

EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY

BY GARY Y. OKIHIRO, Ph.D.

NATIONAL CENTER
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF
DEMOCRACY

CURRICULAR UNDERSTANDINGS

The National Center’s educational premise is based on three curricular understandings:

- 1) we, the people, shape democracy;
- 2) I, too, can shape democracy;
- 3) those who have struggled for freedom and equality have extended democracy's reach for all people.

The National Center’s Educational Framework offers a rethinking of the conventional approach to U.S. history with the following understandings:

- 1) U.S. history has beginnings in Europe but also in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands;
- 2) the U.S. is both a nation of immigrants and a nation formed by expansion and conquest, by enslaved peoples, and by migrant labor;
- 3) U.S. democracy holds promises that sometimes fall short in practice, and it allows opportunities and freedoms but also constraints and repressions;
- 4) the U.S. must be seen from within and from outside, i.e., not just a history that explains peoples’ activities within the bounded space of the U.S. but also a history that explains the deeds of Americans from the point of view of the world outside of the U.S.;
- 5) though U.S. history may be made by the dominant group and its relations with those separated from power and privilege, it is equally constituted by relations among non-dominant groups.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CURRICULAR UNDERSTANDINGS	ii
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE	iv
INTRODUCTION	vi
<i>FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY</i>	1
Rationale	2
Content	3
Method	4
WORLD WAR II: A SAMPLE LESSON	6
Historians and World War II	6
The Contradictions of World War II	9
The Military	10
Labor	11
Endnotes	13
Documents Portfolio	14
APPENDIX: HISTORIANS AND THEIR CRAFT	26
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	28

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...”

— Declaration of Independence, 1776

In 1787, the founding fathers signed the U.S. Constitution and created a democracy, placing the political authority of the nation in the hands of the American people.

Yet at that time, “We, the People” referred to only a limited few.

Prior to World War II, choosing a restaurant, using a public restroom, or staying at a hotel were not “free” choices, but reminders of the limitations for specific groups of Americans. Yet, in the face of these challenges, ordinary men and women chose to fight for equality and freedom. Their actions changed the course of American history. While we know well the names of Rosa Parks, Fred Korematsu, and Cesar Chavez, there are many untold stories of culturally and ethnically diverse individuals and communities that contributed to and strengthened American democracy. It is this pluralism that is at the very core of American democracy, and the heart of the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy’s *Educational Framework*. This framework is a resource for educators to connect the past with the present, and motivate students to assess the successes and failures of American democratic processes and institutions.

The National Center is an affiliate institution of the Los Angeles-based Japanese American National Museum. For over 20 years, the National Museum has promoted greater appreciation of America’s history through the Japanese American experience. We view the National Center as a natural extension of our work to build deeper relationships and broaden the stories told.

Through its programs, activities, and publications, the National Center will partner with teachers and community-based mentors to provide young people with tools to understand the principles of democracy as shared by a diverse American population. By working with middle and high school

teachers our goal is to develop innovative educational resources—lesson plans, study guides and this *Educational Framework*—and to provide workshops, seminars, and opportunities for professional development.

Our shared objective is to motivate students by providing them with hands-on experience and practical knowledge so they can shape and improve their schools and communities today and throughout their lifetimes. We believe that the National Center can and will inspire young people to take action whether through voting, community volunteerism, advocacy, or public service.

Ultimately, our hope is that the National Center's mission to promote democratic principles and civic engagement goes beyond discussion. We welcome you to join these efforts as we work collaboratively to create and implement youth-centered programs that demonstrate “we, the people” really do shape democracy in the United States.



Irene Y. Hirano
President and CEO

EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Like most teachers I know, I entered this profession to help students in my classes and also to contribute to the greater good. Surely, my work as a teacher could bring about a society with fewer inequities.

The reality of the classroom, though, presents the ultimate creative challenge. How do I construct a learning environment for reducing inequities when my school is full of hierarchies, my textbooks are Euro-centric, and my students are left to wonder why I am not teaching their history?

The multi-cultural education movement helped. Workshops, seminars, teaching materials, jack-daw kits, and even a multi-cultural education requirement for teacher certification have all been tools to help us crack a Euro-centric curriculum. More people of more experiences are being included.

Still, the central story line remains the same. In California, a state in which the “minorities” will soon be the “majority,” the 10th grade World History standards focus on Europe. The U.S. History standards include Native Americans only as speakers of a language so exotic it could be used as an unbreakable code and, therefore, used as a tool for the U.S. military.

This isn't good enough; and, it's just not true. My students are Latino, African American, and Belizean American. To teach them that the protagonist in their nation's story is always and forever a 'white man', is to invite them to scream out loud or withdraw into a silent world of never being good enough. But, more than that, this version of who we are as a nation is incomplete.

Isn't our nation in a constant quest to become a “more perfect union?” This is what I want my students to feel in their bones, and feel it is a healthy place to stand. Being American is not only about speaking a particular language and eating apple pie. It does not have to mean denying one's history and culture. This is what I need to teach my students. Otherwise, I send them out into the world unsure of who they are, what their story is, and how they can come from a place of strength.

It is also what I want my niece and nephew to learn. They are growing up, much as I did, in a *de facto* segregated world filled with white people. For them, Western Civilization is the main story line of our nation. It is what they are taught; it is how they live. People of color occupy the margins of their world. But, again, I worry for them. Their great grandfather experienced the “No Irish Need Apply” signs. How would they make sense of that? Will they feel comfortable that they are no longer Irish and are, instead, white, and therefore eligible for privilege and able to ignore the struggle of those less fortunate? I hope not. They, I hope, will

also grow into adults who come from a conscious place of strength—understanding the process of becoming “a more perfect union.”

The National Center for the Preservation of Democracy’s *Educational Framework* is a tool for teachers who want to prepare their students to live in a democracy that is a work in progress. It serves as shared knowledge about ourselves and our journey towards “a more perfect union.” All peoples in our nation can share in its premise that “democracy is also shaped by those who have been denied power and privilege.” This is its beauty. The central narrative is no longer about who is in and who is out. Instead, it is about a process which affects us all and in which we can all engage.

It is not, however, a ready-made lesson plan. This is its other beauty. It invites our participation. Instead of including a paragraph celebrating how the Navajo language was useful in winning World War II, the National Center’s *Educational Framework* provokes a critical assessment of the Navajo’s role in the war effort. It encourages us to ask questions like “Why would a Native American jeopardize his life for a nation which denies him the right to vote?” and “How might an individual’s action eventually contribute to the securing of more rights for all in the future?”

IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, A READY-MADE LESSON PLAN. THIS IS ITS OTHER BEAUTY. IT INVITES OUR PARTICIPATION.

I find this work deeply hopeful. The National Center’s *Educational Framework* supports my original hopes as I went into this work. Although it originates in a specific time and place in our history, the premise that “we, the people, shape democracy” is timeless. Using this as my conceptual framework, I have been able to connect history to my students’ lives in a way that is hopeful and provocative. Should a Japanese American voluntarily join the military when his family has been removed from their home and incarcerated? Should an immigrant without legal status in this country voluntarily join the military to fight in Iraq? The National Center’s educational premise that “those who have struggled for freedom and equality have extended democracy’s reach for all people” and the understanding that “U.S. democracy extends promises that sometimes fall short in practice, and it allows opportunities and freedoms but also constraints and repressions” serves as an anchor for historical content. I teach about World War II by including primary sources on the inequities of life during the 1930s and

1940s, as well as the actions of individuals and groups to counter those inequities. My unit closes with presenting a dilemma both historical and contemporary regarding inequities, loyalty to nation, and war.

Furthermore, the premise that “I, too, can shape democracy” is a guidepost as I think about how to help my students create their own paths. The issues we face can be daunting. We could paper over them and pretend that all is well in the Republic or we could dwell on the miseries and mistakes. Instead, these five words, “I, too, can shape democracy,” give reassurance to my students that they, too, count. They, too, can change the world. They, too, are powerful.

We are ever becoming a more perfect union. I can’t think of a more important mission than giving our next generation an understanding of the nature of this journey, and how they can take our nation further towards a truly inclusive democracy. Isn’t this why so many of us went into teaching?

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FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY

RATIONALE

2

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

- 1) *we, the people, shape democracy;*
- 2) *I, too, can shape democracy;*
- 3) *those who have struggled for freedom and equality have extended democracy's reach.*

Many students, we believe, along with many Americans broadly, hold views contrary to those three assumptions that inform this framework. Democracy, if they think of it at all, was framed by the founding fathers in the system of government that they bestowed, like a precious gift, to succeeding generations. In that sense, the preservation of democracy, as originally conceived, is the duty and deed of patriots.

Instead, “we, the people shape democracy” understands democracy—or rule by the people—to be 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 time and place. Democracy is struggled over, and is thus “fought” for. Hence this framework is titled, *Fighting for Democracy*.

NOTE: This educational framework consists of two parts: (1) an introduction to the entire project, and a brief Appendix on history and the writing of history (pp. 1-5, 26-27); and (2) a sample lesson on World War II (pp. 6-13). The first section outlines the educational framework's rationale, content, and method. The second offers a lesson on World War II, which is merely one in a series of such lessons on the “fight for democracy” that will elucidate upon the rationale and content, and exemplify the method described on page 4. Please know that the use of the word “fighting” in this framework's title is not reserved solely or even primarily for military service, but is meant to convey the broader sense of contest, agency, and resistance. The next lesson, not included herein but forthcoming, will focus on the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, and will expand upon the conjoining efforts of African, Asian and Pacific, and Native Americans and Latina/os in making real the promise of World War II and of America.

WE, THE PEOPLE, SHAPE DEMOCRACY

Who are included within that seemingly generous phrase, “we, the people?” Who are the “we?” Like democracy, the definitions of “we, the people” have been contested. For instance, some African Americans might have been free but most were enslaved from the nation's founding. They became citizens, although not endowed with all of the rights of citizenship, only after the adoption of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments in 1865 and 1868. The 1790 Naturalization Act limited citizenship by naturalization to “free white persons,” and thereby barred Asian American immigrants from citizenship, for the most part, until 1952. And white women might have been citizens but only gained the right to vote in 1920.

Students and Americans generally might believe that democracy's institutions are the creations of Europeans. Although made in America especially along the frontier where, allegedly, the Old World distinctions of station and birth broke down, democracy derived from European antecedents from ancient Greece to the Enlightenment and rise of the modern nation-state. Non-Europeans, within that idea of democracy's source, enjoy, depend upon, and must learn from European civilization, which constitutes America's unifying core and common ground.

While it is true that American institutions draw copiously from European wellsprings, it is equally true that American democracy was created in the U.S. by Europeans and non-Europeans alike. This framework stresses the roles of historically excluded groups in that act of creation as a corrective to the prevailing misconceptions of democracy's natures and meanings. Further, the efforts of those who have been denied power and privilege for inclusion within the American promise, the American creed, the American dream point to the contradictions within American democracy that afford, at once, both opportunities and constraints.

Although the guarantees of life, liberty, and property are foundational to American democracy, they were routinely denied to certain groups at various times in the nation's history. Yet, the principle of equality under the law allowed for demands of redress against inequality, and those claims, whether won or lost, deepened and enriched the meaning of the American identity—the idea of who is an American—and ultimately ensured the rights, privileges, and obligations that comprise the very heart of American democracy.

In those ways, excluded groups have placed themselves within the compass of “we, the people,” a circle that had formerly been denied them, and helped to reshape democracy's contour and extend its reach for the benefit of all Americans.

CONTENT

Fighting for Democracy is intended to complement but also rethink and reframe the familiar curriculum in its focus upon the deeds of excluded groups that ensured and extended democracy's compass.

Too often, students see those separated from power and privilege as victims. They appear in textbooks because of what was done to them rather than what they themselves did. They are passive, and not active. Students thus read about the conquest and near extinction of Native Americans, the enslavement and emancipation of African Americans, the conquest and immigration of Mexican Americans, and the exclusion and detention of Japanese Americans.

This framework stresses instead the struggles of those excluded groups against physical and cultural genocide, against inhumanity and economic exploitation, and against inequality and racism. Their acts of resistance, as individuals and collectives, constitute a human and civil rights movement that flows like a river through the entirety of the nation's past.

Even when conventional understandings endow agency to those denied power and privilege, they oftentimes depict their deeds as discrete and separate acts. It is thus a commonplace for students to see the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s as organized against white supremacy in the South by and for African Americans. The principal relationship is between white and black (and possibly North and South), and the sole beneficiaries are African Americans.

Rather, *Fighting for Democracy*, and especially its follow-up lesson that focuses on the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, highlights the intersections among excluded groups (like the related efforts of African, Asian, and Mexican Americans for integrated public schools), instead of their divergences, and in place of the familiar binary of white and nonwhite, this framework presents a more complicated formulation of race in the U.S. Finally, *Fighting for Democracy* emphasizes that the benefits of equality extend to those who hold and are denied power alike.



Sign in front of neighborhood in Los Angeles, California, ca. 1950s.
Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Multiculturalism, this framework maintains, does not consist of separate strands of experiences or even the summation of those diverse cultures and their contributions. *Fighting for Democracy* encourages students to discover and forge connections across those apparent divides of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and citizenship, and, above all, to find in the lives of others themselves and their fortunes.

METHOD

Through its thematic approach to the American experience, this educational framework allows for the creation of curriculum in which students can develop historical skills, including some of the following national standards: (1) chronological thinking, or a sense of the past, present, and future and their connections through continuities and ruptures; (2) historical comprehension, or the ability to identify and describe narrative structures and historical evidence; (3) historical analysis and interpretation, or the ability to compare, contrast, and contextualize peoples, events, places, and times; (4) historical research, or skills to ask historical questions, to search for and find historical evidence, and to construct a coherent narrative; (5) problem-solving, or the ability

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to identify, analyze, and recommend solutions to historical and contemporary problems and issues; and (6) story-telling, or the ability to recount history through the students' own voices and experiences. (See Appendix, “Historians and Their Craft,” pp. 26-27, for a brief explanation of history and the writing of history.)

Students will read primary, first-person documents to understand the texts, themselves, and the cultures of the U.S. and world. With national standards in mind, some of the language arts skills developed in this framework include: (1) textual criticism, or the ability to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate texts; (2) contextual criticism, or the understanding of texts within their times, places, and genres, and the ability to draw from prior knowledge on the meanings and significances of texts; (3) audiences, or the recognition that authors write for themselves and their audiences, and that those audiences bring their own readings to the texts; (4) language and media, or the appreciation that the conventions of language, including print and non-print texts and pictures, convey meanings that might be hidden or simply assumed; (5) research skills, or the ability to pose questions and generate ideas, and to gather, evaluate, and synthesize data; and (6) language diversity, or the respect for and understanding of the varieties of languages and their uses across peoples, places, and times.

The national social studies standards most relevant to this document include: (1) culture, or the identification and appreciation of diverse belief systems and behavioral patterns; (2) time, continuity, and change, or an understanding of history; (3) places and environments, or a recognition of the spatial dimensions of people’s lives; (4) individuals, identities, and institutions, or an apprehension of the contexts of identity formation and the influences of institutions and practices; (5) power, authority, and governance, or a comprehension of the positions and articulations of privilege; (6) global connections, or a recognition of the interconnections across national boundaries; and (7) civic ideals and practices, or the understanding and exercise of responsible citizenship.

As critical readers, students will employ self-monitoring and corrective strategies for reading comprehension, and will identify, classify, form opinions, and generate ideas for problem-solving.

Overall, *Fighting for Democracy* aspires to promote critical thinking among our students as evidenced in its stresses upon reconsiderations of conventional thinking, close readings of contradictions and opposing viewpoints, encouragement of a debate format, and a selection of primary documents that enable students to formulate their own interpretations and opinions. This primary educational goal of critical thinking is premised upon the profound and foundational belief that American democracy is reliant upon an enlightened and vigilant citizenry, because in the end, “we, the people” determine democracy’s present and future.

WORLD WAR II

This sample lesson focuses upon World War II because it was a key moment in the development of U.S. democracy, and it showed in clear relief both the opportunities and constraints of democracy. It also teaches us more generally about wars and their meanings for civil liberties and freedoms, especially around the nature of citizenship and rights and who is counted within the circle of “we, the people.”

HISTORIANS AND WORLD WAR II

A retired Red Cross worker reminisced about World War II. “The war was fun for America,” he remembered. “I’m not talking about the poor souls who lost sons and daughters. But for the rest of us, the war was a hell of a good time.”¹ That sentiment has led to the phrase, “the good war,” in reference to World War II. One historian even called it “the perfect war.”² “World War Two was just an innocent time in America,” recalled Nancy Arnot Harjan who was thirteen years old at the time of Pearl Harbor. “I was innocent. My parents were innocent. The country was innocent.”³

That perception of World War II as the “good” or “perfect” war, however incongruous the pairing of those adjectives with the noun, arose from several apparently well-founded bases. The war was a just war, a war launched not with imperial designs, but in self-defense against fascism’s aggression and for the cause of liberty and democracy. There were clear-cut villains and equally self-evident heroes. The war brought prosperity to the nation, lifting most from the doldrums of the Great Depression to full employment and weekly earnings that rose by as much as 70 percent. Manufacturing output doubled, and membership in trade unions increased by nearly 50 percent. The war enabled women to enjoy unprecedented economic opportunities and, in turn, greater freedoms from the bonds of marriage and domesticity. Similarly, the war allowed African Americans greater employment mobility, and their contributions to the war effort gave them a powerful argument against the remnants of Jim Crow and for expanded civil rights.



Women Airforce Service Pilots learn to fly, Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas. 1943.
The Woman’s Collection, Texas Women’s University (MSS 250.8.5)

Historians, however, have begun a reassessment of the war and its impact upon U.S. society. The “good war” wasn’t wholly “good,” much less “perfect,” for women and those denied power and privilege in the U.S. In fact, the war, wrote historian Richard Polenberg, “acted as a conservative force in the area of gender relations. Even though millions of women entered the work force, many in jobs that had traditionally been reserved for men, and even though the public came to accept the idea of women, especially wives and mothers, working outside the home, the consensus among historians is that the war thwarted any potential for a significant alteration in gender roles.”⁴ The historian Leila J. Rupp noted that although an unprecedented number of women entered “non-traditional” areas of employment such as heavy

industries and the armed forces, “the temporary lowering of barriers made no permanent impact on women’s opportunities or status in society.” When the war ended and men turned from the military to wage labor, women were displaced from their jobs and relegated to unpaid labor within the home.⁵

A similar argument has been made for the government’s push for minority labor in military and civilian work. Rather than providing equal opportunity or even the beginnings of social equality, the recruitment of formerly excluded groups into war work was prompted by the need for their labor especially in secondary and subservient sectors of the expanding economy. “During and after the Second World War,” recounts social scientist Dale Johnson, “blacks and browns from the rural backwaters of the South and Mexico came by the millions to northern and western industrial cities. But the era of increasing absorption of unskilled and semiskilled labor into the industrial system, and thereby into the mainstream of class society, was rapidly drawing to a close. Blacks and browns were relegated to employment in the most technologically backward of labor-intensive sectors (menial services, construction labor, corporate agriculture) and to unemployment, the squalor of ghetto life, and welfare handouts.”⁶ And after the war, underscoring the temporary nature of their employment, African Americans suffered disproportionately high unemployment rates.

In August 1942, the U.S. Congress, in response to the need for a record-shattering farm production, passed Public Law 45 that authorized the importation of agricultural workers from Mexico. Under the Bracero Program, 220,640 workers entered the U.S., mainly into the Southwest and Pacific Northwest, to produce the crops that fed a nation preoccupied with the business of war. “Overall,” historian Erasmo Gamboa reflected, “the men endured much racial discrimination from employers and local communities alike. On the job, they suffered many accidents not only because of their unfamiliarity with farm machinery, but also because farmers had little regard for their safety. As a rule, braceros received low wages, and when they organized strikes to win increases, they encountered quick and sometimes violent resistance from growers and local officials.”⁷ And after the war, growers turned away from braceros to Mexican American laborers whom they believed to be more easily controlled.

The pattern for women’s, Mexican, and African and Mexican American labor, thus, appear to suggest that World War II might have provided new opportunities for work, but these were temporary and, more importantly, extensions of the entrenched social relations that privileged certain classes of white men over women and excluded groups. Indeed, according to some social commentators, the general impact of war upon society is toward

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conservatism rather than liberalism, toward coercion and uniformity rather than democracy and greater freedoms. The author and editor, Carey McWilliams, writing during World War II, was keenly aware of those tendencies of war having witnessed the “hate strikes” and race riots directed at African Americans, the so-called “Zoot Suit Riots” against Mexican Americans, and the mass removal and detention of Japanese Americans.⁸

Racism, according to historian John W. Dower, was a prominent aspect of World War II, from the blatant racism of the Nazis and their notions of “master-race” to the role of race in the conduct of the Pacific war by both the Japanese and Americans.⁹ At home, anti-Japanese racism translated into the merging of the Japanese enemy with Japanese Americans, and the mass removal and confinement of Japanese Americans in which racism was justified as a “military necessity.” As the general in charge of the defense of the West Coast declared: “A Jap’s a Jap. You can’t change him by giving him a piece of paper,” referring to the citizenship of Japanese Americans. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, enabling the concentration camps for some 120,000 Japanese Americans in Hawai’i and the U.S. West.¹⁰

“The week-long ‘zoot-suit’ race riots which began in Los Angeles on June 3, 1943, touched off a chain reaction of riots across the country,” McWilliams reported. “Similar disturbances were reported in San Diego on June 9;

in Philadelphia on June 10; in Chicago on June 15; and in Evansville on June 27. Between June 16 and August 1, large-scale race riots occurred in Beaumont, Texas, in Detroit, and in Harlem. The Detroit race riot of June 20-21 was one of the most costly and bitter of the century: 25 Negroes and 9 white persons were killed and property worth hundreds of thousands of dollars was destroyed. The Harlem riot of August 1-2, 1943, was the most severe in the history of New York’s Negro community: 5 Negroes were killed, approximately 565 persons received hospital treatment, over 500 arrests were made, and property damage was estimated at \$5,000,000. Nor were these the only disturbances of those tense weeks in midsummer 1943.”¹¹



U.S. servicemen and Mexican American youth clash during so-called “Zoot Suit Riots,” Los Angeles, California, Spring 1943. Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-75515)

The so-called “Zoot Suit Riots” began when a few sailors were set upon by Mexican American youth; the next night about 200 sailors who called themselves a “task force” descended upon East Los Angeles and beat four Mexican Americans. “We’re out to do what the police have failed to do,” one of those sailors explained. “We’re going to clean up this situation. . . .” Over the next several days, sailors and soldiers roamed through Mexican American districts setting upon teenagers, stripped their clothes off and cut their hair, distinguishing marks of “zooters,” and beat them up. On one night, instead of arresting the assailants, the police arrested 44 Mexican Americans, all of whom had been severely beaten. African Americans and Filipino Americans suffered the same fate as Mexican Americans when thousands of whites marched through Los Angeles to find and beat their objects of hate. Only after the military declared the downtown area out of bounds for those in uniform did the riots end, some four days after the first beatings. The *Eagle Rock Advertiser* bemoaned the military’s intervention. “It is too bad the servicemen were called off before they were able to complete the job,” the paper mourned. “Most of the citizens of the city have been delighted with what has been going on.”¹² For an example of a newspaper treatment of the “Zoot Suit Riots”, see the “Documents Portfolio” at the end of this sample lesson.

Following a year and a half of tensions between Detroit's blacks and whites over housing and social services, on a sweltering June day about two weeks after Los Angeles' "Zoot Suit Riots", thousands of whites and blacks gathered and scattered fighting erupted. Rumors spread through the city, and blacks looted stores, attacked whites, and beat to death a white milkman and a white physician making a house call. In turn, mobs of whites attacked and killed blacks. A white sixteen year old boasted: "There were about 200 of us in cars. We killed eight of 'em. . . . I saw knives being stuck through their throats and heads being shot through. . . . It really was some riot." And a white college student recalled that "whites were raving with hate." The Jackson, Mississippi *Daily News* blamed the wartime rhetoric of equality for the riot. "It is blood upon your hands, Mrs. Roosevelt," the paper asserted. "You have been. . .proclaiming and practicing social equality. . . . In Detroit, a city noted for the growing impudence and insolence of its Negro population, an attempt was made to put your preachments into practice."¹³

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF WORLD WAR II

The U.S. had just emerged from the Great Depression, and Japan had invaded China and Hitler's Nazi Germany had taken much of Europe, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his message to Congress in January 1941. In his speech, Roosevelt stated that American democracy consisted of Four Freedoms, the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of religion, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. "We look forward to a world founded upon four essential freedoms," the President declared. "The freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—anywhere in the world."¹⁴ When the war came to the U.S., those Four Freedoms came to define America's reasons for fighting in World War II.



Franklin D. Roosevelt. National Archives at College Park, NDNS-208-PU-171G(1A)

But as the smoke still rose from what was America's Pacific Fleet, Hawai'i's governor surrendered civil authority to America's military and teams of FBI agents and military and civilian police swept into neighborhoods and took into custody Japanese, German, and Italian Americans in Hawai'i and on the U.S. mainland. Martial law suspended democracy and summary detentions eroded the civil liberties of American citizens. A war being waged in the name of freedom curtailed the rights and freedoms of America's peoples.

President Roosevelt was an example of this contradiction between the ideal and practice of democracy. "One obvious thought occurs to me—that every Japanese citizen or non-citizen on the Island of Oahu who meets these Japanese ships or has any connection with their officers or men should be secretly but definitely identified and his or her name placed on a special list of those who would be the first to be placed in a concentration camp in the event of trouble," the President stated in 1936.¹⁵ He was referring to the perfectly legal and public visits of Japanese naval vessels in Hawai'i, and the equally legal and public socializing between Japanese sailors and Japanese American citizens of the U.S. After signing Executive Order 9066, Roosevelt declared in 1943 when endorsing the military draft for Japanese Americans, many of whom were being held in concentration camps, "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry." Meanwhile, draft boards routinely classified *nisei* (second-generation Japanese Americans) as "enemy aliens," and *nisei* soldiers were only allowed to serve in the Army, not the Navy, Air Force, or Marines, and in

THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY FOR EXCLUDED GROUPS WAS A TWO-FRONT EFFORT—ON THE BATTLEFIELDS ABROAD AND IN THE STRUGGLES AT HOME.

segregated units, in violation of the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940. (Refer to “Draft Resistance” in the “Documents Portfolio” at the end of this sample lesson.)

THE MILITARY

An African American soldier, Private Charles K. Wilson, wrote to Roosevelt on May 9, 1944, asking him to address some of the contradictions in the conduct of the war. “It was with extreme pride that I, a soldier in the Armed Forces of our country, read the following affirmation of our war aims, pronounced by you at a recent press conference: ‘The United Nations are fighting to make a world in which tyranny and aggression cannot exist; a world based upon freedom, equality, and justice; a world in which all persons, regardless of race, color and creed, may live in peace, honor and dignity.’ Your use of the word ‘world’ means that we are fighting for ‘freedom, equality, and justice’ for ‘all persons, regardless of race, color and creed’ in our own part of the world, the United States of America, as well as all other countries where such a fight is needed to be carried through. But the picture in our country is marred by one of the strangest paradoxes in our whole fight against world fascism. The United States Armed Forces, to fight for World Democracy, is within itself undemocratic. Let me give you an example of the lack of democracy in our Field, where I am now stationed. Negro soldiers are completely segregated from the white soldiers on the base.... How can we convince...the Negro members, that your pronouncements of the war aims of the United Nations means what it says, when their experience with...the United States of America, is just the opposite?”¹⁶

Despite race riots and Jim Crow and their exclusion from the Army’s Air Corps and their confinement to the kitchens of the Navy, African American service in the Army swelled from 98,000 in 1941 to 468,000 in late 1942. About one million African American men and women served in the armed forces during World War II in segregated units. More than 4,000 African American women served in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). Many African American units earned the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation for their gallantry, and 82 African American pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross. But not a single African American won the Medal of Honor during the war, and an Army study during the 1990s concluded that “racism was the cause” for that extraordinary fact. In 1997, seven African Americans received the Medal of Honor for World War II service.

An estimated 375,000 to 500,000 Mexican Americans served in integrated military units during the war, and, despite race riots and discrimination in housing, education, and employment, Mexican Americans won 17 Congressional Medals of Honor, and hundreds received the Silver and Bronze Stars for valor in battle.

About 25,000 Japanese American men and women served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II even as their parents and siblings were targeted by martial law in Hawai'i and held in detention and concentration camps in Hawai'i and on the mainland. Like African Americans, Japanese Americans served in segregated units, and in limited capacities. Among the most decimated of the war, Japanese American units garnered 18,143 individual citations, including a Medal of Honor (20 additional Medals of Honor were awarded over fifty years after the war) and 52 Distinguished Service Crosses.

Native American men registered for military service in numbers higher than African and Asian Americans and Latina/os. In all, about 25,000 served during the war, 21,767 in the Army, 1,910 in the Navy, 874 in the Marines, and 121 in the Coast Guard. Nearly 800 Native American women joined the WAC and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). An estimated two Native Americans received Medals of Honor, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze Stars, and 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Military service highlighted the contradictions of U.S. democracy. Enlisted to defend the U.S. and its war aims as articulated by the President in his Four Freedoms speech, racialized minorities fulfilled an obligation of citizenship and were counted among “we, the people.” But African and Japanese Americans served in segregated units, were excluded from certain branches of the service, and were denied full equality in the military. And while serving honorably in the war, Mexican Americans were attacked by sailors and soldiers in uniform, Japanese Americans were held in concentration camps secured by military police, African Americans were victimized by mob violence in U.S. cities, and Native Americans were relegated to impoverished reservations. Still, military service provided a powerful argument for claims on democracy by racialized minorities, and those demands would become particularly compelling after the war in the struggle for civil rights during the 1950s and 60s. War veterans would play key roles in the civil rights movement.



Tuskegee Airmen serve in segregated units overseas in Italy, ca. 1944.
National Archives (NWDNS-208-AA-46BB-6)

As the letter from an African American soldier in the “Documents Portfolio” explains, the fight for democracy for excluded groups was a two-front effort—on the battlefields abroad and in the struggles at home. The contest on the domestic front included keeping “faith in the goodness of America,” as was powerfully articulated by “Georgia,” an African American mother in her letter excerpted in the “Documents Portfolio.” Similarly, George Saito, a Japanese American soldier, clung to a faith in the U.S. even as his father was being held in one of America’s concentration camps and his brother had just died in defense of freedom. “America,” he wrote from his foxhole, “is a damned good country.” Saito’s letter, too, is included in the “Documents Portfolio.” As “Georgia” correctly observed, “Mine is a big job—much bigger than that of some mothers, for I am a Negro mother.”

LABOR

That work, the work of holding U.S. democracy to its promise of equality, was taken up by countless “Negro mothers,” George Saitos, and African American soldiers who serve as exemplars of the deeds of excluded

groups in their shaping of American democracy. On the eve of World War II, on April 28-30, 1939, over a thousand delegates from over 120 organizations met in Los Angeles to form El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Española, the first national, civil rights organization for Latina/os. El Congreso called for an end to segregation in public facilities, housing, education, and employment, and endorsed the right of immigrants to live and work in the U.S. without fear of deportation. Its southern California chapter created a woman's committee and platform, which recognized the "double discrimination" faced by Mexican American women in jobs, schools, and health because of their race and gender.

About the time of President Roosevelt's speech outlining the Four Freedoms, African American union leader A. Philip Randolph announced that if the administration failed to take action against racial discrimination in the defense program, he would organize and lead a mass march on Washington. Six days before the scheduled march, on June 25, 1941, the President signed Executive Order 8802 that banned work discrimination on the bases of race, creed, color, or national origin for defense contractors. To monitor compliance with the executive order, the President went on to appoint the Committee on Fair Employment Practice.

Although employers routinely violated the anti-discrimination mandate of the President's executive order, African, Asian, Mexican, and Native Americans flocked to defense industry work. More than one million African Americans left the South during the war for better paying jobs in the North and West. California witnessed an increase of 258,900 African Americans between 1940 and 1950, and they comprised 13 percent of the workers in the Bay Area's four leading shipbuilding companies. About 40,000 Native Americans worked in defense industries during the war, and 20 percent of Native American women living on reservations left for jobs mainly in urban areas. One of them was Faith Feather Traversie, a Yankton Lakota, who was classified as "white" to allow her to work at Mare Island Navy Yard. Traversie was one of the few women welders at the Navy Yard, and she worked with Asian women and Latinas. Excerpts of Traversie's interview appear in the "Documents Portfolio." That migration of women led to changes in gender relations on Native American reservations, and in the self-esteem and independence of some women as shown in the oral history of a Mexican American mother, Beatrice Morales Clifton, excerpted in the "Documents Portfolio."



Leaders of the March on Washington, (left to right), Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, and Dr. John Morsell hold a press conference, New York, 1963. Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-133367)

Because of democracy's contradictions, it is fought over. It is a work in progress. Its promises and ideals do not always conform to its realities and practices. Those who have been denied power and privilege have been particularly instrumental in extending democracy's reach because they inhabit the margins and borders delineated by the phrase, "we, the people." By insisting that they, too, are embraced by that community, excluded groups have expanded the meaning of who is an American, and helped to secure the very rights and privileges that were denied them for the enjoyment of all.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Terkel, *The Good War*, 561.
- 4 Richard Polenberg, "The Good War? A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100:3 (July 1992): 314.
- 5 Leila J. Rupp, "Woman's Place Is in the War: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the United States and Germany, 1939-1945," in *Women of America: A History*, eds. Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 342-59. See also, Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981); Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); and Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).
- 6 Dale Johnson, "On Oppressed Classes," in *Dependence and Underdevelopment*, ed. Frank Cockcroft and Dale Johnson (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 286.
- 7 Erasmo Gamboa, "Braceros in the Pacific Northwest: Laborers on the Domestic Front, 1942-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* 56 (1987): 378-98.
- 8 Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964).
- 9 John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
- 10 On the Japanese American experience during World War II, see Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); and Gary Y. Okihiro and Joan Myers, *Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).
- 11 McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, 3.
- 12 Carey McWilliams, "The Los Angeles Riot of 1943," in *Violence in America: A Historical and Contemporary Reader*, ed. Thomas Rose (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 168-75.
- 13 John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 199-204. See Thurgood Marshall, "The Gestapo in Detroit," *The Crisis* 50 (August 1943): 232-33, 246-47.
- 14 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Message to Congress," January 6, 1941.
- 15 Gary Y. Okihiro, *Cane Fires: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawai'i, 1865-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 172-75.
- 16 Charles F. Wilson to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Tucson, Arizona, May 9, 1944, in Phillip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters From Black Soldiers in World War II* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1983), 134-39.

DOCUMENTS PORTFOLIO



“WE HOPE THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WON’T FORGET THAT IF WE CAN WORK AND FIGHT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC WAY, THAT WE ARE ENTITLED TO ENJOY EVERY PRIVILEGE IT AFFORDS WHEN THIS MESS IS OVER.”

— UNKNOWN AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIER, LETTER TO HIS SISTER, SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE, 1945



Segregated drinking fountain at Halifax County Courthouse, North Carolina, April 1938. Library of Congress (LC-USF33-001112-M1); World War II veteran, Dr. Héctor P. García, leads a farm workers march to protest unfair wages, Texas, 1968. Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi Bell Library; Navajo Code Talkers operate a portable radio set in a jungle clearing, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, December 1943. National Archives (NWDNS-127-MN-69889B); Young men enlist at Manzanar concentration camp, California, November 1944. Gift of Grace and George Izumi, Japanese American National Museum (94.182.11)

ACTS OF ANTI-RACISM, FEBRUARY 1942.

In the hours following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, military and civilian police arrested and detained selected leaders and members of the Japanese American community in Hawai'i and along the West Coast. In February 1942, the Navy ordered Japanese Americans on Terminal Island, California to vacate their homes within forty-eight hours. Panic swept through the community, and profit-seeking whites offered to buy cars, boats, and household items at much reduced rates. But other whites tried to help their Japanese American neighbors. One of those was Virginia Swanson, a Baptist missionary on the island for five years before the war.

In anticipation of the forced eviction, Virginia Swanson wrote to various leaders in Washington, D.C., outlining the plight of the island's families and the difficulty of finding homes for them in communities hostile to Japanese Americans. "Could you work to find a place where they could move?" she asked. "Can you make sure families won't be broken up?" She received no reply. She phoned the Navy, when the eviction order was given, asking for an extension of the deadline without success. She and others of the Baptist Mission Board, whites from other religious groups, and Japanese Americans helped to secure the goods of the Terminal Islanders and arrange for their transportation and shelter.

Swanson described the scene. "The volunteers with trucks worked all night. The people had to go, ready or not. Some had to be pulled forcibly from their homes. They were afraid they were going to be handed over to a firing squad. Why should they have believed me, telling them to get into trucks with strangers?"

Another volunteer, Esther Rhoads, was at the temporary shelter for the Terminal Islanders: "All afternoon trucks and Japanese kept coming. They were tired and dazed as a result of the sudden exodus.... We have old men over seventy – retired fishermen whom the FBI considered ineffective, and we have little children – one baby a year old...practically no men between thirty-five and sixty-five, as they all are interned either in Montana or South Dakota.... I feel especially sorry for the old men. They seem so lost in the high-ceilinged rooms of the Forsyth School. I think they long for the low ceilings and the cozy feel of their little homes back on Terminal Island." And she noted: "Where are these people to go? There are many Japanese with young leaders able to face pioneer life, but those who have come to our hostels represent a group too old or too young to stand the rigors of beginning all over again."

As cited in Gary Y. Okihiro and Joan Myers, *Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 177-78.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What were conditions like in the months following Pearl Harbor for Japanese Americans? What were the roles of America's political leaders, the newspapers, and business and patriotic groups in fostering that climate?
2. What is anti-racism, and who benefits from those acts of anti-racism?
3. If you were a white person in the days following Pearl Harbor, would you have supported or worked against the mass detention of Japanese Americans?

TWO PAGES FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, JUNE 7 AND 9, 1943.

These are photocopies of two pages of the *Los Angeles Times* showing the “news” coverage of the Los Angeles “Zoot Suit Riots” and the detention of Japanese Americans. The riots occurred during the first two weeks of June 1943, and began when servicemen took it upon themselves to rid the streets of Mexican American youth gangs. Scores of servicemen roamed the downtown area and Mexican American communities searching for zoot suiters (young men dressed in hugely padded jackets and flowing trousers that tapered at the ankles, and women in skirts and stockings) who were equated with gang members, but really for any Mexican American young men. The photocopied pages show Mexican American young men in prison and an allegedly slashed white sailor, reversing the roles of attacker and victim. Additionally, the placements of the “news” coverage reveal the associations being made by the *Times* in positioning stories on zoot suit criminality with Japanese American disloyalty. Among the charges leveled at the zoot suiters were that they were part of a Fascist scheme to undermine American unity and that they were unpatriotic, both for not serving in the military and for wearing extravagant clothes amidst wartime rationing. On the other hand, Japanese Americans were removed and detained because of, allegedly, military necessity.



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Compare the photographs of the zoot suiters behind bars and the bandaged sailor in uniform, and discuss the implications of those photographs. Why did the editors of the *Los Angeles Times* place in adjacent columns stories on zoot suiters and inquiries into Japanese American loyalty?
2. What do the photographs and stories say about the “news”? Is it objective? Does it carry hidden messages and assumptions?
3. From this history lesson, what can it teach us today about reading the “news” or watching the “news” on television?

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE RIOTS, DAILY NEWS, JUNE 11, 1943.

Manchester Boddy, editor and publisher of the *Daily News*, offered another view of the “Zoot Suit Riots” by maintaining that Californians have “an affection for his fellow citizens of Mexican ancestry . . .” He attached to his “Views of the News” a letter from a Mexican American mother who described the negative effects of prejudice against Mexican American children in the schools and who appealed to her fellow Californians to, in the aftermath of the riots, show “the warm feeling of friendship that exists here for citizens of Mexican ancestry—as well as for Mexican nationals who are living among us.”

All general rules, including this one, are false. Nevertheless there is one that has held true in so many situations that it deserves consideration. It is this: “Out of every evil comes some good.” Certainly it applies to the current zoot suit trouble.

Police and court records prove that only a ridiculously small percentage of the local Mexican population is involved in the so-called “gang” demonstrations.

The vast majority of local Mexicans are just as distressed over the unfortunate brawls as is any other section of our citizenship. More so, in fact, because the admitted activities of a few irresponsible Mexican youths cast reflections on the many who are not in the least involved.

Every true Californian has an affection for his fellow citizens of Mexican ancestry that is as deep-rooted as the Mexican culture that influences our way of living—our architecture, our music—our language and even our food.

There are those who fear that the current trouble will cause a permanent strain on this friendship. In our

opinion just the opposite will be the case. That is the good that will come from the admitted evil.

Today we received the following letter:

“Dear Mr. Boddy:

“Being a subscriber of the *Daily News*, I have been reading about the so-called ‘zoot suiter.’ Being the mother of four children, I want to express my feelings.

“My children and myself are of Mexican descent, born and raised in this country. We are 100 per cent Americans. My oldest son is serving our country and the youngest is about to join the United States navy.

“In this morning’s paper the so-called ‘pachucos’ are called Hitler’s agents. To that I am expressing my belief. This racial discrimination they have in schools is where the youngsters’ pride is hurt and hatred is started—always being called Mexicans. In schools there are all nationalities, but only Mexicans are called by their ancestors’ blood. There are Irish, Jews, English, French, Swedes, etc., but as long as they are born in this country they are

Americans. Why not those of Mexican descent? They are treated as rare specimens. My two girls and my young son are going to high school. Yesterday, the principal had an auditorium call just for Mexicans. These youngsters resent the way they were taken out of their classes. ‘All Mexicans report to the auditorium,’ with emphasis on the ‘all Mexicans.’

“My children were in tears when they told me. ‘Mother, how do you think we felt, being the only Mexicans in a class and having to walk out. Everybody stared at us.’ ‘These youngsters naturally are hurt, and hatred gets the best of them.

“If the principal of this school had called everybody to the auditorium, those of Mexican blood would have understood, and would not have felt like they were all hoodlums.

“If you care to publish this you are welcome to do so. Many Mexican mothers feel just like I do but are afraid to express their opinions. Thank you.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Note the blame put upon the zoot suiters for the riots by editor Manchester Boddy, despite his statement that not all Mexican Americans were gang members. How does this contrast with the Mexican American mother’s analysis of the situation as arising out of racism sanctioned by the schools against Mexican American youth?
2. Consider the Mexican American mother’s mention of the newspaper calling the zoot suiters “Hitler’s agents,” in light of the *Los Angeles Times* news pages and their pairing of the riots with allegations of Japanese American disloyalty.

LETTER FROM AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIER.

This edited letter titled, “And I Fight for Democracy?,” and dated November 5, 1943, was sent to the Secretary of War in Washington, D.C., and was signed, “A Loyal Negro Soldier.”

I was selected by the President and citizens to fight for a “now – existing Democracy.” I am one soldier who waited to be drafted.* I didn’t volunteer out. I am learning to fight to protect whatever cause for which the Allies* are fighting. I am forced to learn to be ready to kill or be killed for “Democracy.” When the fighting time arrives, I will fight for?

I learned early in life that for the Negro* there is no Democracy. Of course, I know the principles set forth in the Amendments of the Bill of Rights.* I learned that I knew nothing of the operation of a true democratic form of government. I found that a Negro in civilian life has a very tough time with segregation* in public places and discrimination in industry. I knew this and I thought that white people would react differently toward a colored* soldier.

I had heard and read of the cruel treatment given colored soldiers and somehow, even among existing conditions of civilian life. I couldn’t understand how white people could be so down on one who wears the uniform of the fighting forces of this country. From civilian life I was drafted, and now I prepare to fight for the continuation of discriminatory practices against me and my people.

I am a soldier; I made no answer but deep down inside I knew when I faced America’s enemies I will fight for the protection of my loved ones at home.

Listen, Negro America, I am writing this article believing that it will act as a stimulant. You need awakening. Many of you have come to realize that your race is fighting on the battlefields of the world but do you know why they fight? I can answer this question.

The fight on the battlefield is for your existence, not for Democracy. It is upon you that each soldier depends. In my fight, my thoughts will invariably return to you who can fight from Democracy. You must do this for the soldiers because Democracy will be, and Democracy must, must be won at home – not on battlefields but through your bringing pressure to bear on Congress.

*Have students research and discuss these terms.

Reproduced in *Phillip McGuire, Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters From Black Soldiers in World War II* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1983), 85, 87.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Discuss this soldier’s assertion that “for the Negro there is no Democracy.”
2. What were some of the connections, if any, between fighting for democracy on the battlefield and at home?

LETTER FROM AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHER.

“Georgia,” the mother of a nine-year-old son, wrote this letter in 1943.

This is my problem – keeping alive in him that pride and eagerness to help his country win this war. I have read much about the tasks and duties of mothers in wartime. Mine is a big job – much bigger than that of some mothers, for I am a Negro mother, and first, in order to keep that pride and love of his country alive in the heart of my little boy, I’ve got to fight against the resentment and discouragement that wells up sometimes in my own heart.

The fanatics* in my own race almost cause me to waver at times. They say: “What are we fighting for? If we help win the war, we will continue to be kicked around, discriminated against, denied the right to make a decent living.”

I have faith in the goodness of America, because I’m an American.

Yes, I have faith in America, and I love it. I believe in it in spite of the fanatics. I believe that America will eventually wipe out this challenge to her democracy, and that the time will come when no person need fear that he cannot become a truly great American because of race, color or creed.* I believe that after we win this war, we will emerge as an even greater nation. I will keep this faith alive in my own heart, and in the heart of my little boy.

*Have students define and discuss these terms.

As quoted in *Maureen Honey (ed.), Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Discuss “Georgia’s” claim, “Mine is a big job – bigger than that of some mothers, for I am a Negro mother.”
2. Has “Georgia’s” belief that America would become truly democratic been fulfilled? (She predicted this in 1943.)

ORAL HISTORY* OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN MOTHER.

Here are edited excerpts from an oral history with Beatrice Morales Clifton, a mother of four children when the war began and who grew up in southern California.

My father's family was born in Mexico. They were from Durango. My parents married in Mexico. My dad was a factory worker. He used to weave material for the textile mills. My mother was one of those workers, too, and that's how I think that they met. They had three children in Mexico, two girls and a boy. Later, on the change of life, I came.

I didn't have any particular friends, just the girls we saw at school. When I went to the movie, I'd meet some other girl that I knew and we'd meet the boys in there. I was pretty young when I had a boyfriend, Alfonso Ortiz. He was about seventeen and I was maybe thirteen. We went together for about two or three years.

[Beatrice later met her first husband.] His name was Luis Escobosa, a Basco; real light complexioned. He was twenty-seven years old when he signed the marriage license. I was fifteen. The next year, I got pregnant. I was hardly ever with my husband because he was a salesman. He was always out of town. He'd come and go, come and go. Then I got pregnant again with my daughter. I was constantly fighting with him because of money. Later, I divorced him.

[Beatrice remarried in 1934 or 1935 to Julio Morales.] After Pearl Harbor, we moved to 214 Pasadena Avenue. They took a lot of Japanese away,* and they left a lot of houses. But I had a lot of trouble because they wouldn't rent to me because I was a Mexican. They'd tell it to my face. That used to make me feel kind of bitter. One time, one of them told me, "Why don't you say you're Italian? You could pass*." But finally I got this house, that was a pretty good size. There were blacks and there was white, Mexicans, and I guess over there on Pasadena Avenue there must have been quite a few Japanese people. All these people owned their house, but I didn't own mine.

I'd never thought about working. But the more I kept thinking about it, the more I said, "That's a good idea." So I took the forms and when I got home and told my husband, oh, he hit the roof. He was one of those men who didn't believe in the wife ever working; they want to be the supporter. I said, "Well, I've made up my mind. I'm going to work regardless of whether you like it or not." I was determined.

I filled out the papers and I got the job. To me, everything was new. They were doing the P-38s [a fighter airplane] at that time. They put me way in the back, putting little plate nuts and drilling holes. They put me with some guy - he was kind of a stinker, real mean. A lot of guys at the time resented women coming into jobs, and they let you know about it. I messed up something, made a ding. He got so irritable with me, he said, "You're not worth the money Lockheed pays you."

He couldn't have hurt me more if he would have slapped me. When he said that, I dropped the gun and went running downstairs to the restroom, with tears coming down. This girl from Texas saw me, and she followed me. She was real good. She was one of these "toughies"; dressed up and walked like she was kind of tough. She asked me what was wrong. I told her what I had done. She said, "Don't worry." She started cussing him. We came back up and she told them all off.

As time went on, I started getting a little bit better. I just made up my mind that I was going to do it. I learned my job so well that they put me to the next operation. At first, I just began putting little plate nuts and stuff like that. Then afterwards, I learned how to drill the skins and burr* them. Later, as I got going, I learned to rivet and buck.* I got to the point where I was very good.

I was just a mother of four kids, that's all. But I felt proud of myself and felt good because I had never done anything like that. I felt good that I could do something, and being that it was war, I felt that I was doing my part.

I went from 65 cents to \$1.05. That was top pay. It felt good and, besides, it was my own money. I could do whatever I wanted with it because my husband, whatever he was giving to the house, he kept on paying it. I used to buy clothes for the kids; buy little things that they needed. I had a bank account* and I had a little saving at home where I could get ahold of the money right away if I needed it. Julio never asked about it. He knew how much I made; I showed him. My money, I did what I wanted.

I started feeling a little more independent.* Just a little, not too much, because I was still not on my own that I could do this and do that. I didn't until after. Then I got really independent.

*Have students research and discuss these.

From *Shera Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 203-19.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Why did Beatrice's husband not want her to work outside the home?
2. How did having a job and money make Beatrice feel independent?

INTERVIEW WITH AN AMERICAN INDIAN DEFENSE WORKER.

Faith Feather Traversie, a twenty-five-year-old Yankton Lakota Indian, moved with her husband from South Dakota to Vallejo, California. She left her two older daughters with her mother, and took the youngest child with her to California. Her husband joined the Navy, and Traversie remained in California because of the work opportunities. In this interview excerpt, Traversie relates the circumstances of her employment.

Finding no “American Indian” race on the job application form at Mare Island Navy Yard, Traversie checked “other,” and returned the form to the secretary. “Lady,” the secretary asked, “if you’re not one of these nationalities, what in the world are you?” “American Indian,” Traversie responded, and the secretary appeared agitated and excused herself.

“So I stood there and waited while she went to this office. Pretty soon she went to another office – several, two or three followed her into it. Then, finally she came back to me and said, ‘Will you sit down, have a chair – we have to go see the officer of the day.’ So they – she and two others – went into this office and then finally, they had a consultation in there, and she finally came to me and said, ‘We’ll get to you as soon as we can. But we’re calling Washington, D.C.’ Well, she came and she said, ‘Well, we’ll have to classify you as White. Since you’re a ward of the government,* we’ll have to put ‘W’ on your badge for White.’”

Accordingly, “I was White on the base,” Traversie recalled.

*Have students research and discuss this term, “ward of the government.”

Grace Mary Gouveia, “‘We Also Serve’: American Indian Women’s Role in World War II,” *Michigan Historical Review* 20:2 (Fall 1994): 172-74, copyright Central Michigan University.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

1. How was “race” determined in Faith Feather Traversie’s hiring, and what does that say about the meanings of race?

LETTER FROM A JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIER.

This edited letter was written by George Saito, who served with his brother Calvin, while their family was in an American concentration camp. It was written on July 11, 1944, four days after his brother was killed in action, and addressed to his father, Kiichi Saito.

Dear Dad –

I believe the War Dept. has notified you of our loss of Calvin. Dad, I am writing you now because I've just learned of his passing. July 7th was the immemorable day.

I can imagine what a shock it was to you, as it was to me, because it happened so soon – on the twelfth day of combat.

A few events and action leading up to the time of his loss as related by a member of his company, are: On the 6th of July his unit was attacking a hill held by the enemy. After a hard fight with even a little hand-to-hand combat, they took the hill. The Jerries,* after being shoved off, were reforming for a counterattack. In the confusion and disorder of battle, Cal, being the radio-man, somehow got a call through to the artillery to open fire on the enemy. He personally directed and guided the firing on the enemy positions, which routed the enemy. His action and doing his job well at this one instance, explained the fellows, saved many of his buddies. Their unit held that hill that night but the next morning the enemy barraged the hill with mortars and he happened to be one of the unlucky ones. His passing was instantaneous. All of the fellows were telling me what a good soldier and radio-man he was and that his loss was keenly felt.

Well dad, now that the inevitable has happened, I guess you're wondering about his remains. Right now I can't do much for we're still in battle and I am writing you while at our gun position, but as I understand things now, they will bury him here in Italy and after the war you can ask the Government to transfer them to an American cemetery in the States. His personal belongings will be shipped to you in time.

Dad, this is not time to be preaching to you but I have something on my chest, which I want you to hear. In spite of Cal's supreme sacrifice, don't let anyone tell you that he was foolish or made a mistake to volunteer. Of what I've seen in my travels on our mission, I am more than convinced that we've done the right thing in spite of what has happened in the past. America is a damned good country, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Well dad, the Germans are beginning to throw a few shells our way now so maybe I'd better get down in my hole. If there is anything also that you'd like to know except the place, I shall only be too glad to let you know. In time though, when we're allowed I'll give you the exact location.

Cheer up, dad, and do take care of yourself. Regards to all.

Your loving son,

George*

N.B. Three months after sending his father this letter, George Saito was killed in battle.

*Have students research and discuss these.

Gift of Mary S. Tominaga, Japanese American National Museum (94.49.42).

QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

1. If you were Calvin or George Saito, would you have volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army?

DRAFT RESISTANCE.

American Indians and African, Japanese, and Mexican Americans wrestled with the question of serving in the armed forces of their country, which had denied them full equality with others. Some of them decided to resist the draft and refused to fight in the “white man’s war.”* Many more entered the military, in segregated units for African and Japanese Americans, and served with great distinction and valor. American Indians and African and Mexican Americans came from conditions of poverty and discrimination in rural reservations and farm communities and in urban ghettos.* Japanese Americans came from a Hawai’i under martial law* and from America’s concentration camps. For some Japanese Americans, the contradiction between the war rhetoric of President Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms and their loss of civil liberty required that they refuse to serve in the nation’s military. As Jack Tono testified, “before the evacuation I was ready to join the Army, because this is the only country that I knew,” but after the forced removal and mass detention, “I got educated real fast.” Confined by the government in the concentration camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming and asked by the same government to fight to preserve democracy, Tono mused: “You start thinking, where the hell is the democracy we learned in school? Hey, wait a minute now. When I have to give my life up for democracy, I want to see the goddamn thing first. . . .” At Heart Mountain concentration camp, some of the young men formed the Fair Play Committee after the government announced that it would begin to draft Japanese Americans in the camps. The Committee posted bulletins announcing their determination to resist the draft and their reasons for that act of defiance. As a result, the government charged the sixty-three draft resisters and seven members of the Fair Play Committee’s executive council with draft evasion and conspiracy to violate the law. All of the draft resisters were found guilty and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment, and the seven leaders received sentences of four years in prison. After the war, an appeals court overturned their convictions, and on Christmas Eve, 1947, President Harry Truman granted a presidential pardon to all draft resisters.

Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, Bulletin No. 3
March 4, 1944

We, the members of the FPC [Fair Play Committee] are not afraid to go to war—we are not afraid to risk our lives for our country. We would gladly sacrifice our lives to protect and uphold the principles and ideals of our country as set forth in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, for on its inviolability depends the freedom, liberty, justice, and protection of all people including Japanese-American and all other minority groups. But have we been given such freedom, such liberty, such justice, such protection? NO!! Without any hearings, without due process of law as guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights, without any charges filed against us, without any evidence of wrongdoing on our part, one hundred and ten thousand innocent people were kicked out of their homes, literally uprooted from where they have lived for the greater part of their life, and herded like dangerous criminals into concentration camps with barb wire fence and military police guarding it, AND THEN, WITHOUT RECTIFICATION OF THE INJUSTICES COMMITTED AGAINST US NOR WITHOUT RESTORATION OF OUR RIGHTS AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTION, WE ARE ORDERED TO JOIN THE ARMY THRU DISCRIMINATORY PROCEDURES INTO A SEGREGATED COMBAT UNIT! Is that the American way? NO! The FPC believes that unless such actions are opposed NOW, and steps taken to remedy such injustices and discriminations IMMEDIATELY, the future of all minorities and the future of this democratic nation is in danger.

Thus, the members of the FPC unanimously decided at their last open meeting that until we are restored all our rights, all discriminatory features of the Selective Service abolished, and measures are taken to remedy the past injustices thru Judicial pronouncement or Congressional act, we feel that the present program of drafting us from this concentration camp is unjust, unconstitutional, and against all principles of civilized usage, therefore, WE MEMBERS OF THE FAIR PLAY COMMITTEE HEREBY REFUSE TO GO TO THE PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OR TO THE INDUCTION, IF OR WHEN WE ARE CALLED IN ORDER TO CONTEST THE ISSUE.

*Have students research and discuss the term, “white man’s war,” and conditions (reservations, farm labor, and ghettos and martial law in Hawai’i).

Gift of Frank S. Emi, Japanese American National Museum (96.109.56).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Was the Fair Play Committee correct in their determination to resist the draft?
2. Who are the “patriots” and “loyal” Americans—those who served in the military or those who resisted the draft?

APPENDIX

HISTORIANS AND THEIR CRAFT

History is both what happened in the past and the renditions by historians about what happened in the past. Students must not confuse the writings of the past with the past. Without getting into the philosophical questions about “reality” and the “knowing of reality,” we offer this brief exposition on historians and the craft of writing history.

Historians represent the past from their present, including their time and place. In that sense, historians create a past based, in part, upon the perspectives and concerns of their times, cultures, and identities. Histories are thus oftentimes constrained by the times and traditions from which they arise. And yet, some historians strive for “objectivity,” universality, and timelessness to free themselves and their writings from the biases and limitations of their place and time. Others accept their subjectivity and determinants, and see “good” history as writings that speak to and for their time and place.

Because of those varieties of historians and their ideas about their craft, there are contrasting interpretations of history. Generally, historians deploy historical evidence to sustain their explanations for human behavior in the past. The nature of that historical evidence includes first-person accounts, such as diaries, letters, and oral interviews, and secondary materials, such as historical accounts and ethnographies written by those outside the culture they describe. The assembled evidence, along with the assumptions and theories that helped to determine the nature of the research and the selection of what constitutes the body of evidence, informs the writing of history.

We provide an example of that process from writings on the forced removal and detention of Japanese Americans during World War II. This account is quoted from Gary Y. Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 100-01.

“There were three major research undertakings during the war. First, a group of social scientists, mainly anthropologists, studied the camps for the War Relocation Authority, the camp administrators. Then, under the joint sponsorship of the Navy, Office of Indian Affairs, and War Relocation Authority, Alexander H. Leighton directed a research project on the camp in Poston, Arizona. Like the first project, Leighton’s research was used to advise the camp administrators on governing the confined peoples. Finally, the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS), headed by Dorothy Swaine Thomas of the University of California, Berkeley, began with social scientists studying the unfolding Japanese evacuation and relocation program in early 1942. They saw the project as a sociological study of the effects of forced mass migration and dislocation, as a social anthropological study concerning cultural contact and change; as a political science study of camp governance and the interplay of local, state, and national policies; as a social psychological study of collective adjustments to confinement; and as an economic study of the consequences of the program for detainees.

“Those purposes have invited reactions from critics of the camps and from those concerned with Japanese Americans as historical subjects. All three wartime research projects saw the camps as social laboratories in which to study the behavior of human beings in confinement. The results of the first two studies were directly translated into camp governance, although Leighton believed that his study bore broad, general application to situations of stress and rehabilitation. The JERS researchers state that they took special care to remain aloof from the camp administrators and to protect the confidentiality of their human subjects, though subsequent accounts have raised doubts about the thoroughness of the researchers’ efforts in that regard. And, in the pages of books intent on unraveling the camps’ meanings for all Americans, students of Japanese American history find missing the central figures of that story—not those who perpetrated the forced removals and detentions, but their victims, Japanese Americans.”

The works emanating from those three research projects bear the stamp of the purposes and assumptions of those researchers, along with their times. Thus, the social scientists working for the War Relocation Authority (WRA) earned their keep as “community analysts” who observed and reported on Japanese American culture, morale, attitudes toward the U.S. and Japan, and generational conflicts, among other matters. Alexander H. Leighton’s book, *The Governing of Men* (1945) describes community planning at Poston, self-government, social organization, and social disorganization and conflicts, and from those lessons he delineates principles and makes recommendations for the governing of captive populations. And the several books that were published by the JERS researchers stress the local, regional, and national politics and pressures that led to the mass removal and detention of Japanese Americans, along with the interactions between administrators and detainees in the camps and the solidarities and splits experienced in that relationship. Finally, historians critical of those contemporary studies of the concentration camps of World War II attempt to recover the voices of Japanese Americans mainly through oral histories but also through re-readings of community analysts’ reports and the materials generated by the research projects by Leighton and JERS.

For more detailed descriptions and analyses of research and writings on America’s concentration camps, see Rosalie H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Yuji Ichioka (ed.), *Views From Within: The Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1989; and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, *The Politics of Fieldwork: Research in an American Concentration Camp* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

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PHOTO CREDITS

- Page 4 Sign in front of neighborhood in Los Angeles, California barring peoples of color from living there, ca. early 1950s. Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
- Page 6 Commander Charles Sproule reviews drills to Women Airforce Service Pilots, Sweetwater, Texas, 1943. The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS 250.8.5)
- Page 8 Clashes on the streets between U.S. servicemen and Mexican American youth become frequent in Spring 1943. By June, rioting servicemen conduct "search and destroy" raids looking for any youth wearing zoot suits. Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-75515)
- Page 9 Franklin D. Roosevelt. National Archives at College Park, NDNS-208-PU-171G(1A)
- Page 11 Alfred Norris, a crew chief, closes the canopy for his pilot, William T. Mattison, at a base in Italy, ca. 1944. The ground crews and mechanics of the Tuskegee Airmen also serve in segregated units. National Archives (NWDNS-208-AA-46BB-6)
- Page 12 A. Philip Randolph, a prominent African American trade unionist and civil rights leader, threatened to lead thousands in a march on Washington unless all were guaranteed equal opportunity in war industries. Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-133367)
- Page 14 Segregated drinking fountain on the county courthouse lawn, Halifax, North Carolina, April 1938. Library of Congress (LC-USF33-001112-M1)
- Page 14 World War II veteran, Dr. Héctor P. García, leads a farm workers march to protest unfair wages, Texas, 1968. Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi Bell Library
- Page 14 Navajo Code Talkers operate a portable radio set in a jungle clearing, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, December 1943. National Archives (NWDNS-127-MN-69889B)
- Page 14 Young men enlist at Manzanar concentration camp, California, November 1944. Gift of Grace and George Izumi, Japanese American National Museum (94.182.11)
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