The Everyday Heroes of World War II: Ordinary People Who Did Extraordinary Things

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I could have done no different. I would not have known how.

—Elizabeth Humbargar, on helping Japanese Americans during the war years, The Stockton Record, 1978
Introduction

The history of the Japanese community in the US during World War II is often retold against the backdrop of the battlefields of Europe and Asia, where Nisei soldiers fought fiercely to prove their loyalty as Americans, or from within the confines of the incarceration centers, where Nikkei families struggled to lead a life of normalcy after being forcibly removed from their West Coast homes. Yet not only are the Nikkei wartime experiences as varied and multifaceted as the thousands of people who endured them, but they also involved many other individuals who were not of Japanese descent, people who, like schoolteacher Elizabeth Humbargar, could do “no different” but join in the struggle.

The Japanese community as a whole rallied together in support of one other. But there were also countless individuals outside of this tightly knit community who either on their own or within a group sought fair and just treatment for the Nikkei. They were everyday people—from ministers to teachers to farmers to teenagers—who often endured condemnation from others who viewed those of Japanese descent through eyes clouded by hatred, fear and suspicion. They were ordinary people who took extraordinary measures for people they viewed as their equals and more significantly, as their friends.

Here are the stories of just some of the everyday heroes whose experiences are intertwined with those of the Japanese in America. Some of their acts of courage and compassion were written down or recorded in oral histories. Others were recalled in private moments shared with family members or occasionally in public testimonies given in remembrance of the war. Still others were accidentally and fortuitously discovered, perhaps by someone stumbling upon an old box of letters, or a long-forgotten photograph. It is our hope that their experiences will demonstrate the immense power behind individual acts of courage.
Outspoken Advocates

If we do not extend humanity's kindness and understanding to [the Japanese Americans], if we deny them the protection of the Bill of Rights, if we say that they must be denied the privilege of living in any of the 48 states without hearing or charge of misconduct, then we are tearing down the whole American system…

-- Colorado Governor Ralph L. Carr, 1942
Colorado Governor Ralph L. Carr (1887-1950), who served from 1939-1943, was a vociferous advocate of the Japanese Americans, standing alone among colleagues who did not share his sense of justice. Although he supported the war effort, he spoke out publicly against Japanese American incarceration, viewing it as unconstitutional. He welcomed incarcerees into Colorado, but did not send the Japanese in his home state to the centers. Instead, he lobbied for the end of incarceration, tirelessly working to secure the fair treatment and freedom they deserved as US citizens. Unfortunately, this advocacy likely contributed to the end of his political career. Although he served two two-year terms as governor, he would lose his bid for the US Senate and his career in politics.

A son of a coal miner, Ralph Lawrence Carr was born in Rosita, Colorado, and spent his childhood and youth growing up in the small community and attending school in the city. After graduating with a law degree from the University of Colorado, he went on to work as a newspaper editor and an attorney in various small towns. He first moved to Victor, where he met and married his wife, Gretchen Fowler, and adopted two children, Robert and Cynthia. Two years later, he relocated to Trinidad, and then in 1915, to Antonito. His growing success as a lawyer at the county and state levels culminated in 1929, when he was appointed by President Herbert Hoover as the US District Attorney of Colorado. He then moved his family to Denver, a considerable change since they were not accustomed to life in the big city. In fact, throughout his career, Carr would not lose sight of his humble beginnings, and his small-town upbringing shaped much of his character throughout his life.
Unfortunately, it was during this time that he suffered the loss of Gretchen, and found himself raising his two children as a single father. A Republican, Carr also was ousted when the Democrats took power. Still, he remained an active part of the Colorado political community as a prominent attorney specializing in water and irrigation law. In 1938, the Republican Party nominated Carr as its candidate for governor, a position that he won the following year. One of the first tasks he tackled was balancing the state budget and saving Colorado from bankruptcy. His political career had taken a promising turn, and he was looked upon favorably by his colleagues. In 1940, he was given the opportunity to run as vice president on Wendell Willkie’s ticket, a chance he turned down. He was mentioned as a potential presidential candidate in the New York media. The year after he became governor, he married Eleanor Fairall, a Colorado legislator.

It was at this time that the US was plunged into war following the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese Imperial forces. Immediately following the attack, community and business leaders of Japanese descent were rounded up and detained on suspicion of treasonous activity against the US government. The anti-Japanese fear and hysteria that marked this period eventually led to the passing of Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the mass removal of about 110,000 people of Japanese descent from areas along the West Coast to incarceration centers further inland. This included Carr’s home state of Colorado, which in a few months would begin construction of the Granada Relocation Center in its southeastern region.

Carr was a supporter of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s foreign policy and had fully backed the US’ involvement in the war from its start in 1939. But the “evacuation” of the Nikkei, including American citizens, was beyond his comprehension. Upon learning of Executive Order 9066, he expressed outrage and disbelief. He saw it as a blatant infringement of their rights as US citizens and could not support the decision to incarcerate them without evidence or trial. But required to comply with the federal ruling, Carr agreed to provide a place for
Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans in his state, saying that it was a “civic responsibility.” It was a responsibility that most of his colleagues would refuse to take on.

Appealing to Colorado residents’ sense of fairness, he asked them to consider the Constitution’s tenets, which were designed to protect all citizens, not just those from a select group. Pointing to the preamble of the Constitution, which begins, “We the people of the United States,” Carr announced, “It doesn’t say, ‘We the people, who are descendants of the English or the Scandinavians or the French.’” He also questioned the larger implications, for other American citizens, of holding Japanese American citizens without evidence or trial. Would they one day share the same fate?

“Amache,” or the Granada Relocation Center, would be built on Colorado soil at the end of June. The incarceration center opened in August 1942, just months after the issuance of Executive Order 9066. Over the course of its three years in operation, it would be the smallest of the ten incarceration centers, holding more than 7,000 people of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens. But even before it was built, the local community of nearby Lamar was up in arms at the presence of Japanese people in their midst, evidenced by the “No Japs Allowed” signs displayed in store fronts. Although some locals would empathize with the Nikkei and voice their support, the majority would not be so compassionate.

While Carr protested the treatment of the Japanese American community, refusing to send the Japanese in Colorado to the centers, and tried to incite his constituents to do the same, thousands would express their concerns over his position, claiming that the Japanese in America could not be trusted and should instead be feared. Many protested his support of the Nikkei, with some calling for his impeachment. But Carr continued to demand their just treatment and an end to racist attitudes. In many of his speeches, he adamantly opposed the
actions which had stripped the Nikkei of their civil rights and denied their personal property. Defending the incarcerees, he expressed his own personal distaste for the racism inherent in the treatment of the Nikkei:

The Japanese are protected by the same constitution that protects us. They have the same rights as we have. They are protected by the same courts that protect us. If you harm them, you must harm me. I was brought up in a small town where I knew the shame and dishonor of race hatred. I grew to despise it because it threatened the happiness of you and you and you.

The tide of anti-Japanese sentiment was often overwhelming, although attitudes slowly began to change as news of the Nisei soldiers fighting overseas reached the national media and evidence of traitorous activity by the Japanese community failed to manifest. Still, racial prejudice held fast in Colorado. In 1944, the Colorado legislature introduced a bill that would prohibit people of Japanese descent from owning land. Although the bill did not pass the Senate, it gave a clear indication that anti-Japanese feeling was still strong.

Carr ran for Senate in 1942 against Ed Johnson, but did not win a seat. His loss was largely attributed to his controversial advocacy of the Japanese community. He returned to practicing law, and retired from politics. But then in 1950, he planned to reenter the political arena, and ran for governor once more. But unfortunately, a month before the election, he passed away. He was just 62.

It would not be until many years after his death that his efforts to protect the rights of Japanese Americans during the war would be recognized by mainstream America as the work of a great humanitarian rather than a misguided politician. But for those he fought for, he had always represented the best of America.
References:


**Ralph C. Dills** (1910-2002), former Los Angeles judge and the longest serving state legislator in California, and **John Francis Shelley** (1905-1974), former California congressman and 35th mayor of San Francisco, were the only two Capitol lawmakers to oppose the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Popular among his Gardena, Compton and Lawndale constituents, Dills later helped write legislation that would grant partial reparations to former incarcerees nearly forty years after the war. Shelley consistently spoke out against the unfair treatment of Japanese Americans in wartime and was a staunch advocate of civil rights.

Born in Rosston, Texas, Ralph Clinton Dills moved to southern California in his teen years with his parents and nine siblings. A sharecropper’s son, Dills worked hard alongside his brothers to help out his family, first running the tumblers in the family laundry business and then trying his hand as a musician, a hobby he would pursue through college and later. After graduating from Gardena High School, he worked his way through his post-secondary schooling at several California universities, serving as a substitute teacher and playing his saxophone at honky-tonks. He first got his teaching certificate and then earned his law degree. His fondness for school was not one shared with his siblings; he was the only Dills who would pursue education beyond high school. It was about this time that he met Effie Ernestine Wymore, whom he married in 1935.

His entry into the political arena began in 1939, when he was working as a middle-school teacher in Compton in south Los Angeles. One-fifth of the student
body was Japanese, and Dills served as the adviser for the Scholarship Society, whose members were mostly of Japanese descent.

While he was teaching, Dills was elected as a Democratic district assemblyman, a position he held for five and a half terms. After ten years in the California Assembly, he left to practice law and then became a judge. In 1961, his wife, Erneistine, passed away. Five years later, he was elected to the state Senate, and served until 1998, during which time he would marry again twice. At the time of his death in 2002, controversy surrounding his family life following his third marriage to Elizabeth Ging Lee in 1970 and the adoption of her two sons would unfortunately cast a gray shadow over his life. However, his reputation as an “ironman of California politics” remained indelible.

His 42 years as an assemblyman and a senator made him the longest serving legislator in California. As a senator, his efforts focused primarily on the public education system, which he had strongly believed in for most of his life. In fact, he was key to the development of several significant educational institutions in the southern California region, including El Camino Community College, California State University, Long Beach, and the School of Law at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Throughout his life as a teacher, musician, lawyer and judge, he struggled through periods of unemployment and hardship, but he found his calling as a public servant. Politics, he claimed, allowed him to help people and to get things done. “Being able to do something,” he said, “it just got into my blood.” His own experiences and those of the diverse community he served also taught him the difficulties of eking out an existence on little income and resources. He grew to appreciate a hard work ethic, and felt little sympathy for those who opposed the law.
It was thus no surprise when he found himself advocating for the Japanese American community during World War II. He could not understand how hard-working, law-abiding citizens could be treated as “war criminals.” When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, Dills was teaching at the Compton middle school. In the days following the attack, his young students were confused and scared. Dills remembered feeling a sense of outrage at the anti-Japanese hysteria and fear that rose up in its wake, and the government’s incarceration of those of Japanese descent. More than fifty years later, recalling that time period in his life, he said, “I want to tell you, it’s damned hard to be a history teacher and a civil libertarian and a liberal and have to say to kids, ‘I can’t explain. I cannot explain to you why American citizens are treated the way you are going to be treated.’”

When the incarceration of Japanese Americans came up in the legislature, he stood up and spoke adamantly against it, arguing “what a travesty it was upon these people who had harmed nobody except that they just happened to be born a different color.” He was in fact one of two Capitol lawmakers who would vote against the mass confinement of Japanese Americans. He would fight for their redress as well, helping civil service workers gain credit for their time spent in incarceration. He also made sure that, despite strong opposition from some members of the public, a bill would be passed in 1982 that would make the first direct monetary redress payment from the state of California to some 280 Japanese Americans.

In 1942, Dills and then Senator John Francis Shelley were the only two legislators to publicly oppose Executive Order 9066. The two shared humble beginnings and a fervent belief in protecting the rights of American citizens.

Like the elder statesman Dills, John Francis “Jack” Shelley also came from a large, working-class family. He was born in San Francisco, California, to an Irish Catholic family, the oldest of nine children. But unlike Dills, who grew up in and around
small towns, Shelley was raised in the city’s Mission District, attending school there. Life in a port city introduced him to his love of the shipping industry early on. During his high school years, he joined the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific, an American labor union based in San Francisco for sailors, mariners, and other boat crew serving on US flag vessels. Every summer was spent at sea, and he continued working as a merchant machine through his education at St. Ignatius College, which would later become the University of San Francisco Law School. After just two years there, however, the financial hardship of supporting the Shelley family forced him to drop out, and for a short period he worked as a ship purser. Eventually, he was able to get a job as a bakery wagon driver, which enabled him to finish his studies at night, and he received his law degree in 1932. That same year, he married Genevieve Giles, with whom he had one daughter, Joan-Marie. However, he continued to work with the Bakery Wagon Drivers’ Union as a business agent. He then chose to practice law until he was elected to the State senate in 1938, and then again in 1942.

During World War II, he served briefly with the Coast Guard. He went on to fill various community posts, including president of both the San Francisco Labor Council and the California American Federation of Labor and became a congressman in 1948, serving eight terms until 1964, when he became mayor of San Francisco, the first Democrat elected in 50 years. He held the office for four years. In 1952, Genevieve died, and a year later he married Thelma Smith, and had two children, Kathleen and Kevin, who later became involved in politics as well. Shelley became a lobbyist for San Francisco at the State legislature until his death in 1974.

Shelley faced many challenges during his tenure as mayor, facing race riots, public workers’ strikes and the “Summer of Love,” a large “hippie” radical movement. Throughout his four years, Shelley sought to improve relations between the African American community and the local government. He was known as a civil rights advocate, and his stance opposing the confinement of
Japanese Americans during World War II was widely known. After casting one of two votes against incarceration, both he and Dills faced threats of expulsion from the legislature, which thankfully did not come to fruition. His son, Kevin, who was only 18 when his father passed away, said, "My dad's vote seems like a no-brainer now, but at the time, it spoke to who he was and what he believed in, and he passed that on to me."

Shelley’s contributions to Japanese Americans and indeed, the larger community, would be aptly summed up by Daisaku Ikeda, a respected Buddhist teacher who often visited the US, in his 1993 speech honoring his own contributions to world peace. Speaking to a crowd at San Francisco’s War Memorial, he expressed his gratitude to the audience, and then asked them to remember Shelley:

Mayor Shelley used to roll up his sleeves and work with the people. I feel deeply moved at the work of such a champion of human rights, who devoted himself to unceasing dialogue for human dignity and equality... In particular, we should never forget Mayor Shelley’s humane actions when he stood firmly opposed to the confinement of Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II.

References:


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As editor of the Bainbridge Review, a newspaper based on Bainbridge Island, Washington, Walter Woodward (1910-2001) and his wife Milly Woodward (1909-1989) penned editorials lambasting the violation of the rights of Japanese Americans incarcerated under Executive Order 9066. The Woodwards encouraged their Nikkei neighbors, the first to be forcibly removed from their homes, to contribute to the paper as “camp correspondents,” and provide news on births, deaths, marriages, and other events so that they would not be forgotten. Despite strong anti-Japanese sentiment, their paper stood alone in its consistent and public championing of the Nikkei’s constitutional rights.

Born on Bainbridge Island, a tiny island in Puget Sound, Washington, Mildred (“Milly”) Logg grew up in her home state but spent only summers on the island. She and her siblings would not settle permanently there until later in life. She graduated from the University of Washington in Oriental Studies and was fluent in Japanese. After graduation, she moved to Juneau, Alaska, where she worked as an English teacher. It was there that she met Walter Woodward.

Walter was a Seattle native, the son of a physician and a homemaker. He graduated from the University of Washington as well, but as a pre-med student. He was more interested in journalism than medicine, however, and throughout his studies, he worked without pay as a cub reporter for the Seattle Times. After graduating, he found a job as a journalist for a Juneau paper. Working on a story at the high school there, he met Milly. They got married in 1935 and settled on Bainbridge Island. Walter would commute to his now paid job for the Seattle Times while she worked as a teacher on the island. In 1940, when they were both barely thirty years old, they bought the small town gossip weekly Bainbridge Review. In 1941, Walter quit his job at the Times, and they both committed to the Review full time. In its first year under the Woodwards, the Review would expand to not only report on local events but also to editorialize important issues. The paper in fact became known for its honest reporting, strong editorial voice and for its featured open forum, where all letters
to the editors from Islanders would be printed, regardless of their stance on
issues.

The Woodwards would publish their first controversial story before America
took the war, about the British ship the *Warspite*, which was being repaired in
a Bremerton shipyard near Bainbridge Island. Not only did its blood-splattered,
ruined decks serve as a graphic indication of the reality of war but also its
presence in US waters clearly indicated America’s involvement, despite its
“neutral” stance. In fact, there were several British ships under repair in
Washington’s naval yards, and the Woodwards felt it was their obligation to
inform Island natives about their presence. Despite the Navy’s request that the
local media voluntarily censor this information, the *Review* published the story,
which was quickly picked up by the national press. In turn, the paper received
national attention, and *Time* magazine lauded the Woodwards for their
courageous reporting. Years later, Mary, their youngest of three daughters,
recalled that her parents felt compelled to publish that first story. The
Woodwards said, “This is part of what we need to do. We need to be honest with
our readers and so [we] published it.”

After Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, a wave of anti-Japanese
hysteria and fear quickly swept through the nation. Almost immediately following
the attack, hundreds of people of Japanese descent were rounded up and
arrested by the FBI and other government agencies on suspicion of treason. The
fate of the remaining population of Japanese Americans and immigrants of
Japanese descent was under debate. Tiny Bainbridge Island was not immune to
this paranoia.

A small, multi-ethnic community, the island was home to groups of immigrants
who first arrived in the late 1800s, including many Issei, who were drawn to the
Island by a promising agricultural industry. By the early 1900s, Bainbridge Island
had not only a growing farming community but also an active shipbuilding
industry. At the time of the war, there were more than forty Japanese families living there.

The day after the attack, in its first “extra” edition, the Review reported the news about the bombing. It also encouraged the people of Bainbridge to remain calm and level-headed about their Japanese neighbors, who had not shown any signs of disloyalty to the US. Yet in spite of this, rumors about possible espionage among the Japanese community began to circulate.

As early as February 1942, the Review would rise to the defense of the Japanese Americans in Bainbridge and throughout the nation, warning the community against the “danger of a blind, wild, hysterical hatred of all persons who can trace ancestry to Japan.” It would also attest to their national loyalty, stating that “who can say that the big majority of our Japanese Americans are not loyal...their record bespeaks nothing but loyalty: their sons are in our army.” Although the Review stated that the paper “[would] not dispute the federal government if it, in its considered wisdom, calls for the removal of all Japanese,” since it would be “based on necessity and not hatred,” the Review would insist on the preservation of the rights of Japanese American citizens if such measures were taken.

Some residents did not share the Woodwards’ views, and the Review, with its small budget, suffered economically over canceled subscriptions and the loss of advertising revenue. However, the Woodwards persisted in their opposition. Resident Isamu Nakao recalled later that the Review’s was the “one voice who stood with us.” He continued, “That I will never forget! I know that [Walter] took a big beating as far as subscription and advertising losses, however he kept his integrity. He knew what the Constitution and Bill of Rights were all about.”

In March 1942, it became clear that the incarceration of the Japanese in America was imminent. The Review’s editorials became more urgent and vehement, questioning the validity of the “evacuation,” given the short period between Pearl
Harbor’s attack and Executive Order 9066 and the lack of evidence of actual espionage. It also questioned the constitutionality of such an action, pointing out how internment would be a violation of the rights of US citizens. But on March 24, the civilian exclusion order for the Japanese on Bainbridge Island was issued, and more than 270 residents of Japanese descent were given one week to leave. They were in fact the first group to be forcibly removed to an incarceration camp. The Bainbridge residents were sent to California’s Manzanar Relocation Center, before eventually being allowed to transfer to the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho, where most of Seattle’s residents would be later sent.

Unable to prevent the mass removal of their friends and neighbors, the Woodwards redirected their efforts to establishing a vital communication link between the incarcerees and the rest of the Islands’ residents. The Review maintained its opposition to the violation of Japanese American rights and freedoms, but it also recognized that it was important that these people who had become an integral part of the Bainbridge community must not be forgotten. They therefore hired young, high school “camp correspondents” to report the news from within Manzanar, and then Minidoka. The Review featured information on everything camp-related, from marriages to new recruits to the batting averages of baseball players. The Woodwards hoped to keep the Bainbridge Japanese at the forefront of the local community’s collective mind, and their plan worked. Their daughter Mary recalls her parents’ intentions in publishing the weekly column of camp news:

They always presented it that way. That these are our neighbors who are away for awhile. They’re going to be coming home and we want to keep up on their lives. That... I think that was just brilliant on their part, just brilliant. Because it had that effect. It had the effect of... we knew when Fudge and Tad got married. We knew when David was born. We knew when Kay and Sam got married and when Bruce was born. People, could keep up on that. They were always identified not as... not as Jerry Nakata...
from Manzanar has as a .50 batting average, whatever that is, but it was Jerry Nakata of Winslow. They were always identified by the area, where they had lived on the island. So they were still... they were still Bainbridge residents there. People were able to keep up not only with those who were away in camp who could read what was happening on the island, but the opposite was true.

From April 1945, Bainbridge Nikkei residents began to resettle on the island, and largely because of the Review, they were welcomed back by the local community with open arms. More than half of the residents returned, one of the highest percentages of resettlement in the country.

After the war, the Woodwards continued to work in support of their community. They left Washington State for Washington, DC, to work for the Republican National Party. In 1963, the Woodwards stepped down as the paper’s editors, eventually selling the paper in 1988. Milly returned to teaching high school and Walter worked on the editorial board for the Seattle Times, eventually transitioning to a guest columnist and leader of various community boards. In 1989, Milly passed away. In 2001, Walter died. Throughout their later years, they would be honored time and again for their responsible, ethical journalism, and for their full embrace of the freedom of the press. But more so, they would be remembered for their heartfelt and passionate fight to protect the rights of American citizens.

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http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=3111


Faith in Action

We thought they needed help, so we helped.

-- Quaker Mary Blocher Smeltzer, in 1990, recalling her time at Manzanar Relocation Center
Quaker missionary Herbert V. Nicholson (1892-1983) was an active and ardent supporter of the Nikkei community. Together with his wife, Madeline (1888-1983), Nicholson provided spiritual and moral guidance to the Japanese community throughout the war. When Japanese men were detained at army internment camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Nicholson assisted them as an interpreter. When the Nikkei were forcibly removed from their homes, he helped them transition into the incarceration centers. He traveled more than 50,000 miles between centers and camps, bringing many their abandoned personal belongings. He spoke out against incarceration and in defense of their civil rights at churches, community organizations, military bases, and on Capitol Hill.

Herbert Victor Nicholson was born in Rochester, New York, at the turn of the twentieth century. He was one of seven children, raised in a close-knit Quaker family. He spent his early years in New Jersey and then moved with his family to Pennsylvania, where he attended the Quaker school of Westtown. He would remain in the Philadelphia area through college. After graduating from Haverford College, a small, private liberal arts college, he decided to become a missionary in Japan. In 1915, he worked as a secretary to a Quaker missionary in Tokyo, where he met Madeline Clara Waterhouse, a Methodist, whom he married in 1920. A year later, they had their first child, daughter Virginia. In the 1920s, they moved to the city of Mito, north of Tokyo, to help the community there, building a senior home and ministering to lepers. During this time, they had two more children, Samuel and Donald. By living among the Japanese and raising a family there, he developed a deep affinity for the people and culture. But because of growing tensions between Japan and the US, he and his family were compelled to move back to America in 1940, settling in Pasadena, California. Once there, Nicholson took on a position with an all-Japanese American West Los Angeles Methodist Church, where Madeline served as the Sunday School administrator.
Immediately following the December 7, 1941, bombing at Pearl Harbor, the government rounded up people of Japanese descent on suspicion of traitorous activity. Issei men were shipped to federal detention facilities, and Nicholson sought to help out the families affected, including those on Terminal Island, a small fishing community in the Port of Los Angeles. He drove back and forth from California to Washington, offering his support, counsel, and interpretation skills to the men who were detained in the internment camps and to their families.

In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the mass removal of Japanese immigrants and people of Japanese descent from their West Coast homes to incarceration centers further inland. Nicholson again reached out to support the community, helping families prepare for their move and settle their finances when the government froze their accounts. “Evacuation” orders dictated that people could bring only what they could carry with them, so much of their personal property had to be abandoned or sold. But Nicholson was able to save some of their things, having them store their belongings in the chapel of the church. He did whatever he could to ease their fears and assist them in transitioning to their temporary quarters. When the families were set to make the long trip from the “assembly centers” to the incarceration centers, Nicholson and other American Friends Service Committee members served them breakfast, a small but welcome comfort for many who were scared and uncertain about their futures.

Once the families were living behind the barbed wire fences of the incarceration center, Nicholson continued to offer his aid. For his parishioners who were confined at the Manzanar Relocation Center in the California desert, he drove his Dodge pick-up truck between detention facilities and incarceration camps across the states to deliver their belongings—“from trucks to pet kittens”—and other items, eventually traveling some 50,000 miles. Madeline was actively involved in lending her support as well, making visits to the Hillcrest Sanitarium, which
served as a detention center for people of Japanese descent who were stricken with tuberculosis.

In a tribute to Nicholson, who was recognized in 1982 as the “Quaker of the Year” by subscribers to *A Friendly Letter*, an independent Quaker newsletter, editor Chuck Fager described his work during the early years of the war:

Although then in his fifties, Nicholson was an indefatigable worker, and once he understood what was happening he became a kind of combination circuit riding preacher, social worker and advocate for the internees. He travelled almost constantly, tens of thousands of miles to the isolated camps in California, Arizona, Texas and as far away as Montana, Louisiana and Mississippi.

In 1944, Nicholson, a group of Friends of the American Way members and members of the AFSC, met Dillon Myer, the director of the War Relocation Authority, on his visit to Pasadena. Nicholson pressed Myer about closing the camps since young Nisei men were at that time fighting in the US Army. Myer, who would later acknowledge that the evacuation was a “mistake,” encouraged Nicholson to go to Washington, DC, and speak to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy himself, which Nicholson did.

Although he had very little money, Nicholson made his way to the Pentagon, hitchhiking along the way. Once there, he met with McCloy, who informed him that public opinion was the main reason the centers remained open. People all along the West Coast had written scores of letters, demanding that the Japanese should not be allowed to return. Nicholson thus started his own letter-writing campaign, to demonstrate public opinion from the other side. In just four months, more than 150,000 letters made their way to McCloy in support of the closing of the incarceration centers.
In 1945, as the centers began to shut down and incarcerees began to make their way back to their homes or to other areas in the US, Nicholson helped those resettling in southern California. Soon after, he directed his attention to occupied Japan, compelled to help with the rebuilding of the war-torn nation. He recognized that the Japanese people were suffering from the loss of their basic needs, particularly the shortage of milk. Working with Heifer Project International, Nicholson raised money to bring goats first to Okinawa, and then to Yokohama. With his help, more than 5,000 goats were donated to Japan, some delivered personally by him, earning him the nickname of “Yagi no Ojisan” (“Uncle Goat”).

In 1951, he and Madeline returned to Japan to live, and they remained there until 1961, when they returned to Pasadena to continue their ministry with the Japanese community there. Even in his senior years, Nicholson was always working to help his Japanese friends. In 1981, just released from the hospital after a third bout with cancer, he would testify in Los Angeles at a hearing concerning redress.

In his tribute to Nicholson, Fager wrote that the treatment of the Japanese community during World War II was a “dark chapter in our history.” But Nicholson was one who provided the light of hope for many through that bleak period. Just one year before Nicholson’s death, Fager wrote that he was a “courageous witness against this injustice, a witness which has shone brightest then, but which has continued for almost forty years after internment.”

References:


Peace activists Mary Blocher Smeltzer (1915-2012) and husband Ralph E. Smeltzer (1916-1976) worked with the Quakers to assist Japanese immigrant families “evacuated” from their homes, including families on Terminal Island, California, in 1942. After volunteering as teachers at California’s Manzanar Relocation Center, they set up a Church of the Brethren hostel in Chicago for Nisei who were allowed to leave incarceration for work, eventually housing about 1,000 Nisei. After the Chicago hostel was shut down in 1944, they opened another in Brooklyn, New York, in spite of controversial media coverage and local opposition. After the war, the Smeltzers continued to help others resettle.

Born near Portland, Texas, Mary Blocher was raised in a family of cotton-growers. One of four children, her family was a member of the Church of the Brethren, a 300-year old church committed to worldwide peace and justice. They left Texas when she was just five, and in that same year, they moved first to Indiana and then to California, where her family settled. She attended school in La Verne, later graduating from Pomona Junior College and then La Verne College, where she got her degree in math. She attended graduate school at Pomona, where through a reciprocal program she had already been taking classes, and received her teaching credentials. It was during this time in the 1930s that she got to know
Ralph Smeltzer, a member of the same church, and a fellow graduate student one year behind her at Pomona. Ralph was getting his master’s in biology, and he would go on to become a biology teacher. She got a job teaching at Westwood 600 miles away, and for four or five times during the winter, she and a group of other teachers would drive the long distance north. She taught at Westwood for two years. In 1940, she and Ralph were married.

Ralph Emerson Smeltzer was born in Chicago, and like Mary, raised in southern California by parents who were members of the Church of the Brethren. One of three boys, Ralph grew up embracing the tenets of the Church, which were to promote peaceful living and work towards reconciliation. Following his post-graduate studies at Pomona College, Ralph took on his first job as a long-term substitute at Jacob Riis High School in Los Angeles in 1941. That year, both Mary and he would meet every week with the American Friends Service Committee, also known as the Quakers, with whom they worked on various social justice issues. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, Ralph, a conscientious objector, refused to sell war savings stamps in the school and lost his job. He then took on a job as a substitute teacher in LA, which offered only intermittent work. In fact, both he and Mary worked as substitute teachers, struggling to make ends meet. At that time, they lived in Boyle Heights, an ethnically diverse Los Angeles neighborhood with a considerable Japanese population.

On February 25, 1942, the Japanese residents of Terminal Island, a small fishing community in the Port of Los Angeles, were given 48 hours to leave their homes. The community was thrown into chaos, frantically rushing to pack, take care of personal business, and secure personal property like fishing boats and gear—much of which in the end had to be abandoned. Concerned about their welfare, Ralph took a day off from teaching so that he could help the families prepare for their “evacuation.” When the Japanese detainees were made to move from temporary detention facilities to the incarceration centers, the Smeltzers helped serve them breakfast and prepare for the long trip. They both then decided that
they would teach at the concentration camps, where they could continue to help students.

They found a civil service job at Manzanar, where they began to teach high school in September. Although they were assigned housing with other Caucasians, they chose to live in the barracks with the Japanese incarcerees. They shared a space with a group of Kibei men, serving as their resident managers. During a riot following an attack on one of the Manzanar incarcerees and the detainment of Nisei men, Ralph hid one of them on the floor of his car so that he could escape the angry mob that threatened to harm him. The Smeltzers remained at Manzanar for about six months before they decided to move on.

The Smeltzers worked with the Church of the Brethren, which agreed to sponsor a hostel in Chicago in early 1943. The Church would cover the expenses of running the hostel, including small stipends for Ralph and Mary. Knowing that many of the older Japanese would be reluctant to release their children from confinement because of their uncertain welcome “on the outside,” Ralph drove to various relocation centers to set up a network of people. He worked to convince the Issei to release their kids to find jobs, and told them that the Church would help them with a low-cost place to live. The government would locate jobs for them at companies like the Curtiss Candy Company and Kuneo Press.

After the Smeltzers helped house about one thousand people, they closed the hostel because of the sizable Japanese population that had settled there, and went to Brooklyn, New York, where they worked with the Baptist community to start a hostel there. It was May 1944, and anti-Japanese sentiment still ran strong. Although they

encountered opposition by neighboring businesses who did not want Japanese
people living near them, they opened the hostel with little incident. They were
there just until August, when Ralph was offered a position with the Brethren
Service Commission in Illinois. They turned the hostel over to new management,
and moved to Elgin. At that time, Mary was pregnant with their first child.

With the closing of the camps, the Smeltzers, who were by then experienced at
assisting Japanese Americans find housing and employment, helped families
resettle into mainstream society. After the war, although the Smeltzers would
maintain their connection with the Japanese American community, they would
move on to help others in their fight for social justice. Ralph helped post-war
families in Austria, and was later joined by Mary and their two children. In the
1960s, Ralph was active in the civil rights movement, serving as a mediator
between African American leaders and the Caucasian establishment in volatile
Selma, Alabama, in 1963. His admirable efforts at Selma to alleviate the racial
divisiveness there have been the subject of much recent attention. In the 1970s,
Mary would establish the Church of the Brethren “Womaen's Caucus” to
encourage the hiring of women within the Church. Although Mary lost Ralph in
1976, she would continue her work to promote peace until her death in 2012,
actively participating in nuclear testing protests and working with the Peace
Corps in Botswana.

For both Ralph and Mary, their work with the Japanese American community
during World War II was just part of their everyday efforts to help others and
promote peace in the world. Viewing the treatment of the Japanese Americans as
unjust, they set about to make changes as best as they could. When asked why
she chose to help, Mary responded in a way that would typify both her and her
husband’s sentiments towards working for peace: “It’s just part of me. It’s just
part of being a Christian, being a peace person, part of doing what I think is
right.”
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Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

During my stay in the 100th Battalion there were so many good things that happened to me. One is that I have great admiration for a group of young men who sort of stood it alone…I think there’s no greater reward that can come to a man than that he’s done the best job he can while serving his country…

-- Major James Lovell, Executive Officer, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), in 1994
US Marine Robert E. Borchers (1921-2015) spoke out against the unconstitutional treatment of Japanese American citizens under Executive Order 9066 after serving in the war at Guadalcanal in 1943 and then in Nagasaki. In a letter reprinted in Time magazine, the 22-year-old veteran wrote to the American Legion, denouncing the “unAmericanism” and injustice of the incarceration of Japanese Americans. He was then court-martialed, his record marked for bad conduct, and he was sentenced to six months of hard labor. On an appeal, Borchers was reinstated. The greatest reward for his courage came from hundreds of Japanese Americans who wrote him letters of support, thanking him for his actions.

Robert Edward Borchers was born in Hyde Park, Chicago, in 1921, to a journalist father and a mother who took on various odd jobs to support her family. One of three children, he grew up as his neighborhood transformed into an increasingly diverse community, first consisting of a thriving Jewish population and then transitioning into a primarily African American community. These early years were greatly influential in the development of his values, and he came to embrace racial diversity and to appreciate the social and economic hardships that many minorities faced.

The Borchers themselves lived modestly, raising their children—at the time, just the two boys—in a one-bedroom apartment. During the summers, they would drive to Pasadena to visit their friends, William and Bea Carr. Robert went on to serve in the Marines in the war. He was with the Second Marines Division in Guadalcanal in 1943. And in late 1945, he was with the Fifth Marine Division in Nagasaki. During the war, he would contract malaria and would spend time at Camp Pendleton in recovery.

Once, when Borchers was being treated for malaria at the Naval Hospital in San Diego, the Carrs told him about the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Borchers was outraged. Although he was just 22 and in a hospital bed at the
time, he asked them what he could do to help. They suggested that he write a letter to the American Legion, which had been putting forth a clear anti-Japanese agenda. From his hospital bed, Borchers wrote a letter blasting the American Legion and others for the treatment of Japanese Americans, whom he described as being “persecuted.” His letter, reprinted in the December 20, 1943, edition of *Time* magazine under the title, “Inquisition in Los Angeles,” revealed his fervent belief that what he fought for overseas was not what he was now witness to:

> I’m putting it mildly when I say it makes our blood boil … We shall fight this injustice, intolerance, and unAmericanism at home! We will not break faith with those who died…We have fought the Japanese and are recuperating to fight again. We can endure the hell of battle, but we are resolved not to be sold out at home.

Because of his actions, Borchers was court-martialed. His record was marked for bad conduct, and he received a sentence of six months of hard labor. With the help of a Marine attorney, he appealed the decision, and was able to get reinstated. Yet he remained an object of scorn for those who opposed the closing of the incarceration camps and the release of Japanese Americans.

What would remain with Borchers until his death was not the resentment his letter generated among the opposition, but the outpouring of gratitude from Japanese Americans who wrote hundreds of letters to him. Although he could not save all of these letters, he saved 13 of them, which his son Robert “Bob” L. Borchers, discovered in his papers a couple of years after his father moved into a nursing home. His son mused, “Dad would have had to carry these letters in his military seabag through those rough days — and then back to Chicago’s Southside.” The letters he had saved for seventy years included one from high schooler Taeko Omori, who wrote from Arizona’s Poston Relocation Center:
I am more than grateful because I am one who is living in a relocation center, shut away from my dear friends and not free to my unalienable rights. I am an American citizen and I surely think that I am privileged to my liberties, don’t you?

Yet it was not only the Japanese Americans who found Borchers’ letter resonating with their own feelings about the treatment of the Nisei. It was also fellow soldiers serving overseas, many alongside Japanese American soldiers, who were angry at the violation of the very rights and freedoms that they were fighting for. Sergeant Wadsworth Likely, who would later become one of the original members of the national American Veterans Committee, wrote in a letter to the Time magazine editor in response to Borchers’ letter:

I think I have a right to expect that the fundamental human rights which are held up as a banner for us now are still in existence when I get back. The emotional, hateful racial prejudice shown by certain Californians against anyone with yellow skin who can be called “Jap” certainly helps tear down the Constitution of our country not only for loyal Americans of Japanese descent, but for all loyal Americans […]

They say many of us don’t know what we’re fighting for now; you keep up the good work and we’ll know right well what we have to fight for, and against, when we get back.

In 1960, Borchers would move to Minnesota, where he would live until his death in March 2015. During his lifetime, he would serve as a salesman for Tube Turns, a manufacturer of oil, gas and petrochemical processing components, and then for Rockwell Manufacturing Company, a maker of tools. Although he suffered from dementia in his senior years, his son would read and re-read to him the letters he had always cherished. “Despite serious problems with dementia,” Bob said, “Dad poured forth enormous and unforgettable laughter and tears.” For
many Nisei and their families, Borchers was a man whose courageous act they would never forget.

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Major James Lovell (1907-2001) began his career as a teacher in Hawaii, giving instruction to some of the young men whom he would lead in the near future. A member of the Hawaii National Guard, Lovell was selected by Lt. Col. Farrant L. Turner as the executive officer and second-in-command of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) at the unit’s start. Widely beloved and respected by his men, Lovell was known for fighting at the frontline alongside his men when other commanding officers generally remained at the rear. He suffered serious injuries for his bravery and also earned numerous combat awards, including a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Silver Star.

Born in Nebraska, James Wilbur Lovell grew up in the town of Hastings, known at the time for its brickmaking and cigar manufacturing industries. He studied at the University of Nebraska, where he proved to be a fine athlete, earning nine letters in football, basketball and track, and eventually being inducted into the university’s sports hall of fame. His love of sports would serve him in several ways throughout his life.

In his third year at the Nebraska State Teachers College in Kearney, Lovell was one of five candidates selected to teach in Hawaii. He had just one year left to complete his studies. But his parents, who had not approved of any other offers he had already received, encouraged him to go. “Now you’re going someplace,” his father told him. He thus accepted the job and left for the islands in 1930.

The transition from the Midwest to the Pacific was relatively easy. As Lovell himself would explain to the *Hawaii Herald* in 1992, his upbringing in Hastings helped him prepare for the move:

‘The people of Nebraska are pretty down-to-earth people,’ Lovell states simply. ‘And we had quite a few Oriental people in Nebraska. Hastings, my hometown, has a religious college, so we had quite a few Orientals there
as well as at the University of Nebraska. No, it was not a difficult transition [to Hawaii] at all.’

His first teaching job was at Washington Intermediate School, where he gave instruction on mechanical drawing and spent time as a coach for the baseball, football, and track teams. In 1933, he moved to Roosevelt High School, where he taught for another six years. During that time, he married Maui native Genevieve Buchanan, his first wife, with whom he had two children, James, Jr., and Maile Gene. Lovell then taught at an English standard school, and ended up at McKinley, a high school whose student body consisted of a considerable Japanese American population. Its principal, Miles Carey, was a staunch advocate for the Japanese American youth, and his support of his Nisei students would foster Lovell’s own fondness for the Nisei kids. He was there for just two years when he was named Dean of Boys. And then Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941.

By that time, Lovell had already been serving with the Hawaii National Guard and was a member of its football team. He had joined the National Guard in the mid-1920s, and served for six years in Nebraska. He had in fact joined the Hawaii National Guard just one year after his arrival in the islands, and had been called to duty when the 298th and 299th Regiments had been activated in October 1940.

More than 1,400 Japanese American members of the 298th and 299th were sent to the mainland and formed into the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). Their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Farrant L. Turner, had chosen Lovell to serve as his second-in-command and the executive officer. As his commander in the National Guard, Turner was very familiar with Lovell’s background. Lovell had been his right-hand man, and they both believed that the 100th presented the Nisei with the perfect opportunity to prove that they were loyal Americans to those who doubted their national allegiance.
The unit was unique, not only because it consisted primarily of Japanese American soldiers. The 100th was also an “orphan” unit, not attached to any “parent” regiment. There was no precedent for such a unit. When the 100th reported to its first assignment at the training grounds of Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, Lovell drafted its table of organization, sorting out everything from the acquisition of uniforms to transportation to the organization of its various components. It was this organizational plan that ended up being used by the entire military.

In addition to being highly organized, Lovell was an exceptional leader for the Nisei men. Along with his being a teacher, Lovell had also been the athletic coach at McKinley and Roosevelt. He had developed a close bond with many of the Japanese American boys who were now draft-age, and strongly believed in not only their loyalty but also their ability as soldiers. The feeling was mutual. At Camp McCoy, both he and Turner worked to instill the community’s goodwill towards the Nisei, speaking to the local media, businesses, and community organizations and attesting to their national loyalty. He also watched out for the men, most of whom had never lived away from their Hawaii homes. Sometimes, the young soldiers would run into trouble after a night of drinking and revelry. Whenever that happened, Lovell would be the one to retrieve them from the local police station.

On the battlefield, Lovell was known to fight alongside his men on the frontlines, rather than at the rear, with the battalion headquarters. At the brutal battle at Cassino, when the soldiers were making their way up to the monastery, Lovell was there at the forward area with the men. In the Hawaii Herald article, Sgt. Warren Iwai, C Company, recalled:

As I approached towards the castle, I saw a silhouette of a soldier in front of me. I thought, “What the heck? Who’s this soldier in front of me?” There’s not supposed to be anybody in front of me except for the enemy!
As I approached him, it was Maj. Lovell... and he was our battalion commander! What army in the world would you find the battalion commander in front of the point man in the attack? Let me tell you, you won’t find anything like that in any other outfit, where you’ll find the battalion commander out front like that, worrying about his men...

It was at Cassino that Lovell was seriously injured, shot in the back and in his legs. But fortunately, he survived the attack, dragged to safety by one of his men. His wounds were so severe, however, that he was sent home.

His courage and his dedication to his men earned him their profound respect and admiration. He also earned numerous military honors, including a Purple Heart with cluster, Silver Star, Bronze Star with cluster, Victory Medal, Combat Infantry Badge and 10-year Continuing Service (Hawaii National Guard) medal.

After the unit returned from the war, Lovell served as both the president and the director of the 100th’s veterans club. In his later years, Lovell worked in the building and wood supply industries. For 27 years, he worked for hardware and lumber merchants Lewers & Cooke, Ltd., making his way up from a department manager to the president of the company. He continued his love of sports, coaching the college all-stars in the 1955 Hula Bowl. When Lovell reached his senior years, his son from his second marriage, Roy Yokoyama, recalled that elderly gentlemen would stop him and thank him profusely for what he had done for them.

Throughout his life, Lovell had served as a teacher, athletic coach, battalion commander, and corporate executive. He was highly regarded by whomever he led, whether they were young students, soldiers, or employees. For the Nisei, his loyalty was incomparable. Private First Class Leighton “Goro” Sumida, A Company, aptly summed up Lovell’s support of the Nisei soldiers: “He stayed with ‘da Hawaii boys and backed them up 100 percent!”
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Colonel Virgil R. Miller (1900-1968) was highly respected and admired by the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team as their commanding officer. He led the Nisei through some of their most decisive battles in Italy and France, including the rescue of the “Lost Battalion,” when the unit suffered some 800 casualties to save 211 men of a Texas-based regiment in the French Vosges Mountains, and the final push through the Gothic Line. His strong leadership and unwavering courage earned him numerous medals, including a Silver Star, Legion of Merit and Bronze Star. After the war, he continued to be a fierce advocate for Nisei soldiers returning home, publicizing their wartime heroism and sacrifices, and openly defending their rights as Americans.

Born at the turn of the twentieth century in the southwestern region of Puerto Rico, Virgil Rasmuss Miller moved with his family to the capital city of San Juan when he was a teenager. Miller and his two siblings all attended school there while his father, Paul Gerard Miller, served as a commissioner of education until 1921. During World War I, Virgil volunteered to serve with the Puerto Rico Home Guard, a local militia assigned to help defend the island and maintain public order. In 1920, he was appointed by the governor to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. It was a special honor because he was among the first from the territory to enroll there. In 1924, he graduated as an Infantry Second Lieutenant and became one of the first two Puerto Rican Americans to graduate from West Point.
In 1925 in New Jersey, he married Ann McGoughran, with whom he had five children. He returned to Puerto Rico the following year and served with the 65th Infantry, and then at various posts in the US. In 1940, he was transferred to Hawaii and served at Schofield Barracks with the 21st Infantry Brigade and the 24th Infantry Division. He was there in Hawaii with his wife and family on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese Imperial forces. After the attack, he reported to duty at Fort McClellan in Alabama, returning to Hawaii soon after.

Throughout these initial years of his military career, he had worked with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. It was this experience that led to his consideration for his leadership role with the Japanese American soldiers. In June 1943, he was assigned as the executive officer of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a unit comprised primarily of Nisei soldiers. He joined the men at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for training, where they earned a reputation for their excellence in combat skills.

Miller himself would describe the next three years as “the most satisfactory and rewarding of my thirty years of service.” Within this relatively short time, he developed a strong bond with the Nisei soldiers, and they shared a mutual respect and admiration for each other. More importantly, even though he was an officer and they were his soldiers, they recognized each other as equals in humanity.

Fighting with the 442nd, Miller took part in several European Theater campaigns, including Rome-Arno, Germany, North Apennines and Po Valley. In October 1944, Miller assumed command of the 442nd and led the unit through its successful rescue of the “Lost Battalion” in the French Vosges Mountains. In a grueling battle that resulted in hundreds of casualties, the 442nd saved more than 200 men of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division, which had been surrounded by German troops. Miller was promoted to Colonel to replace
Charles W. Pence, who had suffered serious wounds during the battle. In January 1945, he was offered the position of commanding officer of the 65th Infantry Regiment in Puerto Rico, but turned it down to continue on with the 442nd. In April 1945, Miller also spearheaded the unit’s final drive to Germany. With the 3rd Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Pursall, Miller created the decisive plan for a nighttime 3,000-foot climb and a pincers attack at dawn. The soldiers surprised the Germans, eventually breaking through the Gothic Line along the western coast of Italy. Miller then led the 442nd in its capture of Mount Folgorita, Massa, and Turin.

After the war’s end, Miller relinquished command of the 442nd and stayed in Italy until 1947. He went on to serve in Turkey and then returned to the States where he taught military science and tactics at various universities, including Pennsylvania State College and the University of Michigan, where he also served as a research associate until 1954.

Even after his leadership of the 442nd came to an end, he continued to support the Nisei soldiers. Realizing the challenges they would face upon their return home, Miller spoke publicly about the soldiers’ service to their country. He informed people about their courage, honor and sacrifice on the battlefield to allay any doubts about their wartime contributions and to foster a better understanding of the Japanese Americans, easing the racial discrimination that returning families faced.

When Nisei veteran Private First Class Richard H. Naito’s application for membership into the American Legion was rejected because of his race, Miller sent letters of protest to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, and Post 51 commander Dean Helbig, criticizing the Legion’s corruption of American ideals:
When supposedly reputable organizations such as yours violate the principles and ideals for which we fight, these young Japanese-Americans are not the only ones to wonder about our war aims. Millions in Europe and Asia, too, will learn of your action and question the sincerity of American policy and ideals.

His defense of his men well beyond the boundaries of the battlefield and well past the war’s conclusion was a testament to his fierce devotion to the Nisei soldiers.

Miller’s own lengthy service in the military was highlighted by numerous awards, including the Combat Infantryman Badge, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, and Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster. For Miller himself, the pinnacle of his remarkable military career was his service with the 442nd, of which he was particularly proud. At a 1960 Hawaii reunion with the 442nd, his wife, Ann, recalled how Miller easily reconnected with his soldiers. The Nisei “recogniz[ed] him as just another member of the 442,” and they all “loved all the banter and exchange of anecdotes.” In writing about his service with the 442nd RCT, Miller himself wrote, “Of the honors I have received, I am most proud of the Combat Infantryman Badge, earned with the unit, and the fact I received a battlefield promotion to Colonel as a member of the unit.”

For the Nisei soldiers, Miller was much more than just their commanding officer. He was also their friend, and one who was sorely missed when he died in 1968.

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And Justice for All

So began the process of recovering my citizenship. Wayne Collins spent twenty-three years on our behalf. This dedicated civil rights attorney and fearless champion of democracy was forced to enter individual suits for each of the 5,000 renunciants. Before the case was completely closed in 1968, he and his staff had prepared and filed over 10,000 affidavits.

I dedicated my first book, Swimming in the American, to this great man, a man to whom I owe so much. The dedication reads: “To the memory of Wayne M. Collins who rescued me as an American and restored my faith in America.”

-- Hiroshi Kashiwagi, Starting from Loomis and Other Stories (2013)
In December 1945, then Captain Hyman Bravin (1913-1992) provided legal aid to about 75 mainly Kibei soldiers from the 1800th Engineer General Service Battalion, an engineering unit comprised of soldiers of Japanese, German, and Italian descent, who were appearing before the Board of Officers to be discharged. Under government surveillance for suspected disloyalty, the soldiers were given blue discharges and denied any veterans’ benefits despite their loyal service. In the 1980s, Bravin represented the men before the Army Discharge Review Board, condemning their treatment during wartime as “atrocious.” His pro bono work enabled their discharges to be upgraded to “honorable.”

Hyman Bravin was born in Newburgh, New York, and remained in his home state where he was raised and educated. He attended St. John’s University, a private, Roman Catholic college, and received his law degree in 1936. In 1942, Bravin began his four year service with the US Army, training combat troops and eventually earning the rank of Major.

For the majority of his life, Bravin worked as a criminal and civil trial lawyer. He actively worked for the public good, motivated in part by his strong religious beliefs but also by his steadfast conviction in human rights. In the 1950s, he headed a mass transit riders’ advocacy group. In the ‘60s, he served as the chairman of the Bronx Liberal Party. In the 1970s, in a landmark case, he fought for racial desegregation in Brooklyn’s Community School District 21. He also served as New York’s commissioner of veterans affairs, and the commander of the Jewish War Veterans. But it was not until the 1980s that his social justice work would come full circle, when he agreed to once again represent the men whom he had last assisted more than 40 years prior during World War II.

These were the Nisei men of Company B, 1800th Engineer General Service Battalion, of the former 525th Quartermaster Service Company which had been disbanded in 1944. The 1800th was an engineering unit specially made up of men of German, Italian and Japanese descent who were “protestors of conscience,”
and who were hence being monitored by the US government. Among the Nisei, their resistance took on various forms, whether in their refusal to complete the loyalty questionnaire or in their opposition to the forced removal of their family members to incarceration centers. While some were sent to the federal detention facility at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, others were demoted to the rank of private and assigned to the 1800th.

During the war, most of these men had served in Tennessee and Mississippi, where they had trained and performed various military duties, including the repairing of roads, bridges and other property that had sustained some damage from the training of combat troops. Despite being singled out for surveillance by the US government, the unit worked hard to fulfill its assigned duties. The 1800th in fact had been applauded by the local community for its performance and dedication. In May 1945, the men had received a commendation for their rescue efforts after the historic flooding of Arkansas’ White River in the Mississippi Valley.

In 1945, Bravin was assigned to offer legal assistance to 75 of the 1800th Nisei men whose discharge was to be determined by the Board of Officers. Most of the men were Kibei, or Americans of Japanese descent who had been educated in Japan, and many had difficulty speaking English. With the help of an interpreter, Bravin worked hard to secure them the honorable discharges they were due. But while many of the Nisei men who could speak for themselves had received honorable discharges, the Kibei, unable to properly state their case, did not. In 1946, all of the men Bravin represented received a “blue” (neither honorable nor dishonorable) discharge and were denied any veterans’ benefits, despite their years of wartime service and Bravin’s best efforts.

In 1980, former private Kiyoshi Kawashima reestablished contact with Bravin and expressed his desire to review his discharge. Kawashima had served in the 1800th with other Nisei soldiers who had been sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, where they
were forced to pick up trash along the highways while under guard. He recalled being harassed by people driving by, who would call out “Jap prisoners!” to them. He was repeatedly denied the chance to visit his father, who suffered from tuberculosis and was confined to a Los Angeles sanitarium. His requests to be transferred to Arizona’s Poston Relocation Center, where his mother and siblings had been incarcerated, were also denied.

Bravin agreed to represent him and the other men of the 1800th on a pro bono basis before the Army Discharge Review Board. During the review, Bravin testified to the board that the soldiers had received “atrocious” treatment during wartime because of their ethnic background. He also pointed out that they had earned high marks on their military performance records. Two years later, their appeal was a success. Kawashima had his “blue” discharge revised to honorable. The ruling served as a test case for up to 300 others to apply for a revision to their “blue” discharges.

The ruling was a tremendous success and a significant decision for the Nisei who had lived nearly 40 years with the mark on their permanent records, despite having demonstrated their national loyalty during the war. It was for this that Bravin was honored by the Nisei soldiers. In later years, the surviving members of the 1800th would gather together in camaraderie for several reunion dinners with Bravin as their guest of honor.

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**Wayne M. Collins** (1899-1974), a San Francisco-based civil rights lawyer, battled incredible odds as a champion for Japanese Americans. He represented individuals and groups during and after the war, often clashing with such titans as the US government, the American Civil Liberties Union, and even the Japanese American Citizens League. His clients, many of whom he represented pro bono, included Fred Korematsu, Iva Toguri d’Aquino (aka “Tokyo Rose”), and hundreds of Peruvian Japanese who had been interned in US camps and threatened with deportation. Over a period of two decades, he worked tirelessly to help more than 5,000 Nisei regain their US citizenship after they had renounced their status during the war.

Born in Sacramento, California, Wayne Mortimer Collins moved to Oakland with his family, and then eventually settled in San Francisco in 1908, where he received his education. In 1934, he was one of the founders of the Northern California American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and served as one of its directors.

Collins took on the US government in the 1944 landmark *Korematsu v. United States* case with Ernest Besig from the Northern California ACLU. Representing Fred Korematsu, Collins argued against the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066, which set the stage for the forced relocation of all people of Japanese descent from West Coast areas to regions inland. Following the issuance of Executive Order 9066, Korematsu had refused to comply with the evacuation order and underwent facial restructuring to change his appearance in order to avoid incarceration. For his actions, he was arrested and imprisoned. Collins, along with Besig, argued that the government had no right to detain a loyal American citizen. Unfortunately, Korematsu was found guilty of resisting Executive Order 9066. It was not until later that Korematsu’s conviction would be voided.
During the war, Collins also worked with Besig to shut down California’s Tule Lake Segregation Center stockade. Tule Lake was known for holding “troublemakers”—people of Japanese descent who had demonstrated various forms of resistance, from answering “No-No” on the loyalty questionnaire to protesting the incarceration. Besig had received reports from several sources about the abuse and inhumane treatment of prisoners there. The National ACLU, which at the time was closely aligned with the federal government and the War Relocation Authority that ran the centers, prohibited Besig from stepping in, so he turned to Collins for help. Collins made many visits to Tule Lake, finding the evidence he needed to bring legal action against Tule Lake authorities, despite the protestations of the ACLU. He was outraged at the treatment of Japanese Americans there, and he demanded justice for the incarcerees. A year after his first visit, the stockade was permanently closed.

Collins also assisted about 4,700 Tule Lake Japanese American incarcerees who had renounced their citizenship during the war. Classified as “alien enemies,” these incarcerees were slated for repatriation when President Harry S. Truman issued a proclamation in July 1945 authorizing their removal to Japan. Once again in opposition to the National ACLU, Collins argued that these incarcerees had relinquished their citizenship under duress. Filing mass civil suits and then—because of a ruling that placed the burden of proof on each renunciant—individual suits, Collins succeeded in regaining their citizenship rights after a long, 14-year struggle.

After the war, Collins continued to take on cases that no one else would touch. He represented the infamous Iva Ikuko Toguri d’Aquino, aka “Tokyo Rose,” a prisoner-of-war in Japan who had been forced to broadcast anti-American propaganda. D’Aquino had been charged with treason and imprisoned but had been released on good behavior. Collins led a retrial in which he exposed false testimony against her, and d’Aquino was pardoned. Collins also represented 365 Japanese Peruvians who had been forcibly removed from their homes to US
detention facilities to await repatriation to Japan. With the conclusion of the war, these internees found themselves without a home to return to. Peru, which prior to the war had demonstrated anti-Japanese sentiments, denied their return. The US, in turn, also refused their presence, considering them illegal aliens despite the fact that they had been forced to enter the country. Collins worked to release them from confinement, and allow them to remain within the US. Most were released to work at Seabrook Farms in New Jersey.

Speaking at the Tule Lake pilgrimage in 2014, Collins’ son attorney Wayne Collins, Jr., would reveal that his father came up against other titans including the Japanese American Citizens League, which he argued was driven by the members’ self-interests rather than the protection of democratic principles for the Japanese American community. The younger Collins spoke about how his father had devoted much of his life to helping others, and often sacrificing time with his own family. He described his father, who was relentless in his commitment to helping the Japanese Americans, as a “wolfhound.”

Present at the Tule Lake reunion, writer and filmmaker Sharon Yamato noted how Wayne Collins, Jr., spoke with pride about his father, and how the younger Collins appeared to understand and embrace his father’s dedication to the protection of democracy:

Bound by truth, independence, and personal integrity, Wayne M. Collins, like Socrates, fought for everyone’s Constitutional rights. When leadership and institutions threatened to deny the renunciants those freedoms, Collins devoted a lifetime to undoing this wrong. As the humble torch-bearer stood before an audience of grateful beneficiaries, Wayne Collins, Jr., understood better than anyone what this fight meant.

Collins’ remarkable achievements were carried on by his son. The younger Collins had in fact resumed much of the work his father had begun, taking on some of
his unfinished cases, including that of d’Aquino. Heroism, it seems, runs in the family.

References:


In the 1980s, husband and wife Paul T. Minerich and Lisa Nomiyama headed a legal team which set out to clear the records of surviving members of the “Fort McClellan DB (Disciplinary Barrack) Boys,” twenty-one Japanese Americans who in 1944 were court-martialed for refusing combat training in protest of the egregious treatment that they and their families had received during the war. Testifying before the Army board, Minerich and the men would not succeed in having the men’s court-martial convictions expunged from their records, but were able to amend their dishonorable discharges, reinstate their ranks, and secure back pay and other benefits.

After Pepperdine University law student Paul Thomas Minerich married his Santiago High School classmate Lisa Nomiyama in 1973, her father, Tim Nomiyama, shared with him the court-martial papers he had been issued during World War II. The elder Nomiyama revealed that he had been penalized for his military resistance during the war, and became known at the time as one of the Disciplinary Barrack Boys, or “DB Boys.” Along with his wife, Minerich vowed to take on his father-in-law’s case to restore the rights that had been denied to him and the other men more than forty years prior.

In March 1944, after the draft was reinstated for Japanese Americans, about one hundred Nisei soldiers from Fort Riley, Kansas, were transferred to Fort McClellan, Arkansas, for combat training. In protest of the racist treatment that they and their families received during the war and during President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s April 1943 visit to Fort Riley – when the Nisei soldiers were confined and held under armed guard – the men as a group chose to refuse combat training. Twenty-one of the men were court-martialed for their disobedience, resulting in dishonorable discharges, the forfeiture of their pay, and sentences of hard labor of up to thirty years.
In 1945, through an act of clemency, their sentences were reduced, and in 1946, they were paroled and released from prison. Following their release, advocate Charles Edmund Zane, a friend of one of the resisters, worked to have the verdicts from their court martial overturned and sought to gain presidential pardons for the men. But his request for a hearing was rejected, and in 1949, President Truman refused to pardon the men.

Thirty years later, learning about his father-in-law’s history, Minerich resumed the case against the “DB Boys,” taking over where Zane had left off in 1954. Zane, who had grown frustrated over his unsuccessful attempts to gain justice for the men, fully supported Minerich in his task. Starting in January 1980, Minerich began preparing for his case. He focused his arguments on the fact that these men had been subject to racist treatment fueled by the anti-Japanese fervor that had taken hold in the US following the attack on Pearl Harbor. He also demonstrated how the men had been denied their basic constitutional right to question their unjust treatment. He argued that they should have been allowed to “participate in the same rights and ideals they were willing to fight and die for.”

In January 1981, the Army finally agreed to change the dishonorable discharges of all the men who made the appeal to honorable discharges. But Minerich did not stop there. The men pointed out that the change was not an admission of wrongdoing on the Army’s part, but “just a paper.” Minerich agreed. So he persisted, arguing to the review board that American democratic principles do not equate patriotism with “blind obedience,” and that it was unreasonable for the military to expect submissive compliance from men who had been subjected to various injustices by their government. The review board finally relented, awarding the eleven men credit for their years of confinement after their court martial. A year later, their discharges were also revised to reflect the conclusion of their enlistment rather than their release from confinement as the condition of
their discharges. But although the board agreed that the sentences that the soldiers had received were unduly harsh, it would not vacate their court-martial convictions. Still, the case was a success for the DB Boys, who had finally received the acknowledgement that an injustice had been done against them.

Throughout the review, Minerich remained steadfast in his commitment to clear the records of those he felt had been discriminated against. He persisted in proving that the men had been denied their basic rights as US citizens and more importantly, as human beings. His argument centered on his adamant belief that the DB Boys had essentially been punished for their Japanese ancestry, and not simply for disobedience. In arguing their defense, he also recognized that they were not the only Nikkei who had faced such unfair treatment during the war.

Minerich’s role in assisting the Nisei was remarkable on several fronts. He chose to resume an eight-year long unsuccessful legal battle. He chose to take on a case that was more than three decades old. Minerich also chose to represent a group of men who were neither well-known nor celebrated. Minerich himself explained that the men were viewed by some as “traitors” for refusing to engage in combat training, unlike the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team, who were viewed as heroes. But for Minerich, these Nisei men demonstrated a different kind of heroism by standing up for what they believed in. His motivations were not unlike those of the DB Boys themselves, who recognized an injustice and refused to accept it.

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Friends in High Places

“‘Mr. President, if you don’t mind, I want to tell you what I’m supposed to tell you’…So I told him about how things were handled… I didn’t know any exact figures… ‘everything is under control,’ and I said there’s still pressure to evacuate the Japanese population [in Hawaii], the talk is [to] Molokai. I said, ‘I’m not going to tell you the problems that the military is going to face, civilians are going to face…that’s not my area… all I want to tell you is that we’ve come this far. Why don’t we just leave things alone? Mr. [Robert] Shivers [FBI chief], Mr. [Delos] Emmons [military governor of Hawaii], they have control of this… If you don’t mind, just leave it alone.’”

-- Hung Wai Ching, retelling what he said to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at a meeting in Washington, DC, May 1943.
Throughout his law and business career in Honolulu, Hawaii, Vermont native Charles R. Hemenway (1875-1947) took on numerous roles in the community, serving on the boards of major local firms. As head of the Board of Regents at the University of Hawaii, he came to know the young men who would become members of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) and 442nd Regimental Combat Team. As their mentor and friend, he stood behind them, vouching for their integrity and their loyalty as Americans. Hemenway was also influential in the decision to save Hawaii’s Japanese Americans from the same fate as mainland Nikkei who were sent to incarceration centers.

Born in Manchester, Vermont, Charles Reed Hemenway was the second child in a family of five children. His father, Lewis Hunt Hemenway, had been born in Thailand (then known as Siam) to missionary parents and had settled in Manchester, where he worked as a doctor. His mother, Maria Reed, was a Vermont native. In the late 1870s, the family lived briefly in Saint Paul, Minnesota, but returned to Manchester. Early in his life, Hemenway demonstrated his academic ability and high level of dedication. He attended Burr & Burton Seminary in Manchester before going to Yale University, like his brother, where he received his BA in 1897. Hemenway then went on to law school in New York City. In 1899, he left New York for Hawaii to teach mathematics and mechanical drawing at Punahou School, a private school in Honolulu. He would remain in Hawaii for the rest of his life. In 1901, he married Jane Munson Colburn and began a successful career as both a public servant and private businessman. He left that practice in 1907 to accept a position as Hawaii’s attorney general. In that same year, his only son, Charles Reed Colburn, Jr., was born, and Hemenway was appointed by the governor to help found the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, which would eventually become the University of Hawaii.
In 1910, he resumed his private practice, and later began working with Alexander & Baldwin (A&B), one of Hawaii’s “Big Five” companies, a veritable oligarchy of sugar cane processors with considerable political power. In 1920, he was elected as the University’s Board of Regents chairman, and remained in that position until 1940. At the same time he continued with A&B, where he would work for nearly thirty years, serving as their vice president and assistant manager until 1938, when he took on a position as president of the Hawaiian Trust Co., and then president of their board of directors, which he held until his death. In addition he also served with numerous other organizations, including the Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Co., Ltd., and Hawaiian Electric Company.

Hemenway was a man who stood firm in his beliefs of human rights. During World War I, while serving with the university, he stood behind faculty member and German national Professor Maria Heuer, whose position was terminated when she refused to give up her German citizenship and take a loyalty oath. Hemenway protested the policy that allowed her termination based solely on the grounds of her foreign citizenship. His opposition to the anti-German sentiment at the time foreshadowed his fight for the rights of Japanese Americans during World War II.

In the 1920s, Hemenway and his wife lost their only son, who was just a teenager at the time, in a tragic accident. His loss likely served as the impetus behind Hemenway’s fervent and unwavering support of many of the youth who crossed his path during his tenure at Punahou and UH. Hemenway served as the surrogate father to many teenagers and college students, opening his home to them and helping them with counseling, friendship and financial support. His kindness and generosity enabled many who could not afford the tuition to enroll at the university. Football player Thomas Kaulukukui, one of the recipients of Hemenway’s assistance in the 1930s and the first UH football player to earn All-American honors, stated that “Papa Hemenway” had a “special place in [his]
heart.” With great admiration, he recalled, “His Aloha for the Islands and people made it possible for many of us to attend the University, who would otherwise not have had the opportunity.” Kaulukukui himself would later become an athletic director at UH and a football coach.

At a time when the only minorities allowed into the homes of wealthy Caucasian families were domestic helpers or service workers, Hemenway’s open door policy with students from all ethnic backgrounds was unheard of. Yet he developed special bonds with each of his young students, who in turn, like Kaulukukui, respectfully and fondly called him “Pop,” “Old Man,” or “Uncle,” and who referred to him as “The Father of the University.”

His guidance became key for many Nisei men during the war, when their desire to serve their country ran counter to the racism and strong anti-Japanese fear and confusion that they and other Nikkei faced. Immediately following the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese Imperial forces, the head of Honolulu’s FBI Robert L. Shivers and Hawaii’s military governor Delos Emmons consulted Hemenway about the situation, and asked for his advice on the “Japanese problem.” Because of Hemenway’s testimony in support of Japanese Americans, Shivers was convinced of their loyalty to the US, and only a relatively small group of them were interned, whereas all of those of Japanese descent in mainland West Coast areas were forcibly relocated and incarcerated.

Also following the attack, members of the UH Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC) were ordered to report for combat. Most of the ROTC consisted of Japanese American students. That same day, they were asked to join the Hawaii Territorial Guard (HTG), which was to replace the Hawaii National Guard units that had been federalized following the attack. But in January 1942, amidst the growing paranoia directed against the Japanese community, the HTG was disbanded and reformed the next day without any Nisei soldiers. The message was clear: the Japanese American soldiers were not to be trusted. The men were
devastated. Many were also angry, and rightfully so. They had demonstrated their national loyalty as ROTC and HTG men. Why was the government turning its back on them now?

In response, one month later, the men forged ahead to form the Varsity Victory Volunteers (VVV), a group of volunteers who would serve as support for the Army’s 34th Engineers at Schofield Barracks on Oahu. They took on manual labor projects and did whatever they could to prove that they were willing to fight for their country.

One Nisei, Ralph Yempuku, recalled being extremely bitter about his discharge from the HTG. He expressed his frustration to Hemenway, who listened with compassion, and then encouraged him to turn his anger into something positive. Yempuku stated:

He listened to my story and told me that he didn’t blame me if I sat back and finished the war at the University but that it would make him proud to see me join the VVV and that he thought I should consider the future and go ahead and present my other cheek, so to speak. I took his advice and have never regretted it.

Hemenway fully endorsed the VVV, and would consistently voice his public support as well as his profound admiration of the group. He kept in close contact with the young men of the VVV throughout the year. In a letter he wrote to the VVV in late 1942, Hemenway stated:

More and more of our fellow citizens are beginning to understand that your loyalty to our country is just as real as theirs and are also beginning to see that it is given under conditions which are definitely hard and unfair. You are fighting for an ideal and that is worth all the personal sacrifices which you are making. This war can only be won by those who
are fighting for liberty and justice to all - and all means everyone of every race. The old notions of superior and inferior races has been proved wrong and must be discarded in the thinking of all of us. No individual and no race has any monopoly of those traits of character which in combination make good citizens. Understanding, tolerance, integrity, justice and friendliness always win in the end, as they always have and will again. You men are in my thoughts every day and you probably do not realize how deeply I appreciate the daily proof you are giving that my confidence in you has been more than justified.

In January 1943, the VVV disbanded so that its members—including Yempuku—could join the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service. Hemenway’s role in restoring the faith and fortitude of so many of these Nisei young men is made evident by the fact that he was granted honorary membership in the 442nd RCT as well as the 100th Infantry Battalion’s veterans organization, Club 100.

Just a brief glance into the life of Hemenway reveals the profound admiration and high regard that so many felt for him. He was acknowledged time and again for his contributions to the people of Hawaii not only by his colleagues and business associates, but also by countless students, soldiers and friends. At the time of his death in 1947, a member of Club 100 would express the sense of loss felt by all whose lives were touched by Hemenway: “A volume could easily be written on his kindness and consideration if time and space are available... His rich life and accomplishments may well serve as a textbook for us to follow in the future.”

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During World War II, Chinese American community leader Hung Wai Ching (1905-2002), secretary of the Nuuanu and Atherton YMCAs in Hawaii, was appointed to the Morale Section, created to maintain order among racial groups under martial law and to act as a liaison between the civilian government and military governor. Hung believed in the national loyalty of the Nisei soldiers, but also understood that wartime anti-Japanese hysteria made it nearly impossible to prove this loyalty. His level-headed guidance inspired the Nisei to band together to form the Varsity Victory Volunteers labor battalion and eventually the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which gave the Nisei the opportunity to demonstrate their allegiance to the US.

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Chinese immigrant parents, Hung Wai Ching was raised in a mixed ethnic neighborhood close to the downtown area. One of six children, Hung grew up living and playing near the Nuuanu Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) which would become an important part of his own life in his later years. When he was just a child, Hung’s father was killed in an accident, and his mother struggled to raise her six children alone. Hung took on various odd jobs to help the family while he attended school. After he graduated in 1924 from McKinley High School, he went on to study at the University of Hawaii (UH), where he earned his degree in civil engineering. He then pursued his divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary, and then earned his master’s from Yale Divinity School in 1932. Two years later he married his high school classmate, Elsie Tong, with whom he would have three children.
Beginning in 1928, he served as the Boys’ Work Secretary at the Nuuanu YMCA, a position he would hold for ten years. In 1938, he took on the position as secretary of the nearby Atherton YMCA, which he held until 1941. His interaction with the mixed racial community of young men who attended the YMCA gave him unique insight into and an appreciation of the dynamics among the melting pot of races that lived in Hawaii. For this reason, he was sought out by government and community leaders in matters concerning race relations in the Islands.

In December 1940, Hung was invited by the FBI, Army and Navy Intelligence divisions, and community leaders to join the Council on Interracial Unity in anticipation of the upcoming war to foster the harmonious relations among the various races of Hawaii. On December 7, 1941, Japanese Imperial forces attacked Pearl Harbor and various military areas on Oahu, and Hawaii’s world was plunged into chaos. Concerned about the escalating anti-Japanese paranoia that followed the attack, military governor Delos Emmons put together a Morale Section to serve as the bridge between the military and civilian communities, appointing Hung, YMCA leader Charles Loomis, and Japanese American school principal Shigeo Yoshida as its leaders. Their job was to enact the policies put forth by the Council on Interracial Unity and to also serve as the liaison with the Emergency Service Committee, which was largely made up of Japanese American leaders.

Hung reported to Colonel Kendall Fielder, who was in charge of Hawaii’s internal security, and Robert L. Shivers, head of the Honolulu FBI. He intervened on behalf of countless Japanese community members to prevent their detainment or secure their release from confinement. Immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Emmons had assigned Fielder to arrest a daily quota of persons of Japanese ancestry. But Fielder had refused to comply, largely due to Hung’s advice against it.
Hung in fact remained a staunch advocate of the Japanese American community before, during and after World War II. Growing up among the Nisei, he had no doubt that they were loyal Americans. Yet he also realized that America would not be convinced of this loyalty unless it could be proven through military service. For this reason, he encouraged many of the Nisei to prove their national allegiance and volunteer to serve even when they had been declared “enemy aliens.”

In January 1942, the Hawaii Territorial Guard (HTG), comprising students from University of Hawaii’s Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), was disbanded and then reformed the following day without any Japanese American members. This blatant exclusion of the Nisei was a slap in the face for these men who had eagerly volunteered to defend their country. The young men were understandably angry and bitter. Hung counseled them and convinced them to “turn the other cheek.” One hundred thirty men thus petitioned Emmons with their concerns, and the Varsity Victory Volunteers was formed.

The VVV or “Triple V,” as it became known, was a non-combat labor battalion stationed at Schofield Barracks on Oahu. They were assigned to assist the 34th Army Division with various manual labor duties, which they willingly and determinedly took on. Hung knew that the VVV was the perfect means through which the Nisei men could turn the tide of prejudice against them, and he took every opportunity to show off the unit’s worth to government and military officials. In one instance in December 1942, Hung arranged it so that when Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy visited military installations around Oahu he would witness the VVV men working in the field. A few weeks later, the call for volunteers to join an all-Nisei regiment, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, was announced, and the VVV disbanded so that the men could join the 442nd as well as the Military Intelligence Service.
The man who became known as the “Father of the VVV” then adopted the 442nd. He was genuinely concerned about these young men, still “wet behind their ears,” and how they would cope with being so far from home in a land of strangers, many of whom were wary and even hostile towards people of Japanese descent. He thus devoted himself to ensuring that the Nisei soldiers were given fair and just treatment and that they were granted the opportunity to prove their skill and loyalty to the US. The Emergency Service Committee sponsored Hung to monitor the men’s journey to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where they were to be trained. As the men made their way to San Francisco by ship, Hung flew to the mainland and met with General DeWitt. He asked that the men be treated as “American soldiers, not prisoners of war,” rejecting the presence of armed guard escorts and asking for an overnight pass to San Francisco’s Chinatown for the men so he could treat them to dinner there.

Before the Nisei men arrived in the segregated southern city of Hattiesburg near Camp Shelby, Hung also laid the groundwork to ensure that they were treated fairly. Some community members had already expressed outrage over the presence of “Japs” in their area, posting signs that read “Go home Japs!” and writing editorials announcing that they were not welcome. Hung met with the editor of the local paper and the Hattiesburg chief of police to set things right, informing them that the men, like other American soldiers, were volunteers serving their country. By the time the men arrived, the anti-Japanese fervor had largely dissipated. Hung also made sure that the Nisei’s transition from their Hawaii homes to the mainland South was as easy as could be possible during wartime. He arranged for the 442nd to have their own USO and chaplains who were of Japanese descent, which he thought would be a better fit for the men.

Upon returning to Hawaii, Hung spoke out to community and business organizations, keeping them abreast of the 442nd’s progress and preparing the local population for the soldiers’ eventual return home. He wanted to ensure that the men’s return to the Islands would be as smooth as possible. He made sure
that there were jobs available and provided a scholarship fund to help returning soldiers finish their education and training. Because of his constant support of the Nisei, Hung was recognized for his efforts and became the first person to be elected as an honorary member of the 442nd Veterans Club.

Writing about Hung’s part in the war, Ted Tsukiyama, veteran member of the Varsity Victory Volunteers, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team’s 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, and the Military Intelligence Service, stated:

No one ever asked or requested Hung Wai Ching to render all this support and assistance to the Nisei, nor was he ever adequately compensated for the same, for which he never asked. He did not have to speak up nor stand up to defend and affirm the loyalty of the Japanese in Hawaii, when most others chose to remain silent, but he did so willingly and courageously, in the face of peer criticism, racial animosity and wartime anxiety directed against the local Japanese.

The history of wartime Hawaii relating to the story of the fair, calm and reasoned treatment of the Japanese in Hawaii, how the tragedy of mass evacuation and internment was avoided in Hawaii, and how Americans of Japanese ancestry were restored the right to bear arms to fight for their country and given the opportunity to prove their loyalty to America, cannot be written or told without mentioning the service and contributions of Hung Wai Ching in that historical process.

After the war, Hung enjoyed a successful business career, helping to found one of Hawaii’s major airlines, Aloha Airlines, with his brother. He served as its director for 25 years, retiring in 1971. He also served as an advisor and board member for other key Hawaii organizations, including St. Francis Hospital, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Hawaii Veterans Memorial Fund, and the University of Hawaii Foundation.
His contributions to Hawaii and its Japanese American community continue to be felt well after his death in 2002.

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Founding partner of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), a non-governmental organization that worked to foster relationships among Pacific Rim nations, Minnesota native Charles F. Loomis (1887-1957) was a strong proponent of Japanese American civil rights. Loomis served as the chief morale officer for Hawaii's military government during the war, working to foster racial unity among the islands’ various groups, and an ex-officio member of the Emergency Service Committee in 1942, a Morale Section subcommittee specifically for the Japanese community. In these roles, he spoke out for the Japanese Americans, often attesting to their national loyalty.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Charles Francis Loomis grew up in Missouri in a family of five children. As a teenager, he attended Washington University’s Manual Training School, the first such school that trained students in the use of tools and the largest public high school in St. Louis. After graduating from high school, he went on to Missouri University, receiving his degree in 1911 from the Teacher’s College there. At the time, he planned to be a teacher of the natural sciences at the Loomis Institute, a private secondary school in Connecticut that had been founded by relatives. Following his graduation, he served as a manual training expert and football manager and coach at Missouri University.

But his life took a different turn, and he instead moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, in October, with the plan to start Boys’ Work, a program of activities for young men who worked during the day, at the newly constructed Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) building. The following year, in 1912, he married Alice E. Richardson, with whom he had three children.

From 1911 to 1916, Loomis served as the Boys’ Work director for the YMCA in Hawaii. He transferred to the Kauai YMCA to serve as the secretary there until
1919, after which he was the territorial secretary. At the YMCA, Loomis worked with the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association to develop social services for the Islands’ plantations and a program of study, which would later develop into a full-fledged vocational agricultural program for the public schools. In the 1920s, he worked with Frank Atherton, a business and community leader associated with the YMCA, to found the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), an organization dedicated to the research and study of issues concerning the Asia-Pacific region. In 1925, he traveled to Japan, China, and the mainland to consult with other officials who would become members of the IPR.

Loomis expressed an interest in race relations in the years following his arrival to Hawaii. In his 1923 article on religious fellowship in Hawaii, published in the Inter-Church Federation’s newsletter, The Friend, Loomis observed that although “white people and the oriental people are not intermingling to any great extent on terms of familiarity of their religious and social life,” visitors to the Islands would find “the contentment of all the races; no feeling of antagonism, no sense of oppression is apparent.” His work with the YMCA and IPR and his insight into Hawaii’s ethnic diversity made him the perfect candidate for the Committee for Interracial Unity in Hawaii, a group of military and civilian leaders who worked to promote harmonious racial relations. Formed in 1939, the committee was created in anticipation of the US’ entry in the war. Together with YMCA Secretary Hung Wai Ching and high school principal Shigeo Yoshida, Loomis came up with plans to ensure that measures would be in place to maintain racial order.

After the war’s start, on December 18, the three men, representing but not limited to the Caucasian, Chinese, and Japanese ethnic groups, formed the core of the Morale Section. As the chief morale officer for the military government, Loomis acted as a liaison between the Army and the civilian community to maintain favorable relations among the various ethnic groups and to ease racial tensions brought on by the war. In February 1942, the Section formed the Emergency Service Committee, a subcommittee created to work specifically with
the Japanese community in the Islands. The Morale Section was thus able to work closely with Japanese Americans.

During the war, Loomis spoke openly and publicly on behalf of the Japanese in the Islands. He attested to their national loyalty, fully understanding that the rising anti-Japanese feeling threatened the well-being of the Japanese American community. He worked immediately to dispel any misconceptions and rumors about espionage activities by Japanese Americans. Along with Hung and Yoshida, he encouraged the Japanese American community to openly demonstrate their patriotism and to advocate for their right to serve in the US military. The Section encouraged Japanese Americans to show their loyalty by participating in the war effort in whatever way they could, from purchasing war bonds to donating blood to volunteering as firefighters.

Loomis’ work was key to not only maintaining the “contentment of all the races” that had characterized pre-war Hawaii but also supporting Japanese Americans at a time when their place within Island society was being threatened.

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The Strength of Many

Of all the public things that I have done in my life, I look at this as the most important. I was doing something that I thought was right and that needed to be done and was not particularly popular at the time, and I think it has made a lot of difference.


The success of this student relocation program helped pave the way for all evacuee families to relocate out of the camps. It is difficult to assess the impact of the NJASRC [National Japanese American Student Relocation Council] program on the Japanese Americans as we are today. It is immeasurable. But the work they did and their concern for my future has deeply affected the course of my life.

-- Rhoda Nishimura Iyoya, in 1994. Topaz incarceree resettled to Vassar College in 1943.
The Philadelphia-based American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), widely known as the Quakers, were dedicated supporters of the Japanese community in America from well before the war. At the time of the forced removal of thousands of Japanese Americans from their homes along the West Coast, AFSC members rallied together in support of the Nikkei, visiting many in the temporary detention facilities and then later at the incarceration camps, providing moral support and hope for the future. The AFSC established programs to move incarcerees from the centers, locating universities in the Midwest and East that would enroll Nisei students, and finding jobs and homes for others.

During World War I, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), known more commonly as the Quakers, began as an organization dedicated to offering conscientious objectors a means to serve their country without committing to military service. These young men performed various duties to support the war effort in ways that were in line with their personal beliefs, from working as ambulance drivers to assisting with rebuilding war-torn areas in Europe. After the war, the AFSC expanded its mission to ease human suffering around the world.

Prior to World War II, this mission intersected with the fates of ethnic Japanese in America. Well before the December 1941 attack on US Naval Base Pearl Harbor in Hawaii changed the world of the Nikkei community in America, the AFSC had already been working to ease anti-Japanese sentiment in the US. The Immigration Act of 1924, which disallowed the entry of immigrants from Asia to the US, had worsened a growing animosity against the Japanese already living in America. The AFSC sought to promote a better understanding between...
Americans and the Japanese, bringing representatives from Japan to help ease any racial tensions.

After Executive Order 9066 led to the forcible relocation of 110,000 people of Japanese descent from their West Coast homes to incarceration centers in remote areas in the Western states and Arkansas, the AFSC immediately went to work to determine how best to render aid. The Quakers visited the Nikkei families in their homes and later in their temporary detainment facilities and at the incarceration centers that would be their “homes” for the next few years. They provided spiritual and moral support to many who were devastated by the turn of events and stunned by the treatment they were receiving from a country that they had called their own, some for more than 50 years. Members brought food and spoke out publically in support of the Nikkei. Several AFSC members also lived permanently in the incarceration centers, serving as teachers, providing translation help to the Issei, and looking into the living conditions of the “camps.” The work of the AFSC was a source of great encouragement for the Japanese community, which realized that where there was hate and prejudice, there was also kindness and a belief in equality among the races. The AFSC demonstrated to them that not everyone was against them, and that there were supporters who sought to put an end to their discriminatory treatment.

The AFSC created two programs to help move Nikkei from the incarceration camps back into mainstream society. The first was to relocate eligible students to colleges and universities in the Midwest and East, outside of the exclusion zone, where they could either begin or continue their studies that had been interrupted by the war. At the request of the War Relocation Authority, the AFSC took on the leadership of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC), an organization created to resettle students in institutions of higher learning. The program required a tremendous amount of work and dedication. The NJASRC had to build relationships among various organizations, including military and civilian agencies, the colleges and universities, churches, and
charities. They also had to secure the confidence of the Nikkei families and convince them to release their children to their care. The NJASRC worked to identify administrators at these institutions who would welcome Japanese Americans to their campuses and screen potential candidates who would prove worthy of the limited spaces that were made available. Not everyone opened their doors to the incarcerees, whether because of racial prejudice or out of concern that it would be too controversial within their communities. But about 600 institutions did, and at least 4,000 Japanese American young men and women were able to leave the “camps” and finish their studies like other young Americans.

The other program involved finding jobs as well as housing in the Midwestern and Eastern states so that Japanese Americans could work and live outside of the incarceration centers. This program was no less involved than the first, and the AFSC faced the challenging task of establishing the trust of the Nikkei families as well as that of various businesses willing to hire Japanese Americans and then communities willing to accept them—or at least tolerate them—within their midst. In concert with other organizations and individuals, the AFSC set up hostels for those released to live during their employment. It established hostels in major cities including Chicago, Cincinnati and Des Moines in 1943, and then another in Philadelphia in 1944. Later, it would also help these Japanese Americans find permanent housing for themselves and their families who would join them later. After the war, the AFSC would also establish hostels in Pasadena and Los Angeles to help families resettling in the area.

Seeing the end of the Japanese American incarceration was one goal the AFSC hoped to attain. But its ultimate goal was even more challenging—to convince Americans that the Nikkei community was in fact loyal to the United States, and that the Issei were willing to assimilate into American culture.
After the war, the AFSC continued to support the Japanese community, providing aid to Japan and involving many Japanese Americans within the US in the relief effort. It would also continue its work to improve race relations, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, in part using the lessons it learned helping the Nikkei find a place in American society during World War II.

The contributions of the Quakers to the nation’s Japanese American community are still strongly felt today. In a 1998 *Philadelphia Inquirer* interview, Edward Nakawatase, who was born in 1943 at Arizona’s Poston Relocation Center where his parents were married and who then served as the AFSC national representative of Indian Affairs, spoke about the bonds between Japanese Americans and the Quakers. His mother, who recalled receiving a package of baby clothing from the AFSC soon after his birth, donated a portion of her reparation payment to the AFSC. Nakawatase said of the Quakers, “When everyone else was running in the opposite direction, they responded quite positively. There’s enormous gratitude.”

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Following the end of the war, local Monterey community members banded together to show their support of their Japanese American neighbors who were set to return to the California peninsula with the closing of the incarceration camps. In the spring of 1945, more than 440 people representing the full spectrum of American society petitioned for a “democratic way of life” for returnees. After incarcerees began to resettle in the area amid strong anti-Japanese sentiment, these supporters continued to petition for their fair treatment.

Before the war ended, in December 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that the government could not confine loyal Americans against their will. The following month, the government rescinded the mass exclusion orders and announced the shutdown of the incarceration centers that had detained more than 120,000 people of Japanese descent. These incarcerees, who had been forcibly removed from their homes along the West Coast in 1942, were suddenly faced with the daunting challenge of resettlement. Although by this time some 35,000 individuals had been allowed to resettle in areas in the Midwest and East through work release or education programs, this was the first time that the West Coast would be re-opened to the Nikkei.

But for most of the Japanese community, resettlement on the West Coast was not a simple transition, and many did not feel the sense of relief and joy that typically comes with the prospect of sudden freedom after a period of confinement. The “evacuation” of these individuals from their homes to temporary detention facilities and then to the incarceration centers beginning in February 1942 had been a shock to many, and the community was thrown into
chaos as individuals and families were forced to abandon not only their homes, but also their friends, their neighbors, much of their personal property, and their livelihoods. Their return to mainstream American society was fraught with anxiety. Where would they go? What would they find once they returned? Would they be welcomed or would they be turned away?

With the announcement that incarcerees would be returning home, the response along the West Coast region was immediate. Reactions were mixed. A fierce debate ensued, with many Americans supporting their return, but many others strongly opposed to it. The opposition arose mostly from labor organizations, businesses, and agricultural interest groups who were threatened by the competition with the ethnic Japanese workers. Opponents used the media and other means to vilify the Nikkei, questioning their loyalty to America—even despite clear indications of their national allegiance—and to call for their removal from the United States. One such group in the Pacific Northwest, the Remember Pearl Harbor League, issued a pamphlet stating that the Japanese in the US were a threat to national security: “The Japanese were a menace until removed, and will become a menace again when returned. The Japs must not come back.”

Along the Central Coast, where more than 3,800 individuals had been forcibly removed to the incarceration centers further inland, the response was no less mixed. On California’s Monterey Peninsula, where Issei immigrants had settled as fishermen and farmers in the 1890s, some residents blasted the Japanese community, claiming that their return would be a disastrous mistake. By February 1945, an organization with representatives from the Monterey Peninsula and Santa Cruz areas, the Monterey Bay Council on Japanese Relations, was established with the goal "to discourage the return to the Pacific Coast of any person of Japanese ancestry."

In Salinas, an anti-Japanese movement that had festered since early in the war gained ground. Edward Seifert, the Council’s leader and the president of the
Salinas Grower Shipper Vegetable Association, had made known his antagonistic feelings towards the Japanese community and had advocated for their removal from the region during the war. Once resettlement was announced, the Council, which now had supporters all along the Monterey Bay area, stepped up its efforts to stop the Nikkei’s return. On April 23, 1945, it placed an anonymous advertisement in the local newspapers, including *The Herald*, as an "Organization to Discourage Return of Japanese to the Pacific Coast."

In response to the advertisement, supporters of the Nikkei within the area quickly rallied together to express their opposition to the anti-Japanese movement. They wrote letters to *The Herald’s* editor, criticizing its publication of the advertisement and lambasting the racist, “un-American” attitudes it expressed. Letters flooded in, announcing their support of the returning Japanese. One letter dated April 26 questioned whether residents would give in to “the forces of bigotry, prejudice and selfishness” or choose “those of tolerance, justice and the largest good.”

But the most remarkable show of support came in the form of a petition drive that generated a watershed of support from the community members of the Monterey Peninsula. Tim Thomas, a Monterey historian, stumbled upon these petitions while doing research in the local Japanese American Citizens League Hall, seventy years after they were signed. All told, there were fifteen petition packets that had been distributed among the locals, expressing their support of the Japanese community.

The petition read:

> Among the (returning Japanese) will be veterans of this war and relatives of Americans who are fighting for democracy on all our fronts. These families have made their homes here and have been part of the life of our community. Their sons are making the same sacrifices as our own boys.
More than 440 names were collected during the drive, and these appeared in a full-page advertisement in *The Monterey Peninsula Herald* on May 11, 1945, with the bold headline "The Democratic Way of Life for All."

Petition signers represented the full spectrum of Monterey society, from preachers and businessmen to housewives and journalists. Also included were notable members of the literary arts scene, including Pulitzer Prize-winning author John Steinbeck, photographer Edward Weston and his wife, writer Charis Wilson, and poet Robinson Jeffers and his wife, Una.

Commenting about these remarkable documents, Thomas noted, "There's really no other known act like this during the war in which non-Japanese Americans stood up as a community for their Japanese friends and neighbors." He continued, "These petitions represent a really unique moment in American civil rights history."

Encouraged by the welcome-back petition, many Nikkei returned to the region, starting up fishing businesses as well as entering other fields including retail and medicine.

Past Japanese League national president Larry Oda spoke on the importance of the petitions as historical evidence on how the Japanese community was viewed by their neighbors during wartime. The Monterey community’s outpouring of support for returning Nikkei was remarkable not only because it served as encouragement to Japanese community members but also because it occurred during a time when anti-Japanese sentiment still held fast in many segments of American society. Oda stated, “It heartens me that so many prominent members of our community rose up for justice, when it was not really popular to do so.”
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Neighbors and Friends

Quietly, we hurried down Florin-Perkins Road and turned into our own Tsukamoto driveway. How good to see our familiar buildings, our house, and own place. The old barn was still leaning against the big walnut trees. The two old cabins by the bath house and the one on the other side of the main house were still there. Our humble little house stood bravely under the big walnut trees. We ran happily here and there touching everything to make sure it was real, feasting our eyes on the dear place we had missed so much.

Best of all, the Fletchers were there to welcome us home. They had already moved out into the one-room cabin by the water pump so we could have the house we had left in their care. Very few returning Florin residents were as lucky as we were. Many came back to find that they had nothing left. They wondered how they would be able to start all over again.

-- Mary Tsukamoto, returning home in 1945 from Jerome incarceration camp, We the People: A Story of Internment in America (1987)
In 1944, William C. Carr (1890-1978) helped start a Pasadena grassroots organization, “Friends of the American Way,” which provided support and worked to restore the rights of Japanese Americans who were forcibly removed from their homes under Executive Order 9066. The Friends wrote monthly letters and brought care packages to incarcerated Pasadena residents, and gave housing and employment assistance to those returning to the area. A real estate agent, Carr also managed Japanese American properties during their incarceration. The organization petitioned for the Nikkei’s release, starting first with an 18-year old Pasadena resident who was allowed to live with a host family while she attended school.

Born in Chicago, William Charles Carr attended Hyde Park High School and the University of Illinois, at which he received a degree in agriculture. He served for a short time in the military at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, and was discharged in 1918. In 1919, he married Beatrice M. Park, and a year later, they had their first son, William George.

Carr worked as a hardware retailer in Chicago, but then his family moved to Los Angeles, California, where Carr opened up a hardware store. But he soon grew fond of the Poppy Peak area in the southwestern corner of Pasadena, and decided to purchase Poppy Peak Hill in 1924. Discovering a new calling, he launched a real estate business, plotting out the Poppy Peak area into residential lots to sell. He himself built a home there for his family, settling into the Pasadena community. His second son, John, was born there in 1926.

Carr was not a typical real estate agent. In the largely Caucasian area of Pasadena, he set out to open up the area to different races and ethnicities, selling to Jews, African Americans, Mexicans, Japanese and others.

Not everyone appreciated his efforts to promote diversity. Even years later, when his son, John, took up the family trade and followed the same practice of serving
minorities, John’s own son, Christopher, recalled being the target of bullying because of his father’s ties to African Americans. He also remembers the negative comments from other community members who denigrated his work for minorities. In fact, William Carr had been initially rejected by the local realtors’ board because of his interactions with minorities. In response to this, the Jewish community continued to send customers Carr’s way, and the board had no choice but to accept him.

When William Carr first moved to Pasadena, there had already been a considerable Japanese community, and a Japantown had been in existence since the 1920s. Japanese immigrants had settled in the Pasadena area in the early 1900s. Throughout California, many Issei began in America as fishermen or farmers, but in Pasadena, a considerable number entered the nursery business. By 1920, more than 40% of the Issei were gardeners. By 1940, Pasadena’s Old Town was peppered with an assortment of Japanese-run businesses, including several florists, beauty salons, restaurants and a photo studio.

Then on December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor Naval Base was attacked, and the world of the Nikkei was turned upside down as they became subjects of suspicion and fear. In 1942, the government ordered the forced removal of all individuals of Japanese descent from the West Coast region to incarceration centers further inland. In Pasadena, the Issei who had been living there for decades and their families were forced to leave their homes and join the other Nikkei in the “camps.”

Carr watched the developments with great dismay. As a proponent for equal rights for all races, he spoke out publicly and wrote letters to the editors of newspapers and appeals to the governor demanding fair treatment for the Nikkei residents. He founded the Pasadena Chapter of the Pacific Coast Committee on American Principles and Fair Play, advocating for the fair treatment of loyal Japanese Americans and the end of the incarceration. The anti-Japanese
sentiment the Committee confronted was fierce. In December 1943, amidst rumors that the Nikkei were returning to the West Coast, the California State Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Japanese Problems, also known as the Donnelly Committee, sent a telegram to President Roosevelt which the San Francisco Chronicle reprinted:

The California State Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Japanese Resettlement...unanimously and vigorously protests such actions and policies... This committee fears and knows that the relocation in this State of the Japanese during the war will inevitably lead to violence and bloodshed, thus creating an excuse for the mistreatment of American civilian and military prisoners in Japan, many of whom are citizens of this State. Furthermore, because of the extreme difficulty if not impossibility of determining the loyalty of any Japanese, foreign or native born, we believe that such action would further the dangers of sabotage and espionage...

In February 1944, Carr and other Pasadena residents founded the Friends of the American Way, an organization dedicated to the restoration of civil rights for Japanese Americans. Led by Carr—who became its first chairman—and Quaker auditor Hugh Anderson, the Friends set up their headquarters in the abandoned Japanese Union Church. Although Carr himself was not a Quaker, the men worked together to do everything they could to show their support to their Japanese neighbors, writing letters to them in the centers and making visits to the Gila River incarceration camp, where many were confined. They wanted their friends to know that Pasadena did care about them and that they were not forgotten. They also envisioned that their work would be a collective effort by a diverse community. The Friends characterized their efforts to “heal the wounds of the forced evacuation” as “a fruitful and unselfish opportunity for Negro, Jew, Saxon, Catholic, Mexican and Protestant to know and respect each other by working together for the rights of the banished.”
In a 2004 Rafu Shimpo interview, John recalled that his father and Anderson would work together and “pool their gas rations and figure out ways to go to the desert.” They brought care packages and carted personal items to the Pasadena residents detained at Gila River. Carr also helped many families by managing their properties and renting them out, saving their homes for their eventual return and providing them with a form of income.

In 1944, Carr and Anderson came up with a plan to “repatriate” the incarcerees to Pasadena, beginning with a single individual. The men believed that this would demonstrate to the public that “innocent American citizens were being persecuted.” After getting approval from the Western Defense Command head General Charles Bonesteel, who was in charge of the detention, they arranged for Esther Takei, an eighteen year-old Pasadena resident, to be released from Colorado’s Amache incarceration camp to Anderson and his family. In September 1944, amid threats to the Andersons and opposition in the newspapers, Takei became the first Japanese American to return to the West Coast. She registered as a student at Pasadena Junior College. Takei would later recall how “all the patriotic organizations protested” and “marched down to the school board and demanded that I leave.” Despite this, Takei continued attending school, and eventually the unrest died down.

The import of Takei’s return to the West Coast was not lost on other Japanese Americans nor on the US servicemen who were fighting abroad or recovering at home. Her story ran in Stars and Stripes and garnered resounding support from the soldiers. In 1944, USNR Chief Yeoman David C. Mumford wrote to Takei, encouraging her to “be of good cheer and stand fast in your own little battle zone.” Mumford pointed out the significance of Takei’s experience in the broader context of the fight for civil rights for Japanese Americans: “Your importance as a person is as nothing, in a larger sense, to your importance as an example of what can be done or else, cannot be done to an American citizen.” When Carr and Anderson brought Takei home to California, they knew that her return would
have profound effects. This was affirmed by Nisei Army Sergeant Susumu Kazahaya, who wrote to Takei in September, “All I want to say is that since you are the first to come here, you have the most important weapon under your control to impress the people here that there are thousands of other Japanese that are wishing to come back to Southern California...[t]he impressions you leave in your activities will no doubt reflect greatly on the Niseis that will return in the future.”

Carr continued writing letters of support, many to the *Los Angeles Times*. In October, he reported that the Friends organization was “setting a good example of how we of the white majority and Negroes of the largest minority can cooperate together in securing justice for returning Americans.” He made announcements of plans to operate a hostel and offered to entertain Japanese American soldiers on leave in the area. He also reported that the Friends were ready to assist returning Japanese Americans by helping them find jobs and housing.

At the end of the year, the mass exclusion order was rescinded, and the government announced the shutdown of the incarceration centers and the return of the Nikkei to the West Coast for resettlement. Reactions were mixed. While most people responded positively to the news, some opposition groups like the Teamsters Union, which had lobbied for the revocation of the Nisei’s citizenship and protested their release from confinement, had already expressed their anti-Japanese feelings from the start of the war.

In the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, Carr maintained his stance in support of the Japanese community: “We are relieved that America no longer will banish people on a racial basis,” Carr was quoted as stating. “To our returning Pasadena people we offer friendship and help in finding housing and employment. To the army and local law enforcement agencies we promise every assistance in apprehending criminals who intimidate or harm these loyal people.”
Yet despite his tireless advocacy efforts, the fact remained that in the Los Angeles area, racism prevented many Japanese Americans from returning to their prewar employment. Many were excluded from white-collar jobs. Los Angeles General Hospital, for example, disallowed the employment of Japanese Americans until the end of 1945. The Teamsters banned Japanese Americans from the downtown markets. Caucasian suppliers and retailers boycotted the Nikkei in the nursery and cut-flower industry, and by 1946, fewer than one-third of those who had been in the industry before the war had returned to their flower businesses.

Howard Otamura was the first Japanese American resident of Pasadena to return to the flower market. But after being harassed at the market and at his home, which had been targeted by gunshots, he said he was “ready to give up.” But then Carr and the Friends stepped in, and they ensured that the flower market had a constant police presence so that Otamura could continue his work. It was all Carr could do to help, but it was enough for Otamura to persevere.

As the years went on, Carr persisted in his fight for the fair treatment of the Nikkei community. He continued his practice of selling housing in largely Caucasian neighborhoods to Japanese Americans. Joan Takayama-Ogawa recalled, “After the war, Mr. Carr decides that my parents, Hideo and Sonoko Takayama, would be the ideal couple to break the color line in the exclusive neighborhood of the San Rafael Hills.” Carr also sold a home in the same area to another Japanese family in the 1950s. “It was very, very controversial,” Takayama-Ogawa stated. He also encouraged Mike Masaoka to instigate a lawsuit challenging the Alien Land Act that prohibited Asians “ineligible for citizenship” from owning agricultural land in California. Haruye Masaoka v. California became the test case against the Alien Land Act, and eventually led to its termination.

Carr’s determination in securing the rights of Japanese Americans and equal treatment for the Nikkei community represented a lifeline for so many Nikkei at a
time when so many questioned their loyalty and ultimately their humanity. His
tireless efforts to help the Nikkei as well as other minorities in Pasadena was
recognized by the City of Pasadena after his death, in the 1980s.

But the Japanese American community had known all along what Carr had done
for them, and they were grateful for his tireless efforts. Carr’s grandson
Christopher recalled that as a police officer in Pasadena, Nisei would stop him on
the streets when they saw his name badge and ask if he was related to William
Carr. “When I said that William was my grandfather,” he says, “they would thank
me or invite me into their homes.”

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During the war, Bob Fletcher (1911-2013) quit his job as an agricultural inspector and agreed to help three Japanese American families who were forcibly removed from their Florin, California, homes under Executive Order 9066. Despite the local community’s ongoing resentment towards the Japanese immigrant farmers, Fletcher felt that the Nikkei were being unfairly treated and managed the farms the families were forced to leave behind. He worked 18-hour days tending more than 90 acres, paid the bills for the families, and retained only half of the profits during the three years they were incarcerated. After they returned, Fletcher continued to assist them as they resettled amid local opposition.

Robert Emmett Fletcher, Jr., was born in San Francisco and grew up as an only child in a farming family in Brentwood, California. After graduating from high school in 1929, he attended the University of California at Davis, where he received his degree in agriculture in 1933. He continued his farming life, managing a peach orchard in Red Bluff and then taking on a job as a county inspector and then state shipping point agricultural inspector. It was in this position that he came to know many of the Japanese American farmers in the area.

The Issei had immigrated to the area outside of Sacramento in the 1890s, and had enjoyed a relatively productive livelihood as farmers there. However, their success was not always met with a positive response by the surrounding community. As other Nikkei farmers experienced along the West Coast, local Caucasian farmers resented the competition from them. The Japanese community was therefore treated unfairly; Nikkei individuals were often subject to racial
discrimination in their daily lives. While their children attended segregated schools, they faced difficulties in everything from acquiring farming supplies to selling their goods.

Fletcher had become familiar with the Issei farmers around the city of Florin, where he was sent to inspect their produce for the US government. The farmers grew to respect and trust Fletcher, who viewed them as no different from anyone else.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the forced removal of about 110,000 people of Japanese descent from the West Coast to remote areas further inland. All “evacuees” were told to leave behind their homes, their belongings and their livelihoods to move to the incarceration centers established by the War Relocation Authority. The farmers who had lived in the Sacramento area, some for as long as 50 years, were faced with the reality that they had to sell off or abandon their farms. Both choices were devastating, as it meant that when they returned to their homes, there would be nothing remaining for them.

In 1942, Al Tsukamoto, a Nisei whose parents had immigrated to the area in 1905, approached Fletcher with a business proposal on behalf of family friends. Tsukamoto asked Fletcher if he were willing to manage the farms of the Okamoto and Nitta families while they were detained. In return, Tsukamoto offered, Fletcher could retain all of the profits for himself. Fletcher agreed, even though he had no experience in farming the flame tokay grapes on the farms, and he was not a close friend of Tsukamoto. He also offered to manage the Tsukamotos’ farm, recognizing that they had little options during this time.

He quit his job as an inspector, and for three years, he managed the three farms, tending to not only the grapes but also olive trees and strawberries, working more than 90 acres of land and putting in 18-hour days. He stayed in the house
the Tsukamotos had established for the migrant workers, even though they had offered him the use of their own home. For those three years, he paid the taxes and the mortgages and worked the land. And despite Tsukamoto’s offer, Fletcher kept only half of the profits. He banked the other half for the families. During that time, he met and married Teresa Cassieri, with whom he had one son, Robert Emmett III. Both he and Cassieri stayed in the bunkhouse together, sharing the idea that the farmhouse was always the Tsukamotos’, not theirs. They worked together as a team to take care of the farms.

His actions were met with opposition from the local community, which criticized his helping the Japanese Americans. In addition to being personally attacked as a “Jap lover,” a bullet was fired into the Tsukamoto barn. A local business also posted the sign, “We don’t want Japs back here—EVER.” Yet he persisted, with little attention to the objectors, because he believed that the Nikkei were being unfairly treated. “They were the same as anybody else,” he reported to the *Sacramento Bee* in 2010. “It was obvious they had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor.”

In 1945, as the incarceration centers shut down and the Nikkei began to resettle, many farmers in the Florin area did not return, their farms having been lost because of their inability to pay their bills. About 80 percent of them ended up in New Jersey or other areas of the US. Nisei veteran Bill Taketa, who was sent to the Manzanar incarceration center and who later married Doris (Nitta) Taketa, said that his mother, who was a widow at the time of the mass exclusion, had lost her 232-acre farm, which had been almost entirely paid off, when she was forced to abandon it.

When the Nittas, Okamotos, and Tsukamotos returned, however, they found their farms intact and money in the bank. Fletcher’s wife had also cleaned up the Tsukamotos’ home in anticipation of their return, even though she and her husband had been staying in the workers’ quarters. “He saved us,” Doris (Nitta)
Taketa, who was just 12 at the time when she and her family were sent to Arkansas’ Jerome incarceration center, reported to the New York Times in 2013.

After the war, the Fletchers purchased their own farm in Florin where they grew hay and raised cattle. Fletcher, who had served as a volunteer firefighter in the city since 1942, eventually became the fire chief after more than two decades of service, retiring in 1974. The Nikkei community continued to be subject to discriminatory behavior, and Fletcher did what he could to help out. When Tsukamoto needed help buying hardware at the local store because his business was refused, Fletcher would buy it for him.

Fletcher himself was a humble, quiet man who thought little about the significance of his own actions. But eventually the community would recognize his contributions to their city. On his 100th birthday, more than 150 people attended a special celebration held at the Florin Community Center where he was recognized as a “true American hero.”

In his Sacramento Bee obituary in 2013, Tsukamoto’s daughter, Marielle, who was just five years old when her family was “evacuated,” praised Fletcher for his actions:

   Few people in history exemplify the best ideals the way that Bob did. He was honest and hardworking and had integrity. Whenever you asked him about it he just said, “It was the right thing to do.”

Fletcher would remain humble well into his senior years, believing ultimately that what he did was just that—something he just did. But like Marielle Tsukamoto, the Japanese American community recognized his actions as not only incredibly kind and generous, but also remarkably courageous. When the city of Florin honored him in a ceremony in 2010, he said, “I don’t know about courage, [but] it took a devil of a lot of work.”
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Boyle Heights resident **Mollie A. Wilson Murphy** (1926-2014) shared a strong personal connection to many Japanese Americans before the war and would hold fast to this connection during and after their incarceration. Growing up alongside many of these families in her ethnically diverse Los Angeles, California, neighborhood, Murphy was just 18 years old when her Nikkei friends were sent to incarceration centers in 1942. Through the war, she maintained close contact with them, lending support and friendship through her letters, which she saved and which have since become part of an important collection recording the experiences of young ethnic Americans during the war.

Mollie A. Murphy grew up as Mollie Ardelia Wilson in the late 1920s in the diverse Los Angeles, CA, neighborhood of Boyle Heights. She was African American, and her parents had lived there since 1896, when they first moved to California from Oklahoma. Boyle Heights became their home over the next decades, and it was where they raised Mollie and her two brothers, Atoy II and Kenneth. Described by *Los Angeles Times* reporter Suzanne Munchnic as “Southern California’s Ellis Island,” Boyle Heights has historically been a place with a strong, mixed community. Munchnic writes, “People of all nationalities and ethnicities don’t just pass through Boyle Heights, they put down roots, go to school, make friends and establish businesses that pass from one generation to another.”

Murphy and her brothers grew up among a diverse group of friends who were Jewish, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Russian, and African American, as well as other ethnicities. Murphy graduated from Roosevelt High School in the summer of 1943. In a letter she wrote as a teen, she fondly recalled the diverse community of Boyle Heights:

As a child, I vividly remember that on my street alone there were ten different ethnic families residing harmoniously together. My mother learned to cook from Jewish people, because she had been taught by her
own mother. It often amazed me how my mother could communicate with Mrs. Kokoris or Mrs. Akahoshi, because neither of them could speak English and my mother couldn’t speak Greek nor Japanese! It goes to show, that when it comes to mutual problems, you don’t always need words to express your thoughts.

But in 1942, following the issuance of Executive Order 9066, eighteen year-old Murphy watched in dismay as many of her Japanese American friends and their families were forced to leave their homes and to live behind barbed wire in incarceration centers further inland. Describing how she felt at the time, Murphy stated, “I had a lot of emotions, but one was the unfairness…[t]hat really got to me.” Despite her youth, she also recognized the import of what was happening with her friends, and what it meant in terms of the violation of civil rights. What affected the Japanese Americans impacted everyone: “I ha[d] to always think, if they can do it to them, they can do it to me, too.”

Throughout the Nikkei’s period of incarceration, Murphy stayed in touch with many of her friends, who were first detained at the Santa Anita and Pomona Detention Facilities, and then later moved to the incarceration centers at Granada (Amache) in Colorado, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Manzanar in California, and Gila River and Poston in Arizona. She wrote many letters, and her friends responded enthusiastically. Murphy ended up saving her correspondence with these friends, as well as photographs and other memorabilia from those days. As time passed, her treasured keepsakes would serve as important testaments to the experiences of those confined during wartime. They would tell the story of how teenagers were affected by the government’s forced relocation of those of Japanese descent, and would serve as a reminder of a bleak period in American history. Recognizing the significance of these documents, Murphy donated more than 100 of her letters to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, so that the Museum could preserve, study, and share them with others.
In her book *Making a Non-White America*, author Allison Varzally made note of the historic and social significance of Murphy's preserved letters and memorabilia, not only as a record of the incarceration experience, but also of the close ties between the young women in the “camps” and Murphy herself:

Beyond their candid depictions of camp life, holiday greetings and queries about family members and old acquaintances from the neighborhood exposed the emotional closeness of the Nisei girls and their African-American friend. At times the internees stated this affection explicitly: “Mollie, you can be sure that I’ll never forget you,” wrote Violet from Chicago in 1945. “You were so kind to me while I was in camp, and that kindness will never be forgotten.” In a note composed a year earlier, Chiyoko also thanked Mollie “a million for your kindness again. Your friendship’s enuff [sic], honestly!” As the war’s end drew closer and the young women contemplated a return to Los Angeles, they looked to Mollie for a candid assessment of the circumstances there. “Can you tell me how the conditions are out there? I know Mayor Bowron is still dead set against our returning,” June wondered in July 1944. Despite the passage of time and physical distance, they continued to trust their friend.

The letters also demonstrate how during a time when the Nikkei were persecuted and feared by so many, there remained loyal supporters, and these supporters spanned many cultures, races, and ethnicities.

After graduating from college, Murphy attended the University of California at Los Angeles and graduated with a degree in Spanish. She then became a Spanish teacher at Pasadena Community College. In 1947, she married Millard E. Murphy, with whom she would have 11 children—seven sons and four daughters. She and her husband would remain in Boyle Heights until 1957, raising five of their children in the very apartments her father had built on Jersey Street. She then
moved to Pasadena where her family grew by another six children, and where she spent her later years until her death in 2014.

Well after the war, she remained friends with many of the young women she had corresponded with during wartime. But Murphy’s contributions to the Japanese American community are exemplified not only by the gratitude and friendship of these women for whom Murphy served as a lifeline to the world outside of the barbed wire fences, but also by the profound appreciation felt by Americans today, who see Murphy as having provided a vital link from the past to the present. At the 2001 annual meeting of the American Studies Association, scholar George Sanchez spoke about how he was inspired by Murphy and her relationship with the young Japanese American women:

This simple act of friendship, conducted during the most hostile periods, gave me hope regarding maintaining significant relationships across cultures in times of war, as well as inspiration concerning the importance of public engagement that could tell these too often forgotten stories to multiple audiences.

During World War II, for many young Nisei women, Murphy bridged the gap between the nightmare of incarceration and the dream of freedom. Yet her actions hold significance for all Americans, who gain insight into the real-life, human impact of the war on young America.

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Against All Odds

We have found no matter how much they say they are LOYAL AMERICANS there is still a matter of BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER and once a JAP always a JAP. I am for eliminating the Jap families for generations down out of the United States.

-- Elzoe Clark, in a letter written to Park College administrators, upon their admittance of Nisei students to its campus, September 1942.
When his congregation at the Japanese Baptist Church in Seattle, Washington, was forcibly evacuated to the Puyallup Temporary Detention Facility in 1942, **Reverend Emery E. Andrews** (1894-1976) visited his parishioners almost daily. After they were transferred to Idaho’s Minidoka incarceration center, Andrews moved his own family to nearby Twin Falls so that he could continue to minister to church members and traveled back and forth to Seattle to help incarcerees with personal matters and with retrieving belongings left behind. Despite threats from the local community, Andrews welcomed into his home each month more than 150 Japanese Americans stopping over to and from Minidoka.

Emery Eggleston Andrews recognized his calling early on in his life. Born around the turn of the century in Nebraska, he and his family moved to California when he was just two years old, and they started a farm just outside Modesto. At the age of ten, he became a member of his community First Baptist Church. He attended Berkeley Baptist Divinity School and was licensed to preach when he was just 19 years old. Over the new few years, he underwent theological training at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

He met Washington native Mary Magdalene Brooks at the Modesto Baptist Church near the Andrews’ farm, and they returned to her home state to be married in 1917. He was then ordained as a minister by his church in Modesto, and it was at this time that he began his work with minorities, serving various immigrant communities in the area, including the Chinese, Italians and Mexicans,
while he attended Los Angeles Junior College. Two years later, he and his wife had a daughter, Mary Melverna.

That same year, Andrews moved to Seattle, Washington, with his new family. He continued his work with minorities, serving in the International District where he ministered to the Asian communities there. Seattle had a considerable Nikkei population at that time, with many Issei having settled in the area as early as the 1890s, so he grew familiar with many within the Japanese community. Andrews, known as “Andy” among his friends, enrolled at the University of Washington, graduating in 1922 with a degree in sociology and a five-year teaching diploma. In 1926, he and his wife had their second daughter, Betty Jean.

Three years later, in 1929, he took on a position as the pastor of the Japanese Baptist Church (JBC) in Seattle, a church that had been founded in 1899. He resumed the role of its first English-language pastor, Reverend Paul Gates, who had served the church from 1921-1925, to lead the growing number of English-speaking Nisei in the congregation. It would be a position that he would retain until 1955. During his time, he developed lasting relationships with his congregation members. In 1930, Andrews reorganized Boy Scout Troop #53, which had been based at JBC since its start in 1920, and which was not only the first Nisei troop in the area but also one of the first Nisei troops in the US. That year he began his lengthy 38-year stint as the Scoutmaster of the troop, forging friendships with the young men. It was as the Nisei’s pastor and community leader that he grew close to the Japanese American community of Seattle. A year later, in 1931, he received his degree in education.

Before the start of World War II, as a pastor at JBC, Andrews and his family would travel to Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound to deliver a joint service with a Japanese reverend at the Lighthouse Baptist Church there. They would bring members from the Seattle church and enjoy Sunday picnics with the Lighthouse congregation. Emery Brooks, Andrews’ son who was born in 1937, was just a
young boy at the time, but he would later recall that time period with great fondness: “And we always looked forward to coming over here and...[to] all the people on Bainbridge ‘cause it was such a small Japanese community at that time, most of them knew when we were coming over so it got to be quite a party over there. We enjoyed that very much.”

Then on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked US Naval Base Pearl Harbor, and the days of picnics and joyful gatherings were brought to an abrupt halt. In the following months, Andrews witnessed as his friends and church members of the Japanese community were discriminated against and targeted as subjects of suspicion and racially-based hatred. In early 1942, the US government ordered the mass relocation of all people of Japanese descent from the West Coast to remote areas inland, and the Nikkei were forced to abandon their homes, their friends, and their livelihoods to be herded first into temporary detention facilities and then shipped to incarceration centers throughout the Western states and Arkansas. The first to go were the Japanese residents of Bainbridge Island, but the others soon followed.

The Japanese residents of Seattle were slated to be moved to the Puyallup temporary detention facility, later referred to as “Camp Harmony,” and formerly the Western Washington Fairgrounds. The grounds had been hastily converted into temporary living quarters for the Nikkei, the smell of cattle and manure still permeating the air. In the early months of 1942, once they received notice of their “evacuation” and orders to leave everything behind but what they could carry, they scrambled to secure their property and personal belongings, from cars and furniture to photographs and treasured sets of china. Some items were desperately sold off for absurdly low prices. Realizing their predicament, Andrews immediately set to work to help the families. In the basement of the church, he marked off ten-foot squares on the basement floor, indicating each family’s name, and assisted the church members as they stacked as many of their goods as they could there. Kitchen supplies, furniture, and steamer trunks were piled
high, from floor to ceiling. In this way, he was able to save many of their goods, which otherwise would have had been sold off or left to be destroyed or stolen. He kept their belongings stored until their return after the centers shut down.

On Mother’s Day of that year, for the first Sunday in his life as a pastor, Andrews sat in a completely empty church. With no children running around in the nursery, no Nisei waiting in the youth room, and no members sitting in the pews of the sanctuary, he was struck by the profound significance of the emptiness within his church, and decided that something needed to be done. He wrote letters in support of the Japanese community, and he penned others condemning the unfair treatment the Nikkei were facing. He spoke out publicly against mass exclusion and incarceration, criticizing the government for stripping Japanese Americans of their basic rights as well as their humanity. In a speech he delivered to the 1943 Idaho Baptist Assembly, he questioned how the government could expect allegiance from the Japanese Americans, who were being denied their rights as citizens:

What a sad commentary on our civilization. This we have done in Christian America to people just as loyal as you or I. How loyal would you be if you were treated the same way that these people are treated? I would not be loyal. There are some things I would not fight for, even in America.

His advocacy was enough to raise the suspicions of the US government, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation reportedly made several visits to Andrews’ home, questioning his connections to the Nikkei. Yet he continued his activism.

In 1942, Andrews and his family made almost daily visits to Puyallup, where they provided moral and spiritual support to their church members and others. Andrews’ son Emery Brooks remembers that only War Relocation Authority personnel were allowed into the detention facilities, so he and his family were made to stand outside of the fences while they visited with the Nikkei:
And so we would just stand outside the barbed wire and just reach through the barbed wire and touch our people and shake hands or try to give hugs. And if we brought gifts they were immediately taken from us by the guards there and they would rip the gifts open to see what was inside, ’cause they were looking for weapons or whatever objects of subversion that one has. And so, I mean, they just took it from us and ripped ’em open and gave it back, and then we just had to hand it through the barbed wire. There was barbed wire all around. And it’s interesting because “Camp Harmony,” you know, our people are in some [kind] of cattle stalls and some other hastily built shelters down there, but to think that this, this place of joy and fun and entertainment was now a place of containment. And all the cattle stalls, I think of the cattle stalls that held the livestock, legitimate livestock, now were housing illegitimate human livestock, illegitimate in eyes of the nation and the world.

Andrews worked with other religious and community organizations in the Evacuees Service Council, setting up school and library facilities at Puyallup and attempting to make the Nikkei’s stay there as “normal” as possible. But then, his congregation was moved to the more permanent facility in south central Idaho, the Minidoka incarceration center, and daily trips became nearly impossible.

Faced with the removal of his congregation, Andrews made the decision to move his entire family to Twin Falls, a small town near Minidoka. It was a decision that came with negative consequences. At Twin Falls, the family was confronted with threats from those who resented the presence of the Japanese community. Andrews became an object of scorn and ridicule. The owner of a local café in Minidoka threw Andrews out of his café and continually harassed him with taunts of “Jap lover” and “traitor.”
Still, Andrews persisted. He rented a large house in Twin Falls—one much larger than his family needed—and used the extra space to house people who traveled to and from Minidoka. On average, the Andrews hosted 167 visitors a month, and these included Nisei soldiers visiting family members, “camp” volunteers and workers, and Japanese farmers and other workers making their way through the area. He visited the center as often as he could, ministering to the incarcerees on an almost daily basis. On weekends, he brought along his children, who were thus able to see their friends and spend time playing with them. He also made frequent trips back and forth to Seattle, where he would transport his church members’ personal belongings or take care of personal business for them. All told, he traveled about 1,500 miles and made more than 50 trips. He traveled to other incarceration centers as well, trying to help in whatever way he could. Throughout this time, he continued to push for the end of the mass exclusion and confinement of the Japanese American community. After some time, the café owner bought the house that the Andrews’ rented, forcing them to move out. But despite strong opposition, Andrews refused to give up.

While the majority of Seattle’s residents had been sent to Minidoka, the Bainbridge Island residents had been moved to California’s Manzanar incarceration center, and the desert location had proven to be too harsh and inhospitable for those used to milder weather. He pushed for their transfer to Minidoka, and in February 1943, eleven months after they had set foot in Manzanar, the Bainbridge Islanders were reunited with their Seattle neighbors at Minidoka.

In January 1945, the Andrews moved back to Seattle. After about a year—during which time the Seattle Council of Churches pushed for the integration of the Japanese American returnees into existing Caucasian churches and Andrews fought to keep his congregation intact—he reopened the JBC, and he resumed his duties as its minister. As the Japanese American community began to resettle in the area, he once again did what he could to help them ease back into
mainstream society. He assisted returnees with finding housing and employment. He also worked with the relief organization that helped postwar victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings rebuild their homes.

In 1955, he stepped down from his position as JBC’s minister, but agreed to continue on as a minister of visitation. Unlike many other individuals who assisted the Nikkei community during wartime and remained unknown or unacknowledged, Andrews' dedication to social causes was widely recognized by others. He was honored by the Japanese government in 1970 and awarded by the Emperor with the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Fifth Class, for his distinguished achievement in social work. The Japanese American community as a whole honored him as well in 1976, before his death that same year.

Yet it was the many individuals whom he helped who would never forget what he had done for them and for their families as they struggled to survive throughout the difficult years during and after the war. His steadfast belief in them and his dedication restored their faith in humanity at a time when their faith had been tested to its limits.

Yosh Nakagawa, vice president of American Baptist Churches USA in 2002-2003, was a young boy when his family was sent first to Camp Harmony and then to Minidoka. In his essay, “My American Story,” he recalled how the Baptist community came to his family’s aid, and especially how Andrews himself rendered aid and impacted his own outlook on life:

When my country turned from me, let it be said, the church stood beside me. During that time of segregation and shame, missionaries from The American Baptist Home Mission Society and the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society followed us from Japanese Baptist Church in Seattle to internment in Minidoka, Idaho. There—by leading worship in the
camp, retrieving belongings for us in Seattle, and listening to our stories—they affirmed our humanity, encouraging perseverance and hope.

Our journey became their journey. Our pastor, the Rev. Emery Andrews, was thrown out of a café in nearby Idaho Falls by the owner for being a “Jap lover.” That same man, who also owned the house that the Rev. Andrews rented, stood outside hurling epithets at the pastor and later evicted the family for sympathizing with those incarcerated in Camp Minidoka.

The courage and conviction exhibited by the Rev. Andrews and other missionaries inspired me to Christian baptism while I was at Minidoka. Every day I saw American Baptist missionaries standing for justice, while I lived in the midst of institutionalized injustice.

In 1976, Andrews passed away at the age of 81. His death was mourned by many but his life continues to be celebrated by the hundreds of men, women and children whose lives he touched.

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Presbyterian minister William Lindsay Young, Sr. (1893-1959), was president of Park College in Missouri when he witnessed the “evacuation” of thousands of people of Japanese descent, including young students in the middle of their schooling. Outraged at the treatment of these individuals, Young became one of the first to offer enrollment in his college for the students, nine of whom were allowed to leave confinement to study there. His actions started what the media referred to as the “Park College/Parkville War,” a conflict between the college and the local community, which was largely opposed to the Japanese Americans’ presence in their area.

Born in Illinois, William Lindsay Young was the son of a Scottish coal miner. At the age of thirteen, he himself worked in the coal mines. But he was able to leave that way of life behind, and set out on a course of education and religious service that would take him far from his humble beginnings. During World War I, he served his country as a first lieutenant and chaplain. After his service, he started a vigorous and impressive course of education. In 1920, he graduated from Carroll College, a Presbyterian-based liberal arts school in Waukesha, Wisconsin. He then received his BA from Manitoba College in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1922, and continued his education at Missoula’s University of Montana, receiving his MA in 1926. He served as the first Inter-Church pastor at Missoula, where in 1924, he led their first school of religion. In 1932, he received his doctor of laws (LLD) at Waynesburg University, a Christian college in Pennsylvania, and his DD from Carroll College in 1935. In 1941, he was awarded an honorary doctor of letters (LittD) from Waynesburg, and then a doctor of humane letters (LHD) from Illinois’ Lincoln College in the same year. During this time, he served with the National Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church.

Information about Young’s personal life is scarce, but it is known that he married Teresa Kruegar and had four children: the first, William Lindsay, in 1941; and then Tess Elizabeth; Robert, whom he adopted; and William Hugh.
In 1937, before earning his advanced degrees, he took on the position of president of Park College, a small, Presbyterian liberal arts college located in Parkville, Missouri. Although he was involved with the Presbyterian Church and other religious and community organizations throughout his life, his tenure at Park College was one of the most significant periods of his life, when he would become the center of a heated controversy.

In February 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt approved Executive Order 9066, which established restricted military areas along the West Coast and thus set the stage for the forced removal of people of Japanese ancestry from those areas. Among those whose lives were disrupted were students in the midst of their college semesters or secondary students making the transition to post-secondary school. While some chose to serve in the military, others wanted to remain in school and attempted to find ways to do so. Unlike younger students who would receive instruction in the makeshift schools made available within the “camps,” they were denied the opportunities of higher education available outside of the barbed wire fences. Recognizing that the “evacuation” caused a true crisis that would have a far-reaching impact on their futures, the American Friends Service Committee, known as the Quakers, and the War Relocation Authority (WRA) worked together to create the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC) in May 1942.

The NJASRC was designed to help such students resettle into colleges and universities outside of the restricted areas, which was mainly in the Midwest and East. Its job was to coordinate the efforts of a myriad of organizations and agencies to ensure that these students would be able to resume their pursuit of a higher education. One of its most important tasks was identifying schools that would be willing to accept students from the incarceration centers. It was also a challenging task during a time when anti-Japanese sentiment ran high.
In 1942, representing Park College, Young made a trip to southern California, appearing as a guest speaker and delivering talks and sermons. While there, Young witnessed Japanese Americans being temporarily detained at the Santa Anita Detention Facility, a former racetrack that had been hastily constructed into an “assembly center,” temporary holding quarters for people of Japanese ancestry who were awaiting their forced removal to more permanent quarters further inland. It was then that he offered to help in whatever way he could. Young was one of the first administrators to open his school to the Nisei incarcerees. He did so despite overwhelming opposition within the local community.

But first he had to secure the approval of the Parkville community, as required by the WRA, in order to release the students for resettlement. Young’s actions created a public outcry, which later became known as the “Battle of Parkville.” The opposition came from organizations like the American Legion, which had consistently put forth an anti-Japanese agenda throughout the war, and the American War Mothers. These organizations also had the backing of other locals as well as the city’s mayor himself, Herbert A. Dyer. But Young distributed about 1,000 letters to residents of Parkville and neighboring communities, as well as to Park College alumni, to gain their support.

In the fall of 1942, three students resettled at Park College. Opponents decried the resettlement as a “shocking injustice and breach of faith with our own American sons,” and Dyer threatened court action if the college did not expel the three young Nisei men with their so-called “enemy names.” Yet like many of the students who would resettle in the various universities, the men were exemplary students. Arthur Kamitsuka was pursuing a degree in ministry while his brother served in the US Army. Henry Masuda, a star athlete, was his high school class president. Abraham Dohi had ironically won an American Legion essay writing contest just two years prior. He had written on American democracy.
Young responded to objectors by pointing out that America was based on the very ideals of freedom and equal rights: “Is war hysteria making us lose sight of our democratic ideals and the priceless guarantee that all Americans are free, equal, and to have the same opportunities?” While his stance was praised by the local media and many Parkville residents, who encouraged Young to continue to enroll other Nisei as a demonstration of sound patriotism, opponents continued to criticize Young for bringing the “enemy” into their midst. “Once a Jap, always a Jap,” announced one such protestor.

The students thus remained at Park, which maintained that “their loyalty was unquestioned.” In fact, on September 5, the college agreed to accept an additional seven Nisei students, five men and two women. While most of the community supported Young’s decision, others remained adamantly opposed to the inclusion of the students, demanding that the college remain “white.” One student, Masaye Nagao, recalls being told by Young to never travel to town by herself because the townsfolk were angered at the presence of the students and threats of lynching or other harm against the students had been made. “If I can’t go wherever I want to go by myself, it is like camp,” Nagao claimed. But she agreed to abide by Young’s rules. Yet one day, finding that she needed postal stamps but had no one to escort her, she decided to make a trip on her own to town to purchase them. Although she was not harmed, she was the object of unwanted attention, and she soon realized the weight of Young’s advice. Upon her return, Young was furious with her, because he recognized the potential for dangerous consequences, but he was also relieved that she was safe. Nagao remembers how concerned Young was for her well-being:

What a wonderful person Dr. Young was! He was angry and upset but he put his arms around me and told me that he understood how I had felt. He even said that if he had been in my shoes he would have probably done the same thing. He was relieved and happy that I was unscathed and he felt that perhaps some of the townspeople would be able to rethink
their feelings towards us. His punishment was that I was to be grounded for a month, not participate in any social events or activities outside of academic work and to always go down to the town with others. It was really very mild punishment for the anxiety I had caused him, and I was quite relieved and thankful. In fact, my grades for that month really improved since I had to concentrate on my studies.

Nagao was also incredibly grateful to Young, recognizing that it was through his efforts that she was saved from incarceration at Wyoming’s Heart Mountain center, where she was to be confined with her family, and able to continue her schooling.

At a speech she delivered at the 60th anniversary of the Nisei students’ enrollment at Park College in September 2002, she expressed her thanks to Young:

I will be forever grateful for Dr. Young and his courage and determination to accept the Nisei students from the camps despite great opposition. His steadfast stand and his commitment to democratic principles allowed us to continue our education and helped us to achieve our dreams. My years at Park were some of the happiest and most rewarding years of my life.

After the controversy, in 1944, Young resigned as president after eight years serving there and went on to become the president of the Montana Synod Council of Presbyterian Churches and a national executive for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, a position he held during the last fifteen years of his life. In 1957, he would return to his earlier causes, providing financial and moral support to the development of the religious program he founded at Montana State University.
Young passed away at the age of 66. His granddaughter, Diane Young, the daughter of William Lindsay, Jr., would return to Park University in 2009 to learn about her grandfather’s past. What she learned made her recognize the important work that he had done not only for the Japanese American community, but also for America as a whole. In 1950, Young’s successor J.L. Zwingle would continue in his tradition of offering educational opportunities to minorities and open up the school’s residence halls to African Americans, who had been made to live in segregated areas in Parkville.

After poring over the school’s records and reading about her grandfather’s accomplishments at Park College, Diane Young expressed an admiration for him that is shared by many in the Japanese American community. She said:

I was so happy to see that Grandpa Young was a happy man for much of his life and that he was a somewhat rebellious sort. I tend to be that way myself for issues that are really important -- education, peace and compassion for all living creatures. I really did not realize that some of that must have come from him.

It was because of Young’s values of “education, peace and compassion for all living creatures” that many Nisei, not just the students at Park College, would go on to continue their education and become successful, productive citizens, and would in turn pass down their values to the next generation.

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Best Friends Forever

*These people hadn’t done anything that I hadn’t done, except to go to Japanese language school. They were Americans, just like I am.*

-- Ralph Lazo, on the Japanese American incarceration during World War II, in 1981.
Sixteen year-old Ralph Lazo (1925-1992) demonstrated his loyalty to his Japanese American friends by voluntarily moving with some of them to the Manzanar incarceration center in 1942. Lazo, a Mexican-Irish American, had grown up with them in the ethnically diverse Los Angeles neighborhood of Bunker Hill. Angered by the “immoral” treatment of Japanese Americans, he became the only person who was neither Japanese nor a spouse to willingly relocate to Manzanar. Lazo’s optimistic spirit helped Nikkei teens cope with incarceration, and they elected him as their class president. Drafted in 1944, Lazo went on to fight in the Pacific War, earning a Bronze Star.

Los Angeles native Ralph Lazo grew up in the Bunker Hill neighborhood, a melting pot of ethnicities including African Americans, Basques, Caucasians, Latinos, Jews, Koreans and Japanese. His mother, who had been born in Mexico, had passed away when he was just five, so his father assumed the responsibility of both parents, taking care of Ralph and his sister Virginia. When the elder Lazo worked with the Santa Fe Railroad, his son attended school on an Indian reservation in Arizona. But his later years would be spent in the Temple Street area of Los Angeles, where he would develop his lasting friendships with a diverse group of friends. Because his father was busy working as a house painter and muralist, Ralph spent a great deal of time on his own, and was often invited to share a meal with many of his Nisei friends. His friendships developed over the years and continued through his time at Central Junior High School and then at Belmont High School, where he was active in sports and student government.

After the US government announced the impending mass removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from restricted West Coast areas, Lazo watched as his friends and their families frantically began to prepare for their “evacuation.”
Because they were allowed to bring only what they could carry, the Nikkei had to somehow dispose of or store the bulk of their personal belongings, which included everything from cars to furniture to toys. Lazo helped them sell their goods, but was shocked when a neighbor crowed, “I just jewed that Jap!” after making a purchase. Lazo grew increasingly angry as he saw distraught parents desperately selling off items they could not keep, oftentimes at ridiculously low prices. He felt that the Nikkei were being unfairly treated. “Internment was immoral,” he said in a 1981 interview with the Los Angeles Times. “It was wrong and I couldn’t accept it.”

As his friends boarded their train to be shipped off to the incarceration centers, they encouraged Lazo to join them. He easily slipped onto the train. Lazo, who was of Mexican-Irish descent, assumed that he had escaped notice because of his brown skin. He then embarked on a ride that would completely change his life. He was just 16 years old at the time.

Lazo had mentioned to his father that he was going to “camp” with his friends. His father, busy with work, assumed he meant a weekend camp and did not give it much thought. A few days later, a local newspaper reported, “Mexican American Passes for Japanese.” When he learned that his son had in fact joined the Nikkei in Manzanar, an incarceration “camp” in the Owens Valley desert region, he allowed him to remain. Ralph was grateful. “My Dad was a very wise man,” he said. “He knew I was safe and with friends.” His sister, however, wrote him several times, asking that he return home, but he was determined to stay. Authorities also did nothing to stop Lazo from staying.

Although most of his friends had been sent to Heart Mountain incarceration center in Wyoming, Lazo easily made new friends at Manzanar. Within the incarceration center, Lazo kept active and upbeat. He spruced up the dreary camp surroundings by planting trees. He helped deliver the mail and organized parties. He made $12 a month at first, and then $16 a month as a recreation
director, which was the perfect fit for him. He did all he could to lift everyone’s spirits, getting them involved in social activities and sports. John Esaki, Lazo’s classmate and friend who would later make a docudrama based on his life for the Japanese American National Museum (Stand Up for Justice, 2004), described Lazo as “enthusiastic.” Esaki stated, “He spoke a little Japanese and was a cheerleader who fired up the crowd at all the sporting events.”

In 1944, despite being at the bottom of his class of 150 students, Lazo was elected as class president. Bruce Kaji, another classmate and friend, concurred with many of the Nisei students about Lazo: “In fact, he was one of the most popular members of our class - a cheerleader, a president of the class and a mixer. He was very outgoing and most of us Nisei, I speak for me, are very quiet. We got a lot of leadership from Ralph Lazo.”

Lazo remained until August of that year, when he was drafted into the military. Only then did the War Relocation Authority officially recognize that Lazo was not Japanese American.

Lazo had in fact already spent two and a half years at Manzanar. He left the center just two times during his stay—once to register for the draft and another time to attend a Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) conference in Colorado on behalf of the Manzanar YMCA. He was reportedly the only non-Japanese resident in the incarceration centers who was also not a spouse of a Japanese American.

Once drafted, he served in the Army in the South Pacific, seeing combat in the Philippines, and was awarded a Bronze Star. When he returned from the war, he graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles and went on to earn his master’s degree at California State University at Northridge. He taught in Mexico and got married there.
Throughout his life, he continued to support his Japanese American friends, fighting for reparations alongside the Nikkei, but always remaining behind the scenes, ever humble. Lazo was among the first people to donate to the fund for the class action redress lawsuit against the US government, giving $1,000 to the cause. As a teacher, he worked at San Fernando Junior High School, Grant High School, and Monroe High School before taking a position as a counselor at Valley College in 1970, where he worked to encourage Latino parents to send their kids to college and have them register to vote. He was the counselor there until he retired in 1987.

His friends at Manzanar High School will never forget what Lazo did for them. Although it seemed like an impulsive thing to do at the time, he knew it had serious implications and meaning beyond just a “fun time at camp.”

Rosie Kakuuchi, Lazo’s classmate and longtime friend, acknowledged the impact of his actions.

The Constitution? We learned it in school, but it was just words. But to this man it had meaning because he knew the camps were wrong. This is the reason he came into our camp he thought if his buddies are going into camp, he wanted to experience it. Sixteen years old and he leaves his family, not knowing what was going to happen.

Lazo’s actions reached beyond the makeshift campus of Manzanar High School, and well beyond the fenced boundaries of the Manzanar incarceration center. His contribution to the Japanese American community was one made for all of America. At a memorial service in his honor, friend and former classmate William Hohri aptly summed up this sentiment: “As a nation, as Japanese Americans, and as his classmates, we need to remember Ralph for his gift of courage and human kindness and embrace him in our hearts with love and gratitude.”
References:


As the East San Diego Public Library children’s librarian, 
**Clara Estelle Breed** (1906–1994) forged a strong bond with many of the Japanese American children and teens she served. On the day the youngsters and their families departed for the Poston incarceration center in the Arizona desert, “Miss Breed”—as she was known to them—met them at Union Station with stamped, self-addressed postcards, asking them to write to her. She became their vital link to the world outside of incarceration, sending not only books and care packages but also emotional support. Hundreds of these treasured letters became an important record of the wartime experiences of Japanese American children. Breed continued corresponding with many of the Nikkei until her death.

Born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, Clara Estelle Breed grew up as one of two girls in a small family. Her father was a Congregational minister who had worked on Ellis Island, giving Breed her first introduction into the experiences of immigrants to America. She spent her early years in New York and Illinois, and when she was just a teenager, her father passed away. It was then, in 1920, that she, her mother, and older sister moved to San Diego. Breed attended San Diego High School, graduating three years later. She went on to Pomona College and then to Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, where she received her master’s degree in library science. A year later, in 1929, she took a position as the children’s librarian at the East San Diego branch and then at the Central Library. It was there that she became familiar with the many children who frequented the library, and she grew particularly fond of the Japanese American children, whom she felt were especially polite and responsible when it came to borrowing and returning books.

She had been serving at the Central Library on April 1, 1942, when the notices for the mass removal of all people of Japanese ancestry from West Coast areas were posted. In the week that the Nikkei had to prepare for their “evacuation”
and divest themselves of the majority of their personal property and cherished belongings, the children and young adults returned their books to the library and told "Miss Breed"—as they fondly referred to her until her death—where they and their families were to be moved. Breed was deeply saddened by the news. She had known some of the children from an early age, and now these youngsters were adults. This included Fusa and Yuki Tsumagari, now both college-aged Nisei whose education would be interrupted by the exclusion, and Tets Hirasaki, a 22-year old man whom Breed had known for 14 years. She gave them all self-addressed postcards and asked that they write her while they were away.

On the day of their departure, Breed turned up at Union Station with more self-addressed postcards for many of the children. She instructed them to write to her, and let her know how they were doing. In return, she vowed, she would write back and send them things that they needed. In this manner, Breed was able to reassure them and their families who were anxious and scared about what the future held for them that someone on the “outside” would be looking out for them. There were about 1,100 individuals of Japanese ancestry from the area that were forcibly removed, and about 70% of them were American citizens.

She kept her promise. Over the next several years, while their families remained confined at the Poston incarceration center in Arizona, the children and young adults sent hundreds of postcards and letters to Breed, telling her all about “camp” life as well as voicing their concerns and hopes for the future, when they would eventually be released back into mainstream society. Breed wrote in return with letters of encouragement, and she sent care packages of candy, books and clothing, as well as other items that the children specifically requested, like sewing materials. The items were neither highly valuable nor rare, but they were greatly appreciated by their recipients.
Poston, located in Arizona’s Sonoran Desert on a former Indian reservation, was a far cry from San Diego. It was the largest “camp” in terms of its size, as well as the hottest, with temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit and surprisingly oppressive levels of humidity in the summer months. A single barbed wire fence encircled the entire compound, which at its opening included very limited, rudimentary facilities. The families did the best they could to make this dusty, hot and barren place as comfortable as possible, but they had been forced to leave much of their personal belongings behind, and had brought just the essentials with them. Items like pencils were luxuries to many. Books even more so.

In a 2006 *San Diego Union-Tribune* article on Breed, Elizabeth (Kikuchi) Yamada, who was just 11 years old at the time of the mass exclusion, recalled how much the books that Breed sent meant to her. As a child, she had been to the Central Library virtually every week to check out an “armful of books” from Breed. “Books brought us closer to the world we had left behind,” she said. “Miss Breed knew that. She knew the books would entertain us, educate us, enlighten us. And give us hope.”

Breed also wrote letters in support of the resettlement of college-bound Nisei, whom she believed should have the opportunity to continue their education outside of the incarceration centers. She also wrote attesting to the loyalty of the Nikkei men who were separately interned from their families because their national allegiance was being questioned. She believed in their innocence and sought the end of the incarceration, which she found violated the principles of American democracy. In a February 1943 article she wrote for the *Library Journal*, a publication for the library community, Breed wrote:

> To the children and young people of Japanese ancestry born in this country and educated in our schools, the war came like a hurricane, sweeping away their security, their friends, their jobs, sometimes their fathers into internment camps, and finally their schools and homes and
liberty. One day they were living in a democracy, as good as anyone or almost, and the next they were "Japs" aware of hate and potential violence which might strike with lightening swiftness.

In 1945, Breed was promoted to the city librarian, responsible for the establishment of other branch libraries as well as the completion of the main library. The war ended, and the Nikkei began to slowly return to their homes or resettle in other areas, and the families from Poston came back to San Diego. Breed retired in 1970, but she continued to stay in touch with her many friends from before the war, including Yamada. Then in the early 1990s, a few years before her death, Breed contacted Yamada from her nursing home in Spring Valley and asked if she would like the letters and postcards she had saved over the years. Yamada, recognizing the historical value of the correspondence but also curious to read what she had written as a child, happily agreed. She retrieved the letters and re-read hers and shared the others with some of the other former incarcerees, who were amazed at the number of letters Breed had collected—256 in total—and what they themselves had revealed through their correspondence with her.

Yamada donated the collection of letters to the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles, knowing that it would preserve this important part of history. Breed’s letters and other writings are a vital record of the incarceration experience and provide a unique perspective on the Japanese American community during wartime.

In 1991, the former Poston incarceree held a reunion gathering and honored “Miss Breed” as their special guest. More than 700 guests attended, and all stood up to applaud her. “We wanted to show her that she had made a difference in our lives,” Yamada told the Union-Tribune.
In 2001, New York-based children’s author Joanne Oppenheim came across the collections of letters on the JANM website and was inspired to write a children’s book, *Dear Miss Breed*. Breed’s story “spoke to her,” and for four years, she performed research for the book, interviewing the letter-writers, now elderly adults, and learning about the incarceration of the Japanese Americans. In an interview, Oppenheim spoke about Breed’s contribution to the Nikkei community:

Clara Breed was not looking for fame or thanks for what she did. In fact, according to those who knew her, she would be embarrassed that anyone needed to talk about her efforts. Clara Breed was a woman of courage and strong convictions. She spoke out against the injustice of the incarceration—saying boldly that the only crime the Japanese Americans had committed was having the wrong ancestors. But these were no ordinary times. She lived in a city where she risked being despised as a "Jap lover" and even losing her job in the San Diego Public Library. But, Clara Breed held fast to her beliefs...Clara Breed knew that she could not stop the incarceration, but that did not stop her from doing what she could do by speaking out on their behalf and sending them gifts of the heart that showed them they were not forgotten.

Because of “Miss Breed,” the Nikkei children who were sent to Poston knew that the world outside had not forgotten them. And also because of Clara Breed, the Nikkei children of World War II will always be remembered.

References:


The Kindness of Strangers

I guess I felt that those boys at Camp Shelby needed a friend. They were Americans, away from home.

-- Earl M. Finch
During the war, **Earl M. Finch** (1915-1965) supported all troops stationed in his town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, but showed singular compassion for the Japanese American community, whom he recognized as particularly hard hit. He supplied incarceration camp co-ops with basic necessities as well as comfort items made scarce by rationing and shortages. Known as the “one-man USO,” Finch also lifted the spirits of the Nisei soldiers, organizing large social gatherings, keeping in contact with hundreds of soldiers overseas, and traveling thousands of miles to visit wounded soldiers and their families. After the war, he moved to Hawaii and continued his philanthropic work, supporting Nisei veterans and personally providing humanitarian aid to war-torn areas of Japan.

Born near the small Southern town of Ovett, Mississippi, Earl Marvin Finch was the son of a farmer. His childhood was typical for many of the white rural poor at the time. Once farming opportunities ran dry for his family, his father Paul Finch made ends meet by taking various odd jobs, including that of salesman and janitor. His mother, Eloise S. Finch, had been confined to a wheelchair in her early 20s and needed care at home. Finch himself attended school only until the age of ten, when his father could no longer afford to buy a pair of shoes for him, and he was compelled to find work and help out at home in order to ease his family’s difficult financial situation. This upbringing would mold him into the humble, hard-working businessman that he would soon become.

By the time he reached his early twenties, Finch was enjoying a relatively successful run as a local merchant in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Although he had few friends, he was well-respected by the community and was known as a quiet,
honest man. He attended the First Baptist Church, never drank or smoke, and spent his spare time with his parents. By the age of 27, he operated several businesses of his own, including a bowling alley, a clothing shop, and a furniture store. He was by no means wealthy, but firmly in the middle class. Unmarried, he was able to keep himself comfortable and take care of his aging parents.

When World War II began, Finch volunteered to join the Army, but was rejected because of a heart condition and flat feet. His younger brother, Roy, was able to volunteer for the military, so Finch was determined to do his part as well. Although he was disappointed that he could not serve his country through military service, he found another way to contribute to the war effort. He began to serve troops who were stationed in the region, providing them with comfort items and entertainment. He opened the “Earl Finch Company,” an army and navy store near Army training grounds at Camp Shelby, and brought in items that were scarce because of war rationing or shortages. He arranged for special excursions to New Orleans for soldiers coming from far away, including soldiers and seamen from China, the UK and France, to raise their spirits. It was during this time that he came across the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, some of whom had arrived in Hattiesburg from the far-flung territory of Hawaii.

It was the summer of 1943. In his “One Man USO,” author Mark Santoki wrote that Finch invited several Nisei soldiers to his family’s house for a home-cooked meal. Usually, Finch would meet and eat with the soldiers for one meal and never hear from them again, so he was surprised the next day to find the Nisei men sitting on his front porch, chatting with his mother, for whom the men had brought a bouquet of roses as a token of their appreciation. Finch was touched by their gesture, and he took particular interest in the Nisei. He recognized that they were not only culturally and geographically far from home, but also that they had been especially hard hit by the war. The Japanese Americans had been targeted because of their ethnic background, and they were subject to intense
scrutiny, suspected of disloyalty and espionage. The men from Hawaii were often homesick, missing their families and their friends. Some had fathers, uncles, or other male relatives who had been detained in internment centers. For the mainlanders, their families had been confined in incarceration centers scattered along the interior regions of the West Coast states and Arkansas.

So Finch set to work to help not only the soldiers but also their families who were incarcerated. At his Hattiesburg store, he offered an assortment of supplies like tobacco, candy and toiletries, much of which was difficult to secure during wartime. He also provided items to the incarceration camps’ cooperative stores, so that the soldiers’ families in the centers had access to many of the comforts from home, including rare and coveted goods like tofu, bamboo shoots, and soy sauce. One Easter, he and a group of Nisei soldiers delivered 10,000 Easter eggs and 2,000 pints of ice cream to the children of the Rohwer incarceration center.

Continuing in the tradition of keeping the soldiers happy, Finch also organized social events for the Nisei. He purchased a large, 542-acre ranch outside of Hattiesburg and held barbecues and a rodeo for the men. He also helped to found the “Aloha” USO in the region just for the Japanese American troops. With several soldiers’ spouses running the USO, Finch stopped by almost every day, and he brought in Hawaiian music and food, and invited Nisei women from the Arkansas centers to the USO dances to join the soldiers. As the Nisei’s unofficial social director, he hosted thousands of soldiers, and he earned the gratitude and respect of the Japanese American community, which acknowledged the invaluable moral and financial support that Finch provided them.

Yet Finch did not stop there. He supported the Nisei in their athletic activities, sponsoring the 442nd RCT’s baseball team as well as a team of ten swimmers. Befriending many of the Nisei while they were in Hattiesburg, he kept in touch with them when they were shipped overseas. By September 1943, the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) was engaged in combat in Italy, and by June 1944,
the 442nd RCT had joined up with the 100th. Both units suffered high casualty rates, and Finch joined the families in worrying over injuries and grieving over the loss of lives.

He exchanged letters with hundreds of soldiers, and when wounded troops were admitted to the hospitals, he visited them, bringing gifts and lifting their spirits. More than 1,500 Nisei had also arranged for Finch to be the executor of their individual wills, so he would receive death notifications and visit grieving families in the incarceration centers. He was present for other somber occasions; when the wounded took a turn for the worse, he visited the families to lend them moral support and comfort. Sometimes he traveled far distances to lend assistance; in one year alone, he traveled more than 75,000 miles to visit recovering soldiers and families. He became a familiar figure to the Japanese American community, who happily opened their doors and welcomed him into their homes.

The camaraderie he established with the Nikkei community was not well received by everyone. Anti-Japanese sentiment had taken hold throughout the US, and in the Jim Crow South, where segregation was legalized and racial divisions predominated, such racism was particularly intense. Finch was looked upon with suspicion and disdain, and he was taunted with calls of “Jap lover,” with hurtful references to his sexuality, and all manners of insults from his opponents. He was also targeted by threats from objectors. His relationships with the Nisei soldiers caused some concern in Hawaii, where officials thought that he might be a “con artist” taking advantage of the soldiers. Questions also arose about his motivations, centering on the fact that Finch was unmarried and had not been seen dating women. Wary of his close, “unnatural” ties with the Nisei soldiers, the Federal Bureau of Investigation looked into his activities in 1944. No criminal activity was found. But it was clear that his dealings with the Japanese American community were not always welcome.
After the war ended and the incarceration centers shut down, Finch helped many Japanese Americans resettle into their homes and find employment. In March 1946, he was invited to Hawaii for a visit and received, as Santoki describes, “the largest and warmest reception ever given to a private citizen in the history of Hawaii.” The governor of Hawaii presented Finch with flower leis, and for 25 days, the locals toasted Finch for his contributions to the Nisei. His fondness of Hawaii helped him decide to make the move from Mississippi to Hawaii a permanent one, although he hesitated at first because he did not want to appear improper or suggest that he was exploiting his ties with the Nisei. For the first time, he also left behind his elderly parents.

In 1949, despite reservations, Finch moved to Hawaii. He was just 34 years old. Once there, he continued his support of the Nikkei people. He was active in the 442nd Veterans Club and advocated for Hawaii’s statehood. He gave generously to the post-war effort in Japan, and himself made trips there to deliver supplies and goodies to those devastated by the war. He established a scholarship fund to assist young students from Japan to study in Hawaii. He invited two of these students to live at his home, and later informally adopted them as his sons.

The young men whom he had first greeted at Hattiesburg had been through the rigors of training and the harsh reality of war. They had returned and faced resettlement head on, and some went on to finish their education and start their own families. They were grown adults now, and even though they no longer needed Finch’s assistance, they never forgot him, nor what he had done to help them through the difficult years during and immediately following the war.

In 1965, Finch died of a heart attack. He was just 49 years old. A saddened Japanese American community expressed its gratitude for his contributions over the years. More than 300 mourners attended the service, which was led by the former chaplains of the 100th and 442nd. At the service, Hawaii Governor John A. Burns delivered the eulogy, summing up what many saw in a man who
befriended the Nikkei when others turned their backs on them: "Unpopular though it may have been with his neighbors, Earl recognized that those who were willing to make sacrifices in the face of adversity deserved no less than the hand of friendship." Finch would be forever remembered as a friend to the Japanese American community.

References:


Ward Stephenson was a young guard at California’s Tanforan Detention Facility at which George Aki and his family were detained, just days before Aki’s graduation from divinity school. Stephenson, a stranger to Aki but former student at the same school, arranged to collect Aki’s diploma and stood in for him at commencement. Later, Reverend Robert Inglis of Oakland’s Plymouth Congregational Church organized a special ordination ceremony at the detention facility for Aki, gathering clergy and laity from nearby churches. The compassion of strangers helped reinforce Aki’s desire to help others, inspiring him to take on the role of chaplain for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

The journey that California native George Aki made during World War II to become the chaplain of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was not a straightforward and simple one. His decision to join in the war would demand not only his faith in God, but also his faith in humanity.

Growing up in the San Joaquin Valley, Aki lived in a Japanese immigrant agricultural community that faced opposition from local farmers who resented the competition. Many Nikkei during that time were guided spiritually by Reverend Joseph Fukushima, who was the minister at Fresno Independent Congregational Church. Fukushima’s appeal to neighboring Caucasian churches to denounce racism and embrace their religious beliefs inspired Aki to become a minister.

After graduating from Fresno State College, Aki enrolled at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, a multi-denominational Christian seminary. He was just 27 years old when US Naval Base Pearl Harbor was attacked, and when several months later, he and his new wife, along with about 8,000 other Bay-area residents of Japanese descent, were forcibly removed from their homes to the temporary detention facility at Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno. In May 1942,
Aki, who had been relocated just days before his graduation, was in utter despair, believing that he would never be ordained as a minister. He felt a profound sense of betrayal. He was angry at the US government for turning its back on its citizens and angry at God for seeming to abandon him. Relating his wartime experience at a 2011 ceremony honoring him at a Pacific School of Religion event, Aki recalled, “The moment I found myself behind barbed wire confinement at the Tanforan Assembly Center, my faith in America died, my faith in God died, and I died.”

But his life would take an unexpected turn, and his faith would be restored by two acts of kindness at the detention facility. At Tanforan, Ward Stephenson, a young Army guard, arranged to stand in for Aki at the Pacific School graduation commencement exercises. Back at Tanforan, he presented Aki with his diploma and informed him that he had been graduated in absentia. Stephenson, whom Aki was friendly with but whom he did not know very well, had also been a student at the Pacific School, but he had dropped out. Aki was profoundly touched by Stephenson’s generosity.

Then Reverend Robert Inglis of Oakland’s Plymouth Congregational Church held a special ordination ceremony for Aki and another candidate in the dining hall at Tanforan. He organized an ecclesiastical council of Caucasian clergy and recruited laity from churches nearby for the ceremony, which was attended by about 500 Nisei. The kindness of both Reverend Inglis and Stephenson compelled Aki to reconsider his previous emotions and realize that despite the injustice of the treatment of the Japanese American community, there was hope in the goodness of individuals.

He vowed then to continue his religious work. He said, “Through my ordination, I made a pledge to serve Christ’s church and the people of the church. After my ordination I was not afraid of anything. I didn’t even think about death anymore. I’ve been that way ever since.” After four months at Tanforan, where Aki worked
as a minister, his parents were sent to Arkansas’ Jerome incarceration center and he and his wife were sent to Topaz incarceration center, where he served as a minister. Upon his request, however, he was transferred to Jerome, where he also served as a minister.

He also vowed to fight alongside the Nisei soldiers to end not only the war against the Germans, but also the war against racism. He chose to become the chaplain for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team so that he could “fight prejudice all along the way.” In 1943, he went overseas to Italy to serve with the 442nd, replacing Chaplain Israel Yost, who was the first chaplain of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). After the war, in 1960, he would become the minister of the Congregational Church in San Luis Obispo, and would serve there until his retirement in 1978.

References:


Teaching Inspiration

Inside the camp, when every public indication was that we had no future, you had these teachers saying, “Yes, you do matter.”

-- Glenn Kumekawa, who was sent to Topaz incarceration center at the age of 14, in 2005.
**Helen Ely Brill** (1914-2003) moved from her Iowa home to become a teacher in Compton, California, to children of rural Japanese immigrants. When they and their families were forcibly removed to incarceration centers, she took on a teaching job at the Manzanar center. The school superintendent called her “crazy” when she turned down an offer for tenure to leave for Manzanar, but she followed her heart in following in the footsteps of her students. She taught high schoolers and lived with the Nikkei in their barracks rather than in the “little white houses” designated for Caucasian staff.

Helen Weare Ely, later known as Helen Ely Brill, grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the early 1900s. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was in investment securities, and both emphasized the importance of education to their four children. When she turned 18 years old, Helen moved to California, where she attended Scripps College, a liberal arts women’s college in Claremont. Her older sister, Elizabeth, was already attending Scripps, and “loved it,” so it was a logical choice for her. There she showed early signs of her adventurous spirit and enthusiasm to help others. Along with a classmate, she persuaded the Scripps student body to forgo dessert twice a week for two years, saving the money for an underground sprinkler system so that they would have grass on the central quadrangle for their graduation ceremony. The sprinkler system did not make it on time, but her father sent wildflower seeds that were planted so that the quadrangle was scattered with colorful flowers on graduation day.

Helen graduated in 1936, and after a short period of unemployment, she continued her education, receiving her master’s degree in history and teaching credentials a few years later from the graduate school of the Claremont Colleges. While she was at college, she would join in on meetings with the Quakers at Orange Grove, where they would discuss the impending war and think of ways to help those affected. Through these meetings, Helen developed a great admiration for the work of the Quakers and a keen interest in pacifism.
Her first job was teaching in Compton, a city south of Los Angeles, which was then a small farming town with a mix of immigrant populations. Many Japanese American families lived in Compton while working at nearby Dominguez, where Issei had emigrated from Japan at the turn of the century. It was there that she got to know the Nikkei community, whose children would attend school while their parents worked the land. Denied the right to vote as well as the right to own land because of the alien land laws that were in place, the Issei nevertheless labored hard to make a living, and Helen admired their work ethic and humility.

At the school, Helen taught Latin and English to 10th graders. The majority of the students in her Latin class were Japanese Americans, who were taking the class to meet their Latin requirements for college. Helen found great satisfaction and enjoyment teaching the Nisei students, whom she found to be just as hard-working and diligent as their parents. In addition to attending school, many helped their parents raise vegetables to sell at the wholesale markets.

Then, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked US Naval Base Pearl Harbor and America was plunged into war. Helen remembered when the principal first addressed the students in a school assembly on the day following the US’ declaration of war:

> And I'll never forget [the Nisei students]. They came to school, they didn't stay home. But their heads were bowed, and they were terrified. Many of them had had their fathers picked up by the FBI the night before...And their mothers were terrified -- but the other school kids put their arms around them and they were just wonderful. But those poor kids...It was, I think, about a third of the school.

A few months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, notices went up in the region announcing the mass removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from West Coast areas to “assembly centers.” It was then at an Orange Grove Meeting of
Friends in Pasadena that the members contacted Esther Rhoads, a well-known Quaker from Philadelphia who had been the teacher and head of the Friends’ School in Tokyo for about 50 years. She would prove to be a key influence in Helen’s life, and her work would solidify Helen’s determination to dedicate her life to helping others.

In a December 1999 interview with Karen Will, Helen recalled the chaos that ensued as families prepared for the “evacuation,” collecting as many belongings as they could in blankets, because they were allowed to bring only what they could carry. The first to be removed were the Terminal Island residents, whom as she described were “the poorest, hardest working people.” She herself was shocked at the turn of events, and could not understand why the Japanese community was being mistreated. But as she watched Rhoads at work, helping the women, comforting them, and speaking to them in their language while she and other volunteers prepared food for the evacuees, she knew she had found her place: “It made a great impression on me and I knew that that’s where I wanted to be.”

On the day that the Nikkei were being shipped to the detention facilities, Helen and her roommate, another teacher at the school, went to the train station to see the children off. Although she had telephoned all of the other teachers and encouraged them to “[b]e there, to say good-bye to your kids,” no one else showed up, citing reasons that ranged from the too-early departure time to the questionable loyalty of the Nikkei. Helen brought chewing gum, which was prohibited at the school, to pass out to her students. The students were happy and excited, not fully understanding the import of the event, while their parents and grandparents appeared grim, with eyes downcast. Helen’s presence and her gift were small gestures, but showed that she genuinely was concerned for her students and their families. The students were greatly appreciative to receive the small gift.
It was then that she decided that she would follow her students to the incarceration centers. For a teacher such as herself, a teaching stint lasted three years before you were considered for tenure by the school district. Not everyone received tenure, which was coveted by all. So when Helen, one of just three teachers in the entire district who were nominated for tenure, refused it to volunteer at the “camps” instead, her superintendent was floored. Recalling that time, Helen related, “He said, ‘Helen, you’re crazy! You’re going to the Japs?’ And I said, ‘Yes, they’re going up to a place called Manzanar, and I want to go with them.’”

As it turned out, most of her students and their families were sent to other incarceration centers. But Helen was committed to helping the Nikkei community, so she applied for a position at Manzanar and worked to learn the Japanese language, memorizing twenty words a day. While she waited, she spent the summer doing migrant labor work in Palo Alto. She had spent the previous summer in Mexico helping migrant laborers there, so she was familiar with the language and culture. Finally, she got word that her application was accepted, and in August 1943, she headed for Manzanar. On the transport bus there, opponents of the Japanese community threw rotten fruits and vegetables at the bus windows, and protestors stood outside the center gates, taunting the people on the bus who were set to work at the center. Yet Helen remained undeterred in her mission to help the students at Manzanar. At the incarceration center, she worked the switchboard and taught at Manzanar High School. In fact, she taught 11th graders the Constitution—an irony that she wryly recognized—in a makeshift classroom with folding chairs and a cracked wooden floor, where dust storms would leave so much dirt that the floor had to be hosed down periodically. She lived in the barracks rather than in the quarters made specifically for Caucasian staff members, feeling more comfortable there.

Helen stayed at Manzanar two years, which she claimed “were the greatest two years of my life.” She was there when what later became known as the Manzanar
riot took place, in December 1942. Center guards fired into a crowd that had gathered in protest of the arrest of a Nikkei man accused of beating a Japanese American Citizens League official. The shots killed two men and injured others. She was also there when the War Department solicited the incarceration centers for volunteers to serve in the military, and she saw many Nisei leave to join the armed forces.

It was also at Manzanar that she met the man whom she would marry, Robert Brill, a Quaker who was serving with the Civilian Public Service, an alternative program for conscientious objectors. She left Manzanar in 1944 for Cedar Rapids, where she married Bob. They then traveled back to the civilian service camp in California.

After the war, Helen continued her work with the Quakers, helping Japanese Americans resettle into their homes and locate jobs with the closing of the incarceration centers. She and Rhoads helped returnees at the Evergreen Hostel, sometimes hosting as many as 150 guests at a time. She and Bob then moved to New York, where they would have two daughters, Louise and Laurel, settling eventually in the Hartford, Connecticut, area in the 1960s. She taught at Enfield High School there, and she and her husband would continue their work with the Quakers, taking on other social causes, including gay and lesbian awareness. In 1982, she and Bob founded the Connecticut chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), helping Quaker families work through the coming out of gay and lesbian family members. In 1993, Helen and her daughters lost Bob to cancer. Helen herself would continue to lead a full life, traveling the world and advocating for others. In 2003, having just returned home from a trip with her daughter to Yale University in New Haven, she suffered a fall and passed away.

Although Helen referred to her time at Manzanar as the greatest years of her life, she had in fact made a lasting impact on many others outside of the barbed wire.
fences of the incarceration centers. While her Nisei students at Compton High
and Manzanar High would always remember her as kind, generous person who
was concerned about their well-being and a fierce advocate who believed that
they were being treated unfairly, she was first and foremost their teacher. She
taught students throughout her life, and served as a source of inspiration for
many. One such student, Susan Roberts, was a sophomore in high school when
she first met Helen, who was her World History teacher, in the late 1960s.
Roberts, an instructor at the US Coast Guard Academy, remained friends with
Helen for more than 35 years until her death in 2003, and she credited Helen for
having inspired her to become a teacher herself. Helen’s impact on her life as
well as on many other students is best exemplified by Roberts’ words:

Throughout the many years that marked our friendship, Helen Brill was an
inspiration to me and other students who recognized her love of teaching
and presence in the classroom. She lived her beliefs, and she never backed
down in the face of adversity. Helen possessed a conscience that dictated
the need to do what was right, and she never hesitated to share those
beliefs with her students...Helen realized that it doesn’t take much to
inspire students, and she always had a word of encouragement for those
around her. Teachers like Helen can and do have the power to influence
their students’ lives in many tangible and intangible ways. Those results
may take years to achieve fruition, but the effects are powerful and life
altering.

“Miss Brill” was many things for many people: a teacher, a friend, and a social
advocate.

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Washington native and well-known medical researcher and university professor Joseph R. Goodman (1911-2004) was a major supporter of the Japanese American community throughout World War II. From the 1940s, he and his wife Elizabeth Baker (1912-1991) worked with the Quakers to assist Nikkei who were forcibly relocated from their San Francisco homes to incarceration centers in 1942. For two years he served as a teacher at the Topaz incarceration center in Utah, working alongside his wife. The Goodmans worked tirelessly in the anti-incarceration movement, setting up a community council and serving as liaisons between organizations like the War Relocation Authority and the Nikkei community.

Born in Tacoma, Washington, Joseph Robert Goodman attended the University of Washington in Seattle, where he earned his bachelor's degree and then his doctorate in 1930. He left the Pacific Northwest for San Francisco in his early 30s, and met his wife, California-native Elizabeth “Betty” Baker, with whom he would have four children. He took on a position as the assistant superintendent of the Steinhart Aquarium in Golden Gate Park, a facility that had been added to the research society of the California Academy of Natural Sciences in 1923.

When they first met, both husband and wife were active members of the American Friends Service Committee, also known as the Quakers, whose tenets center on social justice, peace, and nonviolence. Early on, Goodman chose to work in the Japanese American enclave of San Francisco to help foster the relationships between the Nikkei and the rest of the community. Most of the Issei there had emigrated from Japan following the earthquake of 1906, and by the time Goodman had made his way to San Francisco, there was a considerable Nikkei population, one of the largest concentrations of Japanese at the time. He became friends with many of the families there. Several months after the US entered the war, the Goodmans took on the role of advocates for the Japanese Americans who had been forcibly relocated from their homes in San Francisco to incarceration centers further inland. He helped set up a community council to
address the Nikkei’s needs, working with the Japanese American Citizens League as well as with the Japanese Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). He worked closely with Lincoln Kanai, a social worker at the YMCA and advocate for the Japanese American community, and other members of the community.

When the Nikkei of San Francisco were first sent to the Tanforan Detention Facility, a race track that had been hastily converted into temporary barracks, Goodman brought items to the incarcerees, who were allowed to bring only what they could carry, leaving behind the bulk of their personal property and treasured belongings. From 1942 to the war’s end, Goodman and his wife worked tirelessly to bring an end to incarceration, attesting to the loyalty of the Japanese American community. He wrote letters to the War Department as well as to his friends within the incarceration centers, motivated by a deep sense of outrage at the injustice the Japanese American community faced.

From 1942 to 1944, Goodman taught high school science at Utah’s Topaz incarceration center in the Sevier Desert. He was foremost a researcher and scientist, yet he enthusiastically took on the roles of teacher, football coach and yearbook adviser for the students. His wife, Elizabeth, worked there as well, dedicated to helping in whatever way she could. From the time it opened in September 1942 until its close, Topaz held more than 11,200 incarcerees, the majority of whom were from the San Francisco Bay Area, and many of the friends and their children he knew were confined there. Goodman remained until January 1944, when he was drafted to work at a forest work camp for conscientious objectors.

After World War II, in the 1950s, Goodman served as the head of the physiological research unit, medical research program, at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Long Beach, and a research associate at the University of Southern California Medical School, Department of Biochemistry and Nutrition. He then served at the pathology and pediatrics departments of the University of
California at San Francisco. He was internationally recognized for his research on AIDS and Alzheimer’s disease.

But it was his more humble roles as a teacher and friend that the Nikkei community would celebrate most of all. His former students would recall how he had inspired them to do the best they could and to continue pursuing their education, despite the hardships of war and incarceration. Many would go on to earn their degrees and pursue graduate work after they resettled into mainstream America with the closing of the “camps.”

In February 2005, about 60 years after the war, former Nisei students from the various incarceration centers gathered together in Los Angeles to pay tribute to their primarily Caucasian teachers who followed them into the centers. In a ceremony hosted by the Japanese American National Museum, 200 teachers were honored for the sacrifices they made to ensure that their students received the best education they could with the limited resources they had and poor conditions they faced. Included among them was Goodman, who was remembered for bringing “exuberance to student lives.” Glenn Kumekawa, a retired professor who was sent to Topaz at the age of 14, voiced the sentiment of all those gathered, who were forever grateful to these teachers: “They were the best of America. They gave us assurance and hope by believing in us.”

References:


When Japanese American students at Stockton High School in California were sent with their families to a temporary detention facility at the San Joaquin County fairgrounds, English teacher and Japanese Club adviser Elizabeth Humbargar (1903-1989) and her sister, math teacher Catherine Humbargar (1901-1996), followed the students and set up a makeshift school there. At the end of their regular school day, the sisters and other volunteers taught the Nikkei students until they were moved to Arkansas’ Rohwer incarceration center. When Rohwer closed three years later, Elizabeth helped returning students by writing hundreds of recommendation letters so that they could find jobs.

Born at the turn of the century in Saline County, Kansas, Elizabeth Mary Humbargar grew up in a large family. She attended the University of Kansas and after her graduation in 1923, tried to find work in her home state. But facing discrimination because of her Catholic background and also purportedly because of her German descent, she decided to move to California in 1926. Her early experiences as a subject of such prejudice would shape her own sense of fairness and compassion.

After her father passed away in 1935, her mother would join her in California. By the 1930s, Elizabeth and her sister took on positions as teachers at Stockton High School in north central California, where the older Catherine taught mathematics and Elizabeth taught English. Stockton, part of the San Joaquin delta, had significant Chinese and Japanese American communities, with many having immigrated in the early 1900s to work as farmers there. At Stockton High, Humbargar developed a keen interest in her Asian American students, becoming a mentor and friend to many of the Nisei in particular, whom she got to know as the faculty adviser of the 400-member Japanese American student club.

Soon after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, the Nikkei community received orders to leave their homes, schools, and businesses and report to various “assembly centers” in the area, where they would be
detained until more permanent quarters could be secured. In May 1942, locals of Japanese ancestry were sent to the Stockton Assembly Center, built at the site of the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds. They were part of the nearly 4,500 San Joaquin residents who were forcibly removed, with two-thirds of them American citizens. Concerned about the welfare of her students, Humbargar and her sister set to work to make sure that they would be able to continue their education. They sought out college students who would be willing to teach classes at the detention facility. They loaded up a horse trailer with books and other materials and headed to the facility, driving past hecklers and ignoring the taunts of protestors. They visited the students almost daily to help the student teachers as well as to provide teaching materials. Each day, the teachers taught for two hours in a converted cow barn with sawhorses covered with butcher paper as desks. Humbargar, who continued working at her teaching job during the day, would take the students’ work back to her school to record their grades so that they would receive credit for their work, which the majority of them did.

In mid-October, the detainees were moved to the Rohwer incarceration center in a rural region of southeastern Arkansas’ swamps, and the sisters could not maintain their daily visits. Rohwer was a 500-acre “camp” surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers. Students attended makeshift schools during the day and went to bed at night in one of the housing barracks that were furnished with canvas cots. But the Humbargars stayed in touch with their students over the course of the war, providing them with a much-needed lifeline to the outside world. They also advocated for the improvement of conditions at the incarceration centers and ultimately for the closing of the centers. The Humbargars maintained a lively correspondence with their students. All told, they wrote about 500 letters of recommendation to help their students find jobs, attend college, and also resettle into mainstream society. Their advocacy did not escape the notice of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which scrutinized Humbargar’s activities and placed her name on the list of “subversives.”
In 1945, after the war, Humbargar remained an avid supporter of the Japanese American community. She helped to restart the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. She and her sister welcomed former students and their families into their own homes as they found their way back into society, assisting with everything from finding a doctor who would serve someone of Japanese descent to purchasing food when money was hard to come by. Humbargar then accepted a position as a counselor at San Joaquin Delta College, one she held until her retirement in 1969.

Later on in life, Humbargar would be recognized by the Nikkei community as well as the State of California and Delta College for her contributions. Yet despite all the attention and honors, she would remain ever humble about her contributions during the war. At the dedication of a garden in her honor, fellow Delta instructor Nelson Nagai said to the Stockton Record, “She will be forever remembered in the hearts of Japanese-Americans in Stockton. She impacted every family in some way.”

References:


Conclusion

To relate the stories of every person who helped the Japanese American community during World War II would surely be an impossible task. Countless individuals lent their assistance in ways both big and small that were nonetheless accepted with profound gratitude. They prepared meals for families departing for “assembly centers,” stored personal belongings that were not allowed to be brought along, volunteered as teachers at the “camps,” wrote letters of protest to their elected officials, corresponded with friends and neighbors in the camps, and a myriad of other actions. They helped in the face of strong opposition, some enduring taunts, boycotts of their businesses, and even physical harm. They were of all ages, all races, and all religions. When it seemed that no one would stand up for the Nikkei, they bravely stepped forward because they believed that they were being unfairly treated, and because they believed that all Americans should be treated equally, regardless of their race. There are many other everyday heroes of World War II whose stories are still unknown. Many of them may never be brought to light, their generosity and bravery perhaps living on only in the memories of the people who were directly affected.