

Honor and Sacrifice The Roy Matsumoto Story

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY LUCY OSTRANDER AND DON SELLERS

DVD, 28 MINUTES, COLOR

STOURWATER PICTURES, 2013

Reviewed by John Sagers

Honor and Sacrifice: The Roy Matsumoto Story is an excellent case study that vividly illustrates issues surrounding early twentieth-century Japanese immigrants to the United States, their American-born children, and Japanese-American military service during the Second World War.

Narrated from the perspective of Roy Matsumoto's daughter, Karen, the film has the intimate tone of a friend telling old family stories. The narrative begins with Roy's father, Wakaji Matsumoto, arriving from Japan in 1906 to join his father on a Los Angeles-area farm. In 1912, Tee Kimura came from Japan as a "picture bride" to marry Wakaji. Their son, Roy, spent his childhood in California but was educated in Japan between 1921 and 1930. As racial discrimination eroded opportunities for Japanese immigrants in California, Wakaji and Tee relocated their family to Japan in 1927, but Roy decided to return to Los Angeles. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Roy was sent to a relocation camp in Jerome, Arkansas. To secure his release, Roy enlisted in the US Army and was deployed as a military intelligence linguist with Merrill's Marauders in Burma. After heroic service that earned him the Bronze Star and Legion of Merit, Roy later served as an interrogator of Japanese prisoners in China and later as an interpreter during the Allied Occupation of Japan.

There is much to recommend about this short film—Wakaji Matsumoto's photographs of life in both California and Hiroshima wonderfully illustrate the hard work of immigrants, the importance of education, and the militarization of Japan.



Screen capture from the film's Kickstarter site at <http://tiny.cc/8bxj6w>.

There is much to recommend about this short film—Wakaji Matsumoto's photographs of life in both California and Hiroshima wonderfully illustrate the hard work of immigrants, the importance of education, and the militarization of Japan. The narrative covers the interactions between Japanese-Americans and their relatives in Japan, racial prejudice and legal discrimination, wartime internment of American citizens and resident aliens, and the motivations of Japanese-Americans who served in the US Armed Forces. While the film is forthright about injustices that Japanese-Americans suffered, it focuses primarily on the positive ways individuals like Roy Matsumoto tried to overcome these injustices.


If the film were longer, it could have probed some issues in greater depth. For instance, interviews with living eyewitnesses focused on recalling events rather than the complexities faced by Japanese immigrants serving in the US military with family members living in Japan or incarcerated in American internment camps. It would have also been interesting if Roy Matsumoto could have commented briefly on what he did after the war and what his experience meant to him in retrospect.

Overall, the film tells an inspiring story of courage in the face of adversity and provides an excellent introduction to a turbulent period in Japanese and American history with a style that is both sensitive and accessible. The film's website includes timelines and other resources to help viewers better understand Roy Matsumoto's story in its wider historical context. At twenty-eight minutes, the film can easily be shown in a variety of classroom settings and serve as a great starting point for discussions of migration, assimilation, personal identity, wartime hysteria, and rising above injustice. Highly recommended. ■

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