



JAPANESE AMERICAN VETERANS ASSOCIATION

C/O AMOUR, LLC, 1313 DOLLEY MADISON BLVD. #104
MCLEAN, VA 22101

Reply to:

Gerald Yamada
10316 Mountington Court
Vienna, VA 22182
gyamada@goingforwardstrategies.com

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Open Letter about “Allegiance”:

The play “Allegiance” is scheduled to open in San Diego, CA, on September 19th. The producers of the play have received criticism about a pre-opening version of the play and they may make some changes before opening. However, we understand that they do not intend to change the play’s characterization of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), Mike Masaoka, who was National JACL Secretary at the time Executive Order 9066 was issued, and the Nisei soldiers. Thus, in our opinion, the play’s plot is objectionable in that it misleads the American public and is a disservice to the Japanese American community. The comments in this letter are based on a review of a pre-opening version of the play.

The play tells how two groups showed their loyalty to the United States during World War II. In telling their stories, the play pits those who volunteered to serve in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team against the “resisters” (aka “No-No boys” and draft resisters). The play also implies that JACL and Masaoka colluded with the government in shaping various governmental policies. These policies related to the forced evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry, Question 27 and Question 28 in the loyalty questionnaire, segregation of “resisters” in Tule Lake WRA camp, and misleading Japanese Americans into volunteering for military service.

First, the play gives the false impression to the American public that the evacuation and unjust imprisonment of persons of Japanese ancestry would not have happened but for the aid provided by JACL and Mike Masaoka. In reality, JACL and Masaoka had no ability to influence Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Army to evacuate persons of Japanese ancestry from the western United States. They should be applauded for their efforts to minimize the pain and harshness of the Executive Order’s implementation during a time of war hysteria and within a culture of hostile and deceitful governmental officials.

Moreover, the play makes no mention of the actions of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who signed Executive Order 9066, and LTG John DeWitt, who implemented Executive Order 9066. These actions were later found to be the result of “prejudice, war hysteria, and lack of political

leadership.” Rather, the play would mislead the American public by attributing unsubstantiated actions to Japanese American leaders who were attempting to bring reason to absolute chaos confronting the community. The play appears to be pandering to the American public with the implicit message: “We don’t blame the government for what happened to us during World War II. JACL and Masaoka did this to us.”

What happened to persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II was overt racial profiling. The lesson learned from that experience is that we must guard against racially motivated governmental policies. This play, “Allegiance,” only serves to dilute or confuse the lesson that the American public should take away from the sacrifices and suffering of those who bore the unjust effects of Executive Order 9066.

Furthermore, there is no question that there was an angry division in 1943 within the Japanese American community between those who volunteered to serve and “resisters” on the matter of loyalty. The play attempts to make the case that the “resisters” made the right choice and that those who volunteered were deceived by Masaoka and made the wrong choice. By fueling this controversy, the play attempts to re-open old wounds and does a disservice to both groups.

Both choices were difficult and had permanent life-altering consequences. In hindsight, both groups should recognize that there was more than one way to show one’s loyalty. Neither choice was the right one or the wrong one. Today, we should celebrate both groups for following their convictions rather than fueling this hostility by continuing to pit these two groups against each other.

Finally, the play uses fictional characters except for Mike Masaoka. The play assaults his good name and reputation by alleging his direct involvement in shaping the government’s controversial policies. Let us hope that the play’s producers and investors can substantiate their apparent character assassination of Masaoka. We will leave it to Mike Masaoka & Associates, a consulting firm that continues to do business in Washington, DC, to raise any challenges related to possibly malicious damage to its business reputation caused by “Allegiance.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerald Yamada". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Gerald Yamada
JAVA President

cc: Mike Masaoka & Associates
Washington, DC