INTRODUCTION
TETSUDEI KASHIMA

During the Second World War two dramatically different scenarios confronted persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States and the territories of Alaska and Hawai‘i. Many knowledgeable Americans now understand that in the continental United States and Alaska, their resident persons of Japanese ancestry, identified as the Nikkei, became involuntary victims of a tragic and gross violation of civil liberties and personal freedom. They suffered a mass expulsion from their homes and confinement in ten incarceration centers for periods ranging from months to, for many, three years. It was military necessity, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared on February 19, 1942, when he signed Executive Order (EO) 9066 authorizing this action. Forty years later, in 1982, a government commission charged with investigating the actions following upon this order concluded that the stated rationale had not been justified. The root historical causes, it elaborated, had been “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.”¹ It was at this point that President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which proferred a presidential apology and required a $20,000 monetary redress payment to the surviving persons affected by that 1942 presidential order.

In the Territory of Hawai‘i, the picture was dramatically different. There was no mass incarceration in the Islands, although the secretary of the navy, Frank Knox, argued for one, and President Roosevelt, in effect, ordered it. What did take place, in all three places—Hawai‘i, Alaska, and the continental United States—was a priori systematic arrest and confinement, referred to here as “the internment,” of initially preselected nationals of Germany, Italy, and Japan, starting on December 7, 1941. Relatively few people are aware of this internment episode, and Yasutaro Soga’s Life Behind Barbed Wire focuses on this important, intriguing, and engrossing

Beyond the forbidding fence
Of double barbed wire,
The mountain, aglow in purple,
Sends us its greetings

YASUTARO (KEINO) SOGA*
chapter of World War II. At that time, he was sixty-eight years old and had lived in Hawai‘i for forty-five years since his initial emigration from Japan. As an immigrant Japanese national, he was an Issei, or first-generation Nikkei, and on that December seventh, he was also managing editor of the Nippu Jiji, a Hawai‘i Japanese vernacular newspaper. For these reasons, and not because he had committed any criminal or other untoward acts against the United States, the Hawai‘i military authorities immediately arrested him. How was this possible?

This introduction attempts to deal with this question and situates Soga’s internment account within the Nikkei World War II experience that includes both the mass incarceration epic and the separate and distinctive set of actions that resulted in the internment of foreign nationals designated as “alien enemies.” These two events are related like complementary tiles of a panoramic mosaic depicting the United States imprisonment picture during World War II. Soga’s work is important because it brings to light a personal and heretofore little understood internment experience that took place during the dark days of World War II. Moreover, Soga’s own story reveals the important interplay between the internment and incarceration as it affected Nikkei from both Hawai‘i and the continental United States, the latter hereafter also referred to as the Mainland. This introduction, will then, start with Yasutaro Soga’s internment experience, touch on the larger incarceration epic, and briefly examine an Issei writer’s style.

The Internment Experience

Although Soga’s actual narrative begins on December 7, 1941, preparations for his arrest started years earlier. What follows in this section provides the background to the Issei transferral from Hawai‘i to the Mainland. In the 1920s, various United States military and government officials became concerned about Hawai‘i’s position as a vulnerable and strategic outpost in the midst of the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Navy, even at this early period, was also interested in Japan’s military and political activities. Then, starting in the 1930s both the navy and the army indicated a growing concern about the activities of the Issei. For example, President Roosevelt in August 1936 wrote to his chief of naval operations: “One obvious thought occurred to me—that every Japanese citizen or non-citizen on the Island of O‘ahu who meets these Japanese ships [arriving in Hawai‘i] or has any connections with their officers or men should be secretly but definitely identified and his or her name placed on a special list of those who would be the first to be placed in a concentration camp in the event of trouble.”

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Such sentiments resulted in the intelligence agencies in the territories of Alaska and Hawai‘i and the Mainland constructing lists of suspect organizations and the names of potentially “dangerous” individuals—in the latter case, mostly nationals and men, but including some women and American citizens as well.

“A-B-C” and the Custodial Detention List

The main agencies responsible for the creation and evaluation of this information were the military’s intelligence units, especially the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and agencies within the Justice Department such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Special Defense Unit. They eventually compiled a “Custodial Detention” list of organizations and individuals they deemed to be actual or potential “threats to the internal security of the United States.”

The listed organizations and names were differentiated by an “A-B-C” hierarchical designation based on their degree of perceived perfidiousness. The navy’s ONI A-listed organizations and its members, for example, were viewed as constituting an actual threat to the United States. They were comprised of twelve Japanese organizations, such as the Kokoryukai (or Black Dragon Society); in the case of the Germans, it was the German American Bund; and the Federation of Italian War Veterans in the U.S.A., Inc., for the Italians. The B-listed organizations were considered “potential threats to the national security” and included certain religious organizations, such as the Japanese Konko Church headquartered in San Francisco. The C-listed organizations were seen as having only some ties to the foreign nationals’ homelands, and their officials and members were thought to engage in activities possibly inimical to the best interests of the United States. These included selected vernacular-language newspapers along with their officers, judō clubs, and names of Japanese-language schoolteachers. Hawai‘i’s A, B, and C list also included voluntary consular agents, business leaders, and priests.

In most instances, it was a case of “guilt by organizational association.” Simply being a member or an officer of these organizations, or subscribing to a particular magazine, could be sufficient reason to have one’s name classified and placed on the list. For the resident Issei, there was never any specific act or action deemed to be criminal in nature or construed to be an act of espionage or sabotage. Rather, merely attending a banquet sponsored by a listed Japanese organization, donating to a charitable organization, participating in a sports activity such as judō, or innocently attending a meeting could result in one’s name being included on such a list. Obvi-
ously, however, paid staff members of a foreign government’s embassy or legation constituted a separate category altogether.

What can be said about the inherent quality of these lists? Nineteen months after the start of the war, in July 1943, the Justice Department conducted an internal review of the A-B-C classification system and its validity when applied to American citizens. It concluded that the rating system was without merit and that the manner of assigning the A-B-C classification was based on “wholly inadequate evidence gathered and analyzed by persons suffering from serious misconceptions as to what evidence should be sought. . . . [It was based on] the use of patently unreliable hearsay, and other varieties of dubious information.”5 However, this review was not extended to foreign national cases, perhaps because of the differences in their legal status. The initial collection of derogatory information and those who evaluated it did not differentiate between citizens and nationals in assigning a particular classification. There is little reason to doubt that the same conclusion about the rating system as applied to citizens would also apply to the procedures used to classify alien nationals. For the Japanese, the method used to assess Issei organizations, and especially the actions of particular individuals, was usually implemented by American officials who had little or no knowledge about this ethnic group, its organizations, or its activities.

The purpose of the list was to pre-identify individuals who would be arrested and interned in the event of a war, and by the late 1930s the spotlight was turned on nationals from Germany, Italy, and Japan. The authority for the subsequent arrests resided in the Alien Enemies Act (1918 and 1798) that read, in part: “upon the declaration of war . . . [when] the President makes a public proclamation of the event . . . natives, citizens, denizens or subjects of the hostile nation . . . [can be] apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as alien enemies.”6

The Justice and War Departments were the two agencies assigned the main responsibility to plan for and, if necessary, implement the Alien Enemies Act. From April through July 1941, they met to spell out the conditions for the activation of such a program. To be brief, the Justice Department agreed to make recommendations and carry out the arrest of designated foreign alien enemies from countries with which the United States was at war and, once the Alien Enemies Act was invoked, to create and institute “hearing” boards to recommend a final status for those nationals. At the hearings, three recommendations were available: release, parole, or permanent internment. If the last recommendation was made, Justice would turn responsibility of the individual over to the army for safekeep-
ing for an indeterminate time period. Their status became, in essence, that of civilian prisoners of war, and their treatment was subject to the articles of the Geneva Convention. The War Department, for its part, agreed to hold these “alien enemies” in camps and centers in the United States. It also accepted primary responsibility for the United States territories and, after their hearings, if the recommendation was for permanent interment, for transporting them to the contiguous United States for placement in a U.S. Army-run internment camp. Yasutaro Soga and others from Hawai‘i were subject to this prewar agreement.

On December 7, 1941, even as Japanese planes were dropping bombs on Pearl Harbor, the military and FBI ordered their agents to arrest all persons on the Custodial Detention list regardless of the A, B, or C classification. By December 9, in Hawai‘i those arrested included 345 Issei, 22 Nisei, 74 German nationals, 19 German Americans, 11 Italian nationals, and 2 Italian Americans; by the end of the war, for the Issei, the numbers had risen to 875, with a few Nisei out of a total Japanese ancestry population of 157,905. In contrast, of 126,948 Nikkei on the Mainland, 6,978 Issei were so interned. The total number of “alien enemies” interned or placed under the jurisdiction of the Justice Department during the war by the United States government came to 39,899, of which 17,477 were Nikkei, mostly Issei; 11,507 mainly German nationals; and 2,730 mainly Italian nationals. Although everyone in this total came under the responsibility of the Justice Department during World War II, and the majority placed in US Army or Justice Department camps, not all of them were so interned. Within the Nikkei group, not a single Issei or Nisei was found guilty of committing any acts of espionage or sabotage, or of hindering the war efforts of the United States.

THE HEARINGS

Once arrested, the Hawai‘i Issei, now referred to as “detainees,” were eventually brought to and held at the Sand Island military detention camp, across the bay from Honolulu. The army determined their ultimate status through a hearing, which, although unlike a civil legal procedure, was considered to be an “administrative proceeding” and a “privilege,” rather than a right accorded to those arrested. In it, they were questioned about their past activities and allowed to offer their personal testimonies. In the continental United States, the detainees could not be represented by counsel, whereas in Hawai‘i they were granted this privilege. Also in Hawai‘i, the detainees were given two hearings: the first with a civilian board and the second with a military panel. On the Mainland there was only a civil-
ian board; the hearing “judges” were mainly local leaders—for example, a Mainland board consisted of a college professor, the editor of a local newspaper, and a local lawyer. Their instructions specified that the recommendation could be based only upon the presented information, usually drawn from the FBI files that had led to the detainee’s inclusion on the Custodial Detention list in the first place. The detainees could not confront their accusers and, in essence, had to “prove their innocence” rather than entering with a presumption of innocence. The hearing board’s recommendation of release, parole, or internment then determined the next step in the detainee’s fate.

**HAWAI’I AND MAINLAND JUSTICE AND WAR DEPARTMENT CAMPS**

If the hearing board members recommended a permanent internment status for a Hawai’i detainee—a recommendation not told to the internee—he or she was then taken eventually to a War Department camp on the Mainland and held for an unspecified duration of time. Mr. Soga was thus interned for four years, and during his captivity he and the other internees were shifted between various camps. He probably knew that two agencies, the military and the Justice Department were most involved in his internment, but he could not have known the extent to which these two and other government and civilian-run agencies cooperated and competed to control the government’s internee population.

Recall that the Justice Department, in their prewar talks, had agreed that with an internment recommendation that responsibility for the internee would transfer to the U.S. Army. From December 1941 to 1943, this was the usual pathway; however, in 1943, with the arrival of a growing number of German and Italian prisoners-of-war brought for internment from the European theater, the War Department asked Justice to take back the civilian internees. The Justice Department agreed to do so, which explains why Soga’s journey started at his Hawai’i camp at Sand Island under the U.S. Army’s Hawai’i Command, his initial Mainland stay was at Angel Island under the Justice Department until his transfer to the army’s Lordsburg, New Mexico, camp, and in 1943 he was transferred back to the Justice Department camps at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Here he remained until the end of the war, when he was released on October 30, 1945, and took a train to Seattle, Washington, to board his Hawai’i-bound ship. Yasutaro Soga could not have known the reason for his many transfers, because even the interning authorities were often unaware of the many changes to which they had to adapt in an ever-changing wartime situation.

Soga mentions the names of numerous camps that held the detainees
and internees during World War II. The character of these camps and centers differed according to their controlling agencies, the type of internees they held, and the duration of time they stayed in operation. Some were under the Justice Department’s Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Stations, or other Army-run temporary detainee holding places, while others were considered permanent camps. Two had very unique functions, such as the Seagoville, Texas, INS internment camp created to hold women internees and their children, and the INS “family reunification” center that Yasutaro Soga called a “cohabitation” camp at Crystal City, Texas. There were numerous camps holding Nikkei internees under army authority, although many of them also held at the same time Issei, Italian, and/or German internees. The two largest centers designated to hold mainly Japanese internees were the army’s Lordsburg internment camp and Justice’s Santa Fe internment center, both located in New Mexico.

What might be confusing to some readers is Soga’s mention of certain incarceration camps run by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). Although more will be said about these centers in the next section, a few words about their relationship with the Justice and War Departments’ internee camps is relevant here. First, the government, perhaps in response to the internees’ and families’ pleas, decided in late 1942 to initiate a family reunification program. From November 1942 until 1945, the largest group from Hawai’i sent to the Mainland was composed of the internees’ wives and children. Although the wives were usually Issei, their names were not on a Custodial Detention list, nor had they been accorded a hearing. Moreover, the children were Nisei, and therefore outside the interning authority of the Alien Enemies Act. So, those from Hawai’i were initially held at a WRA incarceration center awaiting the resolution of various details—for example, completion of the Crystal City camp, waiting for the transfer of their husband or father into the Crystal City camp, and the processing of the dependent’s agreement to accept voluntarily the same internee status as that of their husband or father. The WRA camps mentioned in passing by Soga that held the majority of those from Hawai’i were Minidoka (Idaho), Topaz (Utah), Tule Lake (California), and Heart Mountain (Wyoming). Second, after the Issei internees requested a second hearing and it resulted in a change of status from internee to “parolee” or “release” from the internment camp, their usual destination was a WRA incarceration camp. Here they again found themselves behind barbed-wire fences.

In the internment centers, the internees continually tried to obtain their freedom. As Soga points out, however, there were few options open to them. If the second hearing did not result in a change of status, they
could request repatriation to Japan. Some died for medical reasons, and others took more drastic measures—a few attempted or committed suicide, and three were shot and killed by the guards.

**Issei in the War and Justice Department Camps**

The Issei internees were not simply docile and submissive throughout their internment. Although Soga was not himself present, he points out that an Issei internee collective mass protest arose in June 1942 at the army’s Lordsburg, New Mexico, internment camp. At this camp, the Issei protested work orders that they considered were in contravention of the articles of the Geneva Convention. What Soga does not mention is that their protest eventually led to the transfer of this particular camp commander out of the Lordsburg center. However, during this time of turmoil, two internees, H. Isomura and T. Kobata (mistakenly identified as T. Obata in the text), were shot and killed for allegedly trying to escape, and subsequent research reports that the court-martial board acquitted on both counts the soldier who had committed the homicides. In other camps, internees were beaten or kept in solitary confinement because they refused to obey orders mandated by their jailers. Confinement life was difficult, and the ever-present barbed-wire fence reminded all internees of their prisoner status. As Soga writes, “While we were detained, our minds grew dissolute. The joyless and dreary life continued day after day.”

The Japanese internees spent their days waiting, hoping perhaps to be released, repatriated to Japan, or for a cessation of hostility between the United States and Japan. This is Yasutaro Soga’s story—a participant-observer’s voice for this intrepid Issei group.

**The Incarceration Experience**

Conceptually separate from but intertwined with the actions in the internment camps for the Nikkei were the mass incarceration centers run by the U.S. Army’s Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) and the civilian War Relocation Authority (WRA). Briefly, after December 7, 1941, there were no immediate plans to remove en masse those Issei not already interned or their citizen children. On the West Coast there existed from the early 1900s a history of anti-Japanese sentiment and an extensive array of discriminatory legal and political policies and actions. This ethnic group had been effectively contained and constrained, physically and socially, from large-scale acceptance by members of the larger society. By 1942, they were a segregated ethnic group of whom most of the Mainland
population had little knowledge, nor with whom they sought acquaintance. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the flames of racial animosity were fanned by leading West Coast politicians, military officials, and the general public, and the public silence of President Roosevelt on the subject of the Nikkei group became stronger and drifted over the entire West Coast Nikkei population. Although the historic anti-Japanese forces clamored for the government to solve their “Japanese problem,” President Roosevelt, the US Navy’s ONI, and the Justice Department’s FBI had contrary intelligence reports attesting to the basic loyalty of this ethnic population. Nevertheless, for political reasons, Roosevelt signed an order resulting in the mass incarceration of almost all Nikkei from designated areas of Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona. The authority for this action was Executive Order 9066 (EO 9066), signed on February 19, 1942, authorizing the secretary of war “or any military commander he so designated to prescribe military areas . . . from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restriction [he] may impose in his discretion.” Although the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy, the initiation and implementation of EO 9066 targeted the Nikkei—American citizens and the remaining Issei who were not interned under the Alien Enemies Act. Because the incarceration story under EO 9066 on the Mainland is well known, my focus will now shift to the effects of EO 9066 on Hawai‘i.

Before the start of World War II the Nikkei in Hawai‘i were not excluded from the taint of racial hostility and suspicion as exemplified earlier by the 1939 statement of President Roosevelt. On December 18, Roosevelt accepted his cabinet’s recommendation that all Japanese aliens in Hawai‘i be removed and placed on an island other than O‘ahu. The reply of Lieutenant General Delos C. Emmons, commander of Hawai‘i’s martial law government, to this order stressed the military and logistical difficulties of carrying out this maneuver, and so the War Department gave him permission to send only “those Issei he deemed dangerous to the mainland.” In compliance, Emmons sent to the Mainland on January 21, 1942, 156 Issei, 16 Nisei, and a few others such as 10 German nationals and 14 German Americans. When they arrived on the West Coast, the Justice Department refused to accept the Nisei and German Americans, citing the inadvisability of a Mainland detention because their arrests had been conducted under martial law. Consequently they were returned to Hawai‘i. Later, after the signing of EO 9066, President Roosevelt agreed with Frank Knox’s recommendation to have all persons of Japanese ances-
try in Hawai‘i removed and incarcerated on another Hawai‘i island, stating that “I do not worry about the constitutional question—first because of my recent order (EO 9066) and second because Hawaii is under martial law.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 18 issued an order to General Emmons that “Japanese residents (either U.S. citizens or nationals) as are considered . . . to constitute a source of danger be transported to the U.S. mainland and placed under guard in concentration camps.”

Because of the earlier objection of the Justice Department to interning American citizens, the War Department then ordered a selective removal of up to 15,000 Nikkei to the Mainland into “resettlement” areas, but that these areas are not to be called “internment camps.” Besides the 875 Issei internees, 1,217 Hawai‘i Nikkei came to the Mainland and were placed in the WRA incarceration camps, producing a total of 2,092 Hawai‘i Nikkei so removed. In addition, about 300 Nikkei remained in Hawai‘i and were interned at the army’s Honouliuli Gulch, O‘ahu, internment camp after the Sand Island detention center was closed. The total Hawai‘i Nikkei detained in either the Hawai‘i or Mainland imprisonment facilities came to about 2,392.

What accounts for the differential treatment of the Hawai‘i Nikkei when compared to the mass incarceration of those on the Mainland? The reasons are complex and an extended discussion is beyond the scope of this introduction. Certainly, in Hawai‘i interethnic tensions did exist between the various ethnic groups, but arguably the degree of racial hostility and legal, political, and economic exclusion was considerably less than that faced by Nikkei on the Mainland. However, Hawai‘i’s social history also includes many instances of positive social interrelationships among the island Nikkei and others of the island population. It was at this level of interpersonal relationships, especially between the Nisei generation and members of other racial and ethnic groups in Hawai‘i, that made for a better basis of interethnic understanding and trust. Specifically, Hawai‘i had a group of influential individuals who were knowledgeable about the Nikkei and were careful to treat persons as individuals rather than subjecting them to collective suspicion and fearful attitudes on the basis of their ethnicity. Members of this group had since the late 1930s created a Council for Interracial Unity that quietly but effectively worked to counter efforts toward mass internment and incarceration in Hawai‘i. The members of this committee came from many sectors of the Hawai‘i population, including, for example, Charles Hemenway, a University of Hawai‘i regent; Hung Wai Ching, YMCA executive; Shigeo Yoshida, a Hilo-born writer and teacher; and John A. Burns, Honolulu police detective. Later, key individuals
in Hawai‘i included Robert Shivers, FBI agent, and General Emmons. Within three days of Emmons’ assuming the command of the Hawai‘i’s martial law government on December 18, he created a Morale Committee headed by Ching, Yoshida, and Charles Loomis. This committee became instrumental in capturing and expressing the patriotism and loyalty of the Hawai‘i Nikkei such that by January 16, 1942, General Emmons decided against the president and War Department wish to intern the Issei and their citizen children.\

Another important factor that mitigated the decision for a large-scale internment and incarceration of the Hawai‘i Nikkei was its significant presence in the population and labor force. Nikkei constituted 37.3 percent of the World War II island population, while on the Mainland it was always less than 1 percent. General Emmons used this potential loss-of-labor issue as an important reason to forego immediate compliance with the order for the wholesale incarceration of the Hawai‘i Nikkei. There were undoubtedly other factors, although perhaps of lesser consequence, such as the imposition of martial law allowing for a tighter control of the Nikkei population and the early and impressive showing of the Nisei in creating and participating in a voluntary labor group that was noticed by authorities in both Hawai‘i and Washington, D.C. And finally, the differing personalities and perceptions of the military commanders on the West Coast and Hawai‘i, especially as they assessed the Nikkei populace, undoubtedly played an important role in the differential treatment of this group within their command area.

An Issei Narrative

Inside the entryway of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i in Honolulu are twelve square granite pillars standing side by side. Above the stones is the adage “Values create a people and help them survive and thrive,” and on each column are etched the following in Japanese characters: KöKô (filial piety), On (debt of gratitude), Gaman (quiet endurance), Ganbari (perseverance), Shikata Ga Nai (acceptance with resignation), Kansha (gratitude), Chūgi (loyalty), Sekinin (responsibility), Haji/Hokori (shame/pride), Meiyo (honor), Giri (sense of duty), and Gisei (sacrifice). Each of these Japanese concepts represents core values brought by the Japanese immigrants to their new Hawai‘i home, and these concepts resonate throughout Yasutarō Soga’s narrative. Although Soga does not explicitly refer to these values, an understanding of them helps one to enter into the Issei life-world and illuminates how he understood and made sense of his
social world. For example, throughout the narrative, there is a noticeable positive stress on the importance of quiet endurance, displeasure when individuals unduly place their personal welfare before the good of the group, an emphasis on maintaining one's personal honor, and the necessity of persevering and accepting life's conditions while cherishing moments of hope and beauty even in the most difficult of conditions and times.

The reader may also observe that, in contrast to remembrances written in a European literary tradition, there appears to be an absence of heightened drama. Soga's narrative tone appears to be more monotonic, so that in many sections the mundane aspects of life take and hold center stage. There seems to be an inordinate stress on the daily vicissitudes of life—the weather, flowers, food, and even the pettiness of other internees. The names of people also appear at times to crowd the text. However, rather than seeing these as stylistic liabilities, the reader might recall that this is not a diary but personal recollections initially penned for the 1946 Japanese newspaper-reading audience. Soga's audience is attuned to this Japanese writing style, and it allows us in the present day to appreciate both the Issei perspective and his framing of his personal and eyewitness experiences as an internee in the World War II army and Justice Department camps. What is quite exceptional is his detailed account of almost all the major events encountered by the Hawai‘i Issei internee—Hawai‘i’s Sand Island, Angel Island, California, Lordsburg, and Santa Fe in New Mexico. This is a rare and valuable addition to understanding the complete World War II story.

Again, perhaps because of the journalistic origin of this narrative, Soga appears reluctant to let the reader into his emotional state during his four years of internment. Two examples in the narrative, however, offer tantalizing glimpses of the inner world of the Issei male. When the first Hawai‘i Issei group was told that they would be shipped to the Mainland, he observes that “Many of the men grew desperate and felt that no one cared if they lived or died. One man, who had been so brazen and such a troublemaker before the war, broke down in tears. On the night of the 19th, at the [Hawai‘i] Immigration Office, some men sang, some cried, and some fell deep into thought.” Then, when it was Soga's time to leave Hawai‘i, he tells us: “The day before I left [August 7, 1942], I asked Dr. Mori to give my wife the ninety poems I had composed while in the camp. I felt like the aimless wanderer in the old Japanese tales. I carried a suitcase in each hand and asked a young man to carry the big barracks bag for me. When we passed in front of the women's barracks, they called out, ‘Good
luck!’ I heard Mrs. Mori say, ‘Mr. Soga, be strong.’ A tear fell in spite of myself. We boarded ship at four that afternoon.”

However, Yasutaro Soga was not timid in his depiction and antagonistic portrayal of a few Issei figures in the internment camps. Considering that his initial audience would be a Japanese readership, he was quite willing to castigate others when they showed less than proper deference or concern about what he considered to be shameful behavior (*Haji*), or when they failed to do their expected duty (*Giri*) with honor (*Meiyo*). This provides us with an entrance into the mind of an educated Japanese Issei, and thus is valuable in its own right. That “Values create a people and help them survive and thrive” is a fitting maxim to keep in mind when striving to understand Soga’s public face while in an internment camp.

Soga’s mention of the ninety poems that he sent to his wife the day before he left Hawai‘i gives reason to believe that it was not out of personal reluctance that he limited the expression of his intimate thoughts. He was an accomplished and published poet, and through some poems of Keiho Soga, his pen name, the reader may better understand his innermost sentiments about the internment experience. His separation from his wife, for example, is expressed through the image of someone who is as close as his memory though remaining far-distant:

As I doze at dawn, 
My wife comes to me 
Our hands lightly touch, 
The dream is no more.

At the Santa Fe, New Mexico, camp, Soga saw the effect of the internment and time on the internee’s inner spirit:

Many a friend 
Who is incarcerated 
Ages visibly. 
Summer is passing by.

And for others, their deaths are memorialized:

The barren wasteland 
Raged by sandstorm, 
I weep for my friend 
Who sleeps there alone, 
Eternally.

and,
When the war is over
And after we are gone
Who will visit
This lonely grave in the wild
Where my friend lies buried?
Warera mina
Sarinishi ato no
Kono mushiro
Tare ka touran
Ikusa hate naba

The Issei internees felt keenly their change of status from able-bodied, fully functioning family providers, husbands, and fathers to a vulnerable state imposed through no fault of their own but based only on an accident of ethnicity and generation. The internment camp authorities continued to reinforce this position, and the internees tried continually to find meaning and hope in their daily existence. And so, their daily concerns, petty as they might appear to those outside the system, became the reality of their lives. Soga’s Issei narrative reflects this perspective; yet forever present in the background and brought strategically at times to the foreground by Soga are instances of huge and momentous events such as death, physical assaults, internee resistance, and a seemingly interminable separation of time and distance from their wives and families.

Conclusion

Today, in America’s post-September 11, 2001 days, we have become hyper-vigilant about the possible harmful actions of people about whom we know very little. This was the situation of the Nikkei in Hawai‘i and on the Mainland during World War II, and especially in the case of the Issei, who were all assumed to have unfathomable loyalties toward an enemy nation. This sweeping generalization was not imposed wholesale on the Italian and German nationals in the United States. However, regardless of the perceptions of those in Washington, D.C., about the Nikkei, there were significantly fewer Issei interned in Hawai‘i compared with their mainland compatriots. The incarceration saga likewise offers an even more starkly different picture. Whereas in Alaska and the continental United States almost all the remaining Nikkei group were expelled from their homes and put into “relocation” camps, only a comparative handful were so treated in Hawai‘i. And even among these few individuals, most were voluntary internees hoping to reunite with their husbands and or fathers. It is important to understand at least one important lesson stemming from the differential treatment of this group—that alternatives to mass internment or incarceration do exist and that such actions should not be predicated simply on the basis of ethnicity or race. It is conceivable that a call for similar actions might arise toward a group if another fanatical-based attack
occurs in or to the United States. When fear and prejudice are directed at a vulnerable group—a group that few can claim friendships with or knowledge about—then the result may again mirror the catastrophic actions taken on the U.S. West Coast against their Nikkei population. Hawai‘i demonstrated that knowing people before a shattering event occurs can affect the process generated to deal with difficult situations. Castigating an entire group on the basis of religious affiliation, national origin, ethnicity, race, or other social categories rather than on individual behavior could again result in draconian measures taken in the name of “national security” and “military necessity.”

To this point, George Santayana offers an appropriate remark: “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness... when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.... This is the condition of children and barbarians, in whom instinct has learned nothing from experience.” 19 The lessons that can be learned from Hawai‘i and its treatment of their Nikkei population offers an acceptable alternative to the World War II internment and incarceration instituted in the Territory of Alaska and on the mainland United States. That fewer Issei and Nisei had to endure the difficult journey of internment and incarceration, however, does not alleviate the pain and suffering felt by Yasutaro Soga:

There is nothing more sorrowful than war.
Here alone, all of life’s sadness is brought together.

Seattle, Washington
October 13, 2006

Notes


4. Ibid., 32, 38, 231.
7. Ibid., 124–125.
14. Ibid., 78.
15. Quoted in ibid., 80.
16. Quoted in ibid.
18. The following poems by Yasutaro (Keiho) Soga are published in Nakano and Nakano, *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*. A Japanese *tanka* poem “consists of 31 syllables (5-7-5-7-7)” and “speaks of nature and human emotions and allows the reader to perceive the unsaid and the intimated unsaid” (p. viii).