

# **AN AMERICAN STORY: NORMAN MINETA AND HIS LEGACY**

**DIRECTED BY DIANNE FUKAMI  
PRODUCED BY DIANNE FUKAMI & DEBRA NAKATOMI**



**TRT: 59:00 MINUTES  
IN ENGLISH**

**PRESS CONTACT:  
DSF COMMUNICATIONS  
DANIELLE FAIRLEE  
[Danielle@dsfcommunications.com](mailto:Danielle@dsfcommunications.com)**

**[WWW.MINETALEGACYPROJECT.COM](http://WWW.MINETALEGACYPROJECT.COM)**

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**SYNOPSIS**

**SHORT SYNOPSIS**

It took 7 years for the filmmakers to convince Norman Mineta to agree to a documentary. His response: "I'm just a regular guy." His *American Story* is a path from shame and humiliation as a child in a U.S. concentration camp to seeking justice for all Americans while serving 20 years in Congress and in two presidential cabinets.

**LONG SYNOPSIS**

***An American Story: Norman Mineta and His Legacy*** is a film about injustice, redemption, and a burning desire for all people to be treated equally.

A son of immigrants and forced into a U.S. World War II concentration camp as a child, Norman Mineta became the first Asian American mayor of a major city (San Jose, California); leading to a distinguished 20-year career in Congress; the first Asian American Cabinet member, serving two U.S. Presidents, a Democrat and Republican.

He never forgot his roots or the shame and humiliation he and his family felt during WWII, leading the way for an apology from the U.S. government and redress for Japanese Americans. On September 11, 2001, his leadership as U.S. Secretary of Transportation, would ensure that what happened to Japanese Americans during WWII did not happen to any other group based on ethnicity or religion.

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**BIOGRAPHY OF NORMAN MINETA**

Norman Mineta is a man of many firsts: the first Asian American mayor of a major city; the first Japanese American from the mainland to be elected to Congress; and, the first Asian American to serve in a presidential cabinet.

But beyond these groundbreaking achievements, he personifies our dreams and aspirations. Norm is the son of immigrants forcibly removed from his home with his family to spend years in an internment camp during World War II. And yet, he remains a patriot, has led with integrity achieving a long and storied career as a public servant and continues to champion the underserved and mentor young leaders.

Mineta's career in public service has been both distinguished and unique. For almost 30 years, Mineta represented San Jose, California, first on the City Council, then as mayor and serving 21 years as a Member of Congress. Mineta served as chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Public Works and Transportation from 1992 to 1994, and chaired the Subcommittees on Aviation and Surface Transportation. He was the primary author of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.

Throughout that time, Mineta was an advocate of the burgeoning technology industry. He worked to encourage new industries, spur job growth, and supported the development of the infrastructure needed to accommodate the technology industry and its tremendous growth.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton appointed Mineta Secretary of Commerce. There, Mineta was known for his work on technology issues, bridging the digital divide, achieving international and intergovernmental cooperation on complex fisheries issues, and for streamlining the patent and trademark process.

President George W. Bush appointed Mineta Secretary of Transportation, where he served until 2006. Following the horrific terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, Mineta grounded all aviation flights and then guided the creation of the Transportation Security Administration—an agency with more than 65,000 employees—marking the largest mobilization of a new federal agency since World War II.

He is well known for his work in the areas of transportation—including aviation, surface transportation and infrastructure—and national security. He is recognized for his accomplishments in economic development, science and technology policy, foreign and domestic trade, budgetary issues and civil rights.

Mineta was also a vice president of Lockheed Martin, where he oversaw the first successful implementation of the EZ-Pass system in New York State. Today, Mineta is the President and CEO of Mineta and Associates, LLC.

Recognized for his leadership, Mineta has received numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest civilian honor in the United States—and the

Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy, which is awarded for significant public service of enduring value to aviation in the United States. In February 2016, he was named a Chubb Fellow at Yale University. While in Congress, he was the co-founder of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and chair of the National Civil Aviation Review Commission in 1997.

He is married to Danealia (Deni) Mineta and has two sons, David K. Mineta and Stuart S. Mineta and two stepsons, Robert M. Brantner and Mark D. Brantner.

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**FILMMAKER STATEMENT**

**1. How did this film come about? How did you get into filmmaking? How did this particular idea originate?**

Secretary Mineta is an icon in the Asian American and Japanese American community. For more than five decades, he has been a real trailblazer with accomplishments in public service and elected office, all while retaining his stellar reputation as a man of integrity who is easily accessible and never forgets a name or face. As an American of Japanese ancestry, he faced legal discrimination of the worst kind when he and his family were incarcerated during World War II along with 120,000 people of Japanese descent. How could we tell his story in a way that would inspire others? That was the genesis of the film.

After nearly 15 years working in a local television newsroom, I became involved in documentary filmmaking in 1993 with my involvement in the TV documentary “Separate Lives, Broken Dreams” about the Chinese Exclusion Act.

**2. Why did you make this film? What inspired you?**

Secretary Mineta’s story needed to be told but even more urgently so after the 2016 presidential election. Co-producer Debra Nakatomi and I realized that it was important to raise the visibility of a man who had been subjected to civil liberties violations as a child and who later spent more than 50 years in public service, including appointments in the presidential cabinets of a Democrat and Republican. There is an urgency to remind the American public that there are people who serve our government with integrity, practice civility, and believe in bipartisanship. As the son of immigrants combined with his own experiences during World War II, Mineta’s story is also a cautionary tale about what can happen when polarization and xenophobia are promoted as domestic policies.

**3. How long did it take to make the film, from concept to finish?**

I had been trying to persuade Secretary Mineta to cooperate in a biographical documentary for nearly a decade but his modesty and self-effacing manner were obstacles. Whenever I saw him at community and social events I would approach him with the query, “Norm, when are you going to let me make that documentary about you?” And he would reply “Aw, I’m just a regular Joe; no one is interested in my story.” Expecting the usual repartee, I approached him in November 2013 and was dumbfounded when he said instead, “Let’s talk.” After a long discussion with him and his wife Deni, Debra Nakatomi and I began actively fundraising in 2014 and working on the documentary. It has taken more than four years.

**4. Share a story about filming; anything that you found interesting along the way with your filming journey.**

We were able to video a number of extended interviews with Secretary Mineta. During one of our final interviews, I asked him a question about the American flag pin he always wears on his lapel, anticipating a response about patriotism. Instead he answered that he wears the flag pin because there are times he still feels like a foreigner in his own country, especially when strangers see him and have a questioning look. But when they see his flag pin, they know he's an American citizen. As he is telling this to me on camera, I have tears streaming down my face. I couldn't believe that a man who has given more than 50 years of his life in public service as mayor, Congressman, and a member of two presidential cabinets, still felt the need to wear an American flag pin as a defense mechanism against people who see his Asian American face and silently question his country of origin. As third generation Americans of Japanese ancestry, both Debra and I were deeply touched by this and were reminded of our personal experiences receiving praise from strangers on our ability to speak English fluently or their insistence on asking where we are "really" from instead of accepting that we are from California and that our parents were as well. It is a reminder that for people of color in the U.S., no matter how assimilated one has become or what one has accomplished, that we still are not seen and accepted as Americans.

**5. Did the film change from your original idea for the film as you were filming or in post?**

What makes this documentary film unique is the concept of the Mineta Legacy Project. The film is one component of the Mineta Legacy Project. The other important component is the free online educational curriculum that is being developed concurrently by the Stanford Program for International Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) which will ensure that Norman Mineta's story and contributions will have an even longer life than the film. Whereas in many cases, a curriculum is a byproduct of the film, in our case, we have been creating independent videos for the curriculum that will never be a part of the film. An example is filming a roundtable discussion with high school students who talk about their own present-day experiences with discrimination, social activism, and leadership. SPICE's Dr. Gary Mukai and Rylan Sekiguchi have created an exciting modular-based curriculum for high school and university educators that uses Mineta's life and experiences as a touchpoint to educate students about themes that include immigration, civic engagement, leadership, U.S.-Japan relations, and justice and reconciliation.

**6. What were the challenges in making this film?**

Initially we had trouble getting funding. Traditional grantmakers were not interested and our NEH panel felt that a documentary film about Norman Mineta would not be "sexy" enough. Then two things happened which dramatically changed the fundraising landscaping for us: Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 and Dr. Paul and Hisako Terasaki and Sachiko Kuno made significant contributions to our fundraising effort. Suddenly others realized that this project was going to happen, creating momentum and growing interest.

The other challenge is that Secretary Mineta had back surgery during our filming schedule and a number of shoots had to be changed during his recovery.

**7. What were the successes that you had in making this film?**

We were able to interview both former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton for the film. It took tenacity and more than two years of effort to schedule these, since they are both so busy. Although our time with them was short, both presidents gave us wonderful interviews and it was clear they both have tremendous respect for Secretary Mineta.

**8. What do you want audiences to take away from this film?**

Norman Mineta's story is a real-life version of the American Dream. The son of immigrants, he and his family are incarcerated during World War II, and not only survive, but thrive. Mineta became a national leader while retaining his integrity and honor and never lost his humility. We hope that our audiences see his story and think "I want to get involved. I want to make a difference. I can do that."

**9. Was there a something special technically that you utilized in making this film - your cameras or sound or editing etc... and why were these important.**

Our Director of Photography is Robin Mortarotti, a dedicated artist who has more notes in his binder than we do. His eye for detail resulted in artistry at the Heart Mountain, Wyoming Relocation Center, the internment camp where Mineta and his family were held. There, he shot some scenes in black and white and helped set the tone for that bleak period in U.S. history.

**10. Where do you find inspiration or who/what has influenced you as a filmmaker?**

I look back at the films by Loni Ding, Felicia Lowe, Bob Nakamura, and Steven Okazaki who took our community stories and made them live on the screen so that they became part of the fabric of American history and educated people. Their determination and vision set the bar for what good storytelling and filmmaking should be.

**11. Anything else you want to add about the making of the film and it's importance?**

We began this film with Secretary Mineta's blessing in 2014, we knew his story was compelling and would resonate with a broad audience but couldn't have anticipated the shift that would occur following the 2016 election, upending our political environment and challenging the very principles and issues that Norm has committed his career and life to.

Now, more than ever, his life story resonates deeply with America's core values. We've received scores of comments that this project is more urgent than ever and that his story is a timely reminder of our rights guaranteed by our Constitution and responsibilities we all share to guarding and protecting the values of equity, fairness and inclusion.

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**PRODUCTION CREW**  
**BIOGRAPHIES**

**Lawrence R. Hott, Executive Producer**

Hott has been producing documentary films since 1978, when he left the practice of law to join Florentine Films. His awards include an Emmy, two Academy Award nominations, a George Foster Peabody Award, the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, the Erik Barnouw OAH History Award, five American Film Festival Blue Ribbons, fourteen CINE Golden Eagles, screenings at Telluride, and first-place awards from the San Francisco, Chicago, National Educational, and New England Film Festivals. He has produced and directed two dozen films for national PBS broadcast.

**Dianne Fukami, Co-Producer/Director**

Fukami has produced, directed, and written more than a half-dozen documentaries on the Asian-American experience (mostly on Japanese-American history) which have been broadcast on PBS stations across the country. *Separate Lives, Broken Dreams*, about the Chinese Exclusion Act, was nominated for a national Emmy Award; *Starting Over: Japanese Americans After the War* has received many scholarly citations for its first-person anecdotes. Her most recent documentary, *Stories From Tohoku*, was showcased at CAAMFest in 2014 (formerly the San Francisco Asian International Film Festival) and screened at film festivals in New York and Los Angeles.

**Debra Nakatomi, Co-Producer**

Nakatomi is founder of a strategic communications firm that for over 25 years has developed communications and civic engagement campaigns promoting equity and social change. She is an advisor to executives and mission-driven organizations on communications and culture change. Nakatomi's documentary career began with the co-production of *Stories From Tohoku*, with Dianne Fukami in 2014, a film about the survivors of Japan's 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. The film aired on public television stations and screened throughout the U.S. and Japan.

**Ken Chowder, Writer**

Chowder has scripted over 30 documentary films broadcast on PBS, NBC, TBS, Discovery, AE, and BBC, and published three acclaimed novels with Harper/Collins. His films have been nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary, won the Primetime Emmy, duPont-Columbia Award, Peabody Award, and Erik Barnouw History Award, and been Best Documentary at many festivals, including the American Film Festival. Credits include 7 films for PBS' *The American Experience*, *An American Masters*, and 7 National Geographic films. His articles have appeared in *Smithsonian*, *Audubon*, *American Heritage*, and more. He's been writer or co-writer for over a dozen NEH-sponsored films that have garnered awards, acclaim, and wide distribution nationally and internationally.

**Robin Mortarotti, Director of Photography**

Mortarotti is an award-winning filmmaker with over thirty-five years of experience as producer and director of photography on feature, documentary, commercial, and promotional films. Robin has been the recipient of numerous national and international awards, including C.I.N.E. Golden Eagle, the Council of International Non-theatrical Events, the U.S. Industrial Film



Festival, Columbia/DuPont and Sigma Delta Chi awards, as well as a local daytime Emmy, an Academy Award nomination for “Enrique’s Story” and numerous awards from Eastman Kodak Company.

**Hailey Yang, Editor**

Yang was a news editor for Link Media in San Francisco, California and worked on “LinkAsia”, a weekly half-hour show about Asia. She was a documentary editor for Kia motors and commercial video editor for Clarins, Simpatico Homes and Laneige.

**Derek Nakamoto, Composer**

Nakamoto is a veteran producer and composer with a 30-year career of producing and arranging for some of the most influential music artists. He has composed original music recorded by some of the world's most prestigious ensembles. His extensive musical background has allowed him to work on a variety of eclectic projects. From string arrangements for Grammy winning artists and production credits to full orchestra scores, Nakamoto forges textures and harmonies from different cultures and eras into a unique piece that is sure to move the audience.

**Amy Watanabe, Associate Producer**

Watanabe is an Account Executive at Nakatomi & Associates. Her previous experience focused on civil rights and advocacy work and developing the political pipeline and leadership for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders both locally and nationally. Amy received her bachelor’s degree in Communication Studies and minor in Asian American Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Camille Obata, Production Assistant**

Obata graduated from the University of California, Riverside with a bachelor’s degree in Media and Cultural Studies and a minor in Sociology. This is the first documentary she has worked on. It was both her interest in understanding the ways in which media influences culture, and vice versa, along with her experiences as a Yonsei (fourth generation Japanese American) that has brought her on board the Mineta Legacy Project

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**TIMELINE/MILESTONES**

- **Born:** November 12, 1931 (86 years old), San Jose, CA
- **Spouse:** Danealia “Deni” Brantner Mineta
- **Children:** David & Stuart Mineta; Bob & Mark Brantner
  
- **San Jose Connection**
  - Born and raised in San Jose (except WWII incarceration)
  - Graduated from San Jose High School (elected Student Body President)
  - San Jose City Councilmember 1967-1971
  - Mayor of San Jose 1971-1975
  - Member of Congress from 13<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> District from 1975-1995
  
- **World War II Incarceration**
  - Mineta family forcibly removed from San Jose home to Santa Anita Racetrack
  - 1942 - Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Wyoming
  
- **Education:** UC Berkeley, B.A. in 1953 from School of Business Administration
  
- **Military Service:** U.S. Army in the Military Intelligence Corps, 1953-1956
  
- **Congressional Highlights**
  - Sponsored Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which granted reparations and redress to Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II
  - Sponsored Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which shifted federal transportation policy and funding from highway construction-based to intermodal, 1991
  - Co-author of Americans with Disabilities Act, 1991
  - Co-founded Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), 1994
  - Sponsored or co-sponsored a total of 479 bills during 21 years in Congress
  
- **Presidential Cabinet Member**
  - Secretary of Commerce under President Bill Clinton, 2000-2001
  - Secretary of Transportation under President George W. Bush, 2001-2006
  
- **Other**
  - First Asian American mayor of a major U.S. city
  - First Asian American member of Congress from the mainland
  - First Asian American member of a presidential cabinet
  - Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport named in 2002
  - Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom (highest civilian honor) by President George W. Bush in 2006

**AN AMERICAN STORY: NORMAN MINETA AND HIS LEGACY**  
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**FULL CREDIT ROLL**

**DIRECTOR/PRODUCER**

Dianne Fukami

**PRODUCER**

Debra Nakatomi

**WRITER**

Ken Chowder

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Lawrence R. Hott

**NARRATOR**

Wendy Tokuda

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Robin Mortarotti

**EDITOR**

Hailey Yang

**ASSOCIATE PRODUCER**

Amy Watanabe

**CONSULTING PRODUCER**

Marc Smolowitz

**COMPOSER**

Derek Nakamoto

**SOUND DESIGN & MIX**

Philip Perkins

**AUDIO**

Philip Perkins

Hilary Stewart

**MUSIC SCORE MIX**

Glenn Suravech

**ADDITIONAL CAMERA**

Todd Burger

Steve Cohen

Kevin Jones  
Andy Kuester  
Zane Miyamoto  
Allan Palmer  
Jayme Roy  
Brian Walker  
Max Warren  
James Wu

**ADDITIONAL AUDIO**

Steven Dung  
James Lindsey  
David Wendlinger

**GRIP**

Daniel Anchetta  
Todd Burger  
Gemma Doll-Grossman

**PRODUCTION ASSISTANT**

Camille Obata  
David Dung  
Elyse Mueller  
Lindsay Nakano  
Lisa Peterson Hampshire

**PUBLICISTS**

13th Gen  
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David Magdael & Associates

**EDIT SUPPORT**

Steven Dung

**COLORIST**

Gary Coates

**GRAPHIC DESIGN**

Judy Lichtman

**WEB TEAM**

Jeff Goodhart  
Kyle Miyamoto  
John Nyboer  
PinkTop Design

**TRANSCRIPTIONS**

Debbie Alcantara  
Kate Goldsworthy  
Koji Sato

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Anastasia M. Walsh

## **RESEARCHER**

Eugenia A. Hannon

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American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

Architect of the Capitol

Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS)

Axiom Images

Barack Obama Presidential Library

Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody WY

C-SPAN

California State Parks, Photographic Archives, Angel Is. State Park collection

Clifton Coleman

Collection from Members of Wesley United Methodist Church

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Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians/Los Angeles ©1981, ©1998

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC)

Critical Past

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Democratic National Committee

Joe Ellickson

Robert J. Fisch (we moved this from the R's)

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Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

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History San José  
Ronald K. Ikejiri  
Internment Archives  
Japanese American National Museum  
Gift of Norman Y. Mineta, 98.370  
Gift of the Yamamoto Family, 98.54.22  
Gift of Yutaka Shinohara, 2000/154.1  
Lloyd Evans Collection, Gift of Reverend Stanley T. Evans  
Naokichi Hashizume Collection  
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Japanese American Museum of San Jose  
Japanese Cultural & Community Center of Northern California, Collection of Seizo Oka  
Erik Johansson  
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Los Angeles Daily News Negatives, UCLA Library Special Collections  
Los Angeles Public Library/Herald-Examiner Collection  
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Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies  
Maryknoll Mission Archives  
Mercury News  
Alan Miyatake, Toyo Miyatake Studio  
Museum of History and Industry  
PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, 1983.10.7394  
Seattle Post-Intelligencer Collection, pi28084  
National Archives and Records Administration  
Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress (formerly Natl. Coalition for Redress/Reparations)  
National Museum of American History  
New York Daily News  
Obata Family  
Pacific Citizen  
Panama Pacific Line  
Pasadena Museum of History, Archives  
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San Francisco Chronicle  
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Gary Mukai

Rylan Sekiguchi

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