



DANIEL K. INOUE
INSTITUTE

March 4, 2026

Aloha friends, family, and members of our DKI ohana,

Thank you to those who attended or tuned in to University of Hawaii Professor Colin Moore's presentation called, "Soldiers of a Forgotten Empire: American Memory and the Battle for Filipino Veterans Benefits" on February 27, 2026. Colin's work is supported by funding from the Daniel K. Inouye Institute which looks to encourage the use of Senator's papers as an original source material. Inouye's papers are housed at the Hamilton Library on the UH Manoa campus. You can find a copy of his paper here - <https://dkii.org/academic-works/>



Colin opened his lecture talking about the thousands of letters he found in the Senator's papers from Filipino World War II veterans. They were heartfelt, frustrated, angry at being forgotten or how long it was taking to get relief. Senator read them and responded to each one.

America was built by immigrants who left their homelands in search of a better life. The search for opportunity, escape from persecution, and longing for a new beginning is the foundation of the complicated history, evolution, resilience, and beautiful cultural and ethnic diversity of the United States.

The Filipino experience and their contributions to the construction and culture of the U.S is an important part of our American story. It is a personal story for the people of Hawaii. Filipinos are part of the foundation and fabric of our beloved state. Many came to Hawaii as migrant laborers to work the sugar and pineapple plantations. They made Hawaii their home, raised their families which has spanned generations. Today, the industries and services Hawaii most relies on, like tourism, healthcare and agriculture, are powered by the expertise, loyalty and work ethic of Filipinos.



Senator Daniel K. Inouye, a second generation Japanese American and a U.S. Army Captain who earned the Medal of Honor for military valor during World War II, understood personally what Filipinos mean to Hawaii and the nation.

As Hawaii's first member of the U.S. House of Representatives when Hawaii became a state in 1959, Inouye served on the Foreign Relations Appropriations Subcommittee. One of his assignments included a trip to the Philippines to support flood relief efforts. It was during this disaster recovery work that he learned more about the plight of Filipino World War II veterans.



The U.S. promised more than 260,000 Filipinos benefits and citizenship in return for fighting alongside American soldiers. Many died, even more spilled blood. Our nation reneged. The U.S Immigration office in Manilla closed. The injustice was culminated with the passage of the 1946 Rescission Act, signed into law by President Harry S. Truman, which retroactively stripped 260,000 Filipino soldiers of U.S. naturalization rights and veterans' benefits.

Senator Inouye believed strongly that Filipino veterans had earned the privilege of becoming U.S citizens as was initially promised, as well as the same veterans benefits he, as a WWII veteran, was entitled.



Marie Blanco, longtime legislative director and subsequent Chief of Staff in Senator's D.C. office, coordinated the efforts to secure recognition and benefits for the Filipino veterans. Blanco, the daughter of Filipino immigrants to Hawaii, promised her mother that she would help veterans get what they fought and died for.

With the support of Hawaii's Congressional Delegation and congressional members from California, Senator Inouye pieced together legislative fixes to address some of the grievances – the naturalization of Filipino American World War II veterans, as a part of the Immigration Act of 1990 and the inclusion of a Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.



“Filipino veterans served to protect the United States, and a lot of people don't even know that. When we walked the halls of Congress, we had to start almost from the beginning until their staff (understood),” said Blanco during a video interview as part of a 2019 DKI oral history project. “I think the younger generation needs to notice.”

Senator and his allies tried to secure full veterans benefits and the “chance came when they did the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009,” Blanco said “It started on the House side, \$198 million...and it granted...a one-time benefit for the Filipino veterans,” said Blanco. “...that was the closest Senator Inouye could make sure that the veterans... were going to at least get something...he tried so hard to wipe out the 1946 Recission Act (and) give them full benefits, but it was hard.”



Senator Inouye fought for decades to restore justice to this group of Filipino warriors who fought and died for the opportunity to call America their new home. He would often say that the “wheels of justice grind ever so slowly when the mountain of injustice appears steep and insurmountable. Let us be vigilant, and committed to chip away at the ugly villain called racism.”

We are honored to share different stories and issues Dan Inouye championed during his storied career – quite a few were groups of people who had been aggrieved, followed by his commitment to right the wrong, in whole or in part, no matter how long it took. Filipino veterans are one such group. This reminds us of another favorite saying of his, “History is an important teacher, provided you heed the lessons learned. Otherwise, you are likely to repeat them.”



This could not be a more true statement given everything going on today.

We hope you enjoyed this story.

We are deeply thankful for your support and friendship as we continue to share the Senator's legacy which remains both relevant and important in these tumultuous times. We are now our own 501c3 nonprofit so every gift — no matter the size — will make a meaningful difference. Online donations can be made using this link — <https://dkii.org/donate>

Aloha,
Jennifer, Sara and DKII Team

As a reminder, the bronze statue of our beloved Senator is at the United terminal at the Daniel K. Inouye Airport. Please visit, talk story, take a selfie and send it to us!

Here is a photo of former staff member, and current DKII Board Treasurer, Mark Fox, as he recently traveled to D.C. for meetings.



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Daniel K. Inouye Institute | 725 Kapiolani Blvd, Suite C400 | Honolulu, HI 96813 US

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