Cherry Blossoms, War Dead, and the Ironies of Spring

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"***No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry.***
The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart;
Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry."
(President Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 1, 1943 upon activating the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.")

I place the Japanese American War memorial in Washington, D.C. among the more beautiful and profound small spaces in city overrun with monumental architecture. Located near the heart of the national mall and its wide open spaces, this tiny gem offers a wonderful place for contemplation and relaxation thanks to a structure that encloses it almost within a cocoon.

The memorial to the storied courage of the Japanese American World War II soldiers who fought in the service of the United States is commemorated here. The memorial at Cherry Blossom time is redolent with Spring and with irony - it was the Japanese who, in 1912, gave our nation these cherry blossoms that we so look forward to each year. It was the Japanese Americans who fought so bravely in World War II who are remembered here, and they continue to fight on our nation's behalf. The story of the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, MIS (Military Intelligence Service), 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, 232nd Combat Engineer Company, and 1399th Engineering Construction Battalion and the many other men and women who served overseas during World War II is well told here and here.

I visited the memorial on April 2nd at the height of the Cherry Blossom Festival and here are some of my pictures. And at Cherry Blossom time, the memorial to Nisei heroism that countered racism and the fact that our cherry blossoms are the gift of the Japanese people, it is also redolent not only with Spring but with a sad irony as well . . .

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