

## **George Takei**

### George Takei

(Born 1937). American actor, writer, and activist, George Takei is best known for playing the part of Lieutenant Sulu in the television and film series *Star Trek*. Takei is also a dedicated activist in both the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and Asian American communities. In 2004 the emperor of Japan awarded Takei the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, for helping to foster a better relationship between Japan and the United States.

### Early Life and Education

George Hosato Takei was born on April 20, 1937, in Los Angeles, California. His father was born in Japan but left as a teenager to live in the United States. His mother was born in the United States to Japanese parents but was educated in Japan. The couple met in Los Angeles and owned a cleaning business.

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States entered World War II. Discrimination against Japanese American people rose. Fueled by racist beliefs, many non-Japanese Americans feared that Japanese Americans would not be loyal to the United States. As a result, the U.S. government set up internment camps to keep Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans isolated. People with Japanese ancestry who lived on the West Coast were forced into the camps. In 1942 the Takei family was sent to Camp Rohwer in Arkansas before being moved to Camp Tule Lake in northern California. At the end of the war the family was released from the camp, but they had lost their house and business. They returned to Los Angeles with nothing and slowly rebuilt their lives.

After Takei graduated from high school, he attended the University of California at Berkeley. He studied architecture there but soon transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) to study theater. He earned a bachelor's degree from UCLA in 1960 and a master's degree in 1964.

### Career

While in college Takei did some voice-over work for movies. That led to minor acting parts in television shows and movies. His big break came in 1966 when he was given the role of Lieutenant Sulu in the television debut of *Star Trek*. It had been common in American film and television for white actors to play Asian characters, who were often villains, meek servants, or buffoons. Takei's depiction of an intelligent and capable Asian character helped to ease stereotypes of Asian Americans. The television series lasted for three seasons, but *Star Trek* was revived 10 years later as a feature film that included the cast of the television show. Five more films, including *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), and *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), followed.

Over an acting career spanning more than 60 years, Takei appeared in many television series and films and was a popular voice actor. He voiced characters in cartoon television shows and movies as well as in video games. Takei was the subject of a 2014 documentary, *To Be Takei*. The film focused on Takei's life and his role in popular culture.

In 2012 Takei starred in the musical *Allegiance*, which chronicled his experiences in the internment camps in the 1940s. The play premiered on Broadway in 2015 and was brought to movie theaters in 2016. Takei also contributed his memories of the internment camps to the graphic novel *They Called Us Enemy* (2019), which he wrote with Steven Scott and Justin Eisinger. The book became a best seller and won a

number of awards, including the 2020 Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature and a 2020 American Book Award.

Takei wrote other books, including the memoir *To the Stars* (1994). *Oh, Myyy! There Goes the Internet* (2012) and *Lions and Tigers and Bears: The Internet Strikes Back* (2013) focus on his interactions on social media and the Internet.