

Chinese
Filipinos
Koreans
Indians
Germans
Italians

DOUBLE VICTORY

A Multicultural History of
America in World War II

RONALD TAKAKI

2000.



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
Boston New York London

Sheriff's department to the Grand Jury in regards to the Sleepy Lagoon murder case. In that report it was charged that "all Mexicans are inherently vicious." And there is the assertion of the Lieutenant of the Hollywood police force that said: "A Mexican is always a good suspect." The metropolitan press and radio must also bear the brunt of the responsibility for our ten days of terror [the zoot-suit riot]. Both have raved very much like the loud-mouth Goebbels in directing his diatribes against the Semites.⁹⁷

On October 4, 1944, the District Court of Appeals found that the trial judge in the Sleepy Lagoon case was biased against the defendants and overturned the convictions. Leading the appeal struggle was a defense committee whose membership included Bert Corona, Rita Hayworth, Anthony Quinn, Orson Welles, Henry Fonda, and Carey McWilliams. "It wasn't only seventeen boys who were on trial," the committee declared. "It was the whole of the Mexican people, and their children and grandchildren." In their conclusion, they issued a call to arms against the ideology of white superiority on the home front: "Nazi logic guided the judge and jury and dictated the verdict and sentence. We are at war not only with the armies of the Axis powers, but with the poison gas of their doctrine, with the 'biological basis' of Hitler and with his theories of race supremacy."⁹⁸

DIVERSITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Who Is an American?

How the Chinese Became "Friends"

TWO WEEKS after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Time* magazine explained how to distinguish the Chinese "friend" from the Japanese "enemy":

HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE JAPS: Virtually all Japanese are short. Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader-hipped than short Chinese. Japanese are seldom fat; they often dry up and grow lean as they age. Although both have the typical epicurean fold of the upper eyelid, Japanese eyes are usually set closer together. The Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant. Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversation, laugh loudly at the wrong time. Japanese walk stiffly erect, hard heeled. Chinese, more relaxed, have an easy gait, sometimes shuffle.

Two photographs — one of a Japanese, another of a Chinese — were used as illustrations. Previously maligned as the "heathen Chinese," "mice-eaters," and "Chinks," the Chinese were now "friends" and allies engaged in a heroic common effort against the "Japs."¹

The Chinese had been in America for a long time. They had begun arriving in America during the 1849 Gold Rush to California; by 1930, 400,000 of them had sailed east across the Pacific, carrying a dream of America. Immigrant Lee Chew described what had happened to him. As a sixteen-year-old he saw the triumphant return of a Chinese migrant from the "country of the American wizards." With the money he had earned overseas, the migrant invited his fellow villagers to "a grand party where they were served a hundred roasted pigs, along with chickens, ducks, geese, and an abundance of dainties." Inspired, Chew left for the land the Chinese called "gold mountain."²

In America, Chinese immigrants helped build the transcontinental railroad; they also worked in the factories of San Francisco as well as the agricultural valleys of California. But the Chinese experienced harsh discrimination. The 1790 Naturalization Act denied them the right to become citizens: this law provided that in order to be eligible for naturalized citizenship the applicant had to be "white."³ The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act severely restricted immigration from China. Competing for jobs, white workers forced the Chinese to retreat to Chinatowns, where they worked in small businesses like restaurants and laundries.

One of these immigrants was Andrew Kan. "When I first came," he told an interviewer in 1924, forty-four years after his arrival, "Chinese treated worse than dog. Oh, it was terrible, terrible. At that time all Chinese have queue and dress same as in China. The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you." Although Kan could not become a citizen, he knew he was deserving. "Since I have lived and made money in this country," Kan declared, "I should be able to become an American citizen."⁴

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Chinese Americans

realized that they were still viewed as foreigners, and they also remembered that the Chinese had been called "Japs" in the early twentieth century.⁵ In Chinatown during the early weeks of the war, shopkeepers displayed signs declaring, "This is a Chinese shop," and people wore buttons saying: "I am Chinese." Recalling the fear in the community, Nelly Wong wrote:

When World War II was declared
on the morning radio,
we glued our ears, widened our eyes.
Our bodies shivered. . . .
Shortly our Japanese neighbors vanished
and my parents continued to whisper:
We are Chinese, we are Chinese.
We wore black arm bands,
put up a sign
in bold letters.⁶

During the 1930s, Chinese Americans had anxiously watched Japan systematically unveil its plan for the control of China. On September 18, 1931, the Japanese army attacked Mukden, then marched into Manchuria. Five months later, Japan violently seized Shanghai. As they witnessed the brutal acts of Japanese imperialism, Chinese Americans felt a deep concern for the homeland of their parents. In Chinese school, they listened to the principal give speeches about how Chiang Kai-shek should do more to resist the Japanese. "If you were Chinese-American, you certainly felt the fate of China was important," recounted James Low. "I remember the teachers would always complain, 'China is weak, and look at the treatment we get here.'"⁷

By "treatment," Low was referring to the discrimination that young Chinese Americans were experiencing. They wanted to break away from the immigrant status of their parents, and hoped that education would open doors of employment in the professions and skilled occupations. But they discovered that their edu-

cation mattered little. "Even if you had an education, there was no other work than in a laundry or restaurant," complained David Chin, himself the owner of a laundry in New York. Two Chinese engineers wrote to fifty engineering companies applying for positions in their field and received only negative responses. Similarly Peter Soohoo graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in electrical engineering in 1923; two years later he told a Stanford University researcher: "I have tried to get into the engineering field but thus far have not been able to do so." After failing to find a job as an engineer, a Chinese graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology became a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. Young Chinese Americans wondered whether they had a future outside of Chinatown. The Great Depression made the employment picture even bleaker. "With thousands of . . . blue-eyed collegians at his elbows, looking for a job, with thousands of similar tinted fellows working for a raise, ready to take his place the moment he slips," asked a Chinese youth, "is there a chance for a person with a yellow skin?"⁸

Lamenting this employment discrimination, the San Francisco Chinese newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* advised American-born Chinese to "return" to China. "In the fields of agriculture and aviation, China is much lacking in Western knowledge. Unlimited opportunities are ahead. . . . Indeed, your future lies with China, not with America." Compared to America, China seemed to be a society where they would not have to worry about being rejected for a job because they were Chinese. Stanford University student Louise Leung told an interviewer: "The Chinese who are trained in the schools here do not expect to remain in the United States, but they are looking toward China for the future." Chinese college graduates had the education and qualifications — "everything but the color" for professional employment in America.⁹

"We were all immigrants in those days, no matter where we were born," recalled Victor Wong bitterly. "Between the Chinese and the English education, we had no idea where we belonged. Even to this day, if I wanted to say, 'I'm going to China,' I would

never say it that way; I would say 'go back to China.' Because I was taught from the time I was born that this was not my country, that I would have to go to China to make my living as an adult."¹⁰

The entry of the United States into the war suddenly gave Chinese Americans a chance to make this their country. They passionately joined the war effort to save China and also to win equality for themselves at home. In Chinatowns across the country, patriotism exploded. In "A Memo to Mr. Hitler, Hirohito & Co.," the *Chinese Press* of San Francisco warned:

Have you heard the bad news? America is out to get you. America has a grim, but enthusiastic bombing party started, and you're the target in the parlor game.

San Francisco Chinatown, U.S.A., is joining the party. Chinatown will have fun blasting you to hell. Chinatown is proud to be a part of Freedom's legion in freeing all the decent people of the world from your spectacle.

Chinatown's part of the party will cost \$500,000. Admission price to the fun is purchase of a U.S. War Bond. We're all going to buy a War Bond for Victory.

P. S. More bad news. Everyone in Chinatown is going to this party. We're NOT missing this one.¹¹

In New York Chinatown, excited crowds cheered wildly when the first draft numbers drawn were for Chinese Americans. Chinese boys, too young for the armed services, tried to enlist by giving the authorities their "Chinese age," usually a year older than the age indicated on their birth certificates.¹²

Emily Lee Shek became the first Chinese woman to join the Wacs. "She tried to join up right in the beginning [of the war]," the *Chinese Press* reported in September 1942, "but the 105-pound weight minimum barred her. When the requirement was dropped five pounds, she drank two gallons of water and lived on a special Chinese diet, and made it — yes, with one pound to spare."¹³

Altogether 13,499 Chinese served in the U.S. Armed Forces —

22 percent of all Chinese adult males. "To men of my generation," explained Charlie Leong of San Francisco Chinatown, "World War II was the most important historic event of our times. For the first time we felt we could make it in American society." The war had given them the opportunity to get out of Chinatown, don army uniforms, and be sent overseas where they felt they were part of the great patriotic United States war machine out to do battle with the enemy. Harold Liu of New York Chinatown recalled: "In the 1940s for the first time Chinese were accepted by Americans as being friends because at that time, Chinese and Americans were fighting against the Japanese and the Germans and the Nazis. Therefore, all of a sudden, we became part of an American dream. We had heroes with Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang Kai-shek and so on. It was just a whole different era and in the community we began to feel very good about ourselves."¹⁴ Kamin Chin explained: "My family had been here for over 100 years. I can't change the shape of my eyes. But I am an American. I was fighting discrimination."¹⁵

Chinese Americans also served on the home front. Confined for decades to low-wage jobs, Chinese workers suddenly found new employment opportunities, especially in the defense industries, where labor shortages were acute. Waiters left the restaurants and rushed to the higher-paying industrial jobs. In 1942 four restaurants in New York Chinatown had to shut down because of a lack of waiters, and the proprietor of Li Po, a restaurant in Los Angeles, remarked: "I was just ready for another venture. But I can't now. No men to run it." In Los Angeles, three hundred Chinese laundry workers closed their shops to work on the construction of the ship *China Victory*. "At Douglas, home of the A-20 attack planes and dive bombers," the *Chinese Press* reported in 1943, "there are approximately 100 Chinese working at its three plants — Santa Monica, Long Beach, and El Segundo." Chinese workers constituted 15 percent of the shipyard workforce in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1943. They also found employment in the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation, the shipyards of

Delaware and Mississippi, and the airplane factories on Long Island.¹⁶

One of these new defense industry workers was Arthur Wong. After arriving in New York Chinatown in 1930 at the age of seventeen, he found himself confined to the ethnic economy: "I worked five and a half days in the laundry and worked the whole weekend in the restaurant. And then came the war, and defense work opened up; and some of my friends went to work in a defense plant, and they recommended that I should apply for defense work. So I went to work for Curtiss-Wright, making airplanes. I started out as an assembler, as a riveter."¹⁷

The war also opened employment opportunities for Chinese women. After graduating from college, Jade Snow Wong found that she could not find suitable employment because she was Chinese. Then the war industries began to demand workers. "By this time the trek to the shipyards was well underway," wrote Wong. "The patriotic fever to build as many ships as possible, together with boom wages, combined to attract people from all types of occupations," and Wong was hired as a typist-clerk in a shipyard in Marin County. Several hundred "alert young Chinese-American girls," the *Chinese Press* reported in 1942, "have gone to the defense industries as office workers." The paper proudly presented a partial roster of these workers in the Bay Area, including Fannie Yee, Rosalind Woo, and Jessie Wong of Bethlehem Steel, and Anita Chew, Mildred Lew, and Evelyn Lee of Mare Island's Navy Yard. "They're part of the millions who stand behind the man behind the gun." A year later, in an article on "Women in the War," the *Chinese Press* informed its readers about Alice Yick, the Boston Navy Yard's only Chinese woman mechanical trainee, who could run light lathes, grinders, shapers, planers, and other machine tools. "Helen Young, Lucy Young, and Hilda Lee," the paper continued, "were the first Chinese women aircraft workers in California. They help build B-24 bombers in San Diego."¹⁸

Writing for *Survey Graphic* in 1942, sociologist Rose Hum Lee reported the integration of previously marginalized Chinese work-

DOUBLE VICTORY

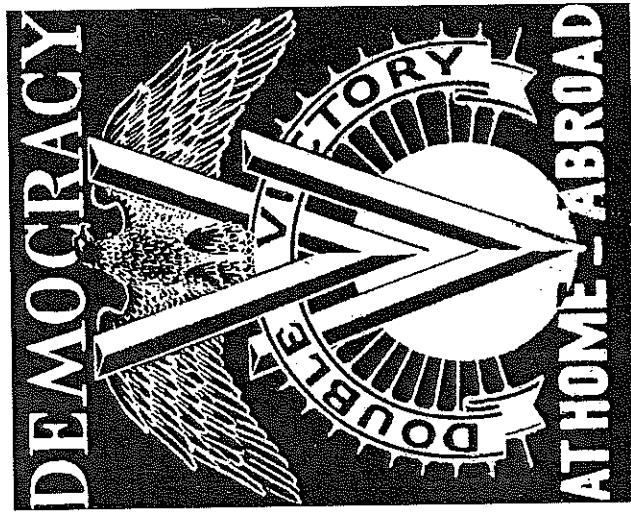
We have stood up uncomplaining.
Besieged on land and blockaded by sea,
We have done all that human endurance could bear. . . .
Our defeat is our victory.²⁷

At Bataan, thousands of Filipinos had fought beside American soldiers, and stories of their courage forced whites to revise their attitudes toward Filipinos in the United States. "No longer on the streetcar do I feel myself in the presence of my enemies," recalled Manuel Buaken. "We Filipinos are the same — it is Americans that have changed in their recognition of us." A Filipino working in a Pullman car was pleasantly surprised by the abrupt change in the attitudes of white travelers. "I am very much embarrassed," he remarked. "They treat me as if I have just arrived from Bataan."²⁸

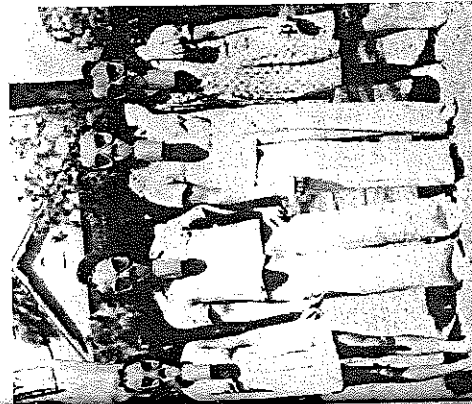
Anxious to defend their homeland, Filipino Americans rushed to the recruiting offices. They were refused, however, for Filipinos were classified as "nationals" and hence ineligible for service in the U.S. Armed Forces. Responding to their protests, President Roosevelt promptly changed the draft law to include Filipinos, and on February 19, 1942, Secretary of War Henry Stimson announced the organization of the First Filipino Infantry Regiment: "This new unit is formed in recognition of the intense loyalty and patriotism of those Filipinos who are now residing in the United States. It provides for them a means of serving in the armed forces of the United States, and the eventual opportunity of fighting on the soil of their homeland."²⁹

Filipinos enthusiastically responded to the call to arms. In California alone sixteen thousand — 40 percent of the state's Filipino population — registered for the first draft. Filipino soldiers had, Doroteo Vite explained in 1942, "a personal reason to be training to fight the invaders. My home and my family and all the things that were dear to me as a boy are there in the path of the Japanese war machine."³⁰

For Filipinos, service in the U.S. Army was also viewed as a path



Symbol of "double victory" in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 7, 1942. "Let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory," wrote James G. Thompson in a letter to the editor. "The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within."

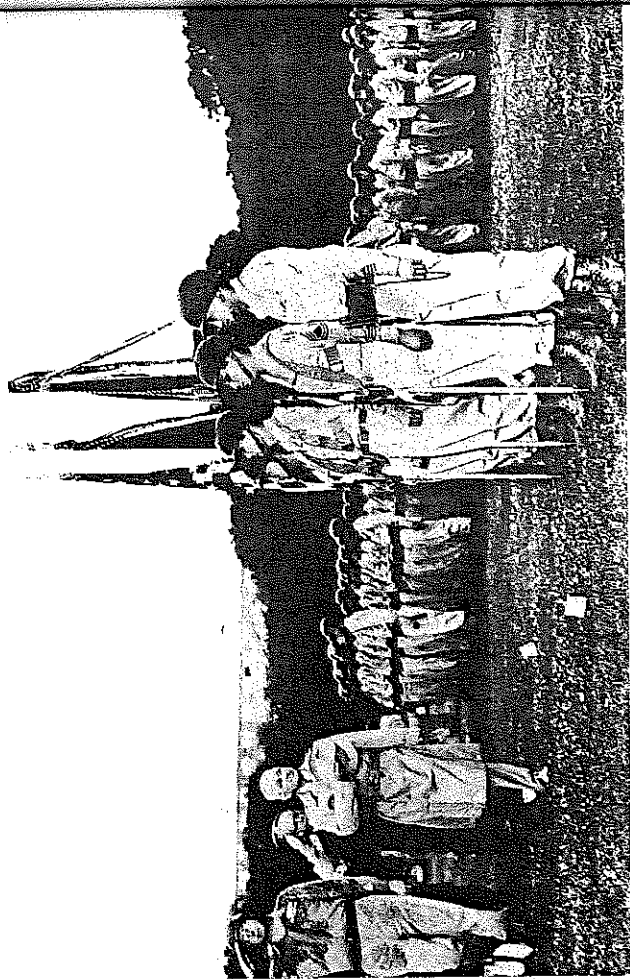


(LEFT) Children in Hawaii wearing gas masks. Fragments of my childhood memory remain vivid — the gas masks in our bedroom closet.

(U.S. Army Museum, Hawaii)

(RIGHT) The V for Victory sign on V-J Day in Honolulu. The children jumped joyously in the streets, shouting, "We won the war! We won the war!" But what had we fought for and what had we won?

(U.S. Army Museum, Hawaii)



President Harry Truman and the 100/442nd Regimental Combat Team at the White House, 1946. "You fought for the free nations of the world," Truman told the Japanese-American soldiers. "You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice — and you won. Keep up that fight . . . continue to win — make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for: 'the welfare of all the people, all the time.'"

(U.S. Army photo)

Diversity and Its Discontents

to acceptance in America. Their very wearing of a uniform was a political statement. "In a few months I will be wearing Uncle Sam's olive-drab army uniform," said a Filipino. "I am looking forward to that day, not with misgiving but with a boyish anticipation of doing something which up to now I have never been allowed to do — serving as an equal with American boys." The war, noted the wife of a soldier, gave Filipinos the chance to show themselves to America as "soldiers of democracy," as "men, not house-boys." One of these soldiers explained: "In all the years I was here before the United States went into the war, I felt that I did not belong here. I was a stranger among a people who did not understand and had no good reason to understand me and my people. . . . In other words, it was a pretty difficult business to be a Filipino in the United States in the years preceding Pearl Harbor."³¹

But in many places being Filipino was still "a difficult business." Stationed at Camp Beale, soldiers of the First Filipino Infantry found they were unwelcome in nearby Marysville, California. Dressed proudly in their U.S. Army uniforms, several Filipino soldiers went into the town during their first weekend pass to have a good dinner and see the sights. They entered a restaurant and sat down, but no one came to serve them. After waiting for half an hour, one of them got up and asked for service, and was told: "We don't serve Filipinos here." Filipino soldiers were turned away from theaters or were forced to sit in a segregated section, and their visiting wives were refused accommodations at the hotels. Concerned about the discriminatory treatment his men were receiving, Colonel Robert H. Offley met with the Marysville Chamber of Commerce. "There," as Private First Class Manuel Buaken put it, "he laid down the law of cooperation with the army — or else. Then the merchants and the restaurant proprietors and the movie houses changed their tune." Though the Filipinos were served in restaurants, the "soul of enjoyment" was gone for Buaken and his brothers. They felt that in their hearts those people

were hating and ridiculing the Filipinos, laughing at their brown skins.³²

But the war opened doors for Filipinos. Aliens who served in the U.S. Armed Forces were allowed to become citizens. On February 20, 1943, at Camp Beale, twelve hundred Filipino soldiers stood proudly in V formation as citizenship was conferred on them. During the ceremony, the commanding officer declared: "Officers who returned from Bataan have said there are no finer soldiers in the world than the Filipinos who fought and starved and died there shoulder to shoulder with our troops. I can well believe it as I look at the men before me. On those faces is quiet determination and a consciousness of training and discipline with a definite end in view. I congratulate them on their soldierly appearance and on their approaching citizenship." In the concluding speech, a judge welcomed the Filipinos: "Citizenship came to us who were born here as a heritage — it will come to you as a privilege. We have every faith you will become and remain loyal, devoted citizens of the United States."³³

A year after the war ended, Congress extended citizenship to Filipino immigrants and permitted an annual token entry of 100 Filipino immigrants. Assessing the impact of the war on the status of Filipinos in 1946, sociologist R. T. Feria reported that employment opportunities had expanded for Filipinos as they entered the shipyards of Wilmington and San Pedro and the plants of Lockheed, Douglas, and Vultee. "The majority became welders, technicians, assembly or office workers, and a few became engineers." Most important, Feria observed, the war had forced Filipinos to make a decision — "to go home and help in the reconstruction of their homeland" or "to spend the rest of their days in America." Granted citizenship and feeling a sense of greater acceptance, thousands of Filipinos chose to make America their permanent home. But would whites forget the bravery of Filipinos at Bataan when the economic prosperity of the war slackened, Feria wondered, and would they invoke another "interminable era of dishwashing and asparagus cutting"?³⁴

Korean Americans: A War to Free Their Homeland

Like the Filipinos, Korean Americans also had a homeland to liberate. "Korea for Victory with America," they shouted. The *Korean National Herald-Pacific Weekly* declared that "every Korean born" was "an enemy born for Japan."³⁵

Koreans had been in America for nearly four decades. Between 1903 and 1907, seven thousand Koreans arrived in Hawaii and California. "My parents were very poor," said a Korean woman. "One year, a heavy rain came, a flood; the crops all washed down. Oh, it was a very hard time. . . . Under the Japanese, no freedom. Not even free talking." She had heard stories about the islands. "Hawaii's a free place, everybody living well. Hawaii had freedom, so if you like talk, you can talk; you like work, you can work. . . . Then I could get to America! That land of freedom with streets paved of gold!"³⁶

However, reality in America punctured this inflated dream. Like the Japanese, Koreans were not allowed to become naturalized citizens. The question of Korean eligibility for citizenship was tested in the courts after World War I by Easurk Emsen Charr. Drafted into the U.S. Army in 1918, he petitioned for citizenship in a federal district court in 1921, arguing that his military service entitled him to naturalized citizenship. However, the court declared that Koreans were "admittedly of the Mongol family" and hence were not eligible for naturalized citizenship.³⁷

Excluded from citizenship in America, Korean immigrants found themselves cut off from their home country in 1910 when Japan annexed Korea. The immigrants dedicated themselves to patriotic organizations struggling against Japanese colonialism. "I was earning money then," recalled one woman, "and decided that I wanted to become a member of the Korean Nationalist Association, pay dues to support the Korean newspaper, and also to contribute to the patriotic fund. I gave one-tenth of my pay — which was optional for women, but I felt so good to be able to do so."³⁸ Grieving over the loss of his homeland, a Korean immigrant urged

the Japanese more than anyone else in the world?" After their protests, they were allowed to have printed on their badges: "I am Korean."⁴²

Korean immigrants were anxious to help win the war against Japan. Many of them possessed an invaluable weapon which the U.S. military needed — knowledge of the Japanese language, which they had been forced to learn in Korea under Japanese control. Korean immigrants were employed as Japanese language teachers and translators of secret Japanese military documents; they also served as propaganda broadcasters in the Pacific front and agents for underground activities in Japanese-occupied areas of Asia. An instructor in oriental languages at the University of California at Berkeley, Bong-Youn Choy recalled his energetic effort during the war: "I delivered lectures on Korean and Japanese politics to the Office of War Information for three months. In addition, I was asked to teach Japanese to the special Army Training Program classes." Commissioned as Navy interpreters, Yi Jong-gun and Pak Yong-hak were sent to the Solomon Islands and participated in the Guadalcanal campaign.⁴³

In Los Angeles, 109 Koreans — one-fifth of the city's Korean population — joined the California National Guard. Ranging in age from eighteen to sixty-five, they were organized into a Korean unit called the Tiger Brigade or "Manghokun." They drilled regularly on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for three to four hours in Exposition Park, preparing to defend California against an enemy invasion. Congratulating them, an army official declared: "I myself have learned the real meaning of patriotism during my participation in this Tiger Brigade, and I cannot find adequate words to describe your contribution in winning this war." Meanwhile, elderly Korean women served in the Red Cross, and old men volunteered as emergency fire wardens. Koreans everywhere bought defense bonds: between 1942 and 1943, they reportedly purchased more than \$239,000 worth of them — an immense sum for a population of only ten thousand. At the celebration of the Korean National Flag Day on August 29, 1943, the Los Angeles

DOUBLE VICTORY

his compatriots in America to organize their lives around nationalistic resistance against Japan: "Now our business should be for all Koreans and our activity should be based on the welfare of our mother country. Thus we are not sojourners, but political wanderers, and we are not laborers but righteous army soldiers."³⁹

Although Koreans were fiercely anti-Japanese, they were often mistaken for Japanese. "When World War Two broke out," Jean Park remembered, "we were still living in Reedley." Her immigrant Korean father decided to move the family to southern California. When Park and her family arrived at their new home, they found whites staring at them and shouting, "Japs go home!" "They were ready to stone us with rocks and descend on us because they had that evil look in their eyes."⁴⁰

Government policies also failed to distinguish Koreans from the Japanese. In 1940, the Alien Registration Act had classified Korean immigrants as subjects of Japan; after the United States declared war against Japan, the government identified Koreans as "enemy aliens." In February 1942, the *Korean National Herald-Pacific Weekly* insisted the government reclassify them as Koreans. "The Korean is an enemy of Japan," the editorial declared, underscoring the torturous irony of the situation. "Since December 7, the Korean here is between the devil and the deep sea for the reason that the United States considers him a subject of Japan, which the Korean resents as an injustice to his true status. . . . What is the status of a Korean in the United States? Is he an enemy alien? Has any Korean ever been in Japanese espionage or in subversive activities against the land where he makes his home and rears his children as true Americans?"⁴¹

In Hawaii, Korean immigrants employed on defense projects in the islands experienced an even more painful insult: they were classified as Japanese. "For years we've been fighting the Japanese and now they tell us that we're Japs," Koreans snapped angrily. "It's an insult!" Placed in a restricted category, these Koreans had to wear badges with black borders. "Why in the hell do they pull a trick like this on us," a Korean worker asked, "when we hate

mayor raised the Korean flag to honor the uniformed men of the Tiger Brigade as they marched past City Hall.⁴⁴

A year later, Hawaii territorial delegate Joseph R. Farrington introduced in Congress a bill for Korean immigration and naturalization. Farrington's bill did not pass, but Koreans had gained greater acceptance and also helped to defeat Japan and free their homeland.⁴⁵

India: Passage to America

Like Korean immigrants, immigrants from India also saw the war as an opportunity to win acceptance in America. They had begun arriving in the U.S. at the beginning of the century, and by 1920, they numbered 6,400, most of them working in California as farmers and agricultural laborers.

When asked why he had left India, Deal Singh Madhas told an interviewer: "To make money and then return to the Punjab [northern India] and farm for myself instead of on the ancestral property." To pay for their transportation to San Francisco, many Punjabis mortgaged some of their land. Even if they had to become debtors to get to America, they thought the promise of getting ahead was worth the sacrifice. Paid only ten or fifteen cents a day in India, they were told they could earn two dollars in America. An immigrant later recalled how California seemed "enchanted."⁴⁶

The majority of the immigrants were Sikhs. Wearing their traditional headdress, the newcomers from India were described as "the tide of turbans." "Always the turban remains," a witness wrote, "the badge and symbol of their native land, their native customs and religion. Whether repairing tracks on the long stretches of the Northern Pacific railways, feeding logs into the screaming rotary saws of the lumber-mills, picking fruit in the luxuriant orchards or sunny hillsides of California, the twisted turban shows white or brilliant . . . an exotic thing in the western landscape." Their strikingly unusual dress and dark skin provoked taunts and verbal abuse from whites. "I used to go to Marysville every Satur-

day," recounted a Sikh. "One day a drunk *ghora* (white man) came out of a bar and motioned to me saying, 'Come here, slave!' I said I was no slave man. He told me that his race ruled India and America, too. All we were slaves. He came close to me and I hit him and got away fast."⁴⁷

In an article on "The Hindu, the Newest Immigration Problem," *Survey* magazine editorialized in 1910: "The civic and social question concerns the ability of the nation to assimilate this class of Hindus and their probable effect on the communities where they settle. Their habits, their intense caste feeling, their lack of home life — no women being among them — and their effect upon standards of labor and wages, all combine to raise a serious question as to whether the doors should be kept open or closed against this strange, new stream." Seven years later, Congress prohibited the entry of Asian-Indian laborers.⁴⁸

However, the question of the political status of Asian Indians already in the United States remained. The federal law of 1790 had reserved naturalized citizenship for "whites" only, providing the basis for excluding Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants from citizenship. But Asian Indians were Caucasian. Would they be entitled to naturalized citizenship? In the 1923 *Bhagat Singh Thind* case, the Supreme Court ruled that Asian Indians were ineligible for naturalization. Arguing that the definition of race had to be based on the "understanding of the common man," the Court held that the term "white person" meant an immigrant from northern and western Europe. "It may be true," the Court declared, "that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today." Thus Asian Indians, while they were "Caucasian," were not "white." The intention of the Founding Fathers was to "confer the privilege of citizenship upon that class of persons" they knew as "white."⁴⁹

Asian Indians denounced this discrimination. In 1940, Khairata Ram Samras petitioned a federal court to overturn the *Thind* deci-

sion. "Discrimination against Hindus in respect to naturalization," Samras argued, "is not only capricious and untenable but in violation of constitutional provisions."⁵⁰ A year later, the issue of citizenship for Asian Indians was swept into the vortex of World War II. In August 1941, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, a broad statement of principles including the right of peoples to choose their own form of government. Asian Indians saw the Charter as an opportunity to press for their rights in the United States. The India Welfare League and the India League of America demanded both independence for India and naturalized citizenship for Asian Indians in the United States.

The war forced American policymakers to recognize the strategic military location of India. Japan could exploit Indian disaffection with British rule, create political chaos in the Asian subcontinent, and drive its military machinery across India. Here was indeed a grim military prospect — the unification of Japanese and German armed forces in the Middle East.

In March 1944, Congress considered a bill that would provide a small immigration quota from India and naturalization rights. A leading supporter of the proposed legislation, Emmanuel Celler of New York, argued that oppressed people throughout the world looked to the United States for justice and equality, and that "our breaking down of immigration and naturalization barriers" would "dull the edge of Jap propaganda."⁵¹

Four months later, in his support for this legislation, S. Chandrasekar, a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, highlighted the need to combat Nazi ideology by repudiating racism at home:

Today, more than ever, the United States is vitally interested in attitudes of Asiatic peoples toward this country. Hitler's justification of Nazi oppression in Europe is supposedly based on the right of the mythically superior Nordic to superimpose his *Kultur* on the other so-called inferior peoples of Europe. If the United States is success-

fully to combat such dangerous ideas, it can ill afford to practice racial discrimination in its relations with Asiatic countries. The immigration policy of this country now excludes nearly a quarter of the human race. America cannot afford to say that she wants the people of India to fight on her side and at the same time maintain that she will not have them among her immigrant groups.

Clearly, the United States could not have it both ways: it could not oppose the racist ideology of Nazism and also "practice" racial discrimination. America had to put its "principle of equality" into its laws and policies, Chandrasekar concluded, in order to reaffirm the faith of the millions in India looking to America for "justice and fair play."⁵² Two years later, Congress permitted India to have a small immigration quota and granted the right of naturalized citizenship to Asian-Indian immigrants.

Germans and Italians: "Just Like Everybody Else"

Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the FBI visited the home of William Hohensee of Munith, Michigan. "Because I was born in Germany," he recalled, "the FBI questioned me at great length regarding my German activities that took place in various German Clubs and establishments in Detroit. From January 1942, until my induction into the Army in 1943, they harassed me periodically with their constant questioning. They were even instrumental in me losing my job as a Teamster employee in the trucking industry. Much to their dismay, I was unable to enlighten them on any German activities simply because I was never involved in anything."⁵³

But Hohensee and his fellow German Americans did not experience a repeat of the backlash that had occurred during World War I. In 1917-1918, federal authorities excluded German aliens from sensitive military areas such as wharves and railroad depots, and interned several thousand of them for minor violations of this

order. Numerous states disenfranchised German aliens; half of the states prohibited instruction in German. In many communities, Bach and Beethoven were banned, and German books were burned.⁵⁴

But such extreme anti-German reactions did not happen during World War II. The army ordered a curfew for German aliens on the West Coast, and the FBI detained three thousand German aliens suspected as security threats. Several German-American Bund leaders were indicted for sedition. However, German Americans were not subjected to mass exclusion or detention. To have done so would have been a logistical nightmare. By 1940, there were 5 million German Americans, including 1,237,000 immigrants. They represented considerable voting power and were important economically as businessmen and workers in the northeast and Midwest. Assimilated into mainstream society, Germans were regarded as Americans, especially since they included individuals with names like Lou Gehrig and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

At first, Italian aliens on the West Coast were suspected of disloyalty. Between 1900 and 1920, 3 million Italians had landed at Ellis Island. About half of them were sojourners with plans to make money and then return to their villages. "Most Italians remain in the United States from two to five years," reported Victor Von Borosini in "Home-Going Italians," published in a 1912 issue of *Survey*.⁵⁵ In 1924, responding to nativist backlashes, Congress passed the National Origins Act, instituting an annual quota for immigration based on 2 percent of the foreign-born population of each nationality residing in the United States in 1890. In that marker year, before the great influx from Italy, foreign-born Italians numbered only about 300,000; thus the quota for Italy was less than 6,000 a year.

Cut off from their country of origin, Italian immigrants and their children continued to be targets of prejudice in Protestant America. Often they experienced ugly stereotyping. "You don't call . . . an Italian a white man?" a construction boss was asked. "No, sir," he replied, "an Italian is a Dago." Italians were said to

be criminally inclined and violent. "The knife with which he cuts his bread," a prison authority commented, "he also uses to lop off another 'dago's' finger or ear. . . . He is quite as familiar with the sight of human blood as with the sight of the food he eats." Italian workers also found themselves restricted in employment opportunities. The Bricklayers Union of New York, for example, successfully pressured the city to exclude unnaturalized Italians from working on the construction of the subways.⁵⁶

After America entered World War II, unnaturalized Italians suddenly found themselves suspected of disloyalty. On the West Coast in February 1942, the army placed a curfew on ten thousand "enemy" Italian aliens and excluded them from restricted zones on the waterfront areas for reasons of "military necessity." "Italians who were not citizens," recalled Alfonso Zirpoli, "were ordered to move out of the area north of Beach Street [in San Francisco]. One Italian came to see me; his son had been killed at Pearl Harbor. He wanted to know what he should do — should he move?"⁵⁷

In San Francisco, Italian fishermen were required to stay away from their boats. "I'll never forget Mr. Maniscalco," recalled Alessandro Baccari, Jr. "He was a fisherman, the most respected at the wharf. I went to grammar school with his son, John. One day, I was visiting their house and he greeted me by saying, 'Alessandro, I can no longer go aboard my boat at the wharf.' Italian aliens were compelled to remain fourteen blocks away from the waterfront. He couldn't comprehend. With tears in his eyes, he told me, 'I'm gonna break the law. My boat is my life.' He would sneak out to see his boat and the waterfront."⁵⁸

In his angry denunciation of the "enemy alien" classification, Frank Buccellato described the ordeal of his mother-in-law. Although her husband was an American citizen, she was not. The army ordered her to move fifteen miles from Pittsburgh, California, a militarily sensitive area. Protesting the order, Buccellato went to the draft board and told them: "This doesn't seem right. My family and my wife's family each have two boys in the service, fighting for the United States of America. We're American citizens;

we're all born here in this country. So what do we care about Italy...? This is our country, right here. Why would... my mother-in-law want to sabotage this country?"⁵⁹

In the end, however, only 85 Italian aliens were detained as security threats, and a proposed evacuation of "enemy" Italian aliens was ruled out. The congressional committee headed by John H. Tolan decided that "evacuation policies instituted for German and Italian aliens on the west coast [would] have direct nationwide import because there are many thousands of these aliens in other parts of the country... Any such proposal is out of the question if we intend to win this war."⁶⁰ Interning Italian Americans was also out of the question in a country where one of the most famous baseball players was Joe DiMaggio and the mayor of New York was Fiorello La Guardia. In May 1942, the waterfront restriction on Italian aliens was rescinded, and on October 12, 1942, Attorney General Francis Biddle announced that Italian aliens would no longer be classified as "enemies."⁶¹ Told he was no longer an "enemy," an Italian immigrant snapped scornfully: "I am an American again, huh?"⁶²

In "Americans in Concentration Camps," published in the *Crisis* in September 1942, Harry Paxton Howard compared the experiences of three American groups — German, Italian, and Japanese. The 120,000 Japanese on the West Coast were evacuated and imprisoned in concentration camps; 40,000 of them, born in Japan, were classified as "enemy aliens." "If they were 'white,' the great majority of them would not be aliens at all." Although most of them had been in America for more than thirty years, they had not been allowed to become citizens because they were "Asiatic." In contrast, over a million German and Italian immigrants entered this country at the same time as the Japanese immigrants and were allowed to become naturalized citizens because they were "white."

On the East Coast, Howard pointed out, the military danger was from Germany and Italy. Enemy submarines had been destroying American shipping, and had even landed agents, some of whom had been apprehended. "But the American government,"

Howard wrote, "has not taken any such high-handed action against Germans and Italians — and their American-born descendants — on the east coast, as has been taken against Japanese and their American-born descendants on the west coast. Germans and Italians are 'white.'"

To illustrate his point, Howard referred to the "New York at War" parade of June 13. Up Fifth Avenue, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia had led a spectacular procession of American and Allied forces and delegations of loyal German Americans and Italian Americans. "There was one omission in the parade," wrote Howard. "Americans of Japanese ancestry were not permitted to take part." Their absence was noticed by four members of the American Civil Liberties Union. Florina Lasker, Reverend John Paul Jones, Mary Dreier, and Guy Emery Shippler sent an indignant protest to the mayor: "We learn with amazement that the committee in charge of the patriotic parade in support of the United Nations on Saturday has refused to permit loyal Japanese-Americans to march, although permitting German-Americans and Italian-Americans to participate. Such discrimination on purely racial grounds is a shocking violation of our democratic professions."

In his conclusion, Howard offered a lesson for black America. "What has happened to these Americans [of Japanese ancestry] in recent months is of direct concern for the American Negro. For the barbarous treatment of these Americans is the result of the color line."⁶³

The significance of the color line was revealed in a remark made by the California attorney general. In his recommendation that the military restrictions against Italian aliens be lifted, Earl Warren told the Tolan committee that it would be "disruptive of national unity" to expel Italian aliens, for they were "just like everybody else."⁶⁴

But, in Warren's view, the Japanese in California whether aliens or citizens by birth were not "just like everybody else." In an interview, Peter Mangiapane and his mother, Nancy, recalled what had happened to Italians and Japanese in California. As Italians,

"we were in the same position as the Japanese," he said. She added: "The only difference was they put them into camps. They lost more than we did." Also noting the difference in the ways the government handled the Italians and the Japanese, Benito Vanni recalled that the Japanese were treated "rotten." "Right around the corner from me was a Japanese laundry, and the owner was a good friend of mine. When you went through the front of the laundry, if you had to judge a book by its cover, you'd say, 'What a dump.' But when you went past the laundry into the living quarters you had to take your shoes off. I was there when they picked him up and his whole family. He was crying. I was crying, 'cause I lost a pretty good friend."⁶⁵

Vanni's friend had been taken away, along with the other Japanese Americans on the West Coast, and forced to spend "years of infamy" imprisoned in internment camps.⁶⁶

7

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR

From Internment to Hiroshima

UNLIKE THE Germans, Italians, and other Asian groups, Japanese Americans were classified as "enemies." Beginning in February 1942, 120,000 Japanese, most of them citizens by birth, were incarcerated without due process of law. "All of this was done," reported the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1982, "despite the fact that not a single documented act of espionage, sabotage or fifth column activity was committed by an American citizen of Japanese ancestry or by a resident Japanese alien on the West Coast."¹

The mass internment of Japanese Americans in 1942 and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 followed in the wake of the shocking surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. "Infamy," Roosevelt's term in his call for a declaration of war against Japan, turned out to be a prologue to other infamies.

Reciting the Gettysburg Address in Plantation Hawaii

Shortly after he inspected the still-smoking ruins of the destroyed fleet, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox issued a statement to the

ers into the economic mainstream: "They have gone into the army and navy, into shipbuilding and aircraft plants. Even the girls are getting jobs." But while the Chinese were participating in the war effort as Americans, Lee noted critically, they were still denied full citizenship in terms of immigration and naturalized citizenship. "Surely racial discrimination should not be directed against those who are America's Allies in the Far East and are helping her in every way to win the war." Lee brought the war home. "To be fighting for freedom and democracy in the Far East, at the cost of seven million lives in five years of hard, long, bitter warfare, and to be denied equal opportunity in the greatest of democracies, seems the height of irony." The contradiction was too evident to be ignored and too embarrassing to the United States to be allowed to continue.¹⁹

The war for democracy abroad required reform at home. In 1942, the California League of Women Voters of San Francisco launched an educational campaign to remove racial discrimination from the immigration laws. A year later, Congress began considering a bill to repeal the Chinese exclusion law and also to allow a quota for Chinese immigration. During her tour of the country, Madame Chiang Kai-shek promoted the repeal legislation. At a dinner party on May 15, she told several key congressmen that rescinding the Chinese exclusion laws would boost Chinese morale and buttress her country's war effort. Chinese-American lobbying activities in support of the bill were widespread and intense. In a letter to Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt, Mrs. Theodora Chan Wang of the Chinese Women's Association of New York explained that Chinese Americans wanted an immigration quota so that they would be accorded the privileges enjoyed by "our companions in ideology and arms." The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New York condemned the exclusion law as a violation of the fundamental principles of equality and friendly cooperation between China and the United States. At a conference in San Antonio in September 1943, Chinese Americans called the exclusion legislation "the stumbling block between China and America,"

and urged their American friends to "repeal it right now, not to wait till the war was over."²⁰

Responding to the pressure, President Roosevelt supported the repeal. "China is our ally," Roosevelt wrote on October 11, 1943. "For many long years she stood alone in the fight against aggression. Today we fight at her side. She has continued her gallant struggle against very great odds." Aware that the legislation was essential to the war effort in Asia, the President urged Congress to "be big enough" to acknowledge an error of the past: "By the repeal of the Chinese exclusion law, we can correct a historic mistake and silence the distorted Japanese propaganda."²¹

Japan had been appealing to Asia to unite in a race war against white America. Its propaganda had been condemning the United States for its discriminatory laws and for the segregation of the Chinese in ghettos, where they had been relegated to "the most menial of occupations, despised and mistreated and at best patronizingly tolerated with a contemptuous humor." Tokyo broadcasts claimed that the Chinese in the United States suffered from "a campaign of venomous vilification of the character of the Chinese people." "Far from waging this war to liberate the oppressed peoples of the world," Tokyo argued on the air waves, "the Anglo-American leaders are trying to restore the obsolete system of imperialism." In June 1943, when the House committee delayed action on the repeal bill, the Japanese radio in Manila editorialized: "Agitation in the U.S. for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act met an early death due to the opposition of anti-Asiatic congressmen, which bears out the fact it was never meant to be sincere, that it was only a gesture, empty words."²²

This Japanese propaganda alarmed U.S. policymakers. A retired navy officer told a congressional committee holding hearings on the repeal bill that the Chinese exclusion law was worth "twenty divisions" to the Japanese army. Supporters of repeal argued: "It is time for us to realize that if nations cannot be gracious to each other, cannot respect each other's race, all talk of democracy is in vain." They also expressed fear that the war could turn into a

racial conflict. "The Japanese have been carrying on a propaganda campaign seeking to align the entire oriental world behind Japanese leadership, seeking to set the oriental world against the occidental world," one congressman warned. "They have called it a campaign of Asia for Asiatics." "Suppose the Chinese do capitulate and join Japan," another congressman echoed, "then all Asia is apt to go with her. Then you will have a race struggle in which we are hopelessly outnumbered that will last, not for 1 year or 5 years, but throughout generations to come." The Chinese exclusion law had to be repealed, he argued, for the "salvation of the white race" depended on continued Chinese friendship and military cooperation. China, a Chicago newspaper declared, was America's "white hope" in the East.²³

In order to help win the war in Asia, Congress repealed the exclusion act and provided an annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants and their right to naturalized citizenship.

Back to Bataan: Filipino Fighters from America

Filipino Americans also viewed the war from a trans-Pacific perspective — America and the homeland they had left behind. After the U.S. annexation of the Philippines in 1898, Filipinos began arriving to work in the cane fields of Hawaii, the farms of California, and the canneries of Alaska. By 1930, 140,000 Filipinos had made the crossing to America.

The newcomers believed it would be easy to earn and save money in America. "My sole ambition was to save enough money to pay back the mortgage on my land," explained one of them. "In the Philippines a man is considered independent and is looked upon with respect by his neighbors if he possesses land." As he said farewell to his brother in the Philippines, a Filipino laborer promised: "I will come back and buy that house. I will buy it and build a high cement wall around it. I will come back with lots of money and put on a new roof. Wait and see!"²⁴

On the West Coast, however, Filipinos experienced labor ex-

ploitation, mob violence, and segregation. On the doors of hotels and other businesses, they often read signs declaring, Positively No Filipinos Allowed. They also could not become citizens. In 1934, the Supreme Court had declared: "White persons' within the meaning of the statute [the 1790 Naturalization Law] are members of the Caucasian race, as Caucasian is defined in the understanding of the mass of men. The term excludes the Chinese, the Japanese, the Hindus, the American Indians and the Filipinos."²⁵

"I have been four years in America," a Filipino immigrant in California sadly remarked, "and I am still a stranger. It is not because I want to be. I have tried to be as 'American' as possible. I live like an American, eat like an American, and dress the same, and yet everywhere I find Americans who remind me of the fact that I am a stranger."²⁶ In 1934, Congress established the Philippines as a commonwealth and prohibited Filipino immigration.

However, the war would offer new opportunities for Filipinos to become Americans. The heroic resistance of Filipino fighters at Bataan was widely recognized. "The gallant United States and Philippine forces in Bataan peninsula surrendered today after enduring the tortures of hell," reported correspondent Frank Hewlett. "They were beaten, but it was a fight that ought to make every American bow his head in tribute. . . . The Americans fought for everything they loved, as did the Filipinos, WITH THEIR FIERCE LOVE OF LIBERTY." In her tribute to the brave men of Bataan, Eleanor Roosevelt highlighted the interracial brotherhood forged on the bloodstained battlefield: "Fighting in Bataan has been an excellent example of what happens when two different races respect each other. Men of different races and backgrounds have fought side by side and praised each other's heroism and courage." Writer and California farm worker Carlos Bulosan conveyed in poetry the meaning of Bataan for Filipino Americans:

Bataan has fallen.

With heads bloody but unbowed, we yielded to the enemy. . . .