

World War II**Biography***Norman Mineta*

1931–



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Norman Mineta was the first Asian American to be appointed to a United States cabinet post. He was a driving force of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.



As you read the biography below, think about how Norman Mineta's heritage and experiences influenced him later in life.

Norman Yoshio Mineta was born in San Jose, California. His family is of Japanese descent. In 1941 when Mineta was a young boy, Japanese forces attacked the United States Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Anti-Japanese hysteria led the United States government to force more than 110,000 Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast to move to inland **internment camps**. Two-thirds of those forced to move were American citizens who lost their jobs and homes as a result. Norman Mineta and his family lived in such a camp in Wyoming for two years.

After the war ended Mineta attended the University of California, Berkeley. He graduated from there in 1953. He then joined the U. S. Army, serving as an intelligence officer in Japan and Korea until 1956.

After serving in the army Mineta joined in his family's insurance business in San Jose. Soon he became involved in local politics. He was elected to the San Jose City Council and served as mayor from 1971 to 1974. Mineta was the first Asian American mayor of a major United States city.

In 1975 Mineta was elected to the United States House of Representatives. During his 20 years in Congress, Mineta was known for his dedication



© Roger Ressmeyer/CORBIS

VOCABULARY

internment camps detention facilities used during wartime to confine and imprison people

cabinet a body of official advisers to a president, governor, etc., comprised of the appointed heads of various government departments

to the people of his district and for building partnerships among his colleagues.

In 1980, along with Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, Mineta co-sponsored a bill that resulted in the establishment of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The commission held numerous hearings all over the country regarding the unjust detention of Japanese Americans during World War II. The commission recommended that a payment of \$20,000 be made to surviving Japanese Americans who had been in the camps, along with a national apology to Japanese Americans from the president. These recommendations were passed into law in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

In 2000 Norman Mineta became the first Asian American to be appointed to a **cabinet** post when he was named Secretary of Commerce under President Bill Clinton. When George W. Bush became president in 2001, he appointed Mineta as Secretary of Transportation.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What experience from Mineta's childhood may have influenced the Civil Liberties Act of 1988?

2. **Make Judgments** Why was the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 important?

ACTIVITY

3. Design a poster protesting the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.