

When fear rewrote the Constitution, 120,000 lives were uprooted.

I AM AMERICAN



LOGLINE

An ambitious Japanese immigrant chases the American Dream—building a thriving business, a loving family, and a life of hard earned dignity—only to have everything torn away when he, his wife, and their American-born children are forcibly sent to concentration camps, where he must summon unimaginable resilience to hold his family and his hope together in the face of injustice.





This is not just history — it is a cautionary American story.

WHY IT MATTERS

This film needs to be made because it speaks to something that binds nearly every American family together: an immigrant story. Unless someone's lineage traces back to Native-born ancestors, somewhere in their family history there is a person who risked everything to pursue the promise of the American Dream. This story honors that universal journey — the courage to leave home, the determination to build something from nothing, and the belief that hard work would lead to security and belonging.

But this is more than a celebration of perseverance. It is a reckoning. By following one family whose dream was violently stripped away when they were sent to concentration camps during World War II, the film reveals how fragile that promise can be. It reminds audiences that the American Dream has, at times, been denied not because of failure or lack of patriotism, but because of fear, prejudice, and policy.

WHY NOW

This story matters now because it is not just history — it is a cautionary American story. It asks urgent questions: Who gets to belong? Who gets to be called “American”? And how quickly can rights be taken from citizens when fear outweighs justice?

By personalizing a chapter often reduced to textbooks, the film transforms statistics into faces, policies into heartbreak, and history into lived experience. It invites audiences to see themselves — or their grandparents — in this family’s struggle. In doing so, it fosters empathy, vigilance, and a deeper understanding of the responsibility that comes with democracy.

This is not simply a period piece. It is a mirror. And it is a warning.





THE STORY

When Executive Order 9066 forces a Japanese American family from their Washington State home into a desert incarceration camp, they must fight to preserve their dignity, identity, and faith in a country that has turned against them.

Set in early 1900s Seattle, an Issei picture bride leaves everything she knows in Japan to marry a man she has only seen in a photograph—only to discover not just a husband, but a partner in ambition. Together they pour their sweat and hope into a small restaurant, transforming it into a bustling cornerstone of the community. They raise Nisei American-born children who pledge allegiance to the flag, chase schoolyard dreams, and believe fully in their country. Their proudest moment comes when their 18-year-old son enlists to serve in the U.S. Army, determined to defend the nation he loves. Their hearts swell again when their eldest daughter marries her caucasian childhood sweetheart.

Then comes the crushing blow of the Attack on Pearl Harbor. Suspicion replaces friendship. Loyalty is questioned. Under Executive Order 9066, the family's American Dream collapses overnight. Their thriving restaurant is shattered, their home abandoned, their dignity assaulted. Given only a single suitcase each, they are forced into concentration camps—watching the life they built with love and sacrifice vanish in an instant.

What remains is heartbreak, resilience, and an unbreakable family bond tested in the face of profound injustice.



“GO FOR BROKE!”

While their parents and siblings were held behind barbed wire under Executive Order 9066, these young men fought on two fronts — against fascism abroad and prejudice at home. Their courage stands as one of the most powerful examples of patriotism, sacrifice, and moral complexity in American history.

They fought in Italy, France, and Germany. They became one of the most decorated units in American military history for its size and length of service.

442nd/MIS Regimental Combat Team

All-Japanese American combat unit, composed mostly of Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), many volunteering from concentration camps. Became one of the most highly decorated units in U.S. military history for its size and length of service.

Awarded

- Over 18,000 individual decorations
- More than 4,000 Purple Hearts
- 21 Medals of Honor (upgraded decades later in recognition of racial bias in earlier awards)

Military Intelligence Service

- Comprised of over 6,000 Japanese American linguists, many trained at the Military Intelligence Service Language School.
- Served in the Pacific Theater against Japan.
- Translated captured documents, intercepted communications, interrogated prisoners, and provided critical battlefield intelligence.

Their work

- Shortened the war in the Pacific.
- Saved countless American lives.
- Helped plan major campaigns, including preparations for the invasion of Japan.

STORY OVERVIEW

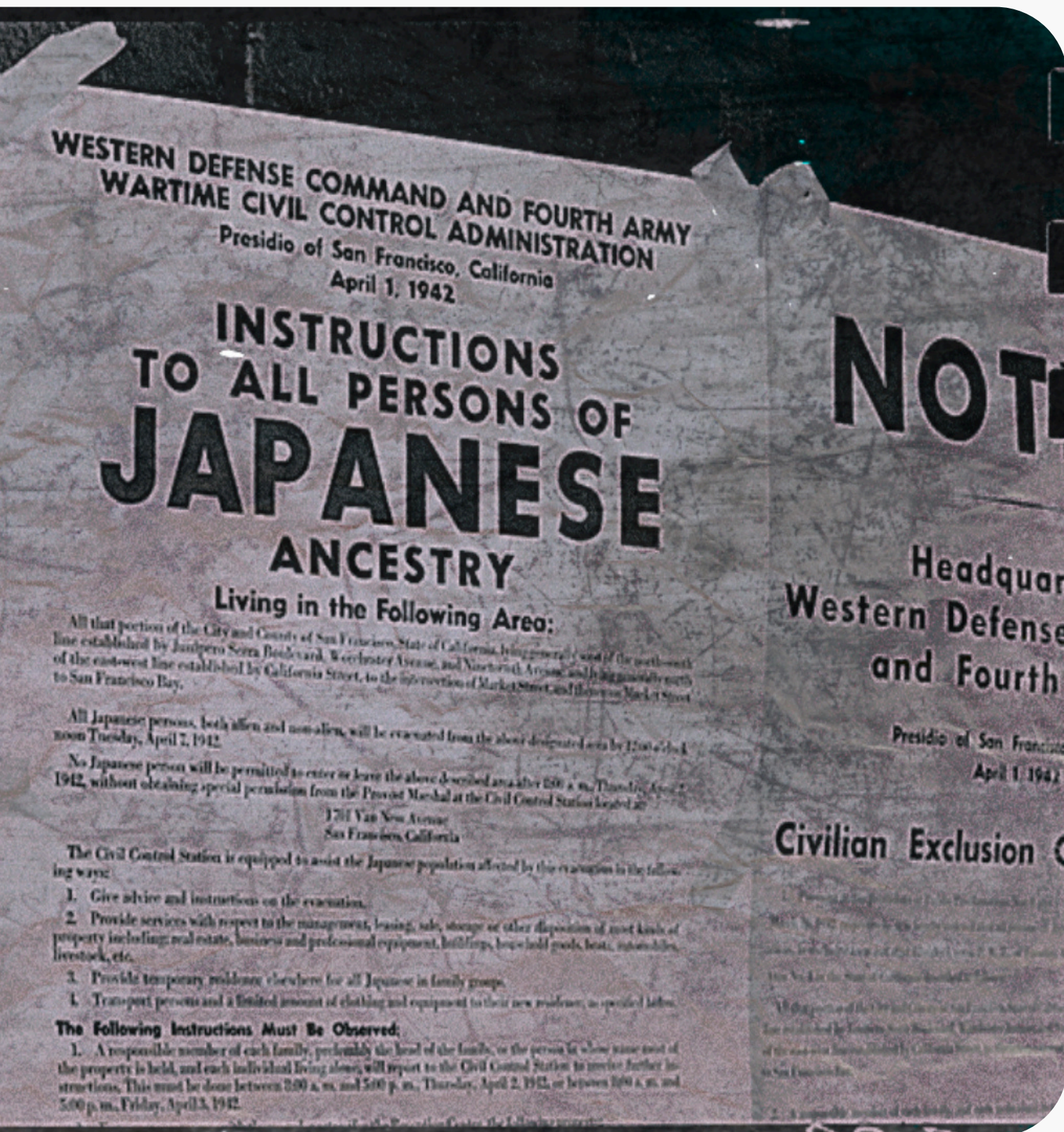
Act I – The American Dream

Act II – Concentration Camp & War

Act III – Aftermath



HOW YOU CAN HELP



This film cannot be made without a community that believes in its importance. We are in the works of securing a fiscal sponsor, which means all donations will be tax-deductible. Your contribution is not just a gift, it is a meaningful investment in preserving American history, amplifying underrepresented voices, and bringing this urgent story to the screen



Make a Tax-Deductible Donation

Every dollar moves this project forward — from archival research and development to production and outreach. No amount is too small to make an impact.

Become a Major Partner

For larger donors and impact investors, there are opportunities to play a transformative role in bringing this film to life while aligning with a project of cultural and historical significance.

Spread the Word

Share the project with your network. Introduce us to potential donors, organizations, and institutions that value historical storytelling and civil rights narratives.

Corporate & Foundation Support

We welcome partnerships with foundations, cultural institutions, and socially conscious brands that believe in stories that matter.





ABOUT THE CREATOR

Kelsi Umeko is a Yonsei (fourth-generation) Japanese American filmmaker whose family story is deeply rooted in one of the most defining chapters of American history. During World War II, her grandparents were among the more than 120,000 Japanese Americans forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated under Executive Order 9066.

Her Dad's side of the family were sent to Tule Lake and then Topaz concentration camp and her Mom's side of the family were sent to Heart Mountain concentration camp.

Her grandfather left concentration camp to serve in the Military Intelligence Service, using his language skills to support U.S. military efforts in the Pacific. Following the war, he became part of Douglas MacArthur's honor guard and worked as his translator while stationed in Japan — a profound and complex role for a Japanese American soldier whose own family had been imprisoned by the country he served.

For Kelsi, this film is not simply a historical project — it is personal. It is an act of remembrance, justice, and generational healing. She is driven to honor not only her grandparents' resilience, but the untold stories of thousands of families whose patriotism endured even when their rights did not. Through this film, she seeks to ensure their courage, sacrifice, and humanity are never forgotten.

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THANK YOU