



JAPANESE AMERICAN PATRIOTISM MEMORIAL

Washington, D.C., District of Columbia, USA

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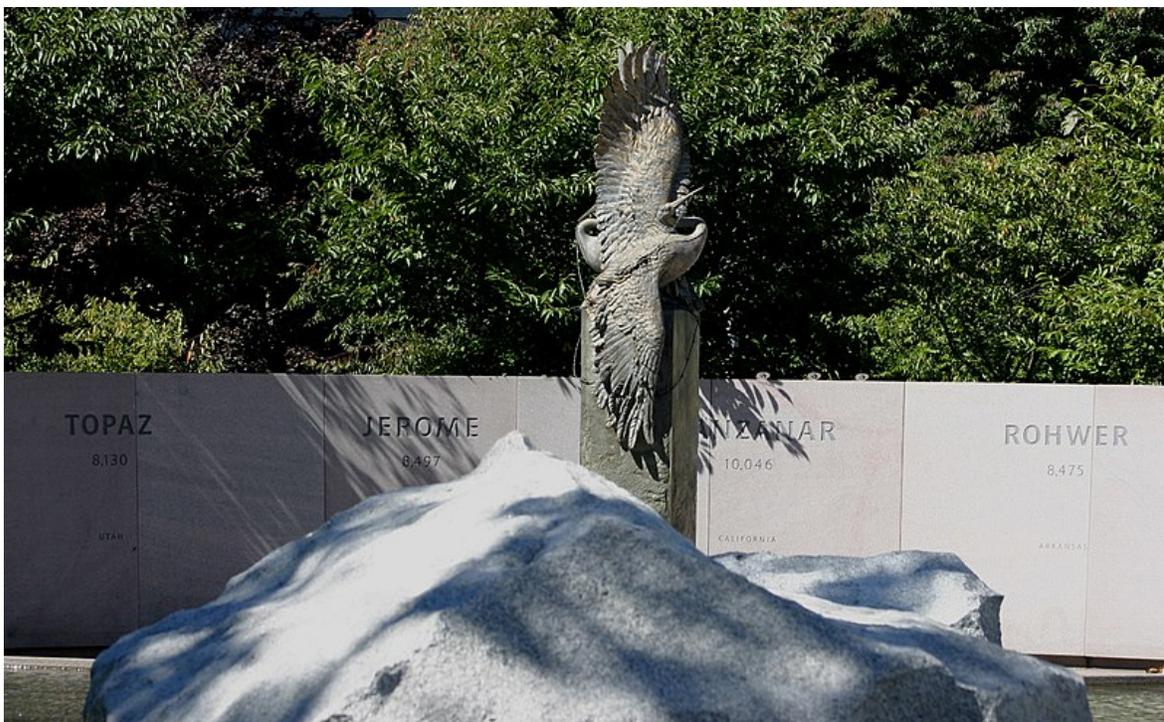


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Executive Summary

The Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II in Washington, D.C., United States, is a monument to the 112,581 Japanese Americans incarcerated by the U.S. Government during World War II. It also commemorates Japanese Americans who served in the U.S. Military. The inscriptions in the memorial received criticism from the Japanese American Voice Group for including a quotation by a Japanese American veteran and activist Mike Masaoka, which praised the unquestioning loyalty of his community to the U.S., originally to be captioned as the 'Japanese American Creed.' The National Japanese American Memorial Foundation agreed to scrap this title but retained Masaoka's quotation. This case study shows how stakeholders from different generations within the Japanese American community conceptualise the commemoration of their and their ancestors' experience of life in the U.S. during and after World War II.

Introduction

The 'Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II' in Washington, D.C., is a commemorative monument to the 112,581 Japanese Americans whom the United States Government baselessly incarcerated during the Second World War. It also commemorates Japanese Americans who served and the more than 800 killed in the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Infantry Regiment and the Military Intelligence Service. The site includes a reflection pool, a 14-foot monument depicting two cranes in barbed wire, and a series of granite slabs recording the ten detention centres' names, Japanese Americans killed in action during World War II, and seven quotations by notable Japanese American figures. It was privately funded by the Go For Broke National Veterans' Association and was given to the National Park Service in 2002. The accompanying inscriptions received criticism from the Japanese American Voice Group for including a quotation by a Japanese American veteran and activist Mike Masaoka, which praised the unquestioning loyalty of his community to the United States, originally to be captioned as the 'Japanese American Creed.' The National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) agreed to scrap this title but retained Masaoka's quotation. As of December 2021, there have been no agreed changes to this memorial.

Background

The internment of Japanese people began almost immediately following the outbreak of war between the USA and Japan on December 7, 1941, with the detention of 1,291 first-generation Japanese Americans (Issei) by the FBI. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which allowed for the exclusion of any population from a region on 'military necessity' and would form the legal bedrock of the internment policy. All such measures took place in conditions of mass hysteria surrounding the assumed disloyalty of Japanese Americans. The War Relocation Authority undertook the policy of exclusion (WRA), established on March 18, 1942, which issued 108 'Civilian Exclusion Orders' to Japanese Americans living on the West Coast, relocating them 'neighbourhood by neighbourhood' first to local assembly centres and then to the 10 'relocation centres' named in this memorial (Manzanar, Tule Lake, Amache, Minidoka, Topaz, Heart Mountain, Rohwer and Jerome, and Gila River). In total, 120,313 people were housed in these overcrowded and hastily constructed camps. Rooms intended to house four people often contained up to 25 in reality. Poor sanitation resulted in bouts of food poisoning and dysentery. Desert rheumatism and malaria also spread due to the location of the camps. Those who swore an oath of loyalty were permitted to enlist in specific Japanese American Military units, specifically the 442nd Infantry Regiment and the 100th Infantry Battalion. The former became the most decorated military unit for its size and period of combat in the US Army. 1,862 died in the camps, and the last internees were not released until

March 1946.¹⁻²⁻³

In December 1982, the Federal Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians published a 467-page report entitled 'Personal Justice Denied' finding that:

The promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it--detention, ending detention and ending exclusion--were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.⁴

The report resulted in the passing of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which recognised and apologised for the 'grave injustice' of the internment policy, providing \$20,000 in restitution to each surviving internee.⁵

In 1987, the same year as the introduction of the Civil Liberties Bill, a group of veterans from the 442nd Infantry regiment led by Mike Masaoka formed the Go For Broke National Veterans Association to build a memorial in Washington to 'honour Japanese American Veterans.' After initial discouragement from the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC), who cited the Commemorative Works Act of 1986, which prohibited war memorials dedicated to a specific ethnic group, the Go For Broke Association succeeded in obtaining approval for the memorial, provided that it was dedicated to Japanese American Patriotism in World War II. The focus on patriotism ensured the incorporation of both the internment experience, the official acts of restitution, and the service of Japanese American soldiers.⁶

On October 24, 1992, President George H. W. Bush signed the Public Law 102-502, permitting 'a memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia or its environs to honour Japanese American patriotism in World War II.'⁷ The Go For Broke Association, which renamed itself the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation, supervised the design and raised funds through public donations under its Executive Director Cherry Y. Tsutsumida.⁸ A ¾ acre site in Washington, D.C. was settled upon at the intersection of Louisiana Avenue, New Jersey Avenue, and D Street NW and architect Davis Buckley was hired to design the monument, which was to contain five elements:⁹

1. A bronze sculpture of two cranes trapped in barbed wire, designed by Nina Akamu

¹ NJAMF, "Forced Removal and Incarceration," *National Japanese Memorial Foundation*, no date.

² WhiskeyBristles, "Memorial to Japanese-American Patriotism in World War II," *Atlas Obscura*, no date.

³ NJAMF, "The American Soldiers," *National Japanese Memorial Foundation*, no date.

⁴ US Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, "Personal Justice Denied: Summary," *US Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*, December 1982.

⁵ Thomas S. Foley, "H.R.442 — 100th Congress (1987-1988)," *100th United States Congress*, August 10, 1988.

⁶ Kirsten A. Hass, "Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall," *Oakland: University of California Press*, 2013, pp. 128-133.

⁷ "PUBLIC LAW 102-502," *102nd United States Congress*, October 24, 1992.

⁸ Brian Niiya, "National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II," *Densho Encyclopedia*, November 9, 2017.

⁹ *Ibid.*

2. Granite panels bearing the names of the 10 internment camps and the numbers held there, along with 7 quotes from Japanese American leaders
3. A reflecting pool containing five stones
4. A list of the more than 800 fallen Japanese American soldiers in World War II
5. A 16ft tubular Japanese bell, designed by Paul Matisse

Buckley consciously worked to create a redemptive arc within the memorial, moving from the trauma of internment towards restitution through military service: 'The forms of the design elements express the concept that through their steadfast loyalty Japanese Americans overcame the unjust denial of civil rights and served their nation with patriotic distinction.'¹⁰

Nina Akamu, whose grandfather died in the Sand Island internment camp, designed the 'Golden Cranes' sculpture. The birds represent both a specific Japanese symbol of longevity and happiness as well as a universal representation of 'freedom and transcendence of the human condition':

On one level, the inversion of the symbols of happiness and freedom and the use of barbed wire represent the internment, injustices and sacrifices suffered by Japanese Americans during the war. The crane holds specific significance for this particular community, but its message is not simply ethnic. Humans share recognition of the universality of suffering and a longing for freedom. Therefore, the sculpture is also an evocation of strength and a testament to the power of the human spirit.¹¹

The NJAMF succeeded in raising the \$11.6 million for the memorial through grassroots fundraising and more significant donations from private foundations and corporate bodies.¹² Ground for the memorial was broken in 1999, and the site was dedicated on November 9, 2000, with 2,000 persons in attendance, including surviving Japanese American Veterans.¹³⁻¹⁴

History of the Contestation

While the memorial's dedication received relatively little media attention, plans for the memorial were criticised publicly by the historian Stephen Ambrose in the *National Review*, describing it as 'a terrible idea': 'The main point is, memorials are supposed to be put in place to honour men and women who acted in some positive way for the good of the nation. They are not erected to praise or acknowledge those who were abused.'¹⁵

However, the most intense criticism came from within the NJAMF itself and the wider Japanese

¹⁰ Kirsten A. Hass, "Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall," *Oakland: University of California Press*, 2013, pp. 136-7.

¹¹ Nina Akamu, "The National Japanese American Memorial, 'Golden Cranes,'" *Studio Equus*, 2016.

¹² Brian Niiya, "National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II," *Densho Encyclopedia*, November 9, 2017.

¹³ Alfred Arakaki, "Groundbreaking Ceremony: October 22 1999," *Puka-Puka Parade: 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans Club*, January 2000.

¹⁴ Rudi Williams, "National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism Dedicated," *American Forces Press Service*, November 15, 2000.

¹⁵ Stephen Ambrose, "A Terrible Idea," *National Review*, November 22, 1999.

community over the inscription of the following quotation by Mike Masaoka: 'I am proud that I am an American of Japanese ancestry. I believe in her institutions, ideals and traditions; I glory in her heritage; I boast of her history; I trust in her future.'¹⁶

These words, titled the 'Japanese American Creed,' were taken from a statement written by Masaoka for the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in 1941, intended to bolster patriotism among his community prior to the outbreak of war. Masaoka and the JACL aroused consternation in the Japanese American community by collaborating with the Federal government on internment. Masaoka testified to Congress in February 1942 that 'I think sincerely, if the military says Move Out,' we will be glad to move.'¹⁷⁻¹⁸

In October 1999, the chair of the Commission of Fine Arts, J. Carter Brown, relayed a 'major concern' voiced by a member of the public of 'aggrandising any one individual or organisation' (e.g. Masaoka and the JACL) and recommended that the NJAMF proceed by 'retaining the quote in question and eliminating any ambiguous reference to an organisation is a possible compromise.' The Foundation agreed to this measure and did not refer to a creed in the inscription. Nevertheless, some of its own Board members expressed deep concern over Masaoka's inclusion as a controversial celebration of unquestioning loyalty and wartime collaboration and recommended removing the inscription altogether. Three Board members, Rita Takahashi, Francis Sogi, and Kelly Kuwayama, formed the Japanese American Voice, which issued a resolution in May 2000 to the US Department of the Interior. More than 1,000 community members eventually signed it. It condemned the inclusion of the quotation, the lack of public consultation, and the existence of a number of historical inaccuracies within the inscriptions.¹⁹

The NPS [National Park Service] and the NJAMF acted insensitively and disrespectfully by including the misquotation of a 'creed,' which was written by a private (not elected) individual they know reflects an organizational perspective of only a limited segment of the Japanese American community, and which they know causes widespread pain and objections.²⁰

In the same period, the NPS and the NJAMF received 700 letters of protest over the Masaoka quotation. Clifford Uyeda, former President of the Japanese American Citizens League, claimed that 'Unless it is changed [...] this monument will split the Japanese American community forever,' while William Hohri, a leading campaigner for Japanese American redress, declared '[it] may be as much a memorial to betrayal and falsified history as it is to patriotism.' Members of Japanese American Voice also claimed that the NJAMF Board had not acted according to its own procedural guidelines and

¹⁶ Art Hansen, "The 'invented fiction' of the model minority and the controversy behind the JA Creed," *Nichi Bei*, January 1, 2015.

¹⁷ Brian Niya, "Japanese American Creed," *Densho Encyclopedia*, January 11, 2018.

¹⁸ Francis Y. Sogi and Yeichi Kuwayama, "Japanese Americans Disunited," *JAVoice.com*, April 26, 2001.

¹⁹ Kirsten A. Hass, "Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall," *Oakland: University of California Press*, 2013, p. 143 and *Ibid*.

²⁰ *JAVoice.com*, "Resolution," *JAVoice.com*, November 9, 2000.

that the names to be included were approved without revealing the accompanying text.²¹⁻²²

The leadership of the foundation defended its inclusion in the press, with Executive Director Cherry Tsutsumida claiming in *Nichi Bei* that the NJAMF Board acted five times on the issue: 'To talk as if they [the protesting Board members] were closed out is nonsense [...] They were at the table like anyone else.' The Board Chair Melvin H. Chiogioji wrote that 'the majority of the Board agreed that achievements under Masaoka's leadership deserved recognition on the Memorial,' citing Masaoka's record in fighting for citizenship and immigration rights as worthy of remembrance. The leadership also argued that this was primarily a generational divide, with Tsutsumida claiming: 'The Nisei [second generation Japanese Americans] love Mike. The Issei [first generation] love Mike. However, the Sansei [third generation] have a problem with him.'²³

In response to the protest, the Director of the National Park Service, Robert Stanton, issued a letter to the *Japanese American Voice* on July 12, 2000. This agreed to resolve historical inaccuracies identified on the inscription regarding the numbers interned, the official names of Poston, Marche and Topaz camps, and the length of time between the Declaration of War and the issuance of Executive Order 966.²⁴ On the subject of Mike Masaoka, however, Stanton wrote:

First, Mr. Masaoka was a key civil rights leader in this country for 50 years during which he successfully fought for the rights of Japanese Americans. Second, the Board of the Foundation, which is erecting this memorial and is composed of Japanese Americans, has considered this matter and voted on numerous occasions to include Mr. Masaoka. We must respect their views. Third, the research about this period in our history is ongoing and it is possible that current historical thinking may change ... Fourth, this is a complicated story and cannot be completely told in a memorial. Thus, we believe that pamphlets should be produced which will give more information to the visitor. Such a pamphlet can be changed over time if the scholarly research indicates a change in the traditional narrative of the story is required.²⁵

Japanese American Voice took particular issue with Stanton's claim that Masaoka was 'a key civil rights leader' and solicited opinions from six scholars and researchers whom all rejected this assertion, with Professor Don Hata of California State University stating: 'the scholarship suggests that Masaoka's place in history is one of notoriety rather than fame.' Following Stanton's refusal to remove the inscription, *Japanese American Voice* published a pamphlet describing the memorial controversy in detail, entitled 'Japanese Americans Disunited' intended to 'encourage the public to delve more deeply into the large body of historical works that exists on Japanese American history, particularly the tragic years of World War II.'²⁶

²¹ Kirsten A. Hass, "Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall," *Oakland: University of California Press*, 2013, p. 143

²² *Nichi Bei Times*, "Nichi Bei Times, May 31, 2000," *JAVoice.com*, May 31, 2000.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *JAVoice.com*, "National Park Service issues response to JAVoice.com resolution," *JAVoice.org*, July 12, 2000.

²⁵ Francis Y. Sogi and Yeiichi Kuwayama, "Japanese Americans Disunited," *JAVoice.com*, April 26, 2001.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Most recently, cultural historian Kristen Ann Hass included an extensive and critical treatment of the memorial in her 2013 book *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall*. As well as documenting the Masaoka controversy, Hass challenged the memorial's narrative of 'redemption' through military service:

It posits that unquestioning loyalty in the form of military service can compensate for race. It forges an antiracist nationalism with the memory of racial exclusion. And it turns on the figuring of the soldier. The soldier is used here three times: stripped of freedom, celebrated for the sacrifice he was almost barred from making, and made to serve the cause of blind devotion.²⁷

Decision-Making Processes

Based on the accounts provided by the Japanese American Voice, the Executive Committee of the NJAMF, itself a private organisation, did not adequately consider the criticism of many of its Board members regarding the inclusion of the Mike Masaoka quotation. The fact that public donations funded the memorial makes the failure to publicise the inclusion of the Masaoka inscription additionally problematic and resulted, by Director Tsutsumida's admission, in some donors asking for their funds to be returned. The NJAMF's singling out specific sections of the Japanese American community for their criticism because they 'were not caught up in the evacuation of the West Coast' added unnecessary division and ill-feeling to the dispute.²⁸

As the Federal agency tasked with managing the site, the National Park Service acknowledged public concerns on this issue and altered the memorial to correct historical inaccuracies. However, its assessment of Masaoka's achievements and legacy contradicted the opinions of many academic researchers who have studied the JACL's collaboration with the government during World War II. Japanese American Voice continued to press for alterations to the memorial, but the NPS has not authorised any further changes or moved to establish mechanisms to resolve the controversy.

The site was formally transferred to the National Park Service in 2002, and the NJAMF continues to conduct educational events at the memorial..²⁹

Dynamics to consider in decision-making include transparency in discussing and approving the memorial's design, intercommunal and intergenerational disagreements, relevant historical research findings regarding individuals and organisations, and the role of government organisations in mediating contestations.

Summary and Conclusions

²⁷ Kirsten A. Hass, "Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall," *Oakland: University of California Press*, 2013, pp. 150-151.

²⁸ Nichi Bei Times, "Nichi Bei Times, May 31, 2000," *JAVoice.com*, May 31, 2000.

²⁹ Brian Niiya, "National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II," *Densho Encyclopedia*, November 9, 2017.

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(Cover Image)

About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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