

**The Loss and Restoration of Rights:
Japanese-Americans of WWII**

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Group Exhibit**

When it comes to WWII, there are millions of survivors with untold stories. John Matsudaira, a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and Hana's grandfather, was no different. He, along with thousands of other Japanese-Americans, seized the responsibility to fight for and maintain their Constitutional rights whilst being incarcerated in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. Through wars fought in courtrooms and on battlefields, Japanese-Americans showcased tremendous effort, personal sacrifice and collective responsibility to regain rights for themselves and for all U.S. citizens.

We began our research by learning more about Hana's family history. Originally our research focused on internment. Then we turned to resources the *Densho* Online Encyclopedia, *Go For Broke* Online Oral Histories Archive, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for first-hand accounts of the liberation of Dachau, and the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. We also used the University of Washington Special Collections for photos and primary source documents in our exhibit— but our greatest sources were, by far, personal interviews with former 442nd members. With family connections and persistent emailing, we were able to interview six veterans who gave us unique and enlightening perspectives.

Although our exhibit focuses on the experiences of the Nisei soldiers of WWII, it also presents the legal battles Japanese-Americans waged against the United States government and the rescue of Holocaust survivors. We incorporated a watchtower, barbed wire, and wire mesh so viewers would feel the restriction and fear that both the interned Japanese-Americans and Holocaust prisoners felt. Barbed wire was also used to divide up the sections of our exhibit, with the final board showing the wires cut, symbolizing how rights were restored. The videos on the 442nd and the liberation of Dachau, combined with a letter written against Japanese-American enlistment in the U.S. Army, help our viewers interact with the exhibit. We collected original

Nisei soldier artifacts such as WWII patches, pins, a cap and also John Matsudaira's 442nd Purple Heart from Hana's family members to supplement our exhibit.

Our project speaks directly to rights and responsibilities of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Japanese-Americans' rights were robbed through the incarceration. As the 442nd formed, many Nisei felt it was their responsibility to prove their loyalty. Yet, some refused to enlist. As a whole, Japanese-Americans felt it was their responsibility to seize their rights and fight for America, —the very country that had restricted their rights and imprisoned them. After the Battle of the Lost Battalion, the 522nd ironically liberated the prisoners of a sub-camp of Dachau, —while their own families were still behind America's barbed wires. In addition to those who fought on the battlefield, others such as Fred Korematsu fought legal battles at home. Korematsu's case against Executive Order 9066 was eventually overturned and he is now acknowledged as a civil rights leader in America. More recently, after 9/11, the U.S. government considered interning Muslims-Americans, but the Japanese-American community stood up for them. Indeed, it is the responsibility of all citizens to fight for and maintain Constitutional rights.