

## DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

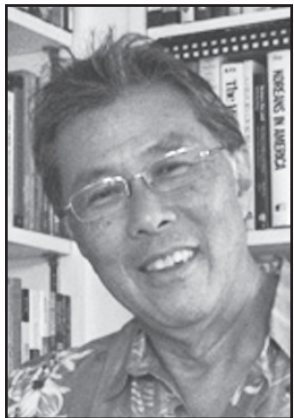
# “WE MUST NEVER FORGET”

## Honouliuli: Remembering for Democracy's Sake

**Gary Y. Okihiro, Ph.D.**  
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*Editor's note: What is the significance of the former internment camp site at Honouliuli in West O'ahu? Is it simply an historic landmark that was once covered over with brush that now has been cleared and identified? Why should we remember Honouliuli? What is its relevance today and into the future?*

*Historian, scholar and author Dr. Gary Y. Okihiro's keynote address at the Feb. 27 Day of Remembrance event addressed those very questions. Due to limited space in the Monsanto Hawaii break room in Kunia, Okihiro's talk could be heard by only a few hundred people. We felt his message was worth sharing with all of our readers, so we asked Dr. Okihiro for permission to publish the text of his address. He graciously granted us that permission.*



**Dr. Gary Okihiro**

*For Gary Okihiro, the invitation to speak at Hawai'i's Day of Remembrance was also an opportunity to come home for a visit. Okihiro was born and grew up on Honolulu Plantation in 'Aiea. He is currently a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University in New York City. Okihiro has authored numerous books; his most recent books with a Hawai'i focus include: "Island World: A History of Hawai'i and the United States" and "Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones." He is also the author of "Cane Fires: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawai'i, 1865-1945." Okihiro received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Studies Association and an honorary doctorate from the University of the Ryukyus in Okinawa.*

*The Hawai'i Herald thanks Dr. Okihiro for sharing his text with our readers.*

I am greatly honored to be here with you today on your day of remembrance; I've been to several DORs on the continent, but never in my island home, Hawai'i. This, thus, is a very special occasion for me. Moreover, your dream to have Honouliuli designated an historic national site makes this DOR especially significant. Commemoration and remembrance of a place such as this one are vital not only for Japanese Americans, but for democracy's sake. For this signal honor, I'd like to thank the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i and the Japanese American Citizens League, Honolulu chapter, the organizers of this pilgrimage. I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Jane Kurahara, DOR's 2011 coordinator, and Brian Niiya, JCCH's director of program development, who were instrumental in my invitation.

The story of our presence here today at Honouliuli begins with U.S. expansion into the Pacific and Commodore Matthew Perry's "opening" of Japan to U.S. and Western influences in 1854. To "drive by force," if necessary, was Perry's instruction in dealing with Japan's reluctant rulers. The encounter set the stage for the 19th-century modernization of Japan and the 20th-century contest for Pacific dominance between imperial Japan and the imperial U.S. republic.

Anchored mid-Pacific lay the fleet of islands called Hawai'i. Settled, revered and nurtured by Polynesians, the land and its waters were soon besieged by foreigners from Europe, but mainly

the U.S. "If a big wave comes in," predicted Hawaiian scholar David Malo in 1837 of the alien flood, "large and unfamiliar fishes will come from the dark ocean, and when they see the small fishes of the shallows they will eat them up."

The invaders wanted anchorages to rest and refresh their ships and crews in their transits between America and Asia; they desired the stands of sandalwood trees in the mountains to take to China to exchange for teas, silks, porcelain and furniture; they hunted the migrating herds of whales for their rich oil and ivory; and most of all, they lusted after Hawaiian land for tropical plantations and the fine harbor at Pu'uloa, or "long hill," which they named Pearl Harbor for their warships to guard the sea lanes and patrol their Pacific destiny.

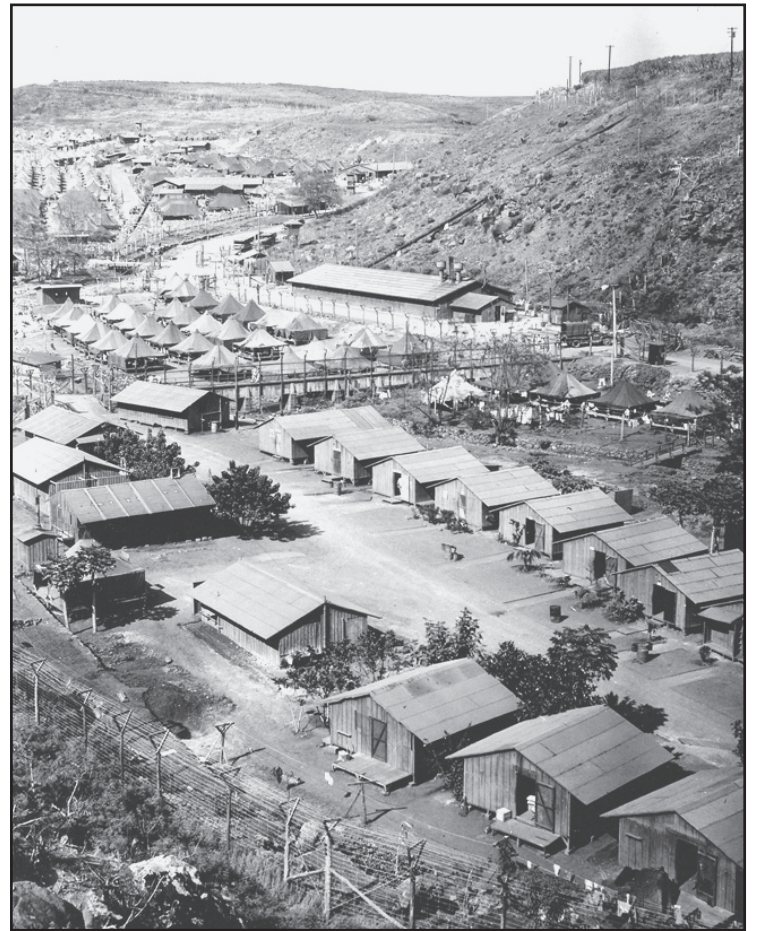
"We are in much need of them," implored Robert Wyllie, the kingdom's foreign minister and master of Princeville plantation on the island of Kaua'i. "I myself could take 500 for my own estates." Wyllie's letter, dated March 10, 1865, opened the gates to Japanese migration to Hawai'i. Three years later, the first shipment of Japanese workers for the sugar plantations arrived, and an additional 29,000 arrived between 1885 and 1894. About 125,000 came to the islands from 1894 to 1908 when a Gentlemen's Agreement between Japan and the U.S. reduced the migration of male laborers.

Women were a mere 9 percent of Hawai'i's Japanese in 1890, but increased to 22 percent in 1900, 31 percent in 1910 and 41 percent in 1920. Women's rapid increase after 1900 was largely the result of "picture brides," who escaped the restrictions of the Gentlemen's Agreement. My grandmother, Chinen Kame, was one of those thousands of *shashin kekkon*. "The picture brides were full of ambition, expectations and dreams," recalled Miyasaki Ai. "None knew what their husbands were like except by the photos. I wondered how many would be saddened and disillusioned. There were many."

Upon arriving at an irrigation camp on Waipahu plantation not far from here, my grandmother was greeted by a forlorn row of shacks surrounded by seemingly endless fields of cane that shielded from her view the outside world. It was stifling. She had no friends and shared the one-room wooden structure with a man she hardly knew. Many nights after a hard day of work in the fields, my grandmother said she cried quietly to herself in the dark.

I wonder if my grandmother ventured far outside the camp that confined her to seek the high ground where she could rise above the fields of cane and see the horizon beyond. She must have quickly exhausted the possibilities of the camp, its communal toilets and bath, its outdoor kitchen, and its six families and several bachelors. She must have followed the stream that flowed from the mountains, discovered the guavas and mangoes that grew along its bank and smiled at the sight of the bright red *lehua* flower that blossomed only in the higher elevations where cooler winds blew. She might have ascended Ko'olau's slopes, so high, so far away from her isolation that, breathless, she might have gained a glimpse of the blue, shimmering Pacific Ocean that stretched into the distance, lapping on friendlier shores.

But plantation labor disallowed dreams and dreamers, and conjugal life resulted in pregnancies and babies as surely as the shrill whistle that blew every morning, save Sunday, to call the workers out to the fields. My grandmother did not



**An aerial view of Honouliuli Internment Camp.** (Photo by R.H. Lodge/JCCH Collection)

have time to ponder her fate. Her life of labor was interrupted only for the bearing and births of 11 children — six girls and five boys — which became almost a biennial ritual. She originally wanted four or five children, my grandmother said, but more hands were useful for farming and brought in much-needed income for the family. Like so many other picture brides, my grandmother worked in the field and home, bearing the burden of self, family and community. Women were not merely brave; they were strong.

An Okinawan song, a dialogue between mother and migrant, described the process by which temporary laborers became permanent settlers:

Let me take my leave, my mother.  
Earn money and come home, my child,  
As I stay home and pray to the gods.  
To this Hawaii from the far away Okinawa  
We have come all the way for the sake of  
money.  
Thinking it'd only be a few years we came,  
But we have now grown our roots deep and  
with green leaves.

Tamashiro Baishiro recalled how his hands blistered cutting cane on Lihu'e plantation on Kaua'i. "It sure was hard work," he noted. "We had no time to rest. We worked like machines. For 200 of us workers, there were seven or eight lunas and above them was a field boss on a horse. We were watched constantly." Yamauchi Tsura added, "If we thought the lunas were coming," she said, "we were afraid. . . . The lunas might or might not come once in a day, but we were always scared that they'd come. We couldn't understand their speech, and so we couldn't answer at all. Both men and women worked very hard, because we were scared."

Lunas and overseers were not merely feared for their strange tongue, but also because they held leather whips which they used freely and with impunity. In fact, as the visible hand of plantation discipline, lunas and overseers were frequently the

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targets of worker action. In 1892 at nearby 'Ewa plantation, more than 200 laborers marched to Honolulu to demand the firing of an overseer who defended an abusive luna, and in June 1893, at Kukuihaele on the Big Island, the entire workforce of 250 walked off the job to attend the trial of an overseer who had shot and wounded a Japanese worker. In January 1894, at Koloa, Kaua'i, 150 chased a luna who had beaten a laborer, and in November 1897, again at 'Ewa, 81 struck over an overseer who had broken a worker's arm. A *hole hole bushi* commonly sung by workers in the cane fields lamented:

Wonderful Hawaii, or so I heard.  
One look and it seems like Hell.  
The manager's the Devil and  
His lunas are demons.

For four months in 1909, some 7,000 Japanese sugar plantation workers on the island of O'ahu struck for higher wages and equality in the workplace, and in 1920, 8,300 Filipino and Japanese laborers walked off the job, calling for higher wages for men and women, an eight-hour day, an eight-week paid maternity leave for women, and for all, improved health-care and recreational facilities.

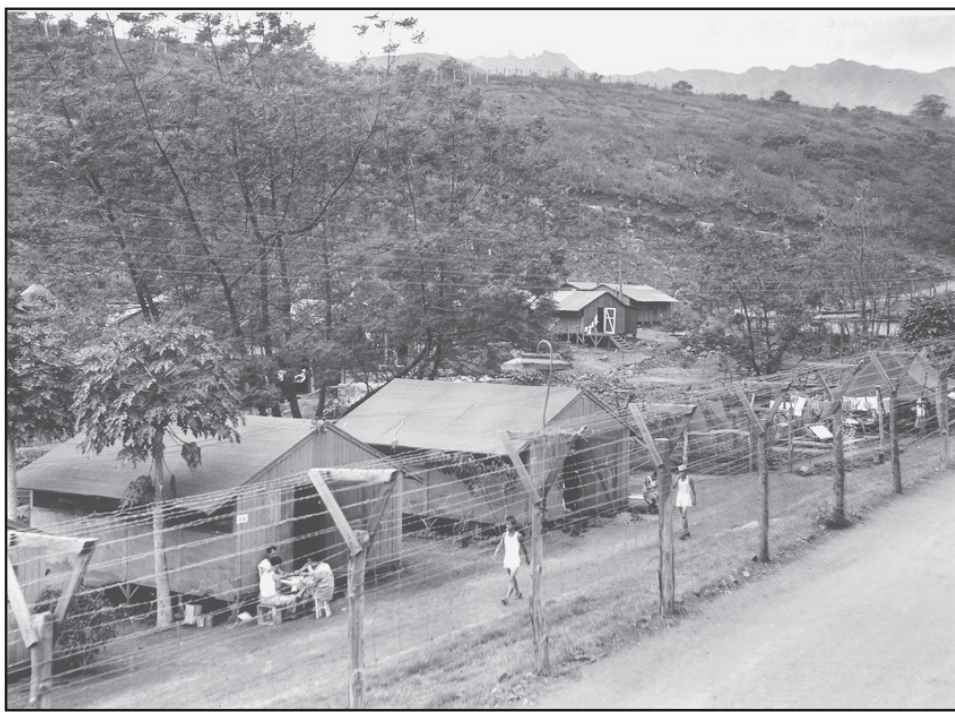
Despite those very American demands by Japanese workers for equality and a "living wage," the planters portrayed the 1909 strike as a racial threat to white supremacy and the 1920 strike, more ominously as "a dark conspiracy to Japanize this American territory." A federal commission sent by Washington to investigate Hawai'i's labor situation following the 1920 strike warned of the "menace of alien domination" and of its belief "that the question of National Defense and the necessity to curtail the domination of the alien Japanese in every phase of the Hawaiian life is more important than all the other problems combined." Military intelligence concluded that the 1920 strike was a means by which America's enemies sought to cripple the U.S. economy and weaken the national resolve to wage war, and the Bureau of Investigation, forerunner of the FBI, described the "Japanese problem" as "almost unbelievable" in scope, and that Japan was bent on a "program for world supremacy" against "the Nordic or white race . . . for the purpose of wresting away the supremacy of the white race and placing such supremacy in the colored peoples under the dominion of Japan."

In anticipation of that global race war, the Bureau of Investigation compiled a list in 1922 of 157 Japanese, including Buddhist priests, Japanese-language school principals and teachers, Christian ministers, and labor and community leaders. These, the Bureau alleged, posed espionage threats. A year later, the territory's military drew up defensive plans for a war with Japan that involved a declaration of martial law, the registration of all enemy aliens, the internment of those considered security risks, and the imposition of restrictions on labor, movement and public information. Before the end of the decade, the military proposed to classify all Japanese, aliens and citizens alike, as enemy aliens, and its criterion for internment changed from potential for espionage to all leaders of the Japanese American community. Without leaders, the officials assumed, Hawai'i's Japanese could be easily intimidated and controlled.

During the 1930s, military and civilian intelligence widened their surveillance of Japanese Americans and refined their plans for containing the "Japanese problem." It was during those preparations that the nation's president, Franklin

Roosevelt, worried over and inquired about the adequacy of those provisions: "What arrangements and plans have been made relative to concentration camps in the Hawaiian Islands for dangerous or undesirable aliens or citizens in the event of national emergency?" the president asked in 1936. "Has the local Joint Planning Committee (Hawai'i) any recommendation to make? One obvious thought occurs to me — that every Japanese citizen or non-citizen on the Island of O'ahu who meets these Japanese ships or has any connection with their officers or men should be secretly but definitely identified and his or her name placed on a special list of those who would be the first to be placed in a concentration camp in the event of trouble." At the time, Japan was not at war with the U.S., and the visit of its ships and men were public and perfectly legal activities.

The president's concern was unnecessary. His acting secretary of war assured the commander-in-chief that arrangements had been made for "the control of the civil population and the prevention of sabotage, of civil disturbances, or of local uprising" of "potentially hostile Japanese."



A close-up view of the Japanese American barracks at Honouliuli. (Photo by R.H. Lodge/JCCH collection)

So while the smoke still rose from the wreckage of America's Pacific Fleet, arresting squads of FBI agents, military police and local law enforcement officers knocked on the doors of persons listed on that team's index cards for apprehension in Hawai'i. And, during the evening of Dec. 7, 1941, the FBI teletype crackled with the urgent message: "Immediately take into custody all Japanese who have been classified in A, B and C categories. . . . Take immediate action. . . ." By Dec. 9, 1,291 Japanese, 865 Germans and 147 Italians were in custody in Hawai'i and on the U.S. continent.

One of those picked up in Honolulu was the esteemed newspaper publisher Soga Yasutaro. The events of Dec. 7 filled him with apprehension and dread. Instead of his usual kimono, Soga put on a suit and slipped on his shoes. In the evening, his eldest son, Shigeo, answered the knock at the door. "There were three, taller than 6 feet and young, military policemen," recalled Soga. "They told me to come to the immigration office. Without hesitation, I replied 'surely' and went to my bedroom to wear my vest and coat." His wife accompanied him outside to the gate, and as he turned to leave, she whispered to him, "'Don't catch a cold.' I wanted to say something," Soga remembered, "but the voice couldn't come out."

In his once-familiar hometown, Soga lost all sense of direction as his captors sped through the blacked-out, deserted streets of Honolulu, stopping only to collect others and to pass through several roadblocks manned by armed sentries. When they arrived at the immigration station, the

men were led into a dimly lit room where military police searched them and confiscated many of their personal items. Soga was half-carried upstairs in the dark by a soldier who suddenly threw him into a room. "I didn't know how many people were in the room, but I couldn't find an inch [of] space for myself to sit down," Soga recalled. After stumbling in the disquieting darkness, a kind hand led him to the top of a bunk bed, where he sat listening to the muted voices in the room.

At daybreak, Soga made out the rows of triple-decked beds and bed mats on the floor, and counted 64 inmates, many he knew, crowded into the single room. The atmosphere, Soga noted, was "bloodthirsty" and the attitude of the guards, "rough." In an instant, he thought, conditions could "burst into bloodshed. . . ." For example, on that first morning, a young, white military police officer ordered his captives around, waving his bayonet menacingly. "I was so furious," remembered Soga, that "I almost threw my mess kit at him." If we had retaliated, Soga thought, "we would have died . . . a dog's death from the thrust of his bayonet."

That treatment given to the leaders of Hawai'i's Japanese was purposefully brutal as if to punish them for Japan's devastating attack on Pearl Harbor. Arbitrary arrest, the crowded sleeping quarters, unsanitary and stinking toilets, and fixed bayonets stressed the master and servant relationship that originally governed the sugar plantations and labor relations. Even when raining, Soga testified, the Japanese were forced to eat outside in the courtyard, rain sprinkling their food. And, Japanese always ate after German and Italian inmates and had to use their dirty plates and utensils, which were carelessly rinsed in a bucket of water filthy with garbage. "I couldn't stand that," remembered Soga, "because even these prisoners looked down on us."

Japanese community leaders on the outer islands were arrested and held in prisons such as Kaua'i's Wailua military prison and the jail in Waimea, the Kilauea military camp on the Big Island, and prisons at Ha'ikū, Maui, and on Moloka'i and Lāna'i. An internee at Kilauea camp tried to escape by climbing the fence, remembered Fukuhara Hishashi. "They killed him, they shot him dead," he said of the guards. Eventually, most were moved to a camp of tents erected on Sand Island, across the harbor from the immigration station. At least 18 Japanese and about 10 German and Italian women were confined at Sand Island. By September 1942, the camp held 319 total internees.

Sand Island's desolate environment and the attitude of its guards underscored the unimportance of Japanese, enemy life. "A dust wind kept blowing almost every day in December," reported Soga, "and the night air was shivering cold." When it rained, the camp flooded, the tents leaked, and the bed cots frequently stood in large pools of water. The camp commander forced the men to stand in the rain for roll call. "It was February and it was rainy — the rain would come down from the mountains and this boss would make us stand in the rain," recalled Furuya Kaetsu, "practically naked, in our undershirt and underpants." Takara Kokubo caught a cold after being forced to stand in the rain, and without medicine, he died.

Strip searches were another means to degrade the Japanese internees and to make them feel exposed and vulnerable. Upon entry to the camp, guards subjected the men to strip searches, and whenever they wanted to find contraband, such as when an internee attempted suicide by slicing his wrist with a razor blade, they conducted strip searches. A Japanese bristled at the indignity of the procedure. "They stripped us down and even

checked the anus," he exclaimed. "We were completely naked. Not even undershorts. They even checked our assholes."

In 1943, the military closed Sand Island and opened this camp at Honouliuli, which remained open from March 1943 to September 1945. Here, inmates were housed in shacks of eight to 10 occupants. Its perimeter secured by a barbed wire fence, the camp's Japanese section had a hospital and medical dispensary, a dental clinic, canteen and kitchen. In May 1943, there were 84 Issei and 154 Nisei, and in October 1944, 50 Issei and 67 Nisei. Dan Nishikawa recalled his anger at being interned and credited his involvement in arts and crafts for keeping his sanity. Canned foods, pork and beans and chile con carne, dominated meals for the first few months, and only after protest did eggs and fresh fruits and vegetables appear. American fliers, Nishikawa testified, regularly practiced bombing runs on the camp, buzzing the shacks as they flew noisily by. They were the enemy, Japanese Americans.

Altogether, from 1942 to 1945, Hawai'i's rulers transferred 1,875 Japanese to concentration camps on the continent, and 1,466 Japanese were confined in concentration camps in the Islands. The anticipation of martial law's end on Oct. 24, 1944, making the confinement and removal of Hawai'i's Japanese legally tricky with the resumption of *habeas corpus* forced the government to hammer out a plan by the summer of that year. On Oct. 18, 1944, six days before the lifting of martial law, Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9489, which authorized the Pacific Ocean Areas commander to declare Hawai'i a military zone, to regulate travel and maintain press censorship, and to intern enemy aliens and exclude from the Islands all those deemed dangerous to security. Consequently, although the extraordinary measure of martial law ended in the Islands, EO 9489 permitted a virtual business as usual at 'Iolani Palace.

So the question for us in this place today, over sixty years after those events of World War II, is why remember, commemorate that past? Too often, it seems to me, in the U.S., public history is used to glorify battles, wars as the victorious march of freedom and democracy over its enemies, both domestic and foreign. I'm thinking of monuments and parks devoted to the Civil War, and here in Hawai'i, the *Arizona* memorial and the murals where my father lies buried at Punchbowl. In recent years, I've gone often to Japan and Okinawa where, it seems to me, memorializations attest to peace, not war. I was especially moved by the peace park at the landing site of the battle of Okinawa and near the epicenter of Hiroshima's holocaust. Honouliuli, I urge, can and should present a message of and reason for peace, not war.

That same spirit suffused the contemporary redress and reparations movement, which resulted in passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. And, in Washington, D.C., the National Japanese American Memorial, commemorating patriotism, perseverance and posterity, is centered by two cranes, symbol of happiness and promise, entangled in barbed wire, but also reaching for the boundless freedom of the skies. That spirit of determined struggle is the only assurance that the violation will never again be endured by any American, that racism or sexism or homophobia or nativism or religious bigotry will never again shape and justify government policy, and action can only be guaranteed when we, the people, resolve it.

I remember being astonished by my dear and close friend, an esteemed constitutional scholar,

when he admitted sadly to me that he was so shaken in the days after 9/11 that he was willing to trade some civil liberties for his personal safety. Of course, in the days, weeks and months following 9/11 in the U.S., thousands of Arab and West, Central and South Asian Americans reported instances of racial harassment and intimidation,



Participants in last year's field study course at Honouliuli, offered by the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu. Behind them is one of two original buildings still standing. (Photo courtesy of University of Hawai'i West Oahu Field School)

including threatening gestures and speech, shootings, and the vandalizing of homes, businesses and mosques. Airline passengers were removed from their flights, a South Asian and his white friend were beaten in San Francisco; Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh, was killed in Arizona in a hate crime; and Waqar Hasan, a Pakistani, was killed in Dallas, Texas.

Balbir Singh Sodhi was 52 years old when he died, face up, among the flowers and shrubs outside his Chevron station in Mesa, Ariz. He was shot at least three times in the back by Frank Roque four days after the Twin Towers fell. When arrested and while being led away in handcuffs, his killer allegedly shouted: "I'm a patriot! I'm an American! Arrest me and let those terrorist run wild?!" Sodhi was a quiet, hard-working man whose determination was inspired by his faith and for the well-being of his children and family. He entered the U.S., leaving behind his wife and five children in the Punjab, to escape the bloody conflict between Sikh separatists and the Indian army and to earn money to support his family.

He got jobs in Los Angeles and San Francisco and joined his brothers in Phoenix, Ariz., after one of his close friends, a Sikh and fellow taxi driver in San Francisco, was killed. With his brothers' help, Sodhi opened the gas station in Mesa, and worked long hours to make ends meet. After 9/11, Sodhi and his fellow Sikhs planned to wear buttons proclaiming them to be Sikhs (and not Muslims) from India, and to display prominently the U.S. flag. Hours before his murder, Sodhi donated \$75 to the Red Cross and checked in with his son who was living in San Francisco. The last line of Sodhi's diary reads: "O God, you are my friend. Now the situation is this, that the task you are going to assign me, I am quite ready for it." Sodhi's ashes were taken from Arizona to join those of his ancestors on the banks of the Sutlej River near the holy temple of Anandpur Sahib.

The treatment accorded America's "enemies" at home violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Americans — the freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, the press and from fear and the due process of law, among others. And, while those apparently immune from harassment and intimidation, from the choices of wearing a *hajib* or *sari*, of attending the mosque or *gurdwara*, or of assembling in groups or speaking Hindi, might willingly trade some of the freedoms of those along the margins of the U.S. mainstream for their perceived personal safety, they sacrifice more than the rights of the dispossessed. And, when those excluded

from community membership fight to secure the freedoms denied them, they guarantee the liberties of those who claim them as their birthright.

More than 83,000 African and Asian men registered under the "special registration" program begun by the Justice Department, which required the fingerprinting and photographing of all men over 16 years of age on non-immigrant visas from selected Muslim countries in Asia and Africa and from North Korea. And, ominously, Halliburton reportedly announced on Jan. 24, 2006, that it had received a \$385 million contract from Homeland Security to build detention centers for "an emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs" in the event of a crisis.

The dehumanization of America's internees included their profiling as Muslims (in a study, 95 percent of those registered by the Justice Department were Muslims) and North Koreans, and their cruel conditions of imprisonment such as crowded and frigid cells, being hosed down with cold water, and being shackled and arbitrarily hustled to locations in the middle of the night. As the government's own agency (DOJ Office of the Inspector General) reported in 2003, the roundup of more than 700 Muslim and Arab non-citizens after 9/11 on the pretext of immigration violations was a religious and racial profiling without any evidence that they posed a danger, and a second report detailed the physical, verbal and psychological abuse inflicted upon them and the inhuman conditions of their confinement.

In excess of physical abuse and as in the case of Japanese Americans, the U.S. violated and thereby undermined some of its most basic foundations, including the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law. And, when a coalition of Arab and West, Central and South Asian Americans, Japanese and other Asian Americans; African Americans; Latina/Latino; whites and women joined in a press conference to declare their opposition to racial harassment and intimidation, racial and religious profiling and curtailments of civil liberties, they upheld some of the best ideals of this Republic. Never again, they urged, should bigotry betray the Constitution's promise.

Indeed the civil and women's rights movements broadly and one of its branches, the Japanese American movement for redress, provides the platform for this planned monument at Honouliuli, and for the renewal of a pledge made by countless women and men throughout this nation's history, sealed with their dreams, sweat and blood. This Honouliuli memorial can serve as a powerful reminder for this country and future generations to never forget. Our democracy depends upon that remembrance and resolve. We must never forget.

We will never forget as long as the haunting memories of lonely, deserted camp sites pursue us still. We will never forget as long as the wind blows cold and hot and the dark gives way to light. We will never forget as long as the grass grows green and the raindrops on land find their way to the sea. And, we will never forget, because this story, this memorial is about us all. It is our commemoration as Japanese Americans, as Americans, as one people. And the silences of meaning will be whispered around the campfires of our consciousness, and with the dawning we will stand, stretch and yawn, and return to our homes to sleep in the warmth of the sun.

And, now, let us build — for peace, for freedom, for democracy's sake. **HH**