will be called upon to make greater sacrifices than any others. But I think sincerely, if the military says "Move Out," we will be glad to move, because we recognize that even behind evacuation there is not just national security but also a thought as to our own welfare and security because we may be subject to mob violence and otherwise if we are permitted to remain.

The United States government made him the liaison for the entire Japanese American population held in the concentration camps. Although he himself was never imprisoned in a camp, in his position as a national JACL spokesman, he advised the government on how to run the concentration camps, and advocated for the segregation of some inmates. He opposed any legal challenges that the Japanese Americans might make to the government, believing that loyal citizens did not challenge the government.

He continued to work towards proving the loyalty of the Japanese Americans to the U.S. government. Masaoka also advocated for the reinstatement of military service for Japanese Americans. Due in part to his efforts, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed. Masaoka, along with his four brothers and many other Japanese American men, joined the 442nd, which served with honor in European military campaigns.

Following World War II, Masaoka lobbied to reform immigration and naturalization laws, resulting in the repeal of the 1924 Japanese Exclusion Act and the abolishment of the National Origins Quota Immigration System.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS PERSON HAVE?

The JACL's support of the World War II exclusion and removal of 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast remains extremely controversial, even today. However, Mike Masaoka firmly believed in his country and felt that he was only doing what it asked of him. He reflected,

Some of my friends, and some who are not my friends, also call me Moses. Moses Masaoka. They say that like the Biblical prophet, I have led my people on a long journey through the wilderness of discrimination and travail.

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Name: Rosa Louise McCauley Parks

Lifespan: 1913-

Home: Tuskegee, AL; Detroit, MI

Associated Press Photo. (detail) "Woman Fingerprinted. Mrs. Rosa Parks, Negro Seamstress, Whose Refusal to Move to the Back of a Bus Touched Off the Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama." 1956. New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THIS PERSON FACE?

As an African American woman in Alabama in the first half of the twentieth century, Rosa Parks faced many types of discrimination. Laws in the South, referred to as Jim Crow laws, forbade blacks from using the same facilities – including bathrooms, swimming pools, drinking fountains, and schools – as whites. As Mrs. Parks said, “For half of my life there were laws and customs in the South that kept African Americans segregated from Caucasians and allowed white people to treat black people without any respect. I never thought this was fair, and from the time I was a child, I tried to protest against disrespectful treatment. But it was very hard to do anything about segregation and racism when white people had the power of the law behind them.”

HOW DID SHE HANDLE THESE CHALLENGES?

After attending Alabama State Teachers’ College, Rosa Parks moved to Montgomery, Alabama, with her husband Raymond and began working with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) to fight segregation in the South. She remembers, “I worked on numerous cases with the NAACP but we did not get the publicity. There were cases of flogging, peonage, murder, and rape. We didn’t seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens.”

In December of 1955, Mrs. Parks remained seated on a crowded bus in Montgomery instead of standing so that a white passenger could have the seat. Later, Rosa Parks wrote, “As I sat there, I tried not to think about what might happen. I knew that anything was possible. I could be manhandled or beaten. I could be arrested. People have asked me if it occurred to me then that I could be the test case the NAACP had been looking for. I did not think about

that at all. In fact, if I had let myself think too deeply about what might happen to me, I might have gotten off the bus. But I chose to remain.” This action resulted in her arrest, a court challenge to Montgomery’s segregation laws, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights Movement.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS PERSON HAVE?

Journalist Rita Dove said, “When she remained seated, that simple decision eventually led to the disintegration of institutionalized segregation in the South, ushering in a new era of the Civil Rights Movement.” After moving to Michigan in 1957, Mrs. Parks and her husband founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development to offer help to young African Americans as they pursued their career and educational goals. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999.

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*National Archives and
Records Administration*

Name: Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson

Lifespan: 1919-1972

Home: Pasadena, CA; Stamford, CT

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THIS PERSON FACE?

Although he served in a segregated unit, Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson served his country during World War II. He faced discrimination and was court martialed after fighting against racial insults. After leaving the Army, Jackie Robinson played with the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues. In 1945, he signed a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers, and in 1947, he was the first African American player in the major leagues since the 19th century. Robinson was also an advocate for civil rights after his baseball career ended. He worked actively to support the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), raising money and funding enterprises to aid the advancement of African Americans.

Jackie Robinson described his integration of baseball in this way:

I guess if I could choose one of the most important moments in my life, I would go back to 1947, in the Yankee Stadium in New York City. It was the opening day of the world series and...it would be the first time that a black man would be allowed to participate...It hadn't been easy. Some of my own teammates refused to accept me because I was black. I had been forced to live with snubs and rebuffs and rejections...But the problems within the Dodgers club had been minor compared to the opposition outside. It hadn't been that easy to fight the resentment expressed by players on other teams, by the team owners, or by bigoted fans screaming 'nigger'. The hate mail piled up. There were threats against me and my family and even out-and-out attempts at physical harm to me.

HOW DID HE HANDLE THESE CHALLENGES?

Robinson quieted many of his critics by doing his job well – exceedingly well. He relied upon the support of many of his teammates, such as Pee Wee Reese, Branch Rickey, the president of the team, black fans, young children, and his family. Instead of responding to the taunts and threats, he kept his composure, played baseball and worked to help his team win. Robinson won the respect of his teammates and became a symbol of black opportunity. Even though it had opposed allowing African Americans into the major leagues, *The Sporting News*, awarded Robinson with the Rookie of the Year Award in 1947. Although he initially tolerated the insults, Robinson began speaking out against the prejudice he faced, including

umpires' calls, hotels that refused to let him stay with his teammates, and teams that refused to hire black players.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS PERSON HAVE?

Robinson "made his gift for the game into a forum for all of America to engage in a conversation that would have a lasting impact on almost every facet of our society." Major League Baseball's doors opened to other African Americans, but not until 1959 were all major league teams integrated. Jackie Robinson captured the national spotlight and served as the inspiration for songs, comic books and a movie. Robinson continued to push for more opportunity for blacks. Shortly before he died, he made a speech on the 25th anniversary of his first year with the Dodgers. He said, "I'd like to live to see a black manager, I'd like to live to see the day when there's a black man coaching at third base". The first black baseball manager, Frank Robinson, was hired by the Cleveland Indians in 1975. In 1997, Rachel Robinson was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of her husband on the 50th anniversary of Jackie's integration of baseball.

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Name: Irene Gaston Samuel

Lifespan: 1915- 1998

Home: Little Rock, AR

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THIS PERSON FACE?

Irene Samuel grew up in the segregated South, but believed in racial equality and social justice. Mrs. Samuel worked for the Federal Housing Authority in the 1930s and 1940s. She hired African American women to serve as clerks, providing them with jobs when others refused to hire them. After returning to Little Rock in 1945, she volunteered twenty to thirty hours per week for organizations like the Easter Seals. In 1958, when Little Rock closed its schools rather than continue with court-mandated integration, she joined the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, headed by Adolphine Fletcher Terry. She served as the committee's executive secretary and became a target for hate mail and harassment by segregationists. One such note proclaimed, "Rape, murder and all types of indecency will be the price because of your capitulation to the NAACP."

HOW DID SHE HANDLE THESE CHALLENGES?

Despite the climate, Samuel and the WEC continued to campaign for the re-opening and integration of Little Rock schools. They mounted a massive campaign to get the general public involved in electing a moderate slate of school board members and ousting segregationists (who had voted not to renew the contracts of 44 teachers and administrators who had taken integrationist or moderate stances during the previous school year). The WEC lined up support, ensured transportation to the polls, and ultimately aided in the successful integration and re-opening of the public schools.

After the WEC disbanded, Irene Samuel continued to campaign against segregationists like Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus. She worked to organize the African American vote, particularly in the Arkansas Delta, and later served Senator Dale Bumpers as his liaison for women's affairs and liaison for African American affairs.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS PERSON HAVE?

As historian Laura Miller noted, Irene Samuel's "sense of justice and compassion, encouraged by her family, turned into a mandate for action during the New Deal. She truly believed that the lives of the least fortunate in society could be improved through government policy. In her view, achieving this meant, simply, getting things done."

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Miller, Laura A. "At Any Rate: Irene Gaston Samuel and the Life of a Southern Liberal," 9 Jan 2004. <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/history/cahr/samuel.htm>