



Chapter 1

ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

On December 7, 1941, Asako Tokuno stood on a street corner in California. She was waiting for the bus to her university. It was the week of final exams. But Tokuno was not thinking about her tests. She felt uneasy. Tokuno was a Japanese-American woman. She had never felt that her **ethnicity** mattered. But now it did.

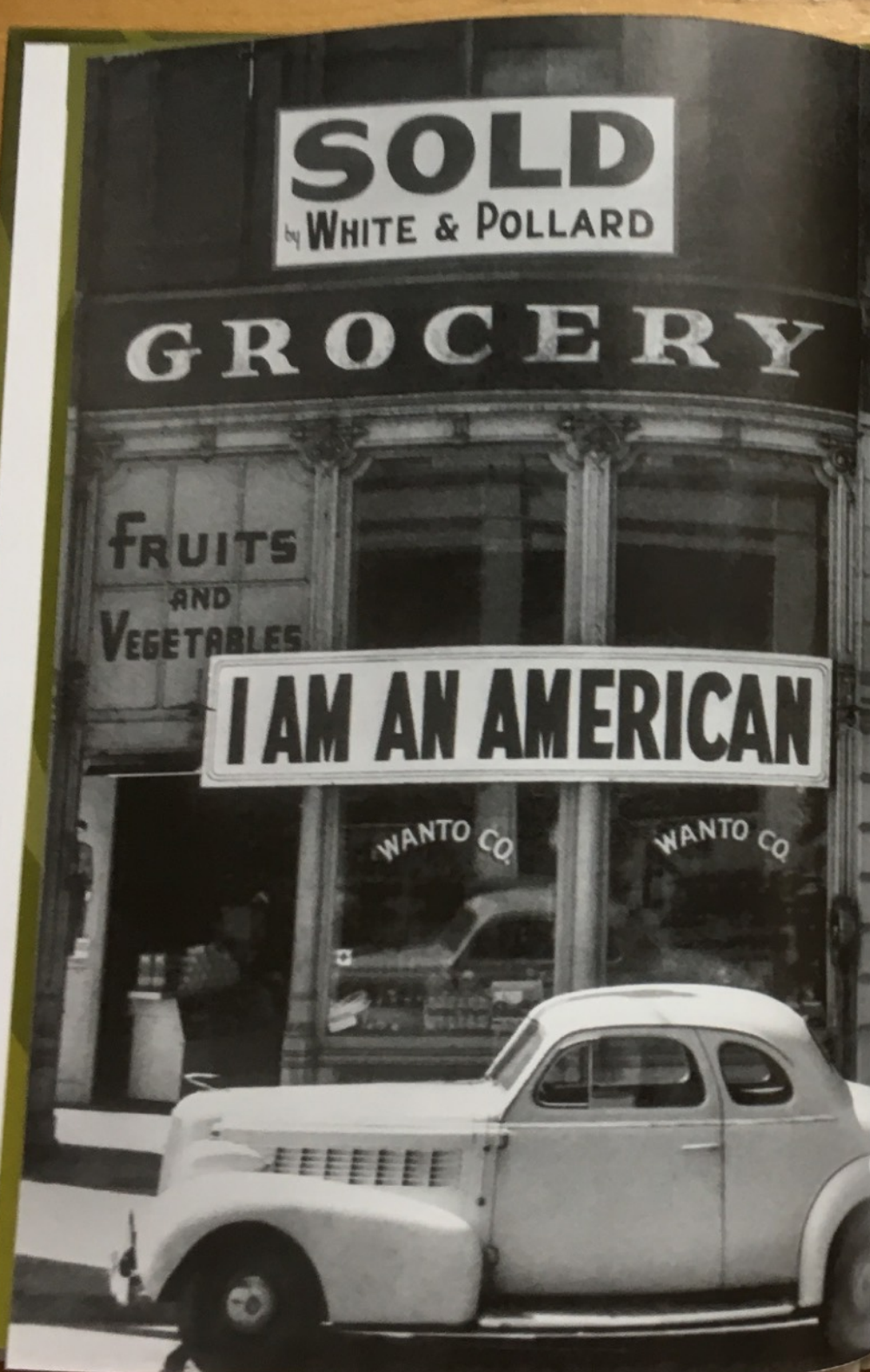
◀ The bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, began a war between the United States and Japan.

"As I'd stand on that corner, I would get this terrible feeling that people were watching, looking at me," Tokuno said.¹

Earlier that day, Japanese forces had launched a surprise attack on the United States. Fighter planes dropped bombs on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack damaged battleships and planes. It left more than 2,400 Americans dead. The next day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. Three days later, Italy and Germany declared war on the United States. Italy and Germany were Japan's **allies**. The United States had entered World War II.

After the attack, Americans worried about their safety. Many felt **prejudice** against Japanese immigrants. They believed that the immigrants were not loyal to the United States. Some suspected the immigrants of spying on the United States for Japan. The children of Japanese immigrants also faced prejudice, even though they were born in the United States. Some had never even seen Japan.

Asako Tokuno grew up in Richmond, California. Her parents had immigrated to the United States before she was born. Many Japanese Americans lived in their city. Between 1886 and 1911, thousands of Japanese immigrants had sailed to the United



▲ Many Japanese immigrants moved to western states or territories such as Arizona, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

States. Most were looking for jobs. More than 400,000 settled along the West Coast. Japanese people continued to immigrate to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. The immigrants were called *Issei*, which means "first generation" in Japanese. Tokuno's parents opened a successful flower shop. Other *Issei* workers found jobs as miners, farmers, and loggers. Eventually, many opened their own businesses.

◀ After the attack on Pearl Harbor, a Japanese-American man put up a sign on his grocery store.

Most of the immigrants' children grew up with Japanese traditions. But they also learned American ways of life. They were called *Nisei*, or "second generation." Many *Nisei* children lived in two different worlds. They usually spoke English in public. But they often spoke Japanese at home. *Nisei* were American-born citizens. Most *Nisei* wanted to be known as Japanese Americans, not as Japanese people who lived in the United States.

But after the Pearl Harbor attack, everything changed. Tokuno later described her experiences. Four years after the bombing, she lived with her sister in an apartment building in St. Paul, Minnesota. "Our landlord said we had to leave because his son



"My dad . . . left Japan at the age of 14. . . . I remember, in his lifetime, I only saw him cry three times. Once was on the seventh of December, because he couldn't understand why the land of his birth had attacked the land of his heart."

—Norman Mineta, the son of a Japanese immigrant to the United States. Mineta later became the United States Secretary of Transportation.²



▲ Norman Mineta remembered growing up with his father, who immigrated to the United States from Japan.

was coming home," she recalled.³ The son was fighting against Japan in the war. He did not want any Japanese Americans in the building. Without warning, Tokuno and her sister needed to look for a new home.

Many other Japanese Americans faced similar problems. After the Pearl Harbor attack, some were fired from their jobs. Others lost their homes. For many Japanese Americans, a new challenge lay ahead.