



Reply to:
Gerald Yamada, JAVA President
gyamada@goingforwardstrategies.com

October 21, 2012

Setting the Record Straight: The Play “Allegiance”

I attended a performance of “Allegiance” on October 12th in San Diego, CA at the Old Globe. This play could provide a unique opportunity to educate a new generation of Americans about the injustice inflicted on the Japanese-American community during World War II and to explore the unimaginably difficult choices they were forced to make resulting in conflicting paths taken to prove their loyalty to the United States.

The play is disappointing in that its story line continues to be grossly misleading. The play attempts to promote sympathy for those who answered no to loyalty questionnaire questions or refused induction into the US Army (aka “resisters”) by seeking to taint the reputation of those who volunteered to serve in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), a segregated Japanese American combat unit formed in the US Army at the urging of Mike Masaoka.

Although revisions have been made from the pre-opening version of the play, the revisions have not altered what I found to be offensive in the pre-opening version. The takeaway message of the play is that those who volunteered to serve in the 442nd RCT were duped and thus the resisters made the better choice as to how to show their loyalty to the United States.

This message is told through a family split between Sam Kimura and his grandfather on one side and Sam’s father and sister on the other side. Sam answers yes to Questions 27 (will you serve in the US military) and 28 (will you forswear allegiance to the Japanese Emperor) in the loyalty questionnaire, volunteers for the 442nd, and is a strong supporter of Masaoka during and after World War II. His grandfather answers yes to both questions and supports Sam’s decision to volunteer. Sam’s father answers no to both questions, is sent presumably to Tule Lake, and opposes Sam’s decision to volunteer. Sam’s sister marries Frankie, who refuses to serve after receiving a draft notice resulting in imprisonment at a federal prison and who strongly dislikes Masaoka. At the time of his sister’s death some 60 years later, she leaves Sam a “report” that supposedly documents that Masaoka advocated that the 442nd RCT should be a segregated “suicide” combat unit with the expressed hope of a high death rate that could be used to publicize their loyalty to America. Upon receiving this information, Sam blames Masaoka for duping him into disobeying his father and joining the 442nd RCT and for sending fellow 442nd RCT comrades to be killed in action.

“Allegiance” Fails to Address the Prejudice and Racial Profiling That Motivated Executive Order 9066. The play dwells on conflicting ways to show loyalty to America but fails to address the overt prejudice motivating governmental policies that resulted in Executive Order 9066 and Questions 27 and 28 in the loyalty questionnaire.

The purpose of issuing EO 9066 was to provide security against sabotage, espionage, and fifth column activity by persons of Japanese ancestry residing in the western part of the United States. There was not a single documented act of sabotage, espionage, or fifth column activity committed by a Japanese American or a resident Japanese alien in the States covered by EO 9066. There was no justification or need for EO 9066.

Furthermore, the Report of the Presidential Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians documents that President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lt. Gen. John DeWitt, and others were motivated by “prejudice, war hysteria, and lack of political leadership.” Even when the FBI argued that there was no justification for continuing to maintain the relocation camps, President Roosevelt refused to close the camps for fear of hurting his re-election chances.

Why are the play’s producers misdirecting the blame away from government officials responsible for falsely imprisoning innocent persons while demonizing a Japanese American activist who was fighting against insurmountable odds to protect those who were the victims of EO 9066?

All adults imprisoned in the Relocation Camps were asked answer a loyalty questionnaire. Questions 27 and 28 were controversial. Question 27 asked if you would serve in the US military. Question 28 asked in part if you would forswear allegiance to the Japanese Emperor. These questions could have caused confusion for some because both questions did not apply to all of them. Only Japanese Americans should have been asked Question 27, and only the Issei should have been asked Question 28. By asking all adults to answer both questions, it would appear that the Government was more interested in finding a large number of no answers to both questions to justify the existence of the relocation camps and their prejudicial decisions.

“Allegiance” Over Romanticizes the Story of the Resisters. In the play, resisters are those who answer no to questions 27 and 28 and those who refused to be inducted, but they still appear to believe in America. According to statistics in the Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, those who answered no to both questions were a very small number of those required to answer the questionnaire. Of the approximately 78,000 who were required to fill out the loyalty questionnaire, approximately 68,000 gave an unqualified yes answer to questions 27 and 28 amounting to 87%. Of the remaining 10,000, 5,300 answered no to both questions amounting to 6.8%. The remainder failed to answer or gave a qualified answer. Of the eligible men who received induction notices, 315 refused to serve and 263 were convicted.

The play fails to portray a third group of resisters who wanted to be repatriated and expatriated to Japan or who renounced their American citizenship. Approximately 20,000 filed applications to be repatriated and expatriated to Japan or about 16% of the evacuees. Of which, 4,724 returned to Japan. Over 5,500 Japanese Americans renounced their citizenship. These numbers could tell a more compelling story than the story of two groups of resisters depicted in the play.

It would be unfair to conclude that all resisters wanted Japan to win the war. Their decision to answer no to both question 27 or 28, to file an application to be repatriated and expatriated to Japan, or to renounce their American citizenship may have been influenced by other reasons such as the prejudicial treatment by the government and not necessarily by an allegiance to Japan.

The important point is that the resisters were in the minority and that all those in that minority may not have been loyal to America as compared to all who volunteered to serve in the 442nd RCT.

442nd RCT Was Not a Suicide Battalion. The 442nd RCT was not created or used as a suicide battalion. During World War II, 11,260,000 served in the US Army. Of which, 318,274 were killed or missing. The number killed amounted to a 2.8% death rate. Approximately 33,000 Nisei soldiers served in the US Army with 569 soldiers in the 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd RCT killed in action amounting to a 1.7% death rate. In comparison, the Japanese Army had 6,300,000 soldiers with 1,326,076 killed amounting to a 24.22% death rate.

The “light bulb” revelation in the play that soldiers die in war does not make the 442nd RCT a suicide battalion. Death is an unfortunate reality of war that is known to every soldier who goes into combat.

The members of the 442nd RCT proved their loyalty by winning and not by dying. Together with the 100th Infantry Battalion, they fought in seven major campaigns receiving seven Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations and earning close to 18,200 individual decorations including 21 Medals of Honor. The 442nd RCT, including the 100th Infantry Battalion, is often referred to as one of the most highly decorated combat units in US military history. Members of the 442nd RCT, 100th Infantry Battalion, and Military Intelligence Service were presented with the Congressional Gold Medal, which is the highest civilian honor that America can bestow, in November 2011.

What distinguishes the valor of the 442nd RCT, including the 100th Infantry Battalion, is that their valor was sustained in all their combat engagements over a two year period. Their courage came from within themselves as a matter of honor, and their unparalleled bravery on the battlefields is what won the war against prejudice at home.

Masaoka’s Foresight in Advocating for a Segregated Combat Unit Was Brilliant. Masaoka had the foresight to urge the government to allow Japanese Americans to volunteer to serve and to create an all Japanese American segregated combat unit. The Army initially rejected the idea of a segregated combat unit because it did not want to give rifles to soldiers whose loyalty to America was suspect. The Army relented and created the 442nd RCT. Masaoka was proud that he was the first to volunteer for the 442nd RCT.

Ironically, the racial prejudice that led to EO 9066 created the opportunity for Masaoka to advocate for a Japanese American segregated combat unit. Without this opportunity, Japanese Americans who served probably would have been assigned to non-combat duties such as clerks, cooks, mess hall attendants, etc. If the Army could have assigned Japanese Americans to other units, the Army would probably not have given rifles to them because the Army was still suspicious of their loyalty, and prejudice against them still existed.

Due to Masaoka’s foresight, the 442nd RCT was formed and given the opportunities to prove themselves. They showed their valor and assembled a combat record that has yet to be surpassed. This opportunity will never again be available to any ethnic group. Based, in part, on the contributions made to the war effort by the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd RCT, and Tuskegee Airmen, President Truman ordered the military to be integrated thereby eliminating the segregated Army units. This leveled the playing field allowing minorities to compete for any military position or rank.

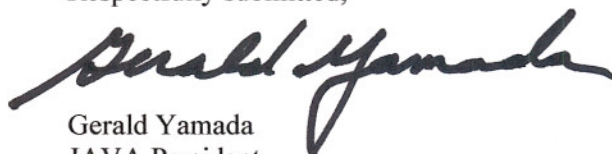
442nd RCT Combat Record and Masaoka’s Foresight Created a Lasting Legacy. Every member of the 442nd RCT and their families should be proud of putting country first as a way to show their loyalty to America. The World War II Nisei soldiers created a legacy that has continued to benefit all of us.

Their legendary military record was cited by Members of Congress in support of passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act giving Issei the right to become naturalized US citizens, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 apologizing for the unjust imprisonment of persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II and awarding redress payments, the National Japanese American Memorial Act of 1992 authorizing the building of a national memorial in Washington, DC to honor the patriotism of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the Confinement Sites Preservation Act of 2006 creating a Federal grant program to preserve the confinement sites used during World War II to imprison persons of Japanese ancestry under the authority of EO 9066. Though these Acts of Congress, their war record and Masaoka's foresight have continued to fight the war against prejudice at home.

In addition, their military accomplishments shattered the glass ceiling for all Asian Pacific Americans in the US military. At the end of World War II, the highest ranking Japanese American officer in the US Army was a Major. Today, there are over 30 Japanese American flag officers in the US military, and about 70 Asian Pacific Americans who have also reached flag rank. A flag officer is either a general or admiral.

Is "Allegiance" Another Titanic? As noted, the producers of "Allegiance" did make revisions to the play in response to comments received before opening. However, the revisions were equivalent to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. If the producers continue to try to convince audiences that Masaoka was a monster who duped Japanese Americans into serving in the 442nd RCT as a suicide battalion, the play is doomed to hit an iceberg of facts and history which do not support this, and the opportunity that "Allegiance" could provide will sink.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerald Yamada". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Gerald Yamada
JAVA President