

## **Undergraduate Commencement**

### **Conferral of Honorary Bachelor's Degrees to Seattle University Nisei students whose educations were disrupted by their WWII removal and incarceration**

**Sunday, June 12, 2011, Key Arena**

Today, the university confers honorary degrees on its Japanese American students who were forced to abandon their educations during World War II.

Would the family members representing those former students today please rise so that the audience can recognize you?

You may be seated.

Sixty-nine years ago, during World War II, 15 students of Japanese ancestry were attending Seattle University, then known as Seattle College. They—like those of you graduating here today—were young men and women, full of hopes and dreams, and they treasured their educations as pathways to achieving those hopes and dreams.

But during the spring of 1942, they were ordered to leave their West Coast homes and this university community because the country was at war with Japan—and they looked like the enemy. Some were able to leave for the interior of the country before internment orders were issued, but most were among the 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry sent to desolate camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. 2/3rds of those who were incarcerated were second-generation Japanese Americans, or Nisei—American citizens by birth.

We now know the removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans to be one of the worst deprivations of civil liberties in this country's history. In the words of the Congressional commission that investigated the WWII incarceration, the wartime orders issued against Japanese Americans "[were] not justified by military necessity." Instead, these decisions were based on "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

We confer these honorary degrees on our Japanese American students who were forced to leave Seattle University. We do this to welcome them back to the university they were forced to leave and to give them, at least in some symbolic way, the degrees they would have earned had they been able to remain and complete their educations.

We confer these degrees, as well, to recognize their courage and perseverance in surviving the injustice of their forced removal. Many were able to leave the confines of the camps to finish their degrees elsewhere. Two went into the armed services. Many went on to accomplished careers and made enduring contributions to their communities and industry. They became treasured and beloved spouses, parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. In moving forward to build rich, productive lives, they show us the strength of the human spirit to survive and thrive, even in the wake of great adversity.

In awarding these honorary degrees, we also affirm Seattle University's commitment to justice. We remember the lives and experiences of these Nisei students and, in so doing, learn the danger of prejudice and fear and the importance of moral leadership during times of national stress. They teach us, in real, human terms, the need for the kinds of leaders we strive to educate at Seattle University—leaders for a more just and humane world.

And so, to remember the great wrongs they suffered when they were taken from our campus and their educations,

to welcome them back into the Seattle University community, and

to recognize what they teach us about courage and strength in the face of adversity,

it is with deep respect and admiration that we confer upon the university's WWII Japanese American students the degree of bachelor of [arts or science], *honoris causa*, *nunc pro tunc* (now for then).

Three of our recipients are still living, but are unable to be present today. Eight of our recipients are represented here today by family. May I now call the names of these honorees and ask their family representatives to the stage.

1. John Edward Fujiwara, accepting his honorary degree on his behalf is his daughter Sister Makiko Fujiwara
2. Shigeko (Iseri) Hirai, accepting her honorary degree is her daughter Shirley Stolp
3. May (Shiga) Hornback, accepting her honorary degree are her daughter Frances Jeché (Yay-kee) and son Vern Hornback
4. June (Koto) Sakaguchi, accepting her honorary degree is her daughter Laura Sakaguchi Hall
5. Madeleine (Ma-de-lyn) (Iwata) Uyehara, accepting her honorary degree is her son Thomas Uyehara
6. Joanne Misako (Oyabe) Watanabe, accepting her honorary degree is her daughter Mary Jo Watanabe
7. Thomas Tamotsu Yamauchi, accepting his honorary degree is his son Doug Yamauchi
8. Lillia Uri (Satow) Matsuda, accepting her honorary degree is her daughter, Terry Matsuda

Uri Matsuda was a 19-year-old nursing student at Seattle College when she was forced to abandon her studies, sent to live in a horse stall at the Puyallup Fairgrounds, and then incarcerated at Minidoka in Idaho.

She went on to complete her education in Illinois; to work as a nurse there and then at Providence Hospital here in Seattle; and to marry and raise a family.

Uri has inspired all of us who have come to know her with her strength, wisdom, and good humor, and, for that, we will always be deeply grateful.

Uri was scheduled, and truly hoped, to be present today to accept these honorary degrees on behalf of all of the recipients. She was, however, unexpectedly hospitalized last week—we send her our good thoughts for a speedy recovery. Her daughter, Terry Matsuda, has agreed to share the remarks that Uri prepared.