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# Similar Experiences, Unique Perspectives: How Japanese American Experiences Influenced Their Participation During World War II

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## **Abstract**

During World War II, Japanese Americans had to endure racist federal government policy in the form of relocation to internment camps around the country. Of the 120,000 people that were interned, a large number were citizens of the United States who protested that their 5th and 14th Amendment rights had been violated by their placement into the camps. The way Japanese Americans reacted to their experiences during the war differed depending on their experiences as Nisei or Kibei. These reactions materialized in different forms of participation in the war, usually involving the decision to serve in the military as a civic duty or whether to give up their citizenship entirely. This paper will explore how their actions shifted during the war based on their experiences of racism and their cultural backgrounds.

## **Keywords**

World War II, Japanese Americans, Japanese American military, military participation

## **Disciplines**

Asian American Studies | Military History | Political History | Social History | United States History

## **Comments**

Written for HIST 421: Seminar: The U.S. and World War II.

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December 12, 2016

History 421

Julia Deros

Honor Code: I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.

When people remember World War II, they often remember it as a war to ensure freedom. It is remembered as a time when American soldiers in both the European and Pacific theaters fought to end regimes of dictators trying to suppress the freedoms of those whom they deemed inferior all while increasing their own power. However, many observers forget or ignore the fact that while Americans were overseas working to secure the freedom of others, American citizens back in the United States were having their own freedoms suppressed. Throughout the war, thousands of people of Japanese descent had their rights stripped from them and were then placed in internment camps found throughout the country. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, sparked a wave of fear of future attacks supported by sabotage from people of Japanese descent living on the West Coast. The fear and suspicion soon grew to encompass not only Japanese aliens living in the United States, but Japanese American citizens as well. Even while holding American citizenship, Japanese Americans on the West Coast were seen as if they were the United States' enemy and were treated as such.

Prejudice towards those of Japanese descent did not begin with their internment during World War II. The United States had a long history of racial discrimination against them starting early in the twentieth century. In 1911, racist sentiment resulted in the Immigration and Nationalization Service declaring that Japanese immigrants were not allowed to file for citizenship. In 1913, Japanese immigrants were barred by the Alien Land Law from owning land. In 1924, the Immigration Act blocked any further immigration of Japanese into the United States.<sup>1</sup> These laws were designed in order to keep Japanese immigrants from growing in

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<sup>1</sup>John Christgau, *"Enemies": World War II Alien Internment* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985), 147.

number to compete with white Americans for agricultural jobs and political influence on the West Coast.

The result of these discriminatory policies was the creation of distinct social groups within the Japanese community. The first were *Issei*, first generation Japanese immigrants who remained in the United States despite being denied the right to obtain American citizenship. While they could only retain their Japanese citizenship, their children born in the United States were guaranteed American citizenship. This second generation of Japanese American citizens was referred to in the Japanese community as *Nisei*. Having been born in the United States, *Nisei* became more assimilated to American culture than Japanese culture which made them more acceptable to other racial groups within the United States. However, this was not always the case. In order to preserve their culture and give them better chances at making lives for themselves, *Issei* often sent their children to Japan to live with relatives for their education. They believed that if their children grew up in Japan, they would have a stronger language and skill set making them more marketable in Japan. Even as citizens in the United States, they would face discrimination for their ethnicity that would limit their opportunities. These American citizens raised in Japan were referred to as *Kibei*. By spending portions of their lives in Japan, *Kibei* became immersed in Japanese rather than American culture and were often viewed with as much racist prejudice as their parents by white Americans despite being American citizens.<sup>2</sup>

The racial prejudice that all three groups of Japanese felt in the United States reached a new height with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. With a direct attack on American lives, Americans across the nation began to fear that the Japanese could strike again,

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<sup>2</sup> Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight: a Japanese American family caught between two worlds* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 14, 36.

next time on the mainland. At first, suspicion was mostly cast on *Issei*. When war was declared, any person living in the United States holding citizenship of an enemy nation was declared an enemy alien. Many *Issei* community leaders with this new enemy alien status were arrested by the FBI on suspicion of potential subversive behavior.<sup>3</sup> As arrests continued, public hysteria towards those of Japanese descent grew. With the help of sensationalist public radio and news publications, hostility and suspicion soon turned to include not only the *Issei*, but the *Nisei* and *Kibei* as well. A columnist for the Scripps Howard named Westbrook Pegler wrote that “the Japanese in California should be under guard to the last man and woman right now and to hell with habeas corpus until the danger is over.”<sup>4</sup> Even having the rights of an American citizen did not protect Japanese Americans from feeling the brunt of racial hysteria; just being the same ethnicity as the enemy was enough to place a person under suspicion.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1942, racist sentiments against Japanese Americans culminated as President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066.<sup>5</sup> This order did not specifically mention the Japanese Americans or any racial group within the United States nor did it prescribe methods of internment. What the order did was authorize military commanders in the United States to prescribe war zones within the nation from which people could be excluded.<sup>6</sup> This meant that the order was essentially a “carte blanche” allowing military commanders to deal with the issue of enemy aliens at their own discretion for the protection of their districts. With authority granted by the President, the Commanding Officer of the Western Defense Command,

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<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation of United States Citizenship by Japanese Americans during World War II,” (doctoral thesis, University of Georgia, 1975), U.S Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Kojiro J. Kawaguchi, “The Nisei Story: The Story of Japanese Americans during World War II,” 1999, folder 248 box 15, Kokihiro F. Kawaguchi Papers, U.S Army Heritage and Education Center. Carlisle, PA, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Christgau, “*Enemies*,” 148.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Asahina, *Just Americans: How Japanese Americans Won a War at Home and Abroad, the story of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion/442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in World War II* (New York, Gotham Books, 2006), 17-18.

General John L. DeWitt, defined the entire West Coast from California to Washington as an exclusion zone and ordered the removal of all residents of Japanese descent.<sup>7</sup>

Starting on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1942, over 120,000 people of Japanese ethnicity were removed from their homes and businesses on the West Coast and placed by the War Relocation Authority into internment camps; however, about 70,000 of these men, women, and children were American citizens. These citizens argued Japanese Americans were protected by the 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments; that they could not be detained without due process of the law and that their rights were protected as citizens regardless of race or ancestry. It was argued that they should not be the only ones targeted when German and Italian Americans, descendants of other belligerent nations, were left alone. Nevertheless, the protests went unheard in an atmosphere of fear and racism.<sup>8</sup> General DeWitt like many others in the country saw the entire Japanese race as an “enemy race,” and that “even Nisei, who were American citizens, could not be trusted.”<sup>9</sup> Japanese American men and women were deemed untrustworthy because their looks and ancestry made it difficult for others to distinguish them from the enemy. They were untrustworthy because they were different.

Although all Japanese American citizens throughout the United States had to face discrimination for their ancestry in some form, they did not all respond in the same ways. As with all Americans living in the country at the time, Japanese Americans came from diverse backgrounds and experiences that influenced how they interpreted World War II and what citizenship meant for them. These interpretations in turn influenced how Japanese Americans chose to participate in the war. Much of the historical research done concerning how Japanese

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<sup>7</sup> Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 14.

<sup>8</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 14, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Kawaguchi, “The Nisei Story,” 3.

Americans viewed their own citizenship contrasts two main forms of involvement: military service and resistance.<sup>10</sup> Historian Robert Asahina is a proponent of the idea that many Japanese Americans used military service as a means of reaffirming their citizenship and as a way of reinforcing their rights as Americans. In his book *Just Americans*, he shows that despite racist federal policy resulting in their internment, over 18,000 Japanese American men served in segregated combat regiments. Rather than give up on being properly treated as citizens, these men decided to fight for the recognition of their rights. They were fighting for the “right to be called ‘just Americans’ and certainly not ‘Japs’.”<sup>11</sup> Military service was their way of pushing back against their treatment to show that in spite of the way they were treated, Japanese Americans were still loyal citizens and acted as such.

The focus on military service as an affirmation of citizenship is contrasted by Japanese American participation in the form of citizenship renunciation. Historian John Christgau discusses in his work, *“Enemies”*: *World War II Alien Internment*, how the treatment of Japanese Americans during the war created discord within their communities, which resulted in refusal to perform military service and renunciation of citizenship. He argues that bitterness resulting from internment led many to view themselves as second-class citizens, and that there was no point in serving a country that treated them so poorly.<sup>12</sup> While the stances of Asahina and Christgau on Japanese American reactions to the war and its impact on ideas of citizenship hold truth, focusing on them separately can make the issues they discuss seem exclusive.

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<sup>10</sup> Japanese Americans’ did not only see their citizenship in terms of a relationship with military service or refusal. Many who did not join the military service or fully renounce citizenship still participated in the war by protesting living conditions with the camps themselves. Rather than be passive, they protested in order to have access to proper economic security, education, or other social benefits unavailable to them in the camps. For more information on this subject, see Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps: North America, Japanese in the United States and Canada during World War II* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993), 104-130.

<sup>11</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Christgau, *“Enemies,”* 144, 148, 149, 152.



In reality, the experiences that led some Japanese Americans to serve in the military as a means of expressing their views on citizenship and others to renunciation were often intertwined. The same experiences could lead one person to choose one path and another person the other. One person could even have interpretations that intertwine the concerns of proponents for both forms of action. Historian Gary Okihiro explains in his work “Tule Lake under Martial Law: a Study in Japanese Resistance” that the responses of Japanese Americans during World War II were often polarized after the war ended in order to reaffirm Japanese American loyalty. When the war ended, groups such as the Japanese American Citizens League and the War Relocation Authority wanted to draw attention to those who served their country in the military as symbols of the “pro-American” majority of internees. Separating out those who protested and renounced citizenship made their group seem like a troublesome minority. Separating them out also served to emphasize the innocence of the majority of those who remained by focusing on their loyal service despite the loss of their rights. Okihiro argues that this separation of responses resulted in the myth of a “model minority,” a group of people that pushed through the opposition against them because of their unwavering loyalty.<sup>13</sup>

This myth, however, does not account for the complexity of Japanese American experiences during the war. As Okihiro argues, the Japanese American reactions cannot be defined in terms of specific groups. The experiences that they had before and during the war often created opinions that overlapped with each other, making their war experience more complex. Overlaps involved experiences of racism, personal or familial safety concerns, or concerns over their own cultural influences. Knowing how a variety of complex factors

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<sup>13</sup>Gary Y. Okihiro, “Tule Lake under Martial Law: a Study in Japanese Resistance,” in *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?*, ed. Alice Yang Murray (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 105-106.

influenced Japanese American reasoning during the war is important for understanding why different groups of Japanese Americans deemed it necessary to either serve in the military through a combat or intelligence role or reject the military entirely and renounce their citizenship.

### **Japanese Americans and Military Combat**

By the time World War II ended in 1945, over 22,500 Japanese Americans had served in the United States Army in some capacity. They would serve throughout the Mediterranean in the European Theater, participating in major campaigns and battles in Italy at Cassino and Anzio, as well as in France where they rescued 211 American men of the Lost Battalion from German encirclement. For their efforts during the war, Japanese American soldiers earned over 9,486 Purple Hearts, 5,000 Bronze Stars, Silver Stars and Distinguished Service Crosses, and 21 Medals of Honor.<sup>14</sup>

These men fought for a nation that based on their race and ancestry had deemed them untrustworthy enough to warrant their internment. Why would Japanese American men risk their lives to fight after experiencing racist policies? The answer to this question for many first depended on where in the United States they were living and what they were doing when the war started. Unlike Japanese Americans on the West Coast, Japanese Americans living in Hawaii did not experience wide-scale internment in camps. At the time, people of Japanese descent constituted the largest racial group in Hawaii and made large contributions to the island chain's economy. The relative size of their communities made it possible for Japanese Americans to

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<sup>14</sup> Bill Yenne, *Rising Sons: the Japanese American GIs who fought for the United States in World War II* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 2. For more detailed information on the operations the all Japanese American 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiments participated in, see Yenne's book as well as Robert Asahina, *Just Americans: How Japanese Americans Won a War at Home and Abroad, the story of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion/442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in World War II* (New York, Gotham Books, 2006).

have a greater political presence and voice as well. Removing such an integral portion of the population would have drained the local economy and put too much stress on the territory's limited resources.<sup>15</sup> Instead of experiencing full removal from their communities, Japanese Americans living in Hawaii mostly felt the restrictions of martial law and curfew regulations instituted at the start of the war and kept in place until 1944.<sup>16</sup>

The greatest restriction that brought home the fact that they were being treated as the enemy by their own country was their restriction from serving in the military early in the war. Before the United States went to war with Japan, 1400 Hawaiian Japanese Americans were serving in the military, mostly in the 298<sup>th</sup> and 299<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments of the Hawaiian National Guard. However, within the weeks following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many of these men were relegated to menial positions. They were denied access to weapons and were either forced to do manual labor or leave the service entirely rather than serve in frontline combat positions.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Japanese Americans in Hawaii as well as the contiguous United States were made ineligible for the draft. They were given the status of IVC on their applications which marked them as enemy aliens even if they held citizenship. The meaning of the IVC status was clear: they were seen as unfit due solely to their ancestry.<sup>18</sup> When Masao Watanabe, recalled first being rejected from service in the early years of the war, he described it as a moment in which

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<sup>15</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Knaefler, Tomi Kaizawa Knaefler, *Our House Divided: Seven Japanese American Families in World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 6-7. Under martial law, Japanese Americans as well as Hawaiians of other races were forced to endure curfews limiting movement between 6:00 pm and 6:00 am. Hawaiians were also required to be working for the period between curfews and could be forced to serve jail time if found out of work. Civil liberties were restricted, finger printing and vaccinations were required, and drills were strictly enforced. See also John Garcia, "John Garcia," in *"The Good War": an oral history of World War Two*, ed. Studs Terkel (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 21.

<sup>17</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, "Disloyalty and Renunciation," 12.

his main thought was “What the hell is this?”<sup>19</sup> His moment of frustration came from being rejected for something that as a citizen he never thought he would be rejected for:

You grow up thinking you’re a citizen, and you want to be a part of this society you’re in, and then the, let’s say the weight of the rejection, is something that was pretty unexpected... And it, I think it bothered us tremendously. You try to be a good citizen, you try to do what you’re supposed to be doing, and the rejection is very hard, difficult.<sup>20</sup>

To Watanabe and other men like him, they were confused as to why they would not be allowed to serve in combat while Americans of other races were being drafted. They were American citizens. Why should they be prevented from serving the country as one? The problem facing Watanabe and soldiers like him was that many Americans doubted Japanese Americans were truly loyal to the United States over Japan. They thought that allowing them into the military would jeopardize the war effort and national safety. During the beginning phases of American entry into the war against the Japanese, the United States suffered setbacks in the Pacific Theater as well as the shelling of ships off the coast of Santa Barbara, California.<sup>21</sup> The tangible defeats that the United States was experiencing affirmed in the public’s mind that the Japanese were a very real threat and that there could possibly be a future invasion of the mainland. The threat of a direct invasion created a greater atmosphere of hostility towards Japanese Americans in Hawaii and on the West Coast. Those doubting the loyalties of Japanese American citizens claimed that even if they seemed trustworthy today, what was to stop them from allying themselves with an invading Japanese force? It was recognized that because of the racist treatment that those of Japanese descent faced, a large number of young men and women had become irritated at the discrimination and lack of equal treatment with citizens of other

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<sup>19</sup> Masao Watanabe, interview by Tom Ikeda, June 19, 1998, Segment 18, transcript, Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 12.

racers.<sup>22</sup> This resentment of being treated as second-class citizens was thought to be enough to encourage cutting any ties they had with the United States and work with the Japanese instead.

The predicament that Hawaiian Japanese American men found themselves in was well described by Tomi Kizawa Knaefler as she watched her brother Stanley caught in the middle of it. In what can only be recognized as a Catch-22, she recalled how “their loyalty was questioned because of their racial origin. The only way they could dispel that distrust was to fight for their country. Yet, military service was denied them, and their loyalty remained under a dark cloud.”<sup>23</sup> Essentially, the only way to prove their loyalty was to serve in the military. Yet, they were not allowed into the military because their loyalty had not been proven. Despite this obstacle, many still wanted to serve. To men like Stanley Kizawa, entering the service was how they would prove themselves to the American public. He believed that “volunteering to fight for America was the only way to prove his loyalty and to win equality for the Japanese” and he wanted to show America that “if you cut off [his] arm it will bleed the same as a white man’s would.”<sup>24</sup> Military service during the war was viewed by him as the way to prove that they were equal to white Americans. Willingness to give his life for the country of his birth would finally prove that he and other Japanese Americans had no ties to Japan.

In addition to using military service to prove their loyalty and affirm their right to equal treatment, other Japanese Americans saw it as a civic duty and as a way to honor their families. While the *Nisei* were born in the United States and grew up surrounded by American culture, their *Issei* parents would instill Japanese cultural values in how they were raised in order to

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<sup>22</sup> Jabulka Jan, “Hawaii’s Japanese,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Jan. 9, 1944.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/176881096/9D4D3EA112A04BAEPQ/49?accountid=2694>.

<sup>23</sup> Knaefler, *Our House Divided*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

preserve their cultural heritage. Compared with American culture which placed greater emphasis on individualism, Japanese cultural values at the time placed greater emphasis on devotion to their country.<sup>25</sup> When *Issei* came to the United States, they raised their children with the cultural values that they themselves had; however, they raised their children to be loyal to their own country, not to Japan. Upon recalling their consideration of joining the military, Katsugo and Katsuaki Miho of Hawaii remembered how their *Issei* father always told them, “my country is Japan, but your country is the United States. No matter what happens to me, your country is the United States.”<sup>26</sup> A similar memory was recalled by Haru Tanaka about her son, Akira Tanaka. She described being proud of him for wanting to serve in the military and that even though she was still a Japanese national, she had tried to teach her son to be a “good American” and “to do his duty for his country.”<sup>27</sup> *Issei* instilled their own cultural values in their children all the while encouraging loyalty to the country of their birth rather than the country of their parent’s birth. Both the Miho’s father and Haru Tanaka wanted to ensure that their children had opportunities that they as foreign nationals could not. The result was that their *Nisei* children had cultural values that emphasized the loyalty other Americans doubted they had and encouraged them to fight in the military as a civic duty.

The freedom to perform their civic duty came to Japanese Americans in Hawaii much sooner than it did to those on West Coast of the United States. In May 1942, the Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall ordered the creation of an all Japanese American battalion using troops from the Hawaiian Islands and pre-war draftees remaining within the military. The segregated unit was referred to as the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Separate) and had been created mainly

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<sup>25</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Knaefler, *Our House Divided*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

from volunteers with similar values as the Miho brothers and the Tanaka family. They wanted to prove their loyalty to the nation and many did not even mind that their unit was segregated throughout the war. Victories would be attributed to them and them alone, proving that Japanese Americans were just as capable as white soldiers and should be treated as their equals.<sup>28</sup>

Wanting to join the armed forces in order to prove loyalty or as part of a citizen's civic duty became more complicated for Japanese Americans in the contiguous United States. While Japanese Americans in Hawaii were still able to retain their relative freedom under martial law, those living on the West Coast had to deal with the loss of much more during their internment in relocation camps. The decisions to fight in the military service made by those in the camps were influenced by much more negative experiences and became all the more complicated. These experiences forced Japanese American men in the camps to consider a much wider range of influences and consequences when determining what they should do. To Japanese Americans that did not have to undergo relocation, it was hard to imagine what that really entailed. What relocation entailed to those that did experience it was often great upheaval in their lives.

When the relocation of the Japanese from the West Coast began, families were often given little time or warning. Internees could be notified from as much a few weeks to as little as forty-eight hours before they were to report to an assembly center, giving families very little time to prepare themselves. They were forced to leave behind their homes, businesses, and belongings often without any form of compensation. The rush to settle their assets often forced them to sell belongings to those looking to make a bargain from their misfortunes at prices a fraction of what

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<sup>28</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 34-36.

they were worth.<sup>29</sup> Some people even resorted to completely destroying their belongings. They took to burning or burying “heirloom kimonos, their religious and other symbolic artifacts, and even their family photographs taken in Japan.”<sup>30</sup> Anything that could be used to accuse a family of disloyalty to the United States was either thrown away or left behind even at the cost of losing the last ties they had to their identity, culture, and former homes.

After having to give up their possessions, internees would then have to report to assembly centers before being transported to one of ten relocation centers in the country.<sup>31</sup> These camps were located far from any local towns in the middle of nowhere to keep internees separated from the general public, often at the sites of abandoned fairgrounds or old horse racing tracks. With only a few bags and the clothes on their backs to their names, men, women, and children would step from the buses into camps surrounded by barbed wire fencing and guard towers staffed by soldiers pointing guns at them. If the barbed wire and armed guards did not reinforce their loss of rights as citizens, then the living conditions did. Many of these camps were still in various states of construction because of the haste at which those of Japanese descent were removed. When Kojiro Kawaguchi arrived at the Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, California in April of 1942, he described how he and his family were assigned to live in horse stables since the barracks were still being constructed. “There was still horse manure on the dirt floor...we were

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<sup>29</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 133, 160.; Henry Murakami, “Henri Murakami,” in *The Homefront: America during World War II*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin D. Mitchell, and Steven J. Schechter (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1984), 111-113. See also Margaret Takahashi, “Margaret Takahashi,” in *The Homefront: America during World War II*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin D. Mitchell, and Steven J. Schechter (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1984), 107-108.

<sup>30</sup> Knaefler, *Our House Divided*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 18. Since many of these internment camps were hastily constructed to prepare for the massive number of evacuees, Japanese Americans were first sent to assembly centers where they would wait until more permanent camps could be completed. The ten main camps used to place Japanese Americans from the West Coast were Manzanar Assembly Center in California; Poston in Arizona; Tule Lake in northern California; Gila in southern Arizona; Minidoka in Idaho; Heart Mountain in Wyoming; Granada in Colorado; Topaz in central Utah; Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas.



forced to sleep in horse stalls not fit for human habitation.”<sup>32</sup> Transfer to the actual camps did not make things much better. Multiple families had to share a single stall divided by partitions and lined with metal cots for beds. Bathrooms and showers were public and located far from their living quarters. Hospitals, canteens, and laundries were always crowded with people.<sup>33</sup> Their treatment within the camps reinforced the fact they Japanese Americans were seen as second class citizens and caused great upheaval in their lives.

While Japanese Americans on the West Coast were having their lives upended, the war continued on. After the Battles of Midway in June 1942, the United States began taking the initiative in the Pacific Theater.<sup>34</sup> With the American military gaining ground, the likelihood of a direct invasion from the Japanese lessened and the threat of internal sabotage decreased. By 1943, it became clearer to the federal government that the internment of Japanese Americans and Japanese aliens was becoming a moot point as a military necessity. Keeping the camps open only drained needed military resources and money without serving any purpose. However, they could not just let the Japanese go back to their homes on the West Coast. The public still viewed anyone with Japanese ancestry as suspicious and saw that the fact they were interned at all meant that they were inherently disloyal. It was also feared that racial tensions between Japanese Americans and Americans of other races on the West Coast would cause a public outcry. White communities on the West Coast opposed the idea of their release because they did not want a flood of Japanese men and women into their communities that would compete with white

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<sup>32</sup> Kawaguchi, “The Nisei Story,” 12.

<sup>33</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 152-153.

<sup>34</sup> During the Battle of Midway, the United States Navy managed to destroy four Japanese naval carriers and their air crews. The Japanese were unable to replace carriers or train new air men due to a lack of resources which crippled their navy enough to halt their advance throughout the Pacific. The United States was then able to launch a counter-offensive starting August of that year at Guadalcanal. See Gerhard L. Weinberg, *World War II: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77.

citizens.<sup>35</sup> To mitigate this outcry, the loyalty of the Japanese had to be proven to the public to show that it was not a military necessity to continue keeping them in the camps. The method that the War Department decided to use was to allow Japanese Americans to serve in the military once again.

In 1943, the War Department began allowing Japanese American men from the camps to volunteer so that they could prove their loyalty and then reintegrate into the community. They had already started the process with the creation of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but they needed men to serve on a much larger scale to prevent any deniability that these men could be released from the camps. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, President Roosevelt authorized the creation of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment and reinstated the draft for Japanese American citizens on the condition that those in the camps fill out a loyalty questionnaire called the “Statement of a U.S Citizen of Japanese Ancestry.”<sup>36</sup> The questionnaire was meant to act as a legal declaration of loyalty to prove to the public that Japanese Americans were at heart loyal and willing to risk their lives for their nation. Any victories achieved by the new Japanese American regiment would then act as further publicity alongside the questionnaire, with the goal of changing American sentiments enough to allow a peaceful release of the Japanese back into the American public. Despite what good intentions the questionnaire may have had, the way it was handled resulted in large divisions within the Japanese American community.

The most basic problem Japanese Americans had with the loyalty questionnaire was that it was seen as insulting. As American citizens, it was felt that they should not have to attest to their loyalties. Going to the internment camps and living without their rights should have been

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<sup>35</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 68; Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 22.

<sup>36</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 43; Christgau, “*Enemies*,” 149.

proof enough that they were loyal to the nation and willing to serve it. The insult was further compounded with the greatest flaw the questionnaire had: two questions that had profound consequences depending on how they were answered. The two questions were worded thus:

Question 27. Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

Question 28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attacks by foreign or domestic, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?<sup>37</sup>

To Japanese American citizens, question 28 was the most confusing and insulting because it implied that they “had a non-existent allegiance to the Emperor of Japan.”<sup>38</sup> They did not understand how they could forswear something that they did not have. If they answered yes to the question, it would imply that they had previously had an allegiance to Japan which could cast suspicion on them. But if they answered no, it would imply that they were refusing to swear loyalty to the United States. The question’s yes or no nature made assumptions that the answer for Japanese Americans should have been easily defined. It denied that there were complex factors influencing their beliefs and responses and made it seem as if their situation was simple.

The loyalty questionnaire’s simple responses glossed over the fact that Japanese Americans in the camps had to make their decision while thinking of not only their own situation, but the situation of others as well. In order to serve in the United States military, both questions had to receive an answer of yes but answering yes could have serious implications for internees. Many of the *Nisei* had been interned with their families which included their *Issei* parents. Since *Issei* were barred from having American citizenship, they were considered Japanese citizens. As Japanese citizens, they were not allowed to serve in the military and could

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<sup>37</sup> Christgau, “*Enemies*,” 149.

<sup>38</sup> Kawaguchi, “The *Nisei* Story,” 16.

not answer yes to question 27. If they answered yes to question 28, they would be left as nationless people stranded without a country to support them. Forced to answer no to question 28, they were left with the fear that they could be forced to repatriate back to Japan since they answered both questions no. Their children as *Nisei* were able to answer yes to both questions if they wanted to join the military, which created the possibility of being separated from their family.<sup>39</sup> Keeping the family together however was the reason many wanted to join the military in the first place. Tosh Yasutake, for instance, exemplifies this reason. His *Issei* mother disapproved of his volunteering because it risked the breakup of their family, yet Tosh was volunteering specifically for his family. Being an *Issei* community leader, his father had been imprisoned earlier in the war for possible subversive activity. Tosh explained that one of the reasons he served was that “he thought it would help Dad,” which calmed his mother’s fears of losing her son.<sup>40</sup> He and others like him believed that serving in the military would give them and their families the opportunity to leave the camps and avoid deportation.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to helping their families through their military service, many soldiers wanted to serve for more personal reasons as well. In recalling why he believed that military service was right for him, Masao Watanabe said:

Because, gee, if you're going to live here, you've got to be a part of society. You've got to do what is expected of you. And I had no problem volunteering. I don't know which was worse: being locked up in camp or going off to war. In my mind, barbed wires aren't very, very inviting, being penned up where you're just -- I guess we were too independent. I just didn't like being

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<sup>39</sup> Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 30.

<sup>40</sup> Tosh Yasutake, interview by Alice Ito and Tom Ikeda, November 14, 2002, Segment 8, transcript, Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive. <http://archive.densho.org/Resource/popuptext.aspx?v=s&i=denshovh-ytosh-01-0008&t=Tosh+Yasutake+Interview+Segment+8+Transcript>.

<sup>41</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 52.

cooped up and looking at barbed wires and guard towers. That just wasn't for me.”<sup>42</sup>

For men like Masao, serving in the military was both a civic duty and a form of escape from what he was experiencing. As a citizen of the United States, he believed that he should be able to perform his civic duty despite being treated so poorly and having his rights denied. He and other men acted as they believed citizens should to hold onto what was seemingly taken from them. Serving in the military would also provide an escape from the internment camps. They would be free to move beyond the barbed wire to training camps around the country as well as the battlefields across the Pacific. The military could provide the freedoms that they had lost when forced to leave their homes.

Not all men who would serve with the 442<sup>nd</sup> were happy with their circumstances. Some had many reservations about the conditions they were to fight under. The fact that they would be serving in a segregated unit controlled by white officers could be disconcerting. Tosh Yasutake had this very reservation before he served. At first, he had been excited to learn that he and other Japanese American men would be able to serve their nation as they had wanted from the start of the war. But as the thought settled in, he started to doubt why he would be placed in a segregated unit. “Well,” he said, “I was apprehensive about being in a segregated unit and I thought they would probably use us -- there'll be discrimination in the way they'd be using us and I think at times when we were overseas it did happen.” He was afraid that the racist mentality that had put people of Japanese descent into the camps could translate over to the military as well. He was afraid that they would be used as cannon fodder to replace white troops. He and soldiers like him would have preferred to be assimilated with troops of other races. The military “ought to just

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<sup>42</sup> Watanabe, interview, Segment 18. <http://archive.densho.org/Resource/popuptext.aspx?v=s&i=denshovh-wmasao-01-0018&t=Masao+Watanabe+Segment+18+Transcript>.

assimilate [them] among the *hakujin* [Caucasian] troops and not have a segregated unit.”<sup>43</sup> By being in an integrated unit they could ensure more equal treatment in where and how they fought over seas. Tosh even held out on enlisting in the hopes of the troops eventually becoming more assimilated, but eventually enlisted in spite of the 442<sup>nd</sup> remaining segregated. The hopes of helping his family through his service overcame the hesitation that he felt.<sup>44</sup>

To the *Nisei* throughout the United States, their decision to serve in the military for the United States was highly intertwined with their views of citizenship. But rather than have one simple view on the subject, there were many interpretations of what citizenship and their service meant. For those in Hawaii, military service came easier in comparison to those in the camps. Hawaiian *Nisei* had greater access to military service from the start of the war which provided a greater sense of freedom even under martial law. It became a more personal way of showing that they were just as loyal as other American citizens and that they had the right to be treated equally. In addition to the personal quality, service also became a way of honoring their families since performing civic duties for one’s country was highly valued in the Japanese culture. Performing the civic duty of military service was affirming their right as a citizen to do so while at the same time honoring their *Issei* parents’ values.

To the *Nisei* in the camps, these purposes for military service overlapped with those of the *Nisei* in Hawaii. Military service provided freedom to them in the more literal sense since it would allow them to move beyond the camps’ barbed wire fences. They also saw military service as a way to address citizenship, but not just for themselves like those in Hawaii. Both groups served while considering the citizenship status of their *Issei* parents, but for those in the

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<sup>43</sup> Tosh Yasutake, interview, Segment 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

camps it was more vital. The loyalty questionnaire reinforced the issue that the *Issei* were not allowed to be citizens. In order to protect their families and aid their parents, *Nisei* in the camps would use their own rights as citizens to serve in the military and demonstrate the loyalties of their families to the American cause. Showing the loyalty of their people was seen as a way to alleviate the hostility towards their race and hopefully decrease the threats of deportation for the *Issei*. However, the opinions of those in the camps did not always overlap with those in Hawaii. The racist policies internees had to endure did play a role in the decision to serve. While those in Hawaii who could fight in the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion did not always mind the segregation because it put a focus on them as people, others did not see it like this. They came to question whether the segregation was being used to put them on the front lines in the way of danger to protect white troops. Even though many decided to volunteer for service in order to affirm their citizenship and aid their family, the specter of race could still influence whether they thought it was worth fighting for or not.

### **Japanese Americans and Military Intelligence**

The experiences that influenced how different groups of Japanese Americans in World War II came to serve in combat roles within the American military also influenced how those same groups came to serve in non-combat roles as well. This was especially the case for the *Kibei*. While *Kibei* served in combat roles alongside the two groups of *Nisei* for similar reasons, they had extra considerations that influenced their wartime participation. Because *Kibei* had lived in Japan for a period of time and often knew the Japanese language better, they came under the most suspicion during the war. However, it was this experience that encouraged *Kibei* to participate not only in combat during the war, but in the intelligence service which complemented their unique situation.

While tensions between the Japanese and the Americans were still growing before war broke out, it became clear that the United States was at an obvious disadvantage in the field of intelligence. In any war, commanding officers have to keep themselves informed of where the enemy is, what their numbers are, and if possible what they are planning. One of the key ways to gain this information is by intercepting enemy documents or interrogating enemy personnel. Yet it becomes completely useless if it cannot be understood. Before the war, there were few sources of Japanese translators available in the United States: former military officers whom had learned Japanese while stationed in Japan, missionaries, businessmen, and other American civilians. However, most of the military officers had since been long retired or incapacitated, and the civilian population of Japanese speakers was almost negligible.<sup>45</sup> Without anyone to translate information the army intercepted the country was at a serious disadvantage in creating strategies to counter Japanese offensives.

What worsened the situation was that Japanese is a difficult language to learn. The language difficulty made training new translators time consuming in a war where battles could sometimes be won or lost with information obtained only hours before. The United States could not afford to waste valuable time teaching new men from scratch. The Japanese themselves considered their language to be so difficult for foreign speakers to learn that it became a form of code in itself and put less effort into encrypting their messages. But the security they held in their language eventually assisted in their downfall. Their decision ignored the fact that the United States had a vast reserve of Japanese speakers by assuming that no one with Japanese heritage

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<sup>45</sup> John Weckerling, "Japanese Americans play vital role in United States intelligence service in World War Two," 1946, U.S Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.



would ever choose another nation over Japan.<sup>46</sup> The pressure for Japanese Americans to learn English instead of Japanese served to assure the enemy further that no one would be able to translate Japanese. Their assumptions were soon proven unfounded. Even as tensions with the Japanese grew, there were some who realized the potential of employing Japanese Americans in the war effort.

The idea of utilizing Japanese American linguistic skills was first proposed by Colonel Carlisle C. Dunesbury and Lieutenant Colonel Wallace Moore in June of 1941. They realized that the key to winning the intelligence game in the Pacific would be to tap into the linguistic and cultural knowledge many Japanese Americans already had, and apply it to the war. The move to utilize this resource began with the establishment of the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) in San Francisco, California, in November 1941. However, the program was not fully developed until it moved to Camp Savage, Minnesota in May of 1942.<sup>47</sup> Just as Japanese Americans were barred from combat roles after Pearl Harbor, they were initially barred from intelligence roles because of their suspected disloyalty. With suspicion and fear of Japanese Americans present throughout the country and the military, the MISLS faced difficulty in recruiting support for its program.<sup>48</sup> In order to assuage fears of disloyalty, they would have to utilize the loyalty questionnaire as well.

As with those looking to serve the military in combat roles, potential translators had to answer yes to questions 27 and 28 of the loyalty questionnaire. But as seen with those wanting to go into combat roles, the loyalty questionnaire posed many problems for *Nisei* and *Kibei*

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<sup>46</sup> George Oakley Totten III, "From Morotai to Mindanao and then to Japan," in *MIS in the War Against Japan: Personal Experiences Related at the 1993 MIS Capital Reunion*, "The Nisei Veteran: An American Patriot," ed. Stanley L. Falk and Warren M. Tsuneishi (Washington D.C: Japanese American Veterans Association, 1995), 34-38.

<sup>47</sup> Weckerling, "Japanese Americans play vital role," np.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

answering the questions. Bitterness over the fact that the questionnaire was thought to be necessary in the first place abounded, and it became interpreted as an insult to the recruits' honor and intelligence.<sup>49</sup> That bitterness became enough for some to refuse to sign the oath at all. Yet to many, the loyalty questionnaire was the first step in proving themselves. To MISLS member Kojiro Kawaguchi, he described how when he was first interned in the camp with his family, he felt extreme bitterness and anger over what his country had done to him and became "disenchanted with American democracy." However, he came to decide that rather than stay in the camps and do nothing, service would provide him the chance to "prove to the other Americans that we were good American citizens, in spite of what our government had done to us."<sup>50</sup>

Despite what Kawaguchi personally thought about serving with the United States military, he still had to consider the circumstances his family was facing. When he originally signed the loyalty oath, he had been planning on joining the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. But his parents were both *Issei* and could not answer questions 27 and 28. If Kawaguchi joined the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, he would become separated from his family and sent to the European theater. As the only son in the family, his parents pressured him to not volunteer for service so that he could remain with the family and provide for them rather than be sent overseas.<sup>51</sup> The pressure coming from the family prevented many *Nisei* and *Kibei* from serving in combat roles when first asked. But on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the MISLS started recruiting from the internment camps. This time,

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<sup>49</sup>Kawaguchi, "The Nisei Story," 16.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 13, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Kawaguchi, "The Nisei Story," 17.

many of those who were prevented from serving in direct combat roles made the decision to join the MISLS as translators.<sup>52</sup>

However, as the recruitment process started to gain traction, the MISLS ran into a problem. In a survey of 3,700 men who signed up for the MISLS program, ninety percent of them did not have a speaking ability proficient enough for practical use. The majority of them were *Nisei* who had been more “Americanized” as they grew up.<sup>53</sup> Having lived in the United States their entire lives, most *Nisei* were only exposed to written Japanese as part of after school classes with their churches or community programs. They were unable to translate more complex characters and pronunciations without having been exposed to them for long periods of time.<sup>54</sup> The *Kibei* on the other hand had been educated in Japan and had been exposed to different styles of Japanese speech and writing. Furthermore, *Kibei* who had attended Japanese schools were familiar with Japanese vocabulary oriented around the military. Leading up to and throughout World War II, Japanese schools had included requisite military training in their curriculums, subjecting their students to ROTC training in preparation for service in the Japanese Imperial Army. Students were constantly drilled in Japanese techniques firing rifles, marching in formation, and obeying orders. More importantly to the MISLS, they were also required to memorize Japanese field manuals detailing Japanese military vocabulary and strategy.<sup>55</sup> Since the *Kibei* had attended Japanese schools, they had been subjected to this education and were therefore privy to important intelligence information even before the war began.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Weckerling, “Japanese Americans play vital role,” np.

<sup>54</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 78, 177-178.

The key to the program's success lay not with the *Nisei*, then, but the *Kibei*. Their more intimate knowledge with Japanese military language and culture not only allowed them to translate information behind the scenes, but serve on the front lines. They had the ability to interrogate enemy prisoners, write pamphlets and broadcast radio transmissions used for propaganda, and act as "cave flushers," soldiers tasked with entering caves on Japanese islands to convince enemy soldiers to exit and surrender.<sup>56</sup> Having been trained in Japanese military doctrine during their schooling, *Kibei* knew how Japanese soldiers were indoctrinated. They recognized the importance of understanding how Japanese soldiers interpreted their circumstances during the war through their cultural values. Knowing what drove Japanese soldiers to act as they did allowed American propaganda efforts to become more targeted and effective. They also recognized that the ability to write in Japanese would make the propaganda more effective as well. Utilizing correct grammatical styles as well as a range of characters would make communication with soldiers of ranging literacy easier and would give incentive to take the propaganda more seriously.<sup>57</sup>

The recognition of their skills through the MISLS program allowed *Kibei* to not only serve their country through the field, but through the classroom as well. Many were recruited as teachers for the MISLS program and taught both *Nisei* and *Hakujin* recruits how to translate Japanese to English and vice versa; read Japanese in multiple writing styles; interrogate captured Japanese soldiers; and interpret intercepted messages.<sup>58</sup> Having the opportunity to teach their language and culture allowed them to pass on their knowledge to others in the Japanese

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<sup>56</sup> Weckerling, "Japanese Americans play vital role," np.

<sup>57</sup> Allison B. Gilmore, *You Can't Fight Tanks with Bayonets* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 170.

<sup>58</sup> Takashi Matsui, "Teaching at the Military Intelligence Service Language School," in *MIS in the War Against Japan: Personal Experiences Related at the 1993 MIS Capital Reunion*, "The *Nisei* Veteran: An American Patriot," ed. Stanley L. Falk and Warren M Tsuneishi (Washington D.C: Japanese American Veterans Association, 1995), 4-8.

American community and increase the resources of the MISLS to include not only *Kibei*, but *Nisei* as well.

Despite the many skills that Japanese Americans could offer, they still had to face the suspicion the public held against them for their ancestry. This suspicion that Japanese Americans faced was often worse for *Kibei* than the *Nisei* because not only were they suspected of disloyalty by Americans of other races, they were often treated with hostility by other Japanese Americans. Having had greater contact with the Japanese culture and language, *Kibei* often felt that the *Nisei* blamed them for their internment by having brought the suspicion of disloyalty onto their ethnic group. As a result of their extended stays in Japan at young ages, many *Kibei* could often have difficulty in readjusting to American culture and the use of English. The result was that they were seen as being more Japanese than American.<sup>59</sup> Their linguistic skills and cultural understandings, the skills that made them the key to success in the MISLS, made them scapegoats even within their own communities.

Not only did Japanese Americans feel threatened within the internment camps, they were constantly threatened once part of the MISLS program. While Japanese American combat units such as the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment were sent to the European Theater, MISLS units were sent to the Pacific Theater. There they served as part of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section headquartered in Australia, working to translate captured Japanese military documents.<sup>60</sup> They acted as the “eyes and ears not only of American combat forces, but also that of the other allied forces fighting Japan.”<sup>61</sup> However, the nature of their work is what made their service more dangerous in some ways than that of normal combat units. In order to translate

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<sup>59</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 37, 39, 43, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Matsui, “Teaching at the Military Intelligence Service Language School,” 4-8.

<sup>61</sup> Weckerling, “Japanese Americans play vital role,” np.

Japanese documents and interrogate prisoners quickly, MISLS members had to go into the field of combat alongside allied troops and work in direct contact with them. This meant that they would be surrounded by enemy soldiers who looked like them.

Throughout the war, propaganda directed against the Japanese was filled with intense violent and racial rhetoric which became problematic for Japanese American translators on the front lines. American home front propaganda had the goal of dehumanizing Japanese soldiers and civilians by portraying them as morally and intellectually inferior to the white American soldiers. Posters, films, and political cartoons would refer to the Japanese as monkeys or rats, and highlighted Japanese atrocities committed against American soldiers to portray the enemy as a primitive race with a “uniquely evil nature.”<sup>62</sup> Racial rhetoric was meant as a way to encourage the American forces to continue fighting the Japanese by eliminating any hesitation they might have. By making the enemy seem inhuman and a threat to the soldiers own safety, killing them became easier.

However, the racist imagery became easily transferable from the Japanese soldiers to the Japanese American translators beside them. In the heat of battle or during the night, it could be difficult to distinguish between the enemy and the translators which made friendly fire a significant possibility. For many, the possibility became reality as AP news camera man Joe Rosenthal witnessed: “They work so close to the enemy on these missions that with the danger of being killed by the Japanese, they run the risk of being shot unintentionally, by our own marines...Many have paid with their lives, and many more have been wounded.”<sup>63</sup> In order to

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<sup>62</sup> John W. Dower, “Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures: World War II in Asia,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*, ed. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 175.

<sup>63</sup> Joe Rosenthal as quoted in Weckerling, “Japanese Americans play vital role,” np.

mitigate the threat of friendly fire, the MISLS translators were assigned white bodyguards. These bodyguards were to be with them every moment of the day to protect them from not only Japanese soldiers, but their fellow Americans. Since they looked like the enemy, it was easy for an American soldier to associate them with the enemy they were constantly indoctrinated to kill, as well as their own self-preservation instincts.<sup>64</sup>

Even if the bodyguards provided some safeguards for the issue of friendly fire in the Pacific Theater, Japanese Americans still had to consider the threat of the enemy themselves when deciding to join the MISLS. Japanese military culture saw acting against the Imperial Japanese Army and surrendering as equivalent to dishonor and warranting punishment.<sup>65</sup> Since the Japanese did not believe that anyone of Japanese ancestry would fight against their homeland in the United States military, they immediately labeled any Japanese Americans they caught as treasonous. Their “treason” against Japan often resulted in Japanese American prisoners facing cruel punishments. MISLS translator Richard M. Sakakida was serving undercover in the Philippines when he experienced this first hand. When the United States surrendered the Philippines in May 1942 to the Japanese, Sakakida was captured after having made the surrender announcement.

Being of Japanese ancestry and serving the American forces, I was charged by the Japanese with ‘treason.’ Furthermore, those Japanese soldiers who were POWs on Bataan all identified me as an American sergeant who had interrogated them. For this reason, I was separated from the American POWs and incarcerated with Japanese prisoners.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 216, 221.

<sup>65</sup> Gilmore, *You Can't Fight Tanks with Bayonets*, 169.

<sup>66</sup> Richard M. Sakakida, “Undercover Agent in Manila.” *In MIS in the War Against Japan: Personal Experiences Related at the 1993 MIS Capital Reunion, “The Nisei Veteran: An American Patriot,”* ed. Stanley L. Falk and Warren M. Tsuneishi (Washington D.C: Japanese American Veterans Association, 1995), 22-26.

He was then subjected to beatings, cigarette burns across his body, and torture from water continuously dripped on his face or shoved down his throat with a hose.<sup>67</sup> Joining the MISLS and serving in the Pacific Theater placed Japanese Americans in situations that could result in possible brutal injury or death at the hands of the Japanese as a form of retribution against them.

While facing so many threats to their safety and the animosity of their own people, how could Japanese Americans, especially the *Kibei*, make the decision to join the MISLS? One of the major reasons that *Kibei* decided to join as translators was because they had such personal relationships to Japan. Even as the war in the Pacific started to come to an end, the MISLS started to increase their efforts. With the end of the war came the daunting effort to rebuild Japan. The war had brought major destruction to Japanese infrastructure and the civilians themselves. Entire cities or major sections were destroyed; food, clothing and other supplies had become scarce; multitudes had been left killed or injured.<sup>68</sup> Rebuilding not only Japan but American-Japanese relations would take a lot of effort and many MISLS members wanted to become a part of it. They would serve as links between the Japanese people and American occupying forces by facilitating communication with civilians and former Imperial Army soldiers.<sup>69</sup> Since the *Kibei* had lived in Japan at some point in their lives, many of them had formed attachments to both the country and the relatives or friends who lived there. Joining the MISLS would give them the opportunity to work alongside the people they knew in order to rebuild Japan in a way that was beneficial to both countries.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Sakakida, "Undercover Agent in Manila," 22-26.

<sup>68</sup> Akiria Miuri, "Akiria Miuri," in *The Good War: an oral history of World War Two*, ed. Studs Terkel (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 203-207.

<sup>69</sup> Weckerling, "Japanese Americans play vital role," np.

<sup>70</sup> Matsui, "Teaching at the Military Intelligence Service Language School," 4-8.; Totten III, "From Morotai to Mindanao," 34-38.



Working with the MISLS would also give both *Kibei* and *Nisei* the opportunities to become more in touch with their Japanese heritage. While *Issei* would try and instill Japanese culture and values within their family's lives, *Kibei* and especially *Nisei* were exposed to American culture. Through public education, exposure to friends of other ethnicities, and popular culture, Japanese Americans were encouraged to move away from their parent's culture and assimilate into their new country as American citizens. This meant that many Japanese Americans did not always have access to their family's cultural roots. For many who did have this access, they did not always embrace it in the attempt to follow their own personal ambitions or become more appealing to their non-Japanese friends.<sup>71</sup> By joining the MISLS, *Nisei* and *Kibei* were given access to education about Japanese language and culture. To some, their experience as translators was a "wonderful and rare experience" that "gave them their livelihood and more than anything else a capacity to appreciate the culture and beauty of their ancestral land."<sup>72</sup>

The Japanese Americans who served with the MISLS had many things in common with those who served in combat with the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. Both groups had experienced the racism that caused the American public to see them with mistrust and the federal government to feel a need to evacuate them and their families to the internment camps. Military service was for *Nisei* and *Kibei* in both groups a way to prove that they were loyal citizens and it was wrong of other Americans to doubt them just because of their race. It was a way to prove that they had the right to be treated equally as American citizens because they were performing their civic duties as one. It was also seen as a way to protect their families.

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<sup>71</sup> Sakamoto, *Midnight in Broad Daylight*, 19, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Matsui, "Teaching at the Military Intelligence Service Language School," 4-8.

Despite these similarities, there were differences in what those in the MISLS and the combat units had to consider in making their decisions. MISLS members, especially *Kibei*, had to prove themselves not only to the rest of the country, but to other Japanese Americans as well. Their background made them targets for blame and judgment that forced them to feel the need to prove themselves more than other *Nisei*. The nature of their work placed them in greater danger from friendly fire on the front lines in the Pacific Theater as well as from Japanese soldiers punishing them from serving with the Americans. However, many saw the opportunities they had for their people after the war as worth the risk. The linguistic and cultural skills that originally brought them so much hate made them vital for both the war effort and the rebuilding of Japan that would take place once the war was over. Once the war was finished, they could use their positions with the MISLS to facilitate the reconstruction of Japan and American-Japanese relations. They did so in the hope that they would be able to rebuild the culture that made them who they were and help promote it in a way that encouraged prejudice against their people to end.

### **Japanese Americans and Citizenship Renunciation:**

While many *Nisei* and *Kibei* made the decision to serve in the United States military in either a combat role or with the MISLS, not all of them chose to do so. Some decided to reject the idea of military service and instead took the more extreme action of renouncing their American citizenship entirely. Even though Japanese Americans experienced similar circumstances regarding racist treatment and placement within the camps, they interpreted these circumstances in different ways. These different interpretations led to a rift within the Japanese American community that only continued to widen as the pressures they faced grew.

When the process of evacuation to the camps first began, many Japanese American citizens were filled with bitterness and resentment over their treatment. They had argued that it violated their 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights and was therefore unconstitutional. It was obvious to those in the camps that their incarceration was based solely on racial motivations and not military necessity as General DeWitt claimed. Stanley Hayami, a *Nisei* who was sent to the Heart Mountain internment camp in Wyoming, recognized that racial prejudice was involved even as a teenager:

Do I think racial prejudice was involved? Yes I do. If it were not, how does one account for the fact that German and Italian aliens were not evacuated while Jap. American citizens as well as Japanese aliens were evacuated. Don't tell me we were the more dangerous.<sup>73</sup>

Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, German American citizens had long been creating their own cultural communities like the Japanese. Formation of strong cultural communities was often seen by the American public as an attempt to only foster foreign cultures while resisting integration into American culture. It was seen as a threat to American identity and was one of the reasons that Japanese communities were suspected of sabotage and targeted for persecution.<sup>74</sup> Yet the German American community had formed their own cultural communities as well. During the war, minority German American communities supported groups such as the German American Bund mobilized thousands of German Americans in support of Hitler. German spies had been caught and submarines had been destroyed along the East Coast as well.<sup>75</sup> Both Japanese Americans and German Americans were descendents of enemy nations during World War II, but the tangible threat some minority German American groups posed was

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<sup>73</sup> Stanley Hayami, December 14, 1942, Guide to the Stanley Hayami Diary, 49, Online Archive of California, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=tf687004zq;developer=local;style=oac4;doc.view=items>.

<sup>74</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 79.

ignored in favor of persecuting Japanese Americans. This was done in spite of the fact that there was no concrete proof of Japanese American sabotage. To many Japanese Americans, this was evidence that even though they held rights as American citizens, they would never be treated as such because of the racial prejudice against them.

Once inside the camps, the feeling of rejection by their own country could become exacerbated by the conditions inside the camps. Interned Japanese Americans had to deal with the issues of inadequate housing and facilities, being kept under armed guard at all times, and discrimination in any employment they had.<sup>76</sup> Many tried to fix these problems by exercising their rights as citizens under the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment; they would hold protests, night vigils, and general strikes against camp authorities. However, much of the American public viewed internment in itself as proof of Japanese American disloyalty. Any protests that the internees made only further proved their beliefs.<sup>77</sup> If Japanese Americans used their rights, they could be seen as disloyal. If they did not use their rights, their problems would go unaddressed.

Resentment towards their poor treatment as citizens led to the growth of pro-Japanese sentiment within the internment camps. As the United States began enforcing evacuation of citizens with Japanese ancestry to the camps, Japanese propagandists took advantage of the situation to promote anti-American sentiments. The propaganda focused on the idea of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” which they argued was a mutual partnership to protect Asian nations against racist and imperialistic intentions of Western nations. Use of internment camps and slew of nativist propaganda against Japanese Americans was proof that

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<sup>76</sup> Collins, “Disloyalty and Renunciation,” 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20, 22.

the United States had negative intentions for Asian peoples.<sup>78</sup> To a more extremist minority within the camps, the arguments found in Japanese propaganda reflected how they interpreted their experiences with American racism and the camps. Their disillusionment eventually led some to renounce their American citizenship in order to repatriate back to Japan.

Those in the internment camps who wanted to renounce their citizenship and repatriate to Japan began to form pro-Japanese, pro-repatriation organizations called the *Hokoku Seinen-Dan*. These groups often used tactics of violence or peer pressure to call attention to their position and gain support among the Japanese American community within the camps.<sup>79</sup> One notable example is the riot that occurred in the Manzanar Assembly Center on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942. Pro-Japanese groups consisting of *Issei* and *Kibei* held a celebration within the camp for the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. When other groups of Japanese Americans tried to stop the celebration, a riot broke out between the two groups that resulted in one death and the injury of several others. As camp military police tried to take control, rioters began throwing stones and could only be suppressed by the use of tear gas.<sup>80</sup> The violence within the camps did not stop when protests and riots were suppressed. Groups like the *Hokoku Seinen-Dan* continually used beatings and other threats of violence to convince young Japanese American men to join their ranks and renounce their citizenship.

While disillusionment caused by experiences of American racism and influence from Japanese propaganda influenced more extreme Japanese American's decision making, it is not enough to fully explain why others decided to renounce their citizenship. It was not until the loyalty questionnaire was distributed through the camps that calls for renunciation and

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<sup>78</sup> Asahina, *Just Americans*, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Christgau, "*Enemies*," 156-57.

<sup>80</sup> Hayami, *Guide to the Stanley Hayami Diary*, 11.

repatriation really began to increase. When it came to answering Questions 27 and 28, *Nisei* and *Kibei* were placed into a bind. While they could answer yes to both questions if they chose, their *Issei* parents could not because they were not American citizens. Since they were not American citizens, they were not allowed to join the United States military and would become stateless people if they forswore allegiance to Japan and the emperor.<sup>81</sup> When deciding how to answer, Japanese Americans had to consider what would happen to their families when they answered the questionnaire.

Japanese Americans who eventually served in both combat units and the MISLS program answered yes to both questions because they believed it would save their families. By proving their own loyalty, perhaps their *Issei* parents would be spared from deportation. However, many other *Nisei* and *Kibei* believed that military service would put their families into jeopardy, not save them. If they answered yes to these questions and were drafted into the military, they would be removed from the camps for service and there was no guarantee that the *Issei* would not be deported while they were gone. Men of draft age were often pressured by their families to answer no on the questionnaire and renounce their citizenship so that the family could be repatriated together rather than be separated.<sup>82</sup> *Nisei* and *Kibei* also had to face pressures the *Hokoku Seinen-Dan* placed upon their families. Because of the threat of beatings they placed on any *Nisei* or *Kibei* who answered yes to the loyalty questionnaire, Japanese Americans feared that the group would come after their own family as punishment.<sup>83</sup> Fear for their physical safety could be enough to pressure many into refusing to fill out the questionnaire and serve in the military.

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<sup>81</sup> Collins, "Disloyalty and Renunciation," 30.

<sup>82</sup> Christgau, "*Enemies*," 148.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

Many also refused to fill out the questionnaire and renounced their citizenship specifically to avoid personally serving in the military. The growing sense that they would not be treated like American citizens because of their race despite their rights under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, many questioned why they should fight for the country that did not respect them. Since they were not treated as citizens, why should they perform military service if that was the civic duty of citizens? As a form of protest to their second-class citizen treatment, some Japanese Americans would rip apart copies of their birth certificates or refuse to sign the loyalty questionnaire.<sup>84</sup> In addition to refusing military service as a protest to treatment, they also refused as a protest in favor of their own safety. While other Nisei and Kibei saw segregated military units like the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment as the way to highlight their own abilities, others saw it as a way to ensure their own safety. By segregating Japanese Americans into their own units, it would be easier to put them into the line of fire ahead of white troops. In addition, by avoiding military service they could also avoid possible retribution from the Japanese. By signing the loyalty questionnaire and serving with the United States military, they showed that they had turned against Japan and would therefore be deemed as traitors. If they or their families were ever deported after the war, they feared they would be subject to punishment.<sup>85</sup>

By the time the use of the loyalty questionnaire ended, over 5000 Japanese Americans had answered negatively and rejected military service. With the overwhelming negative questionnaire answers as well as the presence of violent outbursts within the internment camps, it became difficult for government officials trying to argue that most Japanese Americans were loyal to the United States in order to gain support for allowing Japanese Americans to join the

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<sup>84</sup> Collins, "Disloyalty and Renunciation," 32-33.

<sup>85</sup> Christgau, "*Enemies*," 150-151.

military. Groups such as the *Hokoku Sensei-Dan* seemed to confirm the public's fear that the Japanese Americans were working in league with the Japanese. The turmoil they caused within the camps between themselves and Japanese Americans supporting the military only worsened the situation. The difficult nature of deciding how to answer the loyalty questionnaire resulted in divisions within the internment camps. Masao Watanabe remembered how he felt about those who refused to serve in the military:

It was tough from one extreme to the other, and how do you weigh something like that, two entirely opposite philosophies. And I'm sure they thought they were doing what they thought was right, and we sure thought what we were doing was right. So it's just two opposite philosophies that were not melding together. So it's hard to say. I knew at the time we were...very bitter, and mad. It's just a matter of, "Gee, what these guys did was so much." And then it's negated by a few guys, "no-nos" or something. It was just too much.<sup>86</sup>

Japanese Americans who decided to serve in the military were bitter towards those who wanted to renounce their citizenship and repatriate. As part of the military, they were risking their lives to prove to the American public that they were loyal to the United States and that they should not have been placed in the camps. Even though they could understand why some people decided to answer the questionnaire negatively, they could not allow their efforts to be jeopardized.

The federal government's solution to the problem rejecters posed was to separate out those who were a "disgrace and shame to their brother Japanese Americans" from the rest of the men and women in the camps and repatriate them to Japan.<sup>87</sup> On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, President Roosevelt signed order PL 405 allowing Japanese American citizens to legally renounce their citizenship. Anyone who chose to renounce their citizenship was then deported to the Tule Lake

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<sup>86</sup>Masao Watanabe, interview by Tom Ikeda, June 19, 1998, Segment 28, transcript, Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive.

<sup>87</sup> Christgau, "Enemies," 160-161.



Relocation Center in California as a form of segregation from the rest of the internees. From there, the internees would be sent to Fort Lincoln in Bismarck, North Dakota where they would stay until they could be sent to Japan.<sup>88</sup> 5000 Japanese Americans willingly took the offer to fully renounce their citizenship and be segregated in new camps. As they felt more rejected by the public, the government, and those inside the camps, Japanese Americans saw rejecting American citizenship to move to Japan as the better option. With West Coast communities still holding antagonism towards those of Japanese descent, they believed that even if they were released from the internment camp when the war ended, they would still have to suffer persecution and violence because of their race. Repatriation would let them avoid being forced back into hostile communities.<sup>89</sup>

Despite there being a vocal minority of Japanese Americans that favored the movement to repatriate them to Japan, there were some who had second thoughts about the decision to renounce their citizenship. Once segregated away from their families and the pressures of serving in the military, they questioned whether losing their citizenship was something that they really wanted. However, after the war ended in September, 1945, the Justice Department announced that they were to be deported to Japan starting November 15 of that year.<sup>90</sup> That left very little time for those in the camps to appeal their decisions to renounce citizenship. Many of those who changed their mind and wanted to keep their citizenship sought legal help from Wayne Collins, a lawyer working with the Northern California American Civil Liberties Union. In the case *Korematsu v. The United States*, they argued that the federal government did not have the constitutional authority to evacuate Japanese Americans to concentration camps. Because the

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 155, 160-161.; "Move 650 Disloyal Japs to Alien Internment Camp," Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Feb.12, 1945, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177028122/9D4D3EA112A04BAEPQ/40?accountid=2694>.

<sup>89</sup> Christgau, "Enemies," 158-159.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 167.

camps placed them in situations of duress and coercion that forced them to feel the need to renounce their citizenship, the renunciations made by Japanese American citizens were not valid.<sup>91</sup>

In the end, the Justice Department eventually allowed those who renounced citizenship to formally request that their original renunciation be revoked; however, the legal process and court proceedings would take many years to complete for each individual. Since the arguments posed in *Korematsu v. The United States* were not heard until November 1<sup>st</sup>, many of the internees had already been deported to Japan where they would then have to wait.<sup>92</sup>

Even though Japanese Americans who rejected military service and renounced their citizenship followed a very different path from those who performed military service, many from both groups actually had the same interests in mind when they made their decision. All of them experienced racist policies that limited the rights of themselves and their families. Those on the West Coast had to experience federal removal from their homes based on their race while they watched other ethnic groups remain free. The difference lay in how Japanese Americans chose to deal with what they had experienced. Some decided to take the opportunity the loyalty questionnaire offered them and join the military so that they could prove the judgments made against them wrong. Others, though, became very embittered towards their experience and decided that if their country was not going to respect them as citizens, they would not put their lives at risk for it.

However, there were those who renounced their citizenship not only because it was a form of protest but because they felt that they had to do so. Just as those who volunteered for

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<sup>91</sup> Christgau, "Enemies," 167-168.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 167-169.

military service did so to protect their families, those who rejected military service thought they were doing the same thing. They had to face the possibility pro-Japanese groups such as the *Hokoku Seiden-Dan* that could hurt them or their family if they did not reject military service. They also felt that the only way to keep their family from being separated was by renouncing their citizenship, so that their status as an *Issei*, *Nisei*, or *Kibei* could not be used against them. Rejecting military service would also protect them personally from any Japanese retribution they may face on the battlefield or from white American. Once these pressures were removed though, many Japanese Americans wanted to have their status as American citizens returned which shows that they had done so only as a result of the pressures they faced, not because they truly wished to.

### **Moving Forward:**

As World War II came to an end and the Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps, they had to find a way to come to terms with what they went through. They had gone through the trauma of being persecuted for their race and ancestry, being forced to leave their homes and all of their possessions behind, and being forced to live isolated within the internment camps. But rather than remain passive about their situation, many of them took action to try and find justice for themselves and their communities. However, the actions individuals took could be quite different from each other. While many of them had similar experiences and reasoning that influenced their choices, there were enough unique experiences and concerns that different groups of Japanese Americans had that led to different paths.

While the actions that Japanese Americans took during the war were different in nature, the overlapping reasons that they had for these actions were rooted in one common goal: they

wanted to receive respect as citizens and justice for what they had been forced through. Japanese Americans often made the decisions that they did in order to prove to others that they had been wrongfully persecuted, to find freedom from the internment camps, to protect their family's integrity, or to help protect and promote their race and culture from future persecution.

Many Japanese Americans during the war had begun the process of accomplishing these goals. The 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment became one of the most decorated units in American military history. Soldiers like Daniel Inouye from the units gained enough recognition from their service that they were able to enter the political sphere and become Congressmen, making strides in giving Japanese Americans greater political representation and voice. In 1945 when General Douglas MacArthur accepted the terms of armistice from the Japanese, two men from the MISLS, Lieutenant George K. Kayano of San Francisco and Lieutenant Thomas T. Imada of Hawaii, were standing there with him, recognizing their necessity during the war.<sup>93</sup> The case of *Korematsu v. The United States* brought forth by those pressured to give up their citizenship put the issue of racism against Japanese Americans into the public eye and demanded that the injustice done to them be redressed. Whether they served the military in some capacity or not, they paved the way in the ongoing process of seeking justice for what they had gone through that continued long after the war ended.

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<sup>93</sup> Weckerling, "Japanese Americans play vital role," np.

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