

Sam Mihara

Sam Mihara is a second-generation Japanese American (Nisei) born and raised in San Francisco. When World War II broke out, the United States government using armed military guards forced Sam, age 9, and his family to move to the Heart Mountain camp. It was one of 10 such camps in the country that together housed over 120,000 West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry, most of them U.S.-born American citizens. Sam and his family lived in one room, 20 by 20 feet square in a barrack for the war's duration.

After the war ended, the family returned home to San Francisco. Sam attended U.C. Berkeley undergraduate and UCLA graduate schools, where he earned engineering degrees. He became a rocket scientist and joined the Boeing Company where he became an executive on space programs. Following retirement, Sam changed careers and is now a regular visiting lecturer for the University of California. And he is a national speaker on the topic of mass imprisonment in the U.S. – one of the few, if not the only, former prisoners who speaks across the country about his experience.

Sam helped in the preservation of the Heart Mountain historic prison site in Northwest Wyoming and is now a board member of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, the non-profit organization that oversees the National Historic Landmark site. The site today includes an award-winning museum / school with original camp structures and a walking trail describing the camp.

Sam speaks to educators, schools, colleges, libraries, museums, government attorneys, law schools, law firms and other interested organizations about his war-time experience. The program has been seen and rated very highly by all of his audiences including National Council of History Educators (spoke 5 times), U.C. Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard Law, Princeton and the U.S. Department of Justice. He has spoken to over 50,000 teachers and students in the last few years.

And Sam always ends his presentations with a discussion of the lessons learned from this injustice and how the lessons apply to today's problems in immigration and racial or religious issues.