

Fear Itself: Tanforan and Public Memory

When your country has been attacked by a distant enemy, you want to do something about it. So you look for something to do, even if it's likely to be useless.

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When the news of Pearl Harbor reached San Francisco, Emile Hons' grandfather went down to Ocean Beach to shoot at submarines. Luckily for everyone, there weren't any.

His grandfather was not the only freelance defender staring out at the Pacific Ocean. Hons wrote recently: "Yes, he did say that there were more than a few 'civilian troops' out there that first night. I'm not sure how many night[s] that continued... probably as long as the beer."

After September 11, I can understand the impulse: when your country has been attacked by a distant enemy, you want to do something about it. So you look for something to do, even if it's likely to be useless.

The Pearl Harbor attack of December 1941 happened before Hons was born. We talked about it because, as manager of Tanforan Park Shopping Center in San Bruno, California, he is curator of a site where the U.S. government did something worse than useless.

A plaque in the parking lot at Tanforan marks the San Francisco Bay Area's high-water line for injustice in the name of national security. The mall stands on the former site of a racetrack where, in 1942, some 7,800 Bay Area people of Japanese descent were imprisoned by the U.S. government as potential saboteurs. They were held there, living in horse stables under primitive conditions, for four to five months. Then nearly all were taken by guarded trains to wait out the war behind barbed wire in the alkali desert of Topaz, Utah.

Nationwide, almost 120,000 Japanese Americans were imprisoned under President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. The order also imprisoned some Italian and German immigrants, but its greatest force was reserved for people of Japanese descent, regardless of the strength of their ties to the United States.

Over the past year I have been talking with people about public memory of Tanforan's role in the Internment — with a former guard, former prisoners, activists, historians, administrators, and also with oblivious dwellers in the Californian eternal present. Tanforan makes a good starting point for thoughts about the need for public memory, even of

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unhappy events. It also is food for thought about how injustice can seem necessary at the time it is perpetrated, about the way this country has sometimes threatened its Constitution, and about how the Constitution and the country have always, sooner or later, recovered after all.

Places like Tanforan deserve more space in Americans' sense of historical geography. The existence of Japanese internment sites is a needed reminder that the United States was not immune to the 1940s world pandemic of racism, and more generally that this country's freedoms have never really been safe.

Of course there were worse places to be in 1942. That year there was war all over the world. There was genocide in Europe and China and Southeast Asia. The Japanese military had just killed thousands at Pearl Harbor. But it doesn't follow that, as is sometimes said, the Internment should be judged — and, implicitly, excused — "by the standards of wartime." A democracy should judge its behavior by the standards of a democracy. It is bad enough that this constitutional democracy locked up civilians behind barbed wire, under constant unearned suspicion, in rugged conditions, for three years, solely on the basis of their ethnic origin.

Potential for domestic sabotage was given as the reason for the Internment, but no Japanese American was ever found to have committed any such act. A study by the historian Roger Daniels suggests the government's main justification for the Internment was a report by "an unidentified Treasury Department official" that was noticeably alarmist even at the time. It claimed, for example, that 20,000 Japanese in the San Francisco area were, in the historian's phrase, "ready for organized action," although there were not 20,000 Japanese Americans in that part of California at the time. A second report, from a committee headed by Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts, falsely claimed that the Pearl Harbor attack had been assisted by Japanese spies in Hawaii.

The Internment affected U.S. citizens of Japanese descent as well as new Japanese immigrants — people of all ages and levels of education, none ever proven to be saboteurs, most not dissenters of any kind.

In the early months of what was then called the "evacuation," Japanese Americans were technically free to move east of the Sierra on their own. But in fact those who tried were mainly turned back by official and unofficial racism. The government repeatedly labeled Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens" and announced a growing series of restrictions on their daily lives — orders to turn in radios, cameras and weapons, curfews, travel restrictions. Some neighbors turned nasty, equating local gardeners and professors with faraway killers. Eventually voluntary migration from the eastern half of California was forbidden too. That left the "relocation centers."

In telling the Internment story it is hard to choose the right words. People who talk regularly about the Japanese American Internment (also now called the Incarceration) are for good reason careful to avoid both the original government euphemisms, and terms that might elide the U.S.

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camp experience with the horrors that were unfolding in Europe and Asia, particularly the Nazi genocide. Thus "temporary detention center" has become the most common formal label for small short-term prisons like the one at Tanforan, which at the time of their existence were called "assembly centers." Advisedly, carefully, the label "concentration camp" goes to the long-term "relocation centers" like Topaz, Heart Mountain, Manzanar and Tule Lake.

Former prisoners just say "camp."

The families detained at Tanforan had been made to leave behind their homes and most of their possessions. They lived crowded into horse stalls that still smelled of manure. Memoirs describe the mess hall as badly and unhygienically run, with food insufficient by the standards of normal civilian life, especially in the first weeks. Okubo wrote in her illustrated memoir, *Citizen 13660*, "We had to make friends with the wild creatures in the camp, especially the spiders, mice and rats, because we were outnumbered."

Tanforan functioned as a prison for less than six months — from late April to mid-October 1942 — eventually holding 7800 civilians from San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley. Although the Tanforan incarceration was comparatively short, it was emotionally memorable as the period when free people learned how to be prisoners.

Internment prisoners had no idea how much worse to expect. Tsuyako "Sox" Kitashima, who lived four months in a stable at Tanforan, said that when the camp's population boarded the trains for Utah, a rumor circulated that they would all be bombed to death on arrival. Kitashima said she didn't put the rumor wholly out of her mind until she saw the rows of new barracks at Topaz. They wouldn't build new barracks only to bomb them, she reasoned.

The Topaz camp, with its extreme temperatures, windstorms and perpetual alkali dust, detained most of the Tanforan prisoners for the remaining three years of the war. Kitashima was an assistant barracks block manager there. She summarizes her own term of detention crisply — "I lived out of two suitcases for three years and four months and just replenished it from some orders." The term "orders" referred to items from mail-order houses like Sears Roebuck. In its own way, the big Sears department store at Tanforan is one of the mall's stronger links to its wartime past.

Kitashima remembered the military police guards as "trigger-happy" and not to be trusted. At the Topaz camp, a trigger was in fact pulled memorably one day. An imprisoned UC Berkeley art professor, Chiura Obata, sketched the scene from witnesses' accounts: a man named Hatsuki Wakasa, walking near the fence with his dog, apparently did not hear a sentry's warning and was shot to death.

The historical monument at Tanforan is an unusual combination of markers that only hints at the complicated politics of memory behind it. As you enter the mall's main driveway from El Camino Real, the part you

are likely to notice from your car is an Italian bronze statue of a horse and jockey in full gallop. The horse is Seabiscuit, world's top equine money winner in 1938, who ran here in the glory days of Tanforan Park racetrack. It's on a traffic island, nicely landscaped with shrubs and flowers.

On the traffic island there are four plaques set against the shrubbery around the stone base of the statue. One plaque honors Seabiscuit. Another is a memorial to Maurice O. "Hap" Smith, who developed the mall with his partner Frederick Nicholas. A third plaque recalls the Tanforan track's history as an airstrip for pioneering aviators. It notes that Tanforan was the takeoff point for the world's first shipboard landing by an aircraft. (Tanforan's other main aviation record is not mentioned on the plaque: local historians claim a plane taking off from Tanforan was the first ever to drop a bomb from the air.)

The fourth plaque mentions the Internment:

"Tanforan Racetrack Japanese Assembly Center: Racetrack opened in 1899 and had racing seasons until it burned down in 1964. Many famous horses raced and won here. In 1942, Tanforan became a temporary assembly center for over 4,000 persons of Japanese ancestry who were to be interned for the duration of World War II."

Fred Nicholas is nearly sure he drafted that plaque. As best he can remember, it would have been first placed around 1975 — an unusually early date for an Internment commemoration. Most of California's Internment plaques are dated 1979 or later because they were placed in response to a late-'70s national campaign for redress by the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL). Nicholas, whose company still owns a part interest in the mall, knew the Tanforan story from sad personal experience. He was there in 1942 as a reluctant Army draftee assigned to military police guard duty at the camp.

Last winter he answered my questions stoically in a phone interview from his home in Los Angeles, where he is active in arts organizations and the American Civil Liberties Union, and where in 1970 he was the founder of a nonprofit legal aid office, Public Counsel. He spoke steadily and slowly:

"I was assigned to military police up in the San Francisco area, and the first assignment I had, I was a private, and I remember being part of the squad that went from house to house in the Japanese community and delivered orders for them to vacate their houses, and later I was part of a detail which helped them leave, helped them get their stuff out and guided them and drove a guard truck to the... relocation depot."

He spent three or four months at Tanforan — the camp only operated for a little over five months. During that time he "walked perimeter" in uniform and helmet — "an assigned post, with a rifle which was loaded." Four hours on, four hours off. "I had two tours a day, and then was reassigned to other duties and then back." With the other soldiers he camped in tents at the racetrack.

"I remember I was up on one of the guard towers with the lights, and it looked like a prison... I was 21 years old, I had just come from senior year at USC in journalism, and I was very, very upset about it."

"I became friendly with various of the Japanese who were interned there. They used to give me notes or they used to sit by the fence where I was guarding." He said he ran errands, bought clothing and food for people that they couldn't get in the camp. "It was a very traumatic experience for me. It was very difficult for the people behind the fence and it was very difficult for some of the guards. I'm not saying all of them, but some of them, like me...."

"Most of the people that I talked to were young, mostly girls and young men who had come out of Berkeley, taken out of school, or other schools in the neighborhood, and so we used to talk. And I became friendly with one of the girls behind the fence, and I corresponded with her for many years during the time I was in the Army, and later met her after I got out of the army and became a lawyer, and so I had this correspondence relationship with this young girl who was from Berkeley, who was about my age, and I learned all about her plight, her difficulties, and her families. It was a sad duty for me. But it was also interesting and rewarding, because I did make friends, not of the soldiers but of the people being guarded."

"...I mean, I would be on duty at three or four o'clock in the morning and there would be people out there talking to me... We'd talk about everything. Politics, religion, the state of the world."

I asked, what about changing the situation? Was it possible to change the situation?

"No, it was not possible."

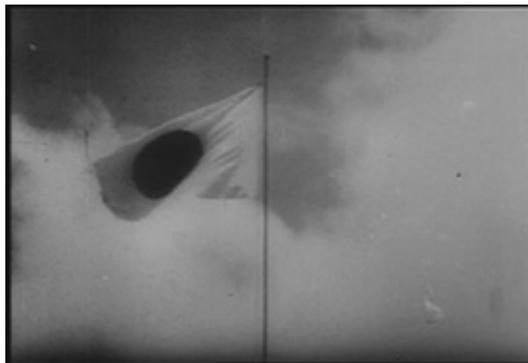
They did talk, though, about the strange fact "that they would do this in California and not in Hawaii, which has more Japanese and was closer to the action." (Some Hawaiians were later interned selectively.)

Nicholas never met Fred Toyosaburo Korematsu, the sometime Tanforan prisoner who was arrested for evading internment. Korematsu lost two famous Supreme Court appeals in 1943 and 1944, but lived to see his conviction overturned and his defense of civil liberties honored by President Clinton. Nicholas said he did study the Korematsu case in law school, and also wrote an article as a student about racial discrimination in the U.S. armed forces.

Nicholas paused to comment that the otherwise famously liberal Justice William Douglas supported the decision denying Korematsu freedom, and that Earl Warren, later known for his Supreme Court civil rights decisions, was governor of California at the time. (Justice Hugo Black wrote the two Korematsu opinions, in both cases with Douglas' agreement. Douglas wrote the December 1944 opinion in *Ex Parte Endo* that allowed internees to leave the camps but did not condemn the Internment itself.)

Why would someone like Warren have acted as he did? "It was time of war

and the people were hysterical and the people didn't know what the hell they were doing. Yeah, I sort of understand it now. I didn't understand it then. 'For the good of the country,' that's what it was."



Fred Nicholas had only a dim memory of his friend and correspondent from the other side of the fence. He knew her first name was Midori; he misspelled her maiden name; he didn't know her married name. But he did remember she had become a publicist for the producer Michael Todd, late husband of Elizabeth Taylor. Once, in the 1950s, "I was sitting in my office one day minding my own business and the phone rang." It was his old friend, with a lunch invitation. She introduced him to Todd and the three of them talked over lunch at Todd's studio. That was the last time Nicholas saw her.

Midori Shimanouchi Lederer is not only a former colleague of Michael Todd, but the founder of Japanese American Social Services, Inc. (JASSI). The JASSI nonprofit organization, which Lederer created in her own retirement, helps Japanese American elders in the New York City area with immigration papers, housing and public benefits — services much like those Public Counsel provides in L.A. She answered my email with a phone call one evening — a bright voice with a generous laugh, long distance all the way from New York.

"Fred Nicholas is a great friend of mine and I can't think of him as 80 years old, but I'm 77 myself." She hadn't seen him since that lunch in the '50s. "I was kind of sweet on him, you know."

Her side of the Internment story began in 1941, when she was a student at the elite Lowell High School in San Francisco. Two distant older brothers were in Japanese government service but she considered herself an American "jazz fiend." Her chief experience of racism was trouble getting into jazz clubs with her white friends. Once, arriving to hear Duke Ellington at Sweet's Ballroom in Oakland, she was told to "come back on Colored Night." She offered to stay in the car but a friend talked her past the man at the door, promising, "No one will know. She'll pass."

The restrictions began in early 1942 after Pearl Harbor. First the curfew and five-mile travel limit kept her from going to clubs. Then she and her family were prisoners at Tanforan. Her friends played the music for her that she couldn't go out to hear any more. "I said, 'oh, wow, gee, that's great' — but they were all white kids and they didn't go to camp and they didn't have to go."

A Communist friend urged her to do as she was told — "she thought I had to do my duty." (Lederer commented tartly that the friend was speaking after the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Up until Hitler attacked the USSR in June 1941, the Communist Party had opposed U.S. entry into the war.)

"I became a Norman Thomas socialist as a result because they thought camp life was miserable."

She voted against the 1944 re-election campaign of President Roosevelt — the president whose Executive Order 9066 authorized the Internment. "I didn't vote for him. I voted for Norman Thomas. So there."

Lederer is still angry. Like most of the 7800 Bay Area "evacuees" who filled Tanforan, she was moved on with her family to the more permanent Topaz camp on the Utah alkali flats. Her father died there after a long-term paralysis.

"I get a lump in my throat when I think of camp life. I've had a lot of therapy and I wish I could get over it."

Recovering her cheerful persona a moment later, she added, "I had some good times there too — I really did."

Unlike most Tanforan prisoners, Lederer made it out of the Topaz camp after a few months. "The Baptists were good to me and they bailed me out." She and her first husband — an orchestral timpanist who she met in camp — were married in New York City.

After the war Lederer began her career as a publicist, eventually working with both Michael Todd and Elizabeth Taylor. She has not been back to San Francisco in fifty years and said she does not care for the place: "After all they kicked me out and I remember that they kicked me out for a reason."

Thirty-five years ago she met and married Peter Lederer, a civil rights lawyer and Austrian Jewish refugee who shared her support for Norman Thomas' socialist presidential campaign. Mr. Lederer now serves on the board of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Tanforan's Internment commemoration is small, though not by comparison with many other U.S. sites. Some former Internment camps have no marker at all.

The Internment is discussed at some length on the [Tanforan mall's own web site](#). However, on my first visit to the mall, the guard at the information desk had no idea the plaque existed, and a brochure available at her desk omitted mention of the Internment from its brief "History" section.

The most complete public information available at the mall about the site's history was in the WaldenBooks near the food court. The store sold me *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment*, a book of artwork and Internment memoirs edited by Kimi Kodani Hill. Professor Obata of UC-Berkeley, held at Tanforan with Berkeley's other Japanese American academics, organized an art school for fellow "evacuees" and made valuable sketches of daily camp life: the Goodyear Blimp flying over the stables and barracks; a July 1942 sketch of the first vegetables raised at Tanforan; a man rowing a handmade boat on the ornamental lake that a group of imprisoned landscapers built in the racetrack infield.

And I looked around the fluorescent-lit carpeted Waldenbooks and thought, this happened right here, so why do I feel like I could be standing in any mall in the world?

Emile Hons' own office at the mall is full of clippings and memorabilia. As an amateur historian and sometime archeologist, he takes a philosophical long view of the Internment: "It's an embarrassing part of history, but it's history." In our interview last year he spoke at length about his own support for commemorating the Internment as an injustice. "Never forget," he said — though he also commented, "I'm sure there are numerous veterans who went through some rough times in the Pacific who have a different opinion."

On another visit to Tanforan last fall I met Krishna Suppiah, owner of Write On Time II Japanese Anime and Gifts, who knew the Internment story but said no customer had ever asked about it in his four years at the store. For him, as for many people, it was hard to pick the right words. "So, this was — right here — a conc- — a camp?"

After talking with Suppiah I met several shoppers and store employees who either did not know the story or did not want to be interviewed. In fact I was beginning to feel as though I was making things up until I got to the hairdressing station of Elsa Espinosa, daughter of a history buff and sister of a newspaper reporter. "It used to be a concentration camp and then it used to be a racetrack or something," she said. No, Ms. Espinosa said, people don't talk about it. Our talk was news to another lady in the salon. Given an explanation, she winced — "ewww."

In an interview last fall, San Bruno local historian Darold Fredericks was pessimistic about general public knowledge of Tanforan's role in the Internment. "Most people don't really have any concept. They don't know that it's a racetrack hardly."

He expressed sadness about the Internment and regret at not knowing more about it, but seemed to feel snubbed by local Japanese American commemoration efforts. "It's very hard to talk to those people, to tell you the truth."

I mentioned a recollection of local JACL activist Richard Nakanishi's that some townspeople had opposed a prominent Internment memorial by arguing it would be vandalized. Was vandalism a real danger? Fredericks said yes. My notes show uncertain, thoughtful phrases next: "There's still a lot of resentment against Japanese, whether they're Americans or not.... During the Second World War they taught us to hate the Japanese and now you're supposed to turn around and say you love them.... It's very contradictory that we put the Japanese and not the Italians or Germans [in camps]... I don't know if it's the exoticness of the Oriental culture or what." Later, he said, "It's a strange thing — they weren't thought of as criminals." And farther on in our talk, "They weren't risks, and everybody knew it."

John Tateishi, executive director of the JACL, said that years after the Internment, in the 1970s, "The younger generation demanded of the

parents that they talk to them about it." Some, he said, were angry with their parents for accepting their imprisonment quietly, "not understanding that there was no choice" — that the government said "go, or we start shooting."

The JACL's own role in persuading people to go is still controversial. Lederer said she is a "reluctant" member of the JACL because she had "terrible fights" with the late wartime JACL leader Mike Masaoka — "He is alleged to have rounded us up and said we should go like quiet good hundred-percent Americans and do as we were told."



Tateishi himself was a child in Manzanar, and remembers thinking of "America" as a distant place represented by light-skinned faces in passing cars outside the fence. He, too had his disagreements with Masaoka: "I grew up very critical of the JACL for its role at the

outbreak of the war and its role in counseling the Japanese American community to cooperate."

But when he confronted Masaoka at their first meeting in 1976, he got an explanation that gave him pause. Masaoka told him the federal authorities had made clear threats: "if Japanese Americans didn't cooperate, it would be done by force... there would be blood on the streets and maybe people killed."

"He said to me, 'What would you do if you counseled people to resist and not go — if there's one child or one woman killed, could you live with that for the rest of your life?'"

Tateishi said he once discussed the federal threats with John Jay McCloy, who as Assistant Secretary of War was one of the Internment's chief administrators. He quotes McCloy as saying, "That's true, we did say that, because it was true, there would have been bloodshed."

The wartime JACL leaders were "all young, all completely inexperienced in dealing with the federal government." Tateishi said. "This was not a government that was aggravated. This was a government that was actively hostile." And the time was the 1940s, when "it was never assumed that you had the rights of a white person."

For Tateishi, the difficulties that faced the early JACL blunt any criticism made in hindsight. "With all bravado now I can sit here and tell you I would have told them to go to hell, but in all honesty I don't know what I would have said."

It took the indignation of the 1970s generation to break more than 30 years of public near-silence about the Internment. For years, Tateishi said, many of those who were imprisoned as adults had refused to talk

about the camps, partly out of stoicism, partly out of internalized shame — a feeling that they must have done something wrong to deserve being rounded up as presumptively disloyal to the United States.

In San Francisco, Kitashima said there was real and feigned ignorance after the war. She tells a story of white customers entering a store newly reopened by internees, asking cheerfully, "Where have you guys been?" as though they didn't know. She adds soberly, "I can't believe that. I think they were pulling our legs."

Life went on. For Fred Nicholas, other subjects crowded the Tanforan detention out of his mind. The rest of the war was eventful for him: service in Italy, Africa and the Philippines, a captain's rank, a wound, and a Bronze Star. Then work as a United Press reporter, law school, and years as a Los Angeles attorney and developer.

After the last train left for Topaz, Tanforan spent the rest of the war as a Navy personnel depot; then it lasted almost twenty more years as a slowly failing racetrack. Local newspaper accounts show it closed in the early 1960s; in March 1964 the property was sold to Sunset International Petroleum Corporation, which announced plans to build a "master-planned community" there. There was a suspicious fire on July 31, 1964 (Hons, the current mall manager, calls it "the one that wasn't arson even though it started in about five buildings. Go figure."). A bank foreclosure followed some time later.

Around 1968 Nicholas re-entered Tanforan's story, this time as a developer in partnership with Hap Smith. They bought most of the former racetrack property to build a mall. (The north end of the old track is now occupied by the separately owned San Bruno Town Center retail plaza.) Tanforan Park Shopping Center opened in 1970 — the same year Nicholas founded Public Counsel.

In preparation for building the mall, Nicholas and Smith hosted a dinner for local officials. Talking with the local police chief, he heard for the first time "what a trauma it was for the city at that time."

"It was an upsetting situation. And these are small-town people, and all of a sudden you have what's tantamount to a prison camp.... You remember — well, you wouldn't remember — that Tanforan was a very popular racetrack and people used to go there."

Hard to imagine it all, standing next to a plaque in a modern parking lot. Everything here is generic postwar suburbia. There are no old buildings in sight, nothing that belongs to the 1940s. From here you can't see the huge military cemetery off to the northwest or the "U.S. Government Property" signs on the other side of the street (the government has kept some of the land it took over here during the war; part of the property now houses a federal records depository).

In 1942 there were high fences here, families living in carelessly whitewashed horse stalls, bitter conflict between compliant and dissenting factions among the prisoners, a censored camp newspaper

called the "Tanforan Totalizer", a camp art school, laundry, mud, manure smells, flies, vegetable patches, a girls' club that ordered matching jackets on which to embroider "Tanfoettes," and U.S. Army military policemen searching for contraband — or, like Nicholas, chatting through the fence.



(Lederer said, "He was chastised for talking to me. He didn't tell you that, but he was chastised for talking to the inmates.")

Even Sox Kitashima had trouble finding her bearings at modern-day Tanforan. She said she walked around the mall parking lot a few years ago with a student documentary film crew trying to find the site of Stable 25, where she had shared a horse stall with her mother and three adult brothers. The only old things that could serve her as a frame of reference were a distant line of gum trees and the 200-year-old El Camino Real road that passes the Tanforan mall. She finally gave up. And Sox Kitashima does not give up easily. She is a cofounder of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations that finally, in 1989, secured \$20,000 payments for each surviving former Internment prisoner.

Nakanishi, an active San Mateo County JACL member and compiler of a Japanese American community history for the Peninsula, wondered last fall what public attention the Internment would get now that the reparations effort has succeeded. "A lot of work has been done, but people — I don't know — They're not interested in past occurrences, which is really sad, because it's bound to happen again if we don't keep our guard up."

A look at the history of Tanforan's public image shows how difficult it in fact was to get the racetrack's Internment history officially recognized as worth remembering. From the time the last prisoner left Tanforan on October 13, 1942, to the time around 1975 when the mall's Internment plaque was first displayed, not much seems to have been said in public about the Tanforan camp. Okubo's book was published in 1946, and some government and academic studies came out, but the subject was not popular.

Correspondence preserved at the San Mateo County Museum shows that in 1973 the mall managers applied to have Tanforan declared a state historic site. Don Frate, then the Hapsmith Company's public relations representative, put the emphasis on Tanforan's aviation history. The Historical Landmarks Advisory Committee disagreed, suggesting the site's history as a racetrack was more important. The Internment was mentioned only as a sidelight.

That changed in the 1970s. Seizo Oka's clipping file at the Japanese American History Archives tells the next part of the story:

In 1978 Yasa Abiko, vice president of the San Francisco-based *Nichi Bei Times*, started an unsuccessful campaign to place a new plaque at Tanforan that would recognize the Internment as a definite injustice.

In 1979, on the February 19 anniversary of Executive Order 9066, a JACL "pilgrimage" from San Francisco to Tanforan unexpectedly drew hundreds of cars. "We had a caravan of cars that stretched for probably three miles," Tateishi remembered.

A month later the San Bruno City Council saw what was probably the angriest public discussion about Tanforan since the Internment itself. The occasion was the March 1979 debate on a Council resolution to recommend that Tanforan be placed on the National Register of Historic Places and be made a California state landmark. The resolution passed 4-1, with Councilman John Barnard dissenting.

According to the *San Mateo Times*:

"Barnard, however, was strongly opposed to the recognition, indicating he has not yet resolved his feelings over the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor which led to the United States' involvement in World War II.

Apologizing in advance to all those 'loyal, decent' Japanese-Americans, Barnard said, 'I guess I'm just too old... I can't accept this at face value,' Barnard said.

The attack on Pearl Harbor, Barnard said, 'was the most horrendous, rotten sneak attack the world has seen in the last 200 or 300 years. I've yet to see an apology from the Japanese government for what they did to us.

'I just cannot condone this.' "

The article says Frate — by then Tanforan's manager — was among those who disagreed with Barnard and tried to calm him. And Nakanishi "told Barnard — who had said earlier that he was in Maine at the time of the attack — that he himself was in Hawaii, where the bombs did not discriminate. 'I'm just as much an American as you are,'...." Barnard did not respond to my interview requests.

Barnard's reaction was not unusual. Tateishi said that in 1979 he appeared on radio call-in shows all over the United States as part of the campaign for Internment reparations, and he was surprised to get "some of the most vitriolic calls" from listeners in the San Francisco area. "I was really unprepared for what I ran into in San Francisco." Perhaps, he said, with more Asian Americans in the Bay Area, "maybe we present a greater threat."

But majority public opinion did turn. The museum files contain a March 1979 official letter that takes a very different tone from the 1973 material. It discusses the San Bruno City Council recommendation and

also a joint effort by Frate, Nakanishi and the JACL to seek landmark status for Tanforan with the Internment history given principal importance.

Tanforan did get state landmark status in August of 1980 as part of a group designation of all 13 California "assembly centers." No official plaque was ever placed there, though a new text was briefly considered by the state landmark commission in 1980. Tateishi and Nakanishi also remember a proposal for a garden to accompany a new memorial, but it is not clear what became of that plan either.

Ten years later the Seabiscuit statue — Tanforan's most prominent link to the past — was taken off display during a renovation and nearly disappeared from the site. Hons said some people at the mall wanted to give the statue to Hap Smith's widow. It is not clear what might have happened to the Internment marker, which had been displayed with it.

Word that the horse was missing got to Sox Kitashima. She went to work.

Hons says he did, too. In a recent email he wrote: "Seabiscuit was in real danger of being shipped off to either the original owner's surviving wife (who has since died), or to Bay Meadows [racetrack] in San Mateo. I think I can safely 'out' myself now and confess that I was instrumental in starting the petition drive that ended up helping keep the sculpture on our property..."

Kitashima was proud to attend the 1991 reinstallation ceremony that placed Seabiscuit and the four historical plaques on their current site in the parking lot. "When the horse was missing — we're missing too," she said.

The trains bound from Tanforan to Topaz probably used the old Southern Pacific tracks on the east side of the mall property. Now the BART transit line is building a new commuter rail station behind the mall, on a spur of the same SP right-of-way. BART spokesman Dave Madden said the spur was outside the old racetrack, so it's not clear whether the 1942 trains would have left for Topaz from that exact spot. But old photos suggest the embarkation point would have been fairly close.

In the train station there will be no mention of the Internment, or of Tanforan's other historical associations. Two other stations on the same new commuter extension line are to include "historical elements," but Tanforan won't.

During the art design competition for Tanforan's new BART station last fall, art program director Regina Almaguer said the candidates had been told about the Internment history among other features of the site, and had received a "community profile" based on local responses to a questionnaire. In the same interview Madden told me, "Tanforan has a long and varied history as you well know but I don't know that [the 1942 incarceration] is an all-encompassing or most important part of that history." He added, "We're future-looking."

BART staff member Molly McArthur said only one artist even discussed an

Internment-related design, and that one was not among the finished submissions. In early 2001 the BART and county transit boards approved an abstract stained-glass design for the Tanforan station.

None of the Japanese American community leaders I queried last winter had heard that BART was interested in placing artwork at the Tanforan station. By the time I told them, it was too late to affect the selection process. On the day the San Mateo County transit board gave final approval to the abstract art design, McArthur told me BART had received "a tentative approach" on the subject, so she and Hons had discussed moving the statue to a plaza that will be built between the mall and the station and also the possibility of a "contemplation corner" there.

A \$105 million renovation is planned at the mall to incorporate the new BART transit station. Nicholas said his Hapsmith Corporation went into partnership with larger companies — Wattson Breevast and Lehman Brothers — to finance the effort.

In our interview last year, Hons was already saying he planned to bring the historical monuments around to the BART station's side of the mall after the renovations — an idea Nicholas liked, though he said the statue's placement would be up to the local managers.

Answering my account of McArthur's comments, Hons wrote recently, "Your word that BART has chosen another piece of artwork for their entrance is unfortunate, but just allows us far more options to look at. I have expressed my opinion in the past for a small — as you put it 'contemplation corner' or garden area (a couple of benches, trees, flowers, etc.) that would play host to some of our history, and I believe the current developer is comfortable with that idea. If you have any names of the Japanese community leaders you spoke with, I would appreciate a couple of contacts to help develop this idea..." I did send names and contact information. So maybe there will be a memorial garden at Tanforan after all.

How did Lederer feel knowing that there's a mall on the spot? "Terrible." And terrible that it was a camp, too. But as for the monument, "thank God that it's looking good, as you say."

When we talked last winter, Lederer had mixed feelings about commemoration. "I really hate the experience, but it is indelible — but I don't think it should be honored — I don't commemorate it..." What did she think of having the plaque there? Why not, she said. "For want of a better way to commemorate Tanforan... I mean, Tanforan is a Park Shopping Center now but my first husband was in the stalls where the horses were. They smelled very horsey and very straw-ish."

In a recent conversation Lederer did not see a direct parallel between the Internment and the September 11 reaction: "you know, I find that the war that's going on with the Taliban... they're very careful. They weren't careful with me — with my type of people. And the Chinese were going crazy — 'I'm Chinese American, I'm not Japanese American.'..."

But Tateishi has been writing urgent public statements on behalf of the JACL ever since the September 11 disaster, saying that Arabs and Muslims in the United States are in danger. "Obviously there's a parallel," he said recently. He thought "President Bush has been pretty good" about urging calm and tolerance in the streets, but "the Attorney General is proposing pretty broad powers over terrorists without saying who those people are." He said he was reminded of the way the FBI rounded up hundreds of Issei — first-generation immigrants from Japan — on scant evidence in 1942.

Sixty years ago the United States took a horrible blow and fought a necessary but horrible war. Out of fear the United States unnecessarily locked up innocent civilians, and only slowly learned to regret their imprisonment.

Now that another national blow has again placed a U.S. minority ethnic group — and in fact many kinds of differentness — under suspicion, we have to think what regret future generations may feel for any repressive measure we now choose to take in the name of freedom.

For now, that monument is still sitting out there in the parking lot at Tanforan. And it's still very much worth a visit.

Related Websites

The plaque at Tanforan:

http://donaldlaird.com/landmarks/counties/900-999/934_sanmateo.html#location

The camp at Topaz, Utah:

<http://www.lib.utah.edu/spc/photo/9066/9066.htm>

Executive Order 9066:

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/anthropolgy74/
<http://www.library.arizona.edu/images/jpamer/execordr.html>

The U.S. Constitution:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/constquery.html>

Restrictions on Japanese-American citizens during World War II:

<http://www.sfmuseum.org/war/evactxt.html>

Japanese-American relocation centers:

<http://www.janm.org/clasc/map.htm>

Min Okubo's memoir, *Citizen 13660*

<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/OKUCIT.html>

Fred Toyosaburo Korematsu's Supreme Court appeals:

<http://laws.findlaw.com/us/319/432.html>
<http://laws.findlaw.com/us/323/214.html>

Fred Toyosaburo Korematsu's Supreme Court victory:

<http://www.aclu.org/news/w012298c.html>

Justice William Douglas' opinion:

<http://laws.findlaw.com/us/323/283.html>

Tanforan mall web page:

<http://www.tanforanpark.com/history.htm>

Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment

<http://www.heydaybooks.com/books/tm.html>

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