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Claremont McKenna College

An Analysis of the Justifications Behind the Japanese Internment
Camps and Its Impact on Japanese American Identity

submitted to
Professor Lisa Koch

by
Elizabeth Yoshitake

for
Senior Thesis
Fall 2022
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A special thank you to the inspiration of my thesis: my grandparents James and Haruko Yoshitake. Thank you for sharing these vulnerable memories with me. I hope you find this paper to be one step towards commemorating and validating your experiences.

Abstract

In the first half of my paper, I will be reviewing the rationale of political leaders, citizen group organizers, and military officers on the issuing of Executive Order 9066. Additionally, I will be addressing the types of support and dissent that contributed to the eventual mandating of the Japanese internment camps during World War II. By looking into these aspects, I hope to find clarity behind why the internment camps were considered constitutional at the time and how it was received throughout society. The second half of my paper will address the dual identities amongst the Issei and Nisei Japanese generations, especially concentrating on the dynamics of being both Japanese and American after the War. To do this, I will be looking at memoirs of personal reflections from past internees. I am choosing to focus on memoirs as opposed to scholarly literature in order to find both political and emotional responses from their experiences in the camps. Through this, I hope to find a relationship between the internment camps and their impact on the prospective futures of Japanese Americans and how they choose to identify in this country.

Overall, most justifications for the issuing of Executive Order 9066 were premised on racial prejudices which policymakers translated into xenophobic policies. The sentiment of white supremacy in the US also dictates many of the ways policymakers advertise internment to adhere to their own ulterior motives. Many of the justifications regarding internment were internalized by Japanese Americans as they endured humiliation, dislocation, and financial ruin. Ultimately, the ways Japanese Americans coped with their hardships varied according to their ages, gender, length of residency, and their connection to heritage.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Motivations

My senior thesis research will be focused on the Japanese internment camps during World War II. I will discuss the political justifications that led to the issuing of Executive Order 9066 — the policy that authorized the mass internment of all American citizens of Japanese descent — and analyze the social pressures that contributed to their ostracization. Furthermore, by referencing personal memoirs as well as the individual experiences of my past-interned grandparents, I will examine how their experiences contributed to both their Japanese and American identities after the War.

My motivation in choosing this topic is inspired by my own grandparents' internment in the camps. Growing up, I was surrounded by memorabilia from their confinement in the remote regions of Wyoming and Arkansas. As I became older, I noticed how even the mere mention of World War II — let alone my grandparents' interned adolescent years — was met with some resistance. Still, I was fascinated by their experiences, and curious about the mark they made on their mindsets as children, and later, as adults. Incarcerated at the ages of 6 and 8, today, my grandparents are 88 and 91 respectively. While they do not have vivid memories of the day-to-day events at these camps, they were able to recall events that triggered deep emotions, like their arrival, birthdays, and bitterly cold winters.

When interviewing them, many of my questions initially made each of them visibly uncomfortable, but I was assured by my grandfather's repeated insistence that "this was important history, especially so that we never forget." The camps' implications are crucial, not only to better understand how governments and individuals promoted

prejudice, but also to learn more about the nuanced ways the Japanese responded to persecution. For most American students, the Japanese internment camps are only a lightly covered subject. But today, nearly eighty years since their imposition, as we see a surge in racial and ethnic hate crimes, understanding this regrettable period reminds us that the systematic detention of groups is not a tool exclusively wielded by dictators. Further, I believe that my curiosity about my grandparents' past has heightened my sensitivity to understanding the vulnerabilities of American minorities generally, and how specific political, economic, and social crises can provoke seemingly pluralistic-minded people to act unconscionably.

Background

The initiation of the Second World War was prompted by Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. At this time, the United States took on an isolationist position as domestic issues regarding the recovery from the Great Depression of the 1930s served a greater purpose to the nation.¹ However, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, prompted America's involvement in the War as well as the rise of anti-Asian sentiment that we see prevail throughout the century.

After Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were seen as a threat to the security of the nation. To alleviate these fears, President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested an investigation on all people of Japanese descent that resided in the US.² Curtis B. Munson,

¹ NationalWW2Museum.org Editors, "The Great Debate," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, accessed November 26, 2022, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/great-debate>.

² Brian Niiya, "Munson Report," in *Densho Encyclopedia*, June 19, 2020, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Munson_Report.

a wealthy businessman from the Midwest with no experience in investigations, was responsible for creating an intelligence report known as The Munson Report by interviewing Japanese residents about their loyalty to America. Many responses from this report insisted that Japanese Americans were not threats to national security as experienced investigators ensured that they would be cooperative.³ However, through a misinterpreted summary of the Report, many of its conclusions were largely overlooked in the war effort. Consequently, the President's decision should be judged less as intentionally punitive than as the product of an incomplete understanding of the true nature of the threat.

Continuing the suspicions of Japanese Americans, influential Congressmen and war generals voiced their opinions which contributed to the eventual passing of Executive Order 9066. Leland Ford, a Congressman from California, was the first member of the House of Representatives to advocate for the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans.⁴ John Rankin, a xenophobic Congressman from Mississippi, called for the deportation of all Japanese Americans by the end of the War.⁵ Although in support of internment, Ford initially disagreed with Rankin's perspective and assured that Japanese Americans were ultimately loyal to the US due to their citizenship. However, after receiving many threatening letters discussing anti-Japanese sentiment, Ford reverses his opinion, defending that Japanese Americans can "prove their patriotism" by voluntarily moving to

³ Niiya.

⁴ Martha Nakagawa, "Leland Ford," in *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed October 3, 2022, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Leland_Ford/.

⁵ Kyra Herzinger, "John Rankin," in *Densho Encyclopedia*, June 22, 2020, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/John_Rankin#Wartime_Stance_Against_Japanese_Americans.

the internment camps.⁶ Attorney General Francis Biddle, known to oppose immigrant rights, initially challenged the idea of incarceration camps but was met with resistance by the War Department.⁷ With his decision being overruled by President Roosevelt and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, the issuing of Executive Order 9066 was set into motion.⁸

While the signing of Executive Order 9066 was one of the most prominent anti-Asian policies in American history, many policies preceding World War II influenced the public's perspectives on Asian immigrants. In 1798, the Alien and Sedition Act created a premise that gave the federal government the power to deport any foreign male citizen and non-citizen at any given moment.⁹ At the time, this policy passed as a threat to any American who opposed the President or the federal government. In 1882, the issuing of the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the immigration and citizenship rights of Chinese workers for 10 years on the premise that this ethnic group "endangered the good order of certain localities."¹⁰ The vague language describing the necessity behind this policy was intentional in order to avoid a public statement of prejudice towards a particular ethnic group. Following this policy in 1898, the decision from *Wong Kim Ark v. US* reaffirmed

⁶ Nakagawa, "Leland Ford."

⁷ Brian Niiya, "Francis Biddle," in *Densho Encyclopedia*, July 15, 2020, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Francis_Biddle/.

⁸ "Executive Order 9066: Resulting in Japanese-American Incarceration (1942)," National Archives, September 22, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066>.

⁹ History.com Editors, "Alien and Sedition Acts," HISTORY, accessed November 24, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/early-us/alien-and-sedition-acts>.

¹⁰ "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)," National Archives, September 8, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act>.

the Fourteenth Amendment by concluding that children of immigrants who are born in the US are American citizens by right.¹¹

Stemming from the growing migration of the Chinese and Japanese to the US, a concern known as the Yellow Peril swept through the country. This metaphor represents the fears white Americans had towards Asian laborers as they were seen as a threat to their own economic prosperity and to white supremacy in the United States.¹² In 1907, a document known as the Gentleman's Agreement called for the equal treatment of the Japanese as US citizens on the premise that the Japanese government would limit their immigration to the United States.¹³ Due to the shortage of Chinese workers from the Chinese Exclusion Act, many Japanese laborers took their place with a dominating presence in the agriculture sector. To reduce domestic economic competition, California passed the Alien Land Law in 1913 which prohibited Asian immigrants from owning land which created great difficulty for the Japanese as their already few options for economic success dwindled even more.¹⁴ This policy particularly intended to limit Japanese job opportunities as they comprised a large portion of the farming industry. An active violation of the Gentlemen's Agreement, the issuing of the Immigration Act of 1924 restricted the migration of Asians to the US through a series of literacy tests and quotas.

¹¹ United States v. Wong Kim Ark, 169 U.S. 649 (1898) (March 28, 1898).

¹² "Asian Immigration: The 'Yellow Peril' · Race in the United States, 1880-1940 · Student Digital Gallery · BGSU Libraries," accessed October 8, 2022, <https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/exhibits/show/race-in-us/asian-americans/asian-immigration-and-the--yel>.

¹³ History.state.gov Editors, "Japanese-American Relations at the Turn of the Century, 1900–1922," Office of the Historian, accessed November 26, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/japanese-relations>.

¹⁴ Eji.org Editors, "California Law Prohibits Asian Immigrants from Owning Land," Eji, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/may/3>.

Throughout its history, the American federal government has promoted the importance of Western ideology in its policies. However, actions to uphold these ideas have repeatedly demonstrated a blatant distrust and intolerance for foreigners. The mere presence of Asian immigrants threatens the preservation of American homogeneity. To alleviate these fears, the United States federal government continuously enacts policies that are intended to ensure that “the Japanese [are] in a racially subordinate position in the US.”¹⁵ In a country that proclaims the extensive freedoms and “limitless” opportunities granted to each American citizen, many who do not completely assimilate are refused these ideals for the sake of cultural uniformity.

Summary

In my second chapter regarding the justification of the internment camps, I will begin with an analysis of the rationalization behind Executive Order 9066. Within this section, I will broadly discuss the context and general consensus of the American people and their opinions on Japanese internment. Through my findings, it is evident that Americans have both conscious and unconscious biases that guide their rationale. The majority of those who support internment used logic based in racial prejudice and xenophobia which was developed since the beginning of the Japanese migration to the United States. Next, the economic limitations of Japanese Americans both before and after the camps placed them in a subordinate position compared to other white

¹⁵ Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 20, <http://archive.org/details/niseisanseishift0000taka>.

Americans. Here, we see that white farmers find the Japanese as economic competition and advocate for their internment in order to monopolize the agricultural industry.

Politically, the armed forces also expressed their support for internment as they utilize a metaphor, known as the Fifth Column, to justify their responses. Contrary to my initial beliefs, top military officials were major dissenters of internment, and many expressed their concern for the loss of Japanese American constitutional rights. At the local level, citizen groups played an instrumental role in lobbying for Japanese internment. Even groups that were created for the Japanese expressed loyalty to the American government as they urged the Japanese to comply with their wartime demands. Newspapers became one of the key methods of disseminating information to both government officials and local citizens. In the Pacific Northwest, the majority of newspapers were explicit in their racially motivated rationale for internment. Only a handful of newspapers, most of which were created by and for Japanese Americans, condemned the government's actions and supported their constitutional rights. To conclude this section, I analyzed different social prejudices that had an impact on the psyche of those who supported internment. Ultimately, it was evident that American disdain for the Japanese is deeper than xenophobic preferences — it was guided by unconscious stereotypes that allowed them to caricature the Japanese as un-American and not worthy of fundamental constitutional protections.

The third chapter of my paper will address Japanese American identity in the US and will be split into two large sections: political and non-political responses from memoirs by past internees. To begin the political response section, I will define and explain the differences between the Japanese generations of the Issei and Nisei. In order

to explain the nuances behind Japanese American identity, it is important to acknowledge the generational differences between them as they had very distinguishing attributes that guided their mindset after the camps. Regarding the non-political responses from the memoirs, the majority of my findings reported significant feelings of dehumanization, hopelessness, and demoralization. On the other hand, some Japanese Americans described how Japanese-based ideologies, such as “it can’t be helped”, provided a rationale that allowed them to suppress their ordeals, and move on. After the camps, many Japanese looked for communities within their culture as post-war discrimination continued to persist in their financial, educational, and social spheres. By looking towards other Japanese Americans for comfort, many found themselves embracing their heritage more so than they did before and throughout the internment. Ultimately, the Issei generation’s identity remained consistently tied to their Japanese origins, and for the Nisei, there was a newfound appreciation for their Japanese heritage, but also a strong affiliation to their American birthplace.

Main Conclusions

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the internment of Japanese Americans was largely rationalized on the basis of national security. But a mixture of deep-rooted racial prejudices, economic opposition, and political indifference all combined to reveal a more complex cause. Further, the experiences of those interned were not monolithic. Reactions varied along the lines of class, gender, and most notably between the Nisei and Issei.

Memoirs from the Japanese serve as central sources in determining how the Japanese endured their internment, and the impact it made on their lives after release. Native-born Japanese generally attached loyalty to the Empire, expecting a swift defeat and a triumphant return home. American-born Japanese typically suppressed the hardships experienced in the camps. But the lingering prejudices they confronted after the War convinced them that their lives would be irreparably harmed and that they would be forever dismissed as outsiders.

Research Methods

My research for this thesis was equally divided among both primary and secondary sources. Memoirs comprised the majority of my primary materials, serving as compelling accounts of both the facts confronted and the feelings endured. Secondary sources, culled mostly from scholars writing about the War period, were critical in revealing how the rest of America justified its actions post-Pearl Harbor. I approached my research with the mindset of a scholar, wanting to create a kind of detachment from my subject. The credibility of my arguments, I had always believed, came from presenting each side, flaws and all, to the reader so that they could make their own informed decision. However, through writing this paper, I came to see this approach as idealistic, and ultimately unrealistic. While my biases reveal themselves in my choices — my sources, my organization, and my proportions — I hope that one day my analysis will contribute to the growing body of research that understands the precursors for internment, and the legacy it left in its wake.

Road Map

In the first core chapter of this thesis, I will be explaining the rationale behind the enactment of the internment camps by the government at both federal and local levels. I will address the core ideas that inspired prejudice against the Japanese leading up to the War. I will also be analyzing the ways in which the media, particularly newspapers, portrayed Japanese Americans at this time and the influence this may have had on government officials. In the second core chapter of this thesis, I will be looking into memoirs from ex-internees and identifying patterns within their narratives to see if treatment during and following internment had any impact on their national and cultural identities. I will be analyzing the predominant hopes and fears that followed internment, and how those emotions shaped their futures. By structuring my thesis in this way, I hope to find a relationship between the way the camps were justified and the potential internalization of that rationale by Japanese Americans. I would like to explore the possible impacts of broader American sentiment and how that has shaped the ways in which Japanese Americans choose to identify.

Chapter 2: Justifications of the Japanese Internment Camps

In many ways, the seeds for the World War II internment of Japanese Americans were planted well before the attack on Pearl Harbor. For many years prior, Japanese Americans had lived and thrived in the American West, predominantly in California and the Pacific Northwest. But as a small minority, with little national political influence, they were vulnerable to xenophobia. The efforts to marginalize, and subsequently intern, more than 100,000 Japanese Americans took more than an executive order — it required the complicity of a myriad of interest groups, who collectively opposed them as an economic, religious, social, and even moral threat to the American ideal. The origins and influence of those who opposed people of Japanese descent provide us with important insights into the accepted definition of an American and how these factors contribute to the ways the Japanese chose to identify with — or reject — aspects of the American character.

The Rationalization Behind Executive Order 9066

The rationalization of Executive Order 9066 provided a set of specific criteria that allowed the American federal government to justify the internment of Japanese Americans. First, the federal government concluded that it would be impossible for the Japanese to assimilate due to their refusal to sufficiently embrace American cultural traditions. In the government's eyes, the Japanese were unwilling to Americanize as they upheld their cultural traditions inside and outside of the home. Ultimately, this raises the question of what defines an American. Must the American identity be heritable, or does it derive from allegiance to American values and traditions? How can a government,

especially a durable American democracy, equitably measure its people's loyalties?

While the surprising Pearl Harbor attack unified America against the barbaric Japanese Emperor Hirohito, it also galvanized the nation, which provided the rationale for denying fundamental civil rights in the name of victory.

The language detailing Executive Order 9066 gave the military the power to remove any person who is considered a threat to the country. The purposefully ambiguous phrasing of this policy regarding the subject of detention is intended to provide the government freedom to implement any ulterior motives. Furthermore, by advertising the Order as an emergency wartime necessity, the Roosevelt Administration was able to quickly coordinate with other government bureaucrats, military officers, and influential local officials to enforce it. Throughout the camps' lifetime, the administration implemented a selective release scheme in which specific members of the Japanese community were freed over time.¹⁶ By releasing a small number of interned Japanese, the administration sought to appease civil libertarians who stridently condemned Roosevelt for the camps. This plan was merely a public relations ploy to reassure the citizens that the federal government was respecting minority rights by using a sample of citizens that was unrepresentative of the true conditions of the interned Japanese Americans.

Economic Limitations on Japanese Americans

Economically, American businesses supported internment, primarily as an indirect means of financial self-interest. In January 1942, the United Fresh Fruit and

¹⁶ Cheryl Greenberg, "Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14, no. 2 (1995): 9.

Vegetable Association, a leading agricultural conglomerate, called for the “immediate internment” of all Japanese people.¹⁷ At the time, Japanese American farmers comprised a staggering 45% of employed Japanese Americans in West Coast states.¹⁸ Many white farmers seized on the surging Japanese resentment as a means of reducing competition.

Racism was a prevailing rationale among many white farmers who believed that the agriculture industry had long been infiltrated by “outsiders.” One prominent California farmer, Austin Anson, viewed the War conflict in racial terms, by stating:

“We’re charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons... It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men... They undersell the white man in the markets.... They work their women and children while the white farmer must pay wages for his help. If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers could take over and produce everything the Jap grows. And we do not want them back when the war ends, either.”¹⁹

The clash of two American economies — one Asian and another, white — explains some of the bitterness that arises due to their coexistence. Opposition to traditional Japanese farming practices, which featured a “labor-intensive, high-yield style of agriculture,” clashed with the more “resource-intensive, low-yield agriculture characteristic of American farming.”²⁰ While the Japanese owned a large portion of the West’s most productive farms, there is no evidence that as a group, their intent was to monopolize the

¹⁷ “Internment of Enemy Aliens in Western States Demanded: Violence Feared Between Japanese and Filipino Produce Farm Labor in Pacific Coast Area,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995)*, January 23, 1942.

¹⁸ Gwynn Guilford, “The Dangerous Economics of Racial Resentment during World War II,” Quartz, February 13, 2018, <https://qz.com/1201502/japanese-internment-camps-during-world-war-ii-are-a-lesson-in-the-scary/-economics-of-racial-resentment/>.

¹⁹ Guilford, “The Dangerous Economics of Racial Resentment during World War II.”

²⁰ Guilford.

industry. Regardless, white farmers exploited growing anti-Japanese sentiment to tighten their grip in a highly competitive industry.

Political and Martial Rationale

Major support for internment was seen in the armed forces. Prominent military officers such as John L. DeWitt and Major General Allen W. Guillion aggressively sought to wrestle internment oversight away from civilian authority. These generals invoked the Fifth Column protocol, which justified the suspension of civil liberties during times of national emergency. They argued that America should presume that a contingent of Japanese Americans was conspiring with Hirohito to sabotage the American war effort.²¹ However, even in the absence of credible evidence of conspiracy, military officers continued to hold sway over a terrified Congress and president.

California Governor Culbert Olsen and Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron used the radio to disseminate myths perpetuated by the military. Olsen and Bowron seized on the Fifth Column metaphor, asserting that the Pearl Harbor attack surely involved coordination from Japanese Americans.²² Discrimination against the Japanese was also rampant among the armed forces as General John DeWitt, the head of the Western Defense Command, requested for the removal of all Japanese Americans from his command zone, arguing that “the enemy of the US was ‘the Japanese race’.”²³ One year into the War, the first peacetime draft law was enacted with “one of the first federal

²¹ Roger Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 36, http://archive.org/details/prisonerswithout0000dani_f5q7.

²² Daniels, 43.

²³ Robert Shaffer, “Opposition to Internment: Defending Japanese American Rights during World War II,” *The Historian* 61, no. 3 (1999): 600.

statutes to contain a nondiscriminatory clause... [especially against] race, creed, color..., [and] membership...in any labor, political, religious, or other organization.”²⁴ However, in practice, few, if any, Japanese Americans successfully enlisted. In reality, many veterans of Japanese descent were dismissed under the pretext that they were either “physically or mentally unfit.”²⁵

Despite lower-ranked officers’ fervent calls for Japanese internment, top officials were mainly opposed to a mass evacuation. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and his Chief of Staff George C. Marshall urged the military to focus on fighting the war.²⁶ Both officers acknowledged Japanese American natural rights and regarded suggestions for internment to doubtfully be a “common sense procedure.”²⁷ General Mark W. Clark, another opponent of internment, suggested that sabotage is difficult to successfully combat, and that the military would become vulnerable if internment was to become official.²⁸

Influence of Citizen Groups

Citizen groups played instrumental roles in prodding state and local governments to exclude the Japanese from society. One prominent organization, the Native Sons of the Golden West, was formed with the goal of “preserving both the historical significance and culture of California,” and led the movement for the public exclusion of Japanese

²⁴ Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial*, 34-35.

²⁵ Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial*, 35.

²⁶ Daniels, 31.

²⁷ Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial*.

²⁸ Daniels, 44.

Americans.²⁹ At their 65th Grand Parlor convention, members of this organization voted to attack Japanese American citizenship with this approach: “first to prosecute, then to carry through to the Supreme Court of the United States, if necessary, a suit challenging the United States citizenship of the Japanese; and second to draft and sponsor an amendment to the Constitution of the United States which shall have for its object the exclusion of all persons of Japanese ancestry from American citizenship.”³⁰ Later, in *Native Sons in Regan v. King Court*, the Supreme Court supported the lawsuit of the Registrar of Voters in San Francisco by a California elector who claimed that “his rights and privileges, secured to him by law, are impaired by permitting ineligible persons [the Japanese] to exercise the rights and privileges of electors of the State of California.”³¹ Here, the precedent of *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark*, the landmark case that established that American-born people are citizens by right, is being challenged.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court served to only fan the flames that citizen groups had ignited. The Native Sons in *Regan v. King's* decision reasoned that the Japanese, no matter how deep their American roots, could never feel completely secure that they were indeed citizens. Thus, if legal rights were not guaranteed, could they ever consider themselves completely American, and “worthy” of due process? Furthermore, if the

²⁹ “About Us - NSGW,” November 27, 2018, <https://nsgw.org/about-us/>.

³⁰ Greg Robinson, “Native Sons of the Golden West/Native Daughters of the Golden West,” in *Densho Encyclopedia*, September 18, 2015, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Native_Sons_of_the_Golden_West/Native_/Daughters_of_the_/Golden_West/.

³¹ *Regan v. King*, 49 F. Supp. 222 (N.D. Cal. 1942) (U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California July 2, 1942).

Supreme Court — the nation’s court of last resort — could question Japanese claims to citizenship, what higher authority could they appeal to?

Although most organizations supporting internment were American, some Japanese civil rights groups supported the government’s demands to relocate. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), primarily composed of Nisei, advocated for the Japanese cooperation of federal demands. It stressed the importance of compliance as a patriotic gesture, consistent with the American value of accommodation. American race and ethnicity historian, Cheryl Greenberg, has speculated on the reasons why a Japanese civil rights organization would publicly support the *revocation* of rights, rather than their expansion. According to Greenberg, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese may have conceded that relocation was acceptable — out of guilt by association.³² Regardless of the JACL’s motives, its actions made the Japanese more vulnerable to government action.

Local Media Perspectives

Local media played a critical role in disseminating the government’s case for internment. The *Argus*, located in Seattle, distinguished between Issei (immigrant Japanese) and Nisei (first-generation Japanese Americans) citizens. This paper contends that while Japanese nationals are not welcomed, American-born citizens of Japanese descent should be allocated the same rights as other American citizens.³³ Another Seattle-

³² Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment,” 9.

³³ Luke Colasurdo, “The Internment of Japanese Americans as Reported by Seattle Area Weekly Newspapers - Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project,” The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, Spring 2005, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/news_colasurdo.htm.

based newspaper, the *West Seattle Herald*, known for its extensive coverage of the Order, was less sanguine, imploring America to “GET ‘EM OUT!” with language identifying any Japanese person as a national threat.³⁴

Though scarce, there were news sources that opposed internment. In Washington, *The Bainbridge Review* often covered their community which was 8% Japanese.³⁵ This newspaper condemned the government’s bigotry and reminded the Japanese that they had constitutional rights as citizens. Another newspaper, the *Japanese American Courier*, was one of the first sources to be published and written by Japanese Americans.³⁶ This paper served as the “voice” for Japanese Americans as it denounced Japan’s actions at Pearl Harbor and assured its readers that they were loyal to the United States. While this paper proclaimed the Order as immoral, it urged Japanese Americans, as patriotic citizens, to “cheerfully and willingly” comply with the government’s decree.³⁷ Focused on deflecting blame rather than promoting justice, this platform operated to create unity within the Japanese American community. Regardless of their political stance, these newspapers were not only an important platform to articulate common feelings, but also a space that fostered community among an increasingly jaded population.

³⁴ Colasurdo.

³⁵ “Pre WWII - Lives of Bainbridge Island Nikkei Before the War,” *BIJAC*, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://bijac.org/history/bainbridge-island-before-wwii/pre-wwii-lives-of-bainbridge-island-nikkei-before-the-war/>.

³⁶ Colasurdo, “The Internment of Japanese Americans as Reported by Seattle Area Weekly Newspapers - Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project.”

³⁷ Colasurdo.

Analysis of Social Prejudices Towards Japanese Americans

In addition to labeling the Japanese as economic and cultural threats, opponents used pseudoscience to justify their detention in racial terms. Beginning in the late 19th Century, the eugenics movement sought to use science to create superior races. In 1927, the Supreme Court upheld state-imposed sterilizations in its *Buck v. Bell* decision. In upholding this practice, the Court held that state sterilization laws of the intellectually disabled were constitutional. In his notorious majority opinion, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. reasoned that sterilization was necessary to prevent those who would be a burden on society.³⁸ Even President Roosevelt, the progressive New Dealer who pledged to lift up minorities and the dispossessed, hired an anthropologist to “undertake a study of race-crossing of Asian and European stocks” — a tacit sign of government approval of the practices.³⁹

Inside the camps, the presence of interracial couples brought about issues for the army’s Western Defense Command (WDC). With at least 1,400 intermarried Japanese Americans interned, the WDC found their incarceration to be inappropriate as these couples were seen as more likely to be allegiant to the US.⁴⁰ Through the “Mixed Marriage Leave Clearances” policy, Major Herman P. Goebel Jr. laid the sexist and racist standards to which interracial couples were able to return home. Interracial couples with minor children were allowed to leave the camps due to the WDC’s fear of raising an

³⁸ Nancy Ordover, “Buck v. Bell and Before,” in *American Eugenics*, NED-New edition, Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 133, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttt7tz.18>.

³⁹ Alison Dundes Renteln, “A Psychohistorical Analysis of the Japanese American Internment,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1995): 630.

⁴⁰ Paul R. Spickard, “Injustice Compounded: Amerasians and Non-Japanese Americans in World War II Concentration Camps,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5, no. 2 (1986): 6.

American child in a predominately Japanese environment.⁴¹ While all interracial couples with minor children were allowed to exit the camps, the demographics of the interned parents dictated how much freedom was granted after their departure. The most significant criteria from the WDC illustrated that interracial couples with minor children would be able to return to their homes only on the condition that the father is of European descent. This reasoning was rooted in the belief that fathers of European descent can provide a more “American” home environment as the priority of Army officials was to ensure that children with Amerasian parents were raised to completely assimilate into American culture.⁴² On the other hand, interracial couples with minor children who had a father of Japanese ancestry were allowed to exit the camps, but not allowed to return home as Japanese fathers are assumed to “make their children more than half Japanese.”⁴³

Though race prejudice was a major underlying impetus behind discrimination, so too was sexism. Notorious myths regarding typical “Japanese character,” particularly one about the Japanese man as hypersexual, also fueled prejudices that strengthened the pro-internment rationale. Because of their statistically higher birth rates, Japanese men are viewed as sexually aggressive.⁴⁴ Along with the specter of miscegenation, Japanese men are seen to be “driven by a beastly sexual urge...the Jap would endanger the white female and the purity of the Anglo-American stock.”⁴⁵ American social policy historian, Alison Renteln, argues that these anxieties are the product of projection, where one’s own fears

⁴¹ Spickard, 7.

⁴² Spickard, 8.

⁴³ Spickard, 8.

⁴⁴ Renteln, 636.

⁴⁵ Renteln, 636.

are externalized onto others. While on the outside white men depict Japanese men as savages, internally they are masking their own desires that fetishize Japanese women for their “exotic sensuality.”⁴⁶

Chapter Conclusion

Through the vigilant efforts of political officials and influential policymakers, the treatment of Japanese Americans as second-class citizens was intentionally promoted as a reaction against a growing immigrant population. The United States, whose government was founded on a respect for due process and equal protection under the law, suspended these guarantees on the pretense that it was protecting America. The use of the internment camps as a means to support the government’s ulterior motives brings us to question their intentions, and ultimately, the protections built into our democracy that resist the unjust use of federal power. The expansive power behind Executive Order 9066 demands greater scrutiny. When used judiciously, this power can help to swiftly implement a policy — but it also has the potential to be a tool for aspiring dictators who wish to circumvent the legislative check on executive authority. As the images of Japanese internment fade from our memory, we should shift our focus to evaluating the integrity of our three branches of government. Are these symbolic guardians worthy of our trust, or are their structural flaws that require repair, so that when they are overwhelmed at moments of national crisis, they will genuinely protect us?

⁴⁶ Renteln, 644.

For Japanese Americans, internment was more than a physical separation; it was a dislocation from their communities, their livelihoods, and perhaps most profoundly, from their government. While the Japanese threat was real, the overwhelming evidence is that it was represented by only a small subgroup of Japanese. Entire families, many of whom were second and third generation — who often shunned visits to their ancestral lands out of loyalty to their adopted homes — were classified as outsiders. Remarkably, very little was heard from traditional defenders of minority group rights, like the American Civil Liberties Union. Perhaps the existential threat posed by war-repelled groups who would in non-wartime circumstances take up the cause. The War could justify discrimination that would otherwise be intolerable, like that aimed at the BIPOC community. The ultimate message created by the American federal government during this time period is that protection of American minorities would have to take a backseat to the threat of totalitarianism.

Chapter 3: Japanese and American Self-Identification

For the second half of my paper, I will be looking at the impacts of the Japanese internment camps on self-identification. In the late 1800s, there was a mass emigration of Japanese who came to America for better economic opportunities. In their new environment, Japanese Americans took the initiative to assimilate to American culture. It is important to note the qualities of Japanese culture that influence the ways in which Japanese immigrants dealt with adversity. Anti-Japanese sentiment on both local and federal levels was common since their immigration. Because of their reserved nature and strong will to assimilate, Japanese immigrants were less likely to fight discrimination and more likely to internalize prejudices.

Identity is the foundation of who we are. It is what determines our priorities and how we act in the world. I am interested in looking at the impact that a life-altering event, such as internment, has on how Japanese Americans identify themselves. For this chapter's research, I will be looking primarily at memoirs, or first-hand accounts of personal experiences during and following the incarceration camps. The historical value and insight memoirs provide are important when analyzing self-identification, as compared to third-party sources which simplify individual experiences. Memoirs allow readers to empathize with the author and humanize their experiences with the detailed nuances of their situation. Because memoirs are based on firsthand experiences, I hope to be able to find patterns among individualized reflections about how the internment camps shaped Japanese American identity.

Political Responses from Memoirs

Definitions of Issei and Nisei Generations

To have a sufficient understanding of dual identities, we must first distinguish between the Issei and Nisei generations. The Issei generation comprises of Japanese immigrants who migrated from Japan in the late 1800s. As economic conditions declined, many emigrated to Hawaii, and later, to the Pacific Northwest and California, where agricultural work was plentiful. However, once settled, Issei found that menial and itinerant work was the best they could expect. To improve their social and economic positions, most Issei adopted an “accommodationist strategy,” whereby they assimilated the business practices and social etiquette familiar to native-born American citizens.⁴⁷ Like many immigrant communities before them, Isseis inculcated in their children the importance of higher education, as a means of ascending both their social and economic class.

The Nisei, children of the Issei generation, overwhelmingly viewed their Japanese heritage as secondary to their American origins. Growing up, most Nisei often felt self-conscious about their Japanese culture, especially being raised during the Red Scare era of the early 1950s. Economically, Nisei found themselves similarly vulnerable as the Issei, as many were forced to close their farms or shutter their family businesses from their clientele boycotting Japanese-produced goods.⁴⁸ Socially, the Nisei were more

⁴⁷ Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei*, 18.

⁴⁸ Takahashi, 36.

accepted than the Issei whose heavily-accented English stigmatized them as outsiders and distinguished them from the Nisei, who spoke the language flawlessly.⁴⁹

Reconciling with Dual Identities

Distinguishing between immigrants and first-generation Japanese Americans, and the ways in which they viewed their political and social loyalties is a critically important starting point for understanding the mindsets of each group after the War. Within the camps, a clear division developed between the generations. Overwhelmingly, Japanese immigrants saw themselves as prisoners of war, believing that they would be liberated by Japan. Consequently, their relationship with camp personnel was profoundly hostile. Rebellions, usually in the form of strikes, were often organized. The Issei also had a kind of fatalism about their prospects after the war. Their opposition was not rooted in a belief that Constitutional guarantees permitted them to speak freely, but in a belief that as Japanese nationals, their loyalty lay with the emperor, not with the American president.

In his compelling memoir, Yasutaro Soga chronicled the lives of Issei in both New Mexico and Hawaii. At Sand Island Camp, on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, there was a mixture of classes — from Japanese-speaking journalists to convicted felons.⁵⁰ Soga recalled how the camp resembled a prison more than it did a residential camp. Here, the collegiality and camaraderie that characterized Manzanar were replaced with a constant undercurrent of hostility. Threats of imminent uprisings, suicides, and strikes

⁴⁹ Takahashi, 45.

⁵⁰ Keiho Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai'i Issei* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 40, http://archive.org/details/lifebehindbarbed00soga_0.

were common, and thus required heavy surveillance from camp security.⁵¹ At Lordsburg, in desolate central New Mexico, the camp was meticulously organized into units resembling mini governments, with each having its own “governor,” secretary, and postmaster.⁵² The appearance of self-rule was just that — an attempt by officials to give the internee a sense of autonomy and to calm their impulse to retaliate.⁵³ Overall, Soga’s memoir depicts the Issei as decidedly Japanese, loyal to the Empire, and pining for the day it would defeat America. Soga expresses contempt for the Issei in Hawaii who were deluded into thinking that Japan had been victorious and that their economic opportunities in their homeland would be far more lucrative than those in the States.⁵⁴

For first-generation Japanese Americans, the Nisei struggled to find clarity in their identities. Born in America, the Nisei grew up with similar aspirations and fears as other American citizens but were also bound by their Japanese heritage from their immigrant parents.⁵⁵ Especially during the rise of anti-Japanese sentiment, the Nisei felt that they had to choose one part of their cultural makeup — Japanese or American — even though this duality is impossible to separate when defining identity.

Grappling with their Japanese and American identities, many Nisei found it confusing to know what was expected of them in society. While the Nisei attended American schools, which emphasized freedom of expression and the challenging of traditional ideals, their homes stressed Japanese notions of respect, honor, and obedience

⁵¹ Soga, 41.

⁵² Soga, 75.

⁵³ Soga, 75.

⁵⁴ Soga, 205.

⁵⁵ Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow, 1969), 171, <http://archive.org/details/niseiquietameric0000hoso>.

towards authority. This demonstrates the struggles in the Nisei's efforts to assimilate to American culture as their parents are encouraging the Nisei to adhere to the authority of American teachers who are "unconsciously and unintentionally...indoctrinating [them] in a conflicting philosophy."⁵⁶ Additionally, the Nisei saw themselves as the link that bonded their heritage in the East and in the West. This created a sense of pressure for the Nisei as they felt the need to accomplish their own dreams as well as those of their parents.⁵⁷

As the Issei worry about the diminishment of Japanese culture in the Nisei, many Issei emphasized the importance of the Nisei traveling to Japan to learn more about Japanese culture, which ultimately led to the creation of sponsored Nisei tours to Japan. Miya Sannomiya, a member of the 1925 tour, reflects on her dual identities: "I respect Japan, the land of my ancestors. But I know nothing about her. I cannot even speak Japanese. In spite of all our difficulties, I love America. I prefer to do my best in America."⁵⁸ Ultimately, the Nisei defined their identities to reflect their homage towards their environments rather than to their ethnic culture.

Resistance Within the Camps

While Japanese American relations with camp officials were tolerable, those with the FBI were frequently contentious. Commissioner Hoover enacted an extensive system of surveillance, most notoriously by recruiting moles who would report any agitation to

⁵⁶ Hosokawa, 172.

⁵⁷ Hosokawa, 176.

⁵⁸ Hosokawa, 176–77.

agents. In early 1942, several theories about an imminent Japanese American insurgency circulated — ranging from a conspiracy of farmers to direct the enemy to American airfields, to groups of Los Angeles fishermen stashing Japanese military clothing.⁵⁹ Though no large-scale treason was uncovered, the threat was enough to intensify surveillance in the camps. In Keiho Soga's memoir, conditions at the Lordsburg facility in New Mexico were constantly surveilled, but most internees merely accepted this as just another indignity.

Government discrimination leading up to and following internment heavily influenced the ways in which Japanese Americans identify with their American culture. Prior to internment, Japanese nationals who were suspected of pledging allegiance to Japan were seized and labeled by serial numbers for an investigation. These actions of objectification remove any sense of humanity while simultaneously ostracizing the Japanese from the rest of society. According to Kiki Funabiki, the Department of Justice would “detain suspected Issei from two to six years without charges or due process.”⁶⁰ Returning from the camps, Japanese Americans faced discrimination in the form of anti-Japanese propaganda. Posters in major cities would advertise ideas such as “Jap Hunting License, Open Season, No Limit” and “Let's Blast the Japs Clean Off the map.”⁶¹ Ever since their migration, the Japanese have felt unwanted and objectified by the American government and society.

⁵⁹ Jerry Stanley, *I Am an American: A True Story of Japanese Internment* (New York: Scholastic, 1998), 14, <http://archive.org/details/iamamericantrues00stan>.

⁶⁰ Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei*, 85.

⁶¹ Takahashi, 90.

Non-Political Responses from Memoirs

Feelings of Dehumanization

First-generation memoirs are decidedly non-political and tend to stress the degrading effects of captivity — as opposed to the ways their liberties were restricted. After being released from the camps, internees had feelings of dehumanization which permeated through different forms of everyday life.

The experiences of Kiku Hori Funabiki and Sato Hashizume were representative of many internees who endured the humiliation of doing menial work after being released. They bartered their labor as “schoolgirls” or servants for better accommodations and small luxuries like spending money.⁶² The stigma of internment, combined with their lack of marketable skills made their search for work after internment arduous. Even after being released, some Japanese Americans found it difficult to detach from their interned identities. Kiku poignantly acknowledged how perceptions of herself inside the camps paralleled those she endured outside detention. Hashizume notes that “it seems even though I was no longer in camp, I was still expected to live by the rules of others. Upon our release...we had been given official directives: Keep a low profile. Limit congregation with Asians to a minimum. Never converse in Japanese in public.”⁶³ Here, Hashizume alludes to a pervasive stereotype of the submissive and obsequious Japanese, and its power to not only repel other Americans — but also its hold on Japanese self-esteem. Even in the social and work lives of Japanese Americans, government rationale is

⁶² Takahashi, 77.

⁶³ Takahashi, 80.

encompassed in their psyche — forcing them to submit to their authority even after being released.

Loss of Dignity and Motivation

While the incarceration camps provided an educational system, the narrow curriculum and scarce resources stifled the academic motivations of many Japanese American students. Recollecting her times in camp, Florence Miho Nakamura describes the school system in Topaz as merely a place to socialize, rather than to learn.⁶⁴ She explains how the shortage of supplies and teachers hindered her academic growth and stunted her ambitions. Furthermore, learning once outside of the camps proved to be no better than when interned. After being demonized in the media, Japanese Americans still faced great prejudices in the classroom. Nakamura explains that while American schools had better supplies and teachers than inside the camps, Japanese Americans remained social outcasts who were “ignored and ostracized by fellow classmates.”⁶⁵ Consequently, many Nisei became cynical of the American educational system, often dropping out of school to work in family-owned businesses.

Reintegration, Discrimination, & Demoralization After the Camps

For many Americans the Post-War years brought the promise of economic and educational opportunity. For returning soldiers, the GI Bill covered most college expenses and provided down payment for homes. But for the Japanese, no such

⁶⁴ Takahashi, 185.

⁶⁵ Takahashi, 185.

opportunities existed. As a consequence, most reverted to family businesses and found alternative means of financing their education.

The popular concept of *Shikata ga nai*, “it can’t be helped”, was more than a staid traditional saying — it conveyed a sense of powerlessness that was pervasive among many internees. Reintegration was more than a matter of returning to farms, factories, and offices. For the previously employed, there was no guarantee of reinstatement; and even if given work, most were offered entry-level positions with significantly lower pay. With unstable job conditions and unfamiliar environments, many returning internees have felt that they are “constantly having to put their lives together one piece at a time.”⁶⁶ Resourcefulness became a prized attribute of most internees, and in the years immediately following the war, Japanese American cultural societies flourished — both to preserve traditions and as means of helping displaced citizens.

For many internees, like my grandparents, resuming life in Southern California was daunting, but not impossible. The Japanese American community was well established, with social and economic networks going back several generations. For my grandparents, the greatest barrier was not in finding unskilled work, but in moving into the middle class. Small businesses, especially in the wholesale fruit and vegetable trade, could survive by catering primarily to Japanese restaurants, but moving outside the community was challenging. The stigma of being associated with the nation that had thrust America into a World War was still fresh in the American consciousness.

⁶⁶ Takahashi, 122.

My paternal great-grandfather, Yoichi Yoshitake, was an Issei who resettled on the outskirts of Montebello, California, hoping to resume work as a gardener. However, he soon found that in the intervening years, employers filled their vacancies, often paying lower wages. With little savings or credit, he could not secure even a modest bank loan to start his own business. Further, the many Japanese community associations that helped those who were rejected by traditional banks, had dwindled considerably. Middle-class Nisei, who were the groups' primary benefactors, were more focused on rebuilding their own financial lives. Still, my great-grandfather remained optimistic, clinging to the belief that America, despite treating him harshly, would eventually come to embrace his son. My grandfather, James Isamu Yoshitake, who grew up in the heart of Los Angeles, spent his adolescent years as a typical American boy, rarely encountering the prejudice that followed his father. With the motivation to pursue a formal education, my grandfather still struggled to find comparable work that would allow him to distinguish himself from his father's reality. Despite his practical hardships, he continued to believe deeply in the ideal America — a place that offered the opportunity to transcend one's caste — a concept that had created a highly stratified imperial Japan.

Self-Reliance vs. Community

The rise of anti-Japanese sentiment after World War II disengaged many Japanese Americans from society and drew them closer to their familial ties. Due to the camps' racist rationalization from the federal government, Japanese Americans became cynical of America's ability to protect them. In these times of despair, Japanese Americans reverted to Japanese notions of conformity and community to cope with their

displacement. Feelings of shame for being associated with the enemy nation caused many returning internees to suppress their memories of the camps, limiting future generation's knowledge of their experiences.⁶⁷ In turn, this lack of self-reflection led them to avoid any conflict that would further hinder their efforts to assimilate.

The dynamics between the Issei and Nisei following their internment had a great impact on the ways that they reconciled with both their Japanese and American identities. As mainly elderly immigrants, the Issei did not have the motivation to pursue a life beyond their means. Many Issei settled for low-wage, labor-intensive jobs that were sufficient in providing for their families but made it difficult for their children to pursue ambitious futures outside of the camps. The financial difficulties the Issei faced once returning from the camps also made it difficult for them to improve their economic status. With their Japanese upbringing, the Issei relied on Buddhist and Shinto ideologies coated with ideas of conformity and a homogenous culture to raise the Nisei.⁶⁸ The need to maintain and continue Japanese tradition was the priority for many Issei to find solace in a time of despair. The Nisei, too, were compelled to learn the Japanese language to stay in communication with their parents and to help them through their elderly years. Additionally, the Nisei found it essential to embrace their Japanese heritage as a means of showing solidarity and providing a sense of peace in an effort to alleviate the pain their immigrant parents had to endure.

⁶⁷ Brian Komei Dempster, *Making Home from War: Stories of Japanese American Exile and Resettlement* (Library of Congress), 186, accessed October 24, 2022, <https://www.scribd.com/book/260742756/Making-Home-from-War-Stories-of-Japanese-American-Exile-and-Resettlement>.

⁶⁸ Neil Nakadate, *Looking After Minidoka: An American Memoir*, 71, accessed December 1, 2022, <https://www.scribd.com/book/392106972/Looking-After-Minidoka-An-American-Memoir>.

While the Nisei also faced similar financial hurdles as the Issei, this generation felt a responsibility to structure their lives as an act of redemption for their parents. Many Nisei after internment adopted the mentality of *Kodomo no tame ni*, translated to “for the sake of the children,” to guide their prospective futures. This mentality was responsible for the suppression of memories from the camps which in turn emphasizes a focus on working for the sake of creating a better life for their own children. As a result, the Nisei created the “model minority” image for Asian Americans which established cultural expectations such as academic excellence, social modesty, and obedience to authority.⁶⁹ The Nisei utilized these characteristics to convey an image of Japanese Americans that demonstrated a kind of conquering of their past trauma. However, while these stereotypes have positive implications, they create a false narrative that disregards the harsh realities that many Issei have faced after internment such as “renunciations of citizenship, depression and suicides, and intracommunity resentments and violence.”⁷⁰

Chapter Conclusion

As Henry Miller, an American novelist, once wrote, “If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored. One’s destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.”⁷¹ This quote encapsulates the general feeling the Japanese had towards their newfound lives post-internment. While most would expect a years-long incarceration sentence and complete removal from society to

⁶⁹ Nakadate, 282.

⁷⁰ Nakadate, 282.

⁷¹ Nakadate, 238.

discourage the Japanese from being optimistic, many found solace in their communities to keep them afloat. Ultimately, identity is a fluctuating and nuanced perspective that is difficult to simplify. Many factors contributed to the overwhelming number of emotions that dictated the ways Japanese Americans chose to grapple with their excluded realities.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Today, nearly eighty years after the internment of the Japanese, most Americans believe it to be a shameful episode, and never likely to repeat itself again. Only twenty years after the War, as the Civil Rights movement reached its peak, American rationale for discrimination took a different course. African Americans, inspired by the charismatic and eloquent Martin Luther King, challenged the entire political system that imposed a separate, inferior world on them. They challenged the barriers that kept them from voting, sitting in front of buses, and staying in hotels of their choosing. And they protested their plight in the midst of a war.

But unlike World War II, which was seen as a justifiable conflict, Vietnam came to be seen as an immoral intervention into an unwinnable struggle. The Vietnam War deeply divided Americans, and in this division, reformers, including black civil rights activists, were embraced. African American activists could appeal to American ideals alongside American institutions to galvanize their followers. The same environment for the protest was not available for the Japanese. This impact on the Japanese was markedly different than that made on African Americans, who had endured slavery and then shortly after the end of the Civil War, had made significant political strides in state legislatures. The Japanese who had settled in America did not have the benefit of a dynamic, world-renowned leader like King, nor an influential organization like the NAACP that could draw on deep political, legal, and economic connections to defend vulnerable Blacks.

Reparations nearly forty years later, along with a formal apology, marked an important recognition of the harm done by a misguided policy. Still, while the payments to what were then middle-aged adults had little effect on their identities, the memories of

being abruptly shunned as outsiders compelled many Japanese to create insular communities adjacent to their communities before the War. Very few Japanese migrated outside California, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest, likely due to a fear that if a crisis were to recur, they would be even more vulnerable in areas with fewer Japanese.

The story of Japanese internment is not merely an ethnic story, it is an American story. Its history spotlights our nation's vulnerability to racial injustice, especially in times of national crisis, and should inspire vigilance in ensuring that whatever threat to national security exists is first reasonably understood. Protecting the rights of any American ethnic minority should not fall on the shoulders of the minority themselves. It should be shared with all decent Americans, regardless of race, who might remind themselves that their freedom is inextricably linked with all other Americans.

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