

An american at pearl
harbor by ellen
nakashima



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An American at Pearl Harbor by Ellen Nakashima is an essay about the experiences of the author's father during and after World War II. Shig, the nickname of Nakashima's father, is a Japanese-American living in Hawaii when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. After that attack, Shig and the rest of the Japanese-American community experienced discrimination.

Shikataganai, a Japanese word that means living with things that cannot be changed and accepting what cannot be helped, is the philosophy that helped Shig overcome the consequences of the war.

Understanding the concept of shikataganai would pave the way in understanding why Shig behaved the way he did during the war. Despite this understanding, Shig's still complicates the real meaning of shikataganai.

Shikataganai As mentioned before, shikataganai, means living with things that cannot be changed and accepting what cannot be changed. For minorities like Shig, during the war, (especially the Japanese-Americans) shikataganai is a philosophy that must be adapted. Shig is from Japan, but his country is the United States.

He understands that despite his heritage, he knew where his loyalty lies, and that is with the US Government. He knew that if needed, he would fend off the Japanese because that is just the way it is. " He is American, they are Japanese," as Shig would explain. He was, in fact, a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and reported the very next day after the attack. However, despite his loyalty to America, he was laid off along with other Japanese-Americans. His belief in the shikataganai philosophy made him conclude that it was inevitable.

With the help of shikataganai philosophy, he took no offense in this and took a back seat, at least momentarily, and allowed things to unfold on their own. Shig knew very well that this was obviously an act of discrimination, but he believed it was shikataganai. Shikataganai also “ forced” Shig to denounce his Japanese citizenship. The notion was the Japanese attack left Japanese-Americans in an awkward position. They felt they had to deny their Japanese citizenship in order to at least lessen the discrimination. Thus, Shig used the shikataganai philosophy to justify the injustices happening to them.

In some ways, he was right to blame the inevitability of things that led to his decisions, but his experiences proved that too much reliance on shikataganai did not help him. Shikataganai and Fatalism There are some similarities between Shikataganai and Fatalism. Fatalism is the belief in pre-destination, meaning everything happens as it is intended to be, and there is nothing we can do about it. This is a faulty belief that has almost taken its toll on Shig if he and his fellow Japanese-Americans had not thought of actively doing something about their situation.

Challenging Shikataganai Going back to the problem at hand, Shig’s experiences during and after the war challenge our understanding of shikataganai. Initially, Shig was a devout “ shikataganaist”; he believed that there is nothing he can do about things happening around him, so he just let things happen to him and accepted it with the thought that this is just the way things are and that he has to accept it. A turning point in Shig’s life came when he and other Japanese-Americans were laid off from the corps.

A certain Hung Wai Ching inspired them to do something about their fate and instead of just sitting around and watching things unfold without even trying to do something. The laid off Japanese-Americans wrote a letter to an officer and their efforts were rewarded—that officer allowed them to form a volunteer group to help in the war but not necessarily as soldiers, for they were assigned first as volunteers to the Corps of Engineers. Even if Shig was not assigned as a soldier, he was still able to help the war effort.

This experience of Shig goes against his philosophy of shikataganai, for he has actively done something to help alleviate his situation which otherwise would be hopeless if he was to continue believing in shikataganai. His short stint as a volunteer was followed by a career in intelligence in the military, which he applied for in order to be drafted. Again, this is against what Shig used to do as a believer of shikataganai. Shig's mixed experiences in the war complicate, if not contradict, our understanding of shikataganai; at one point, Shig was doing nothing, and then in another, he was.

Conclusion Understanding the concept of shikataganai is imperative in understanding the actions of Shig during the war. Fully understanding the concept would give readers an idea why Shig and other Japanese-Americans did all those things that can only be summed up to as their war experiences. On the contrary, our understanding of shikataganai does not clarify why some of Shig's experiences go against the philosophy, as some of his experiences complicate the definition of shikataganai given at the beginning of the essay.