

Hiroshi

Growing up in California, he lived in a world of “wealthy whites over here and everyone else over there.” In 1942, at age 19, like the one hundred twenty thousand other Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in one of the ten internment camps in California, Arkansas, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Colorado and Arizona, Hiroshi was sent to the Tule Lake Segregation Center, in Newell, California. Tule Lake was the largest and most conflict-ridden of these camps, with horrendous dust storms, eight-foot-high fencing and barbed wire all around. “During my four years in this concentration camp,” he says, “to fight the boredom I started writing stories and plays and joined the camp’s theater company.” Then the U.S. government tried to force all detainees to fill out a “loyalty questionnaire.” Hiroshi refused because it was in violation of his Constitutional rights. He was branded a “No-No Boy,” called disloyal and a traitor and lost his citizenship, which affected the next twenty years of his life, until he was able to restore his national identity. Through his writing, acting, and publishing, Hiroshi devoted a large part of his life to making people aware of what it means to be American.

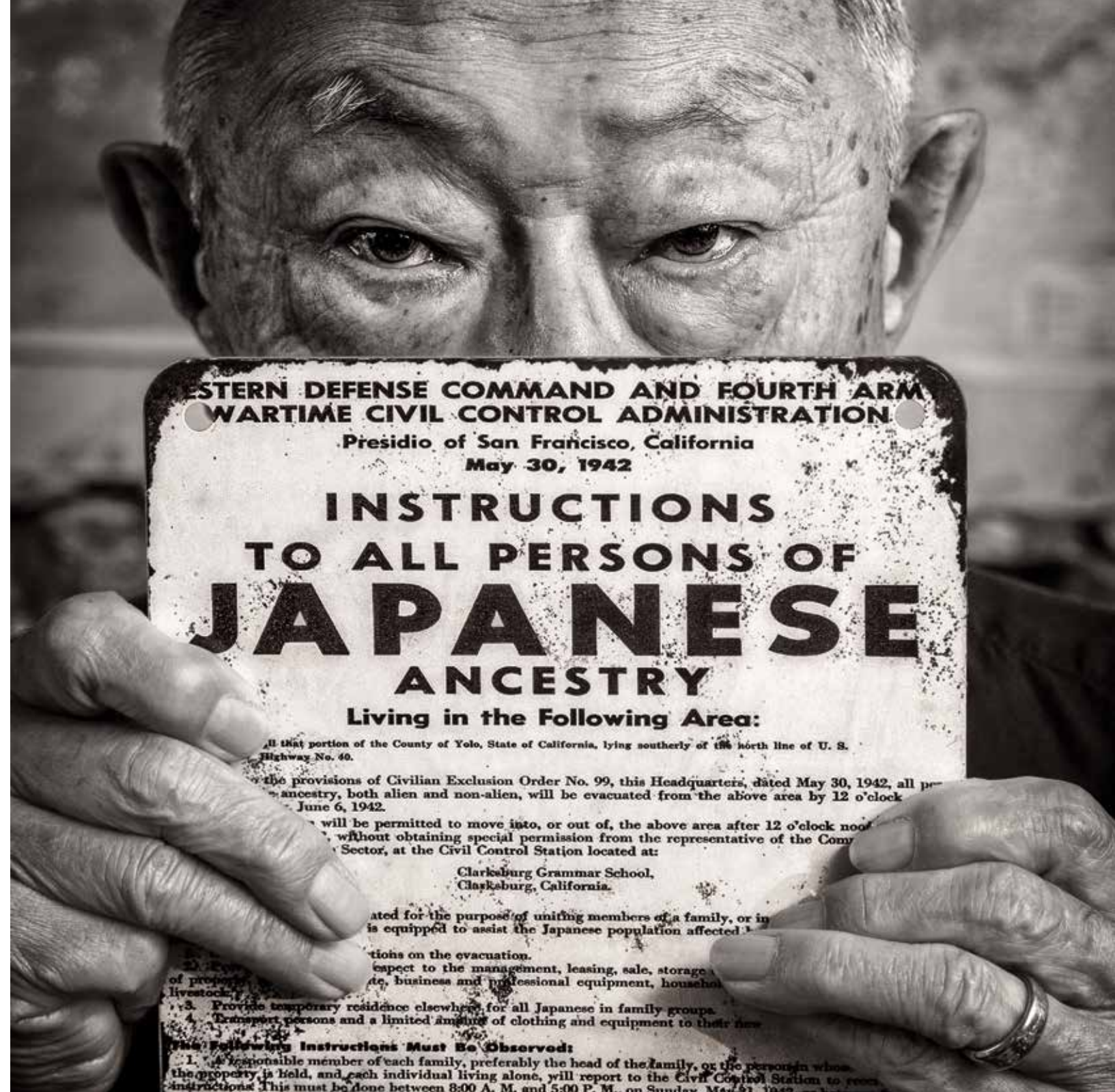
In May 2011, Hiroshi, by then an award-winning author, actor, and father of an Asian American theater, received a special invitation to attend a poetry reading with President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, at the White House.

“The evening prior to the White House event, my father did a reading at a bookstore. When he was finished, the owner, an African American woman named Shirikiana, asked my father, ‘Has anyone ever thanked you for the courage it took to be a No-No Boy?’ My dad hesitated and said, ‘Not directly.’ She then said, ‘Well, we can take care of that right now.’ Everyone yelled out ‘THANK YOU!’ and started to applaud. She continued: ‘You are my elder. But you are not only my elder, you are one of our nation’s elders. And if you don’t mind, I would like to do something right now.’ Shereached behind my dad’s back and removed an imaginary burden off his shoulders.

The next day, my dad walked to the top of the Lincoln Memorial. And as we stood under the words of the Emancipation Proclamation and looked out on the National Mall, I could not help thinking of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. I remembered those famous words and how they applied to my father at this moment: ‘Free At Last, Free At Last!’ He is free at last.

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Soji, Your Grateful Son



Hiroshi – U.S. Internment Camp Survivor

“I can say that I’m proud to be an American. There was a time when I couldn’t listen to our National Anthem. But now when I hear it, I feel that it’s my song, too.”