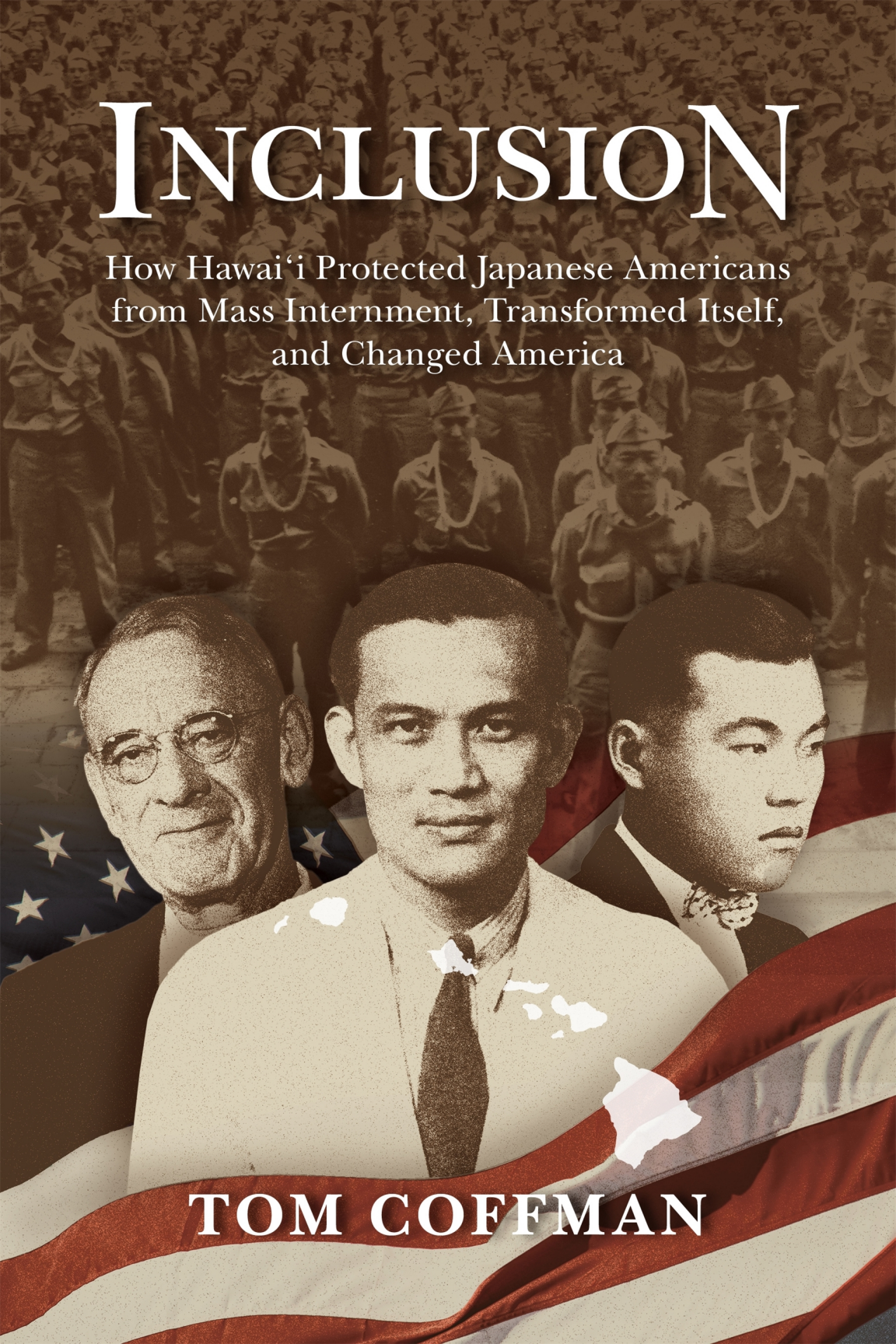
INCLUSION

How Hawai‘i Protected Japanese Americans from Mass Internment, Transformed Itself, and Changed America



TOM COFFMAN

Inclusion

Inclusion

How Hawai'i Protected Japanese Americans from Mass Internment, Transformed Itself, and Changed America

Tom Coffman

University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

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Cover design: Aaron Lee

For Lois again and forever,
and for Harry, Nate, and Makena,
Justin, Jackie, and Alina;
Eli and Micah;
Anya, Rose, and Reyn;
and Mosiah

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Prologue

The American period of Hawai‘i’s long history flows from two events. The first is the American takeover of 1898, which I described in my book *Nation Within*. The second is the crisis brought down by World War II, which I explore here. In the aftermath of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, the dark question for Hawai‘i was the fate of its large Japanese-ancestry population. This was a question that went to Hawai‘i’s character no less than to the character of the United States.

As the U.S. government began indiscriminately rounding up people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast, a combination of public officials and private citizens in Hawai‘i resisted. Audaciously for an overseas territory in a war zone, they attempted to create an alternative course. How and why is the arc of this book.

In the course of the work, I saw instances in which the relationship between Hawai‘i and Washington, D.C., was interactive. Through this two-way process, Hawai‘i contributed to changing the policies, behavior, and standards of the federal government.

I first glimpsed the possibility of such a pivot point as a young political reporter for the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. The moment was 7 a.m. on a particular day in January 1971 when, by appointment, I rang the doorbell of Washington Place. Washington Place was originally the home of Hawai‘i’s last monarch, Lili‘uokalani, and was by then the residence of the elected governor of Hawai‘i, John Anthony Burns. Mr. Burns answered the door himself, just as he sometimes answered the house telephone. We passed through the queen’s household area to a family-like breakfast table of relative informality, and there we started on the first pot of coffee.

When I told him I hoped to write a book about the politics of Hawai‘i, he well might have thought my youthful interest exceeded my understanding. He was sixty-two years old and was widely thought of

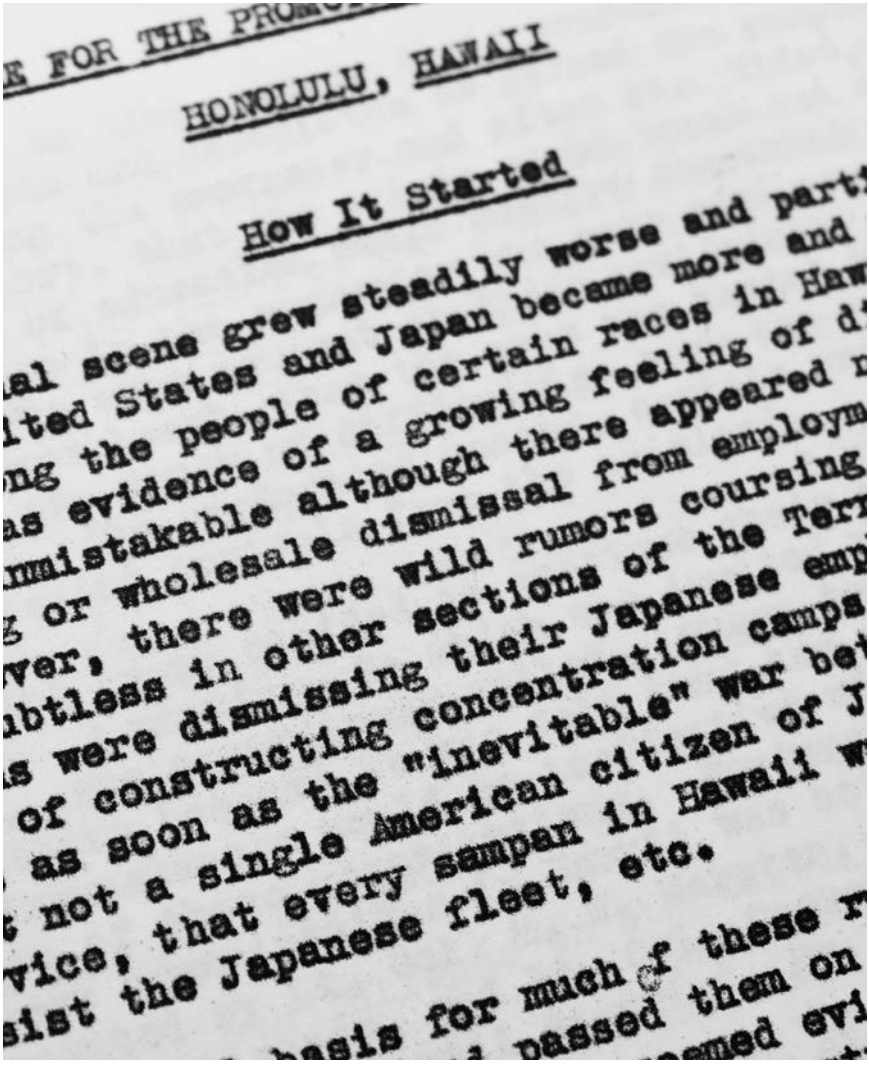
as a living legend. He had led the Hawai‘i democratization movement in the 1950s, guided the statehood bill through Congress in 1959, and most recently had been reelected to a third four-year term as governor. I began by asking that most routine of twentieth-century questions, “Could you talk to me about where you were and what you were doing on December seventh?” He grimaced. Possibly he thought I knew the answer, although I did not. He paused, as if traversing a distance, then spoke with a growing intensity.

On December 7, 1941, he was an acting captain in the Honolulu Police Department. He had met with the agent in charge of the Honolulu FBI office, a man named Robert L. Shivers. Together they reviewed the internal-security arrest list. Burns described himself as saying, in response to certain names, “I know so-and-so, and he is a damn fine American.” Sometimes, he said, a name would be removed from the list at this last moment. He and Shivers then supervised the arrests of several hundred people. (I was, for my part, astonished that he was involved in anything of the sort, in that his political base was particularly strong among Japanese American voters—a reaction I kept to myself.)

Reviewing my interview notes, unearthed from a closet, I see the names of people then new to me. Burns often mentioned Hung Wai Ching and Shigeo Yoshida, as well as other names I would ask him to spell, such as Katagiri: K-a-t-a-g-i-r-i. He talked about the crucial importance of the prewar months to minimizing the arrests. He talked for more than five hours, and it was neither statehood nor the rise of the Democratic Party that rocked the cradle of his narrative, but what had occurred in the crisis of war.

In my subsequent book, *Catch a Wave,* I nonetheless wrote only briefly about the war period. While this may now seem extremely naïve, it reflected the times. We were in the trough of a great wave. World War II was deep history, and Hawai‘i was moving on. What Burns thought of as monumental had been obscured.

Fifteen years later, in 1986, a group of Japanese Americans in Honolulu organized themselves around the idea of actively appreciating individuals who had befriended them during the war. This was a significant moment in the community’s reworking of the past. The Japanese word retrieved for the occasion was *kansha,* which has to do with gratitude. The *kansha* observance filled the Honolulu Civic Center. Prominent



E FOR THE PRO

HONOLULU, HAWAII

How It Started

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How It Started. In a moment when the future of Hawai‘i hung in the balance, Shigeo Yoshida described the background and contacts of the Council for Interracial Unity.

among the several honorees still living, the Chinese American Hung Wai Ching was thanked with a special enthusiasm.

I was subsequently introduced to Mr. Ching. He was past eighty years old, but his energy level was astonishing. He quickly got into his story. "Do you understand?" He waved the air. "You get that?" He loved irony. "You know who wrote the general's speech? Calmed the people down? Japanese guy! Shigeo Yoshida! A Buddhahead wrote that speech!" His laughter was uproarious.

He said the real story was in the files, but where were the files? Without validation, he feared being taken for a self-aggrandizing old man. "What about my meeting with Roosevelt?" he asked. "Who's going to believe that?" He often referred to Shigeo Yoshida as if Yoshida could vouch for him, but Yoshida was by then deceased. "Shigeo did all the writing," he said, "Shigeo was the idea man." Because Yoshida was of Japanese ancestry, he did not have a security clearance. As a result, he took care of the work in Honolulu while Ching, with his high-level clearance, was on the move, traveling often and talking to people in positions of power. Ching framed a stage whisper with his inordinately long fingers. "Shigeo was the brains. I was the mouth." He winked.[1]

In 2004, I was researching a documentary film on the crisis of the home front in wartime Hawai'i. The director of the University of Hawai'i's Archives and Manuscript Collections (UHAM) called my attention to three vintage cardboard boxes of possibly interesting matter. They had come to light in a recent move into the library's new wing, but the contents had never been accessed. They were filled with aging brown folders, bulging with notes and memos, with labels written mostly in pencil, such as Internment, Emergency Service Committee, 100th, 442nd, VVV, Haole, Chinese, Filipino, Maui, Kona, and, yes, Burns and Ching.

These were the files.[2]

Inclusion

PART I

From the Ground Up

CHAPTER 1

On the Ground

WITHIN THE REALITIES OF HAWAI'I, the time horizon for the onset of World War II was not a day but more than four decades. From the 1898 American takeover forward, the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor connected a previously independent small nation to the downward drift of world events. As the United States military developed the harbor, it was often described as America's Pacific Gibraltar. When its guardians so famously slumbered, Americans were inveighed to focus on one thing: *Remember Pearl Harbor.*

The U.S. Navy was crippled, and more than twenty-four hundred Americans were dead. Terrified people across the country demanded to know how Japan could have attacked with such success. Roughly, the national answer became this: a faceless enemy had laid the groundwork from within. Surely Japan's triumph was a matter of subversion, espionage, and sabotage.

In an attempt to counter the growing hysteria, Shigeo Yoshida, then a young teacher, wrote an account of a small interracial group in Honolulu that had met for more than a year in anticipation of a war. The Council for Interracial Unity, as Yoshida called it, had determined that if war broke out, it would attempt two things. One was to prevent a mass internment of Hawai'i's large Japanese-ancestry population. The second was to maximize participation of Hawai'i's people in the war effort.

Yoshida's account likely was written hurriedly in mid-December of 1941, nine or ten days after the bombing. Adapted to the demands of the moment, it was akin to jamming a foot in a closing door. Flawlessly typed, it ran to five single-spaced pages. The original passed among several of the most important figures in the territory of Hawai'i, and an onionskin copy came to rest in the first of Yoshida's cardboard boxes.[1] Yoshida recounted how fewer than a dozen people of varied racial ancestries had gathered the previous year at a residence in Honolulu

to address what might occur if Japan and the United States went to war. The group, he wrote, was brought together by "a rising tenseness." He wrote of rumors that the Caucasian firms were dismissing their Japanese employees, and that the U.S. Army was building concentration camps for use when "the inevitable war" began. He wrote of fears that "not a single American citizen of Japanese ancestry would be inducted into service. . . . Misinformation could," he said, "destroy the unique, though not perfect, interracial good will which has been built up in Hawaii." Optimistically, he had in mind a time frame that looked through the war and past it: "How we get along during the war will determine how we get along when the war is over."

Those present at the meeting were of Japanese, Chinese, and Caucasian ancestries. The connecting person was a patrician figure named Charles H. Hemenway. Yoshida eventually was to name his two sons after Hemenway, but as of 1941 Yoshida simply described him as older and more established, while others were younger and "just coming into positions of leadership." Yoshida himself was thirty-two, and his closest associate, Hung Wai Ching, was thirty-five. Additional people were invited to discussion meetings. Some came and went, but a handful stuck together, attending repeatedly.

The meetings revealed three points of view. One, war was not sufficiently imminent to do anything. Two, the situation was quickly worsening, "but nothing could be done about it by way of an organized movement." This second group nonetheless wanted to continue meeting with the idea of reinforcing interracial friendships. The third group held that the onset of war was only a matter of time, and they must redouble their efforts to maintain a stable community.

The latter was a grand notion. Being an overseas possession of the United States, the territory of Hawai'i lacked the governmental mechanisms to achieve such a goal. This relegated the means to community relationships so elemental as to not usually be associated with the hard stuff of policy and history. These included personal acquaintances, work relationships, social practices, and social standards, or what members of the Council for Interracial Relations referred to as the spirit of *aloha*.

The group became a committee. In addition to Hemenway, Yoshida, and Ching, it consisted of Dr. Miles H. Cary, a renowned high school principal, and several other individuals who had worked with one another through the YMCA. From the federal intelligence agencies, there were

Courtesy of Ching family album.

Courtesy of Ted T. Tsukiyama.

Courtesy of Yoshida family album.

Charles Hemenway *(center)*, the father figure of the University of Hawai'i, mentored both Hung Wai Ching *(left)* and Shigeo Yoshida *(right)*.

two people: the agent in charge of the Honolulu FBI office, Robert Shivers, and the chief intelligence officer of the U.S. Army's Hawaiian Department, Colonel M. W. Marston. Taken together, their life experiences illuminated a territorial Hawai'i that often was described as languid and unchanging but was not quite what it appeared.

By accident of family decisions, Shigeo Yoshida was neither a city boy nor a country jack. He was from a semirural part of Hilo, the most populous town on the Big Island of Hawai'i. As a result, he grew up with insight into the two disparate lifestyles that dominated the territory. One was the inherently backward and hierarchical world of the plantations. The other was an emerging and more open urban society.

Shigeo was the fourth of eight children of Naohiko and Ichi Yoshida, who had immigrated as a couple in 1898, the year of Hawai'i's forced annexation to the United States. With duty-free access to the American sugar market, plantation agriculture was expanding rapidly, and the planters were luring Japanese workers by the tens of thousands, giving the lie to their often-rumored fear that Japan would take over Hawai'i.

Naohiko Yoshida was twenty-six years old, the son of a samurai. As such, he was the inheritor of the two swords of the warrior class, but he himself was without status in Japan, the entire class having been displaced by mechanization and firepower. It may reasonably be inferred that Naohiko had looked to Hawai'i to recoup the status that his family had lost to modernization. There is no record of him laboring for the

plantations. What did survive was an account in which he attempted to function—without apparent success—as a headman within a plantation camp made up of Japanese families, who tended to be isolated as a matter of calculation by the plantations and also as a result of their large numbers and their inclination to stick together.[2]

By 1910, the U.S. Census listed Naohiko as a sugarcane farmer and his wife Ichi, six years younger than he, as a laborer on a "home farm." Two Japanese boarders were listed at their address as cane cutters. Together the notes suggest that Naohiko might have become an early day sharecropper, or "contract farmer," as it was called. This was noteworthy because it provided him a margin of autonomy that wage labor did not. Naohiko acquired a horse, then a car. He bought a flat-crowned straw boater hat, a white shirt, a necktie, and knee-high boots of the sort worn by plantation overseers. The 1920 census reported that he was able to read and write, meaning he had become literate in English. In contrast, Ichi was marked "No" and "No," meaning she neither spoke nor read English. Initially their neighborhood in Hilo was entirely Japanese, but with time they were joined by Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, and Koreans.

That Naohiko and Ichi had emigrated as a couple was an exception to the usual pattern, in which the Japanese male came as a bachelor and, some years later, either returned to Japan or sent to Japan for a bride. Their arrival as a previously married couple accounted for creating American-born children who were nearly a full generation older than most Nisei. Yoshio, a son, was born shortly after their arrival, followed by two girls. Shigeo was born in 1907, followed by four more children. Yoshio went to sea on Japanese merchant ships, returned to Hilo, lived next door with his young wife, and took up carpentry. The two older sisters likewise went to work at a young age. As the fourth child, Shigeo Yoshida benefited from his place in the birth order. Where his older siblings went out to earn wages, Shigeo would have the luxury of pursuing an advanced education.

Through the American public school system, Yoshida began to realize his intellectual potential. He was an A student, a member of the student council and the literary society, and the president of his class. He also was a writer and a debater, skills that sharpened the use of logic and the vigorous presentation of ideas. His high school's faculty was made up entirely of Caucasians from the U.S. Mainland, some of whom were highly educated. His English teacher had a doctorate degree from the

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Archives

ACA, Amherst College Archives
AH, Archives of Hawai'i
BOHP, Burns Oral History Project
DDR, Densho Digital Repository
HA, *Honolulu Advertiser*
HI, Hoover Institution
HSB, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*
HWCP, Hung Wai Ching Papers
NARA, National Archives and Records Administration
NDMC, National Defense Migration Committee, 77th Congress, Tolan Committee
PHA, Pearl Harbor Attack, Joint Congressional Committees, 79th Congress
RASRL, Romanzo Adams Social Research Laboratory
UHAM, University of Hawai'i Archives and Manuscript Collections

About the Author

Tom Coffman's first window into Hawai'i was as chief political reporter of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (1968–1973). A major character of *Inclusion,* John A. Burns, was governor, and Japanese American war veterans prominently populated the State Legislature and congressional delegation. Since 1973 the author has worked as an independent writer and producer. He is the recipient of the State of Hawai'i Award for Literature, three Hawai'i Book Publishers Association awards for Best Nonfiction, and numerous documentary film awards.

The connecting thread of his work is the social and political development of Hawai'i in context of the American nation and the Pacific Rim.

He has often been involved in community projects. He helped write the OHA Culture Plan/Draft One. He served on the storyline work group of the historical gallery of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i, as well as director/producer of its theme film, *Ganbare.* He wrote and directed the Judiciary History Center's film on martial law. He has spoken at institutions, to community groups, and to classes of young people across Hawai'i and around the United States.

His books include *Catch A Wave; Nation Within: The History of America's Occupation of Hawai'i; The Island Edge of America; I Respectfully Dissent: A Biography of Edward H. Nakamura;* and *Tadaima! I Am Home.*

His PBS films include *O Hawai'i, From First Settlement to Kingdom; Nation Within; Arirang—The Korean American Journey; Ninoy Aquino and the Rise of People Power;* and *First Battle: The Battle for Equality in Wartime Hawai'i.*