Adrift in a Sea of Muddled Assumptions â€“ Part II

Description

A few days ago, I blogged out loud about the muddled assumptions. One comment I made was I didnâ€™t think we had faced a situation where we had had a populace with a significant number of citizens who held an allegiance to something above the nation itself. I wrote that before the shooting in Seattle at the Jewish Federation Building, but the behavior of the man who entered the building, using a hostage to get in the door is exactly the mindset that is so troubling:

> Amy Wasser-Simpson, the federationâ€™s vice president, told the Seattle Times that Haq got past security at the building and shouted, â€œIâ€™m a Muslim American; Iâ€™m angry at Israel,â€• before he began shooting.

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44nd RCT Insignia

Iâ€™ve rethought the issue, and we have had a situation like this before. It began on Dec 7th, 1941, but the outcome is not the same. Back then, the response from the Japanese-American community, was to send forth the 442nd Regimental Combat Team:

> On December 7, 1941, the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was attacked by Japan. This act thrust the United States into World War II. All men who were eligible for military duty were called upon to fight, except Japanese Americans. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Japanese American men were catagorized 4C, non-draftable. Moreover, they and their families were placed into concetration camps by the United States Government. However, on February 1, 1943, the government reversed its decision on Japanese Americans serving in the armed forces and announced the formation of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team.
> The 442nd initially consisted of Japanese American volunteers from the mainland United States and the Hawaiian Islands. ***There were many different reasons why these young men volunteered. Despite the rampant racism towards Japanese Americans during this period, many volunteers felt that if there was to be any future for Japanese in the United States, they had to demonstrate their loyalty by fighting for their country.***
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> The majority of volunteers from Hawaii and the mainland were sent to Camp Shelby in Mississippi. Initially, tension existed between the Hawaiians and the mainlanders. The mainlanders often degraded the Hawaiians for their poor speech and â€œbarbaricâ€• aggressive manners, thus causing them to feel inferior. Due to the excessive fighting and dissension among the troops, the commanding officers were ready to terminate the training. However, a suggestion was made to have the Hawaiians and mainlanders visit relocation camps. After Hawaiian Japanese Americans visited some of the camps, they realized the hardships mainlanders had gone through and a new sense of respect developed for each

other. One Japanese American remembers, â€œthe regiment was not formed when we volunteered, nor when we arrived in Camp Shelpby, but rather, it was formed after this (relocation camp) visitâ€• (Matsuo, Boyhood to War. 73)

When this unified unit arrived in Europe, they still had to prove their competence, as well as their loyalty to white soldiers and commanding officers. However, after liberating the small town of Bruyeres in Southern France and rescuing the â€œLost Battalionâ€• (141st), Japanese American soldiers gained the respect of their fellow soldiers, the townspeople of Bruyeres, and particularily the members of the â€œLost Battalion.â€• For their performance, the 442nd has been recognized as the most decorated unit in United States history. 18,000 total awards were bestowed upon the 442nd, including 9,500 Purple Hearts, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, Seven Distinguished Unit Citations, but only one Congressional Medal of Honor (Crost, Honor by Fire. 179). Although their impeccable service earned the 442nd the respect of their fellow soldiers, they were not perceived in the same way by American society when they returned to the West Coast.

Immediately following their return, the 442nd realized that the attitudes of many Americans had not changed. World War II veterans of Japanese ancestry were welcomed home by signs that read, â€œNo Japs Allowed,â€• and â€œNo Japs Wanted.â€• In many cases, veterans were denied service in local shops and restaurants, and their homes and property were often vandalized or set on fire.

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Notice the mentality shift. In 1941, those oj Japanese descent felt they owned it to their new nation, and the rest of the citizens, to demonstrated in a courageous manner, their loyalty. Their nickname: â€œGo For Broke.â€• we know what that means and thatâ€™s how they fought, becoming the most decorated regiment in the US Army.

Get a load of this:

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was the most decorated unit for its size and length of service, in the entire history of the U.S. Military. The 4,000 men who initially came in April 1943 had to be replaced nearly 3.5 times. In total, about 14,000 men served, ultimately earning 9,486 Purple Hearts , 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented eight Presidential Unit Citations.

Anyone who questions service like that has lived in a hole their entire lives. They, like the units comprised of African-Americans, such as the USS MASON (DE-529) and the 761st Tank Battalion, were accepted at the front lines as fighting men, equal to the challenge of combat.

The situation of the day, vs the time of the reloaction camps of the 1940â€™s are opposite in how communities of non-native Americans handled the decision of loyalty.

I also think, having found the very consise history of the 442nd I quoted above, that is it interesting to observe how the rest of the population reacted. Once again, it is from oppostie ends of the spectrum: At the end of the war, the Japanese-Americans (and African-Americans) who stepped up to the plate and shed their blood for â€œthe Man,â€• suffered cruelty and assaults from those who they had defended. In this day, while the Muslim-Americans donâ€™t stand and proclaim their alliegance to the nation that affords them freedom, and, most notable, does not relocate them into camps, which confiscating their money, personal property and businesses to divide between the Americans in their communities, we also go out of our way to make sure no one is offended by the words in print or on TV, nor any action taken by law enforcement that might be looked upon as â€œprofiling.â€•

One group showed us they were with us, while the military members from the land of their ancestors, pilaged, raped and murdered their way across China and the Pacific Islands and Rim before cannibalizing our aviators at Chi Chi Jima.

Today, those who have come to us from the Islamic countries openly condem us when we discuss taking action to secure the freedom of all of our citizens, to include them. Itâ€™s a world upside down.

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To the men of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, I salute you and the legacy you gave your new nation. To the Islamic-Americans, I challenge you to read their history and decide your response.

Update 8/01/2006: CDR Salamander has a post regarding this topicâ€¦

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Date Created
July 31, 2006
Author
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