

Chapter Twenty-One: Norman Mineta_1950s

In Chapter Twenty-One titled "Norman Mineta," we explore the resilience and journey of Norman Mineta following the closure of incarceration camps where Japanese Americans had been detained during WWII. Upon their release, families were urged to disperse and assimilate into mainstream American life, striving to prove their loyalty to the nation—advice echoed by his father, Kay. After military service, Norm confronted racial prejudice when trying to rent an apartment, which fueled his passion for politics as he transitioned to his father's insurance business.

Mineta's political career took shape as he joined the San Jose city council and eventually became the city's mayor—significant milestones for an Asian American in the 1950s. A connection with childhood friend Alan Simpson, the delinquent turned distinguished lawyer, exemplifies their unlikely yet enduring friendship. They balanced their opposing political views with mutual respect and affection throughout their careers, laughing and arguing in equal measure.

As a Congress member alongside Daniel Inouye, Mineta advocated for reparations and justice for Japanese Americans wronged during the war. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 passed due to bipartisan support, reflecting the ongoing struggle for recognition and dignity. President Reagan acknowledged the injustices faced by Japanese Americans during his signing of the act, reinforcing the importance of these historical corrections.

Norm continued to serve, becoming the first Asian American cabinet member, under both President Clinton as Secretary of Commerce and President Bush as Secretary of Transportation. His tenure included immediate and decisive actions following the 9/11 attacks, where he ensured planes were grounded to prevent further tragedies, reflecting a commitment to justice and safety.

Throughout his life, Mineta served as a beacon against racial profiling, urging a commitment to equity that stemmed from his own experiences of injustice. The chapter closes with reflections on Mineta and Simpson's founding of the Mineta-Simpson Institute, dedicated to remembering the lessons of the past while celebrating their shared laughter. As both figures age, their legacy emphasizes service to others and the fight for social justice as the true markers of historical significance.