

# HEROISM COMES IN DIFFERENT FORMS

Book focuses on American soldiers of Japanese descent during WWII

In May 1944, the 4,100 men of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought seasickness and nerves as they steamed across the Atlantic Ocean in a 90-ship convoy toward a destiny they could not imagine.

The team was comprised entirely of American soldiers of Japanese descent, many of whom volunteered to fight in World War II — even after they initially were classified as “enemy aliens” by the U.S. government and their families were ousted from their homes and imprisoned behind barbed wire in concentration camps throughout the American West.

Despite that, these soldiers went on to fight so valorously in eight major campaigns in World War II that the team eventually became the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in U.S. history.

Daniel James Brown, of Redmond, Washington, is the best-selling author of “The Boys in the Boat.” Brown shares the team’s story in his new book, “Facing the Mountain.”

Brown focuses particularly on the lives of four young men.

Katsugo “Kats” Miho was finishing up his first semester as a freshman at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu when phalanxes of Japanese warplanes bombed Pearl Harbor on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941.

In Spokane, Washington, 17-year-old Fred Shiosaki heard the news while he was listening to the radio in the apartment above

his parent’s laundry business.

In Salina Valley, 16-year old Rudy Tokiwa was hoeing his family’s lettuce fields when his sister came running to tell him about the attack.

And at the University of Washington, Gordon Hirabayashi knew that his decision a year earlier to register as a Conscientious Objector did not absolve him from duty.

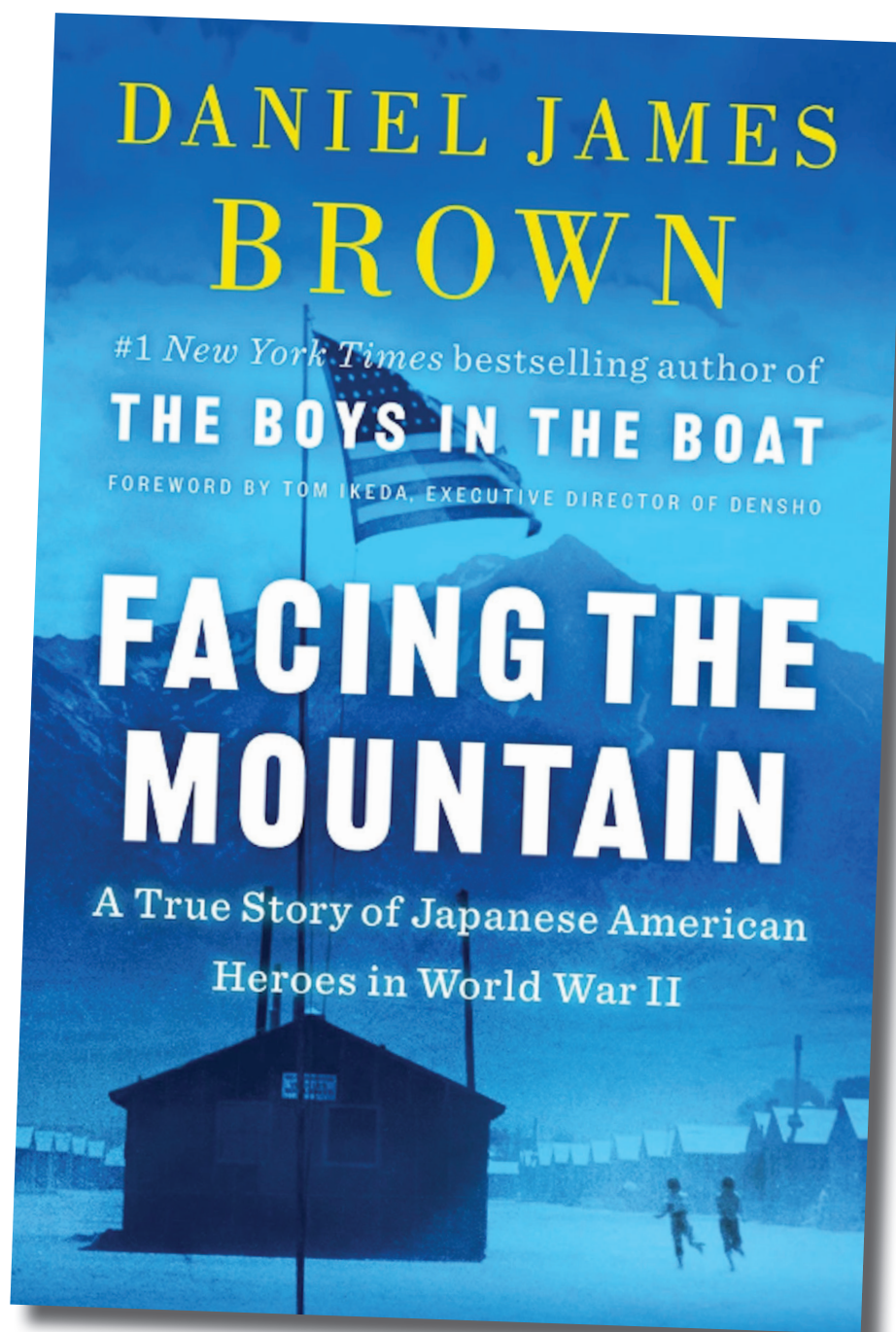
## This week’s book

‘Facing the Mountain’ by Daniel James Brown  
 Viking — 464 pages — \$30

Brown tells how these four individuals navigated the war by adhering to the principles that had been instilled in them by their families, teachers and spiritual leaders.

Three of the four chose to enlist, although they arrived at this decision in different ways. Even after these young men were brought together into one racially segregated unit, there were still distinct cultural clashes between the kotonks (mainlanders) and the Buddhaheads (from Hawaii). Brown shows how they eventually overcame their differences to fight as a formidably cohesive unit in even the harshest circumstances.

As a committed pacifist, Hirabayashi became a fighter of a different sort. When he saw how drastically his own federal government was infringing on the rights of Americans of Japanese descent, he decided to use himself as a test case to challenge what he believed were racially prejudiced



and unconstitutional laws. This resulted in court cases, labor camp sentences and time behind bars.

Decades later, his conviction was overturned. Posthumously, he was awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

With “Facing the Mountain,” Brown delivers a powerful message about the multiplicity of identities and backgrounds that have created “the spirit that has always

animated America.”

Especially now, at a time when hate crimes against Asian-Americans are on the rise, this deeply researched and richly detailed book is a must-read.

*The Bookmonger* is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [barbaralmcm@gmail.com](mailto:barbaralmcm@gmail.com).

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