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Linda Tamura, *Nisei Soldiers Break Their Silence: Coming Home to Hood River*. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2012. Pp. xx, 346. ISBN 978-0-295-99209-9.

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In November 1944, some members of the American Legion post in the Oregon community of Hood River defaced a memorial to local residents serving in the US military during World War II, specifically blotting out the names of Japanese Americans. The war had exacerbated a long-standing bigotry among some white residents against local Nisei (American-born children of Japanese immigrants); certain American Legion members claimed that these men were not really Americans and that their loyalties lay with the Emperor of Japan. Linda Tamura (Willamette Univ.) begins *Nisei Soldiers Break Their Silence* with this symbolic example of the often tense relations between the white and Japanese American communities in the area. Investigating the history of Nisei soldiers before, during, and after the war, she finds that they were determined to show their loyalty to the United States despite the suspicions and mistreatment they endured in the wider community.

Tamura, a member of a long established Japanese American family in the area, has previously published a history of first-generation Japanese American settlers (Issei) in the Hood River area, about sixty miles east of Portland on the Columbia River.¹ By World War II, this was the largest such community in Oregon outside of Portland; its five hundred members, of course, paled in comparison to the populations of Japanese Americans in Los Angeles and Seattle. Tamura reports “the untold journey of ... largely unheralded veterans. Embedded in a past in which fear, mistrust and sheer economics overtook a community’s ethics and commitment to civil rights, it ... raises questions about parallel challenges we face today as well as the actions we should take to resolve them” (xx).

Tamura begins by sketching the lives of Japanese Americans in the Hood River area and in the country at large in the decades before the Second World War. Japanese immigrants, who first arrived in the area in the 1890s and early 1900s, found work clearing farmland and building railroads. They later acquired small plots of land and developed productive orchards and produce farms, where their American-born children grew up and helped with farm work. As elsewhere in the western United States, some white residents of Hood River resented the success of Japanese American farmers; this, combined with wider racist attitudes, fueled anti-Japanese sentiment throughout the 1910s and 20s.

Pearl Harbor intensified this hostility, and many whites questioned the allegiance of the Issei and Nisei living among them. In the aftermath of President Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, the US government interned Japanese Americans on the West Coast as a putative matter of national security. In the meantime, the Selective Service system reclassified the Nisei who had enlisted or been drafted into the US Army as “aliens not acceptable to the armed forces” (52) in September 1942. The army itself lacked a clear policy about Nisei soldiers already in the service, but many officers doubted their loyalty. Some Nisei were discharged; others remained on active duty after reassignment to noncombat duties.

As the war progressed, however, the government rescinded its ban and recruited interned Nisei men into the military. Most ended up in the famous 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which included Japanese Americans from Hawaii, who had previously formed the 100th Infantry Battalion. The 442nd fought in some of the heaviest combat in Western Europe. Other Nisei joined the less well known Military Intelligence Service (MIS), where, by the end of the war, they “had translated two million documents with more than twenty million pages, [and] interrogated fourteen thousand Japanese prisoners” (87).

1. *The Hood River Issei: An Oral History of Japanese Settlers in Oregon’s Hood River Valley* (Urbana: U Illinois Pr, 1993).

Nonetheless, Tamura points out, these Nisei servicemen continued to face discrimination. The Army did not commission Nisei in the MIS as officers until late in the war. In the segregated 442nd, senior officer ranks were closed to Japanese Americans and superior officers in the European theater had misgivings about the unit's loyalties and capabilities; those early doubts were dispelled as the 442nd earned a reputation for fighting prowess. Tamura vividly illustrates the dedication of the Nisei to proving their allegiance as American citizens, their stoic endurance of difficult conditions, and their perseverance in the face of unfair treatment.

Some Nisei soldiers outside the 442nd and the MIS more vigorously protested against the inequities they were subjected to in the military and that their families suffered in the internment camps. Widespread resentment and disillusionment followed a visit by President Roosevelt to Fort Riley, Kansas, in April 1943: Army officials confined Nisei soldiers under armed guard in a remote part of the base as a potential security threat to the president. These men eventually joined other Nisei in the 33rd Infantry Battalion and were posted to Fort McClellan, Arkansas, to train as replacements for combat losses in the 442nd. When, in early 1944, some of these Nisei gathered outside the battalion headquarters to seek appointments with the commanding officer to discuss their grievances, they refused orders by white officers and NCOs to march to another building. Eventually, twenty-eight men were charged with insubordination and court-martialed. Twenty-one of the "Fort McClellan discipline barrack boys" or "DB boys" were convicted and sentenced to terms of ten to twenty years of hard labor at Fort Leavenworth. By 1946, however, all had been released and, after a long struggle with the Pentagon, their dishonorable discharges were—*forty years later*—voided and their military benefits reinstated.

The aftermath of the war brought its own challenges for the Hood River Nisei veterans. Organizations like the American Legion, comprised of older men, many of them World War I veterans and now prominent members of the local community, opposed the return of the Japanese Americans. They still believed them to be disloyal, despite the sterling wartime service of Nisei soldiers. Economic factors, particularly envy of the success of Japanese American farmers, played a part as well. This hostility toward the Hood River Nisei was roundly condemned by military personnel who had witnessed their loyal service. Many Japanese Americans who had lived in the Hood River area before internment never returned after the war; those veterans who did return with their families had to put up with discriminatory practices like refusal of service in local businesses.

Over time, the Nisei were gradually accepted by the white community. By the 1950s, even the veterans' groups who had scorned them during and immediately after the war welcomed Nisei veterans as the people of the Hood River community moved past wartime injustices and got on with their lives. In the late twentieth century, the history of the Nisei became better known thanks to the efforts of the postwar generation of Japanese Americans demanding redress for internment at the national level and their cooperation with whites to commemorate the Hood River area's wartime history. Linda Tamura has made a valuable contribution to that process.

The author draws heavily on over a hundred interviews with Nisei veterans, their family members, and others from the Hood River community. Because of her personal connections with the Nisei, Tamura enjoyed more immediate access to their stories than any outside researcher might have. Besides interviews, she relies on veterans' records, newspaper stories, various government reports, and a wide range of secondary literature on the Japanese American experience.

The only significant drawback of the book is the absence of any attempt to place the Japanese American veterans' experiences in a wider context. How, for example, does the Nisei veterans' history compare with that of other marginalized groups within the military during and after the war? Did African American or Hispanic service personnel meet with the same sort of enmity as they returned to their home communities after the war? Did they, too, eventually demand and receive some proper recognition of their sacrifices?

Despite these criticisms, *Nisei Soldiers Break Their Silence* is a much-needed account of a crucial period in Japanese American history. One hopes other scholars will compare the Hood River Nisei veterans' experience with that of their counterparts in major cities on the West Coast. Linda Tamura's clearly written, discerning, and engaging book deserves careful study by both specialists and general readers interested in Japanese Americans' contributions during and after the Second World War.