Go For Broke National Education Center is dedicated to providing educational opportunities on the World War II Japanese American veteran story. Our student essay and poetry contest gives students around the world the chance not only to learn more about that story, but to connect with it on a personal level. By engaging students with this history, we ensure the next generation remembers the courage and sacrifice of the World War II American veterans of Japanese ancestry.

This year’s prompts included:
(1) The Japanese American WWII veteran experience is still relevant to our society today. Explore one of the ways this is true.

(2) How will you carry on the legacy of the Japanese American WWII veterans?

(3) This year is the 75th anniversary of the Korematsu v. United States and Ex Parte Endo cases where the courts upheld the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. Analyze what the Japanese American WWII experience can teach us about the Constitution, rights and responsibilities.

CONTEST JUDGES
The 2019 High School and College Essay and Poetry Contest would not be successful without the generous support from our contest judges. We thank each judge for their time and expertise!

Karen Ageno
Hiromi Aoyama
Mary Jane Fujimori
Philip Hirose

Elizabeth Kato
Emiko Kranz
Kent Marume
Kay Takano

Jo Ann Takemoto
Staci Toji
Nancy Sagawa
Linton Yee

CONTEST PRESENTING SPONSOR

CONTEST SUPPORTING SPONSORS
Ken and June Shimabukuro
Anonymous donor in memory of WWII veteran Masao “Mas” Takahashi
2019 High School & College/University Essay, Performance & Visual Arts Contest

Honorees

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 generosity of two Supporting Sponsors: Ken and June Shimabukuro, and an anonymous donor in memory of Masao “Mas” 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.

Masao 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 July 2015, but will forever remain deep in our hearts.
Congratulations to all 2019 Student Contest Winners!

ESSAY

HIGH SCHOOL

First Place: Kara Chu
Stand Tall and Speak Up

Second Place: Joshua Lee
The Unfinished Work of the Nation

Third Place: JoAnne Migaki
Carrying On a Legacy

COLLEGE

First Place: Miya Eberlein
History for a Free Future

Second Place: Kai Kato
Stoves, Courts, and Constitutional Failure

Third Place: Kazuhiro Edeza
Through Solidarity, We Will Persevere

POETRY

HIGH SCHOOL

First Place: Ashley Tanaka
The Japanese American Legacy, Told Through Haikus

Second Place: Nicole Tanaka
One Legacy

Third Place: Arielle Stern
Between Our Worlds

COLLEGE

First Place: Alan Hino
Honoring a Promise

Second Place: Sophia Ichida Eberlein
Heirlooms

Third Place: Caryn Iwakiri
It’s Not Over Yet
Stand Tall and Speak Up

Go for Broke!

I’ve heard this saying throughout my life. I’ve heard it in videos and oral histories. I’ve heard it at community events reminding us to never forget. I’ve heard it from the stoic World War II veterans that look like me. These Japanese-American soldiers had to “win big” on two fronts: the war abroad and racial prejudice at home that forced their families into internment camps. “Go for Broke” gave courage to the Nisei fighting for our country, and now it gives me the courage to stand up for our aging WWII veterans.

“The Japanese-Americans wanted to be in the camps,” my classmate tells me. “The government was keeping them safe.” I feel sick when I hear that. “No!” I say loudly as I face him. My classmates turn to me, their eyes like spotlights on a Broadway stage. And I tell them a story about fear and captivity, but also a story about sacrifice and bravery. I may not feel strong or brave, but if our Nisei taught me anything, it’s that I can “Go for Broke.” Because of them, I have learned to stand tall and speak up.

At the LA premiere of Stacey Hayashi’s movie Go For Broke, I was one of the few teenagers there. I befriended WWII veteran Frank Wada, and we talked for a long time about his fascinating life. Last month, I was so honored to receive a binder in the mail, handmade by him and personalized for me, detailing his experience in the 442nd. It is a treasure chest of stories, photographs, and facts I had never heard before. I am excited to share his story with local community organizations.

I have seen the wall of negative propaganda at the Defining Courage exhibit in the Go For Broke National Education Center. Veteran Yosh Nakamura discussed the impacts on the WWII Voices of Legacy panel. He said to us, “The worst thing that happened to us was the propaganda. Newspapers painted us with the same brush that they painted the Japanese Imperial forces with. The same thing is happening today.”

Today, we cannot allow fear to dictate our actions and force innocent civilians into submission without due process. “Go for Broke” makes us Japanese-Americans responsible to stand up for those who are facing similar discrimination faced by our families during WWII. We must act if we see history being repeated, and we must stand up for justice as JAs recently did against Latino immigrant children being detained at Fort Sill and in the continuous fight for civil rights for all. Today and everyday, we must never forget the sacrifices made by our brave soldiers and veterans, and we must honor them by fighting for what is right. I want everyone to see all our Japanese-American WWII veterans through me. From volunteering at the GFB Monument Anniversary to speaking at the VFW Memorial Day Service, I will carry on their legacy and speak out against injustice and prejudice because never again is NOW.
Second Place: JOSHUA LEE
Punahou School; Honolulu, HI
Grade 10 (2018-2019 academic year)

We come here on the shoulders of our ancestors. Joshua wrote his essay as a tribute to his grandmother’s brother, who fought in the 442nd and was a humble family and community leader, as well as to recognize the prejudice Japanese-Americans faced during WWII. Joshua’s interest in understanding the Japanese American WWII story began after he started taking a Japanese language course at school and quickly became passionate about Japanese religions, culture, and food.

The Unfinished Work of the Nation

I was raised in a standard, modest household—with love, promise, and dreams—in the United States. Like most Americans, I attended public school, saying the Pledge of Allegiance every morning and enthusiastically singing patriotic songs with my classmates. But this was not enough for 120,000 Japanese Americans.

Some 80 years before me, Fred Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo grew up similarly in the United States. However, after the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, they were subject to President Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, which authorized the mass evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans into remote, desolate camps surrounded by barbed wire and soldiers in gun towers. Korematsu and Endo sought to overturn the government’s action with cases that reached the US Supreme Court. They lost—this year is the 75th anniversary of the Korematsu and Endo cases where the courts upheld the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. But failure did not mean defeat.

Although the Court protected 9066, they acknowledged that Japanese Americans like Endo, who were “concededly loyal,” should be released from detention. Decades later, in Trump v. Hawaii (2018), Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts wrote: “Korematsu was gravely wrong the day it was decided… and has no place in law under the Constitution.” Korematsu and Endo argued to the Court that detaining individuals because of their disfavored race, religion or other identity on a premise of national security is unconstitutional. Even though the Court continues to believe that anyone can be arrested in the case of national security, the Korematsu-Endo argument is now honored by thoughtful American communities.

Familiarity with the Korematsu-Endo cases is a sobering, but inspiring way of understanding the Constitution, rights, and responsibilities as a minority. Those who see the cases, see justice. But those who understand the cases, recognize the continuing need to fight for justice.

Nothing can stop people’s right to equality. Values of courage, compassion, and perseverance are bigger than any one case. Justice has no single point of success or failure. Korematsu and Endo were principal, but not all-encompassing, protests. Instead, concerned Americans pressed beyond the two cases. They gathered together to redress the WWII wrongs, and spurred federal legislation authorizing compensation for Japanese Americans in 1988 as well as an apology issued by President Bill Clinton in 1993.

The fight must continue. There are so many examples of bullying marginalized groups in America that it is difficult to expect virtue from majority power. For those who care about this country, it is necessary to fight against tyranny, rather than just turn aside. In the face of injustice, people should look to Korematsu and Endo as examples when they ask themselves “What can I do? I am only one person.” They have taught me that ensuring and extending basic Constitutional rights to everyone remains a civic need. Thank you, Mr. Korematsu. Thank you, Ms. Endo.
Third Place: JOANNE MIGAKI  
Denver School of Science and Technology: College View High School; Denver, CO  
Grade 12 (2018-2019 academic year)

JoAnne is a yonsei who will be attending the University of Denver to study marketing and international business. In her spare time, she enjoys bullet journaling, skiing, and spending time with her family. JoAnne decided to honor her grandfather, Ted Migaki, by entering the contest to share his legacy. The Nisei soldier story is an integral part of who she is because it has taught her numerous lessons about how to remain determined in the face of uncertainty.

Carrying On a Legacy

When my grandfather, Ted Tadao Migaki, unfortunately passed away seven years ago, he took with him valuable stories forged from memories of a difficult period in American history: World War II. At the time, I was merely eleven-years-old and had yet to grasp the harsh reality my grandfather, great-aunt, and great-grandparents had faced in the 1940’s. Fortunately, my growing curiosity was encouraged by Chibi No Gakko, a weekend school that taught Japanese American children about their heritage and culture; thanks to their efforts, I became educated about an incredibly significant portion of history that has greatly impacted my generation. Taking the time to investigate my rich family history, I learned about how my family was forced to move from Portland, Oregon to Camp Minidoka and how my grandfather joined the army to serve his country.

As a high school graduate, I was greatly disappointed with the lack of representation concerning the Japanese internment camps during my AP US History classes. Although my school requires students to spend their entire junior year learning about American history, only thirty minutes were dedicated to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II. When my teachers recommended that I present at a whole school assembly, I realized that it was the perfect opportunity to share the legacy of my grandfather and all of the brave Japanese Americans who honorably fought for a country that had turned its back on them. Given the platform to educate my peers on a historical event that is incredibly meaningful to me, I received a positive but shocked response. Unfortunately, many were unaware of Japanese American history and the sacrifices veterans made to protect the United States.

By presenting in front of the entire school, I realized the importance of sharing a topic that I felt incredibly passionate about. Considering the relevance of the veterans’ story in today’s society, I realized I can preserve their legacy by using it to connect with current world issues. Concerning America’s present immigration issues and China’s imprisonment of its own Muslim citizens, using Japanese American veterans’ stories of proving their worth to a country that doubted them, their legacy could continue as an inspiring message of hope and perseverance.

As I prepare to attend the University of Denver this fall, I have realized the importance of continuing to educate not only myself, but others, about the heroic feats of the Japanese American World War II veterans. By upholding the motto of the 442nd Infantry Regiment to “Go For Broke,” I hope to represent the veterans’ mission by taking a stand and not allowing what happened to the Japanese Americans happen to anyone else. With immense pride in my heritage and culture, I hope to become a role model by emulating the determination and courage displayed by the Japanese American veterans who paved the way for future generations.
First Place: MIYA ICHIDA EBERLEIN
University of California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, CA
College 4th year (2018-2019 academic year)

Miya graduated in June 2019 from UCLA with a degree in Molecular Biology. She is currently working as a research assistant at Cedars Sinai, and evaluating the effect that virtual reality can have for patient pain management. Her favorite extracurricular activity at UCLA was paddling for the UCLA Dragon Boat team. Miya entered this contest to honor the Japanese-American World War II veterans that fought so valiantly for the United States.

History for a Free Future

There it was. A single, short line printed as an afterthought in my massive American History textbook: “Over 100,000 Japanese Americans were relocated during World War II.” The sentence ended as soon as it began. I scanned the page, looking for anything further on the topic. I flipped to the next page. And the next. Surely there was more to say! But nothing. That was the extent of it.

However, growing up as a Japanese American, I knew that the small acknowledgement in my history book did not even begin to cover the importance of the Japanese American experience during World War II. My mother took us to Manzanar as children, the dirt desert ground cracked from drought still etched in my mind. It was there that I first learned that “camp” did not always mean “summer camp.” My siblings and I grew up quickly that day, but for an important reason. If we do not learn from history, it is sure to be repeated.

Closer to home, we frequented the Japanese American National Museum and learned more about the patriotism and bravery of the 442nd Infantry Regiment. For years, we came back to see the exhibit, viewing photographs from the camps and hearing veterans tell their stories. So when I read that single, small line in my History textbook (that had more to say about the growth of squash than the interment of an entire population based solely on their ancestry) I could not carry on silently. I actively questioned why so little space was dedicated to telling the story of the brave Japanese American soldiers who risked their lives for a country that pried them away from their prior lives at home. My teacher agreed with the lack of acknowledgement and let me lead a lesson that spanned far more than nine words.

My classmates were astonished to hear of the loyalty that the soldiers of the 442nd Infantry had, fighting for a country that had placed them and their families behind barbed wire fences. It was patriotism unlike anything anyone had ever heard before: men fighting to uphold ideals of freedom while they themselves had none.

Now more than ever, it is vital to learn and teach about the history of the Japanese Internment so that the same usurpation of rights is not repeated. With an influx of unaccompanied children crossing the border, Ft. Sill is planned to be reopened to house 1,400 migrant children. In 1942, it was used as a concentration camp, holding 700 Japanese American men. The parallels are jarring. We must draw from the strength and resilience demonstrated by the Japanese American World War II Veterans. When protesting, asking for policy changes, and petitioning our lawmakers to uphold ideals of freedom, we too can “go for broke!” We must carry on the legacy of the Japanese American Veterans by learning about their history, and teaching it too.

After all, if we do not learn from history, it is sure to be repeated.
Second Place: KAI KATO
Stanford University; Stanford, CA
College 1st year (2018-2019 academic year)

Kai is intending on majoring in Political Science and minoring in Computer Science. He is also deeply interested in Japan-US and other international relations, being involved with Model United Nations and the Stanford Japan Exchange Conference at school. Kai was inspired to enter the contest because he recognizes the selfless sacrifices made by Nisei soldiers and hopes to keep their memory and tradition alive.

Stoves, Courts, and Constitutional Failure

A single potbelly stove. That's what my grandfather remembers to be the only thing in his barrack at Heart Mountain when he first arrived. As unsightly as it may have been, that stove would give the dozens of people in his overcrowded room warmth that the inadequately insulated walls could not provide. That stove is emblematic of how he unwillingly left behind all the comforts of his home to be confined within barbed-wire fences in conditions worse than many prisons. My grandfather, an American citizen, was just one of the 80,000 people denied due process and basic rights for the sake of “military necessity.” With E.O. 9066, FDR had uprooted the life of this young boy and so many others.

While my grandfather spent his days in the camp, a legal battle waged on halfway across the country. Fred Korematsu’s Supreme Court case had the potential to rectify the injustice of internment. Yet, in one fell swoop, Korematsu v. United States and Ex Parte Endo upheld the constitutionality of FDR’s E.O. They had decided that Japanese-American internment was justified by the Constitution, even though the rights thought to be guaranteed under the same document had been stripped away for many Japanese-Americans. But what the government had failed to recognize is that by forsaking the rights of the Japanese-Americans, they had failed the Constitution.

The rights afforded by the Constitution and its amendments are meant to guarantee that Americans will have freedom from encroachment on their personal dignity by all tyrants, governments, and others alike. The founding fathers began with the Bill of Rights. Generations later, changes like the 14th amendment expanded and reinforced the dignity that all Americans deserve. America, built on notions of freedom, possesses an evolving Constitution that ensures those freedoms.

Or so we thought.

The Japanese-American WWII experience is proof of the failings of the institutions meant to uphold the Constitution. Today, Korematsu has been relegated to the disgraceful collection of “anti-canon” Supreme Court decisions, joining the ranks of the infamous Dred Scott v. Sandford and Plessy v. Ferguson decisions. Modern common judicial thought recognizes that Korematsu was wrongly decided. Falling prey to mass hysteria and racist fears, the courts had failed to protect the inherent human dignities of Americans that the Constitution intended to preserve. To not fail again, our nation must prioritize the rights and dignities of people first - even amidst hysteria and fear.

In support of upholding the E.O., Justice Black wrote that, “Citizenship has its responsibilities… and, in time of war, the burden is always heavier.” To him, part of civic responsibility is to simply shoulder ‘burdens’ like internment. However, I posit that it is not our civic responsibility to lie down in the face of injustice, but to stand up for our inherent human dignity. My grandfather and his potbelly stove is a testament to how our institutions failed to protect the people as the Constitution intended. By understanding this history, we can make sure to never again repeat such failure.
Third Place: KAZUHIRO EDEZA  
Golden West College; Huntington Beach, CA  
College 2nd year (2018-2019 academic year)

Kazuhiro Edeza is a student at SF State, studying history and Asian American Studies. In his free time, he dedicates himself to community service and organizing the future Nikkei Student Union on his campus. Although he is a shin-Nisei, Kazuhiro feels a strong connection with the Japanese American (JA) WWII experience. While learning more about the community’s story, he found out about our Nisei soldiers and has considered them to be his heroes ever since. Kazuhiro entered the GFBNEC Essay Contest in hopes to share the lessons that can be learned from the JA WWII experience and continue the preservation of said story.

Through Solidarity, We Will Persevere

The forefathers of this country promoted a life of freedom on the basis that all men are permitted to uphold their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, these values were thrown aside on February 19th, 1942, when Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. With the power of this document, the United States proceeded to incarcerate 120,000 Japanese Americans (JAs). These unforgivable events that unfolded during the 1940s show a darker side of the American establishment; however, as we look back at these events, it also sheds a light on lessons revolving around the Constitution, our rights, and the responsibility we carry to uphold them.

The harshest lesson that can be derived from the incarceration of the JA community is that the Constitution is only as powerful as the American people make it. One of the contributing factors to the incarceration of the JA community was the lack of pushback from the American public. The JA population within the exclusion zone should’ve been protected by the fifth amendment; unfortunately, since the public did not protest the exclusion orders, the denial of due process was overlooked. This can be compared to the unjust imprisonment of migrants today, who are incarcerated without a fair trial. The Constitution supposedly protects said rights, but if the majority of the public does not care to give value to the piece of legislation that grants those rights, then the Constitution is nothing more than an old piece of paper.

The events that occurred during WWII also reveal how easy it is for our nation to single out a minority group. What the JA community was during WWII is now the African American, Chicanx/Latinx American, and Islamic American communities today. This is especially true because, to this day, there is still no legislation that overturns EO 9066. As a result, if a military zone were to be established and there is no one willing to stand up for the targeted group, then their rights in this nation will be erased just as easily as rights of JA were once erased decades ago.

That being said, it is our responsibility as American citizens to uphold the Constitution. The JA veterans of WWII did so through military service, but there are plenty of other ways to do so in our daily lives. Individuals such as Frank Emi, Yuri Kochiyama, and Herbert Nicholson believed in the Constitution for what it stood for and made it their responsibility to uphold the rights it entails simply by speaking up against the establishment. Today, we may draw inspiration from these individuals and learn from their actions to not only uphold the Constitution, but to also protect those that may not be as fortunate to be given those rights.

The injustices committed against the Japanese American community during WWII were dishonorable, to say the least. However, it is through this dark history that we may work towards a brighter future as we understand the lessons this past presents to us.
High School Poetry Winners

First Place: ASHLEY TANAKA
Gabrielino High School; San Gabriel, CA
Grade 11 (2018-2019 academic year)

Ashley Tanaka a third generation Japanese American. She has special interest in visual and performing arts, poetry, and sciences. Her main reason for entering this contest is to honor of Mari Nitake, a Nisei who stayed at the Tule Lake Internment Camp and who also looked after her father when he was young. The story of the Nisei soldiers inspires her because even when looked down upon, they rose and still put forth their best efforts in protecting their country, eventually becoming the most decorated military regiment.

The Japanese American Legacy, Told Through Haikus

Prejudice against
Japanese Americans
Did not hold them back.

They proudly showed us
The American spirit
In many cases.

When placed in camps,
For their color, not their crimes,
They stayed by our side.

They fought in the war,
Triumphed the toughest battles,
Showing loyalty.

It is no wonder
That they are amongst the most
Decorated groups.

Race should not deny
American citizens
Of natural rights.

By risking their lives
And helping their country fight,
They taught this lesson.

When America
Chooses to take away rights,
Citizens must fight.

They must remind us
When there are injustices
So we’ll change our ways.

A Japanese phrase
Often said is ganbatte.
“Don’t ever give up.”

They took this to heart
And showed their native country
Racism is wrong.

We must continue,
Against all opposition,
To be dutiful.

And protect our rights
When denied by the U.S.
To make a difference.

That is the spirit
Embodied by citizens
Who fight for justice.
Second Place: NICOLE TANAKA
Gabrielino High School; San Gabriel, CA
Grade 11 (2018-2019 academic year)

Nicole is passionate about filmmaking, art, and learning about the Japanese American legacy. The resilience, determination, and strength of the Nisei soldier story inspires her to stand up for what she believes in and makes her proud of who she is today. She entered this contest to express her respect for the Nisei soldiers in an artistic way.

One Legacy

It's in this story we manifest
Pay respect to those suppressed
One look speaks for us all, a silent cell wall
Through museums, books, and pictures to look
It reminds us of the strength that it took
Through writing and speaking our minds
It reminds us of our faith in mankind
Their eyes are an escapade
Of a journey they displayed
What it means to be a fighter
Courage, pride, to Go for Broke
To find your worth in just one stroke
Between Our Worlds

He sat next to me
At his wobbly wooden desk
Making dark grey marks on his white paper
And I did too.
He drew shapes with his small, unblemished hands
Curves and lines forming dog and cat and toy
And I did too.
He took twos and turned them into fours
Fives into tens
And I did too.
He smiled with a missing tooth on one side
And shook the earth when he laughed
And I did too.

Until I had to go
And he got to stay
Even though we spoke the same words
And sat at identical wobbly wooden desks.
I could see him now,
Only through the sharp metal wire that came between our worlds.
Wire that separated people with sandy hair and milky skin
From people with charcoal hair and tan skin,
Even though we had the same toothless smiles
And we laughed the same earth-shaking laughs.

In 2019, I had to go because my parents crossed the border to provide a better life for me
And he got to stay because he already had it,
I had to go months without a toothbrush and a change of clothes because my parents wanted a better life for me
And he got to take hot showers every night because he already had it,
I had to watch my mother and father being ripped from our home because they wanted a better life for me
And he got to sit with his parents as they read him bedtime stories because he already had it.

I could see him now,
Only through the sharp metal wire that came between our worlds.
Wire that separated people who called the United States of America home
From people who called the United States of America home.
Watashi wa Amerika jin desu.
Soy estadounidense.
I am American.
First Place: ALAN HINO
San Diego State University; San Diego, CA
College: 2nd year graduate (2018-2019 academic year)

Alan Hino is a 31 year old Learning Design and Technology graduate student at San Diego State University, where he plans to graduate in May 2020. He entered this contest because he wanted to pay tribute to his great Uncles Hobi Fujiu and Tom Shishido, who served in the 442nd Anti-Tank Company and the MIS, respectively. Their lives and stories serve as a constant reminder and inspiration for Alan to be a better man for his community, and more importantly, his family. In addition, Alan seeks to preserve not only his uncles’ legacies, but the legacies of the other Nisei soldiers by volunteering as a Torchbearer for the Go For Broke National Education Center.

Honoring a Promise

Growing up a Yonsei
made me blissfully unaware of what my ancestors endured during the War.
No one wanted to talk about it
almost as if it never existed.

Things were spoken about in hushed tones and secretive glances
like parents spelling out taboo words in front of children.
My uncle passed away and stories of his heroic actions were reflected upon with reverence;
embarrassingly, I was completely ignorant about his past.

442nd, Anti-Tank Company, ‘Go For Broke’
floating in gliders and earning a Bronze Star.
I felt shame; embarrassment; and…
Anger.

Why hadn’t my family spoken up? Why was this ignored?
I could not forgive my family for neglecting a significant portion of my uncle’s life.
How could we celebrate his life properly, if we forget his sacrifices?
These questions led to answers;

Answers I was not prepared for…
Manzanar; Jerome; Rohwer.
I collected the jagged edges of my family’s history
spoken by uncles, aunts, and grandparents, piece by piece.

Answers were foggy, twisted, and distorted by time.
I was shaken by what I heard. I was so proud to be an American
Yet, I felt betrayed, confused, and angry.

More probing led to more questions…
...and another revelation.
Another uncle served in the MIS.
Military Intelligence Service.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
I made up for lost time
asked even more questions
found ways to help.
I made a promise to my aunt after she lost her husband.

I vowed to preserve his legacy;
I swore to educate future generations;
I promised to make my family proud.
How can I do this?

Telling the story of how Americans, regardless of terrible injustices, fought for their Country
using my voice for those who no longer can.
My uncle, a Nisei, was a hero.
My other uncle, another Nisei, is a hero.

My actions speak louder than my words.
I carry the burden of my Uncles’ sacrifices with me on a daily basis.
Their names, ID numbers,
and accomplishments are etched into my skin.

I bare the weight of the massive responsibility to share my Uncles’ stories
when people ask questions about my artwork; my tattoos.
I am privileged that I have this opportunity
to educate others about the Greatest Generation.

My uncles, and other men like them, sacrificed everything for us.
Their legacies live on through us, the Yonsei,
and eventually, the Gosei,
and I guard it with respect and dignity.

Building a bridge between generations and ensuring their stories live on
and never forgetting what our ancestors sacrificed for us.
All of them.
‘Okage Sama De.’

I hold these words close to my heart
and work so others do not have to realize the pain of another Manzanar ever again...
Reflecting on their stories, their accomplishments, and their lives…
Motivates me to reach for greater heights in my own life.

Compassion is contagious and I want to infect as many people as I can.
Strangers, friends, loved ones.
I made a promise years ago to carry on my Uncles’ legacies
and time has only strengthened that vow.

I owe it to them;
I owe everything that I am to what they and the rest of my family sacrificed.
I want to recognize those who were just doing the ‘right thing’
without seeking recognition, accolades, or praise.

I honor that promise
by being a torchbearer for future generations.
This is for you Hobi and Tom. Thank you,
for everything.
Second Place: SOPHIA ICHIDA EBERLEIN
University of California, Berkeley; Berkeley, CA
College 2nd year (2018-2019 academic year)

Sophia Ichida Eberlein is studying English and Film at UC Berkeley. She loves learning to play new instruments and enjoys making albums in her free time under the name “Sophiya Sweet.” She is also passionate about writing, illustrating, and publishing books. Sophia grew up visiting the Japanese American National Museum frequently, and feels that the story of the bravery and patriotism the Nisei soldiers demonstrated should be widely shared and celebrated for generations to come!

Heirlooms

Freedom does not come free
My Okasan says to me
As her Otosan once said to her
We pass down these words like heirlooms
So that we do not forget
That with mere days to pack all they owned
Buses forced Japanese Americans far from home
Swelltering sunshine scorching down
Families stripped from their businesses, lives, and towns
Okasan reminds me that because of our ancestry
A concentration camp is where we would be
So we must honor Ojiisan’s words
Freedom did not come Free

Though bound by barbed wire fences
Young Japanese Americans pledged their loyalty
Courageously coming to America’s defenses
Banding together as the 442nd Infantry
Fighting for a land that promised freedom
While they themselves had none
They proved to be passionately patriotic
Go for broke! wager everything until the war is won!

We must never forget their sacrifices
And carry on their legacy
Fighting for equal protection
Until everyone is free

Today as children grow up quickly at the border
Trapped between fences and a wall
We must take to the streets to protest
Still fighting for freedom for all

The 442nd Infantry fought
For a country they called home
Although it didn’t even recognize them
As one of its own

We can carry on their legacy
Of standing up for what is right
Go for broke! a spirit unbreakable
We will not give up the fight

I say to my Okasan
Freedom did not come free

But if we keep on fighting
One day

We will stop repeating history
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Caryn is a second-year al El Camino Community College. She is currently study  
Child Development to hopefully become a Speech-Language Pathologist. She recently  
has grown a passion to understand her culture and her roots where her grandparents  
and great grandparents came from. She hopes to never forget the past that she came  
and how this event has influenced our world today.

It’s Not Over Yet

Only now,  
I am proud  
To be who I am,  
Proud of the past I came from  
Of the people who lived  
and died before me and  
Of the measures that were fought.

I am proud to say I am  
Japanese.  
Proud to say that I come from  
A family that immigrated from Japan  
To live a new life and did just that.

I am proud to know that men fought hard  
And gave their allegiance to this country,  
Giving everything  
To a place that didn’t even trust their name.

Proud to say we fought for our rights  
Our rights as citizens of this country.  
We fought a battle even after the war.  
A battle to restart from scratch  
To gain trust  
To rebuild things that were taken  
To hear the hurtful words that people  
Placed on us,  
Words that maybe haven’t left us completely yet.  
But those things push us.  
I work hard knowing  
That’s what life once was for us.  
I push myself for my parents, parents  
That did everything to keep us here.  
If it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t have this life  
Where I am proud to be who I am.

How can I not be proud of who I am  
When there’s a whole month  
Dedicated to being me, Asian.  
But in all this, I hear a voice saying  
“When will it be me?”  
I hear someone else.  
I hear their whisper in the midst of the war inside, “when  
will this stop?”

I see a young girl  
Beautiful, with a colorful hijab  
As she flows down the street.  
 Barely seeing her feet and watching her  
Glide everywhere she goes.  
I see the boy who got pulled over for the color of his skin.  
Never understanding why he is already hated for just  
being himself.

Who are we to turn a blind eye  
To people who experienced what we once did.  
To let them walk through this life  
Wondering who is by their side.  
When only a group of people became  
Who society thinks they are.  
Was that not once us?

What are we to do?  
Sit around and make them  
Fight this war on their own  
Who are we  
To say we wouldn’t have wanted  
People by our side  
Someone to stop  
What had happened.  
Who are we to say we are strong
And not fight for people who
Experienced life just like us,
But maybe even worse.
Cowards now are we now?

There is still a war,
Who knows if it ever ended
A war that may not be with guns
But still violence
There is still a fight
There is still progress
That needs to happen
So let’s not stop now!
How can we stop there’s
So much that needs to be done.

Maybe our fight is coming to a close
But a new one is arising every day
We can’t stop fighting
We shall not watch others
Suffer from what we had suffered through
We will not sit and watch anymore.
I can not sit and watch anymore.

Maybe one day,
When there is no more hate
No more violence
No more divide between anyone
We will all be able to look back.
Every single beautiful boy and girl,
Man and women
Husband and wife
No matter what they wear on their head
Or even what they believe in their hearts
They will all be able to look back and say
“I am proud and to be who I am.”