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Three Views of the Attack on Pearl Harbor: Navy, Civilian, and Resident Perspectives

POPULAR UNDERSTANDING of the attack on Pearl Harbor will undoubtedly be colored by the release of the \$135 million epic *Pearl Harbor*, the fifth most expensive film in movie history. Described as “an adventure/romance in which everything blows up at the end,” Disney’s Touchstone Pictures recreated the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on the U.S. Navy as its visual climax with an impressive array of special effects. During the film’s production, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* journalist Burl Burlingame was already at work enumerating the movie’s technological inaccuracies and shortcomings.¹ In a second article which focused on the film’s portrayal of race, Burlingame noted that originally the producers, executives, and director of *Pearl Harbor* said they would spare no expense in accurately portraying the attack—even obtaining the approval of veterans groups. During the filming, however, producer Jerry Bruckheimer “waffled mightily on the subject of accuracy,” recharacterizing his project as “gee-whiz-it’s-just-entertainment.”² With the film’s release on Memorial Day of 2001, a new generation’s perception of the attack will likely forever be influenced by the images and impressions engendered by the film.

Also influential, however, have been the two films used to orient the more than one million visitors a year to the USS *Arizona* Memorial, administered by the National Park Service (NPS) on the Pearl

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Harbor Naval Base. This article will focus on how both films have represented the attack, its origins, and outcomes. While less dramatic than their Hollywood counterparts, the two films nonetheless demonstrate the creation and manipulation of collective memory as much as more commercial products. Particularly telling is the way the accounts differ from one another. The first film was produced in 1980 by the United States Navy; the second was produced in 1991–92 by the NPS in association with Lance Bird of the American Studies Film Center in New York. Together they represent official, public memory in both its military and civilian guises. The following analysis of the films, based on nine months of ethnographic research conducted at the *Arizona* Memorial in 1994, is presented in terms of content (what is or is not told), style (the techniques used to relate the story), and impact (audience reaction).

These official versions will then be compared to the personal memories of residents who survived the attack, as recorded by the University of Hawai'i's Center for Oral History in its five-volume series, *An Era of Change: Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i*.³ Here, I will focus on how private recollections support or contradict the official film versions and with what result. I will demonstrate that the identity of the storyteller (whether institutional or individual) figures prominently in the selection of facts used to convey the story and, consequently, in the stories' impact on the listener—even in instances where storylines and context are virtually identical, as they are in the film versions. However, the narratives are not always what one might predict based on the presenter's identity; and what is omitted from an account is often more telling than what is explicitly stated. While some see this "amnesia" as a characteristically American means of depoliticizing the past,⁴ in the case of Pearl Harbor one can hardly tell the story without assigning, or at least implying, responsibility for what was the greatest Naval disaster in U.S. history. Clearly, these accounts of Pearl Harbor reflect not just multiple perspectives but active interests at work, determining what, in the storyteller's judgment, should be recalled and publicly remembered and what is better left unspoken, unshared, and unrecorded.

While both the Navy and the NPS films convey a good deal of information, the time constraints of the interpretive program and the lack of audience expertise on the subject combine to limit what is pre-

sented to a descriptive account of the attack and what triggered it. This is especially the case with the NPS film since the site's interpretive mission is limited to the attack and its immediate aftermath; i.e., World War II battles (much less Hiroshima) are perforce excluded. The choice of material conveyed by the films is obviously crucial to audience comprehension and interpretation of the event. What the oral histories provide (often as told by the children of those who were adults in 1941) is information on what the attack, its anticipation, and its aftermath cost residents who lived through it. Their stories are of job loss, confiscation of goods and property, shortages, martial law, disruption of lives, and fear. One realizes that, for many, fear existed long before the attack, it was not generated solely by Japanese military action, and it continues to be present to the degree that it precludes open discussion of the past.

In evaluating the gaps and variations found in these narratives, I address the need to explore not only the sources and consequences of official historical "ignore-ance"⁵ but of communal silence as well. For the most striking aspect of this study is surely not that memory of even the most dramatic episodes fades or that it works selectively to further political interests. Rather, it is that so many survivors deliberately drew a curtain of silence over their wartime experience, thereby allowing the story to be told, publicly unchallenged, by those with perspectives greatly at variance with their own. In my conclusion, I investigate the purpose that such silence serves.

THE MILITARY PERSPECTIVE: THE NAVY FILM

One might begin by asking why the Navy film (1980) is included in the comparison since it has not been screened since 1992, the date it was officially "retired." The answer is simple: millions of people saw it over the eleven years it was shown at the USS *Arizona* Memorial, they remember it, and they allude to it in evaluating its successor. More than that, however, the attitudes displayed in the film continue to be expressed by the Navy, as exemplified by the formal remarks made by Admiral Henry Chiles at the 1995 Naval observance of the Pearl Harbor attack: "It's a powerful reminder that we need to always be strong militarily and vigilant in our life as a country. We must not be caught off guard again."

The film's opening scene is also the most memorable, judging by the comments of visitors who have seen both the Navy and the National Park Service films. Viewers frequently make mention of how much they liked (and miss) this scene, in which the names of the men who died on the *Arizona* are whispered while the camera pans over the ship's sunken hull. It produces a somewhat eerie, ghost-like effect. The music heard in the background and used intermittently at the beginning of the film and again at the end conveys a sense of foreboding. Hearing it, the audience is reminded of the ship's ultimate fate as the film progresses with footage illustrating the *Arizona's* service history. The wavy effect used as a transition device also functions as an allusion to the underwater grave of the *Arizona*. It enables the audience to assume the perspective of the submerged ship, looking up through the rippling water while peering into the past. The poetic effect is in sharp contrast to the crisp, condensed prose akin to a ship's log which is used to describe the *Arizona's* service record. It culminates with the vessel's assignment to Pearl Harbor the summer of 1941. The description of the site gives no indication that it was anything but a military installation; i.e., no mention is made of the civilian population of Hawai'i.

The scene then shifts to Asia. A litany of Japanese military campaigns is recited, beginning with Manchuria and ending with Singapore. The description of U.S. reaction to the hostility is noteworthy. There is little mention of diplomatic activity or warnings until the events of December 7 are recounted. By then, it was too late: President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull are shown meeting with ambassadors in Washington, D.C. after Japanese planes were already airborne. The sole note that the U.S. was alert to danger is couched in terms of military preparedness: "Yet the U.S. did prepare in some ways. Congress provided for replacement of obsolete Navy ships." Otherwise, the film continues, "As an isolationist nation, the United States hoped the whole business would go away."

If the civilian branch of the American government does not come across as alert or effective, the Japanese military certainly does. In fact, the Navy film recognizes the professionalism of Japanese forces so explicitly that its assessment has generated more negative feedback from American audiences than anything else appearing in the film or at the site in general. Specifically, the film states that the Japanese operation was "one of the most brilliantly planned and executed naval

attacks in history." Further, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the combined Japanese fleet, is characterized as a "brilliant strategist."⁶ Former military officers employed as rangers at the memorial recognize the objective accuracy of these statements (the very success of the attack would seem to warrant such a conclusion), while understanding Americans' sensitivity on the subject. (The current film refrains from passing judgment.⁷) To further contrast Japanese dynamism with America's seeming inactivity, footage is shown from the Battle of the Bands that took place at Pearl Harbor's Bloch Arena the night of December 6; and the story is told of how the *Arizona*'s band had come in second, thereby winning the right to sleep late the next morning.⁸ The narrator sums up the situation by saying, "Pearl Harbor slept."

In reality, of course, the military was far from asleep. The problem was not its state of readiness, but its failure to perceive where the danger lay. The difference between naive innocence and misjudging a threatening situation can hardly be overstated. The latter assessment is actually attested to in the footage that follows, but not in a way that contradicts the earlier impression of innocent slumber. The destroyer *Ward* had detected and fired upon one of the midget submarines Japan had in the area and reported doing so almost an hour before the bombing. Japanese planes were picked up on U.S. radar, but (mis)identified as a flight of B-17s due in from the mainland that morning. Fatal strategic choices made by the U.S. military are entirely omitted from the Navy film and will be analyzed below in connection with the NPS film where they *are* noted.

The footage of the attack is vivid, much of it courtesy of Hollywood re-creations. Hence, unlike the National Park Service film which utilizes authentic footage almost exclusively, the Navy film shows American servicemen scrambling to respond. No one inside a battleship on that morning would have paused to shoot such footage (or survive if he had), but the Navy film's audience is never alerted to that fact. After almost three minutes of battle scenes, the male narrator returns to tally the losses: so many ships, so many "Navy men and Marines" dead and wounded. No mention is made of the attack on O'ahu's other bases, of Army casualties, civilian casualties, or Japanese casualties for that matter. The attack is arbitrarily limited to the confines of Pearl Harbor, making the story the Navy's to tell.

In sharp contrast to the film's earlier portrayal of passivity and resul-

tant devastation, the salvage and recovery operations are described as follows: "Like the mythical phoenix, the Pacific Fleet returned to fight again. The cry 'Remember Pearl Harbor' rallied Americans everywhere." Having awakened at last, "hundreds of civilian technicians" joined Navy personnel to work "around the clock" at repairing the damage. The result "would stand forever as one of the greatest achievements in maritime history."⁹ Paralleling the earlier recitation of Japanese military actions in Asia and the Pacific, a litany of successive American victories is reeled off. As Geoffrey White¹⁰ has noted, the list concludes with Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Japan, omitting mention of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After footage of the signing of the surrender documents on board the *Missouri*, the music comes up, marking the return to the underwater grave of the *Arizona*. As viewers look at the memorial designed by architect Alfred Preis and the wall of names contained within it, the film concludes with these words:

If we forget December 7, 1941; if we forget over 1,000 men still entombed aboard USS *Arizona*; if we forget that a nation unprepared will sacrifice many of her finest men and women, then we would forget what America stands for and that is why we must remember Pearl Harbor. Homeport still for one of the world's most powerful Naval forces, the United States Pacific Fleet.

To summarize what has been presented thus far, the Navy film is precisely that: the story of Pearl Harbor told from the Navy perspective. It is not unlike a military briefing: full of maps, facts, and figures; short on sentiment—with the dramatic exception of the whispered names so loved by the audience; and structured by sharply drawn contrasts between "us" and "them." Interestingly, these designations could almost as readily refer to "military" and "civilian" (or, more precisely, "Washington officials") as "the U.S." and "Japan." At no time prior to mobilization are American leaders portrayed as particularly capable, much less "brilliant." U.S. military officers, when mentioned by name, are reported as killed in the line of duty. As such, they become candidates for martyrdom, not recrimination. Perhaps this is what the film's audiences (unconsciously) objected to; i.e., not the professional recognition accorded the Japanese by their U.S. counterparts, but the contrasting and unrelieved portrayal of Americans as sleeping, oblivious or, having paid the price for their shortcomings, dead.

What aim would be served by the Navy's presenting such a picture? I suggest the stark contrast made it easier for the Navy to present and argue its case in black-and-white terms: public support of the military equals survival; denial equals disaster. In the post-Vietnam era of the Cold War, the 1980 film would have been a useful tool for garnering civilian favor, as well as a not-so-subtle reminder to officialdom about who it is that pays the price for political decisions. The film concludes by showing that the best defense (i.e., the one that eventually won the war) is the civilian sector working with (for) the military to overwhelm the enemy technologically. If war does not appear imminent, that is all the more reason to remain vigilant. The only alternative envisioned by the film is the whispered names of those at rest in the sunken ship. Thus, the film's usage of the slogan "Remember Pearl Harbor" has both memorializing and proselytizing functions.

THE CIVILIAN PERSPECTIVE: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE FILM

The NPS film tells the same story, but it has been "civilianized" to include the American public. The 1992 film aims at preparing visitors, intellectually and emotionally, for their visit to the memorial.¹¹ Many visitors consider the Vietnam War ancient history, much less Pearl Harbor and World War II. Therefore, urging them to remember something of which they have no memory is seen as futile and self-defeating. The National Park Service film provides more diplomatic history than does the Navy film; its version includes other branches of the service; it relies almost exclusively on authentic footage and photographs; it does not hesitate to name emotions; and it therefore concludes on a very different note, evoking a more subtle range of responses from the audience. The use of a female narrator (actress Stockard Channing) immediately alerts the audience not to expect a gung-ho, John Wayne-style presentation. In contrast to the Navy film's emphasis on imminent attack and eternal vigilance, the National Park Service film uses an historical approach that provides perspective on the events that took place more than a half-century ago. As a result, viewers are given a sweeping, Olympian view which allows them both to see what did happen and to imagine what might have transpired had different choices been made.

However, such a perspective also presents the filmmakers with two problems: making the film relevant to younger viewers and compressing considerable historical material into the twenty-three minutes allotted the film portion of the visitor program. The first problem is solved by engaging the viewer's emotions and imagination; e.g., what would I have done? The solution is due in no small part to Channing's talented reading of the script. The challenge of time constraints is handled by showing Movietone News footage. Viewers see what audiences of the 1930s saw. They absorb the information being presented while maintaining historical perspective on the events given Movietone's dated style of delivery, poor sound quality, and melodramatic musical score. The hard-driving narration stands in strong contrast to Channing's richly textured delivery. Movietone's dramatic presentation is thus tempered by Channing's measured telling of the events' aftermath. Like the Navy film, the National Park Service film includes some background on the USS *Arizona*. However, instead of beginning the film with the ship and leading up to its assignment at Pearl Harbor, the NPS film begins with events in the Pacific, discusses the U.S. response, including military preparations, and then narrows its focus to the ship. Rather than relate the *Arizona*'s service history, the film "civilianizes" the ship by describing it as "a small city gone to sea."

By assuming a noncombatant perspective, the film situates itself above the fray by showing the various parties at work: the Japanese, the Americans, the U.S. government in Washington, the U.S. military in Hawai'i, the Army, the Navy. Such a stance also enables the film to portray events as the result of lapses in judgment and the misinterpretation of data, rather than the seemingly willful oblivion emphasized in the Navy film. Both films cover the same ground and relate many of the same details. But the Navy film gives a sense of inevitability to its telling of the story: this is what one can expect when a nation goes unprepared. The National Park Service film offers no lessons, treating the events as unique and implicitly encouraging the audience to imagine alternate scenarios (e.g., what if the radar operator who spotted the Japanese planes had not been told, "Don't worry about it"). In short, by demonstrating the complexity of the situation, the NPS narrative makes viewers aware of what alternatives existed, which decisions were made, and how orders were carried out. The film footage shown of Roosevelt, Hull, Japanese diplomats, and others does

not convey a picture of inactivity or a state of ease. One does not get the impression that the United States was so politically naive as to “hope the whole business would go away.” Militarily, no one was asleep; everyone did what he thought best, based on tragically wrong assumptions. The fact that these choices appeared plausible at the time gives them their tragic quality.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the National Park Service film more fully describes the military in Hawai‘i prior to the attack than did the Navy film. In so doing, the difference in perspective between the two films is most clearly seen. The NPS film states “The American military knew that a surprise Japanese attack on Hawai‘i was possible, and they thought they were prepared.” It describes O‘ahu’s fortifications and the fleet’s preparing for war with weekly exercises. It notes that the bombers based at Hickam Field were capable of reaching an enemy fleet far out at sea. How could such a seemingly invincible force be caught so flat-footed? As the audience comes to realize, weapons in themselves are not everything; they must be properly targeted. The film continues: believing that the greatest danger was not from a Japanese air attack but from saboteurs within Hawai‘i’s large Japanese population, the Army’s General Short ordered that aircraft be parked wing-tip to wing-tip, in the center of the airfields so they could be guarded more easily against local residents. Their guns unloaded, the planes were easy targets. Their destruction throughout O‘ahu left the Navy completely vulnerable to air attack at Pearl Harbor. The accompanying footage, an aerial view of the parked planes, shows just how easy it was. One frequently hears gasps and groans from the audience as it grasps that fact. When presented with this element of the story, one better understands why the Navy chose to relate its version the way it did: better to claim innocence and imply being hampered by short-sighted officials than to admit the military’s role in its own defeat or the racist assumptions behind its strategy.

The NPS film moves from the aerial view of the airfield to the *Arizona* at anchor at night with “Moonlight Serenade” playing in the background. There are just a few shots of Hawai‘i’s beaches, palms, and a hula dancer; but one does sense that there were also civilians living in the islands whose lives would be changed forever by the attack. The attack itself is conveyed with archival footage and still photos. It gives the impression of devastation without being graphic or gory.

Here no music is used. Instead, the audio track is filled with the sound of explosions, engines, sirens, and the crackle of fire. Unlike the Navy film, ten ships are cited in addition to the *Arizona* and the damage they sustained is recounted. Also unlike the Navy film, no mention is made of commanding officers who were killed in the attack. Despite being pressured to include them, National Park Service personnel felt all casualties should be treated equally and no one should be singled out for recognition.¹² Thus, in the enumeration of the dead and wounded, “sailors, airmen, marines, soldiers, and civilians” are all included. Then the Japanese losses are given. Rather than shifting immediately to salvage efforts as did the Navy film, the NPS film shows the response of the U.S. government and the American people: FDR’s “date in infamy” speech is followed by scenes of young men enlisting and children watching a military parade. Thus, society is shown being mobilized, not just technicians. Here and only here is the phrase “remember Pearl Harbor” used, and it is heard in the form of the song “Let’s Remember Pearl Harbor.”

Having shown a mobilized and united America, the film devotes two sentences to the salvage effort, then turns to the war in the Pacific. Given that the memorial’s interpretive mission limits it to events immediately relevant to the attack, the story of the war is very quickly told. Ships which met (or just missed meeting) at Pearl Harbor, meet again at Midway where “the tide of the war turned.” Unlike the Navy’s film, military victories are not listed, nor is the surrender mentioned. Rather, the screen goes completely blank for a few seconds—long enough to make the audience conscious of its surroundings. Then the film returns with contemporary color footage of the harbor and the memorial, preparing viewers for what they will soon experience for themselves. Here is the final example of the film’s civilian perspective. While the remembrance ritual shown in the Navy film is limited to Naval personnel (specifically, a close-up of a teary-eyed sailor), the National Park Service film shows the annual December 7 remembrance ceremonies which are held at the *Arizona* Memorial Visitor Center. American and Japanese participants draw a slip of paper bearing the name of a deceased serviceman and remember him individually. Not only does the film open up remembrance rituals to American civilians and foreigners, it also lets its audience know non-Americans are welcome to visit the memorial. The film closes by asking,

How shall we remember them, those who died? Mourn the dead. Remember the battle. Understand the tragedy. Honor the memory. Let our grief for the men of *Arizona* be for all those whose futures were taken from them on December 7th, 1941. Here they will never be forgotten.

Thus, the film concludes on a very different note than does the Navy film. As stated by the memorial's (former) superintendent, Donald Magee, "Patriotic groups wanted to use the theme that we always need to be prepared so this doesn't happen again. And that was not our theme . . . I said, 'That's a military theme. That's not what a memorial is about.' How do we remember? We thought about that all along."¹³ To quote filmmaker Lance Bird, "What really mattered was how do you feel about all this when the lights go up? . . . [We] try to quiet them down and let them know that they're going to do something unusual, that may have an emotional effect on them."¹⁴ How does the audience respond? A few write to complain that the film panders to the Japanese. Their comments are balanced by those who complain the presentation is too pro-American. Many visitors feel emotions with an intensity that surprises them: grief, patriotic pride, and a sense of serenity once they are on the memorial itself out in the harbor. For the audience of this film, remembering Pearl Harbor is not about eternal vigilance, but about the futility of war, the brevity of life, and the need to work for peace.

THE RESIDENT PERSPECTIVE: THE ORAL HISTORIES

In October of 1990, National Park Service personnel approached the Center for Oral History at the University of Hawai'i about undertaking an oral history project to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. The 33 people who were eventually interviewed about their memories of the war years in Hawai'i were chosen on the basis of their ethnic diversity and representative lifestyles. Some were Caucasian (both from the mainland and Hawai'i-born), some were Japanese-American, others were of African-American, Chinese, Korean, Okinawan, Filipino, Samoan, or Hawaiian descent. Many were the children of immigrants; a few were foreign-born Italians and Japanese and thus interned during the war. Few were older than their twenties in 1941. Some remembered the period as

exciting and fun; for others it was a time of hardship, uncertainty, and fear. Some saw opportunity and profited from the unprecedented influx of men and materiel; others had their property seized and suffered severe losses. Some later served in the military; more were employed as civilian workers; one was a pacifist; none escaped untouched.

A formal interview schedule was not used; therefore, the same subjects were not covered by all participants. While the reader may regret certain follow-up questions not being asked or an occasional failure to probe more deeply, the 1,782-page transcript certainly provides a vivid picture of life in Hawai'i during World War II. However, the focus here will be limited to material that pertains to the two films' divergent presentations of why the defeat occurred; namely, the issue of military preparedness and, consequently, military-civilian relations in Hawai'i in general and their racist nature in particular. As mentioned previously, the NPS film depicts U.S. vulnerability at Pearl Harbor as the result of the strategic decision to classify the largely rural Japanese population as a greater security threat than the Japanese military. To explain why this should be so, I draw on Gary Okihiro's *Cane Fire*¹⁵ for background on attitudes toward the Japanese, whether aliens or U.S. citizens, living in Hawai'i.

Japanese immigrants arrived in Honolulu in large numbers to work in the sugarcane fields after 1885. As a result of a strike by sugar workers in 1920, the white American oligarchy that controlled Hawai'i sought to replace the predominantly Japanese laborers with other Asians. To do so, it was necessary to change U.S. immigration law. To bolster their case in testifying before Congress about the law, the planters portrayed the conflict not as labor strife but as an expression of Japanese nationalism. While the law remained unchanged, the commission set up to look into the matter identified Hawai'i's problem as "the menace of alien domination" which threatened to "sweep everything American from the Islands."¹⁶ Given the U.S. military's long-standing interest in Pearl Harbor and the triangular equation drawn between Hawai'i's economic prosperity, political stability, and white American elite, military interests and sugar interests coincided.

On January 15, 1921, the U.S. Secretary of War approved a defense plan for O'ahu that included martial law and the internment of enemy aliens. In 1929, the Military Intelligence Division proposed classifying both Japanese aliens and their American-born children as enemy

aliens. In 1932, Connecticut Senator Hiram Bingham went so far as to introduce a bill to replace Hawai'i's territorial government with control by the Navy and a governing commission on the grounds that American democracy was ill-equipped to deal with the Japanese menace.¹⁷ (By then the oligarchy feared being overthrown via the ballot box.) As Okihiro concludes, "Pearl Harbor merely triggered the gun loading of the previous two decades, or, more correctly, of the anti-Japanese movement that spanned the entire range of a people's history, from plantation to concentration camp."¹⁸ While one would not expect material of this detail to be part of the visitor center films, it certainly provides perspective on why American planes were being guarded in the middle of airfields.

If the military was dismissive of the sighting of enemy submarines and the radar detection of Japanese planes, the local populace was even less mindful of the possibility of an attack. Residents heard the planes and explosions but went calmly about their business, convinced the noise was the result of routine military maneuvers. Far from being unprepared and asleep, the U.S. military had drilled so frequently and intensely that Hawai'i's civilian populace could not tell the difference between practice and the real thing. One woman who was a secretary at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in 1941 described her memory of the attack as follows. She had planned to go swimming with a Naval officer the morning of December 7. She telephoned him to confirm and, hearing the noise from her apartment in Waikiki, asked what was going on. He said he did not know, but would get back to her. She then turned on the radio and learned it was an attack. No one was to go out or use the telephone, and doctors were to report for duty. Her roommate, who had been in the shower, did not believe the news, dismissed the noise as "army maneuvers," and drove off to meet friends. Over breakfast her Chinese guests remarked on the din, saying, "If we weren't in Hawai'i, we'd think a war was going on." The roommate returned to Waikiki almost three hours after the attack began, still unaware that anything was amiss.¹⁹

One finds this reaction over and over in the transcripts: disbelief based on knowledge of prior U.S. military activity. As one eyewitness told it, "Every Sunday morning for weeks and weeks the military had had practice with all kinds of bombs going off all around, boats at sea shelling. And you would think it was a war then. So when the Japanese airplanes were bombing Pearl Harbor, we just thought it's another

exercise. Almost everybody did.”²⁰ Those who learned about the war from the radio were the lucky ones. Some of the interviewees lived or worked in the path of the bombers and saw the planes firsthand. The daughter of Korean immigrants, Agnes Chun went to sleep the night of December 6 exhausted from her first day on the job as a cashier at S. H. Kress and Company. At 16, she was proud of the \$1.90 she had earned for those eight hours of work. She was still in bed when she heard the planes the next morning.

I heard commotion outside, and I got up. When I went out, they said, “Oh, the war. There’s a war.” There’s planes flying around and when I looked up, we saw a plane flying, and it was with the round red circle.

So we ran inside and as we were listening to the radio, about 9, 9:30, we heard this thud-like (sound) . . . [In a building across the lane] right under the veranda, there was a huge hole. We all ran and were looking at the hole . . . [when] some kind of uniformed people (came) running. They told us to evacuate. So the whole neighborhood had to evacuate . . .

[They spent the night in a house that had just been constructed by in-laws but was not yet occupied.] From there we looked towards Pearl Harbor, (and saw) the smoke coming up . . . We were all scared, and especially at night when they told us all the lights had to be out.²¹

For island residents, the next step was not the salvage and rebuilding sequence presented in the films, but the complete disruption of their lives under martial law.²² Interviewees related stories of curfews, black-outs, and long evenings with nothing to do but get on each other’s nerves. Gas and alcohol were rationed, schools were closed, and the military commandeered whatever it needed: land, housing, equipment, businesses. Prices were frozen and so were jobs. People were fingerprinted, registered, and given identity badges to wear. Some individuals were assigned jobs without benefit of training. Having arrived on December 3, 1941 to play a football game in Hawai‘i, Paul Tognetti stated, “We didn’t even know what Hawai‘i was. And when we got here, during December 7, O‘ahu was being bombed and we asked each other, ‘What’s O‘ahu?’” By December 8, he and his San Jose State teammates were military police defending O‘ahu. They had been asked to work at the police station and agreed to do so rather than sit around the hotel wondering what was going to hap-

pen. They were given military police arm bands, 1918 steel helmets, and riot guns; then sent out on patrol to guard 'A'ala Park against invasion by paratroopers. To quote Tognetti, "So I was there with my little riot gun and hoped nothing would come in. And martial law was declared. Everybody had to be off the streets. And the marines were on the waterfront, and anything that moved, their machine guns went all night."²³

Neither the Navy nor the National Park Service film mentions that most of the damage done on O'ahu away from U.S. military installations was caused by friendly fire: anti-aircraft shells that missed their target (although park rangers are quick to mention this fact in their talks on the subject). However, few realized this at the time and the islands were rife with rumors of a Japanese invasion. As time passed and fear receded, members of the business community chafed under the many military restrictions, especially those made in the heat of the moment without thought as to consequence. For those servicing the military, it was a time of economic boom. A number of interviewees, especially women, spoke of the job opportunities that came their way and how much they enjoyed them, economically and socially.²⁴ Others were equally cognizant of tension within families when daughters became emotionally involved with soldiers who often failed to return to the islands. Relations between local male civilian workers and belligerent and/or drunken servicemen sometimes erupted into violence. Much more often, however, one reads that people just "took it" because "in those days, what the military did went unchallenged."²⁵

It is interesting that several interviewees specifically mention Southern servicemen when speaking of racial attitudes. Ernest Golden, an African-American from Georgia who came to Hawai'i to escape Southern racism, speaks very tellingly on race relations in the islands compared with those on the continent. More representative of the situation, however, are the experiences of Japanese-American interviewees, many of whom had parents who were still citizens of Japan at the time of the attack. If other residents of Hawai'i became fearful after the attack, Americans of Japanese ancestry (AJAs) were anxious well before and for much longer afterward. They realized they were under suspicion by the military,²⁶ and they were afraid that one false step, one careless word, or even a misinterpreted look could trigger their doom and that of their families. What is disturbing about read-

ing their accounts is the realization that for many the pain, fear, and humiliation lasted decades after the war. The short, emphatic responses given below speak volumes:

Q: How did you feel about the war against Japan?

A: I don't feel nothing at all. And they treat me just the same, so I never feel nothing at all . . .

Q: Did you think you were more for the Japanese side or for the American side or did it matter?

A: No, I never feel . . . I never take side, any side. That part, no, I no ill feeling against Japan or American or whatever.

Q: What about the other people? The other people in the Japanese community, the other Japanese neighbors, how did they feel about the war?

A: I don't know, *no*. Never ask or. . . .

Q: Were there things like Japanese (-language) newspapers and radio that you folks had?

A: Japanese newspaper? No, I don't know.

Q: Not over here [i.e., Hilo].

A: No.

[*after a break*]

Q: How much did you know about what was happening on the other islands like on O'ahu?

A: No.

Q: No news?

A: No, I don't know.

Q: Did you hear anything about how things were though, on the other islands?

A: No.

Q: So just mostly only Hilo things?

A: Yeah.

Q: How much did you know about the war and how things were going? Who was winning and things like that?

A: Oh, that. Only, you know, whatever you hear on the radio and this and that. Newspaper. (Other than) that, we do not know.

Q: How did you feel about the war and what was happening?

A: Oh, I don't feel nothing at all. Get war or not. Only thing we feel is that we cannot go fishing [his occupation], that's all.²⁷

When the topic shifted to fishing, the interviewee answered with a response that was six times longer than any given answer above. It appears that while the interviewer was probing for facts and memories, the interviewee felt he was being interrogated on a subject that was better left untouched. It is not until well into the exchange that the interviewee realized that the knowledge base the questioner was asking about referred to American news media and not contraband sources of information. Even when family members ask questions about wartime activities, they are rarely successful in getting people to talk.²⁸ One woman who was a teenager during the war discussed talking to her *nisei* father about life then.

We were surprised, even to this day, he had remembered a lot of things. He corrected me. And yet, when I question him about anything that happened after we got evacuated, a lot of things, even if he remembers, he won't tell me about it. He won't tell me about it. And it seemed as though he either blocks it out, or he finds the easiest way out [is to say], "No, I don't remember."

. . . so it must be something—that period of time is very painful. And either he doesn't want to remember, or he doesn't want to talk about it. Every now and then, if I bring something up, he would say yes or no. But especially when I tell him things about Mom's part [she suffered a nervous breakdown] . . . he just won't answer anymore, and I see tears in his eyes. So it's very painful for him, so I just drop it.

When asked if she herself ever speaks about what happened to her family during the war, she replied,

After the war, only a very few people knew. It was mostly my supervisors and strangely enough, all of my supervisors were Caucasian people. But they were some of the nicest people I have ever met . . . So with my experience with the military ousting us [forced evacuation and permanent loss of farmland abutting Pearl Harbor], and yet I got employment with the military, and there were so many benefits given to me

through them. Like I say, all of 'em were Caucasians, and they were really, really nice.²⁹

It is worth noting that for many residents of Hawai'i, the war was their first opportunity to meet Caucasian-Americans who were from the working- and middle-classes, rather than the elite. It proved to be a revelation. If a local Caucasian testified to the reliability of AJAs or intervened in some way to protect their interests vis-à-vis the military governor, that act of kindness is still remembered today and the person cited by name.³⁰ Such individual actions stood in sharp contrast to official policy which, for example, denied an Okinawan woman access to her husband's body while it was in a hospital mortuary. The man had been fishing at sea during the attack. The following day his wife received the news he was at Queen's Hospital; it was unclear if he was dead or alive.

Security guard was over there all, so they won't let us go in . . . My cousin went down and asked, "Oh, can the wife just see?" And they refused. You can't go in at that time, everything was restricted . . .

[Her sister-in-law worked for a prominent Caucasian who took her straight into the hospital mortuary where she could identify her brother's body and confirm his death for the widow.]

Q: So you only got to see your husband when you—when Mr. Richards came along with you.

A: My sister-in-law went, yeah. That's when I knew he died . . . But at that time, I didn't know if over here people had killed or Japan plane had killed . . . I didn't inquire to find out anything about that . . . at first they weren't supposed to talk nothing about this.³¹

More affecting than interviews with internees (who in this collection speak of the boredom of incarceration and having limited access to their families³²) is the story of Ruth Yamaguchi. Her family lived poised on ruin for many long months. Her paternal grandmother was from Japan and had strongly opposed her son, Ruth's father, when he renounced his Japanese citizenship in 1940. At 14, Ruth was the oldest daughter still at home and she had to look after three very lively younger brothers. Her mother was totally absorbed with a sickly baby and suffered a nervous breakdown after the attack. The family had just purchased nine acres of farmland adjacent to Pearl Harbor and

moved into a three-bedroom house on the site in August of 1941. One morning a few weeks after the attack, they were ordered off their land before sundown by military officers. Whether the confiscation of land, home, and furnishings was due to geography or race was not determined until long afterward. Her family stayed with another Japanese-American family and was, in turn, joined by two more families—for a total of twenty people living in one tiny house.

Ruth describes her life as a teenager, caring for the younger children while her mother became increasingly unstable, her baby brother faded, and her father exhausted himself working the farm and also at a salaried job. Afraid to antagonize the officers who lived in their house or to endanger their neighbors by stopping to visit with them, the family endured crowded conditions and the bickering of the four families' children. Ashamed to reveal the family's evacuation and frantic about her mother's health, Ruth was unable to concentrate on school and dropped out to take a job at the army exchange. The most memorable character in her story, however, is her grandmother, a Japanese citizen and literally hysterical about the fact—not, as one might expect, because she feared American reprisals, but because she feared Japanese invaders would kill her as a traitor for living in Hawai'i. She was also convinced that she was the sole cause of the eviction of her son and his family. Ruth's exhaustion was compounded by having to reason continually with her panicky and guilt-ridden grandmother. Yet, recalls Ruth,

No matter what the military did to us, Dad did not hold anything against the U.S. government . . . all these years [he was] very loyal to America, regardless of what they did. And I remember one time he did tell me that . . . no matter what they did, he felt very fortunate they did not do anything to Grandma. She was an alien in the family, yet he felt very fortunate they did not do anything to Grandma, because he heard of all these different stories, no matter how old they were, they were taken away and interned.

Summarizing her feelings, Ruth expressed the unresolved conflict in the situation:

In those days, nobody fought the government, nobody's gonna question or stand against the government. No matter even if you're Japanese, if you're born American Japanese, you're very loyal to America. I

thought (about) my father, when he cut off his citizenship, saying that he's an American citizen.

And yet I thought about people like my Grandma, where, during the war, they were persons without a country. She did not belong to America, she did not belong to Japan. And I thought about that, and I could not help but feel so sorry for people like my Grandma. Whether they went with Japan, it was wrong, whether they went with America, it was wrong for them. It must have been emotionally hard for them.

And yet when I think about our situation, there was nobody to stand up for us. You didn't dare fight the government, you did what you were told . . . You all had to get out if the government told you. It was not a case of standing up for your rights . . . People who were interned, everybody knew about them. But it seemed as though we were part of American history that happened, and yet unknown or forgotten. But to bring it up fifty years later, it hasn't been easy, because I guess for people my age, we really remember a lot of things. There's part of our childhood that we lost.³³

Several themes stand out in reviewing the oral histories: the total upheaval people underwent, the power of the military, and the part race played in shaping one's experience. It seems the younger one was at the time of the attack and the less responsibility one had, the more exhilarating one found the change—unless one was of Japanese ancestry. People bore up as best they could under the heavy hand of martial law and quickly became engaged in their wartime occupations. For many, and especially for women, it meant economic opportunity and undreamed of career possibilities. However, for AJAs without Caucasian contacts, it was a trying time. Fearful of being identified as or with the enemy, forbidden to congregate in groups, made vulnerable by elderly parents who retained Japanese citizenship,³⁴ their language forbidden, their land and goods confiscated whenever the military deemed it necessary, and without any means of redress for a half-century, Hawai'i's AJAs remained silent. The silence engendered by fear and later by humiliation was compounded by the wartime need for secrecy. It was not wise to be thought to know too much, especially if one was not Caucasian. The oral history transcripts document that silence and lingering uneasiness, making them all the more valuable as a complement to the films shown at the *Arizona Memorial*. In particular, they are evidence of what else happened that day on

O'ahu—this time from the perspective of residents: disbelief, chaos, threat, and challenge.

CONCLUSION

I have analyzed three stories of Pearl Harbor as told from national as well as from local perspectives. I have examined the official histories told at the site as well as the personal recollections of those who lived there. Most particularly, in looking at the thrust of the stories and the priorities of their presenters, I have compared what was and is being told with what has been and still is omitted. In focusing on the narratives told by the Navy, the National Park Service, and local residents, I am mindful that myriad other versions exist.³⁵ However, the films and oral histories analyzed above were selected for the light they shed on the creation of public memory by virtue of 1) their sharply contrasting perspectives and 2) the legitimacy they are accorded given their firsthand association with the site. Even if one compares only the films, one is struck by the difference in perspective, aim, and impact. Yet neither film deemed it necessary to allude to those who lived on the land surrounding the harbor at the time of the attack. Perhaps it was thought that a superficial reference to such a complicated and sensitive issue would be worse than no mention at all. However, silence on the subject has meant that few local residents relate personally to the memorial. Some feel hesitant to visit, still unsure of their welcome. In response, the National Park Service has instituted special programming for residents in recent years, including ranger presentations on civilian life during the war.

How do the three stories differ and with what effect on their audiences? In the Navy version, initial military defeat culminates in ultimate victory and the admonition to be eternally vigilant. Presumably, audiences were meant to leave the theater in a patriotic, determined frame of mind. The National Park Service film prepares its viewers for their visit to the memorial by balancing a national historical perspective with a personal sense of loss. As a result, visitors often describe themselves as experiencing both serenity and grief while viewing the *Arizona* from the memorial, the latter straddling the barely visible ship where it sank in the harbor. The stories of Pearl Harbor's wartime residents vary widely, but there are common threads in the descriptions

of life disrupted by a drastically changed world. Not just military lives were lost at Pearl Harbor, but a collective way of life that had developed in the islands. The threat to peace was not just external in origin but internal in the form of racism.

While the individual stories of change and personal suffering may not be part of the national canon of collective memory concerning the attack, they are significant for their insight and provide an emotional counterpoint to the stories of death and military bravery. Sometimes the greatest challenge lies in just carrying on. This was true of no group more than AJAs, and their tradition has been to carry on in silence. As an explanation for this silence, I refer to Jacob Climo's analysis³⁶ of the motives of holocaust survivors: a desire to shield one's family members from direct knowledge of a painful past, an inability to voice the humiliation and grief, and a desire to establish balance and control in one's life. As was suggested earlier, for some, fear is still present—not the fear of death or imprisonment, but the fear of starting trouble and/or being forced to endure further humiliation by having one's identity or loyalty questioned. Why activate racial prejudice?

Lastly, there is the desire to forget those aspects of life that no longer fit one's image, especially if a great deal has been sacrificed to achieve that identity. This, of course, is the case with the AJAs who chose to demonstrate their loyalty during World War II by joining the military and serving with distinction—particularly in the legendary 100th Battalion. These individuals returned home determined to implement the change they felt they had paid for in advance with blood and tears. When stories from the World War II era are told, as they increasingly are, the focus is on military service not the internment camps. The emphasis is on experiences held in common with other (non-Asian) Americans rather than the role of internee which was socially unacceptable, psychologically painful, and politically disadvantageous. Since the preferred image must be acknowledged by others for closure to be complete,³⁷ this is the story that is presented for outside consumption. But in certain contexts, when it is safe to do so, bits of other experiences are also revealed—reluctantly, painfully, and haltingly—as each side approaches the other to reach understanding.

This analysis has sought to compare the content, aims, and impact of on-site accounts of the attack on Pearl Harbor, as well as to explore

how these narratives are shaped by the silences of official omission, cultural reticence, and/or personal reluctance. The subtexts of military might, uneasy political relations, and racial tension—when spoken of at all—are still handled gingerly, not openly or candidly explored. If the Pearl Harbor narratives are a classic example of how collective memory reflects mainstream civic culture while popular memory offers radically different perspectives, it is also true that sensitivity on the subject has increased. In 2000, the National Park Service digitally altered footage in its orientation film at the insistence of Japanese-Americans who felt a scene with a Japanese fieldworker implied that some members of their community had been subversive.

NOTES

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¹ Burl Burlingame, "Off and On Target," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 10 Apr. 2000 <<http://starbulletin.com/2000/04/10/features/story1.html>>. Burlingame is also the author of *Advance Force Pearl Harbor* (Kailua: Pacific Monograph, 1992).

² Burl Burlingame, "Race and Reality at War in the Movies," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 29 Apr. 2000 <<http://starbulletin.com/2000/04/29/editorial/special.html>>.

³ Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change: Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i*, 5 vols., (Honolulu: Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i, 1994).

⁴ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991) 701.

⁵ Michael H. Frisch, "The Memory of History," *Presenting the Past*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Ray Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986) 5-17.

⁶ The third element that American audiences regularly took exception to and interpreted as pandering to Japan involved the film's explanation of Japanese motivation: "Japan was being squeezed, cut off from oil, money frozen in the United States . . . Japan felt that her back was to the wall."

⁷ The story behind what was or was not included in the NPS film is a complex one. Suffice it to say that the NPS reviewed well over a dozen drafts of the

script and screened several cuts of the film before the final product emerged. Park personnel wisely made interested parties such as the Navy, the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, and others privy to the process. While delaying production and driving up costs, their inclusion also prevented any serious backlash. If disgruntled viewers write to complain about an aspect of the film, the superintendent can respond by citing the agencies that supported it.

- ⁸ According to Park Superintendent Donald Magee, this is one of the myths of Pearl Harbor. The band did not win nor did anyone sleep late. The band that did place second dedicated its trophy to the men of the *Arizona*, hence the confusion.
- ⁹ No mention is made of Japan's failure to bomb the base's fuel storage and repair facilities which, of course, made the U.S. repair effort feasible. The Japanese had feared that by lingering they would be caught at sea by American retaliatory forces, so they left without carrying out this objective. It was Japan's biggest—some say, only—mistake in the attack.
- ¹⁰ Geoffrey White, "Moving History: The Pearl Harbor Film(s)," *Positions* 5:3 (1997) : 709–44.
- ¹¹ Park Superintendent Donald Magee cited the following reasons for producing a new film: research had revealed historical inaccuracies in the old film, the master print had been misplaced so new copies could not be made for the visitor center, and the fiftieth anniversary of the attack was regarded as an opportune time for taking a fresh approach. However, production delays resulted in the film's debuting almost a year late.
- ¹² Magee, Donald. Personal interview. 24 February 1994.
- ¹³ Magee, Donald. Personal interview. 24 February 1994.
- ¹⁴ Bird, Lance. Personal interview. 3 March 1994.
- ¹⁵ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Cane Fire: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawaii 1865–1945* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991).
- ¹⁶ Okihiro, *Cane Fire* 95–97.
- ¹⁷ Okihiro, *Cane Fire* 161.
- ¹⁸ Okihiro, *Cane Fire* 274.
- ¹⁹ Mary Osterloh Aiton interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 1–24.
- ²⁰ Samuel Lindley interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 65–92.
- ²¹ Agnes Eun Soon Rho Chun interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 1549–1620.
- ²² The O'ahu defense plan, originally prepared twenty years previously, swung into operation and remained in effect with regard to martial law until long after the danger was past: October 24, 1944.
- ²³ Paul Tognetti interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 125–62.
- ²⁴ See interview with Mary Hendrickson, the daughter of Filipino immigrants on Kauai. She became a member of the Women's Air Raid Defense, the first uniformed, all-female unit to serve during World War II. Mary Samson Hendrickson interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 193–248.
- ²⁵ See Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawai'i* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) and Gwenfread

- E. Allen, *Hawai'i's War Years, 1941-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1952).
- ²⁶ Samuel Lindley, a Quaker pacifist, was the only interviewee to cite physical evidence of the pre-attack suspicion directed toward Hawai'i's Japanese community. "A week before Pearl Harbor, I was downtown. And I saw on the front of the railroad station . . . they had set up machine guns. And instead of facing out to the ocean, as you might expect, they were facing the street, where they figured Japanese in Hawai'i might attack the railroad station. And also, there were machine guns set up in the tower of Kawaiaha'o Church where the clock is, along King Street [facing the territorial legislature] in case there was some kind of local insurrection, I suppose." Samuel Lindley interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 65-92.
- ²⁷ Mitsuru Yamada interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 645-72.
- ²⁸ Cf. Lawrence Reginald Rodriggs, *We Remember Pearl Harbor: Honolulu Civilians Recall the War Years 1941-1945* (Newark, CA: Communications Concepts, 1991) xiii concerning his Portuguese father's flat refusal to discuss his experience at Hickam Field where he was a civilian volunteer ambulance driver.
- ²⁹ Ruth Yamaguchi interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 1621-1722.
- ³⁰ See interviews with Harriet Kuwamoto, Etsuo Sayama, Harry K. Suga, and Loraine Yamada, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 279-378, 923-92, 1191-1250, 1753-82.
- ³¹ Kimiko Watanabe interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 1305-24.
- ³² Joe Pacific and Toso Haseyama interviews, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 163-92, 1723-52. But see also Okihiro, *Cane Fire* 214.
- ³³ Ruth Yamaguchi interview, Center for Oral History, *An Era of Change* 1621-1722. Mrs. Yamaguchi is among the 136 former residents of Pu'uloa whose applications for redress were approved by the U.S. Justice Department in January of 1994. Each evacuee received \$20,000 and a formal apology for being evicted on the basis of race from a designated military strategic area.
- ³⁴ It should be pointed out that until 1952 Japanese resident aliens did not have the option of becoming naturalized citizens.
- ³⁵ Particularly the oral histories collected by Rodriggs, *We Remember Pearl Harbor* and Robert S. LaForte and Ronald E. Marcello, *Remembering Pearl Harbor: Eyewitness Accounts by U.S. Military Men and Women* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1991).
- ³⁶ Jacob J. Climo, "Prisons of Silence," *The Labyrinth of Memory*, ed. Marea C. Teski and Jacob J. Climo (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1995) 179.
- ³⁷ See Molly G. Schuchat, "It Only Counts If You Share It," *The Labyrinth of Memory*, ed. Marea C. Teski and Jacob J. Climo (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1995) 134.

