2015 HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENT
ESSAY & VIDEO CONTEST

PRESENTING SPONSOR:

PACIFIC GLOBAL
Investment Management Company

SUPPORTING SPONSORS:
Ken and June Shimabukuro
Anonymous Donor in Memory of World War II Veteran Masao Takahashi
We are pleased to announce that Pacific Global Investment Management Company is once again the Presenting Sponsor of this year’s contest. Their generous contribution is made in memory of long-time community philanthropists and business leaders Manabi Hirasaki and Sig Kagawa. The contest has also been made possible by the generous support of two Supporting Sponsors: Ken and June Shimabukuro, and an anonymous donor in memory of Masao Takahashi.

**Manabi Hirasaki**  
522nd Field Artillery Battalion, C Battery  

“I just figured I was doing my share...I was proud to be with the 442nd.”

Manabi Hirasaki knew the power behind the 100th/442nd/MIS story. A group of young men battled both the enemy and American prejudice, emerging successful and providing a shining model for future generations. That is why, after fighting in World War II, Manabi battled for decades to ensure that his fellow soldiers’ legacy was never forgotten.

**Sig Kagawa**  
Community Philanthropist and Business Leader  

A strong leader with a lasting mission – getting others involved and invested.

Siegfried "Sig" Kagawa devoted his life to philanthropy and to helping others. A long-time supporter of Japanese American causes, he energetically promoted lasting education to keep the story of his community alive. To him, it was vital American history for all future generations.

**Mas Takahashi**  
100th Infantry Battalion, C Company  

Keeping his buddies’ memories alive.

Masao “Mas” Takahashi never spoke about himself. He fought heroically in the 100th Infantry Battalion during World War II, yet he preferred to speak about his fellow soldiers. Always humble, Mas dedicated his life to keeping the memories of his buddies alive. Mas passed away this July, but will forever remain deep in our hearts.
September 19, 2015

Students, guests, veterans, and honored attendees:

Go For Broke National Education Center is committed to preserving and perpetuating the Japanese American World War II veteran story. The purpose of our essay and video contest is to encourage high school and college students to learn about the Nisei soldier story – which is truly an American Story of patriotism, heroism, humility, and courage. In so doing we hope they will have a greater appreciation of their civil rights, realize the sacrifices that were made for those rights, and be positive forces helping to safeguard these rights which are the cornerstone of our great nation.

Contained in this booklet are the 30 winning entries from college and high school students that share compelling aspects of the Nisei veteran story in very personal and profound ways. Congratulations to the many students who won and who shared their stories. Their essays and videos speak passionately about their admiration for the Nisei soldiers who made great sacrifices so those who followed would have a better life.

Our contest is growing larger and larger by the year. This is the third annual contest – and the first time that we’ve accepted videos in addition to essays. We had a record 247 entrants this year, from 16 states and the District of Columbia. We truly are making an impact nationally!

We would like to thank Pacific Global Investment Management Company who once again was our Presenting Sponsor this year. Their generous contribution was made in memory of long-time community philanthropists and business leaders Manabi Hirasaki and Sig Kagawa. The contest was also made possible by the generous support of two Supporting Sponsors: Ken and June Shimabukuro, and an anonymous donor in memory of World War II veteran Masao Takahashi.

I encourage you to take a few minutes to read these essays and view these videos. I guarantee that you will be inspired, and perhaps even moved to tears, by the students’ observations and insight.

Enjoy,

Donald Nose
President, Go For Broke National Education Center
September 19, 2015

Students, guests, veterans, and honored attendees:

It was an honor and a privilege to help manage the 2015 High School and College Student Essay and Video Contest. This was the first year that we gave students the option to create either an essay or a short video, and I was overjoyed with the response from students all over the country. Yet again, we broke our previous record for number of entrants, and both the essays and the videos are shining examples of passion and creativity. Even more impressive than the essays and videos are the students themselves. As the main contact person with the student entrants, I have found myself speaking to 250 passionate, intelligent, and caring young adults. They all have a deep appreciation for the past and big dreams for the future. Our country – and our world – is in good hands as we pass the torch to this new generation.

I also need to thank the many wonderful volunteers and coworkers who made this year’s contest such a success. From the very beginning, our volunteers did mind-work (planning, evaluating, judging) and legwork (contacting school districts, teachers, and friends) that made this contest possible. You all know who you are, and I am forever grateful. I hope to see you again for 2016!

Lastly – and most importantly – I have to thank the veterans themselves. All of you are the inspiration. You are the inspiration to these students, you are the inspiration to our staff, you are my personal inspiration, and you continue to be an inspiration to Americans everywhere. Thank you so much for your service. As one student so eloquently stated, all generations must “remember the sacrifices and contributions that you made so that all Americans may live as equals in peace and freedom today.”

Thank you to the veterans, and congratulations to the students who will keep their story alive.

Chris Brusatte
Go For Broke National Education Center
Contest Judges

NANCY SAGAWA
Years Taught: 1984-2010
Schools: Nuffer Elementary School (Norwalk-La Mirada School District) and Frank C. Leal Elementary School (ABC Unified School District)
Most Rewarding or Memorable Thing About Being a Teacher:
“It was rewarding to have students come back to visit and tell me that they were able to apply what they learned in class.”

MARY JANE FUJIMURA
Years Taught: 1967-2003
Schools: Des Moines (Seattle), Nuffer, and Lampton Elementary Schools
Most Rewarding or Memorable Thing About Being a Teacher:
“Being able to work with young children and young minds, I was constantly learning from my students. Teaching to me is one of the most rewarding professions.”

IKUKO KIRIYAMA
Years Taught: 1962-2005
Schools: Foshay Junior High School and James Monroe High School
“Competitions such as Go for Broke’s essay and video contest require students to do in-depth research. This process leads them to a greater knowledge and appreciation of their heritage and sharing this new-found knowledge with their families and peers.”

NAOMI JUE
Years Taught: 1965-1975, 1989-2012
Schools: Numerous Schools in Northern and Southern California
Most Rewarding or Memorable Thing About Being a Teacher:
“My greatest pleasure in teaching is the student - to develop their curiosity, enthusiasm, and self-confidence in their learning.”

AUDREY ISHIMOTO
Volunteer for: Go For Broke National Education Center, Torrance Memorial Hospital, Aquarium of the Pacific, Peninsula High School PTSA and School Site Council, and the USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association.
“My children were involved in the Go For Broke essay contest last year, and I saw firsthand what an emotional impact writing this essay had on them as they gained a greater appreciation for the Nisei soldiers and all who sacrificed for our country.”

BARBARA LAI
Years Taught: 1974-2013
Schools: Downey and Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School Districts
“The Go For Broke contest is important because it makes connections between the youth of today and the youth of yesterday. The Nisei were so young to have done the brave deeds we honor. In researching and learning about history, the youth of today will learn about their valor and patriotism and be inspired.”
2015 High School & College Student Essay and Video Contest

— By the Numbers —

✓ Number of Contestants: 247

✓ Number of Winners: 30

✓ Number of High Schools Represented: ~55

✓ Number of Colleges / Universities Represented: 20

✓ Number of States Represented: 16 + DC

✓ Amount of Prize Money Awarded: $6,500

✓ Years that Go For Broke Has Run the Contest: 3
2015 High School & College Student Essay and Video Contest
Complete List of Winners

First Prize, Essay, College/University
Michelle Grochocinski
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

First Prize, Essay, High School
Lauren Irie
West Torrance High School, Torrance, CA

First Prize, Video, College/University
Mark Frederick
Penn State University at Altoona, Altoona, PA

First Prize, Video, High School
Sydney Dempsey
Maui High School, Kahului, HI

Second Prize, Essay, College/University
Kevin Koyama
Northeastern University, Boston, MA

Second Prize, Essay, High School
Nicole Nishizawa
Punahou School, Honolulu, HI

Second Prize, Video, College/University
Christian Saiki
Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA

Second Prize, Video, High School
Kyla Kikkawa
Flintridge Preparatory School, La Cañada Flintridge, CA

Third Prize Winners, Essay
Kainalu Saiki
Kamehameha Schools Kapalama, Honolulu, HI

Taylor Riedley
Simi Valley High School, Simi Valley, CA

Ashley Ishigo
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

Jordan Lee
Mid-Pacific Institute, Honolulu, HI

Dante Hirata-Epstein
‘Iolani School, Honolulu, HI

Yu Rankin
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

Remaining Top Thirty Finalists
Allysha Yasuda
University of Idaho, Moscow, ID

Alyna Kim
West Torrance High School, Torrance, CA

Brandon Irie
West Torrance High School, Torrance, CA

Brandon Ishikata
San Diego State University, San Diego, CA

Caitlin Chen
Irvington High School, Fremont, CA

Cassidy Minae Jung
Flintridge Preparatory School, La Cañada Flintridge, CA

Clare Yejin Lee
Oxford Academy, Cypress, CA

Cody Yamada
University of Nevada at Reno, Reno, NV

Daisy Matias
Alhambra High School, Alhambra, CA

Julia Davidson
Palos Verdes High School, Palos Verdes Estates, CA

Kaitlyn Allen-O’Gara
Oxford Academy, Cypress, CA

Kristen Hayashi
University of California at Riverside, Riverside, CA

Samantha Zee
Waiakea High School, Hilo, HI

Sasha Cox
Kamehameha Schools Kapalama, Honolulu, HI

Teddy Powers
Canyon High School, Anaheim, CA

Tony Chiang
Oxford Academy, Cypress, CA
I am a clinical social work graduate student interested in breaking the cycles of poverty and incarceration on a macro level and relieving depression and anxiety on an individual level. Daniel Inouye has been more than an inspiration to me; he is a personal idol, and I was honored to pay homage to his accomplishments. When I’m not striving to follow his example and better the world, you can find me reading, drawing, weight lifting, and enjoying nature.

A Silent Call to Action

Daniel Inouye’s inherent, assumed selflessness struck me, a millennial living in culture of exaggerated self-importance and individualism—manifestations of the Twitter age. People of my generation preach and protest for social justice, but at the end of the day we return to our personal anxieties about deadlines and college loans. As a university student and aspiring social worker, I engage in countless dialogues about institutionalized oppression and my passion for policy reformation, but I feel trapped in an academic bubble, unable to act and carry out the changes I so desire. Daniel Inouye’s accomplishments as a war hero and Senator are impressive in their own right, but it was his smaller actions of collectivism that inspired me. Here is a true activist. Here is one who does not merely preach and prattle—no, he is the opposite, incredibly humble. Daniel Inouye demonstrated his passion for social justice via his actions throughout his entire life.

Inouye’s main concern as a soldier, along with his Japanese-American companions, was to honor his family. I am touched by this sentiment. So many of us fall into self-centered routines in our everyday lives, ignoring news of foreign violence; we cannot achieve the selflessness of these soldiers even at the prime of our lives. Inouye followed through with this attitude despite incredible hardships. In the aftermath of his final battle, Inouye’s arm was blown off and he was shot through the stomach, yet he still took care of his men before himself: he arranged them into defensive positions to ensure their safety even while he was bleeding to death. During his interview, Inouye chose not to capitalize on his own (impossibly impressive) sacrifices and accomplishments, but to commend the African American soldiers whose blood donations saved his life and praise their act of giving to strangers. To repay their generosity, Inouye did not write a simple written thank-you; he joined the fight for equality for minorities. Again, he acted. And through his actions, he helped give a voice to many silenced peoples. Inouye concluded his interview by encouraging the young to study history, to study the stories of persons who were not just individuals but community members, whose solidarity created change. Study what has been done.

I am inspired to learn beyond philosophy and theory. My plans to be a force of positive change have always involved the future: after my degree, after I’m licensed, after I’ve saved enough to support myself comfortably. Daniel Inouye has taught me that I can act now. My behavior must follow my attitudes. I might not yet be learned enough to enter the fight for large-scale change, but small actions of selflessness now build the community that we need to push for policy reformation in the future. They are worthwhile in and of themselves. Living for others humbly and earnestly like Daniel Inouye will help me to be a true voice for victims of oppression.
Lauren Irie  
West Torrance High School – Torrance, CA  
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

I plan on majoring in chemical or aerospace engineering in college. I have been vice president of my school’s Japanese Cultural Club for two years, and will be president next year. I have been attending Gardena Buddhist Church’s Japanese Language School since I was five years old, which has encouraged me to learn more about the Japanese language and culture. My inspiration to participate in this contest is my Japanese American grandfather who used to always say the famous quote: “Give me liberty, or give me death.”

Go Forward

One suitcase, each family, all else left behind  
Dignity, freedom, liberty: were those left too?  
Trapped, alienated, segregated, confined  
Stripped from their red, white, and blue.

Is this the American way?  
Citizen or alien? Friend or foe?  
Should I fight or should I stay?  
Are you a yes-yes or a no-no?

Yet the great sea crashing against the shores  
Grasping, clasping the land of both of homes  
Engulfed in sweat, sorrow, and war  
Treated like monsters in this world we roam.

Our freedom and families we defend  
Don’t take back a single stroke  
Never give in, until the final end  
We all stand strong: “go for broke.”

I, a Japanese American, stand free today  
Thanks to the sacrifice of those before  
The courage of every soldier, every child, every Nikkei  
Who plowed through the demands of war.

Go, go, go, forward, go forward  
Fight for our freedom, liberty, our pride  
Never take another step backward  
Strength in every leap, every march, every stride.
As a long time student of history, the story of the Japanese Americans in World War II serves as a means of interest and inspiration for me (as it should for others). This contest allowed me to combine my passions of film and history in a way that permits me to share that enthusiasm with others. On the side, I participate in World War II reenacting, golfing, traveling to historical sites, and enjoying cinema.

Watch Mark’s video online at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20UNdvTzPuM
Sydney Dempsey  
Maui High School – Kahului, HI  
Sophomore (2014-2015 School Year)

Digital media, robotics, and school pretty much run my life. It was actually through digital media that I discovered this contest, and became inspired by the story of the Nisei soldiers. I had learned about their story during a research project and found it very courageous how they decided to fight in the war to prove their loyalty; especially with how poorly they were treated by the government.

Watch Sydney’s video online at:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ojgoPg5yW0&feature=youtu.be
I am a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, and am pursuing my Masters in Business Administration and Masters of Science in Finance from Northeastern University. I am also a Marine Corps officer who has deployed throughout the globe - seeing the best and worst of people. Needless to say, my interests and respect for the 100/442/MIS have grown with my interactions with my cousins’ grandpa and my personal experiences. By entering this contest, I had hoped to honor him, those who have served, and those who continue to serve our country.

We Are Different, But the Same

A person may feel confident they understand the military after researching hundreds of books and films. But they can’t completely understand. Words and pictures could never fully convey the military experiences. After talking with and listening to Grandpa Minamide, my cousin’s grandpa, I learned an important lesson: we are different, but the same.

Growing up, I was ignorant to the fact that Akira Minamide served in the 442nd RCT, L Company. To me, he was just, “Grandpa Minamide.” He treated me like his “real” grandchildren and often took care of my sister and I. But when I decided to serve in the military, his overall attitude changed. I could tell he was proud, but he was never overt about it like my other relatives. He was quiet, but his sincerity was the strongest. It was my older sister who finally told me, “Of course he’s proud of you; he was in the 442nd.”

After my first deployment, he finally approached me during one of our Christmas family gatherings. We talked about our training and some of our experiences. I had never heard him talk about any of his service. My aunt told me later, “I have never heard my dad talk about any of that. Thank you.” Two thoughts went through my head: Why me? Why now?

As we talked about our experiences, I was amazed at some of the comments he made. I remember thinking, “What do you mean they still do that?” There was a gap between our generations, but the training was similar. The training mindset was different, but the same.

Recently listening to his 442nd experiences online, I realized more commonalities in our experiences. Personally, I could tell you the sound of a mortar round or a RPG as it flies past your head, or how scared I felt as the building I was in got hit. In an interview, Grandpa Minamide talked about the feeling of lying in a hole and thinking it was not deep enough to protect himself from the flying shrapnel. He knew my situation and was the only family member who could truly understand. I could also tell you what it felt like to put my life in someone else’s hands; Grandpa Minamide had also lived it. War experiences were different, but the same.

In response to: Why me? Why now? It was because I had lived it. I had experienced it. I was the only family member who could understand him. Grandpa Minamide served in Europe. I served in the Middle East. Even though they were two different wars, there were similar experiences of not knowing if you’re coming home safely. But more importantly, it felt as if he were passing a message of assurance to me, “We are of different generations and wars. But don’t worry. I’ve been there. I understand. We survived. I am here for you. We are the same.”
Character Over Circumstance

I like to remember my Grandpa Toshi as a living history book. In his time, he experienced firsthand key events of the 20th century. He was raised by immigrant parents, struggled through the Great Depression, and enlisted in World War II. In his training, my Grandpa witnessed the racial segregation in Mississippi and in Europe, contributed to the liberation of Bruyères, helped rescue the Lost Battalion, and was one of the first to discover the Dachau concentration camp. By the age of 25, he had come into contact with a number of peoples that most don’t meet in their entire lifetimes. In his time at Dachau, my Grandpa told the story of how his unit, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, found the fenced compound on their way into Germany. At the time, concentration camps were unfamiliar, so he and his buddies felt somewhat fearful of what they had stumbled upon. On entering the fences, he witnessed firsthand the hollowed, emaciated and starving people. My Grandpa and his buddies' first instinct was to feed them whatever rations they had. However, an order from their lieutenant prohibited the act, knowing they didn't have enough food for the amount of people in need. Nevertheless, against orders, my Grandpa and his buddies couldn't help but give the prisoners coffee, crackers, candy—whatever they had.

This one selfless act demonstrated the type of care my grandfather had for others without regard for race or ethnicity. My grandfather, wise beyond his years, saw people as simply people. As a Japanese-American, he too was discriminated against as a possible “threat to the United States”. However, he found a way to turn that injustice into an opportunity to learn open-mindedness and acceptance. My Grandpa didn't know what exactly he would experience when he signed up for the 442nd, but those years forever changed his life. As a recently graduated senior in high school, I'm not facing advanced artillery or German armies (and I can thank God and my Grandpa for that). However, as I go off to college across the country, I will have to trust in what the unpredictability of life will bring. No matter what incredible situation I find myself in, I will strive to live as selflessly and courageously as my Grandpa did in the midst of every sunshine and every storm. Experiencing everything he experienced at such a young age is almost unimaginable, yet the strength of my Grandpa’s character got him through it all. With his values of courage, selflessness, and tolerance in mind, I too hope to weather and stand tall in the challenges of years to come.
I'm a 22 year old student from Wailua, HI. In my spare time, I enjoy making iced coffee, eating pizza, and participating in volunteer programs through my school. I entered this contest because I wanted to honor the memory of my grandfather, who was a part of the 442nd RCT. The Nisei soldier experience inspires me in many ways. I find it amazing that despite all the injustices that they faced, many brave Japanese Americans still volunteered to fight for their country. All the sacrifices that the Nisei soldiers made give me a chance to achieve my goals without having to face the obstacles that they faced.

"Go For Broke!"
My grandfather, Charles Saiki, always kept a “Go for broke” sticker on his car’s side window.

One day, my grandfather explained its meaning. As a child, I didn’t fully understand the context. But as I grew older and heard more of my grandfather’s stories, I began to understand.

During WWII, my grandfather was one of the many Japanese-American soldiers who voluntarily put their lives on the line for their country. Despite facing numerous unwarranted prejudices and discrimination, they decided to “Go for broke” and proved their loyalty.

Watch Christian’s video online at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoWehB4WDxg&feature=youtu.be
I am a freshman at Flintridge Preparatory School in La Cañada, California. At school, I love learning history, science, and English. I like to dance, play basketball, play ukulele, and sing. I first heard about this contest through my brother, who submitted an entry in the past, and I decided to try it. The Nisei soldier story inspires me because the soldiers were extremely courageous, and they sacrificed for our well-being.

Watch Kyla’s video online at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5o12FX180Q&feature=youtu.be
Aloha, I am Kainalu Saiki from the island of Kauai, and I love to lift weights, and find new challenges for myself. I am pursuing a degree in engineering and that also happens to be one of my passions. I entered this contest to honor the memory of my grandfather who fought in the 442nd RCT and to also honor the memory of all the other 442nd veterans. The Nisei soldiers inspire me because of how selfless they were in the face of a country that mistreated them, and it teaches me to always think of others and to persevere.

“Are you 18 or over?”
“Yes.”
“Do you know how to drive a truck?”
“Yes.”

All complete lies told by my young and restless grandfather, who secretly applied for the military, and who eventually was placed into the 442nd Regimental Combat Team as a truck driver who didn’t know how to drive a truck. During my grandfather’s recollection, he placed significant importance on the idea and task of fighting for the nation that had fought against him, his friends, and his family. Truly this great and honorable challenge was taken on by many, but I feel as if the greatest thing he had to say was about living life to the fullest, and always being humble.

Growing up on a rice farm on a small island could seem rather dull to some people; but no person could possibly be have had been more fed up with it than my grandfather. My grandfather had spent most of his time within a couple miles of his own house, and never got to leave the island of Kauai. So in the middle of a work day, when the army recruiters came to his house and said “Well Charlie, Uncle Sam needs you,” he dropped all of his bags, looked at his little sibling and asked them to “Tell mom and dad I might be gone for a while.” He then further elaborated that he didn’t want to leave just to fight for what he thought was right, because fighting for his family and friends was what he thought was right; my grandfather left because it was his only opportunity to go see the world, and he took it.

Unfortunately that’s as positive as my grandfather’s war memories got. In his eyes and voice, you could tell that the war against racism and biases had been won, but also that the thoughts of his now resting friends were the price of victory for all of us.

As I finished talking to him, I asked him what it felt like to be a hero, but the word struck him, and he told me assuredly that the heroes were the people who never came home.

To me, my grandfather had taught me the immense destruction found in racism and biases, but that’s something that I feel most 442nd veterans would certainly pass on. My grandfather had given me the inner flame to take risks and opportunities, because it may be a chance for you to be part of something that changes the world. Most importantly, when he had told me about whom the heroes of the war were, it had changed my life, so from then on I’ve felt that if the 442 had said “Go for Broke” for people they didn’t even know, people who may have even hated them, and for me and you, then we could all “Go for Broke” for them.
A Legacy of Kindness

One summer day, I found a documentary my mom had purchased about a year ago entitled Unknown Warriors of World War II with David Ono. Curious, I inserted the DVD into the player and watched with interest. It was only a half-hour long, but one of its featured stories moved me in a way that no other story has.

During WWII, the Nazis invaded Pietrasanta, Italy, and forced citizens out of their homes until the Allies arrived on September 19, 1944. By the spring of 1945, the villagers were still impoverished and starving. Children, including 12-year-old Americo Bugliani, would wander to the Allied camps in hope of finding some food.

When Bugliani trudged into the 442nd's bivouac on April 3, 1945, he did not expect the comfort he found from a Japanese American soldier. The soldier was Paul Sakamoto, who gave the boy food and presents, including a toothbrush and a photograph of himself. Bugliani was unaware that the gifts were most of Sakamoto's belongings; he only noticed the soldier's genuine kindness. It was a simple exchange that lasted no more than a few minutes, but it contrasted so vividly with Bugliani's other wartime experiences that it gave him hope in times of adversity. Bugliani went on to immigrate to America, become an American veteran, and earn a Ph.D. in Philosophy, all the while remembering Sakamoto with fondness.

Fifty years later, as a member of the American Legion's Chicago Nisei Post, Bugliani found Sakamoto's contact information and asked to have a reunion. Sakamoto admitted to not remembering Bugliani, since he had given many children presents, but he invited Bugliani and his wife to visit his home in Hilo, Hawaii. The Buglianis were once again impressed with Sakamoto's generosity, for he and his wife had prepared gifts of food and island necklaces upon the couple's arrival.

Seeing Sakamoto a second time inspired Bugliani to make a monument not only to the one Nisei who touched his life, but to the entire 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. He appealed to Pietrasanta's leading citizens and fundraised so the statue of a fallen Nisei would be placed with an inscription honoring all of the Japanese Americans who saved their town. Even after the memorial's completion, Bugliani continued to make donations honoring Nisei soldiers in Sakamoto's memory, and is a life member of the Japanese American Veterans Association.

The story of Sakamoto and Bugliani emphasizes the importance of kindness, and that one kind act can lead to an abundance of good. As a youth, I strive to leave a mark on the world. It moves me that Bugliani was profoundly touched by Sakamoto's simple benevolence, and I aspire to have such an impact on someone in the hope that he or she would move on to benefit others. Sakamoto's story has inspired me to try to make all of my actions gracious, no matter how insignificant they seem, for even the smallest gestures can change a person forever.
I am entering my second year at USC, where I study biomechanical engineering. In my free time I enjoy catching up on sleep, taking photos, playing basketball, and exploring downtown LA. I was inspired to enter the contest after finding old pictures of my grandfather in uniform. His story inspires me to go "the extra mile" for the people I love, without expectation of reward.

At my grandfather Kuniyuki Ishigo’s funeral, they brought out an American flag in a triangular box and presented it to my grandmother. Having been eight years old, I didn’t understand the gesture, but didn’t think too much about it. Later that day, I asked my parents if everyone who passed away received such a flag. To my surprise, they informed me that my grandfather received the special flag because he had served in the military.

All the years I had been to my grandparents’ house – picking flowers in the garden, watching baseball, and folding origami, there had never been any mention of the war, or my grandfather’s service. All I had known about his past was that he had been skinny, and that he was a gifted coconut tree climber. To this day, I know very little about his tour of duty aside from the fact that he had enlisted in an attempt to locate his brother, who was serving for the Japanese military. My father and my grandmother have since passed away, and an internet search elicits only a single result containing only a few physical descriptions.

As I think upon the memory of my grandfather, I can understand why he never told me about his service. My grandfather had not enlisted for glory or recognition, he had enlisted out of a duty to his country and a love for his family. He risked his life for the nation he called home, and for the brother he hoped he could save. His love for both his country and for his family has inspired me to strive to help others without the expectation of reward or recognition – only out of kindness and camaraderie.

Although Kuniyuki never found his brother, he was surrounded by loving family his entire life. The fact that my grandfather had enlisted for more than just a sense of nationalism makes him even more courageous in my eyes. Stories like this one shed light on the predicament many Japanese-Americans of the time faced. Caught between two seemingly conflicting identities, my grandfather joined the military in an attempt to demonstrate his compassion, his commitment, and his love for both family and country. Although he was never much of a talker, he has showed me that there are much deeper and powerful ways of demonstrating one’s love and caring. In the case of my grandfather, actions truly spoke louder than words.
I am an incoming University of Pennsylvania student, who enjoys statistics, Japanese, playing basketball, bowling, and karate. My grandmother’s brother, Eichi Oki, served in the 442nd, so I wanted to write an essay as a tribute to both him and all of the courageous Japanese American soldiers of WWII. Despite being labeled as the “enemy,” the Nisei soldiers defied the odds and fought valiantly for the country they believed was always their home.

Jap?

“Watch it, Jap!” His shoulder drives into my chest and jolts me backwards. A large, unprovoked, sneering stranger he looks down at me with his two friends; I am alone in an arcade in Reno, far from my home in Honolulu.

I prepare to defend myself and target the bridge of his nose. If I strike, I can fracture bone and cartilage up through his brain. As he laughs at me, thoughts of my black belt and unleashing the explosive punch I have perfected for nine years in the karate dojo traverse through my mind.

But I elect to ignore the challenge. I move on. I move past him.

Writing this essay, I realize even more that I did the right thing. At that moment, I was astounded and outraged.

Jap? Aren’t we beyond this? My grandmother’s only brother, Eichi Oki, served in the renowned 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Composed of American soldiers of Japanese ancestry, it became the most decorated unit in U.S. military history. The 442nd, their families, and communities surmounted discrimination, and overcame hardship and injustice. They bolstered, with blood, grace, and sacrifice, the Constitution's purpose—“We, the people of the United States...to form a more perfect union, establish justice...and secure the blessing of liberty to...establish this Constitution.”

Japanese Americans did this even though they were labeled the “enemy” swiftly after Imperial Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. Their property and belongings were seized. Almost 120,000 were forcibly uprooted and herded to distant, remote concentration camps as prisoners in their own country.

Yet, they believed in America and its promise. They recognized that the Constitution remains a “working” document, a work in progress. A former Supreme Court Justice wrote, “The truth is...that constitutions and laws are not sufficient of themselves...despite the Fifth Amendment’s command that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law...these constitutional safeguards were denied...under Executive Order 9066 [which authorized the Japanese-American internment].”

As the Japanese American WWII experience teaches us about the Constitution, rights, and responsibilities, the Constitution is only effective when citizens are fully engaged. They must "Go for Broke."

Go for Broke means all-out commitment to demonstrating who we are, and doing so without anger, resentment, and retaliation. It means acting and reacting with composure, fortitude, and faith. It means standing on principle, but only at an appropriate time and place. It means letting insults pass in a manner that is honorable, sensible, and beneficial to all.

Above all, it means being extraordinarily responsible citizens: forsaking individual pride, interest, and even life to the unfinished extension of the Constitution--that no group, irrespective of appearance and family origin, should be marginalized, bullied, and deprived of constitutional rights.

Jap?

Bait me. Threaten me. Underestimate me. Ha! I’ll transcend you. I am the scion of a driven legacy and community.
True Kindness

The valor of the 100th Infantry Battalion has left an indelible mark on America's history. Yet for me, feats and medals did not first capture my interest, but rather, the selfless giving of its veterans. I was eight when Grandpa Goro, smiling in his "Go for Broke" cap, first offered me pistachios and chocolate. When I returned, he not only continued offering his snacks, but stories of his life as well. Leighton Goro Sumida's kindness not only led him to become a grandpa to me, but an inexhaustible source of inspiration as well.

In November 1941, Goro began his military training on Oahu. A mere month later, the attack on Pearl Harbor reshaped his life.

Goro recalls the hakujins seizing his rifle, fearful of purported loyalty towards Japan. As fear proliferated, merely going to the bathroom now required multiple escorts. Despite growing discrimination, he refused to let the prejudice of individuals trump his spirit.

The trainees' parents gave them omamori, Japanese luck charms, to protect them in battle. Their higher-ups wanted them surrendered and burned. Goro held on to his. Loyalty to his country, he knew, did not require discarding his culture.

The charm worked, and both his body and his character emerged from the war unscathed. First in Africa then the hills of Southern Italy, he witnessed his friends killed by bullets, explosives, and artillery. Yet, he felt no resentment towards the enemy. They too lost friends, fear death, and longed to return home. While those at home abhorred "Japs" and their culture, Goro treated civilians of the Axis powers warmly, giving food, friendship, and learning their language. "War is not a glory", he remarked. Yet, through war Goro learned to embrace his surrounding world.

He did not hate the men who planted the S-mines that sent a friend flying into the air. He did not hate the men who ordered his company to clear a path into Rome but not enter, so its liberators would be Caucasian. His spirit remained strong when, returning to the United States after four years, he found his Aunty interned in Arkansas, and African-Americans beaten by Caucasians without consequence. His experience evidences the invincibility of kindness in the face of adversity.

Today, my generation strives to live up to his legacy. We strive to not condemn others for their race or sexuality, but act with humanity. In distant states thousands of miles away, I discovered that I, a boy who looked and spoke differently, was treated no different from the local next door. I was a person, not my color, accent, or race. Grandpa Goro's advice is simple: "treat people nice." This ideal, exemplified by him, is a balm for prejudice and bulwark for goodness.

Grandpa Goro's kindness was first revealed to me through food. It was the kindness he lived his life according to that, along with the military feats of the 100th Battalion, will be forever stitched into the fabric of society.
Yu Rankin
University of Southern California – Los Angeles, CA
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

I attend the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. I am studying to become an entrepreneur and own a global multi-billion dollar business. I like to skate, surf, snowboard, play basketball, scuba dive/snorkel, hike, and travel. I entered into this contest because I wanted to thank the Nisei soldiers in my own words for all their sacrifices and contributions. I wanted them to know that my generation knows and appreciates what they did.

The Heroes of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

I remember the first time I truly heard about the Japanese internment camps and the Nisei soldiers. I remember visiting the Japanese American National Museum and the Go For Broke Monument, and being in complete and utter shock. Right in front of my eyes was the complete truth. Right in front of my eyes was the story that should have been told.

Japanese Americans were mistreated during WWII by America. The government was concerned after Pearl Harbor, but what the government did not fully understand was that Americans are not a race or ethnicity. America is a nationality, an ideal, a utopia, a land where people of all colors are welcome and can truly be free from persecution, racism, and discrimination. Americans are people who believe in equality, who believe in the idea that all men and women are created equal.

Through their sacrifices, the Nisei soldiers proved that it is not the color of your skin that makes you American: it is what is truly in your heart. Americans are patriotic, admirable, honorable, compassionate, strong, and courageous. Even though the Nisei soldiers were being discriminated against, they still fought hard for the same people who were discriminating against them. While their families were in internment camps, they still fought bravely and strongly for the same people that put their families in those internment camps. They did this because they believed in America and its ideals. They did this because they wanted to prove to America that they were truly Americans. They wanted to prove that they were not the enemies, but instead the heroes of this nation. Indeed, they proved their worth. Indeed, they proved their value. Indeed, they proved their loyalty.

My generation, especially Japanese Americans in particular, owe them. This is why I entered into this essay contest. Not because of the money, but because I wanted to thank them in my own words for all their sacrifices and contributions. I wanted them to know that my generation knows and appreciates what they did. They paved the way for us to be accepted as Japanese and American. They helped other Americans believe and understand that we are not the Japanese of Pearl Harbor, but instead the Japanese Americans of the Nisei soldiers. Because of the Nisei soldiers, my generation will never be put in internment camps. Because of the Nisei soldiers, my generation will never be segregated. Their sacrifices and contributions will forever resonate in my generation and future generations to come. We will never forget what they have done and the sacrifices that they have made. I know that I can say for myself, my generation, future generations, this country, and even people in other countries such as France that we are all in gratitude and in debt to these brave soldiers of the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team/MIS. We salute you!
I am studying biology, pre-medical, at the University of Idaho. I love staying active and participating in my campus' philanthropies. After graduating I plan to become a pediatric endocrinologist. I entered this contest because I believe the Nisei story has taught our country and the world many lessons. Continuing to learn from the Nisei experience and teaching future generations is very important. I am honored to share this legacy and carry these traditions on.

War fosters more fear and hatred than almost anything in our society. It poisons people, making them question everything they thought was true. In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted legislation, Executive Order 9066, which would imprison over 127,000 Japanese American citizens. Those innocent men, women, and children endured terrible prejudice and injustice simply because of their Japanese heritage. Forced to sell most of their possessions and property, Japanese Americans were sent to remote locations surrounded by barbed wire fences and sentry towers. Their lives would be changed forever. Men armed with guns kept watch over those in the internment camps around the clock. Often times, there were not enough barracks to accommodate all of the people; consequently, there was a lot of overcrowding and very little privacy. Many of the internment camps were placed in isolated areas where the temperatures would overcome one hundred degrees in the summer and plummet well below freezing during the winter. They slept on cots, lived in unsanitary conditions, and performed hard labor for little pay. The question is: Why did this happen? How could the United States, the land of the free, force its citizens to live like prisoners in their own country?

I give you one simple answer: fear. A four-letter word that’s as old as time itself, possessing the ability to make even the most sensible people behave irrationally. The hysteria of war incites fear wherever it goes. Unfortunately, President Roosevelt let that fear rob him of his sense of right and wrong. The fact that this happened shows how the government and Constitution ultimately failed.

The Constitution was created to protect our rights. Those who lived in internment camps were denied their rights and freedoms, all of which are clearly stated in the Constitution. Japanese Americans were denied the freedom of speech, the freedom of unreasonable searches and seizures, and the right to equal protection under the laws. For instance, speaking the Japanese language in public meetings was prohibited. FBI officials searched many Japanese homes without a warrant. Not to mention, perhaps the greatest of all: “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law…” In spite of this horrendous tragedy against Japanese Americans, we, as humans, keep a record of our history and that is so we can learn from mistakes that have already been made. We must learn from the past in order to build a better future. Educating students on what happened will help to further prevent anything like this from ever happening again. Furthermore, doing so can make more legislation that prevents similar prejudice a possibility. The Japanese American World War II experience also teaches us grace, strength, and determination. My grandparents endured that time with such class and inner strength that I can never understand. They never gave up or lost faith in the United States. We must never forget their experience or what it has taught us.
I enjoy literature and art, which usually combine in my mind and interests in the form of sequential art. I also like jogging and martial arts, and currently take taekwondo. I play video games casually, and enjoy trying to pick some songs out on the guitar and ocarina. Initially, I heard about this contest through my APUSH class as a final project, but I entered the contest out of my own volition. I entered with my mind on my uncle and his heroic qualities. Certain things, like that sense of loyalty and bonds, don’t need to change, and should be remembered.

William Kazumi Yamamoto was a resident of Honolulu, HI, and a soldier in the 442nd “Go For Broke” regimental combat team. He, like many others, returned from the war with a Purple Heart. Mr. Yamamoto was my mother’s great uncle, which makes him my great, great uncle.

Uncle Bill lived his life on Oahu, far away from continental United States. This great regional distance—augmented by the markedly higher rate of diversity on the islands—created a very different atmosphere for my uncle.

My uncle came back from the war quietly. Like many Japanese American War heroes, he wasn’t exactly celebrated. However, my uncle was noble and self-assured, as far as my family could tell. Despite being discriminated against, he lived through a full 82 years surrounded by family. He’s remembered as being the persevering type; the noble and strong type. By noble, my relatives remember him as the type to maintain a confident pride, not an entitled pride.

When he returned, my uncle resumed life as usual. He didn’t expect anything in return. It was his balance of humility as a citizen and pride as an American that made him stand out to my family. But they all acknowledge that the war was different for the ones that lived at the site of the Pearl Harbor bombing. To them, the Japanese pilots were simply the enemy, and Pearl Harbor was a war tragedy. Their struggle was less the internment, which happened in some places on the island, but the curfews and constant policing. The Japanese-Americans on the Hawaiian islands did not suffer the property loss that the mainland soldiers did, and so did not hold the same resentment. All these things made them less bitter heroes.

My uncle went to war out of duty and patriotism. He held his American citizenship in high esteem, and went to war because he loved this country as it was: his own. Even as he was refused service at a barber shop by a white worker after the war, he maintained his pride and dignity as a part of the United States citizenry. He had an attitude of gratitude until the very end, and was buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. My family still celebrates his contribution, and he represents the quiet spirit of strength my family has always known.
Brandon Irie  
West Torrance High School – Torrance, CA  
Freshman (2014-2015 School Year)  

I am in multiple sports, marching and advanced band, and on the board of two service learning and fundraising clubs. I aspire for a career in the medical or environmental fields of science. I entered this contest, inspired by my uncle who is dedicated to the Nichi Bei Foundation, passionately encouraging Japanese culture to generations of Japanese Americans in Northern and Southern California. All of the WWII Nisei veterans have given me the image of self-identity and bravery, which I hope leads me to become an empowering person.

No Ignorance

There is no way in sugar coating that our society teaches ignorance. Our teachers, textbooks, and school curriculum all miss the importance of what really matters from the past. History shouldn’t be multiple choice questions that ask generic one word answers. Are we really understanding the importance of what took place by bubbling in circles? Does this treat the men and women that influenced the time and period with any means of respect?

I remember learning about the Japanese American World War II experience in my eighth grade U.S. history class, and I was very intrigued because I am Japanese American, yet knew only bits and pieces of what had happened. What I never could comprehend was how much care and detail that my teacher had omitted of the experience. The 33,000 Japanese Americans that served in armed forces during World War II, epitomize capabilities of achievements and endurance against the struggles of racial stereotypes and cruel judgement.

One of the soldiers that I found most relatable to was Norman Ikari, one of the many Japanese Americans that served in the 1943 442nd Regimental Combat team. Mr. Ikari is a family-man that stuck up for his family and his ideals. He represented in many ways the pride of being an American. Despite not being prepared into combat, nor treated well by others because of his race, he said, “I just had to fit in.” He was still a loyal citizen and a hard worker for the team even if he was separated from his family in the internment camps. His service in Naples helped withdraw the Germans from the city, but he resulted in shattered legs after his unit climbed the Tuscan hills. This one detrimental experience did not define his service entirety. Mr. Ikari, like many of the Japanese American soldiers, fought not only for his country but to prove the rights of his family and friends.

That is why I feel somewhat despaired that these soldiers that fought in World War II aren’t as appreciated to many of my Yonsei (fourth-generation Japanese American) friends. We accept to show ignorance because we believe we have our own problems with school and extracurricular activities we focus towards. However, these Japanese Americans soldiers were once merely the same teenagers, living with similar ambitions. This is why grasping the knowledge of their history made a relatable difference in my life, and gave me the inspiration to accomplish my own goals and always stand up for my ideals.

Many of the Japanese American soldiers in World War II are passing as years come, but I promise that their passion will live with myself and many others that are not full of ignorance and pursue bravery, sacrifice, and endurance faced in life. To the Japanese American soldiers deceased or living, I give my humblest “Arigato Gozaimasu (Thank you).” I’m honored to be a part of your legacy and will share your stories for years to come.
Brandon Ishikata
San Diego State University
Senior (2014-2015 School Year)

I am currently pursuing a California Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential. At SDSU, I was a Senior Resident Advisor for the residence halls, a SDSU Ambassador, Zumba® group fitness instructor, and was crowned the 2014 SDSU Homecoming King. I entered the contest to honor the legacy of a friend’s family member who was a 442nd soldier and to inspire future generations. As a future educator and proud Yonsei, I hope to continue the inspiring Nisei legacy by educating students on the morals and history of the Japanese American culture.

Daniel Inouye: With Liberty and Justice for All

In the “Pledge of Allegiance”, the song ends with the line “with liberty and justice for all.” Widely known as a symbol of patriotism, many young Japanese Americans were eager to serve the United States during World War II by joining 442nd Regimental Combat Team. One of the selfless soldiers from the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was Daniel Inouye. I was drawn to Inouye’s story because his work on the battlefield proved he was willing to sacrifice and persevere in order protect the country.

One highlight that is meaningful to me was his advocacy for others. While participating in athletics, Inouye was inspired to study medicine and become an orthopedic surgeon. When Japan bombed the United States in World War II, Inouye plan shifted and was eager to serve the United States at the age of 17. At first, Inouye was denied because of his Japanese classification as an “enemy alien.” However, Inouye’s persistence toward petitioning to the White House gave him and other Japanese Americans permission to serve. Although he was exempt from military service because of his enrollment in college, Inouye without question volunteered.

Similar to a Cinderella plot line, Inouye exceeded expectations, overcame the odds and proved his strength as a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Throughout basic training, Inouye proved his strong leadership abilities being promoted to sergeant status and becoming a platoon leader within his first year. However, his training couldn’t have prepared him for his life changing tragedy on April 21, 1945. When leading soldiers in Europe, a grenade launcher struck Inouye. Although injured on the battlefield, Inouye courageously continued to lead his soldiers and fight with his left hand until he lost consciousness. To this day, this image on the battlefield is meaningful and showcases a true example of leadership and perseverance.

One of the most meaningful events that occurred in Inouye’s life was the result on the battlefield. Because the accident, Inouye also was unable to fulfill his dream of becoming an orthopedic surgeon. To most people, being unable to obtain their personal dream would cause people to feel defeated. Instead, Inouye proved he is a man of strength and kindness and channeled his energy towards making positive change. Inouye continued dedicate his life towards service in a different capacity in government affairs and was elected to serve as Hawaii’s first U.S. Representative.

Daniel Inouye’s World War II experience continues to inspire me today because I feel the Millennial generation does not understand the concept of sacrifice. After researching and understanding Inouye’s story, his perspective gives me a deeper and upmost respect for those Japanese American soldiers who gave up their life for the U.S.A. Inouye sacrificed his life in order to keep Americans safe. Daniel Inouye’s contribution towards the 442nd Battalion has ultimately defined the ideals, values, and ideas of the “Pledge of Allegiance.” Through his leadership, direction, and sacrifice, Daniel Inouye gave millions of Americans the opportunity to live out the “American Dream” and bring “justice to ALL.”
I am 15 years old, enjoy science classes, and have an interest in medicine and biological research. In my free time, I write, watch Netflix, and read. Through this contest, I learned about and was inspired by the fortitude and selflessness of Nisei soldiers. I entered in order to share the unsung contributions of the Nisei soldier with the world.

The soldiers of the 442nd were mechanics, stevedores, college students, and restaurant owners. The regiment was divided between native Hawaiians and mainland Americans, the 100th Battalion and the 552nd Battalion, the volunteers and the draftees. They were connected only by their desire to prove their loyalty and their belonging to the innocent yet incriminated group during World War II.

In the predawn hours of December 7, 1941, thousands of sailors and soldiers were killed instantly after the Japanese bombed the Pearl Harbor Naval Base in Hawaii. Terrified of their first encounter with the war after a decade of careful isolation, Americans incriminated the Nisei and their families because of the color of their hair and the shade of their skin, and with no charges, trials, or due process, Japanese Americans were imprisoned in barbed wire prisons with their basic human rights violated, each attached with the label “enemy alien.”

Still, despite the humiliation of being shipped away from their homes, the shock of their sudden loss of freedom, and the pain of being trapped in barbed wire camps, the men volunteered for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team to fight two battles: one to defend the country they loved, like millions of other young men who fought in the war; and one to prove themselves to the same country that had suddenly turned against them.

I visited the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, where I learned about the victories that cost the 442nd staggering numbers in Europe and about the record eighteen thousand awards. I heard stories of their time trapped in internment camps, and their determined actions in battle, not just for America but also to preserve the honor of their families. I learned that the few survivors still came back to suspicious looks and hissed insults, to fearful whispers and social ostracism.

My grandfather, who fought in the 4th Infantry Division, told me about his time in Germany. As an Asian American, he was naturally treated with suspicion. “Despite what happened to the Japanese, despite how my family was treated, I went to serve my country. It was my privilege and responsibility.”

We must share the story of the Nisei soldiers, who, despite the betrayal of the country they loved, put the needs of the Americans ahead of their own resentment. We cannot allow these men to be reduced to mere sentences in high school history textbooks. Their legacy of loyalty and integrity must be preserved and shared, not only for the immigrants and minority groups who struggle to find their place in America, but also to remind Asian Americans of the difficult struggle for equality that cost them many lives.

We must continue to honor their sacrifice by never forgetting their legacy. It is our responsibility to share their stories, to immortalize them as heroes. These soldiers paved the way for the change in the perception and status all Asian Americans, in the country that I am now proud to call home.
This fall, I will be attending Brown University, where I plan to concentrate in Health and Human Biology. I am a Level 10 competitive gymnast in the USA Gymnastics Junior Olympic program, and will continue my career on the Brown gymnastics team. This contest held a great importance to me because of the close and personal relationship I had with my WWII veteran great-grandfather, Chikara Don Oka. It was the perfect opportunity to share his powerful story with the community and let his and the Japanese American WWII legacy live on.

“Honor with Humility”

Chikara Don Oka, my great-grandfather who passed away on March 10, 2015, was a veteran of the U.S. Military Intelligence Service, World War II. The most meaningful part of his war experience to me was his example of humble and honorable duty. Born on January 5, 1920, in Watsonville, California, he was the third of seven brothers. Raised in Japan, he returned to the U.S. as a teenager, worked various jobs, learned English, and studied art. On February 16, 1942, he enlisted in the United States Army at the Presidio. After infantry training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas, ready to be a soldier, he was disappointingly assigned menial jobs, first “KP” duty at Camp Crowder, Missouri—a far cry from duties assigned to Caucasian soldiers—then cleaning officers’ quarters at Camp Carson, Colorado. When M.I.S. recruiters came to Camp Carson, he interviewed and tested for a position despite the negative stigma of using the enemy language, and moved to Camp Savage, Minnesota, to attend M.I.S. language school and training. As part of the M.I.S., Grandpa served tours of duty in the Joint Intelligence Center – Pacific Ocean Area (JICPOA), the Aleutians Islands, the South Pacific, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. His work included deciphering codes and cryptographs and interpreting and translating in interrogations of enemy prisoners.

He insisted he didn’t do anything heroic or amazing, but in reality, he underwent great personal sacrifice. He was a peaceful man who disliked the war, but became a soldier. He was a man loyal to his country, but had to fight against two of his brothers, Takeo and Teiji, who fought for Japan, and was devastated by their deaths. He wasn't a combat soldier, but nearly died from service-related tuberculosis, necessitating removal of five ribs and seven years of rehabilitation. However, despite it all, he was proud to have served. When duty called, he served his country to the best of his ability in the face of racial prejudice and personal conflict. The courage, sacrifice, and fortitude that drove the Nisei soldiers to “give it their all” in the face of obstacles deepens my appreciation for the price of freedom and for all armed forces who served and now serve to protect our privileges. Although the work my great-grandfather performed with the other M.I.S. was credited with reducing Allied war casualties and shortening the war by two years, it was 70 years that their work was recognized through a Congressional Medal of Honor.

His sense of duty with humility permeated his life. When my great-grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, he was her uncomplaining primary caregiver until her death. He also shared his WWII experiences with historians, not for personal glory, but to preserve the legacy of the Nisei soldiers for future generations. My great-grandfather's example motivates me towards a goal of serving my community. As I begin my studies, I hope to become a worthy health-care provider and will strive to fulfill my duty with humility.
Many of my extracurriculars include art, teaching young children at church, and being part of my school’s leadership programs. I entered the contest because I was interested in the history of World War II and its soldiers. To my surprise, reading about the lives of the Nisei soldiers transformed the experience of just writing an essay about soldiers to an opportunity to honor the memories of their heroic actions through the way they served and lived their lives, making it a valuable moment to me.

When I first looked at the name “Ray Nosaka”, I couldn’t think of a single thing we would have in common: he’s a male, Japanese veteran who had experienced war and discrimination, while I’m a Korean schoolgirl during a generally peaceful era. But through my research about this man, the printed name soon grew into not a perfect man with standard sentiments described in some pages of my American history, but a real human capable of thought and reflection about his life experiences and relationships.

I had a general idea that all Japanese-American soldiers would, among other broad generalizations, have past backgrounds filled with tragedy and overcoming of hardships. I soon learned that I wasn’t necessarily wrong, but I wasn’t correct, either. Ray Nosaka indeed had a life of ups and downs, which included a devastating fire, and having to shift from Japanese to an American lifestyle, but his early years were pretty normal, in that I could relate to most of his experiences. As an immigrant myself, I found myself agreeing to his sentiments of having to endure teasing and assimilating quickly to the U.S. I was also surprised to find out our personalities were similar, with both being the quieter, shy type, as well as the fact that, to my amazement, he had dated a Korean girl during a time of antagonistic relationships between the two races. Although there were some points that I couldn’t relate with, like Nosaka’s involvement in a gang, I was impressed to learn about how he would always treat each situation as a learning lesson: in this case, he attributed his gang activity as a way in developing loyalty, but he never failed to look at situations in another direction, which I admired.

As I transitioned into reading about Nosaka’s history as a soldier, I couldn’t help but be even more impressed at his growing maturity and the complexity of his personality. Admirably, he had a fierce sense of loyalty for his comrades and hatred towards the enemy, but he was still capable of compassion and pity towards the other side as well. His experiences did include discrimination, such as against his own race and towards African Americans as well, but he never allowed his resentment to take over his beliefs of what he thought was racial injustice. Above all, I really admired his thoughts about his own position as a soldier, and what it meant to have a gun in his hands: he thought of himself as no better than a murderer, but I believe it takes great compassion and self-awareness to empathize with the enemy side, and really understand his actions as a soldier.

Through this contest, not only have I gained an understanding of Ray Nosaka, but I realize that I’ve gained the privilege of holding his memories and wisdom about his vast experiences—which feels like a great honor to be given. Through this piece, I’m thankful for the opportunity to learn about the sacrifices of an American hero.
I am a Community Health Sciences Major (emphasis in Public Health) with a minor in Gerontology. Outside of the classroom, I enjoy exploring new areas, volunteering, and participating in student organizations. I entered this contest to share my great-grandfather’s story so that his legacy may live on in the memories of others. Individuals such as he deserve to be honored and remembered for the impact they have made throughout history.

A Man with a Name

There once was a man with a name.

Today, his story is recalled by those who remember the legacy that he left. This is his story.

Being raised on the Big Island of Hawaii, one might think of the beautiful beaches and blue skies that come with living in paradise. However, once President Roosevelt’s Selective Training & Service Act of 1940 was addressed, this man and many others just like him were drafted into the U.S. Army. Because of their background and ethnicity, they became the 100th Infantry Battalion.

The man moved to a new island, O’ahu, where he was given a new, American name, “George”. Many men, like George, were given American names because there were many talks of “sabotage” and “traitors” after the events that occurred at Pearl Harbor.

George had just finishing basic training and was returning to the Big Island aboard the Royal T Frank, a transport ship intending to bring George and 25 other men back home. One foggy morning, George and some of the other crew members on the deck were awoken by a “thud”. The next thing he knew, George was in the ocean, clutching onto a mailbag, while he watched the ship go deep below the sea. After he and the other survivors were rescued, they were immediately deployed to the mainland, their trip home had been torpedoed.

After some time training in the mainland, George was sent to the European campaign in Italy. The weather was not made for George and the others but they made up for it by cooking, because that’s where the Hawaii boys made “ono kine grindz” for the other soldiers to experience. George was fighting in the Battle of Monte Cassino until he became injured after being hit by grenade shrapnel. George received immense amounts of treatment for the injury in San Antonio, Texas where he eventually recovered but remained paralyzed for the rest of his life.

What does this man’s experience mean to me?

“George” Yukio Taketa is my great-grandfather and in my eyes, an unsung hero. My great-grandfather traveled the world, fought for freedom, and changed history. There are thousands like him, Japanese-American soldiers who made a significant impact during the war but whose actions will remain only as telltale story passed down for generations to come. Our freedom today would not be heard of without individuals like my great-grandfather.

My full name is Cody Yukio Yamada. Just like my great-grandfather, I am a man with a name. A man with a story to be told. A proud Japanese-American waiting for my chance to make history.
Daisy Matias
Alhambra High School – Alhambra, CA
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

Daisy Matias will be a senior this year at Alhambra High School in California. In her essay, Daisy writes how Daniel Inouye truly inspired her. Before learning about Inouye, Daisy held mankind in a much more negative light. But Inouye’s selfless sacrifice gave her renewed confidence in humanity.

Beautiful Things

They say that the hearts of all mankind are driven by greed—that all acts of “selflessness” are really only done for the sole purpose of recognition and reward. They also say that to determine whether this is true, one only needs to witness their actions in a life or death situation. I believed, for a longest time, that everyone belonged to the worst of both categories. Daniel Inouye, however, proved me wrong at every turn of his unsurpassed military service.

Daniel Inouye was a Japanese American who had volunteered for military duty in World War II and served in the highly decorated 442nd infantry unit. It was in Italy, taking down German machine gun nests, where he demonstrated incredible acts of valor. When Inouye was shot in the stomach, he refused treatment and rallied his men to move onward instead. Later, when he had been about to throw a grenade, he was severely wounded in his arm. Although his men rushed forward to help, he called them off for fear that the grenade would detonate in his suddenly uncontrollable hand. Inouye only stopped fighting when he had reached the extent of his human ability so that severe blood loss led him to lose consciousness. By then, however, he had managed to annihilate the last machine gun nest.

It is not Inouye’s military achievements that were most meaningful to me, although they were inarguably remarkable, but the decisions that he made while in excruciating pain that truly speak to me...and abash me. Whenever I catch a cold, receive a paper cut, or scrape my knee, I decide that I need a break at home plus a bandage or two before I decide that it’s safe to go on. Furthermore, I know that if my life were in danger, I might not consider the safety of others if it meant my rescue. Putting myself in Inouye’s position, I might have gladly accepted treatment after getting shot and cried for my men come to save me even after losing my hand with a hostile grenade clutched within. I might have retreated after getting a taste of death and lost my mind to the fire of agony, even defy anyone that hurt my chances of survival. Having Inouye sacrifice to consider, I know I would act differently now.

I used to think that I had an excuse to be selfish because I thought every other person was motivated by the same flame of greed. Then I was exposed to Inouye, the epitome of a selfless soldier who was ready to give his life at any moment in order to protect his comrades and even serve a country that doubted his loyalty—and serve so well that America was put to shame. But today, the excuse is gone, and I know that every person, man, women, or child, has the obligation, if not to fight a war, then to show America what those beautiful things called kindness, selflessness, and sacrifice, really are.
The Japanese American experience during World War II always fills me with a deep quaking fear because it shows just how easily normal, everyday Americans can be swayed to so blatantly disregard the very backbone of their society: the Constitution, a vanguard for civil liberties. If we are to believe that the constitution is the law of our fair country, that the noble ideals it promises are not mere dead words, that this piece of paper is far more than a piece of paper, and that it is, in fact, our nation’s supreme doctrine on rights of citizens, that the rights and responsibilities of citizens aren’t just empty promises, then it is our responsibility to never allow the inalienable rights it so eloquently guarantees to be usurped or diminished due to malicious sentiment cultivated callously during allegedly “different” times. The Constitution was meant to be heeded during Peacetime, Summer time, Hard times, and above all else, Wartime. Additionally, citizen’s responsibilities become imperative to the maintenance of a shaken society during times of domestic disquiet. It is a measure of a Nation’s moral fiber to see if they can maintain the same code of ethics during times of law and order as they can in times when both are absent and disorder is the only thing not being rationed by the government. The American treatment of the Japanese blatantly went against the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Passed during Reconstruction, this epochal piece of legislation stipulated that all states must “provide equal protection under the law” to all citizens. In layman’s terms, what rights you give to one citizen you cannot deny another citizen on the grounds of race. By placing thousands of innocent and unquestionably loyal Japanese-Americans in internment camps, The American Government was denying citizens one of their most basic rights: liberty, a clear violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. One must question what drove America to so disgustingly disregard Japanese-American’s rights. While the argument can be made that at the time, there were special circumstances, that Americans were blinded by the red, white, and blue in their eyes, a color set that they desperately wished not to contaminate with the diabolic dye of the “yellow tide”, these factors do not fully justify the corrupt contortion of the Constitution. Regardless of how we all feel about Executive Order 9066, if it is really so easy to bend supposedly adamant axioms to the will of a hostile, bigoted majority group, then who’s to say that it’s not entirely unfathomable to have Uncle Sam locking you or me up tomorrow because “special circumstances” deemed it necessary to restrict our civil rights? This notion must be kept alive so that the Japanese American WWII experience never receives an encore. Such a lesson would do right by the Japanese-Americans wronged during WWII and is the only necessary and desirable outcome that can viably come out of this All-American tragedy. If this maxim is kept alive, we’ll have every possible protection against the Manzanars of tomorrow.
The American flag is often seen as a symbol of hope; it stands tall over America with bright colors waving for all to see. It surrounds its people, protecting them with the red, white, and blue. However, sometimes that same symbol of pride and freedom can wrap itself tight, squeezing the life out of those it once protected. On December 7, 1941, that vicious cycle began as 353 Japanese planes and bombers dropped out of six aircraft carriers. 2,403 Americans died that day at Pearl Harbor, and 1,178 were injured after the attack. As America prepared to enter World War II, people began to fear those who may not have been loyal. Using nothing but prejudice that was founded upon eye shape, accent, and skin color, the American federal government interned Japanese-Americans, and rejected Japanese-Americans from serving in the army. Their lives were demolished despite their loyalty, and all because of prejudiced worry.

Discrimination is most prominent at times of worry. When normal lives are threatened, people tend to attack what they see as abnormal. In 1941, normal American life was threatened by the supposedly abnormal group of people who had only recently been allowed in the United States: the Japanese. Grant Ichikawa understood what it was like to have one’s loyalty completely disregarded without any logical basis. He considered himself an American, and no words could properly express his disappointment when the government mandated that he be interned. Despite the distrust and rampant discrimination that existed, Ichikawa decided to prove he was not an “enemy-alien”, as he had been classified, by joining the United States Military Intelligence Service. He was not alone; 800 Japanese-Americans gave their lives to prove their loyalty to America. Despite the intense discrimination Ichikawa felt, he followed the orders of the United States army with the hope that they would believe his loyalty rested in America. It is truly admirable the dedication that people like Ichikawa put forth, despite the circumstances.

In 2015, much has changed. Japanese-Americans are no longer in internment camps. However, America continues to fail minorities. People who walk into airports with turbans are automatically scrutinized after 2001 and given the current war with Iraq and Syria against the Islamic State. America has continued its discriminatory tactics, just moving onto a new target. The experiences from Japanese-Americans that have been re-iterated again and again need to be understood, not just heard. It is “We the people” that are protected by the Constitution, not “We the people except that minority that may be affiliated with another country because of their skin color.” There are no exceptions to equality.

The American flag strangled Japanese-Americans and barred them from freedom after the attack on Pearl Harbor because of fear. It was an illogical reaction to an illogical train of thought. The damage has been done, and the hope must be that the cycle will be broken, and that skin color will no longer be a determination of whether one person is equal to another.
The Discovery of a Hero: Finding My Great-Uncle in a Textbook

Imagine my disbelief when I came across the story of my great-uncle Henry Kondo, a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, in the textbook that I was using to teach U.S. history to undergraduates at the University of California, Riverside. The WWII chapter of the textbook included a *Los Angeles Times* article from November 1944, with the headline: “Gold Star Honors Nisei Killed in Action,” indicated that Private First Class Henry Kondo was the first Nisei soldier from Pasadena to be killed in action. The article began with a moving, yet chilling quote from a letter that Kondo sent to his family in which he emphatically states: “even unto death, we’ll show we’re Americans in every way.” The article also detailed a ceremony in which Kondo was posthumously awarded a gold star. The article lauded Kondo’s actions as noble, yet I realized that none of his family members would have been present for the prestigious honor since they would have been incarcerated at Gila River or out-of-state with other relatives.

In preparation for that week’s lecture, I knew that I had an amazing opportunity to use my great-uncle’s story to make the history of WWII more relatable to my students. There was only one problem. Despite being an aspiring historian, I admittedly knew very little about my great-uncle. I asked my aunt if she knew more about Uncle Henry. She brought out several photographs, along with a bundle of letters that Henry had sent to his sister (my Grandma Misa) while he was on duty in Europe. From a historian’s point-of-view, the letters create an archive that provides valuable insight into the experience of a Japanese American soldier who fought in the European theater. In one letter to Misa, dated August 23, 1944, Kondo writes: “I’m writing this letter in my foxhole—a hole 6 ft x 5 ft x 2 ft, my temporary home. The Krauts have been shelling this area well since we’ve been here... like the fellows say—if one [shell] doesn’t land in your hole, you’re O.K. If one does, you won’t know it.” While Kondo’s early letters are relatively lighthearted when he arrived in Europe, expressing a sense of awe at seeing the places that he had only read about in books, the content of the letters becomes more intense as he and the other members of the 442nd begin to experience heavy combat. Nonetheless, Kondo maintains a sense of optimism so not to worry his family.

While poring over the letters, it became a challenge for me to look at them objectively as historical documents. Instead, it was a very emotional experience to get to know my great-uncle through his letters.

I am honored to say that I am Henry Kondo’s great-niece and am proud to have been able to share his story with my students to make the history of WWII more relatable. While it was a serendipitous coincidence to find my great-uncle in a history textbook, it prompted me to learn more about the bravery and great sacrifice of the Nisei soldiers in a very personal way. This is evidence that the Go For Broke National Education Center is successfully advancing its mission to share the story of the WWII Japanese American soldier.
Wataru Kohashi was born on September 9, 1922 in Keaukaha, Hawaii, but grew up in Shinmachi in Hilo, Hawaii as the ninth of ten children. Kohashi enlisted in the US Army in March of 1943, at the age of twenty. With Hawaii under Martial Law, Kohashi said it was a way to get off the islands. He became a member of Company F, in the Second Battalion, of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team. Having served for two years, eight months, and seven days, Kohashi was awarded the EAME Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Distinguished Unit Badge, and two Purple Hearts. He was also recognized for his part in rescuing The Lost Battalion through a fierce battle against German forces in France.

Kohashi’s first day of battle set the course of his life and shaped who he is today. In June of 1944, the initial combat alignment consisted of Companies F and E leading with G providing support. Following the Colonel’s orders, Companies G and F switched positions. All moved through Italy’s open fields and cultivated farmland by an open interval formation.

With no word from the E and G, Company F moved faster to catch up in order to provide support. They assumed they were far behind, but were actually ahead. The company started to run, stopping only when they made visual contact with German soldiers near a tank three hundred yards ahead. Both sides were equally surprised to see the other and the fighting ensued.

Kohashi and Kiyoshi Muranaga were responsible for the mortar. Both knew killing the tank was impossible, alternatively they aimed around it to delay the crew from getting in. By nature, mortars take about fifteen seconds to hit its target. The first round missed, the second hit near the tank, and the third jammed. The fourth round was fired, but the tank shot its only round at Kohashi and Muranaga. The German shell exploded in front of them, leaving Kohashi with minor injuries, but blinded by the spray. Next to him, Muranaga struggled to get up, but Kohashi held him down. The German soldiers retreated, but sadly, Muranaga bled out and passed away in Kohashi’s arms. Muranaga was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and later the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Despite the horrific experience, Kohashi bravely returned to battle the same day. He was lucky to walk away with his life and was honorably discharged on November 24, 1945. Kohashi went home to Hilo, worked for Hilo Electric Light Company for 37 years, and married Kikuye Shiraki on November 22, 1952. They had four children and later, six grandchildren. Seventy years after being discharged, Kohashi can clearly picture Kiyoshi Muranaga’s face and describe his experience in vivid detail. Today at the age of 92, Wataru Kohashi does yard work every day and is still going strong. This man is a soldier, an inspiration, and I am proud to call him my grandfather.
My extracurricular interests include contemporary dance and equestrian sports. My academic interests are largely focused on American and world history. I entered this contest as a way to test my skills both as a writer as well as a historian, and the Nisei soldier story greatly inspires me by allowing me to gain a greater appreciation for life and our constitution.

Joseph Ichiuji, an American Hero

Throughout World War II, over sixteen million American servicemen and women fought to defend America’s freedom. Despite the glory bestowed upon most WWII veterans, one aspect of the war goes unacknowledged by many Americans today. The wartime contributions made by thousands of Japanese-Americans cannot be underestimated. One man’s story in particular exhibits the tremendous bravery and loyalty expressed by many soldiers during WWII. In a time when Japanese-Americans were widely persecuted for their ethnicity, Joseph Ichiuji endured incarceration with clarity and dignity, proving himself a true American hero.

Joseph Ichiuji and his family were moved from their home in Reedley, California to Arizona’s Posten Relocation Camp in August 1942. During his time there, Ichiuji maintained optimism and hope. He compared Posten to the military, stating that both followed similar procedures and routines. However, Ichiuji’s experience in the camp was one of great uncertainty, notably for his family; the camp tore a part any sense of familiarity. Roles were altered, but even amidst chaos, some were able to find liberation. Throughout his early wartime experiences, Ichiuji’s most meaningful attribute was his optimism. As the war progressed, Ichiuji continued to learn and became stronger.

In February 1943, Ichiuji volunteered to join America’s 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This courageous decision allowed Ichiuji to leave Posten and serve his country overseas in Italy, France, and Germany. During Ichiuji’s time abroad, he found himself present during the liberation of Dachau’s sub camps. In the time since the event, Ichiuji demonstrated the rare and noble capability of analyzing the war and his personal experience from an impartial perspective. After witnessing racial prejudice in both America and Germany, and incarceration in his own country, Ichiuji deserves our respect for his acceptance of the past, along with his ability to continue life unscathed. Ichiuji welcomed America’s recognition of her mistakes, and lived the rest of his life as a proud American veteran.

The maturity and optimism with which Ichiuji handled wartime are, in my personal opinion, the most meaningful elements of his WWII experience. Ichiuji consistently demonstrated a rare lucidity in the midst of trials. I respect his decision to join the 442nd; Ichiuji understood that in order to improve his situation, it was necessary to take action. His maturity is incredibly meaningful for all Americans today. Ichiuji was not resentful after the war, and he demonstrated an admirable acknowledgement of the past, while selflessly using his experiences to improve the future of America. Every American citizen should strive to model the characteristics exhibited by Joseph Ichiuji.

Despite the dangers and risks of being a Japanese-American serviceman during WWII, Ichiuji managed to put aside his country’s wrongdoings and serve his nation with the utmost loyalty. The struggles and trials Ichiuji underwent are immeasurable, yet this brave American was still able to eliminate any resentment and used his personal experience to better the lives of others. Although Joseph Ichiuji is just one of America’s many Japanese-American heroes, his story deserves our attention and reverence.
Teddy Powers
Canyon High School – Anaheim, CA
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

I enjoy playing and watching basketball, hanging out with my friends, traveling, and eating. I entered the contest to learn and share about my great-great-uncle Harry Sasaki who served in the 442nd. The Nisei story inspires me to stay true to who I truly am and persevere through hard times no matter how bad it gets.

Harry Sasaki was a highly decorated sergeant of the 442nd company G, receiving the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, and Oak Leaf Cluster among other prominent awards. But what made my great-great-uncle Harry heroic wasn’t just his military accolades, but rather his story that’s not only motivational to me, but also helps me appreciate my own Japanese American heritage.

Harry married Lucille Forrester, a Caucasian woman from Pomona, in 1939. They married in Mexico since it was illegal, due to California’s anti-miscegenation laws, for a person of Japanese ancestry to marry a Caucasian. In 1937, they had a daughter named Merle.

After the signing of Executive Order 9066, Harry and his daughter Merle, since she was at least 1/16th Japanese, were forced to relocate to the Gila River internment camp, while his wife was free to stay at their home in Pomona. Fortunately, Lucille decided not to break up her family and follow her husband and daughter. However, shortly after relocating, Merle became ill and special permission was granted to the family that only allowed Lucille and Merle to depart from Gila River, leaving Harry by himself.

Harry had every right to hate the government that split up his family and stripped him of his civil liberties given to him as an American citizen. But instead of harboring resentment against the U.S., he felt the need to join fellow Japanese Americans, risking his life, and enlist in the 442nd. This helps me appreciate my own generation as a Japanese American knowing that my great-great-uncle Harry fought to give me and other Japanese Americans a better life today.

He not only risked his life on the battlefield as a soldier in the 442nd unit, earning the Combat Infantryman Badge, but also served in the Military Intelligence Service. This showcased his extreme dedication and perseverance in the army, not only serving on the battlefield, but also using his skills to collect, analyze, and interpret information from the Japanese. Also showing his and other’s loyalty to the US. This trait of perseverance seems to be one that I admire very much and try to replicate throughout my life today. It also seems to encompass the 442nd’s motto, “Go for Broke”. It means he gave it his all to help the US during the war in order to accomplish the goal of helping his own and other future generations of Japanese Americans by creating a better image for them.

When I heard this story about my great-great-uncle, I was amazed by how dedicated and selfless he was. He chose to help defend a country that wrongfully split his family apart, in order to create a better future for other Japanese Americans. He did this just to show that he and other fellow Japanese Americans were loyal to the US, even though Japan was fighting on the other side during the war. He did this with such a selfless heart, thinking of future generations with his daughter or even my generation to create a new and acceptable image for Japanese Americans, even if it came at the cost of his life in the war. I am half Caucasian and half Asian, but due to my great-great-uncle Harry’s and the other members of the 442nd, I now see how being Japanese American serves a place in American history.
Japanese Americans during WWII: The Model Citizens of our Nation

World War II brought the United States to reach its full potential. It motivated women to climb the ladders of society, reinvigorated a sense of importance among black soldiers, and opened the path for America to become a world power. One of the storylines that often flies under the radar, however, is the incredible testimony of the Japanese American soldiers and how they redefined our perception of a model US citizen. In the midst of betrayal and tribulation, the Japanese Americans held their heads high and fought to prove their loyalty, serving as the ultimate pattern that every citizen should learn to follow today.

When a man becomes the victim of betrayal and doubt, there are three types of responses. The first is vengeance; the man seeks revenge for being wronged. The second is passivity; the man does nothing to improve his situation. The third, also the rarest, is arousal; this man uses his position as an underdog to prove himself and show why he was wrongly condemned. Rather than feeling pitiful or angry, such a man swallows his pride, uses every hardship as motivation, and sets out on a mission to prove his value. Such a response was that of the Japanese American soldiers during WWII.

Although sent to relocation camps, disrespected by their fellow citizens, doubted by the government, unwelcome at home, and betrayed by the country of proclaimed “equal rights”, the Japanese Americans did not give in. They had a tough mentality, the heart of a warrior, and most importantly, a loyalty that was more durable than any other group of Americans. These soldiers sacrificed their lives and futures to prove a point, and that’s exactly what they accomplished. The 100th Battalion displayed bravery and a level of intensity that could not be matched by other troops. Japanese Americans not only made an impression on the world, but also proved that America was wrong from the start for doubting them.

The Japanese American WWII experience is definitely an uplifting, feel good story worthy of being shared, but there is much more to it. Their dedication and devotion during the war is a testimony of what a true citizen is. A genuine citizen does not give up on his country when the times are difficult or when he suffers from misunderstanding and persecution. As citizens of the US, it is our responsibility to offer unwavering loyalty to the country. If at times we become victims of mistreatment or feel unappreciated by the nation, we should never turn our backs on the country. It is common today for unsatisfied citizens to condemn, blame, and revolt against their nation. Such a response only issues forth further injustice and discontent, leaving those citizens deprived of the respect they demand. Instead, we need to follow the footsteps of our dear Japanese American soldiers, who overcame adversity and eventually earned the respect they deserved through persistence, forgiveness, and loyalty.
Wisdom and Advice for our Student Winners

Our Hanashi Oral History Archives is the world’s largest collection of Japanese American World War II veterans’ life histories. Our volunteers have conducted nearly 1,200 interviews since 1998. At the end of each session, our interviewer asks the veteran to give personal advice to future generations. Here are some of the powerful quotes that they have spoken over the years.

*****

I’m not telling you, you gotta do this. I’m not telling you, you gotta follow a certain principle. I got to tell you, you have to follow your own heart. You have to find out for yourself what you have to do to make this world smoother and rounder.

Masaji Inoshita

In life, you see all kinds of adversity, but you need to keep your eyes open for opportunities to be able to advance different things. And you have to take some chances. And being negative doesn’t help. You have to be always positive about things.

Osamu Inashima

Number one, when you commit yourself to something you follow through to the end. If you’re going after a certain thing, go after it.

Edwin Higashino

Prejudice still exists no matter where you are because society goes that way...but don’t take it so seriously that it deters you from doing the things that you want to do.

Casey Kawamoto

Americans, you are free. So guard the freedom as much as you can through being a Good Samaritan. And teach your children and their children what we went through. Keep on going so that this world can be one.

Larry Kodama

I firmly believe then, now, and in the future, you have to stand up and fight for what you think is right. Because if you don’t, who is? The next guy? Well, maybe you’re the next guy. And of course fighting means in different ways, not necessarily going into the military or going to war. There’s all kinds of ways of fighting.

Harry Fukuhara

I’ve always felt that you can’t wait for something to happen; you must make it happen yourself.

Rudy Tokiwa

They’re going to be living in a different generation from us, entirely different. All I can say is that they should live abundant life. Be good to everyone and don’t hate anybody, but live a nice, clean life.

Shiyo Doiwchi

I think everybody has to make their own choices, and I think that’s the way it ought to be. But whatever you believe in, exercise those beliefs and have compassion and love, and we’ll be on the right track.

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