In 1991, the Japanese mass media repeatedly expressed concern about renewed anti-Japanese sentiments in the fiftieth anniversary year of the Pearl Harbor attack. Television news shows sometimes claimed, when reporting on U.S.-Japan issues, that Japan-bashing would probably become intense in response to the forthcoming special anniversary of that attack. Representatives of Japanese newspapers who were stationed in Washington, D.C., spent a great deal of energy trying to identify any signs of anti-Japanese feelings associated with the anniversary. Japanese magazines also carried many special articles that focused on the U.S.-Japan relationship, some of which carried such sensational titles as "Hatred toward Japan is About to Explode!" or "Japan as Enemy."1

In fact, Americans were deeply concerned about remembering the Pearl Harbor attack on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the event. A poll taken in Texas in 1991 that asked to what extent it was important to remember Pearl Harbor confirmed that fact. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents thought it "very important" to do so; another thirty percent felt it was "important" to do so. Only ten percent thought it "not very important," or "not at all important" to recall what had happened on 7 December 1941. Thus nearly nine out of ten respondents thought remembering the traumatic events of that day was important.2

While this particular poll reflected only the sentiments of Texans, it seems probable that the "Remember Pearl Harbor!" notion has survived for a half-century in the minds of Americans.

Why did Americans feel it so important to remember the attack? From a purely contemporary perspective, it might be argued that the

---

2. The Houston office of the Japan External Trade Organization conducted the poll in March 1991.
intensity of their feeling mirrored their frustration with continuing, unresolved economic friction with Japan. The Pearl Harbor attack could be cited as tangible evidence of Japan’s unfairness, sneakiness, and untrustworthy character. The Japanese media implicitly accepted this interpretation in expressing their concern about the resurgence of anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States in 1991.

But in fact no large-scale surge of Japan-bashing materialized in 1991. Interestingly enough, a Japanese television station that tried to focus on “renewed anti-Japanese sentiments” among Americans in producing its special program for the fiftieth anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack had to change its focus. The producers simply could not find sufficient facts to support the existence of anti-Japanese feelings whose existence they had presupposed.

If ill feelings toward Japan were not the cause, why, then, did Americans find remembering Pearl Harbor so important? For the average Japanese, that question remains quite a riddle. This essay analyzes Americans’ views toward the Pearl Harbor attack through the eyes of an ordinary Japanese. It discusses the implications of its findings for the maintenance of a sound bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan. Its findings are presented with the hope that they may enhance mutual understanding between Americans and Japanese.

I have used two approaches in trying to identify Americans’ perception of the Pearl Harbor attack. The first was spot interviews at the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, conducted in August 1991. In order to avoid bias that might be generated by a Japanese questioner, I had an American assistant act as interviewer. He spoke with forty people: twenty-one men and nineteen women whose ages ranged from sixteen to seventy-eight. My second approach was to focus on a reconciliation ceremony between Japanese veterans and Pearl Harbor survivors. Originally planned for 1991, it was canceled in response to pressure from opponents and then held, after all, in 1992. The story of this reconciliation effort will highlight the impressive perceptions and attitudes of American survivors of the Japanese attack.

**At the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial**

All of those interviewed at the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial were asked two questions: First, is it important for Americans to remember the Pearl Harbor attack? Second, if so, why do you think remembering it is important? A sample of their responses provides an interesting array of opinions.

A fifty-four-year-old housewife from Texas thought it very important to remember the attack. She said doing so was necessary so that