

I am a 4th generation Japanese American and Oregonian. I write in support of Oregon Senate Bill 1509. Four of my great uncles were Oregon Nisei veterans who served during WWII. These men served their country honorably at a time when America turned its back on them. Instead of living the “American Dream” as U.S. born citizens, they were denied their civil rights and life as they knew it came to an abrupt halt. Their families were forced from their homes and businesses, and many Japanese Americans lost everything.

My grandpa’s brothers Akira (Ike) and Arthur Iwasaki were members of the 442nd Regimental Combat team. They spoke about their wartime experiences publicly and with family. I remember Ike sharing about the training and riding in the back of an open military vehicle in freezing weather. Art was part of the group who rescued the Lost Battalion from Texas. Following their return from battle, they remained active with other veterans through the Oregon Nisei Veterans and attended reunions with their units. Arthur’s uniform is now on display at the new National Museum of the U.S. Army, near Washington, DC.

The hardships that the Nisei soldiers endured did not cease when they returned home, not even when the war was over. Racism ran strong. Many found that they could not shop at their preferred stores and were no longer welcome to conduct business with former associates. Still, they persevered. In most cases, they shielded their children from the truth of this horrible time, and it was never talked about during the 50 years following the war.

Learning about the Japanese American incarceration was different for my generation. My grandparents and their siblings answered questions of their grandchildren and participated in interviews. They shared their personal experiences with the hope that this would not happen again to anyone.

In November 2011, fourteen members of my family traveled to Washington, DC to participate in the festivities of Congress awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the WWII Japanese American veterans of the 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat team and Military Intelligence Service. At age 92, my uncle Arthur Iwasaki was healthy and able to enjoy the experience. The Army combed its records and during those ceremonies also awarded him a bronze star to add to his two purple hearts. The banquet at Emancipation Hall was the size of a football field with 250 tables, all celebrating this recognition, which was unfortunately after many veterans had already passed away.

The commemoration of Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Memorial Highway would honor the sacrifices of these brave men who made significant contributions toward winning the war. It would also be an educational opportunity for future generations to learn about the Japanese American soldiers’ heroic achievements.

Sincerely,

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Japanese American Museum of Oregon – board member
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