

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY: WHO IS THE “WE” IN “WE THE PEOPLE”? **EXHIBITION OVERVIEW**

Introduction

“We the People.” With these three words, the United States Constitution places the responsibility of a living, vibrant democracy in the hands of all of us. But not everyone was included in “We the People” in 1787 – or for much of our history since.

Fighting for Democracy: Who is the “We” in “We the People”? brings to life the stories of seven men and women whose lives were forever changed by the events of World War II. Denied their fundamental rights, each of them, in their own way, chose to fight for equality, freedom and justice overseas and at home. The seven – Héctor García, Hazel Ying Lee, Frances Slanger, Bill Terry, George Saito, Domingo Los Baños, and Carl Gorman – represent the millions of Americans who joined the war effort because they believed in the promise of democracy in America. In the face of adversity, they took action to expand the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Americans. Their challenge is ours to continue.

Pre-War

Second-class Americans

Before the war, “Whites-Only” signs and restricted neighborhoods and beaches reminded ethnic Americans of their second-class status. Social clubs and schools were segregated because of race.

World War I and mass unemployment during the Great Depression heightened anti-black and anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the country. Cultural traditions and native languages were seen as markers of “foreignness.” Violent racial conflicts broke out, and immigration from most countries was curbed. The perception of who was considered “American” narrowed.

In this section of the exhibition, seven large trunks are displayed, providing the visitor with a snapshot of Héctor, Hazel, Frances, Bill, George, Domingo, and Carl before World War II. Visitors can rummage through replicas of personal photos, letters and other documents. A video monitor in each trunk reveals the discrimination that Mexican American, Chinese American, Jewish American, African American, Japanese American, Filipino American, and Native American communities across the country experienced before the war.

War

Double Victory

After December 7, 1941, thousands of women and people of color enlisted in the military and filled jobs in the war industries. For many, it was an opportunity to find work in positions previously unavailable to them.

For others, the war resulted in the massive violation of their constitutional rights. Approximately 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were forced to leave their West Coast homes and were incarcerated in America's concentration camps. Increased xenophobia during the war led to brutal race riots. Hundreds of Americans were killed on U.S. streets nationwide. Many Americans found that they were fighting for a double victory: first, against the enemy overseas and second, for justice at home.

In this section of the exhibition, visitors can view videos and examine photos to learn about the experiences of each of the seven individuals during the war, including the regiments they served in and the honors and accolades they received. In addition, guests will learn about the segregated military service units that defended the country during the war, among them the Women Air Force Service Pilots, Tuskegee Airmen, Navajo Code Talkers, Japanese American Regimental Combat Team, and the Filipino Infantry Regiment.

Theatrical Hub

At the heart of the exhibition is an intimate performance space in which a three-actor production takes place several times each day, featuring a diverse cast of actors who bring to life the individuals featured in the exhibition. The 25-minute live performance explores how the concept of "We the People" has been challenged, revised and expanded throughout American history. A 10-minute discussion about diversity, identity and equality follows each show, drawing connections to current debates about immigration, citizenship and civil rights in America.

When not serving as a performance space, the theatrical hub will feature a multimedia collage that incorporates thought-provoking imagery and recorded interviews with leading voices in Philadelphia's multicultural community. The hub also will serve as a location for gallery talks with representatives from local partner organizations.

Post-War

Fighting for Tomorrow

In a unified effort to defend their country, men and women, regardless of race, class or gender, had worked together on the factory assembly line and on the battlefield. Segregated units had fought in the most violent battles overseas to protect American freedom.

Ordinary men and women, who had fought for democracy in the armed forces, now returned home unwilling to accept second-class citizenship. With this newfound perspective, they fought for democracy at home – to expand the constitutional rights of all Americans.

Using iPads, visitors will have the opportunity to discover the post-war legacies of each of the seven individuals. Created by the National Constitution Center, with original content from the Japanese American National Museum and the assistance of the Drexel University School of Education, the iPad app also explores the issues and causes dearest to Héctor, Hazel, Frances, Bill, George, Domingo, and Carl, and the ways in which their courage and sacrifices laid the foundation for future civil rights and women's movements.

You Shape Democracy

Each of these seven men and women uniquely contributed to creating a more inclusive democracy. Through their struggles for freedom, equality and justice in America, they imparted a lasting legacy of courage and strength in the face of adversity.

Today, the "We" in "We the People" has been expanded, but it is a story that is still being written. It is up to us to become active and engaged citizens who take a stand to improve the nation as we see fit.

In the exhibition's final section, visitors will have the chance to reflect on the seven individuals' courage in the context of American history. A large-scale timeline spans the walls, highlighting civil rights milestones alongside key moments in the lives of Héctor, Hazel, Frances, Bill, George, Domingo, and Carl. Visitors are encouraged to fill out a reflection card and post their message along the timeline of the individual who most inspires them to fight for democracy.

Fighting for Democracy: Who is the "We in "We the People"?

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National Constitution Center in Philadelphia

Admission to *Fighting for Democracy* is FREE with regular museum admission of \$12 for adults, \$11 for seniors ages 65 and over, and \$8 for children ages 4-12. Active military personnel and children ages 3 and under are free. Group rates also are available, and groups can book the *Fighting for Democracy* theater experience in advance. For ticket information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.

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