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Between the Devil and the Deep Sea: The Korean American War for Independence (1910-1945)

A Thesis by

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Orange, California

Wilkinson College

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in War and Society

May 2020

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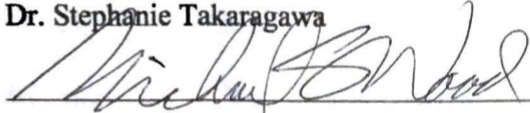
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The thesis of Andrew J. Chae is approved.



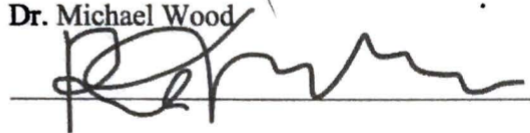
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## ABSTRACT

Between the Devil and the Deep Sea: The Korean American War for Independence (1910-1945)

by Andrew J. Chae

From 1910 to 1945, while the Korean peninsula was a protectorate- and eventual colony- of the Empire of Japan, Koreans in the United States began an arduous process to maintain their sense of identity in a new land, and struggled to have a voice in a society that rejected their race. As a people in diasporic exile, Korean Americans engaged in a collective war for their independence by gathering resources to liberate Korea and committing extraordinary effort to deconstruct contrived stereotypes of Koreans. There are a number of forms of primary sources that corroborate the major arguments of the thesis, including early Korean American- and American- newspaper reporting, first-hand testimonials, propaganda editorials, military and government documents, statements, and letters.

This thesis was written in the early months of 2020, a time when Asian culture and acknowledgement of Asian American contributions was at its height, only to have it come crashing down to one of its lowest points. At the start of February, the South Korean thriller *Parasite* became the first foreign film to receive the Academy Award for “Best Picture”, and, just over a week later, California had issued its first official apology for its role in the internment of the Japanese. Then, almost as quickly as the successes came, an explosion of anti-Asian sentiment swept the globe in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Known as the “Yellow Peril”, the latent feelings of anger and discrimination erased any sense of ambiguous racism, effectively overturning decades of meticulously crafted progress by countless people. But this struggle is merely another battle in an endless war, as Korean Americans cope with the generalized and misdirected racism that the older generations had faced. However, as racism

engenders hardships and a new need to validate themselves and their fidelity to American values, Korean Americans will demonstrate once again perseverance and sacrifice to bring a better future, just as they did during their war for independence.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

G.I.	Galvanized Iron, or Government Issue
K.N.A.	Korean National Association
L.A.	Los Angeles
O.C.S.	Officer Candidate School
U.C.	University of California
U.S.	United States
U.S.C.	University of Southern California
WAVES	United States Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve) Program
W.R.A.	War Relocation Authority
WWII	World War II
442 <sup>nd</sup> RCT	442 <sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team



## Preface

On the night of February 9, 2020, at the Dolby Theatre in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles, California, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences held the 92<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards. After a few years of controversies and negative publicity, the 2020 Oscars went down as a historic event of international proportions. The Oscar for “Best Picture” went to the South Korean film *Parasite*, the first foreign, non-English speaking film to win such a category in history. The film’s director, Bong Joon Ho, also took the Oscar for “Best Director”, becoming the first Korean filmmaker to do so. The *Los Angeles Times* heralded the win as a “much-needed slap to the American film industry” and “no small thing” during a time of heightened feelings of nationalism and xenophobia.<sup>1</sup>

*Parasite*’s big win highlighted a cultural significance as it occurred in Los Angeles, a city that is currently home to the largest- and one of the oldest- Korean American communities in the United States. The film’s win made headlines throughout the city- and the world- as Koreans proudly celebrated their people’s accomplishment. This represented a stark contrast to the plight of Korean immigrants who, merely a century ago, arrived in a much different Los Angeles: one that would have never considered such people to make any significant contributions at all. Koreans were met with a harsh reality of systemic racism, an anti-Asian establishment, and already codified laws set in place to homogenize them under a generic label of either Chinese or Japanese. Perhaps befitting of the name of the movie that would be celebrated as a cultural milestone, Koreans began their history in the United States seen as parasites- perhaps even

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Chang, “It’s just the Oscars – but my God, it matters that ‘Parasite’ won best picture,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2020-02-09/oscars-parasite-best-picture-glass-ceiling>

antithetical- to American ideals and culture. The path from rejection and oppression to Koreans receiving applause upon acceptance of a prestigious award came at significant cost and sacrifice. The Oscar for *Parasite* stands atop the foundation built by early Korean immigrants and their children in a time when they would have never dreamed their new country would ever even acknowledge their existence.

At the turn of the twentieth century, small groups of Koreans arrived on the shores of the United States, enticed by the promise of equality and freedom. To their disappointment, the land of opportunity was exclusively offered to those of European descent and held an aggressive and actively negative disposition towards Asians. Furthermore, beginning in 1910, the Korean mainland lost its national sovereignty and became a colony of the Empire of Japan, which placed a further strain on the new immigrants, as they had neither a stable social identity nor the ability to return to their country if they so desired. And, as if to add insult to injury, they were restricted from obtaining the full rights guaranteed with American citizenship because of anti-Asian laws and sentiments. As a people in diasporic exile, Korean Americans collectively declared an unofficial war of independence in support of their homeland while simultaneously also declaring their own personal war in a fight to define their own American identity, separate from the Chinese and Japanese. Through delegation, organization, fundraising, education, networking, and opportunities of service, Korean Americans demonstrated incredible resolve and determination for their independence.

The scope of modern Korean history reveals a wide variety of stories and scenarios experienced by those who lived in different countries and various time periods, but the focus of the thesis will be that of Koreans in America from 1910 to the end of World War II in 1945. Since the mid-1800s, the Korean diaspora has included lands such as the Russian Far East and

Northeast China, and closer to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the list included Japan, the United States, and Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the experiences of Koreans in America become further complicated after World War II with the start of the Korean War and the rise Korean immigration to the United States throughout the Cold War. Additionally, the climax of conflict to Koreans in America was the 1992 Los Angeles Riots after it ravaged through Koreatown and much of Central Los Angeles. However, because of the broad nature of the Korean diaspora and the endless minority struggle of Korean Americans, this thesis will focus on the experience of Koreans in America and their unique position during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The methodological approach taken to examine the lives of Korean Americans from 1910-1945 was in order to review the secondary source works and biographies of Korean American communities of the time period, and significant figures within said community. The overarching theme of a war for independence was first hypothesized in stories linked to struggles of national identity, bitterness towards the Japanese colonizers, and American patriotism. Furthermore, through primary sources, the struggles and motives of early Korean Americans are found in rhetoric and action. Such primary sources include Korean American and American newspapers of the time like *Sinhan Minbo*, the oral histories of Susan Ahn Cuddy, Kim Young Oak, Ahn Chang Ho, and Syngman Rhee, military and civilian documents, and legislation. The limitations of the scope of the subject come from the unofficial nature of the war for independence, thus making it difficult to gather evidence from a movement that was never consolidated nor fought on a unified front. The hope of this paper is to bring to light the forgotten generation of Korean Americans that struggled to live during circumstances that demanded extraordinary resilience.

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<sup>2</sup> Kwang-kyu Lee, *Overseas Koreans* (Jimoondang International, 2000).

In Chapter One, the underlying theme is the motivation of Koreans to leave their homeland in hopes of finding a land of equality and open opportunities. The political instability in Korea as well as other factors led a few to the United States, where they settled in cities like Honolulu, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Riverside. Korea's strict class system, set by the ruling aristocracy, effectively stifled opportunities for growth in the poor and middle classes.<sup>3</sup> The burgeoning Korean American communities of the early twentieth century too lacked opportunities to build up their communities, thereby stunting an already limited growth in job networks, business opportunities, and the creation of schools, homes, churches, and other gathering places.<sup>4</sup> Although they left Korea to flee inequality, they fared no better in the United States, where they were confronted by an anti-Asian establishment and discriminatory laws to suppress the perceived Asian menace. Despite their limited resources, the first of the Korean immigrants established a bedrock of perseverance and determination that would only grow with successive generations.

In Chapter Two, the small communities of Korean Americans are left powerless as their homeland fell into the hands of Imperial Japan. In addition to Korean Americans stripped of national identity, the immigration status of Korean Americans became further complicated: the process of homogenizing Korean Americans into a Japanese label became apparent in both the United States and the Empire of Japan. The early independence movement drove the Korean American community to proceed in a unified front both for their homeland's freedom as well as their own declared right to demand that they be treated as a unique people with their own culture

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<sup>3</sup> Usong Han, *Unsung Hero: The Story of Colonel Young Oak Kim* (Riverside: Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2011), v-vi.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 270.

distinct from others. Korean independence leaders such as Ahn Chang Ho and Syngman Rhee rallied Korean American communities fervently towards these desires; many, on their own accord, formed organizations, militant groups, and some of the more radical members took to embracing violence as a means to such ends.

The Korean Americans' war for independence continues in Chapter Three with the attacks on Pearl Harbor shaking the nation and subsequently mobilizing Korean Americans. The chapter highlights an urgency in the early communities to demonstrate patriotism in colors both American and Korean while attempting to combat a rise in anti-Asian sentiment. Some Korean Americans formed National Guard brigades, while others took to Washington, D.C. to sound the alarm against potential Japanese threats in the country. Violent anti-Japanese hate manifested throughout the country; anyone of Japanese descent in America was evicted from their homes and forced into internment camps. Already embittered, Koreans in America were faced with a dilemma: to do nothing and watch as their communities fell apart or serve a country that expounded a generalized hatred of all Asians, including them.

In Chapter Four, many Korean Americans had dutifully contributed to American society in its war effort against the Empire of Japan and, subsequently, the American liberation of Korea. In addition, within the Armed Forces of World War II, extraordinary figures- like Susan Ahn Cuddy and Kim Young Oak- placed their Korean heritage firmly under them and placed the United States above all else- all in the name of an independent Korea. While many came out of the war ready to use their veteran status to build stronger communities, some paid the ultimate price and never returned home. The motivation of Korean and American nationalism led many Korean American service members to fight for the dual opportunity to be both the liberated and the liberators.

Figures such as Ahn Chang Ho and Syngman Rhee led the independence movement throughout Korean American communities, while Susan Ahn Cuddy and Kim Young Oak served in the U.S. military with high distinction and honor. Events such as the Hemet Valley Incident and the attack on Pearl Harbor provided a fearful nation with an easy scapegoat- Asian Americans. Moments like the assassination of Durham Stevens and the anti-Japanese diatribes of Kilsoo Haan underscored deep resentment and hatred for Japanese occupation in the lives of Korean while stories from Mary Paik Lee and Hannah Nixon would follow a different route, showing that compassion defeats violence and hatred.

Alongside the tangible war against systemic racism, societal rejection, discrimination, and the Japanese occupation of Korea, there was a conflicted struggle of identity within Koreans who lived in the United States. As many stories in the following chapters will reveal, many Koreans in America were faced with the question: Am I Korean, Korean American, or American? And painfully, the natural thought process included the question: which part of my identity must die in order for the other to live? Racial labels become complicated in cases such as the early Koreans in America, especially in a story in which Koreans are seeking the label Korean Americans, but America calls them Chinese/Japanese Orientals, and the Japanese Empire calls them Japanese under their jurisdiction. Furthermore, the term “Asian Americans” was coined by student activists at the University of California, Berkeley in the 1960s by those inspired by the civil-rights movement to protest structural inequality, outside the range of focus of this thesis; but, the term will be used towards general descriptions of Asians in America at the time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jia Tolentino, “‘Minor Feelings’ and the possibilities of Asian-American Identity,” *The New Yorker*, March 6, 2020.

The war for independence of the early twentieth century shaped the resilience of future Korean Americans. They have proven that they deserve recognition in American history and society. Throughout the short history of Koreans in the United States, immigrants demonstrated profound effort for their communities to gain recognition in their own right in the face of their homeland's occupation. In the struggle for an identity, sovereignty, and acceptance, the Korean American war for independence forged the relationship between the United States and its Asian American population.

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<https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/minor-feelings-and-the-possibilities-of-asian-american-identity>

## Chapter 1: Early Korean Americans

*“They are different in color... different in race... They have not in common with the Caucasian a single trait.”*

The access to proper education was an important reason for Koreans immigrating to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Many first-generation Korean Americans brought with them the notion that education is the necessary foundation for achieving high-societal status and economic success. Additionally, education was seen as a rarity, a nearly inaccessible tool traditionally hoarded by the Yangban elite.<sup>2</sup> For Korean immigrants, America’s free education system was an incredible incentive and enough of a reason to permanently settle in the unknown land.

Relations with the United States of America and Korea started with the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation signed in 1882. Between 1899 and 1902, records show the first Korean immigrant group to arrive in the United States was “165 ginseng merchants, 3 women, 2 children, and 20 elders (age 45 and above).” As formal relations between the two nations were officially established, several Korean diplomats settled in San Francisco to welcome Korean immigrants to the U.S. These delegates helped form a community in San Francisco and brought a “highly political nature” to the early start of this immigrant group. The establishment of such a community would serve to bring about active participation tied to familial dedication and public service in the Korean independence movement in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Immigration Act of 1965, discriminatory immigration laws prevented the full development of Asian immigration to the United States, thereby curtailing the growth of the

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<sup>1</sup> Usong Han, *Unsung Hero: The Story of Colonel Young Oak Kim* (Riverside: Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2011), 22.

<sup>2</sup> James Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream: Portraits of a Successful Immigrant Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, v-vi.



Korean American community before the act's passage.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the more established Japanese and Chinese communities in the U.S., the small number of early Koreans did not allow for a "separate ethnic community."<sup>5</sup> The initial migrants lacked the resources to develop their own immigrant enclaves, therefore struggling to establish job networks, business opportunities, schools, churches, and even gathering places.<sup>6</sup>

On January 13, 1903, now officially considered Korean American Day, the first major documented case of Korean migration to the United States was the arrival of 102 laborers to Hawaii. Between 1903 and 1905, more than 7,000 Korean men continued to settle throughout Hawaii to work on sugarcane plantations.<sup>7</sup> The Hawaiian Sugar Plantation Association had used American missionaries and recruiters to entice many potential laborers to emigrate to Hawaii to pursue a "divide and conquer" strategy to combat rising wages and control the labor force.<sup>8</sup> Korean workers, alongside Chinese, Filipino, Portuguese, and others were brought in to work as laborers and field hands on the Hawaiian sugar plantations with the hopes of breaking the hegemony of the Japanese labor force already firmly entrenched there. In the case of the Korean laborers, the majority of them were single males in their early twenties.<sup>9</sup> Because American "anti-miscegenation" laws made it illegal for whites and non-whites to marry while also clearly defining ethnic boundaries, many of these men came with hopes of marriage through "picture brides".<sup>10</sup> As a result, approximately a thousand Korean women emigrated to Hawaii to marry

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<sup>4</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, v-vi.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 270.

<sup>6</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 270.

<sup>7</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, v-vi.

<sup>8</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, vi-vii.

<sup>9</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, vi-vii.

<sup>10</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 20.

through the pictures they had exchanged with Korean males settled on the sugar plantations.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, many of the Korean women found jobs as janitors, laundresses, and cooks at the sugar plantations.<sup>12</sup>

As the Korean community became family-oriented- and their savings mounted- many sought new opportunities in California. From the islands of Hawaii, Korean families began to move towards the West Coast in cities like Seattle, Los Angeles, and Riverside. Soon Kwon Kim, a sugarcane worker from Hawaii, moved from the islands and headed towards Seattle in 1916 with several missionaries.<sup>13</sup> Kim settled in Los Angeles to build a family where they would have a daughter, Willa Kim, who would later become one of few Korean American costume designers to enter the American Theater Hall of Fame.<sup>14</sup>

Alongside the many Koreans who migrated to Hawaii, the late 19th Century and early 20th Century saw the start of the early Korean community in Los Angeles. Between 1902 and 1903, around 102 Korean professionals and teachers made the arduous journey from Korea to Hawaii, then to San Francisco, and finally, Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup> With American education as an incentive, these immigrants sought to grow their wealth and education in the U.S. to later help their homeland develop into a modern nation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, vi-vii.

<sup>12</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, vi-vii.

<sup>13</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Anita Gates, "Willa Kim, Designer of Fanciful Costumes, Dies at 99." *The New York Times*, December 28, 2016.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/28/theater/willa-kim-dead-tony-winning-costume-designer.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/28/theater/willa-kim-dead-tony-winning-costume-designer.html?_r=0)

<sup>15</sup> Sheila Smith Noonan, *The Changing Face of North America since 1965* (Broomall: Mason Crest Publishers, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 20.

Los Angeles has been described as the “Capital of the Pacific Rim” and the “Gateway to the Pacific.” Although it is the West Coast of the United States, it is also the east coast of the vast and diverse Pacific world. Across the city’s long history, immigrants have grown and shaped the population since its Spanish roots to the start of the film industry to its modern status as an international cultural and economic powerhouse. Many Koreans began lives throughout the United States, however the majority of them resided in California. The Korean immigrants that settled in Los Angeles persevered through local challenges and institutional racism to eventually call it their permanent home, establishing Koreatown as the largest neighborhood in the city.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1930s, under 700 Koreans had settled in Los Angeles. The two communities they established were in Downtown Los Angeles and Bunker Hill- also known as “Old Koreatown”- areas; another in South-Central Los Angeles.<sup>18</sup> As the second generation of Korean Americans grew of age, many made considerable and valuable contributions to American society. Some of the most notable Korean Americans from the time period include Alfred Song, the first Asian American to be elected into office in California; Sammy Lee, two-time Olympic gold medalist in 1948 and 1952; Mary Lee Shon, Korean American advocate and lead developer of the LA Unified curriculum on Asian-Americans; David Hyun, renowned architect famous for his development of the “Japanese Village Plaza” in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles; Philip Ahn, eldest son of Korean independence leader Ahn Chang Ho and the first Asian American to receive a star

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<sup>17</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Kimberly Yu, "Emerging diversity, Los Angeles' Koreatown 1990-2000," *Amerasia Journal* 30:1 (2004): 25–52.

Edward T. Chang and Carol K. Park. *Korean Americans: A Concise History* (Riverside: The Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2019), 39.

of the Hollywood “Walk of Fame”; and Susan Ahn Cuddy, the first Asian-American woman to join the U.S. Navy, and first to serve as an officer in the U.S. Navy.<sup>19</sup>

### **Anti-Asian Establishment in America**

Throughout American history, the United States has been a beacon of hope for immigrants, and its foundations established on their success. However, when Asian immigrants arrived in the United States, they were met with aggressive racism and an establishment that worked against them. The experience of racial discrimination varied across different ethnic minorities, but Asian groups were immediately met with a society ready to make the possibilities of permanently settling a very difficult task.

Chinese immigrants faced an onslaught of severe discrimination and institutional racism. Their contributions in expanding the western frontier of the United States were the foundations of its continental growth, but the Chinese’s own population growth was stunted by laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Chinese Americans were prohibited from bringing “picture brides” which brought them close to complete exclusion.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the economic growth of Asian Americans was suppressed by the Alien Land Law of 1913, which prohibited them from leasing or owning land in California.<sup>22</sup> One Korean immigrant recalled: “We left California because the state had passed the alien land act. You couldn’t control your farm. Then we went to Washington. But after we lived there for a few years, Washington passed an anti-alien exclusion farm law, so we went to Utah where they did not have such a law.”<sup>23</sup>

Another Korean immigrant revealed the racist extent of the Alien Land Law: “If we wanted to

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<sup>19</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

rent land, it had to be in a child's Korean name that was born in this country – a citizen. It was impossible as a foreigner.”<sup>24</sup> Other laws placed Asian Americans as permanent second-class citizens. Crime committed against Asian Americans meant nothing as one law prohibited Chinese Americans from testifying against white people in court.<sup>25</sup> Asian American immigrants lived through a system built to work against Asians, meaning they had to painstakingly accumulate their wealth through hard work and dedication.

There were private organizations that outright condemned Asian Americans and lobbied against them. The Asiatic Exclusion League described Korean and Japanese immigrants as “undesirable aliens.”<sup>26</sup> The San Francisco Building Trades Council demanded the expansion of the Chinese Exclusion Act to include Korean and Japanese persons, while the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League lobbied against Korean and Japanese immigrants, respectively.<sup>27</sup> By the turn of the century, the immigrant populations of Koreans, Japanese, and Filipinos grew, which worried San Francisco city officials. By then, the Chinese and Japanese were already popular targets of exclusion. But in 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education included Koreans as part of their segregation directive.<sup>28</sup> Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were moved into the city's “Oriental Schools” with one official stating, “[White] children should not be placed in any position where their youthful impressions may be affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race.”<sup>29</sup> In 1909, Grove Johnson, an anti-Japanese petitioner, stated, “I am responsible to the mothers and fathers of Sacramento County who have their little daughters

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<sup>24</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>25</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>27</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>28</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>29</sup> Roger Daniels. *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in America Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 32.

sitting side by side in the school rooms with matured Japs, their base minds, their lascivious thoughts, multiplied by their race and strengthened by their mode of life.”<sup>30</sup> Even the University of California at Berkeley, now famous for its liberal and progressive ideals, rejected a group of thirty Indian students’ application to the interfraternity council for a new fraternity because of their Asian heritage.<sup>31</sup> Racist policies against the Koreans and Japanese went up as far as the Oval Office, when in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt gave an executive order to block Korean and Japanese laborers from moving from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland. A few years later in 1912, the Democratic Party in California followed the trend to push forward federal legislation to officially exclude Korean, Japanese, and Hindu laborers from immigration.<sup>32</sup>

The late 1800s and early 1900s in the United States saw much confusion over allowing Asian immigrants to obtain citizenship. Although Anti-Asian organizations and the federal government called for exclusion, there were oftentimes a conflict of interest between such organizations; Attorney General Charles Bonaparte declared the Japanese to be ineligible for citizenship, but in 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt negotiated a quid pro quo with the Japanese government to allow naturalization.<sup>33</sup> In such an effort to ease tensions with the government of Japan over the immigration restriction, the executive branch failed to give a clear directive for the rest of the country. In the midst of such confusion, a federal district court was met with a case involving a Korean immigrant who was drafted into the U.S. Army to serve in World War I in 1918.<sup>34</sup> Easurk Emsen Charr petitioned for citizenship after his service to a

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<sup>30</sup> Daniels, *Asian America*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Shelley Sang-Hee Lee. *A New History of Asian America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 130.

<sup>32</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>33</sup> Yuji Ichioka. *Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 211-212.

<sup>34</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

country that wanted to exclude him for his race.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, the court declared Koreans could not be naturalized because they were “admittedly of the Mongol family... the Provisions of the draft law clearly did not contemplate the incorporation of those eligible to citizenship [in the armed forces].”<sup>36</sup> In 1911, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization took the stance of labeling Koreans and Japanese as ineligible for citizenship.<sup>37</sup> But, because Congress had not passed legislation on the matter, around 400 Japanese immigrants were able to obtain citizenship by 1911.<sup>38</sup>

The motives behind anti-Asian legislation can be seen by the Immigration Act of 1924- a reinstatement of naturalization law from 1790- which stated American citizenship was reserved for “free white persons of good character.”<sup>39</sup> In 1924, Ulysses S. Webb, the Attorney General of California, testified before Congress against all Asians, particularly Chinese and Japanese:

They are different in color; different in ideals; different in race; different in ambitions; different in their theory of political economy and government. They speak a different language; they worship another God. They have not in common with the Caucasian a single trait.<sup>40</sup>

The xenophobia found in legislation points towards the reasons for the establishment of anti-Asian policies. The fear of a white minority and change in demographics drove the oppression of minorities, devoid of considerations for future consequences.

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<sup>35</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>36</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>37</sup> Ichioka, Issei, 211.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Reeves. *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Picador, 2016), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ulysses S. Webb, *Congressional Testimonial on Japanese Immigration Legislation*, Senate Committee on Immigration, 1924. Reeves, *Infamy*, 9.

Korean immigrants were unknown to many in the United States and faced a widespread generalized racism against Asian peoples. Considered “strangers from a different shore,” all parts of Korean people’s lives were disrupted with constant and pervasive discrimination. In the early 1920s, Do-Yun Yoon recalled facing rejection from white land lords and were told they can only live in certain “towns” like “Mexican Town” or “Black Town.” Koreans attempting to participate in social gathering places were often turned away or were only permitted in segregated areas. Yoon recalled, “When we first came to Delano [Kern County, California], the Americans would not let us sit anywhere in the theater. They permitted us to sit in one corner with the Mexicans but not with the Americans.” Many other establishments presented a weary form of discrimination in fear of their own rejection from their white community peers. Yoon stated, “Although there were not many customers, the waitress did not come to my table. After a while, a young receptionist came to me and said with a low voice that ‘we can’t serve you lunch, because if we start serving lunch to the Orientals, white Americans will not come here.’”<sup>41</sup>

In the city of Reedly, Fresno County, California, ethnic boundaries were devised by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to separate the various races away from white communities. Accounts showed Korean children were shunned by German parents who did not allow their children to play with the Koreans and faced ridicule and visible discomfort on the faces of non-Koreans when they walked through their neighborhoods. Even within segregated neighborhoods, Koreans faced discrimination from other Asian groups. One Korean immigrant resident recalled, “On the whole Japanese looked down upon the Koreans... They felt superior to us. Rarely was there a Japanese boy or girl who treated a Korean boy or girl equally.” Although the ethnic lines between communities was apparent, there were some cases of racial harmony between neighbors. Some

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<sup>41</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 271.



of the Japanese and Korean families gained trust between each other at grocery stores or other public places, because some of the Koreans were able to speak Japanese. Other accounts found Italian and Korean families to be on “very friendly” terms, as a result of living together on the poorer sides of town and sharing their struggles as immigrants.<sup>42</sup>

Korean immigrants entered the United States with hopes of prosperity and away from the oppression of the Yangban elites of Korea; however, they found themselves wedged in a conflict between the American establishment and its discriminatory anti-Asian policies. Despite a system working against their success, the perseverance and dedication to succeed by the early Korean American communities were the foundations upon which future generations could build upon their hard work.

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<sup>42</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 289-290.

## Chapter 2: The People Without a Home

*“Hirohito, you really committed a great sin, didn't you...”*

At the turn of the century, many Koreans saw the United States as a hopeful potential for starting a new home and identity. However, in 1905, Korea became a protectorate of the Empire of Japan, and in 1910, the Korean peninsula was officially annexed under Japanese rule. The homeland of the Koreans fell into a new, dark era under Imperial Japan. The Japanese Empire's time on the Korean peninsula saw forced assimilation policies, pushing the Korean culture to near cultural extinction. The Japanese Empire's assimilation policies imposed on Korea starting in the 1920s illegalized the Korean language, names, attires, and religions, with many families made to adopt the Japanese language and Japanese surnames, such as Kim made to become Kanemura.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of the colonization of Korea were profound on Koreans living abroad in the United States. The immigration status of Korean Americans became further complicated with the Japanese Empire's prohibition of Korean migration to the U.S. to protect the interest of Japanese workers in Hawaii and the mainland, thus quelling the quality and quantity of the Korean communities in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> With Japan's ban of Korean emigration to the United States, Koreans in America effectively became cut off from their homeland and their connections back home.<sup>3</sup> With the United States denying Korean people American citizenship, and their homeland in the hands of the Japanese, Koreans found themselves to be a people without a home and country.

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<sup>1</sup> James Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream: Portraits of a Successful Immigrant Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Usong Han, *Unsung Hero: The Story of Colonel Young Oak Kim* (Riverside: Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2011), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 282.

The hatred for the Japanese only grew as they could do nothing but listen to reports of suffering and injustice back in Korea. Second-generation Korean Americans experienced the agony of their parents with one daughter saying, “My mother longed to go back to Korea, but the thought of the Japanese made her shudder.”<sup>4</sup> Other Korean Americans described Korea as a “tiger’s cage” or “snake hell” in its situation.<sup>5</sup> In a letter published in 1911 by the Korean American newspaper *Sinhan Minbo*, Cho Mun-chan, having recently traveled to colonial Korea wrote, “It is very difficult to describe the situation at home... It is awfully hard to live under these conditions. I am chained now, after having lived freely in America... I have only one request of you – please arrange my passage to America.”<sup>6</sup> Arguably different from other ethnic groups, Korean Americans felt a stronger sense of unity and ethnicity powered by the necessity to fight for the independence of their homeland. In lieu of the circumstances, the Korean community, which lacked its own ethnic economy, stood in solidarity with one another as they considered themselves the only free Koreans left in the world.

To make matters worse, colonization of Korea meant anti-Japanese policies also applied to Korean Americans. According to the Immigration Act of 1924, under the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, U.S. residents born in Japan could not own land and could not become citizens.<sup>7</sup> The act’s section of land ownership was strongly advocated by Dr. Edward Alsworth Ross, a distinguished professor of sociology at Stanford University, when he wrote:

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<sup>4</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.

<sup>5</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.

<sup>6</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.

<sup>7</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans, Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), 66.

1. [The Japanese] are unassimilable.
2. [The Japanese] work for low wages and thereby undermine the existing work standards of American workmen.
3. [The Japanese] standard of living are much lower than American workmen.
4. [The Japanese] lack a proper political for American democratic institutions.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the American government viewed Korean Americans as no different from the Japanese, thereby homogenized under a Japanese label. Therefore, the same restrictions upon their lives were imposed making success in the United States nearly impossible.

As the colonization of Korea progressed, the Japanese Empire made efforts to claim responsibility over Koreans living in diaspora in the United States. After the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake devastated the California Bay Area, the Japanese government reached out to effected Japanese and Koreans living in the city.<sup>9</sup> The Korean Americans immediately rejected any assistance from the Japanese government stating, “We are calling your attention to the fact that we are anti-Japanese, so we shall not accept any relief fund from the Japanese consulate. We shall reject interference of Japanese authorities in our community affairs in any manner. No matter how great a plight we are in, we must always refuse Japanese help. We’d rather die free than under Japanese jurisdiction.”<sup>10</sup> Almost assuredly, the act of claiming jurisdiction over Koreans in America meant their status as Japanese nationals would be strengthened, but the quick thinking of Korean American leadership helped their communities- and future generations- see what was happening to them.

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<sup>8</sup> McWilliams, *Prejudice*, 66.

Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Picador, 2016), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281-282.

<sup>10</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281-282.

Almost a decade after the Japanese Empire's annexation of the Korean peninsula, the March 1, 1919 Mansei Movement in Korea saw mass protests for Korean independence which ended in massacre. The effects of the incident were profound as it sparked international outrage and ignited international Korean efforts against the Japanese Empire and for their fight for their homeland.<sup>11</sup> Reports of Japanese troops murdering thousands of Korean protestors in the incident consolidated Korean American support for Korean independence.

The Korean National Association (KNA), founded in 1909 by Ahn Chang Ho, was formed out of the Korean Independence Movement to advocate for Korean interests for international Koreans in diaspora.<sup>12</sup> The KNA helped raise funds for the independence movement and combat the possibility of the extinction of the Korean identity.<sup>13</sup> The KNA harnessed the anti-Japanese sentiment stirring in the Korean communities and used it to establish a political group to act as a cohesive voice. In addition, other like-minded organizations joined the KNA, even developing international branches in places as disparate as Manchuria, the Russian Maritime Province, Siberia, and Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

The KNA helped develop a Korean conscience built on patriotic dedication and sacrifice, with most engagements taking the form of monetary contributions.<sup>15</sup> Between March 1919 and December 1920, Korean Americans helped raise over \$200,000 for the cause.<sup>16</sup> The incident had deep effects on the community, with many dreaming of a "return to a free Korea", some donating

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<sup>11</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, viii-ix.

<sup>12</sup> Han-Kyo Kim, "The Korean Independence Movement in the United States," *International Journal of Korean Studies* (2002): 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ilpyong J. Kim, *Korean-Americans: Past, Present, and Future* (Carlsbad: Hollym International Corporation, 2005), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Kim, *Korean-Americans*, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Kim, *Korean-Americans: Past, Present, and Future*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, viii-ix.

portions of the little savings they had to realizing this goal.<sup>17</sup> By the 1920s, the KNA became an integral part of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the symbol of Korean sovereignty. Throughout the decade, the KNA garnered international support for Korean nationalism, lobbying the U.S. government to support Korean sovereignty, and becoming the foremost organization for all matters relating to the Korean American community.<sup>18</sup>

In 1938, the Korean National Association building, along with the Korean United Presbyterian Church next to it in Los Angeles, was dedicated by the city for its role as an international hub and historic site for independence activities.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Ahn Chang Ho's original family home has since become a part of the University of Southern California's campus and is currently home to the USC Korean Studies Institute.<sup>20</sup>

However, despite significant effort by Korean Americans against the Japanese Empire and for Korean independence, Korean Americans continued to suffer from the misplaced anti-Japanese sentiment from whites. A former student of a Los Angeles elementary school recollected, "During the first days of school life, children would call me 'Jap.' I would protest and sometimes resort to fists, but the most effective means would be total indifference." Another former student recounted her high school history teacher's use of the word "Jap" against her saying she asked her teacher, "How do you know I'm a Jap? ... Are you so ignorant you don't know what a Korean is? And you're a history teacher?" A Korean woman reported on an incident from 1924, "No matter where I appeared – whether the library, on the street car, or

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<sup>17</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 287.

<sup>18</sup> Kim, *Korean-Americans*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Edward T. Chang and Carol K. Park, *Korean Americans: A Concise History* (Riverside: The Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2019), 39.

<sup>20</sup> "Who We Are," *USC Korean Studies Institute*. Retrieved February 19, 2020.  
<https://dornsife.usc.edu/ksi/who-we-are/>

downtown, I perceived that the [whites'] attention was fixed upon me and soon there followed a faint but audible whisper, 'Oh, she is a Jap!'. When a Korean American sought a simple haircut at the local barbershop, he was demanded to leave the store because the barber did not want the "Japanese trade." At the same time Korean Americans grew their anger against the Japanese Empire, and their aching for their homeland persisted, they had to face misdirected anti-Japanese racism.<sup>21</sup>

Some events went as far as violent confrontations against Korean Americans by anti-Japanese white Americans. For example, in 1910 in Upland, San Bernardino County, California, Korean laborers hired to pick oranges on Mary Steward's farm were attacked by white farmers with rocks threatening to kill them. In a rare act of compassion for minorities, Steward armed the Koreans with guns and instructed them to defend themselves at all costs. Steward stated, "The minority Korean people in this great country of America have a right to live and work just as the other nationalities. They are hard-working, diligent and honest people who are struggling for a decent life."<sup>22</sup>

In 1913, a similar incident in Hemet, Riverside County, California took place which ultimately turned into an international event. Known as the Hemet Valley Incident, eleven Korean laborers from Riverside's Korean community, Pachappa Camp, came to Hemet looking for work during the Great Freeze.<sup>23</sup> Immediately upon their arrival, anti-Japanese and anti-Asian white laborers violently confronted the Koreans and chased them out of town.

The incident pushed Japan and the United States to near crisis. The Japanese Association of Southern California, a branch of the Japanese government, urged the consul general in San

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<sup>21</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 271.

<sup>22</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>23</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 23-25.

Francisco to intervene on behalf of the Koreans, considered- under colonization- Japanese subjects.<sup>24</sup> An official from the Los Angeles Japanese consulate even visited the Korean laborers and offered assistance.<sup>25</sup> However, the Korean laborers and the Korean American community found Japanese intervention to be an outrage citing that “this was a Korean issue.”<sup>26</sup> As a response to the meddling of the Japanese government, David Lee, president of the Korean National Association, sent a telegram to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan requesting the U.S. government to cease dealings with the Japanese in Korean-immigrant affairs.<sup>27</sup> An excerpt from the telegram read: “Please regard [Koreans] not as Japanese in the time of peace and war. We Koreans came to America before Japan’s annexation of Korea and we will never submit to her so long as the sun remains in heaven.”<sup>28</sup> Bryan responded to Lee’s telegram with a press release announcing the *de facto* recognition of Korean American autonomy as political refugees and non-Japanese subjects. The Hemet Valley Incident presented a stark reality that Koreans in America would have to fight for themselves to help preserve their identity and heritage in the United States.

Despite attempted Japanese intervention in Korean American affairs, the reality of a colonized Korea was still distant to many Koreans in the United States. However, when the city of Los Angeles hosted the Olympics in 1932, it brought the situation in Korea directly to their doorsteps. Hundreds of L.A. Koreans watched the opening flag ceremony as Korean athletes were introduced under the Japanese flag. Susan Ahn Cuddy reflected on the moment stating,

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<sup>24</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 23-25.

<sup>25</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.

<sup>26</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 23-25.

<sup>27</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 23-25.

Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.

<sup>28</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 282.



“They were there but they weren't very happy, and I felt sorry for them.” During the Olympic games, Korean boxers and marathon runners visited the home of Korean independence leader Ahn Chang Ho, where many community members came to greet the Olympic athletes as heroes. Four years later, Korean Americans witnessed Sohn Gi Jung win gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics in Nazi Germany. Although this was the first ever Korean athlete to win gold, Sohn was awarded his medal underneath the flag of the Empire of Japan. Susan Ahn Cuddy recounted the moment stating, “The world saw the Japanese flag rise and wave in the sky over Hitler's Germany. Sohn cried. I am certain that [Ahn Chang Ho] cried too... Here was a historical event, a Korean winning the marathon for the first time ever, and it should have been a triumph for Korea. But it became one more reminder for the millions of Koreans that they were a people without a country.” The Olympics of the decade became a visible reminder for Korean Americans that their nation was fading from history without much thought from other countries, and that they were the only ones who could do anything about it. To their frustration, Korean Americans felt great injustice from every possible angle. However, the unfortunate circumstances they faced only reaffirmed their commitment to the cause, making it clear to American society that Koreans were different from the Japanese.<sup>29</sup>

The misunderstanding of Koreans by the United States government came to a boiling point when the 1940 Alien Registration Act considered Korean immigrants as Japanese subjects and labeled as “enemy aliens.”<sup>30</sup> After Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, this aspect of Korean immigration status was aggressively opposed by the Korean community, with many joining anti-

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<sup>29</sup> John Cha, *Willow Tree Shade: The Susan Ahn Cuddy Story* (Korean American Heritage Foundation, 2005), 135-136.

<sup>30</sup> Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1982* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 156.

Japanese protests wearing badges and signs stating, “I’m not a Jap.”<sup>31</sup> In 1942, Korean Americans were determined by the Department of Justice to be exempt from “enemy alien” status, thereafter the Hawaii Governor followed suit, citing economic reasons.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the early stages of Koreans in America, the opposition of Japan’s colonization of Korea was the driving force behind unifying the communities. There were three prominent Korean immigrant leaders working out of the United States that people found hope and leadership in. While in the U.S., the three men promoted different approaches towards the fight against the Japanese: Yong Man Park, founder of the Korean Military Corps, promoted direct military confrontation; Syngman Rhee, the future first President of the Republic of Korea, advocated for diplomacy; and Ahn Chang Ho, key founding member of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, prioritized patriotic leadership and education. Park’s militarist approach struggled to gain ground, partly because military training consisted of wooden rifles; but mainly because Korean Americans were considered “aliens ineligible for citizenship” and later “enemy aliens”, thus making armament infeasible. However, Ahn and Rhee’s emphasis on education and diplomacy was far more practical in the situation Korean Americans were for.<sup>33</sup>

Although Rhee and Ahn worked together on a number of issues, the two independence leaders came into conflict, thereby dividing political support within the Korean American communities. Rhee went to lead the Korean Provisional Government while Ahn focused his attention on establishing the Korean National Association. In 1925, Rhee was impeached by the Provisional Government on allegations that he abused his power while leading the organization.

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<sup>31</sup> Kim, *Korean-Americans*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *A New History of Asian America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 223.

<sup>33</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, viii-viv.

Rhee left for Hawaii to work with the Dongji Hoe, or the Comrade Association, to start the Dongji Investment Group towards funding the independence movement. Rhee went bankrupt after five years, and Ahn left the United States only to be arrested and eventually die at a Japanese hospital in Korea.<sup>34</sup>

### **Ahn Chang Ho**

The three independence leaders gave prominence to Korean Americans, but none embodied the spirit of Korea and America like Ahn Chang Ho. Born in present day North Korea, Ahn Chang Ho arrived in San Francisco in 1902, with his wife, Hye-Ryeon Helen Lee, to be the first Korean couple to immigrate to the United States.<sup>35</sup> Also known by his pen name, Dosan (meaning “island mountain”, referring to his experience seeing the peaks of Hawaii), Ahn came as a student and a Protestant social activist.<sup>36</sup> At 24, Ahn enrolled in a San Francisco elementary school to learn English and American culture. Using the knowledge he learned there, he went on to found schools in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Francisco, and abroad. While in San Francisco, Ahn encouraged his community to adopt the American way of life.<sup>37</sup> Several stories account Ahn Chang Ho visiting homes in San Francisco to instruct Korean immigrants on how to dress and present themselves as Americans.<sup>38</sup> According to one in particular, “he put up curtains, cleaned their houses and planted flowers in the Gardens,” which describes Ahn, surprisingly having the “common touch”, despite the subsequent mythologization of his legacy.<sup>39</sup> When the Ahns moved to Riverside, he continued to promote American assimilation practices to Korean

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<sup>34</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Dosan Ahn Chang Ho, *Dosan: The Man and His Thought* (San Francisco: Young Korean Academy, 2005), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ahn, *Dosan*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ahn, *Dosan*, 7.

communities there. Ahn organized a Korean labor movement in the citrus groves and farms, preaching to the laborers, “To pick even one orange with sincerity in an American orchard will make a contribution to our country.”<sup>40</sup> In 1914, Ahn and his wife moved to Los Angeles to raise their family of five children, where they established their home as a waystation for Korean immigrants and a makeshift headquarters for the independence movement in Southern California.<sup>41</sup>

By the time the Mansei Movement in 1919 was taking its effect in Korean American communities, Ahn Chang Ho took the opportunity to expand the Korean independence movement in the United States. Ahn, joined by Syngman Rhee, traveled to Shanghai, China to establish an exiled Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, for which he held the title of premier until 1921.<sup>42</sup> Ahn and Rhee accepted the enormous endeavor of organizing and consolidating several international Korean independence efforts into one entity.<sup>43</sup> One of the independent organizations the Provisional Government absorbed was the Korean Aviation School in Redwood City, California. The aviation school would later send Korean American pilots to fight against the Japanese in World War II as well as help found the air force of the Republic of Korea after independence.<sup>44</sup>

After establishing the Korean Provisional Government, Ahn Chang Ho briefly returned to Los Angeles, and, in 1926, he set out on a diplomatic mission to the Philippines, never to return to the United States again.<sup>45</sup> An account at the time stated Ahn’s reason for leaving was because

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<sup>40</sup> Ahn, *Dosan*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, ix-xii.

Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

the U.S. had deported him. Kong Wong and Charles Hong Lee- most likely supporters of Rhee- had sent a letter to the U.S. Immigration Office accusing him of being a Bolshevik communist.<sup>46</sup>

When Ahn arrived in Manila (the Philippines was a colony of the United States at the time), Ahn viewed it much more favorably than he did the Japanese Occupation of Korea.<sup>47</sup>

According to a letter Ahn wrote to his daughter Susan Ahn Cuddy, she wrote:

[Ahn] saw Philippine flags hoisted up everywhere despite the fact that the country was supposedly an American colony... He hardly saw any interference on the part of the Americans, and he was even envious of the Filipinos. In Korea, you display a Korean flag, you die... In Korea, school children must use Japanese names as well as speak the Japanese language. In fact, the Korean language is banned. How do you kill a language by force? The Japanese are trying their best to do so. Korean language newspapers are illegal in Korea. All the textbooks are in Japanese, and every morning, the children must bow in the direction of the Japanese Emperor. All the children across the country must bow to Hirohito who might be in his bathrobe, or in the bathroom hundreds of miles away.<sup>48</sup>

While continuing his mission in Asia, Ahn was arrested in Shanghai in 1932 and extradited to Korea where he faced charges of terrorism and violating Japan's Preservation of Peace Laws.<sup>49</sup>

When Ahn arrived, Japanese soldiers kept reporters and weeping crowds from seeing him. After a five-year prison sentence, Ahn was arrested again in 1937 where he was beaten and tortured, then released to a hospital after contracting tuberculosis.<sup>50</sup> Ahn had dreamed of returning to a free Korea as a free man. Instead, Ahn had been jailed under an imperialist law meant to destroy any sort of independence movement.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

In the hospital, Ahn refused to give up his struggle for independence. According to Japanese physicians and interrogators, Ahn had stated:

When I eat, I eat for Korean independence. This will not change as long as I live... I don't want to see Japan perish, rather I want to see Japan become a good nation. Infringing upon Korea, your neighbor, will never prove profitable to you. Japan will profit by having 30 million Koreans as her friendly neighbors and not by annexing 30 million spiteful people. Therefore, to assert Korean independence is tantamount to desiring the well-being of Japan.<sup>52</sup>

On March 10, 1938, his supporters gathered around him as he drew his last breath.<sup>53</sup> Ahn's last request was for someone to prop him up to see out the window the country he loved and fought so valiantly for. According to Susan Ahn Cuddy, Ahn told those weeping around him, "Do not despair..." and stated his last words, "Hirohito, you really committed a great sin, didn't you!"<sup>54</sup> At age 59, Ahn had passed away in Korea, leaving Syngman Rhee as the uncontested leader of the independence movement.<sup>55</sup> Although the official account is that Ahn died from tuberculosis, Susan Ahn Cuddy and Ahn's family were skeptical of the reason for his death.<sup>56</sup>

Today, Ahn Chang Ho's name can be seen throughout Los Angeles. The Harbor 110 and Santa Monica 10 Freeway junction bears his name on the interchange sign, as well as the Ahn Chang Ho post office in Koreatown, Ahn Chang Ho Square on Jefferson Boulevard near U.S.C., the Ahn Chang Ho family home on USC's campus, and the Ahn Chang Ho memorial statue in Riverside.<sup>57</sup> The early 20<sup>th</sup> century held little opportunities for Korean American communities to succeed, but it was Ahn Chang Ho who lived and breathed Korean and American ideals. Ahn made Koreans matter to the American government and the international community. But to

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<sup>52</sup> Ahn, *Dosan*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

<sup>54</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 136.

<sup>57</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23.

many, Ahn's sacrifice and dedication to his country has started to fade from the collective memory of Korean Americans. Fortunately, his name remains in L.A. by those who made sure people will never forget. Within the annals of history, Syngman Rhee became the champion of Korean independence after securing the presidency. However, Ahn Chang Ho's dedication and contributions to his homeland, his family, and community is the reason both the Korean American community and the Republic of Korea has been able to thrive far past what Ahn could possibly have dreamed of. Through Ahn Chang Ho's emphasis on education, diplomacy, and patriotic leadership, his legacy is clear and apparent – Ahn Chang Ho led the Korean American war for independence to success.

### **Rise of Korean American Militancy**

Though diplomacy and education were the top priority in the independence movement, there was undoubtedly the presence of Korean American militancy and hostilities against their homeland's colonizers. Korean outrage and anger against Japanese annexation of Korea was always apparent in the early communities of the United States. The increase in tensions pushed many to actively spread Japanese hatred, form militant groups, and even commit violent actions.

The first moment of Korean militancy can be traced back to the assassination of Durham Stevens. As pro-Japanese American, Stevens drew the ire of Korean Americans for his role in Korea's colonization by Japan. As an American diplomat, he worked as a close advisor to the Resident-General of Korea, even going so far as to receive payment by the Japanese government.<sup>58</sup> In 1908, Stevens was sent to Washington D.C. by Japan to assure American businesses in Korea that the Korean people welcomed colonization and this new state of affairs

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<sup>58</sup> David Shavit, "Stevens, Durham White (1851-1908)," *The United States in Asia: A Historical Dictionary* (1990): 468.

would benefit them with Korea as a Japanese protectorate.<sup>59</sup> Stevens' travel plans and political agenda was published by American newspapers, to which Korean immigrants reacted angrily by calling him a "Japanese dog."<sup>60</sup> Upset with Stevens, Koreans implored him to meet with the community and denounce his stance. On March 23, while at a stop in San Francisco, angry crowds of Koreans confronted Stevens, when two of them, Chang In-Hawn and Jeon Myeong-Un, shot and killed Stevens in front of the Ferry Building.<sup>61</sup> According to a New York Times article from 1908, Chang heard the news of Stevens' death and was overjoyed with "manifest delight."<sup>62</sup> Chang and Jeon proclaimed their actions as necessary, calling Stevens a "traitor to Korea" and that "thousands of people have been killed through his plans."<sup>63</sup> Although the assassins were charged with murder and imprisoned, the Korean community hailed the men as patriots and heroes.<sup>64</sup>

The assassination of Durham Stevens signaled the rise of nationalism in Korean American communities, many of which began to advocate for armed resistance. A statement issued by the *Sinhan Minbo* read, "We shall overcome this crisis by resorting to arms and blood. In order to kill all traitors and to crush the Japanese, it is necessary to resort to pistols and swords and it can be accomplished only through spilling our blood and sacrificing our lives."<sup>65</sup> Koreans

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<sup>59</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 283.

<sup>60</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 283.

<sup>61</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> "Stevens is Dead; Japanese Mourn; American Diplomat Succumbs to Wounds Inflicted by Korean Fanatic. Operation Was Necessary Concern Over His Death in Japan is Considered Remarkable – Advocated Restriction of Immigration," *The New York Times*, March 27, 1908.

<sup>63</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> K.W. Lee and Grace Kim, "Yang the Eyewitness: The patriot relates his account of the 1908 assassination of the infamous American mercenary Durham Stevens," *KoreAm Magazine* (January 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281.



in the United States began “quasi-military training programs” to prepare for an armed revolution against the Japanese in Korea.<sup>66</sup> Independence leader Yong Man Park formed a 300-man military corps in Hawaii, as well as novice military academies in Claremont, Los Angeles County, and Lompoc, Santa Barbara County, California.<sup>67</sup>

One of the most significant of the Korean military groups in the United States was the Korean Aviation School, or the Redwood City Aviation School.<sup>68</sup> In 1920, Roh Baek Rin, defense secretary of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai, orchestrated the establishment of a pilot training school in Willows, Glenn County, California.<sup>69</sup> At the time of its conception, only Russia, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and France had established air schools.<sup>70</sup> The Provisional Government leadership saw the potential for an air defense corps after witnessing the effectiveness of fighter planes and bombers in World War I.<sup>71</sup> This was very much ahead of its time, and was admittedly a highly unusual move on Roh’s part to start a defense aviation school from Shanghai, for Korea, on the American mainland.

The Korean Aviation School had a total of thirty students, six flight trainers, an American engineer, and three airplanes funded by rice tycoon Kim Chong-Nim, also known as “the Rice King.”<sup>72</sup> Kim Chong-Nim was an important figure in early Korean American communities. Kim was seen as a leader and an important financial supporter to both the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the Korean National Association. Although Syngman Rhee and Ahn

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<sup>66</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>67</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

<sup>68</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, x.

<sup>70</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, x.

<sup>71</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xi.

<sup>72</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 272.

Chang Ho were at odds with one another, Kim supported both leaders.<sup>73</sup> Kim worked closely with Ahn, supporting many of the KNA's endeavors; he maintained relations with Rhee as well, later to serve along-side him as chair of the Comrade Association in 1946.<sup>74</sup> On average, Kim had donated \$50,000 to keep the school running.<sup>75</sup> According to a Willows Daily Journal article from March 1, 1920, Roh Baek Rin stated, "Korean Aviation School is a continuation of the March 1st Movement of 1919, and Korean pilots will be mobilized to fight against Japan."<sup>76</sup> One supporter of the school declared, "When Korea is armed to such an extent that she can meet the foe on something like an even footing, victory will be ours. We Koreans want to be in the fight. Actually, all Koreans have a date with the Japs, and the sooner we are able to keep it, the better."<sup>77</sup> The first year of opening held great success for the small aviation school in the small town of Willows.

The Korean Aviation School was in operation for less than two years when Kim's rice farms were hit by severe flooding. Kim could no longer support the trainees and that year the school closed indefinitely. Although the school only lasted a year and a half, some of its students would later be appointed by the Provisional Government to establish and fly for the post-independence Korean Air Force.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the spirit of Korean aviation continued in the communities, which led to some of the pilots flying for the U.S. armed forces against Japan in the Pacific during World War II.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xii.

<sup>74</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xii.

<sup>75</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xi.

<sup>76</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, ix-xii.

<sup>77</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281.

<sup>78</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, xi.

<sup>79</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 22.

In the 1930s, Korean American organizations attempted to continue an open dialogue with the United States government to support Korean nationalism and the independence of Korea.<sup>80</sup> In 1933, William H. Lee and Kilsu Haan wrote the “Korean’s Appeal” document letter to Washington D.C. requesting Korean Americans be utilized for anti-Japanese activities.<sup>81</sup> The document claimed Haan was hired by the Japanese consulate in Hawaii and had the ability to infiltrate and “conduct counterintelligence work” for the U.S. government.<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, U.S. intelligence officials decided Haan was compromised and declared his sources unreliable.<sup>83</sup>

Korean Americans not involved in any military groups still participated by promoting Japanese hatred in their communities. In the 1930s, one outsider observed, “Singly and collectively, [Koreans] hate the Japanese; all Japanese.”<sup>84</sup> A Korean soy sauce advertisement in a Korean newspaper stated, “DON’T BUY THE JAP’S SOY SAUCE. Now we produce better soy sauce in taste and color. Order now.”<sup>85</sup> Families made sure that their children took pride in their Korean heritage and that they understood the crimes committed by the Japanese. Korean American school children were told not to play or associate with other Japanese kids, and when families went to restaurants for dinner, they exclusively only went to Chinese or Mexican places, never Japanese.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 39.

<sup>81</sup> William H. Lee and Kilsoo Haan, *Korean’s Appeal*, Korean National Association, April 20, 1933.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Kim, “Kilsoo Haan,” *Densho Encyclopedia* online, Retrieved March 11, 2020. [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Kilsoo\\_Haan/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Kilsoo_Haan/)

<sup>83</sup> Kim, “Kilsoo Haan.”

<sup>84</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281-282.

<sup>85</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 281-282.

<sup>86</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20.

Some told horror stories of Japanese atrocities against the Koreans in their homeland. An account made by a Korean American who remembered hearing such stories recalled:

One lady said that her brother had died in Korea from back injuries suffered from persistent Japanese floggings. Another told of the burning of a Christian church filled with a worshipping congregation. A third told of Japanese wholesale mistreatment of Korean-Christians who were tied by the thumbs to the ceiling and left to die by painful hanging. Still another related in detail the brutal mistreatment of women who were physically tortured and mutilated for the 'savage satisfaction' of the Japanese men.<sup>87</sup>

Korean Americans used such stories to find emotional meaning and justification for their cause.

Koreans away from their homeland felt they had to occupy themselves with any form of contribution towards independence, even if that meant exacerbating their hatred towards Japan.

They demonized the enemy by memorizing the exact numbers of Koreans killed in the Mansei Movement, and deified Korean independence leaders and honored nationalists who had killed Japanese officials as martyrs.

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<sup>87</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 283.

### **Chapter 3: Korean Americans on the Homefront During World War II**

*“The Korean here is between the devil and the deep sea...”*

On December 7, 1941, a quiet Sunday morning turned into a warzone as Japanese forces bombed the Hawaiian naval base of Pearl Harbor without warning. Japan’s imperial conquests had manifested itself as a sneak attack on the United States thereby solidifying public support for the war and joining the Allies. In addition to America entering the fray, the actions by the Empire of Japan would have major ramifications for Japanese Americans, as well as other Asian Americans caught in the rampage of the American public, hellbent on revenge. Korean Americans suffered a multitude of misdirected racism- as they were mistaken as Japanese- but used the opportunity to bolster their patriotism and loyalty to their homeland and the United States.

As the Pearl Harbor attacks were unfolding, in Los Angeles, a community program rehearsal was underway as several Koreans were preparing for a play in the evening. Sponsored by the Society for Aid to the Korean Volunteer Corps in China, the event was to raise relief funds for about 200,000 refugee Korean families caught in Japan’s war in China. While rehearsing, the sudden news of the attack was announced: “the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor.” Accounts have told that those in the room became electrified with energy shouting, “Daehan Toknip Manse!” meaning “Long live Korean independence!” Bong Youn Choy, a Japanese language teacher at the University of California at Berkeley, was in attendance that morning. “No Korean, old and younger alike, could not control his emotions of joy,” Choy said. “Some old Korean immigrants had tears in their eyes and kept silent. Every Korean felt that a long dream for national independence would soon become a reality.” Later that evening, as people gathered at the fundraiser, the mood was overwhelmingly “enthusiastic and happy” as the

play was presented to an audience of Koreans, Chinese, and whites. Although the account of this sort of reaction to the Pearl Harbor attacks is unusual, to the Korean Americans, a Japanese attack on the United States meant the possibility of Korean liberation would soon come true. That very night, members of the Korean National Association met at the Los Angeles headquarters and established the role all Korean Americans should undertake during the duration of a Japanese and American conflict:

1. Koreans shall promote unity during the war and act harmoniously.
2. Koreans shall work for the defense of the country where they reside and all those who are healthy should volunteer for national guard duty. Those who are financially capable should purchase war bonds, and those who are skilled should volunteer for appropriate duties.
3. Koreans shall wear a badge identifying them as Koreans, for security purposes.

Koreans in America was well aware this conflict would bring trials to their status and identity, but also understood that their participation in the war effort would bring a favorable outcome to Korea in the end.<sup>1</sup>

Korean Americans had long prepared for a conflict between the United States and Japan. Before America had declared war on Japan, independence leader Syngman Rhee campaigned for an American liberation of Korea:

The United States should employ all her power, economic, moral, and military, now to check Japan in order to prevent an ultimate conflict with her... Is it not equally clear, then, that your true policy should be to act quickly and keep him down by fours before he grows too big, so that he can never get out of hand?

In addition, on April 20, 1941, a few months before the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the United Korean Committee convened with representatives of several Korean American nationalist organizations to issue a joint declaration:

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Takaki. *Strangers of a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 364.

Hundreds and thousands of our brothers and sisters have died in the past on the battle fronts for the cause of national independence, and the sacrifices have become a living symbol for our guidance today... We Koreans in America should unite together as one body and should support the Allied powers until they bring a final victory of the present war against the Axis powers.

Korean American communities rallied behind the American declaration of war against Japan with many cheering “Korea for victory with America!” Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Korean National Herald Pacific Weekly declared that “every Korean born [was] an enemy born for Japan.” World War II quickly became another unifying cause for Korean American communities and presented itself as an opportunity to demonstrate Korean nationalism and American patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

In Los Angeles, around 110 Korean men ages ranging from 18-65, a fifth of the city’s Korean population at the time, formed the Tiger Brigade, or the *Manghokun*, as the Korean branch of the California National Guard. The Tiger Brigade practiced their military drills at Exposition Park, twice a week for three to four hours at a time, to prepare for any enemy threats that may harm California. One white Army Officer stated, “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.”<sup>3</sup>

Between 1942 and 1943, Koreans throughout the United States bought large sums of defense bonds towards the war effort. It was reported that Koreans alone bought around \$240,000 worth of bonds, which was a significant amount of money for a national minority population of just 10,000 people. Elderly Korean women volunteered to serve in the American Red Cross, and elderly Korean men volunteered to serve as emergency fire wardens.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 364-365.

<sup>3</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 367.

<sup>4</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 367.

By World War II, many Korean immigrants had arrived in the United States knowing how to read and write in Korean, English, and Japanese. Because of Japanese assimilation policies in Korea, Koreans knew the Japanese language all too well. As a result, these Korean immigrants were able to provide an invaluable weapon to the American arsenal. Koreans were eventually employed by several branches of the U.S. military and government as Japanese language translators, teachers, propaganda broadcasters in the Pacific against Japanese soldiers, and even underground agents sent to Japanese occupied areas of Asia. As one of these Koreans, Bong Youn Choy taught for the Oriental languages department at U.C. Berkeley and college extension courses on the Japanese language in Oakland and San Francisco. Choy's invaluable skills were utilized by the Office of War Information at their San Francisco branch, and lectured on Korean and Japanese politics. Choy also taught the Special Army Training Program classes, as well as broadcasted anti-Japanese propaganda in Korea. Other interpreters included Yo Jong Gun and Pak Young Hak, both of whom were commissioned by the U.S. Navy to serve on the Solomon Islands and Guadalcanal Campaigns. Ironically, the Japanese language meant to bond the Koreans and the Japanese in a cultural hegemony would ultimately be used against the Japanese Empire.<sup>5</sup>

The Korean American contributions towards the war effort did not go unnoticed by white Americans. On August 29, 1943, Korean Americans gathered in front of the Los Angeles City Hall to celebrate Korean National Flag Day. The Los Angeles mayor had the Korean flag raised to honor members of the Tiger Brigade as they marched before the city hall. In 1944, Joseph R. Farrington, one of Hawaii's territorial delegates, introduced a bill for Korean immigration and naturalization on Capitol Hill. Although the bill did not pass, the mere discussion of the Koreans

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<sup>5</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365-367.



towards naturalization meant the idea of Koreans as Americans was gaining wider prominence and recognition, pushing America towards their struggle for independence.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the progress being made on the Korean American front, governmental policies and society as a whole were excruciatingly slow to accept any differentiation between Koreans and the Japanese. Because of the Alien Registration Act of 1940, Korean immigrants were already labeled as subjects of Japan, and thus subsequently redefined as “enemy aliens” in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. In 1942, the Korean National Herald Pacific Weekly demanded the government remove the mislabeling of Korean Americans:

The Korean is an enemy of Japan. 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?

For Koreans serving in an anti-Japanese capacity for the United States, the constant misnomers of Japanese and “enemy alien” was a reminder of their perceived inferiority. Many Koreans working on defense projects on military bases had to wear special badges with black borders around them indicating their restricted status. One Korean defense worker remarked, “For years we’ve been fighting the Japanese and now they tell us that we’re ‘Japs’. It’s an insult! Why in the hell do they pull a trick like this on us when we hate the Japanese more than anyone else in the world.” After several complaints to their superiors, Koreans working on military projects were able to switch their restriction badges to badges bearing the statement, “I am Korean.”<sup>7</sup>

America’s entry into World War II sent shockwaves throughout the country. The future remained unclear, but Korean Americans, with uncertainty looming over their heads, took the

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<sup>6</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 367.

<sup>7</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365-366.

opportunity to bolster their status as a minority group willing to strengthen its relationship with a nation that ignored and suppressed them. The drive towards independence helped Koreans to respond to America's toughest time with acts of patriotism and service. Despite their enthusiasm to aid the war effort, systemic racism continued to work against them, for which the Korean community had to stand in solidarity once more to overcome.

### **Racism Against Asian Americans**

To understand such an oppressive system faced by Korean Americans, one must understand the context of racism and segregation in the United States at the time. By the 1940s, American society was the most diverse it had ever been in its history. Although cities had many different racial and ethnic communities, relations between groups often broke down due to infighting. Even up until the 1930s, there were on average ten lynchings per year from white on black occurrences.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the country, Jim Crow laws made manifest the racism of the South, effectively chaining black people to second class citizenship; segregation became the new means of disenfranchisement in schools, the military, and public places. In 1943, cities in the north faced riots when black workers joined all-white factory assembly lines. Contrary to popular belief, the South was not alone in racial oppression; racism had no particular geographic boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

American popular culture before World War II promoted societal racism against minorities; however, as advocacy of anti-black racism increased, the aftermath of Pearl Harbor led to some of the worst anti-Japanese and anti-Asian works in publication history. Theodore

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<sup>8</sup> Theodor Seuss Geisel and Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (New York: New Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Seuss Geisel and Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (New York: New Press, 2001), 23.

Seuss Geisel- better known by his pen name Dr. Seuss- was famous for his works against racism and anti-Semitism, but far less known for his hypocritical work on anti-Japanese, anti-Asian propaganda. The publishing company he worked for, *PM*, prided itself as a progressive magazine.<sup>10</sup> In keeping with its character, in 1942 alone, Dr. Seuss produced several anti-racist works: “The Discriminating Employer” advocated for black and Jewish labor; “The Old Run-Around” showed black job hunters stuck in a maze; “I’ll run Democracy’s War. You stay in your Jim Crow Tanks!” showed Jewish and black soldiers only differing in skin tone; “War Industry” pictured the U.S. military playing the piano only using the white keys, not utilizing the black keys; and in “Race Hatred,” Dr. Seuss criticized Georgia’s Democratic Governor Eugene Talmadge for his segregationist views with references to the Klu Klux Klan.<sup>11</sup>

While simultaneously campaigning for black and Jewish civil rights, Dr. Seuss was also at the forefront of anti-Japanese propaganda. His drawings of Asian peoples consisted of crude caricatures that highlighted “Asian” features, something his representation of blacks and Jewish peoples did not include. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attacks, the United States government prepared to initiate the forced evacuation of almost 120,000 people of Japanese descent on the West Coast- two-thirds of whom were born on American soil- into internment camps.<sup>12</sup>

As the official order to intern the Japanese drew closer, propagandists like Dr. Seuss, politicians, and other influential people further exacerbated anti-Asian sentiment. On December 10, 1941, three days after the Pearl Harbor attacks, Dr. Seuss drew “Jap Alley,” in which multitudes of cats with interchangeable Asian faces overwhelmed Uncle Sam as he fought them

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<sup>10</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 23-25.

<sup>12</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

off.<sup>13</sup> On February 13, 1942, days before the evacuation order, Dr. Seuss produced “Waiting for the Signal from Home,” which showed Asian people identical in appearance in line from Washington to California to pick up TNT.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Seuss’s propaganda piece worked perfectly with the *West Seattle Herald*’s editorial of the same time which stated unequivocally, “The government should initiate instant and drastic orders sweeping all aliens, foreign and native born, so far inland that we can forget about them for the duration [of the war].”<sup>15</sup> One U.S. Senator, Harley Kilgore, wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

It is my sincere belief that the Pacific coast should be declared a military area which will give authority to treat residents, either aliens or citizens, as camp followers and put them under military law, permitting their removal, regardless of their citizenship rights, to internal and less dangerous areas.<sup>16</sup>

The public sentiment against Asians was overwhelmingly geared towards the explicit acceptance of anti-Asian racism, further institutionalizing and tragically normalizing their segregation and oppression.

Anti-Asian discrimination became even more blatant despite the lack of any indication of betrayal or disloyalty to the United States. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was common knowledge among military and intelligence agents that there was an overwhelmingly lack of evidence towards Japanese American espionage.<sup>17</sup> The absence of concrete evidence garnered false reports about Japanese American spies and sabotage on newspapers and radios, even reaching the

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<sup>13</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Scott McGaugh, *Battlefield Angels: Saving Lives from Valley Forge to Afghanistan* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 84.

Scott McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory: The Epic World War II Story of the Japanese American GIs Who Rescued the Lost Battalion* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2016), 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> Harley Kilgore, *Letter to President Franklin Roosevelt*, February 19, 1942.

<sup>17</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

President and his aides.<sup>18</sup> For example, a California journal published reports of Japanese Americans preparing to attack naval bases, Army Air Corps bases, and other defense plants.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, it seems that the government of Japan had indeed attempted to sow chaos in America, but came to the conclusion that Japanese Americans were too loyal to their country and quickly scrapped any plans to utilize the population.<sup>20</sup> The hatred- and later internment- of the Japanese was driven purely by societal and institutional racism against Asian Americans. As Richard Minear put it, to the “eternal discredit” of Dr. Seuss and *PM*, their progressive, social justice mission is inconsistent at best, seeing that they promoted anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiment during the early years of World War II.<sup>21</sup>

By the 1940s, many leftist parts of the United States had movements to remove racist slander out of American culture; however, the aftermath of Pearl Harbor revealed racism against Asians was well part of the mainstream and also considered different from the racism of blacks and other minorities. According to Minear, Dr. Seuss and *PM* had received multiple letters of complaint from their leftist audience against offensive articles and drawings representing non-Asian minorities. These letters established the boundaries in which the editors created their content. But, there were no letters sent to the publishers about the racist portrayals of Asians. This chapter of Dr. Seuss’s life has been hidden because of its hypocritical and consequential nature on his legacy- even the books meant to teach the dangers of racism had a gaping hole in which the entirety of the Asian race fell through.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Picador, 2016), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Geisel and Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 26.

## Internment of Japanese Americans

On December 8, 1941, less than twenty-four hours after the Pearl Harbor attacks, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war against the Empire of Japan. December 11 saw Adolf Hitler declare war against the United States to support its Japanese ally, with Italy's Mussolini following suit later that day. The following series of events saw the fullest extent of racism against Asians manifest itself into the incarceration of an entire ethnic group based on counter-factual evidence and racial hysteria.<sup>23</sup>

The order enacted against Japanese Americans- native born Americans- was founded upon nothing more than blatant discrimination and complete injustice. Immediately after President Roosevelt's speech, 1,212 Japanese Americans were arrested with no evidence of any crime under orders of the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover.<sup>24</sup> Some of the President's advisors cautioned against false reports based on racial hysteria, but Roosevelt's beliefs in the prevailing racial myths and theories of Asian inferiority prevented any reasonable course of action.<sup>25</sup> In conversations with friends, Roosevelt had speculated the reasons for the "devious and treacherous" nature of the Japanese was because of the shape of their less developed skulls.<sup>26</sup> One friend of Roosevelt, Ales Hrdlicka, director of the Smithsonian Institute and an anthropologist, told the president the Japanese were "two thousand years behind

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<sup>23</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 3.

"Translation: Declaration of War Against the United States, by Benito Mussolini. Italy, December 11, 1941," *Wikisource*, Retrieved March 7, 2020.  
[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Declaration\\_of\\_War\\_Against\\_the\\_United\\_States,\\_by\\_Benito\\_Mussolini.\\_Italy,\\_December\\_11,\\_1941](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Declaration_of_War_Against_the_United_States,_by_Benito_Mussolini._Italy,_December_11,_1941)

<sup>24</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, *Report to President Franklin Roosevelt*, December 10, 1941.

<sup>25</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 18.

Reeves, *Infamy*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 259.

Caucasians,” to which the President replied, “Could that be dealt with surgically?”<sup>27</sup> Even two years prior to the internment of Japanese Americans, a State Department investigation concluded off of pure speculation, “the entire [Japanese American] population on the West Coast will rise and commit sabotage.”<sup>28</sup> From normal American homes to the highest echelons of government, racial superiority dictated the fate of Asian Americans. As the country geared up for war against the Nazis, they also prepared plans for concentration camps for its own citizens.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt enacted Executive Order 9066 which authorized the immediate evacuation and incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry.<sup>29</sup> Some 120,000 Japanese Americans were removed from the West Coast and moved to one of ten “concentration camps” scattered throughout barren parts of mainland United States, where they stayed for the duration of the war.<sup>30</sup> Most of the incarcerated were born in the U.S.; however, they were placed in desolate camps guarded by armed soldiers in watchtowers and treated like criminals merely because they had the appearance of soldiers of Imperial Japan.<sup>31</sup>

When the authorities demanded people of Japanese ancestry leave their homes and report to the assembly centers, many families had to abandon their belongings and homes. In one account, Japanese neighbors of Mary Park Lee had asked her to look after their home and take whatever they wanted, because they would rather have the Lee’s take it than looters.<sup>32</sup> “They were our friends, so we couldn’t do that,” Lee said, “but we said we would look after their things

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<sup>27</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Knox, *Presentation to President Franklin Roosevelt*, October 1940.

<sup>29</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 19.

Knox. *Presentation to President Franklin Roosevelt*.

<sup>31</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, xvi.

<sup>32</sup> M. P. Lee, S. Chan, and D. Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 95.

as much as possible.”<sup>33</sup> Another Japanese friend of Lee asked her to live on their property, rent-free, to keep it from seizure by the government or strangers.<sup>34</sup> Lee recounted, “After the Japanese left, however, many white people came in trucks, intending to take away all kinds of belongings. But when they saw us watching, they left.” Later on, Lee tried to understand the punishment Japanese peoples were encountering: “We’ve lived with them all along and knew them well and it didn’t occur to me that they were responsible [for the attack].”<sup>35</sup> Other Korean Americans felt similarly to Mary Park Lee. Jean Park stated, “It made me feel sad to hear that their land was taken away from and that they were imprisoned.”<sup>36</sup> Koreans in Hawaii felt similar sentiments: “It didn’t make me feel any differently toward the Japanese,” said a Korean man shortly after the Pearl Harbor attacks.<sup>37</sup> The onslaught of attacks against their constitutional rights continued as the government and military destroyed their lives with no one able or willing to advocate for the Japanese in America.

One Korean American man, Kim Young Oak, an officer in the U.S. Army, witnessed the depraved state of the concentration camps firsthand. Raised by parents who were independence activists, Kim was strictly forbidden to interact with Japanese classmates, but had a few Japanese friends anyway. After President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, some of Kim’s Japanese American friends had been interned at the Rohwer War Relocation Center, an internment camp in Arkansas. He visited the Rohwer with his officer uniform on and demanded entry, to which befuddled security guards eventually obliged after a phone call to their superiors. According to Kim, the internment camp seemed to be a “concentration camp” with little to no privacy, small

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<sup>33</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 95.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 366.

<sup>37</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 366.



living quarters, lack of basic amenities, barbed wires, and watch towers complete with searchlights and machine guns pointed towards the inside. Kim stayed about a week with his friends and their families in the camp. According to Usong Han, Kim became a hero in the eyes of the Japanese Americans, especially to the children. “They never missed watching the American soldiers, who were cruel to the internees,” Han said. “But, were polite to Young Oak, always calling him ‘sir’.”<sup>38</sup> Unbeknownst to Kim, his visit to Rohwer was a great symbol for racial reconciliation. Kim’s compassion and friendship transcended the politics that hindered Korean and Japanese relations for so many decades.

While Japanese Americans and Asian Americans in general experienced severe mistreatment, German and Italian citizens were in no discernable way treated in the same manner; in contrast, they were protected by larger communities and high-ranking officials, including the President. The day of the German and Italian declarations of war against the U.S., J. Edgar Hoover had ordered the arrest of 620 Germans and 98 Italians.<sup>39</sup> Most of the German arrests came from pro-Nazi, pro-Hitler organizations like the German American Bund.<sup>40</sup> The Italian number of arrests could have been higher, but President Roosevelt advised Attorney General Francis Biddle to “take it easy on Italians and Italian Americans.”<sup>41</sup> The President, along with other government officials, worried that the arrests might upset the Italian American mayors of New York and San Francisco, whose parents never applied for American citizenship.<sup>42</sup> In addition, officials feared negative publicity that might come from jailing the parents of Joe

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<sup>38</sup> Usong Han, *Unsung Hero: The Story of Colonel Young Oak Kim* (Riverside: Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2011), 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> Jay Feldman, *Manufacturing Hysteria: A History of Scapegoating, Surveillance, and Secrecy in Modern America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 164.

<sup>40</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 4.

DiMaggio, a star player of the New York Yankees and named the American League's Most Valuable Player in 1941.<sup>43</sup> The thought of incarcerating German and Italian Americans seemed too absurd for government officials, and was never considered; however, the lack of Asian American advocacy in the U.S. allowed for the swift relocation of helpless Japanese American communities.

The man in charge of the Japanese American evacuation was Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, commanding general of the Western Defense Command.<sup>44</sup> Arguably the most arrogant and blindest of all government officials responsible for the incarcerations, DeWitt's policy-making methodology for the evacuation of Japanese persons was founded on baseless lies and an unwillingness to view them as human beings. DeWitt believed all of the Japanese living on the West Coast were "potential enemies of Japanese extraction... organized and ready for concerted operation at a favorable opportunity... assisted by enemy agents signaling from the coastline," with his most absurd statement saying, "the very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken."<sup>45</sup> DeWitt's justification for violating the constitutional rights of Japanese Americans was, "A Jap is a Jap... You can't tell one Jap from another. They all look the same."<sup>46</sup> To DeWitt, everyone who was not an American citizen in the U.S. was an enemy of society.<sup>47</sup> He even appealed to the U.S. government, suggesting they should end any drafted policies regarding Japanese American citizenship after

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Arbesman and Steven Strogatz, "A Journey to Baseball's Alternate Universe," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2008.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/opinion/30strogatz.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/opinion/30strogatz.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

<sup>44</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley Press, 2013), 88.

<sup>45</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 40.

<sup>47</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 62.

the war had ended.<sup>48</sup> After a naval sailor asked the Lieutenant General why native-born Americans were being incarcerated, DeWitt replied, “Well! Why didn’t they become citizens?”<sup>49</sup> As Chief Boatswain Mario Stagnaro best described DeWitt, “He wouldn’t listen to reason whatsoever... He’s a damn fool, a complete nut, in my opinion.”<sup>50</sup>

DeWitt’s goal was to utilize the potential of Japanese American labor power in the internment camps. As best stated by Takashi Fujitani, DeWitt’s plans called for the “sheer exploitation under grossly discriminatory conditions without any compensatory benefits to the soldiers or their communities.”<sup>51</sup> DeWitt stated, “Failure to utilize the considerable number of American male citizens of Japanese ancestry in the United States, would constitute failure to make use of all available manpower.”<sup>52</sup> While some parts of the government had concerns over the interned Japanese’s “rights and liberties” and “fears and sensibilities,” DeWitt dismissed such concerns and only saw them as “blocks of wood” or a “blank wall of silence,” void of any individual subjectivities.<sup>53</sup>

As the interned Japanese settled into the camps, DeWitt was presented with the possibilities of army recruitment and registration of the Japanese American by the War Relocation Authority and the War Department.<sup>54</sup> The military’s exclusionary regulations towards labor held that the Japanese must pass a loyalty test to serve the war effort in any capacity. In the mind of DeWitt, any loyalty test would be invalid with the Japanese, obstructing the potential

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<sup>48</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 137.

<sup>54</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 135.

use of the interned Japanese as a valuable source of manpower for the war.<sup>55</sup> DeWitt denounced any form of loyalty tests, stating he had no interest in background checks, evaluation of police records, or even of their own willingness to serve in the military.<sup>56</sup> DeWitt's argument for his strict stance was simply that "[one] could not tell the sheep from the goats" and any loyalty questionnaire could be compromised through lies by anyone who was disloyal.<sup>57</sup> DeWitt went as far as to remove the swearing of allegiance as an option for opting out of the internment camps in the belief that it was pointless.<sup>58</sup> DeWitt's stubborn discriminatory beliefs held on firmly to the disposition that the Japanese would never be able to prove loyalty to the United States, thereby impeding his own goal for Japanese labor.

To the frustration of DeWitt, the WRA and War Department had foiled DeWitt's original hardline segregationist plans by moving forward with loyalty tests and military recruitment. It was reported DeWitt harshly criticized the violation of his intended plans as the implementation was taking place. Ironically, DeWitt's views and actions mirrored that of his country's enemy, Imperial Japan, which indeed used forced labor from colonized regions. Similar to the mindset of the Empire of Japan, DeWitt's policies were one of deep ideological racism and superiority. His character was the fullest representation of the society he eagerly espoused, but in doing so he achieved the apex of hatred and racism.<sup>59</sup>

As the effects of the Pearl Harbor attacks continued to resonate in American society, Korean Americans found themselves at the forefront of the public's thirst for vengeance against Japanese peoples. Korean Americans faced difficult challenges of discrimination and witnessed

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<sup>55</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 89.

<sup>56</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 136.

<sup>58</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 136.

<sup>59</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 136.

firsthand the effects of the internment of the Japanese throughout World War II. Many Koreans in America attempted to avoid the full effect of anti-Asian racism: some took advantage of the void left behind after the Japanese were evicted. Still others showed ostentatious displays of American patriotism, and a few decided to take radical lengths to promote and accelerate what was being done to the Japanese as payback for colonization.

Certain radical Korean nationalists favored the internment of the Japanese, and considered it best for Korean independence. Kilsoo Haan, president of the Sino Korean People's League, had been a strong proponent of incarcerating dangerous Japanese Americans. In 1941, Haan spread the idea that 35,000 to 50,000 Japanese people in Hawaii were waiting to assist the Empire of Japan against a potential war with the United States. In 1942, Haan took advantage of the outrage that resulted from Pearl Harbor to call for the immediate deportation of Japanese people on the West Coast. Haan claimed Japanese Americans were engaged in military intelligence operations, relaying information back to Japan. Haan argued, "It is our conviction that the best way to prepare against the Japanese is to let the American people know the Japanese plans and what the Japs and the Japanese Americans are doing in this country."<sup>60</sup>

One Korean American man held the same sentiments as Kilsoo Haan, but had second thoughts after witnessing the incarceration firsthand. One visitor went to the Japanese internment camp of Manzanar to visit her parents who had been incarcerated. Her husband, a Korean American, held the notion that the internment of the Japanese was justified; however, he had a change of heart when he found a child's toy on the ground.<sup>61</sup> This moment reveals complexity in the identity of Asian peoples while in America. The natural tendency of the Korean American

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<sup>60</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 366.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffery Burton, "Excavating Legacy: Community Archaeology at a Japanese American WWII Incarceration Site," *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage*, September 2017:160-172.

man who visited the Manzanar Camp was to consider his identity as separate from those in the internment camps, but the emotions he felt show the distance growing between those in the United States and East Asian geopolitics.

Korean Americans had faced discrimination before, being mistaken as Japanese. However, after the events of Pearl Harbor, the anti-Asian sentiment had worsened considerably. The family of Jean Park had heard stories of what was being done to the Japanese, so they moved from the Central Valley down to Southern California, where they bought a formerly owned Japanese farm.<sup>62</sup> The Parks had heard that the mass deportation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast allowed for their neglected homes, farms, and belongings to be sold for very little.<sup>63</sup> When they arrived at their purchased property, the Parks found a group of white townspeople angrily staring at them and yelled, “Japs go home!”<sup>64</sup> Jean Park recalled, “They were ready to stone us with rocks and descend on us because they had that evil look in their eyes.”<sup>65</sup> Kim Young Oak looked for jobs in areas of the country where he might not find racial barriers. According to Kim, certain towns mistook him as Japanese and threw tomatoes at him, calling him “a Jap.”<sup>66</sup> Even after the mass eviction of Japanese people was complete, other Asians were subjected to heavy discrimination and even violence. Many were afraid to go out at night, while others were beaten during the day.<sup>67</sup> Some had their car tires slashed, car radios and batteries stolen, and repeated targets of vandalism.<sup>68</sup> One group of young Korean American boys

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<sup>62</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365.

<sup>63</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365.

<sup>64</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365-366.

<sup>65</sup> Takaki, *Strangers of a Different Shore*, 365-366.

<sup>66</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 96.

<sup>68</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 96.

were pulled over by whites and had their car overturned on the highway.<sup>69</sup> To Korean Americans, these types of situations became a shared common experience throughout their communities.

Mary Paik Lee was a young mother at the time of the Pearl Harbor attacks. Her experiences have been documented in *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Woman in America*, in which some of her accounts of anti-Japanese discrimination are documented. In one heartbreaking- and interesting- story, Lee had been working in the fields of Whittier, California all day and had not heard about the events that transpired in Pearl Harbor that morning. On her way home, she stopped by the local grocery store. Thinking this would be a routine supply stop, Lee left her one-year-old son in the truck. When she entered, one white man said, “There’s one of them damned Japs now. What’s she doing here?” Mrs. Hannah Nixon, the owner of the grocery store and the mother of future U.S. President Richard Nixon, approached her friends and exclaimed, “Shame on you, all of you. You have known Mrs. Lee for years. You know she’s not Japanese, and even if she were, she is not to blame for what happened at Pearl Harbor! This is the time to remember your religion and practice it.” Lee later recounted, “What a wonderful, courageous woman to take such an unpopular stand for me, an oriental, upon whom every white person was looking with hatred. Later, whenever I heard President Nixon refer to his mother as an angel, my thoughts went back to that sad day in her grocery store.” Hannah Nixon’s Quaker upbringing showed a rare sense of compassion and understanding for Mary Paik Lee’s situation, in a time when Korean Americans had no one to defend them. As Lee left the store thinking the worst was over, she found three white teenage boys violently threatening her one-year-old son. Lee shouted, “Does it take three of you to beat up a one-year-old baby?” Lee later found out her

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<sup>69</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 96.

second son had also suffered a violent encounter when he was cursed at and slapped by customers of their roadside business. Lee reflected on these past events and stated with sadness, “They just assumed that all Orientals were Japanese; they didn’t even bother to find out before committing violence.”<sup>70</sup>

Shortly after Lee’s incident at the Nixon’s grocery store, Lee had visited a J.C. Penney store where she encountered a racist employee. The cashier grabbed the purchased item from Lee and threw it on the floor. Lee also grabbed the exact amount of change and threw it on the floor beneath the cashier. As Lee was leaving, the store manager asked what was wrong and demanded Lee tell him the cashier’s name so that he could fire her, saying, “It won’t happen again here, as long as I am the manager of the store.” Lee replied, “It [doesn’t] matter; everybody [is] acting the same way.” Later on, Lee stated, “It was comforting to know that someone was sensible enough not to join the frenzy of others.”<sup>71</sup>

As the United States further progressed into total war, the need to differentiate between “enemy Japanese” and “friendly Asians” became ever more necessary. Efforts by Korean American community organizations and other Asian minorities to set themselves apart from the Japanese gained attention from federal officials and the mainstream media. As a result, the 1940s saw officials move away from lumping all “Asiatics” and “Orientals” under one label, and instead make efforts to distinguish between the different Asian groups. Unsurprisingly, their initial efforts were nothing if not offensive and racist.

Various editorials published articles on the differences between “Japs” and Asian allies.<sup>72</sup> With the stark rise of anti-Japanese sentiments, efforts geared towards generalized Asian racism

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<sup>70</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 96.

<sup>71</sup> Lee, Chan, and Yoo, *Quiet Odyssey*, 96.

<sup>72</sup> Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *A New History of Asian America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 225.



were no longer helpful; however, the approach and outcome were far from racist and discriminatory. On December 22, 1941, *Time Magazine* wrote an article titled “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,” which encouraged readers to learn the difference between the enemy Japanese and the friendly Chinese.<sup>73</sup> The article provided details of physical differences between the two including the Chinese’ “placid expression” compared to the “arrogant demeanor” of the Japanese.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, in 1942, the U.S. Army had famed cartoonist Milton Caniff produce “How to Spot a Jap” to help American soldiers identify their Chinese allies and Japanese enemies. Originally seen only by American soldiers stationed in Asia, the comic was later republished in *Life Magazine* to a much broader audience.<sup>75</sup> A section of the article further elaborated the differences in facial features, stating, “The Chinese has a smooth face... Look at their profiles and teeth... Chinese usually has evenly set choppers – Japanese has buck teeth... the Chinese smiles easily...”<sup>76</sup> The validity of articles produced to differentiate between Asian friendlies and the Japanese were thoroughly compromised as a result of the racism ingrained in the authors. As it turned out, decades of established discrimination against all Asian peoples made it difficult to reverse the damages of generalizations in the age of the Second World War.

Asian groups took matters into their own hands to lobby for the repeal of anti-Asian immigration and naturalization laws. To some leftists, the repeals would be a step towards a more free and equal society, while to others, it demonstrated a “necessary gesture” for

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<sup>73</sup> “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,” *TIME Magazine*, December 22, 1941.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 225.

<sup>75</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, 20.

Milton Caniff, “How to Spot a Jap,” *Pocket Guide to China*, no.1 (1942), United States National Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Iain Burns, “Shocking WWII Propaganda Pamphlet on Spotting 'a Jap',” *Daily Mail Online*, October 26, 2017, Accessed December 18, 2019.

[www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5020743/Shocking-WWII-propaganda-pamphlet-spotting-Jap.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5020743/Shocking-WWII-propaganda-pamphlet-spotting-Jap.html).

maintaining a positive stance with American allies as well as holding the upper hand over its rivals.<sup>77</sup> The United States' war with the Empire of Japan meant building partnerships and alliances throughout Asia. Asian independence leaders like Chiang Kai-Shek, a Chinese Nationalist revolutionary, and Taraknath Das, anti-British Bengali Indian revolutionary, denounced racist American policies, and the Chinese Exclusion Act in particular.<sup>78</sup> For most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese Exclusion Act was generally used to suppress most Asian minority groups. As a result, domestic lobby groups such as the Citizens Committee to Repeal the Chinese Exclusion and other Chinese-American organizations were at the forefront of the act's repeal and declared such exclusive, discriminatory laws "violated American principles of equality and was an unacceptable affront to a wartime ally."<sup>79</sup> To ensure the plight of Korean American sovereignty was included in the discussions, Korean Americans like Kilsoo Haan, and the Korean National Association and Korean Provisional Government, continued their efforts. The collective growth of Asian leaders and organizations created an exigent outcry for appeal. Taraknath Das testified to a congressional committee on the matter stating, "As long as Anglo American powers would continue to practice racial discrimination against the people of the orient, a vast majority of the Orientals will not have any genuine confidence in the professions of promotion of world democracy and world brotherhood."<sup>80</sup> By 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act was loosened under the Magnuson Act, and later completely abolished by the Immigration and

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<sup>77</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 236.

<sup>78</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 236.

<sup>79</sup> K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>80</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 236.

Nationality Act of 1965.<sup>81</sup> Although change to Asian American equality came slowly, World War II revealed that the United States was in the midst of transformation.

The epitome of American racism against Asian peoples revealed itself at the start of World War II. The incarceration of Japanese Americans was the result of decades of anti-Asian sentiment in the United States. Unfortunately, Korean Americans were caught in the middle because of their homeland's colonized status by the Empire of Japan. While discriminated against by a homogenized view of Korean Americans as Japanese, Koreans in America nevertheless overcame their struggles by demonstrating their loyalty to a country that did not consider them a part of its ethos.

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<sup>81</sup> William Wei, "The Chinese-American Experience: An Introduction," *HarpWeek*, Accessed January 22, 2020.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140126021457/http://immigrants.harpweek.com/ChineseAmericans/1Introduction/BillWeiIntro.htm>

## Chapter 4: Korean Americans in the Armed Forces During World War II

*“Slanted Eyes Won’t Make a Real Soldier.”*

On September 1, 1939, the German Wehrmacht launched an invasion of Poland, and by 1942, the entire continent of Europe was at the mercy of Adolf Hitler.<sup>1</sup> In 1941, after the events of Pearl Harbor, the United States was faced with a two-front war: The Pacific Theater and the European Theater. The U.S. Armed Forces called upon the entirety of America’s able-bodied, male population to serve overseas in war- including the minorities it had long oppressed, the interned Japanese. While in Washington, D.C., Syngman Rhee, also with Kilsoo Haan, took the opportunity of war to secure Allied recognition of the Korean Provisional Government.<sup>2</sup> Rhee called all Korean Americans to join arms to defeat Japan: “Every armed Japanese is your enemy and you visit upon them the fury of an unconquerable people. To fight for America is to fight for Korea.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Korean Americans had already understood their service towards the war effort was their way of contributing to the U.S. war against Japan, and ultimately the American liberation of Korea. Whether by Rhee’s call to arms or by their own will, several hundred Korean Americans from the mainland and Hawaii enlisted in the Army and Navy, deploying them to Nazi-occupied Europe or the Pacific to fight the Empire of Japan. Motivated by both Korean and American nationalism, many Korean American service members exhibited great sacrifice and bravery for the opportunity to be free and to free others. Korean Americans who served in World War II

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<sup>1</sup> Edward T. Chang and Carol K. Park, *Korean Americans: A Concise History* (Riverside: The Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2019), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *A New History of Asian America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 212.

<sup>3</sup> David Yoo, *Contentious Spirits: Religion in Korean American History, 1903-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 119.

include Fred Ohr, a distinguished flying ace who flew several operations in Europe; John Park, the only Korean American that gave his life on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day; and Richard Shinn, member of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division who fought in the Battle of the Bulge. In memory of their father and for their country, three of Ahn Chang Ho's children served in the Second World War: Philip Ahn enlisted in the army and served in the Special Services playing Japanese villains in war films; Ralph Ahn joined the navy to serve in the Pacific; and Susan Ahn Cuddy, arguably the most distinguished and famous one out of Ahn's children, rose to the rank of Lieutenant and became the first Asian American woman to join the Navy.<sup>4</sup>

### **Susan Ahn Cuddy**

Susan Ahn Cuddy joined the United States Navy in 1942 to become the first Asian American woman to serve in the Navy and Asian American woman officer in the U.S. military.<sup>5</sup> Born in 1915 in Los Angeles to independence leader Ahn Chang Ho and Helen Lee, she was raised surrounded by the issues of Korean sovereignty and racial injustice. Cuddy stated in an interview, "It was hard knowing that you didn't have a country. There was a grocer on the corner in our neighborhood and he was Jewish and said that he did not have a homeland either. He helped us a lot and I became best friends with his daughter."<sup>6</sup> Presumably to prepare his daughter for an unfriendly and sexist anti-Asian America, her father Ahn encouraged her not to be "ladylike" and allowed her and her siblings to "grow up rough," also promoting her to play American sports to better assimilate.<sup>7</sup> In 1926, when her father left for the Philippines and later

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<sup>4</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 45-48.

<sup>5</sup> James Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream: Portraits of a Successful Immigrant Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018), 23.

<sup>6</sup> John Cha, *Willow Tree Shade: The Susan Ahn Cuddy Story* (Korean American Heritage Foundation, 2005), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23.

died in Japanese occupied Korea, Cuddy's mother was left to raise the children. According to Cuddy, "My mother, like many of the women, were left behind as their husbands went to work for Korean independence."<sup>8</sup> After Ahn Chang Ho had left the country, in 1936, Helen Lee became the leader of the Patriotic Organization of Korean American Women to promote independence activism amongst Korean American women.<sup>9</sup>

After graduating from San Diego State College, Cuddy initially applied for the United States Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve) program, better known as WAVES.<sup>10</sup> Her application was rejected without much explanation, but it was clear she was not wanted by the Navy because of her race.<sup>11</sup> However, after the Pearl Harbor attacks, Cuddy became a WAVE after successfully enlisting in the U.S. Navy and enrolling in the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup> She solidified her spot as the first female aerial gunnery officer when she trained her male counterparts to down enemy aircraft.<sup>13</sup> The Navy had stationed her deep in the South in Atlanta, Georgia, where Cuddy would have most likely been one of the first Koreans to visit.<sup>14</sup> In one account, Cuddy entered an Atlanta diner to have one of the patrons nearly receive a heart attack at the sight of an Asian woman, in addition to her dressed in a naval uniform.<sup>15</sup> Cuddy was a trailblazer, establishing many firsts for

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<sup>8</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 129.

<sup>13</sup> Erin Blakemore, "The Officer Who Opened the U.S. Navy for Asian-American Women," *TIME*, May 3, 2016.

<https://time.com/4314308/susan-cuddy-history/>

<sup>14</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 134.

<sup>15</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 133.

accomplishments at every level in the Navy, not including being the first Asian person to visit various places in the deep South.

In memory of her father, Cuddy worked hard to set herself apart, proving that a Korean American woman was worthy and more than capable in any position. In a letter to her friend, Cuddy wrote:

In our family, we have always tried to live up to the spirit of our father. Though he spent his entire life trying to wrest Korea from Japanese domination, he believed in America—so much so that he came here in 1902 to learn the ways of American democracy to take back his people—and I honor him in wearing this uniform.<sup>16</sup>

Any opportunity Cuddy had to talk about her father and Korea came easily and she felt the need to continue the fight for Korean independence. Coworkers and strangers were not shy to ask, “Are you Chinese? Japanese? Eskimo? Indian? Filipino? Samoan?”<sup>17</sup> Cuddy was frustrated that no one ever mentioned Korea, which “drove her nuts,” so she would politely inform them she was Korean.<sup>18</sup> Most would reply “Where is Korea?” or “How come I’ve never heard of it before?” to which Cuddy would take the opportunity to teach others about the Japanese occupation and the Korean fight for independence.<sup>19</sup>

Cuddy was confronted with the same questions of her race with whomever she encountered, and the discussion of Korea’s situation and her father’s legacy became second nature to her. Ironically, the last place she expected these questions to come from was the Navy. Even more so, the Navy took special interest in Cuddy’s background and assigned a personal photographer to follow her in her daily duties. The Navy also encouraged her to publicly talk to reporters and make speeches at gatherings about her Korean heritage and patriotic motivations.

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<sup>16</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 97.

<sup>17</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 108.

Although Cuddy found her new spotlight puzzling- she was initially rejected by the Navy for being an Oriental- Cuddy understood the Navy wanted to highlight her life and personal fight for democracy because she was the Navy's first female Asian enlistee.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the common questioning, and discrimination, of Cuddy's heritage, she faced sexism from the male personnel around her. While executing her duties, Cuddy was frequently pawed at by men. While Cuddy was training a group of soldiers on anti-aircraft weaponry, one white male soldier did not take kindly to a female Asian officer's instruction. The soldier disobeyed her orders, to which she barked back, "Down here, you will shoot when I tell you to shoot!"<sup>21</sup> To make matters worse, a popular American magazine had published a segment on forced Korean prostitutes, or "comfort women."<sup>22</sup> The widely read segment created the false impression in some men that all Korean women were promiscuous and engaged in racy behavior.<sup>23</sup> Cuddy recounted that some of these men attempted to find out if their instructor had the same inclinations as that of the "comfort women."<sup>24</sup>

Cuddy demonstrated that she was not a woman to be messed with at an informal baseball game. According to John Cha, "Susan showed her prowess on the baseball field that the boys saw her in a different light. At a base softball game, of all places. Susan snagged line drives, scooped up hard grounders, and ran the bases so quickly, that the boys were dumbstruck."<sup>25</sup> After that, Cuddy boasted "the boys clamored over her for a different reason," to get her to play

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<sup>20</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Blakemore, "The Officer Who Opened the U.S. Navy for Asian-American Women."

<sup>22</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 121.

<sup>24</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 121.

<sup>25</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 124.



for their team.<sup>26</sup> Cuddy proved to be proficient and extraordinary in every aspect of her life, but she knew her potential was stifled by the times she lived in, her gender, and the color of her skin.

Susan Ahn Cuddy dutifully served in the Navy for the rest of the war, and later accomplished another feat by marrying Chief Petty Officer Francis Cuddy, an Irish American codebreaker who helped the Korean resistance in their fight for independence against Japan. During the Cold War, she worked for the National Security Agency as an intelligence officer, and became a leading advocate for women's rights and justice for Asian Americans. In 2003, Cuddy received the honor of California's "Woman of the Year," and in 2006, the Asian American Justice Center honored her with the "American Courage Award."<sup>27</sup>

### **Kim Young Oak**

Arguably the most famous Korean American to serve in World War II is Kim Young Oak. Among the hundreds of WWII Korean American combatants, Kim's experience has been the most discussed and documented. Kim Young Oak was born in Los Angeles in 1919 as the eldest son of Kim Soon Kwon and Norah Koh.<sup>28</sup> His parents had been among the first to emigrate and settled in Los Angeles in 1910, after escaping Japanese captivity for independence activism.<sup>29</sup> Kim was described as a "quiet, hardworking boy," raised in a family on the brink of poverty, and endured frequent anti-Asian discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

Kim attended Central Middle School in Los Angeles within a diverse community and student body.<sup>31</sup> His classmates consisted of white, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Jewish

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<sup>26</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 124.

<sup>27</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23-24.

<sup>28</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, viii.

<sup>29</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, viii.

<sup>30</sup> Scott McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory: The Epic World War II Story of the Japanese American GIs Who Rescued the Lost Battalion* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2016), 36.

<sup>31</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 19.

children, but when attending Belmont High School, Kim suffered heavy discrimination at the hands of a majority white population.<sup>32</sup> Kim was considered a bright student, with natural leadership skills, and a photographic memory; however, he blamed his limitations on his ethnicity, and secretly cursed his heritage.<sup>33</sup> While minority students were allowed to participate in regular curriculum and athletics programs, they were restricted from extracurricular activities. Similar to Susan Ahn Cuddy's upbringing, Kim held a deep sense of Korean pride, but lacked the tolerance for ignorance when he had to explain his heritage to those who asked. When asked of Kim's heritage by white students, he responded in short answers, "Korea." Students taunted back, "Where is Korea? Is it China or is it Japan? Is it a country? We can't find it on the map!" Kim angrily responded, "Korea is Korea!"<sup>34</sup>

Like most Korean immigrant children, Kim was taught the importance of education and its potential to lead to financial and societal success. After attending Belmont High, a college preparatory school, Kim reluctantly attended Los Angeles City College. According to Kim, college held no purpose for Koreans, who would receive a college degree only to work at "vegetable stores, laundromats, or butcher shops."<sup>35</sup> Anti-Asian sentiment prevented Korean American college graduates from obtaining professional careers. Because of this, Kim defied the wishes of his parents and dropped out of college in his freshman year, and begrudgingly worked several odd jobs.<sup>36</sup> In another parallel to Susan Ahn Cuddy, in the early stages of World War II in Europe, Kim attempted to volunteer for the U.S. Army only to find rejection due to his

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<sup>32</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22.

Oriental heritage.<sup>37</sup> However, by January 1941, Congress had passed legislation allowing for Asian Americans to be drafted into the military, and Kim was drafted into the Army. <sup>38</sup>

Kim had undergone basic training only to find the jobs available to him were more mundane odd-jobs. Kim was told he had a choice between a cook, mechanic, or supply clerk, but not a combat soldier. When Kim asked why he could not become a combat soldier, his supervisor responded by saying, “What? Are you out of your mind? You have the wrong eyes. Slanted eyes won’t make a real soldier.” Although Kim had shot ten bullseye hits on his first target practice session, his race was the only thing of concern to the Army. He was eventually assigned to mechanic school, and later spent most of his time fixing jeeps, trucks, and other heavy equipment.<sup>39</sup>

After the fateful events of December 7, 1941, the Army sought to supplement their shortage of officers in preparation for the European Theater. Kim was commanded to report to Fort Benning, home to the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School. His commanding officer told him, “The war is going to end soon. You are smart and highly educated. I think you will become a good officer. It’s a waste if you stay here.” To the excitement of Kim, he became the first Asian American to attend Officer Candidate School in U.S. military history, and even though he persevered against discrimination, he never considered the possibility of being an Asian American officer. To Kim’s surprise, his commander’s OCS recommendation was accepted, but upon his arrival, he was found to be the only minority in the entire school. No longer believing

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<sup>37</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22.

the myth of white superiority, Kim made a promise to himself: “I will do my best. I will never be kicked out for not trying.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1943, upon graduating, Kim was stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to train Japanese American combatant recruits to be placed in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team’s 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion, an all Japanese American unit later known as the “Purple Heart Battalion.”<sup>41</sup> The 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a segregated unit, consisting of mostly second-generation Japanese Americans soldiers and officers under the command of mostly white officers.<sup>42</sup> The Army did not fully trust the loyalty of the Japanese Americans, so they were secretly shipped out from Hawaii to Mississippi after the Pearl Harbor attacks.<sup>43</sup>

Given the racial tensions between the Koreans and Japanese, Kim was given the option to switch to a different unit, but he refused. Kim’s commanding battalion officer told him, “You know, I don’t think you realize that this is a Japanese unit. You’re Korean. Historically, the Japanese and Koreans don’t get along,” and then said, “All the other officers who preceded you and who were not Japanese wanted out. The process has been set up. I can have you transferred first thing in the morning.”<sup>44</sup> Kim responded saying, “Sir, they’re Americans, and I’m an American. We’re going to fight for America, so I want to stay.”<sup>45</sup> Kim was placed on probation until he could prove his efficacy in the segregated Japanese unit. Kim was a patriot of the United States and its Constitution, and believed its ideals could and should go beyond racial tensions. Kim understood it would be difficult as a Korean American officer leading a Japanese American

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<sup>40</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 22-24.

<sup>41</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 48.

unit, given the situation in Korea, but Kim knew he had to gain his unit's trust and respect before leading them into battle.<sup>46</sup>

Kim proved to be a “taskmaster”, having inherited an unwanted unit that was dysfunctional and ill-equipped.<sup>47</sup> Before Kim's leadership, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a ragtag group of Japanese Americans, mostly from Hawaii, described as “unfit” and “poorly disciplined,” who worked poorly with mainland Japanese Americans.<sup>48</sup> In the eyes of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion, mainland Japanese Americans were too “Americanized” in behavior, and on the contrary, mainland Japanese Americans openly taunted their Hawaiian counterparts for their raggedy looks and pidgin English.<sup>49</sup> Pidgin English, a combination of English, Hawaiian, Japanese, and other languages, was unknown to outsiders of Hawaii. Eventually used on the European frontlines against the Germans, during training, the recruits used it to speak against Kim, loud enough so he could hear it; but, to protect his authority, Kim ignored them.<sup>50</sup> To the recruits, they were well aware Koreans did not like the Japanese, and the same went the other way around. Initially, the recruits called Kim “yeobo,” meaning darling in Korean, a phrase Korean husbands say to their wives, but an anti-Korean derogatory term used by Hawaiian Japanese Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to racial tension, the recruits held a “lackadaisical manner” and were severely bored.<sup>52</sup> Kim implemented harsh military discipline, to which his nickname “yeobo” turned into

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<sup>46</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> James M. McCaffrey, *Going for Broke: Japanese American Soldiers in the War Against Nazi Germany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 44.

<sup>48</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 37.

“G.I. Kim.”<sup>53</sup> Kim ignored outdated instructions from the Army training manual, and developed his own set of combat training strategies, which would later be adopted by the U.S. Army and used in the Korean War.<sup>54</sup> Under Kim’s guidance, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was made to be combat-ready and trained to withstand harsh conditions.

On September 29, 1943, after the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was deployed to Salerno, Italy, Kim’s unit entered combat for the first time upon encountering the German Wehrmacht’s Tenth Army.<sup>55</sup> In the eyes of the Army, 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT units were expendable compared to white units; therefore, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to move upon enemy positions, most likely to soften the battlefield for white units. Kim refused to follow the order and suggested taking alternative routes to take the objective; but, as it was the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s first firefight, the Japanese American soldiers did not want to show cowardice, and convinced Kim to proceed with the order.<sup>56</sup> The 100<sup>th</sup>’s motto, “Go for Broke,” was later adopted as the official motto of the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT.<sup>57</sup>

The Japanese Americans of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT as a whole, strived to exemplify their patriotism and commitment to serve.<sup>58</sup> Kim learned to harness this sentiment and stated, “[The Japanese American soldier] had to succeed. They couldn’t fail. We had to be as good as any other Caucasian outfit. And we knew that we had to shed blood... And we all had to

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Robert Asahina, “Young Oak Kim,” *100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion Veterans Education Center*, Accessed March 31, 2020.

<http://www.100thbattalion.org/history/veterans/officers/young-oak-kim/>

<sup>53</sup> Han, *Unsung Hero*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

<sup>55</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Asahina, *Just Americans: How Japanese Americans Won a War at Home and Abroad* (Penguin Group, 2007), 69.

<sup>58</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

be prepared to pay that price.”<sup>59</sup> On several occasions, Kim sat with his fellow officers and men to talk and play cards where they discovered the similarities between Koreans and Japanese, and began to see themselves united as Asian Americans. On one of these “serious bull sessions,” Kim and “Spark” Matsunaga, later a U.S. Senator for Hawaii, Sakae Takahashi, later the first Japanese American veteran political office holder, and several others, discussed their post war lives and how they could make a difference in changing the political dynamic of their communities.<sup>60</sup> The Japanese Americans understood their service in the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT would give them the “moral authority,” and political base as veterans, to bring their people out of the plantation fields, out of oppression, and into seats of power in post-WWII America.<sup>61</sup> Kim spoke to them saying, “You’re going to do it for the Japanese Americans, but in the end, you’re going to do it for all Asians, and that’s why I’m here. I look like you. No one can tell the difference, and so when it gets done, it’s going to be for everybody.”<sup>62</sup> Word of Kim’s leadership spread throughout the unit that Kim placed the interest of his men at heart.<sup>63</sup> Kim’s demeanor, mindset, and understanding of his men solidified their respect for him, and they never doubted their Korean American officer again.

As the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved north in Italy, Kim’s actions showed exemplary courage and the quality leadership, for which his unit earned him his final nickname “Samurai Kim”- only this time, it was a cultural nod and respect to Kim.<sup>64</sup> On several occasions, reports from the

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<sup>59</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

<sup>60</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

Tom Coffman, “Sakae Takahashi,” *100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion Veterans Education Center*, Accessed April 2, 2020.

<http://www.100thbattalion.org/history/veterans/officers/sakae-takahashi/2/>

<sup>61</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

<sup>62</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

<sup>63</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 37.

<sup>64</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 37.

Battle of Anzio stated Kim placed himself in the line of fire to draw the enemies away from his comrades.<sup>65</sup> In October 1944, Kim had eventually become too injured to continue leading his unit after moving through Italy and into France, and thereafter was removed from the frontlines and shipped back to the United States.<sup>66</sup> Although Kim could not complete his duty alongside his men to the end of the war, his leadership had left a lasting impression on his unit. Kim became widely recognized throughout the 442<sup>nd</sup> for his “courage, serenity under fire, innate battlefield intelligence, and idiosyncrasies.” Stories of his valor even reached back home with articles about Kim appearing in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>67</sup> In 2005, after Kim had passed away, U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor for his role in the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT, wrote in Kim’s obituary:

There was one name that always commanded attention and respect: Captain Kim’s. He was a bona fide hero of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. When I got to meet him after I entered combat, my respect and admiration of him grew because he was such a fearless leader who, through his deeds, inspired his men.<sup>68</sup>

By the end of Kim’s service, he had been promoted to the rank of Captain and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts, one French Cross of War, and one Italian War Cross of Military Valor just to name a few, and even a church plaque with his name on it to this day in Biffontaine, France.<sup>69</sup> After World War II, the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT’s 18,000 men became the most decorated regiment in all of the U.S. Armed Forces, collectively achieving 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor, and 7 Presidential Citations.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> McGaugh, *Honor Before Glory*, 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Asahina, “Young Oak Kim.”

<sup>69</sup> Flanigan, *The Korean-American Dream*, 23-24.

Dorian Travers “Four New Inductees to Museum’s Gallery of Heroes, *Museum News You Can Use*, June 2006, Honolulu: Hawaii Army Museum Society, 4–6.

<sup>70</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 48.



Although Kim did not personally receive the Medal of Honor, since before his death in 2005, there has been a decades-long petition in the Korean American community to posthumously bestow Kim with the esteemed award.

Kim Young Oak had devoted his life to serving the United States and to honor the Korean independence legacy of his parents. What began as a personal goal to achieve a good paying job became a crusade to better the lives of Asian Americans and achieve some form of racial reconciliation between Koreans, Japanese, and whites. In addition, Kim's achievements contributed to the 442<sup>nd</sup>'s lasting impression of Asians in America, acknowledging its shameful role in the internment of Japanese Americans. Kim recalled, "I'm against segregation... [but] in hindsight, I'm glad the 100<sup>th</sup> was a segregated unit. Because then if it did well, [Asian Americans would] get the credit."<sup>71</sup> Before the United States entered World War II, society held a homogenized view of all Asian Americans, but by the end of the war, Kim's legacy alone disrupted such notions and made an indelible mark in the fabric of Asian American history.

By the time World War II had ended, the bravery, sacrifice, and forward-thinking mindset of Korean American veterans had challenged the anti-Asian establishment they were born into. Their actions had a profound impact on the gross generalizations in which Korean Americans- and Asian Americans- thought they would have to suffer in perpetuity. While the stories of many WWII Korean American veterans have yet to be brought to light, the stories of Susan Ahn Cuddy and Kim Young Oak are testaments to distinguished honor and resilience in their service to both the United States and Korea. While both Kim and Cuddy's parents sought to promote Korean nationalism through Korean efforts alone, Kim and Cuddy stood in their environments and persevered towards racial reconciliation through their actions. Their legacies

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<sup>71</sup> Asahina, "Young Oak Kim."

have had lasting effects on the Los Angeles community, to Korean Americans, as well as South Korea. When the two entered their roles in WWII, they were but racial anomalies. But by the end, Kim and Cuddy had proved that Korean Americans were indeed an independent group of their own.

## Conclusion

The World War II-era in the United States brought to light the extent of anti-Asian discrimination from society and established political institutions. Furthermore, it revealed the potentially serious impact on American life from foreign events. After the broadcast of the Pearl Harbor events, anti-Asian discrimination hit its apogee, forcing over hundreds of thousands of Americans into concentration camps while the U.S. Armed Forces prepared to take on an enemy who was doing the same. However, the end of the war resulted in an era of hope for restoration and growth for many Asian Americans. With the end of the Pacific War, Japan demonstrated a willingness to reform itself through liberal democratic reform, and with the exemplary actions of the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT, the United States and the Japanese people- along with Japanese Americans- began a period of reconciliation and economic rebuilding.<sup>1</sup> Some Japanese Americans went onto achieving high ranking political offices, an incredible feat considering they were labeled “enemy aliens” and shipped into wasteland concentration camps at the start of the war. By the 1960s, *Time Magazine* described Asian-Americans, specifically Japanese Americans in mind, the country’s “Model Minority.”<sup>2</sup> In hindsight, such a term was and is offensive and insinuates white supremacist ideals; however, it did signify that the progress made by Japanese Americans were too significant to ignore. On the bicentennial of the United States’ founding, President Gerald Ford denounced the internment by stating, “... we should have known then – not only was that evacuation wrong, but Japanese-Americans were and are loyal Americans.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *A New History of Asian America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 238-239.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Picador, 2016), xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Reeves, *Infamy*, xxi.

Although the war improved the status of many Asian Americans, discrimination and stereotypes proved to be a never-ending struggle. In the early days of the Cold War, Asian Americans learned of the “American Dream”- a suburban home with a white picket fence- and the quintessential image of the nuclear family, which were, by design, reserved for white Americans. Even for African Americans, who also valiantly served in the war, the greatest struggles against discrimination were yet to come. For some Asian Americans, the outcome of World War II stifled their progress in combating racism. With the rise of Communist China in 1949, Chinese Americans faced continuous challenges during the post-war years as the “Red Scare” gripped American society.<sup>4</sup>

Before World War II churned the gears of war in America, Korean Americans, small in number and, therefore, political power, struggled to keep their communities alive and were largely forgotten. However, from the small, quiet communities scattered throughout the West Coast, came extraordinary individuals that helped finally place Korea on the map. After nearly 35 years of the Japanese occupation of Korea, the Allied Forces liberated the Korean peninsula, only to have it split down the middle between the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel: the U.S. controlled south, and a puppet of the Soviet Union in the north.<sup>5</sup> Syngman Rhee, after years of delegating with Washington, D.C., became the first president of the Republic of Korea in 1948.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union placed their own Communist version of Rhee by installing Kim Il Sung as leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the north. This political divide in the peninsula would later prove to be the next heart wrenching chapter for the Korean people.

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<sup>4</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 238.

<sup>5</sup> Edward T. Chang and Carol K. Park. *Korean Americans: A Concise History* (Riverside: The Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, 2019), 47.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, *A New History of Asian America*, 238-239.

Just five years after the end of the Second World War, the situation on the peninsula would eventually lead to the Korean War, the first armed conflict of the Cold War which lasted from 1950 to 1953. Korean on the peninsula faced severe hardships as the war ravaged their homeland, with many Korean Americans diverting their independence efforts towards the war. The Korean War would forge a permanent, mutual alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea, something the Korean independence leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century could only dream of. Some have argued the “friendship” of the two nations to be paternal and hegemonic in nature.<sup>7</sup> Others have added that the Korean people, as a result, have become “the most simulated of all Asians,” reinforcing the label of “honorary whiteness” attributed to Asian Americans in general.<sup>8</sup>

But, with Korea free of Japanese rule, Korean Americans turned their invested efforts away from the independence movement and towards building their community status, thus evolving their nationalistic identity. As the restrictions against Asian Americans eased, many took their new-found opportunities towards higher education, athletics, law, the medical field, and business. Such opportunities became the new ways for Korean Americans to combat racism and discrimination as their struggles continued into the Cold War era. With the efforts of the early Koreans in America established, major wives of Korean immigrants would arrive to the United States to further contribute to American society.

For Korean Americans who came in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the time of uncertainty and potentially on the brink of eradication from American society became an

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<sup>7</sup> Michael E. Lathan, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22-23.

opportunity. Koreans in America waged a multi-generational war for independence to break from the idea of an Asian American hegemony through service, sacrifice, patriotism, and dedication. The Korean American war for independence pulled resources from every corner of its communities from its business members, local leaders, athletes, teachers, farmers, laborers, military members, academics, publishers, and even families. For nearly the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Koreans in America, unwilling to succumb to their place between the devil and the deep sea, fought a total war to ensure the recognition of their identity, their place in America, and the survival of Korea.

The many efforts made by Korean Americans during their war for independence allowed for this hermit community to gain steadfast recognition. Their sacrifices have built the sturdy foundations upon which thousands of Korean immigrants flooded into the United States between the 1960s to the 1990s; however, their efforts largely forgotten within history. But, it was their perseverance led the United States to liberate Korean and forge the birth of the Republic of Korea. Through resilience, they helped Korean Americans secure a place in American society. It is always the willingness of a people to place others before their own selfish desires that makes communities, institutions, companies, and countries truly great.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chang and Park, *Korean Americans*, 49.

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