



Impact Statement

Daphne Cheng, Grade 10

Flight of Paper Cranes, 2026

Colored pencil, marker on paper, 14 x 17 inches

Yun Hua Fang Art Studio, Saratoga, CA

Unsung Hero: Mitsuye Endo

My Unsung Hero is Mitsuye Endo, a plaintiff in the landmark case “Ex parte Mitsuye Endo.” In 1944, the outcome of this case was this: the Supreme Court ruled that the United States government could not indefinitely confine Japanese American citizens who were “concededly loyal” in War Relocation Authority camps. Of all the cases related to Japanese internment, hers was the only that resulted in a victory for Nisei (a person born in the United States or Canada, whose parents were immigrants from Japan)—and hers was the one that led to the lifting of Japanese American exclusion from the West Coast, freeing thousands of unfairly interned people. In my artwork I tried to demonstrate the sheer impact and number of achievements she accomplished in her life by organizing the background to be busy and overlapping. The background images of sea life and plant life illustrated what her work of research impacted and cultivated.

During the period of Japanese internment, Endo was fired from her job because of her ethnicity. She and others worked to challenge this discriminatory practice. Though she was hesitant, she said, “I agreed to do it at that moment, because they said it’s for the good of everybody, and so I said, well if that’s it, I’ll go ahead and do it.” Her bravery led to the eventual dissolution of internment camps, a practice that clearly violates the Constitutional rights of Japanese Americans. For her efforts, she should be remembered and celebrated alongside other Nisei who fought in the legal system as well.

I wanted to depict her contribution to justice through paper cranes. Origami, of course, is paramount to Japanese culture, rooted in philosophy and tradition. Cranes in particular symbolize hope, healing, and good fortune---all things I’m sure Endo would have wished for in times of difficulty. The cranes in my drawing are mid-flight, freely soaring in the sky, away from earthly burdens. The barbed wire represents the internment camps Japanese Americans were relocated to, and it snakes throughout the painting, attempting to trap the cranes. The largest paper crane is held up by a pair of hands. Those are Mitsuye Endo’s hands, as she helps it fly, referencing how her court case helped win the freedom of many.