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FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY

AN EDUCATOR'S RESOURCE GUIDE

WRITTEN BY EFTIHIA DANELLIS AND ANN DU

NATIONAL CENTER
 FOR THE PRESERVATION OF
DEMOCRACY

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY IS AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION THAT PROVIDES TOOLS FOR LIVING DEMOCRATICALLY IN A DIVERSE AMERICAN SOCIETY. PARTNERING WITH EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY-BASED MENTORS, THE NATIONAL CENTER WORKS TO INSPIRE YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE, INFORMED PARTICIPANTS IN SHAPING DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES.

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PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY
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WWW.NCDEMOCRACY.ORG

PRINTED IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY IS A PROGRAM OF THE

 JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
369 East First Street, Los Angeles, California 90063
Tel: 213.625.0414 • janm.org

THE NATIONAL CENTER'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ARE MADE POSSIBLE, IN PART, BY THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF MANABI AND SUMI HIRASAKI, THE BOEING COMPANY, THE ELAINE AND LAWRENCE KONO FOUNDATION, TOYOTA MOTOR SALES, U.S.A., INC., THE NATHAN CUMMINGS FOUNDATION, RIGHTEOUS PERSONS FOUNDATION, AND DWIGHT STUART YOUTH FOUNDATION.



TOYOTA

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PREFACE

A LETTER FROM UNITED STATES SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE

Dear Educator:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to introduce you to the work of the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy and its exhibition, *Fighting for Democracy*, which tells the vital story of young men and women during World War II who, through their resolute actions, expanded democracy's reach for us all.

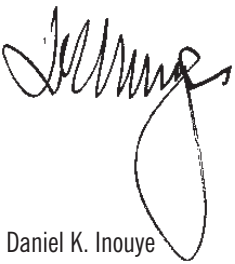
The exhibition is one part of the larger work of the National Center. Both have their roots in the landmark Civil Liberties Act of 1988 in which the United States government acknowledged violating the civil rights of over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated during World War II without due process and without being charged with any crime. My colleagues and I in Congress watched with pride as President Ronald Reagan signed this important bill offering a formal apology and demonstrating that America can acknowledge its mistakes and that our democracy can evolve over time. Accordingly, embedded in this legislation was the commitment to educate all Americans about the lessons learned from the Japanese American experience, so no one else would suffer a similar experience.

Of course Japanese Americans are not alone in being treated as unequal Americans. For generations, too many Americans experienced discrimination. During World War II, our democracy allowed discriminatory laws that enforced segregation—both in the civilian sector and in the Armed Forces. I myself was initially classified as “4C”: an “enemy alien” simply because I looked like the enemy attackers at Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, I was privileged to fight alongside many Americans of every color and creed who believed in the promise of democracy, and I realized that American democracy is not a finished concept but is always evolving and changing. All of us, especially our young people, need to understand and believe that we can change historic inequities for the betterment of all.

To this end an appropriation from the Department of Defense enabled the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy to be established in the historic building of the Japanese American National Museum. Created through a collaboration of educators, community leaders, scholars, concerned individuals, and young people, the National Center works to inspire all youth to be active, informed participants in shaping democracy in America.

The interactive exhibition, *Fighting for Democracy*, currently housed at the Hirasaki Democracy Hall of the National Center, traces the real-life stories of young men and women, most not much older than the students you teach. Each individual in his or her own way acts against injustice. I believe when our young people learn these stories, discover the impact each individual had, and realize that they can make a difference, our democracy and our nation will be strengthened.

I hope that this Educator's Resource Guide will help you and your students explore the multifaceted nature of our democracy and that it will be useful in preparing your students to become invested and active participants in our nation's future.



Daniel K. Inouye
United States Senator
Chair, National Board of Advisors
National Center for the Preservation of Democracy

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY

The National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (National Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational project that provides tools for living democratically in a diverse American society. Partnering with educators and community-based mentors, the National Center works to inspire youth to become active, informed participants in shaping democracy in America.

The National Center embraces the integral relationship between democracy and diversity. By exploring the largely untold stories of Americans of diverse cultures and ethnicities who broke barriers for the betterment of all peoples, the National Center guides youth in discovering the civic engagement skills that empower them to make positive changes in their communities.

Founded in 2000 and opened to the public in 2005, the National Center builds on the more than twenty years of scholarship and cultural education of the Japanese American National Museum. At its Los Angeles headquarters and also online at www.ncdemocracy.org, the National Center has launched a carefully considered collection of programs that includes a multimedia historical exhibition, school group visits, student workshops, a youth video-arts project, public programs, professional development for educators, and educational materials such as curricula and lesson plans.

CURRICULAR UNDERSTANDINGS

The National Center for the Preservation of Democracy is premised upon three profound and far-reaching ideas that are the framework of our curricular approach:

- We, the people, shape democracy;
- I, too, can shape democracy;
- Those who have struggled for freedom and equality have extended democracy's reach for all people.

Many students, as well as many other Americans generally, do not subscribe to these three assumptions. Democracy, if they think of it at all, is the system of government that the founding fathers bestowed to succeeding generations of Americans. In that sense the preservation of democracy, as originally conceived, is the duty and deed of patriots. Our approach emphasizing “we, the people, shape democracy” suggests that democracy—or rule by the people—is a work in progress. Democracy is not enshrined in a museum case, in the U.S. Constitution, or in the ballot box. Democracy is made and remade by individuals and groups in a time and place. Democracy is struggled over, and is thus “fought for.”¹

Moreover, democracy is a dynamic and nonlinear process, often reflecting steps taken backward as well as forward. The choices and actions of individuals and groups to help our nation confront and live up to its best ideals, often in the face of great challenges and injustice, have strengthened democracy in America. The National Center's goal is to help young people understand what democracy means to them personally and to activate their participation in the democratic process by giving them the opportunity and tools to do so.

For more elaboration on the National Center's rationale, assumptions, and approach, please read our Educational Framework at <http://www.ncdemocracy.org>

Note

1. Gary Okihiro, *Educational Framework: Fighting for Democracy* (Los Angeles: National Center for the Preservation of Democracy, 2005), 2.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION: *FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY*

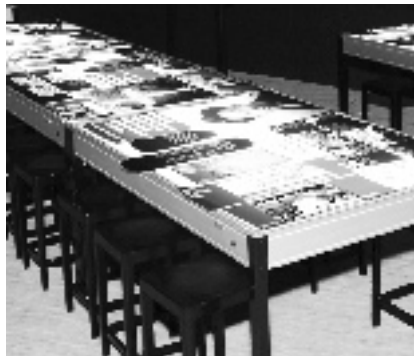
Housed at the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy in Los Angeles, the *Fighting for Democracy* exhibition uses World War II as a case study to begin discussion about how women and minorities have expanded the meaning of “we” in “we, the people.” The exhibition looks at the experiences of real people and traces their personal stories throughout the pre-war, war, and post-war periods as examples of the millions of Americans whose lives were affected by the war. In this way, larger events such as segregation, military service, immigration, citizenship and civil rights may be viewed and understood from multiple perspectives.

After first encountering large mirrors projecting provocative statements, visitors are introduced to the exhibition’s principal characters. Through vintage-looking clothing armoirs— one for each individual

—visitors can discover the family histories of each character by rummaging through cabinet doors and drawers and pulling out facsimiles of letters, photo albums, personal papers, and more. In addition, materials such as newspapers and immigration documents enable visitors to think about broader issues of race, gender, class, and citizenship against the backdrop of the critical question: Whom does the “we” in “we, the people” include?

The World War II section of the exhibition features colorful freestanding walls of illuminated text, quotes, images, and mini-documentaries that continue the stories of the characters. Within the context of World War II, visitors can see their varied choices and outcomes.

The post-war section of the exhibition is organized around a series of light tables upon which lay movable transparency images. The images reflect both the personal and larger historical context of the post-war stories of the exhibition characters. This activity encourages visitors to



explore the connections among the characters and their communities; visitors can organize their own light table display through larger exhibition themes, such as definitions of service, questions of loyalty, and the struggle for civil rights.

The *Fighting for Democracy* exhibition’s physical design provides visitors with a dynamic learning environment that encourages hands-on exploration and dialogue. Each area of the exhibition is designed so that visitors can physically involve themselves as “researchers,” setting the experience apart from the traditional museum visit. Visitors can handle and examine replicas of primary materials, such as legal documents, newspapers, yearbooks, and scrapbooks, to understand both the lives of people who lived in a historical moment and the importance of their contributions to our lives today.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION SPACE: *THE HIRASAKI DEMOCRACY HALL*

The National Center for the Preservation of Democracy is proud to house its inaugural exhibition *Fighting for Democracy* in the Hirasaki Democracy Hall. The engaging stories of young men and women featured in *Fighting for Democracy* is a testament to the resilience of a community that formerly occupied this historic, symbolic, and sacred space.

Built in 1925, this sanctuary hall was a part of the former Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, the first Buddhist temple in the Los Angeles area. The hall was a place of religious practice and a center for the Japanese community, in a neighborhood which came to be known as “Little Tokyo.”

On February 19, 1942, two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the forcible eviction of 110,000 Japanese Americans from their homes on the West Coast and their incarceration in concentration camps because of their ancestry. President Roosevelt’s declaration mandated only about a week for some residents to vacate their homes and sell their furniture and household goods at throwaway prices. Most were ordered to report to government-designated assembly points within the following two months with only what they could carry by hand.

Ironically, the Nishi Hongwanji Temple served as a departure site for many Japanese Americans. When Nishi Hongwanji’s missionaries and congregation were sent to concentration camps, their belongings were left in the temple’s basement storage in the keep of a Caucasian Buddhist missionary. Once a place where Japanese American citizens exercised their right to gather and worship freely, this sanctuary hall’s vacancy during World War II was a stark and silent reminder of how wartime anxiety and racist hysteria jeopardized the Japanese American community’s rights to life, liberty, and property.



Upon their release from camp after the World War II, many of the people from Little Tokyo, now homeless, returned to their former neighborhoods. Nishi Hongwanji became a temporary shelter for some people, and many Japanese Americans slept on the floors of Hirasaki Hall as they began to rebuild their lives.

Today, the former temple containing the Hirasaki Democracy Hall is a designated historic site for the many important functions it served. It commemorates the Japanese American community, which endured a loss of freedom and civil liberties and has nevertheless persevered and thrived. Moreover, the building’s aesthetics and aura remind us about the importance of preserving history. Because of its historic value, much of the physical structure itself has remained untouched.

To honor this history, the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy has selected this sacred space to tell stories through *Fighting for Democracy*. The exhibition brings to light the choices and sacrifices that diverse individuals made during the World War II era in the name of freedom, paving a path through hardship and struggle to build our nation as we know it today. The National Center is a place where visitors and young people are invited to examine the complexities of democracy, explore their own histories, and consider their personal contributions to democracy and our nation at large.