Sites of Japanese Memory: Museums, Memorials, Commemoration
Kamikaze and Mass Suicide

"Challenging Kamikaze Stereotypes: 'Wings of Defeat' on the Silver Screen"
James L. Huffman
N.D.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-James_L_-Huffman/2910

"The Songs of Nippon, the Yamato Museum and the Inculcation of Japanese Nationalism"
Yuki TANAKA
May 8, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/2746

"Compulsory Mass Suicide, the Battle of Okinawa, and Japan's Textbook Controversy"
Aniya Masaaki, The Okinawa Times, and Asahi Shinbun
January 6, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Aniya-Masaaki/2629

"The Martyrdom: Children and the Battle of Okinawa"
Mark Ealey
November 6, 2005
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mark-Ealey/1689

Claims against the Japanese government for World War II war crimes extend to crimes committed against the state's own population. The pilots of "kamikaze" suicide missions and civilians caught in regions of fierce fighting such as Okinawa in 1945 are a case in point.

James Huffman's essay is an introduction to the award-winning documentary film *Wings of Defeat*, which addresses the legacy of the kamikaze attacks in the last years of the war and features interviews of both survivors of the kamikaze units and American sailors who survived kamikaze attacks. Yuki Tanaka discusses war songs related to the giant battleship Yamato, which was sunk during a "kamikaze" mission in 1945. He notes a recent surge of war-glorifying rhetoric, seen not only in a revival of military songs among Japan's youth, but also the increasing popularity of rap songs with ultranationalist and war-glorifying messages. He adds to the discussion an analysis of the relatively new museum to preserve the memory of the Yamato in Kure, the Kure City Maritime History and Science Museum. The museum was designed as a technology museum, but it is generally known rather as the "Yamato Museum," because one of its main attractions is a model, one-tenth the actual size of the Yamato. Even the official tourism pamphlet of Kure City speaks of "the Yamato Museum" and not the official title. The museum proudly explains the sophisticated technology used in the battleship and emphasizes that it paved the way to Japan's postwar resurgence, because much of the same technology was later applied to Japan's postwar automobile and electronics industries. However, Tanaka also notes that some Japanese citizens have protested this historical interpretation.

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The next selection (three essays/editorials summarized in one reading) addresses the forced suicide of many Okinawan civilians by Japanese soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa in spring 1945. Okinawans were a stigmatized minority in prewar Japan and the Imperial troops from mainland Japan did not trust the locals, whose dialect they could hardly understand. In April and May 1945, when US troops landed on the island, Imperial troops feared that local islanders would engage in "espionage" and "betray" them. In some situations, they responded by ordering Okinawans—not only military personnel, but also civilians, including women and children—to commit suicide. In 2007 the central government attempted to censor references to mass suicide in history textbooks outraged Okinawans. This anger against the government's actions culminated in demonstrations with more than 100,000 participants—among the largest that postwar Japan ever had seen.

The readings here, two newspaper editorials and a journal article published during the height of the controversy, illuminate the Ministry of Education's system of textbook approval (or censorship) and show how the central government pressures publishers to change the contents of history textbooks. The editorials show that although the changes that the central government demanded from publishers were subtle, the issue was highly sensitive for the people of Okinawa, who still feel discriminated against in contemporary Japan. At the same time, as the last reading, a partial translation of "Typhoon of Steel: An Okinawan Schoolboy's Quest for Martyrdom," acknowledges, civilians were sometimes willing to die during the Battle of Okinawa for reasons that, in retrospect, seem to many Japanese pitiful rather than noble. Taken together then, these articles shed light on the issues of state violence towards its own people and the idea of sacrificing civilians for the "good of the nation." They also further underscore the politics of memory in Japan and the ongoing attempts to purge the national "master narrative" of all its dark moments in history.

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