

I AM AMERICAN



A cinematic journey of sacrifice, belonging and what it means to be an American.

THE IMMIGRANT

1915

A Japanese picture bride crosses the Pacific to join the husband she knows only through a photograph. She arrives carrying a suitcase, courage, and the hope of building a life in America.

CITIZENSHIP

A NEW GENERATION

Their children grow up in American classrooms, reciting the pledge beside their classmates. Born here, this is the only country they know.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

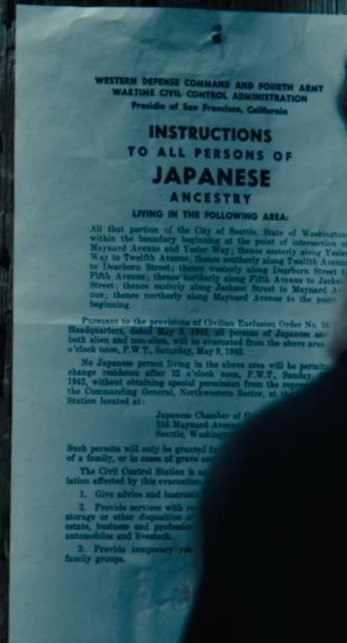
ROOTS TAKE HOLD

As the restaurant thrives, so does the family. They find friendship, belonging, and a home in the country their children have always known.

PEARL HARBOR + EO 9066

FEAR BECOMES POLICY

After Pearl Harbor, fear and prejudice become government policy. Under Executive Order 9066, the family is forced from their home and community and incarcerated in a concentration camp.



PRISONERS

BEHIND BARBED WIRE

The family is incarcerated along with approximately 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry. Roughly two-thirds are American citizens-imprisoned without due process, strictly because of ancestry.



A young boy with dark hair is looking upwards with a curious expression. He is positioned behind a dark horizontal bar, possibly a railing or a piece of furniture. The background is dark and out of focus, with some warm, yellowish light sources visible on the right side, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

THE FINISHED FILM

A HISTORY PRESERVED ON SCREEN

NARRATIVE SHORT

40 MINUTES

SHOT ON

ARRI ALEXA 35 XTREME

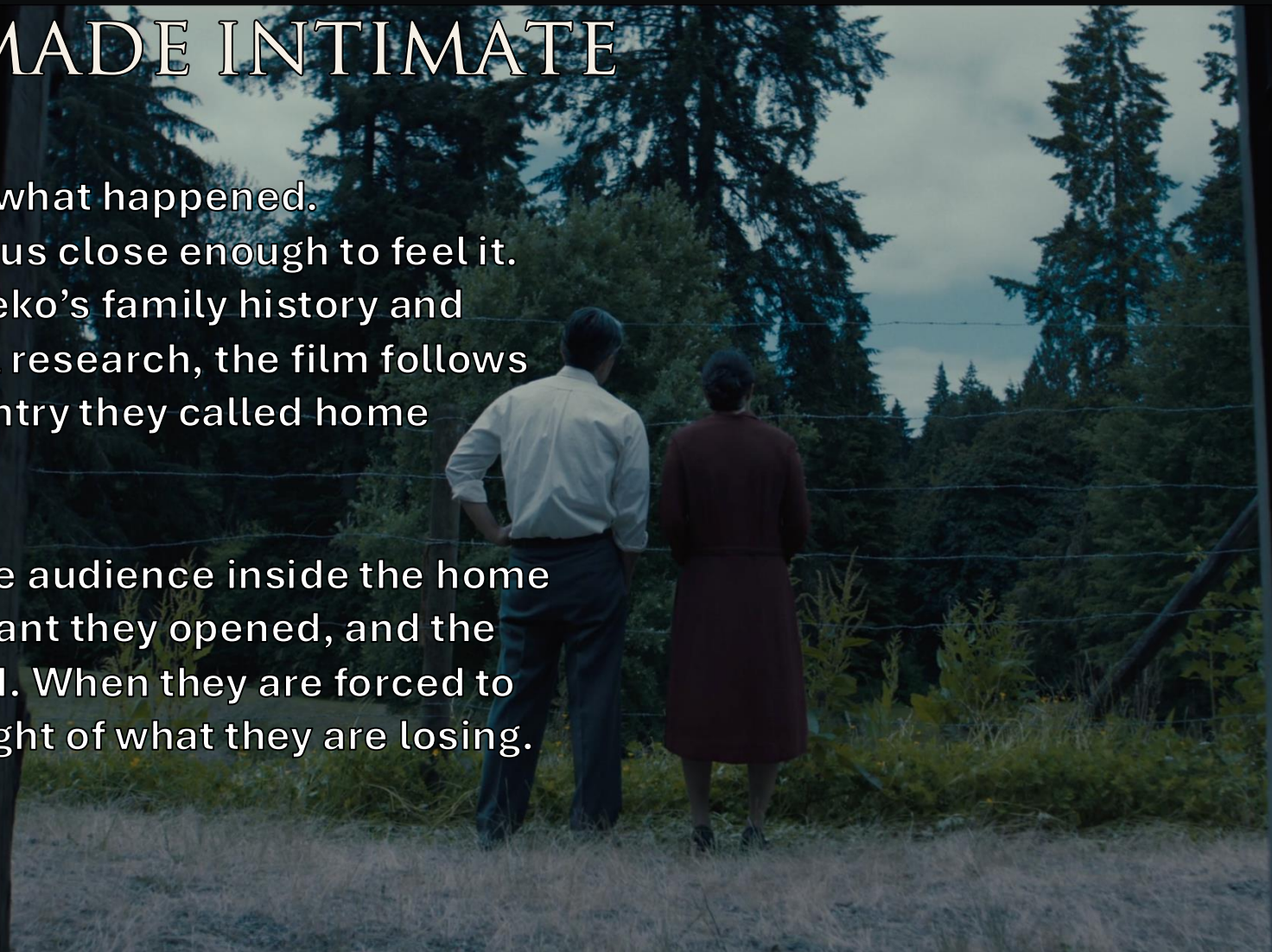
STATUS

FINISHED FILM

HISTORY MADE INTIMATE

History books record what happened. I Am American brings us close enough to feel it. Drawn from Kelsi Umeko's family history and grounded in historical research, the film follows one family as the country they called home forces them from it.

The camera places the audience inside the home they built, the restaurant they opened, and the community they loved. When they are forced to leave, we feel the weight of what they are losing.



KEY CREATIVE TEAM

CREDITS YOU MAY RECOGNIZE

MASAMI KAGAYAMA

Editor

- Shogun
- Big Brother
- Oh Lucy!
- Bid America!

NANCY HVASTA LEONARDI

Hair & Makeup
Department Head

- Star Trek: Next Gen
- Memoirs of a Geisha
- Back to the Future
- Yellowstone

ERIK VENTURA

Colorist • Company 3

- SWAT
- The Boys
- The Morning Show
- Avatar: TV Series

MIU SATO

Composer

- Burn Order: Rachel Maddow
- BM in Screen Scoring from NYU
- Recipient of Alan Menken scholarship

THREE PATHS TO AUDIENCE

- 01 **FILM FESTIVALS**
Build recognition, press and momentum through a targeted festival run.
- 02 **EDUCATION**
Give educators a story that brings history off the page and opens a discussion about the incarceration of Japanese Americans.
- 03 **PRIVATE SCREENINGS**
Partner with organizations and people who are interested in hosting a screening for their community.



FROM HISTORY

SIGNIFICANT LOCATIONS

- PANAMA HOTEL
- VIRGINIA V STEAMSHIP
- BOTHELL HISTORICAL MUSEUM
- NW RAILWAY MUSEUM
- INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT-SEATTLE

ARTIFACTS

- SUITCASE FROM CAMP
- MATTRESS CASING FROM CAMP
- NAME TAGS WITH REAL NAMES AND NUMBERS ASSIGNED
- MIS MILITARY UNIFORM

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

19 FEBRUARY 2027

85 YEARS SINCE EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066

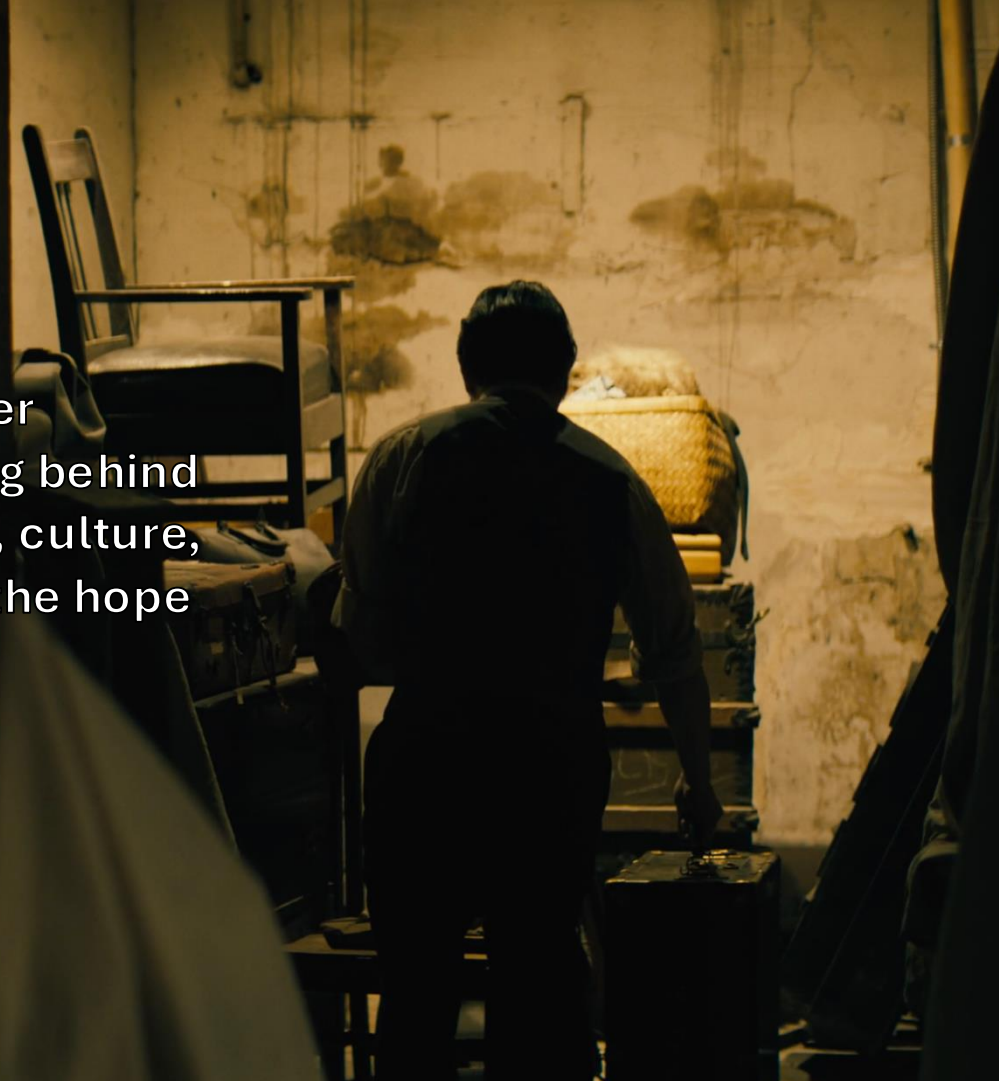
Survivors of incarceration are now in their late eighties and nineties. This film allows their voices and lived experiences to never be forgotten.

As we mark this anniversary, we honor those who lived through incarceration by keeping their stories alive and passing them forward to the next generation.

THE STORY IS STILL AMERICAN

BELONGING

This family's journey is part of a larger American story; an immigrant leaving behind their home country, native language, culture, family and belonging to chase after the hope of the American Dream.



THE PAST BECOMES A QUESTION FOR THE PRESENT

HELP CARRY THE STORY FORWARD

GIVE

We are still accepting tax-deductible donations through our fiscal sponsor; NW Film Forum. Independent filmmaking is made possible when people believe in the story and choose to stand behind it.

SHARE

Help us spread the word—with educators, cultural organizations, community leaders, historical societies, and people who are passionate about preserving this history.

HOST

If you or someone you know is interested in hosting a private screening, please contact us to begin the conversation.

A tax-deductible project fiscally sponsored by Northwest Film Forum

PRESS COVERAGE

IN THE PRESS

NEWS

King 5 New Day

Fox 13 Seattle

PODCAST

The Two Oh Six

Kiro News Radio

EDITORIAL

NW Asian Weekly

KELSI UMEKO

WRITER|DIRECTOR|PRODUCER



Kelsi Umeko is a Japanese American writer, director, producer, and actor committed to telling authentic stories that are grounded in truth. Her work as an actor showed her how much a story can change when the people it represents also have a voice in its development. She began creating her own films to bring Asian American perspectives to the writing and directing process, where the choices that shape a story are made.

I Am American grew from Kelsi's own family history. She drew on her great-grandmother's diaries, childhood memories shared by her great-uncles, and years of archival research to shape the characters, dialogue, and performances. Details from her family's traditions give the film a sense of daily life beyond the historical record.

By telling this story through one family's experience, Kelsi brings audiences close to the people who lived it. The film preserves memories passed down through generations and invites viewers to consider this chapter of American history through a personal lens.

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