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Conflict, Resistance, and Resolve: Uncovering Lost Narratives in Japanese-American Internment

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Abstract: By the end of 1942, the U.S. army and the national government had forcibly removed 120,000 Japanese descended individuals from their homes on the West Coast, confining them to ten internment camps across the nation. In an effort to construct a more accurate representation of the mindset of internees in the wartime era, my thesis hones in on conflict and division within camp life. I emphasize the heterogeneity of Japanese-American voices and push back against the oversimplification of the different internee subgroups: the Japan-born immigrants (“Issei”), U.S.-born citizens (“Nisei”), and Japan-educated Nisei who returned home before the war (“Kibei”). Throughout the course of the internment era, they have been characterized as “loyal” or “disloyal.” The continued use of these labels, both in the wartime period and in the subsequent scholarship on internment, minimizes the complexity of internees’ views. Their mindsets were shaped by the traumatic nature of removal, the treatment they received in the camps, and their fears about post-camp life. Depending on their individual experiences, internees chose to act in distinct ways. For example, some internees resisted governmental authority while others served as government informants. However, their choices were not necessarily indicative of undying loyalty to Japan or the United States. Through a case study of the Manzanar internment camp in California and the Poston internment camp in Arizona, I demonstrate that the “disloyal” and “loyal” labels provide an incomplete understanding of life in the camps. Deep disagreements shaped internees’ experiences, and the intricacies of the internment experience are silenced through racialized assumptions about people of Japanese ancestry. With conflict as a lens for viewing the internment experience, a much clearer picture wartime Japanese American experiences comes to the forefront.

Reader's Note: Please note that this version of my thesis has been adapted for publication. I have only chosen to publish the second chapter (of three) and I have included a trimmed-down introduction and conclusion to provide more context on my overall work. My bibliography has not been altered and reflects the full list of sources that I consulted throughout my research.

Introduction

In 1980, almost four decades after Japanese American Internment took place, the United States Congress created the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The Commission assessed Executive Order 9066, which officially mandated the exclusion of Japanese-descended individuals on the West Coast, and it reviewed the Army's handling of the removal and internment process.¹ Its work culminated in a 1983 report entitled *Personal Justice Denied*, which concluded that "careful review of the facts...has not revealed any security or military threat from the West Coast ethnic Japanese in 1942."² This was crucial because it completely invalidated the internment process and contradicted the endless "evidence" that had established the Japanese as an unpredictable danger to national security.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that "careful review" enables historians to gain a truer understanding of internment, one that extends beyond broad assumptions about the Japanese population. My research demonstrates that Japanese internees not only faced extreme racial prejudice, but also recognized it as such and pushed back against it. I emphasize the heterogeneity of Japanese-American voices from the late 1930s-1946, emphasizing conflict in the internment experience. Adopting a focus on conflict allows historians studying the internment era to explain another kind of racist wrong, which was the oversimplification of many different kinds of people under the labels of "disloyal" and "loyal." Deep disagreements shaped internees' experiences, and using racialized assumptions about Japanese-descended people to categorize internees creates silences in the internment narrative.

¹ United States, Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 455.

² *Ibid.*, 455.

After conducting their investigation of internment, the Commission concluded that “the broad historical causes which shaped...[internment]...were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”³ Outwardly acknowledging the role of racial discrimination in the decision to intern the Japanese-descended population from the West Coast was key, as notable governmental actors denied these same claims throughout the wartime period. The Commission also struck down the “military necessity” rationale that justified the internment process and led to a “loss of property and personal liberty” for the internees.⁴ In acknowledging the material and psychological effects of internment, the Commission constituted the first true example of the government taking responsibility for its decisions during WWII. Although these conclusions were drawn long after internment had ended, they were still a notable step in recognizing the power of racial stereotypes and the grave mistake that the government made by mandating internment.

Ultimately, the Commission’s findings resulted in passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, a landmark piece of legislation that provided reparations for the Japanese Americans who had been interned. The text of the act declared that:

“(1) a grave injustice was done to citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry by the evacuation, relocation, and internment of civilians during World War II; (2) these actions were without security reasons and without any acts of espionage or sabotage documented by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, and were motivated by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership; (3) the excluded individuals suffered enormous damages for which appropriate compensation has not been made; and (4) the Congress apologizes on behalf of the Nation.”⁵

³ Ibid, 18.

⁴ Ibid, 457-458.

⁵ Library of Congress, “Summary: H.R.442 — 100th Congress (1987-1988),” Congress.gov, last modified July 26, 1988, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/442#:~:text=Title%20I%3A%20United%20States%20Citizens,because%20they%20refused%20to%20accept.>

Along with this statement, the act ordered the Attorney General to find individuals who were eligible for reparations and pay each of them \$20,000 in damages.⁶ In making these powerful claims and issuing reparations, Congress invalidated every aspect of the Executive Order and the pieces of “evidence” that were gathered against Japanese-descended individuals to support internment. The language of the act also acknowledges the racial prejudice that permeated every stage of the removal process, a reality that was vehemently denied in the internment era itself.

For two to three decades after World War II and internment had ended, the historical scholarship on Japanese American internment was written from the perspective of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the federal government, and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). The reasons for this were two-fold: 1) historians researching internment were analyzing primary sources that had been produced by these groups, leading to a subconscious representation of these dominant perspectives and 2) the JACL took deliberate steps to disseminate a portrayal of Japanese Americans (Nisei) as a model minority and in doing so, obscured the harmful effects of racism.

In 1960, the JACL National President, Shigeo Wakamatsu, announced the beginning of the Japanese American Research Project (JARP), which was intended to document Japanese American history and present the group as trustworthy citizens in the aftermath of WWII.⁷ Researchers worked closely with the JACL to publish books that highlighted the organization’s activism as well as their collaboration with the federal government. Bill Hosokawa was a prominent historian who took part in JARP, publishing *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* in 1969. The publication of his book embodies both of the issues outlined above. One instance of Hosokawa’s subconscious portrayal of governmental figures occurs in his discussion of WRA director Dillon Myer and the loyalty questionnaire of 1943.⁸

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Katie L. Furuyama, “Imagining Equality, Constructing Ethnicity, Race, Identity, and Nation: The Japanese American Citizens League and the League of United Latin American Citizens” (PhD diss., University of California Irvine, 2012), 82, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/imagining-equality-constructing-ethnicity-race/docview/920153327/se-2?accountid=14707>.

⁸ I will discuss the loyalty questionnaire in detail in Chapter Three.

Questions No. 27 and 28 were particularly contentious, asking if the internees would denounce their allegiance to any country other than the United States. The government modified question 28 in response to negative reactions that arose in the camps, specifically by the Issei. Answering the question affirmatively meant that they had to renounce their citizenship to Japan, the only country they had citizenship in. While this is merely one example of the complexity of the loyalty questionnaire, Hosokawa provides a very surface level analysis of the “No” responses to questions 27 and 28. He uses the reasoning of Dillon Myer, director of the WRA, to explain these answers—thus ruling out any varying perspectives. According to Myer, “most of the [“no” replies] were expressions of people who had failed to become integrated into their prewar communities, who were weary of fighting against discrimination, [and] who were unhappy with the way they had been treated in the Evacuation.”⁹ In this sense, Hosokawa took Myer’s perspective as fact, failing to recognize possible deeper motivations for the internees.

Additionally, a major part of Hosokawa’s analysis involves deemphasizing the role of resisters within the camps. By labeling the Nisei as “quiet Americans” in the title of his book, Hosokawa frames the Japanese American community as less problematic and disturbing in the camps. He also advances a heroic depiction of the JACL, praising the way it swept in to deal with the resistance that did occur amongst the internee community more generally. In fact, one of Hosokawa’s chapter titles is “The Dedicated JACL-ers,” and within it, he emphasizes that the “JACL... proceeded with its work quietly and usually effectively despite the inclination of substantial numbers of evacuees to blame it for everything from the evacuation decision to inadequate food in the camps.”¹⁰ Essentially, he frames the work of the JACL as noble and brave despite the onslaught of criticism they faced within the camps.

⁹ Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 365.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 387.

Gradually, this WRA/JACL perspective began to crumble, as other historians gained more access to primary sources that highlighted the perspectives of the internees themselves. The essay “The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective,” written by Arthur A. Hansen and David A. Hacker in 1974, is one of the first works to make this switch and expose previously hidden perspectives. As the title suggests, the authors adopt what they call an “ethnic perspective” on analyzing the Manzanar Riot, which occurred in December 1942 at the Manzanar internment Camp.¹¹ Prior to delving into their argument, the authors explain how the WRA/JACL perspective downplayed the riot’s cultural significance in the Japanese American community.¹² Proponents of the WRA/JACL perspective tended to use language that reduced the significance of the riot to a one time “incident.” Using the word “riot” or other terms that indicated deep-rooted grievances would have undermined the WRA’s image and the way their policies were viewed by the American populace.¹³

This trend of exposing new interpretations continued in the works of historians who looked to provide new viewpoints on the years leading up to internment as well as The Pacific War as a whole. A key historiographical turning point was Roger Daniels’s *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (1971), which utilized racism as a lens throughout the course of the book. He argued that the commonly known “military necessity” rationale, which originated in government documents and was re-emphasized in secondary literature, was just an excuse to cover up the true driving factors behind internment. He boldly asserts that “the myth of military necessity was used as a fig leaf for a particular variant of American racism.”¹⁴ While he gives the most weight to racism in his analysis, he also highlights other factors, such as political motives and the personal attitudes of government officials.

¹¹ The Manzanar Riot and its background will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

¹² The WRA/JACL perspective refers to the viewpoint of WRA and JACL themselves along with the ideas of historians who adopted it in the secondary literature about the riot itself.

¹³ Arthur A. Hansen and David A. Hacker, “The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective,” *Amerasia Journal* 2, no. 2 (1974): 119.

¹⁴ Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), 71.

In regards to the Pacific War on a larger scale, John Dower's *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (1983) traces the long history of anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast, and he delves extensively into the "foreignizing" of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. as well as Japanese Americans. Japanese-descended individuals were constantly dehumanized in propaganda and in the media as a whole, which helped reconcile the contradictory views of Japanese as "lesser than" and superhuman.¹⁵ In this sense, the mainstream media framed the Japanese as inferior while also cultivating intense fear about Japanese prowess and abilities; both of these arguments would help to justify internment in the minds of the American people. Dower emphasizes that the main difference between the Japanese enemy in Asia and the German enemy was that the hatred for the Japanese enemy was deeply rooted in racial bias as opposed to the events of the war itself. Dower's work was extremely impactful in that it offered a racial analysis of WWII's Pacific front that had not been explored before.

Additionally, Brian Hayashi's book, *Democratizing the Enemy: Japanese American Internment* (2004) features a broader perspective on the period of internment as a whole. He analyzes cultural, social, economic, and other factors that led to the mass removal and internment of Japanese Americans and Japanese-born immigrants. He is part of a large body of scholars who gained access to previously unseen documents after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and once reparations began to be distributed to all former internees.¹⁶ Many of these documents came from former internees, and with these sources in mind, Hayashi focuses largely on the "wider, global context influencing decision makers and the victims."¹⁷ With views becoming more polarized as the war

¹⁵ John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, 7th ed (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1993), 89.

¹⁶ Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7. In addition to Hayashi, I will consult a variety of revisionist works, including the following: Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). Cherstin M. Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots: Japanese American Wartime Citizenship, Civil Disobedience, and Historical Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012). Peter H. Irons, *Justice at War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983). Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgment without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment during World War II* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

began, the removal and internment of these varying groups would prove to be problematic in the camps—these tensions are explored by Hayashi later on in his book. While this is only a brief discussion of Hayashi’s focus, the emergence of a plethora of new documents in recent years has allowed other researchers to gain more insight into individual Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrant pre-war communities, as well as personal experiences in the internment camps.

My thesis adopts a similar framework as Hayashi in the sense that I will explore a variety of factors in regards to internment—not just race. However, my approach differs in that it will hone in on the viewpoints of dissenting individuals in an environment where there were severe restrictions on their ability to express their personal and political opinions. The JACL dominated the already limited political space in the internment camps because of their fervent commitment to Americanism, making it crucial to uncover voices that have traditionally been minimized. Given this context, I will examine the ways in which those deemed “loyal” and “disloyal” interacted with one another and how they saw each other’s viewpoints. Part of this process involves exploring the relationship between “loyal” individuals and the government, exemplified through the JACL’s official policy of cooperation that persisted prior to removal, through internment, and into the post-war era. When considering “disloyal” individuals, I will investigate the reasoning behind their actions and explain their mindset as a product of years of anti-Japanese discrimination, the trauma of the removal experience, life in the internment camps, and concerns about their welfare in the post-war era. In regards to both “loyal” and “disloyal” individuals, I will question traditional notions of who belonged to each category and critically examine the idea that certain segments of the Japanese population belonged to one category or the other. My approach focuses on conflict, encompassing mass resistance and everyday acts of rebellion.

To accomplish this goal of bringing conflict to the forefront of the internment narrative, my thesis is structured into three chapters. In Chapter One, I delve into the factors that led to internment, exploring the racial stereotypes that Japanese individuals faced and the pervasiveness of negative public opinion towards the Japanese. Through the use of governmental and Army sources, I

demonstrate the different factors that allowed internment to occur in the first place. However, I also outline the activism of the JACL during this time period, exposing their economic, social, and cultural arguments against internment. These pleas against mass internment occurred alongside their commitment to cooperating with whatever decision the government chose to act on, their definition of the show of loyalty that caused division within the Japanese community.

The JACL is a multi-generational, long-standing institution that still exists today. The modern day JACL is not the same as the JACL that operated in the 1940s, and while the organization has inherited elements of its past, the context in which it now works is vastly different. The wartime JACL aligned itself with the government in the WWII era, looking to protect Japanese Americans by portraying them as loyal citizens. Prior to removal, the JACL distanced itself from what the U.S. government saw as threatening elements of the Japanese population. Within the internment period, their strategy involved the repression of conflict and resistance in the camps, which did not comply with their definition of national allegiance. In the post-war period, the JACL looked to advance the experiences of “loyal” Japanese American soldiers at the expense of stories of resistance. Throughout the following chapters, I contextualize the organization’s actions at different points in its history, and I analyze how the wartime JACL and the government advanced a joint narrative that effectively erased dissenting internee perspectives. This slanted narrative then persisted into the post-war period and has since been reproduced by historians, obscuring the truth about life in the internment camps.

After having established important background knowledge on internment, Chapter Two represents the core of my thesis with its assertion that conflict characterized the Japanese internment experience and that it should be at the center of debates about how it is remembered. This chapter primarily relies on sources created by internees to expose their thought processes and beliefs, both of which are important to understanding why certain internees chose to resist and why others did not. To focus my argument, I utilize two case studies: 1) the Poston Strike of November 1942 and 2) the Manzanar Riot of December 1942. These two acts of resistance are the most notable instances of

violence and division in the camps, and are extremely useful in exploring the division between “disloyal” and “loyal” individuals. It is in this chapter that I challenge traditional notions of who belonged to each of these categories, and how internees conceptualized themselves in the internment environment. While these two camps are not representative of all of the internment camps and the experiences that internees had, they are a valuable starting point for challenging ideas about conflict in this complex historical era.

In order to emphasize the importance of the internee perspective, Chapter Three delves into the governmental narratives that persisted during the internment era. This perspective goes hand in hand with that of the JACL, who closely allied with the government and helped provide insider information from within the camps to governmental authorities. This chapter revolves around the idea that the government erased the complex perspectives of internees for its own goals, which were closely tied to propaganda and public image. Understanding how the government reacted to Manzanar and Poston as well as their point of view on initiatives such as the loyalty questionnaire reveal the simplification of internee perspectives and the downplaying of resistance.

In addition to online resources, my thesis draws heavily on archival sources from my research trips to California, Washington D.C., and College Park, MD. While I was in California, I visited the Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley, where I focused my attention on microfilm reels from within the internment camps themselves. In addition to Bancroft, I visited the Japanese American National Library in San Francisco, which provided me with access to personal papers from key players in the Manzanar Riot as well as governmental correspondence regarding questions of loyalty during the internment era. By visiting both branches of the National Archives in Washington D.C. and Maryland, I gained access to a considerable amount of governmental sources which contributed to the third chapter of my thesis. These sources helped to cement the government’s perspective on important topics such as loyalty, the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot, and they also demonstrated the way the government took action in these situations. While visiting the National

Archives, I also gained access to microfilm reels of internee publications from within the camps, which were useful in tracking the ways in which internees, both “loyal” and “disloyal,” reacted to life in the internment period. While my thesis hinges on the importance of internee perspectives, the use of government sources is crucial to contrasting these narratives and emphasizing the importance of doing away with generalizations about internee points of view.

My thesis directly challenges the strict labels that have been used to describe internment and thus demonstrates the centrality of division to the internment experience. The ideas and perspectives of the internee population were fluid and ever changing, just as the WWII environment was unpredictable. More specifically, the evidence that I present combats the idea that the Japanese American citizens were a homogenous group, unwavering in their patriotism and loyalty. In reality, internees operated outside of the boundaries that they were arbitrarily assigned to, each with their own reasons for fighting against or supporting the WRA and the government. The ambiguity of the internment camp experience provides a truer understanding of the lives of all internees, and makes space for the uncertainty that existed in day to day life. Aside from portraying a more accurate view of the internment era, embracing ambiguity prevents historians from inheriting the erasures that have persisted in discussions of Japanese American internment.

Important to the construction of my thesis is the acknowledgement of the fact that internee perspectives can be difficult to uncover. Internees were greatly limited in their ability to express themselves and thus the source material that is left behind is minimal. The oppressive nature of the internment camps limited the number of sources written by Japanese and Japanese Americans and in many cases, sources written by internees were heavily influenced by the WRA and the government as a whole. Thus, the governmental sources that I employ throughout my thesis demonstrate the government’s oversimplification of internment, but I also use them to investigate internee perspectives in a new way. Sociological reports, for example, are one way in which non-Japanese perspectives were instrumental in highlighting internees’ mindsets.

In 2012, the JACL began an educational campaign entitled “Power of Words,” aimed at “understand[ing] language euphemisms used to describe the Japanese American World War II experience and the preferred terminology that more accurately describes the dire realities of the experience.”¹⁸ For example, they encourage the use of the term “incarceration” as opposed to “internment”: “The word incarceration more accurately describes those held in WRA camps. Incarcerate...reflects the prison-like conditions faced by Japanese Americans as well as the view that they were treated as if guilty of sabotage, espionage, and/or suspect loyalty.”¹⁹ Although I appreciate the JACL’s perspective and the imagery that the word “incarcerate” invokes, I prefer the term “internment” to better highlight the wartime context. Additionally, I use the term “internee” as opposed to “evacuee” when referencing the Japanese Americans and others that were forcibly removed from their homes in 1942. While some secondary sources uncritically refer to these individuals as evacuees, the term minimizes the negative effects of the internment process.²⁰ “Evacuee” suggests that the Japanese on the West Coast were merely evacuated to protect the nation, which grossly distorts their experience. Employing the term “evacuee” thus downplays the significance of the internment era and ignores the history of life within the camps, as it treats forced removal as a temporary inconvenience.

I argue that conflict and division are central to understanding Japanese American internment, and that this tension stemmed in part from government and JACL definitions of who was “loyal” and “disloyal.” Understanding the variety of perspectives that emerged in the camps is complicated due to the erasure of dissenting opinions. This erasure proliferated in the internment era but was also inherited

¹⁸ Japanese American Citizens League, “The Power of Words,” Japanese American Citizens League, last modified 2013, <https://jacl.org/power-of-words>.

¹⁹ Japanese American Citizens League, comp., *Power of Words Handbook* (San Francisco, CA: NATIONAL JACL POWER OF WORDS II COMMITTEE, 2013), 10, <https://jacl.org/power-of-words>.

²⁰ Prior to the publication of Roger Daniels’s 1971 work *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II*, historians uncritically adapted government euphemisms (such as evacuation, evacuee, relocation) in their studies of internment. Beginning in the 1970s and in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, the role of racism became more important in Japanese American internment studies. In this new context, government terms began to be called into question and historians replaced these terms with words that were more appropriate to the experiences of Japanese descended individuals (such as internee, internment, removal).

by subsequent historians. These silences take away the agency of Japanese Americans who risked their lives to express dissent. The JACL and U.S. government representations that minimize this fact feed into a stereotype of Japanese Americans as loyal and cooperative, one that endures to the present. My thesis works against this erasure to highlight underrepresented voices.

While the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was a victory for the Japanese Americans who had suffered throughout the internment process, it does not represent a complete understanding of internment history. Awarding reparations is not a conclusion to the internment experience—the stories from the period live on to reveal the complexity of life in the camps. Governmental narratives of internment downplay the conflict and division that existed in between internees, suggesting that all Japanese Americans possessed an unwavering loyalty to the U.S. The Japanese American Citizens League has reinforced this narrative, neglecting the stories of individuals who did not fit this mold.²¹ The 1988 Act is a symbol of progress, but internment history is not a matter of the past. The internee experience and the infractions of the government are still relevant to the way that Japanese Americans interact within society today.

²¹ More background on the JACL as an organization as well as their claims will be discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter Two: Forming New Identities: Life and Conflict in the Internment Camps

Despite the greatest efforts of the JACL, forced removal was mandated by the U.S. government and General DeWitt's civilian exclusion orders were disseminated across Military Areas No. 1 and No. 2. By August 1942, the army had forcibly removed all individuals of Japanese descent from both military areas.²² Later that same year, internees undertook two major acts of resistance: the Poston Strike in November 1942, and the Manzanar Riot in December 1942. Due to the fact that two key acts of organized resistance took place during the first year of internment, it can be tempting to posit 1942 as the primary year of struggle in the camps. However, such a view is extremely limiting and suggests that the entirety of internment was not a divisive and jarring experience. In light of this, this chapter will argue that dissent and conflict characterized the Japanese internment experience and should be at the center of debates about how it is remembered.

This chapter analyzes two large scale acts of resistance from the internment period, the Poston Strike of November 1942 and the Manzanar Riot of December 1942. Using archival documents to explore the sentiments of those deemed "resisters" offers insights into the types of stressors that persisted long after the conflicts had ended. Utilizing these events is crucial because there is a misconception that internees seldom resisted, and Poston and Manzanar are often posited as exceptions to this narrative. I argue that these events are emblematic of sentiments that *persisted* from the start of internment until it ended. By exploring the complexity of the internee population, the evidence presented here demonstrates that Nisei also joined acts of resistance, and that the Poston Strike and Manzanar Riot do not depart from the norm of camp life. Resistance was an everyday part of the internment camp experience, and internees across the nation protested their situation.

Furthermore, internees who resisted the authority of the WRA did so not as a single departure in their lives but rather as a part of who they were. Viewing internment in the context of the past and

²² Brian Niiya, "Civilian Exclusion Orders," Densho Encyclopedia, last modified June 12, 2020, accessed September 2, 2022, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civilian_exclusion_orders.

acknowledging its implications for the future reveals more about pre-war times, Japanese culture, familial structure, socioeconomic patterns, and overall, provides a more accurate picture of its impact on the individuals involved. I take this approach because the internees did not live in a fixed state where their actions in the present were not affected by their past experiences or their thoughts about the future. Not only did they live in a dynamic, ever-changing world that was plagued by World War II, but they tied their own experiences and thoughts to the events of the world at large. In order to understand life in the camps and the reasoning behind divisions in the internee population, internment should be viewed as a continuation of the past and as an element that helped shape the future.

Upon arrival in the camps, internees were forced to adjust to a completely new and unfamiliar environment where they were confronted with the fact that aliens and citizens alike, regardless of their demonstrations of loyalty, were considered dangerous to the United States. By forming religious organizations, arranging recreational activities, and producing publications, internees reclaimed aspects of their prior lives and created a sense of normalcy in a situation that they could not control. By participating in such activities and choosing where to devote their energies, internees regained some autonomy over their lives and forged their own narratives of internment. Publications are helpful when looking to gain insight into the mindset of internees, as they were directly written and produced by the Japanese in the camps—not the WRA administration. Although internees wrote these publications, their level of influence on the publications can be difficult to determine. In many cases, the administration determined appropriate topics of discussion, obscuring the perspectives of the internees. Additionally, the administration's influence often led to an evasion of the problems within the camps. Many publications failed to capture the true nature of the camps and the divisions that existed. Examples from within the Poston camp include newspapers from the Young Buddhist Association, the Bussei Bugle, Choir Times, and Library News, as well as special editions such as the Poston New Year's Festival and the Poston Christmas edition. While it would be a mistake to assume that *all* publications within the internment camps imposed a more positive view of internment and encouraged residents to

look away from the tensions that existed, there are plenty of examples of this perspective. Publications that consistently deemphasized the struggles of internment deepened the divide between those who supported the U.S. government's actions and those who were unwilling to accept internment by enforcing an inaccurate version of reality. Internees lived in an environment that limited their ability to voice their opinions, even in situations where they had some control. Therefore, acts of resistance are crucial to reconstructing how internees reclaimed agency over their lives and fought for change.

Poston New Year's Festival Publication

Before discussing the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot, I will explore an example of a publication that minimizes the strenuous nature of camp life and hides dissenting narratives. A publication for the New Year's Festival at Poston, produced six weeks after the strike, emphasized the way in which the camp population was able to overcome the obstacles of internment and the conflicts that had occurred. This pamphlet was produced by internees who were a part of the Unit II committee that was organizing the festival. In this sense, the pamphlet was not part of a larger newspaper publication. Instead, it contained a program for the New Year's Concert along with the variety of activities that were planned for the internees. An article from the *Poston Chronicle* discusses the committee's efforts, explaining that they were "working practically 24 hours a day," and that the committee anticipated that "'our Festival is going to be a smashing success!'"²³ While it is not outlandish to argue that internees became more aware of the different elements of camp life and grew into a routine, the idea of a "new spirit" in the community was not an attitude shared by all internees; this reality will be explored later in this chapter.²⁴

This New Year publication by Unit II at Poston is intriguing because the authors had a clear understanding of their position in American society as well as the internment process. Their emphasis

²³ "Poston Two New Year Festival Plans Going Ahead Despite Xmas Holiday Festivities," *Poston Chronicle* (Poston, AZ), December 25, 1942, 2, accessed November 2, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83025333/1942-12-25/ed-1/?q=Christmas&sp=2&st=text&r=0.073,-0.049,0.904,0.722,0>.

²⁴ "Poston New Year's Festival," January 1, 1943, Reel 30, Record Group 210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, 1941-1989, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington D.C, 1.

on unity, cooperation, and the “new spirit” was not based in ignorance or a misunderstanding of the government’s decisions. The introductory page had a statement from John Maeno, Chairman of the Community Congress for Unit II, in which he discussed the tribulations of 1942 and the circumstances of the camps. He emphasized that the residents of Poston “came to this desert, jungle which was baked in unimaginable heat and intolerable dust under most unwelcome, undemocratic, and unAmerican circumstances.”²⁵ Not only was Maeno aware of the struggle behind removal and the difficulty of life in the internment camps, he directly addressed its “unAmerican” nature. Despite this, the publication as a whole actively chose to place emphasis on the unity and character of Poston, urging residents to carry their resolve into the new year. While the Poston New Year’s Bulletin is only one example of an internment camp publication that supported the government’s activities, it reveals that the idea of being “pro-American” did not always come in the form of dramatic displays of patriotism. By diverting attention away from the divisions and struggles of internment, certain internees passively condoned the actions of the government and created conflicting narratives of the internment experience.

Poston Christmas Bulletin Publication

The Poston Christmas Bulletin emulated this forward-looking attitude in its New Year’s Resolution section, highlighting internee views and not those of the administration. For instance, the first resolution explains that there should not be sighing or sadness at their current situation for “we salute our nation by doing this act.”²⁶ Another resolution emphasized the importance of purity and denouncing crime, for behaving in this way was wise, virtuous, and representative of the United States as whole.²⁷ All of the resolutions that were published conveyed the sense of cooperation and duty to the United States that some of the internees felt. In essence, feelings of discontent and complaints were

²⁵ Ibid, 1.

²⁶ “Poston Christmas Bulletin,” December 1942, Reel 30, Record Group 210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, 1941-1989, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington D.C, 6.

²⁷ Ibid, 6.

being pushed to the side because complying with removal and living in the internment camps was seen as a noble sacrifice. This perspective was closely aligned with the sentiments of the JACL in the pre-internment era. In the JACL's efforts to prevent removal, they consistently reiterated that they were against removal but would comply if it was the ultimate decision of the government. They viewed it as a sacrifice for their nation and part of their duties as citizens, even though they did not see wholesale removal as a necessary response to the perceived threat that Japanese-descended people posed.²⁸

Similarly, the writers of the Poston Christmas Bulletin saw the act of consenting to the restriction of their freedom and accepting life in the internment camps as honorable, as it would help secure the future of the internees in the post-war era. By cooperating with the WRA and accepting camp life for what it was, these individuals downplayed the true nature of internment. A negative consequence of doing this was a false sense of peace and harmony in the internment process, and the suppression of narratives that criticized the internment experience and the WRA.

The role of internee produced publications in evading the harmful elements of the internee experience reveal the complex nature of the camp environment. Many of the publications showcased the writing of internees that chose to cooperate with the government. Internees had different reasons for writing narratives that promoted the government's narrative of unity in the camps; some of them agreed with the government's rhetoric and others approved it for their own survival. Regardless of internee motivations, these publications erased conflicts that occurred in the camps or at the very least blurred the motivations of the internees involved. This form of "support" for the U.S. was not necessarily active because it was not the same as individuals who pledged full allegiance to the U.S. and were passionate about acts of loyalty such as military service, but it is still central to the internment narrative. Regardless of the degree of any given internee's "pro-American" views, it is obvious that some were alienated by such ideas. Living in the camps was directly antithetical to U.S.

²⁸ Seattle Chapter Japanese American Citizens League, "Report Submitted to Tolson Congressional Committee on National Defense Migration," 2.

ideals of democracy, which raises the question of how people with such diverging perspectives were able to coexist, reside, and adapt to camp life with one another.

General Discontent in Poston: Sociological and Anthropological Perspectives

Despite internees' attempts to coexist in the oppressive environment of the internment camps, disagreements amongst the various internee groups proliferated. Although publications and WRA administrators attempted to strengthen the community and promote togetherness, it was extremely difficult for all the internee groups to coexist. One of the most prominent examples of the division and discontent that plagued the internment camps is the Poston Strike, which began to unfold on November 15th, 1942. In addition to a thorough analysis of the strike and its aftermath, understanding the conditions in Poston more generally is crucial to comprehending the dynamics of the camp and the thought processes of the internees.

While it can be tempting to view acts of resistance as the climax of tension and to assume that the levels of discontent decrease, this perspective suggests that some sort of resolution takes place after a conflict occurs. However, after the Poston Strike, sources of discontent did not disappear. Understanding these tensions and highlighting the fact that they still existed long after the strike reveals that despite the publications' discussion of unity and positivity looking into the new year of 1943, the camp was not a center of harmony and cooperation. While the New Year's Bulletin and the Christmas bulletin suggested otherwise, the idea of unity was certainly not shared by all. Common sources of discontent were the lack of information or the spread of inaccurate stories, the environment of the camp itself, inequalities between the administration and the internees, and frustration due to a lack of supplies and daily necessities.

In an effort to understand the internee population and their mindset, sociologists were sent to the camps to live amongst the internees and learn more about them. One prominent example was anthropologist John F. Embree, and his analysis of the internees provides more insight into the discontent that they felt. Embree was considered to be an expert on both mainland Japanese and

Japanese Americans, and one of his most notable studies was entitled *Suye Mura, A Japanese Village*, based on his fieldwork in Kumamoto, Japan.²⁹ He also engaged in anthropological research in a Japanese American community in Kona, Hawai'i, which led to the publication of *Acculturation among the Japanese of Kona, Hawaii*.³⁰ Due to his extensive expertise and knowledge of Japanese culture, attitudes, and dynamics, he was sought out by the WRA to assist them throughout the internment process. In his own notes, he explained that the occurrences and daily life at Poston were very well-documented by various researchers. He highlighted the “large scale study of the whole project” by Dr. Alexander Leighton and Ned Spicer from the Bureau of Sociological Research, and their focus on capturing the sentiments of internees *and* administrators.³¹ Although Embree’s remarks cannot be taken with absolute certainty due to his positionality as a white man who was not subjected to the racial motivations that resulted in internment, his conclusions are still useful in understanding the internees’ thought processes.

In September of 1942, prior to the strike, Embree discussed the resentment that some internees felt due to the fact that Poston was overstaffed. The main reason behind this problem in Poston’s early years arose from the joint operation of the camp by the WRA and the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA). Embree interviewed many internees, including quotes from them in his reports. In his discussion of this overstaffing problem, a Japanese American that he spoke to lamented that “there is an expert for every evacuee. The educated young people especially resent being guinea pigs. They also resent the patronizing attitude of the staff. Many evacuees resent the association of Poston with the Indian Service, as they feel that they are being treated like Indians on a reservation.”³² On the surface, this

²⁹ Densho Encyclopedia Contributors, “John F. Embree,” Densho Encyclopedia, last modified June 15, 2020, accessed November 3, 2022, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/John_F_Embree/.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ John F. Embree, “Notes on the Poston Project,” September 9, 1942, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder J 1.001, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1941-1953, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 9. For more information on Leighton’s conclusions from Poston, consult his work. Alexander H. Leighton, *The Governing of Men: General Principles and Recommendations Based on Experience at a Japanese Relocation Camp* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1945).

³² Ibid, 8.

reaction seems to be a simplistic response to the excessive number of staff members in the camp, but it actually reveals a great deal about the stance of some Nisei leading up to the strike. The Nisei that was interviewed by Embree acknowledged his educational status and the fact that many others felt that their knowledge and experience should have prevented them from being treated as “guinea pigs.” The use of the word “expert” to describe the staff also highlights the patronizing attitude that some Japanese Americans received from the administrators, who automatically discredited the abilities of the internees and viewed themselves above the entire internee population. It could also imply that the administrators acted as though they knew what the internees felt, but in reality they could not understand the difficulty of the internment process and the complex nature of the population.

More striking, however, is the comment about internees feeling as though they were “Indians on a reservation.” Evidently, sharing the same territory as Native Americans, working on the same land, and living in a restricted way was frustrating to Japanese Americans because it reminded them of the fact that the U.S. viewed them as racially inferior. Being treated in such a way made them feel subjugated, a reality that they attributed to the lives of Native Americans in the United States. This comment brings a new dimension to the discontent that Japanese Americans experienced—not only was the situation in the camps complicated, frustrating, and upsetting—it caused the internees to compare themselves to a group in American society that they recognized as oppressed. Out of this comparison arose a resentment within the internees, as the similarities that they drew between both groups highlighted the fact that their citizenship rights were completely disregarded. Despite the various examples of assimilation that these internees had felt that they demonstrated in the realms of education, religion, economic life, they were still not viewed as valuable to American society. Another conclusion from this quote is the fact that “anti-American” views were diverse, just as “pro-American” views were. The government saw negative comments against them as the work of pro-Japanese radicals, when in reality many internees looked to highlight the hypocritical nature of internment in a country that prided itself on democratic values. Due to the oppressive environment of camp life, the

WRA mislabeled these individuals and suggested that everyone who spoke out against the government was aggressively loyal to Japan. The label of “anti-American” should not only conjure up images of pro-Japanese militarists—this category also included many Japanese Americans and other internees who were unable to accept the reality of internment and the injustices that they were forced to endure.

In regards to the attitudes of young Japanese Americans, Embree explored the connection between liberty and religion as a way of revealing the impact of internment. He stressed that “Young Japanese Americans cannot see why, as American citizens, they should be put in a concentration camp,” and that “the limited liberties they enjoy are distrusted.”³³ Such details are important in gaining an understanding of the way that the internees felt about their daily lives—while some individuals clung to the power and autonomy they did have, others were wary of exercising such limited rights because they feared repercussions. Embree demonstrated this fear by discussing religious liberty, as internees felt that this freedom was given so that “the whites can then point to Buddhist developments as an argument that Japanese are unassimilable and should be shipped back to Japan.”³⁴ The fact that some internees viewed freedom as dangerous reveals their lack of confidence in the U.S. government and the WRA administrators. There was clearly no regard for citizenship rights in the past, so they feared being punished further with repatriation or other consequences. This outlook led to increased participation in Christian Sunday schools, which is significant because even in the camps, there was still a need to present an image of civilization and assimilation to the government. Any sign of Japanese culture or so-called Eastern values could be seen as a potential threat due to the government’s belief in racial stereotypes. Thus, not only was internment a period of severely limited liberties, but the few liberties that remained were managed cautiously.

At the same time, there were instances of “young people formerly Christian turn[ing] to Buddhism feeling that Christianity, which they identify with American democracy, has betrayed

³³ Ibid, 6.

³⁴ Ibid, 6.

them.”³⁵ Such a response is also significant because it illustrates that removal and internment radicalized some internees to the point where they could no longer feel the same way about the U.S. and traditionally American values. Some Nisei found a sense of comfort in Buddhism and the connection to their Issei parents, both of which they craved in the uncertainty of the internment era. Due to the fact that Buddhism was oftentimes seen as suspicious and pro-Japanese, these individuals would have been perceived as “anti-American.” However, their distrust of America was spearheaded by the removal process, and not an indication of their allegiance to Japan—instead, it can more accurately be referred to as a distancing from American hypocrisy.

Despite claims of unity in the publications created by internees, there was not a sense of togetherness in Poston. In an interview, Reverend Jitsuo Morikawa, a pastor of the Baptist Church in Poston, emphasized that “there is a keen feeling on the part of young people for lack of recreational social life. The formal sermon is the only thing we have to offer.”³⁶ Morikawa was not a member of the younger population at Poston, but he still recognized the disunity and lack of true connection in the camp. He also highlighted the level of misinformation in the camp even in the wake of the strike, suggesting that “there should be a monthly town hall meeting as big as the strike gathering bringing to the people all the salient points of what has happened during the past weeks and what will happen during the next few weeks.”³⁷ There was a desire for information and accurate details as to what was occurring in the camps, and lack of access to these facts was extremely upsetting to internees. The strike, despite its impact and the shocking nature of it, did not bring a resolution to the problems that internees had been experiencing throughout their time in Poston.

³⁵ Ibid, 6.

³⁶ Jitsuo Morikawa, Interview, “On Replacing Caucasians,” May 6, 1943, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder J 15.05, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records, 1930-1974, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 3.

³⁷ Ibid, 2.

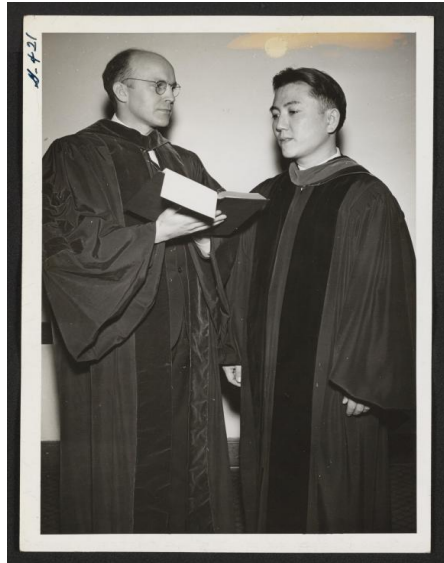


Figure 6: Reverend Jitsuo Morikawa (right) being recognized as a Pastor of the Baptist Church. He was the first Japanese American to assume this role in the Baptist Church. Morikawa's thoughts on the lack of community building structures in Poston were closely connected to his religious practices. He saw the formal sermon as a way for internees to bond with one another and forge connections, lamenting that other camp structures did not offer such opportunities. Source: War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, University of California Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

Echoing these sentiments of discontent was Alexander Leighton, who outlined the tense environment that the internees endured. His background in psychology made him an ideal leader for the Bureau of Sociological Research, an organization formed after internment had begun. The BSR was comprised of social scientists who were assigned to Poston and tasked with studying the internment experience.³⁸ While his study *The Governing of Men* is an extremely notable and comprehensive source, his personal notes also provide insight into the challenges that internees faced. He explored the fear of suspected informants by talking to internees and gathering information. For instance, a man named Dick Nishimuro stressed that “George Yamaguchi and Toshio Yatsoshiro and Tamie Tsuchiyama are all being talked about in the community and are under suspicion for being stooges and informers.”³⁹ The fact that the community as a whole discussed these individuals reveals

³⁸ Okihiro, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American Internment*, 84.

³⁹ Alexander Leighton, “Leighton's Sociological Journal,” November 17, 1942, BANC 67/14c, folder J10.11, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1930-1974, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 2.

that there was an atmosphere of distrust and resentment in the camps. While some internees supported the actions of these individuals and their affiliation with the government, others experienced betrayal when their community members cooperated.

Additionally, Leighton's papers illustrate the fears of internees, especially those who sought to avoid any connection to the administration. Upon visiting the camp hospital on December 2, 1942, Leighton encountered a man named Matsui, who had been a janitor in Block 28.⁴⁰ He was taken to the hospital on November 24th, and "was fearful and crying and saying that people accused him of being a spie [sic]. He is an issei and was formerly Japanese typesetter for a newspaper."⁴¹ These accusations were so severe that he attempted to commit suicide multiple times, explaining "that people thought he was a spy because he was a Christian and that he wanted to die and if he did he wanted everybody to know that he had never been a spy but he hoped the United States would win because that way there would be a better world."⁴² Matsui's story is powerful because it reveals the impact of the assumptions that were made about the various subgroups. Issei were automatically viewed as suspicious and untrustworthy due to their connection to Japan, and in Matsui's case, his faith and his previous employment experience made him all the more threatening. However, Matsui was willing to die in order to prove that he was not a spy, and he reiterated his support for the U.S. in the war effort. In assuming that all Issei and Kibei were disloyal or that all Nisei were loyal, voices from within the camps are silenced. Not only that, but the conflict between "loyal" and "disloyal" individuals is oversimplified, suggesting that all the members of any given subgroup shared the same views.

Chronological Account of the Poston Strike

Having looked at studies and interviews that were conducted within Poston, it is clear that there was considerable tension amongst internees as well as between internees and the administration.

⁴⁰ Alexander Leighton, "Leighton's Sociological Journal," December 2, 1942, BANC 67/14c, folder J10.11, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement records, 1930-1974, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid, 3.

⁴² Ibid, 3.

Such background is crucial to understand the development of the Poston Strike and its effects. As with many acts of resistance, the sentiments behind the strike are arguably more significant than the event itself—simply knowing the chronology of an event does not reveal anything about the thoughts of those involved or their motivations. Yet in this case, a chronological reconstruction does demonstrate that feelings of conflict ran deep.

On November 15, 1942, George Fujii and Isamu Uchida were arrested as suspects in the beating of an FBI informant, initiating a chain of events that led to the strike.⁴³ Notably, the arrested suspects were both Kibei, showcasing the tensions between different internee subgroups in the camps. Some internees looked upon FBI informants with disdain because the former saw the latter's close relationship with the government as an indication of believing in Americanism. Showing support for the U.S.'s democratic values seemed inappropriate in the face of internment, a clear betrayal of U.S. citizenship rights. However, if the Kibei men were not responsible for this crime, their suspected involvement reveals the stereotypes that were imposed on different members of the internee community—Kibei were automatically assumed to be dangerous and disloyal, while groups like Nisei were normally seen as loyal.

In the days following the arrests, there were various attempts made to negotiate with the administration for the suspects' freedom, all of which were unsuccessful. Based on rumors that the FBI was arriving to transport the suspects and take complete control of the investigation, blocks 26, 27, 28, 37, 38, 43, and 44 concluded that "drastic" measures were necessary to ensure that the suspects were released.⁴⁴ This decision is important because it negates narratives that have framed the Poston Strike as an act of defiance by a pro-Axis minority—alleged supporters of imperial Japan's war against the United States.⁴⁵ The fact that the representatives of seven blocks concurred in preventing the FBI from

⁴³ "Chronological Account of the Poston Strike," November 15, 1942, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder J 6.24, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1930-1974, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁵ Analysis of archival sources reveals the government/WRA narrative of the Poston Strike as a "pro-Axis" demonstration. The media also echoed this narrative, and more examples of this will be discussed in chapter three.

removing the suspects suggests that a variety of internees were willing to defy the government and supported the beating of the FBI informant. On the morning of November 18th, rumors of the FBI's arrival spread rapidly and a message was sent to "the subjugation and warehouse crews to quit work and start picketing the police station. Meanwhile three to four hundred residents from the interested blocks gathered in front of the police station to prevent the F.B.I from taking the prisoners at any cost."⁴⁶ A leader in this crowd then ordered the driver of the block managers' supply truck to command the block managers to close the office and send the residents of their respective blocks to protest in front of the camp police station. The crowd increased to 2,500, and even more so after lunch.⁴⁷ Therefore, at its core, the Poston Strike was essentially a show of support for Fujii and Uchida, and the involvement of thousands of residents highlights the divide between those who supported the FBI informant and those who stood behind the suspects.

Although the protesters were described as "Issei and Kibei with a sprinkling of Nisei," this quote contributes to the misunderstanding of the strike itself.⁴⁸ It implies that there were minimal Nisei involved, and creates the perception that only Issei and Kibei positioned themselves against the government. However, it does not account for fear about participating in the strike or the fact that there were Kibei and Issei that did not involve themselves in the protest. Mr. John Evans was the acting project director and addressed the protesters, asserting that justice would be served and that an outcome based on the actions of the suspects was desired by all. Assuming that the internees would be content if the suspects were found guilty and given a punishment is a clear misunderstanding of the sentiments of some internees. While "pro-American" individuals might have been satisfied with such an outcome, others supported the assault on the FBI informant for the message it sent about cooperating with the U.S. government. Evans and many other administrators were unable to

⁴⁶ "Chronological Account of the Poston Strike," 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

comprehend the complexities of the internee population, failing to see the possibility of behaviors overlapping across subgroups. A prominent example of internees operating outside the stereotypes attributed to the different subgroups actually occurred amidst the protest itself, as a Nisei girl was the first to “razz” Evans after his speech.⁴⁹ Clearly, Nisei participation in the protest occurred, and with the same zeal as the other protesters.

Additionally, the language of the protesters towards those who sympathized with the administration is telling of the deep divisions within the camps. While these comments can be viewed as derogatory, they reveal the negative perception that was attached to those who showed support for the administration. After the protesters were advised to “have faith in the administration and...give them time until Monday,” they “broke out into exclamations of ‘Inu!,’ (‘Dog!’) and ‘Nagure!’ (‘Let 's beat him up!’).”⁵⁰ Even a small comment in support of the administration caused immense anger in the minds of the protesters and led to them trying to beat him up, indicating their reluctance to support a group that had so easily betrayed its own citizens and made assumptions about all Japanese-descended individuals due to their racial background. The target of these comments was Mizushima, a member of the Issei Advisory Board. He is yet another example of the stereotypes associated with different subgroups being inaccurate in some scenarios, as the removal experience clearly had the power to impact *all* groups in different ways. For some individuals, such as Mizushima, removal did not affect their loyalty to the U.S. and they continued to support the administration. On the other hand, people such as the Nisei girl who approached Evans turned away from sources of U.S. authority. Support or disdain for the United States was not confined to one subgroup or another—while there were certain trends, taking these trends literally risks the erasure of other narratives.

As a whole, the strike was very complicated, but key details allow a glimpse of internee perceptions and the community structures in the camps. In the days following the arrests, there were a

⁴⁹ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 5.

great deal of picketing by the blocks, but more notably, all of the block managers resigned. The decision to resign occurred on November 18th, and the discussions at the meeting highlight the ways in which internees conceptualized the block manager system. An individual in the meeting who recommended this course of action remarked that “the block manager stood at the tail end of the administration and that it was his duty to carry out the policies of the administration. If he joined the strike without resigning from his official post it was dereliction of duty entrusted to him.”⁵¹ This quote is crucial because it positions block managers as lower tier administrative members, not as true representatives of the internee community. Thus, in order to truly serve the internee population and participate in the strike like they had wanted to, the block managers had to resign and renounce their obligation to the administration. Although the administration lacked an appropriate understanding of the discontent that pervaded in the camp, they knew that the block managers resigned to show solidarity with the rest of the community members.

Confident in their abilities, the group turned its attention to Uchida after receiving the news that Fujii was released. In their minds, Uchida’s guilt was not connected to his freedom, highlighting the internees’ willingness to disregard the rules of the administration and American values more generally. For the internees, picketing and fighting for Uchida’s freedom was a symbol of solidarity for the Japanese internee community and a rejection of U.S. policies of removal and internment. These feelings of anger and frustration were evident in the use of banners that were modeled on the Japanese flag, as well as the use of dogs as symbols for the FBI and FBI informants. One of the more notable banners was a modified version of Admiral Togo’s flag from the Russo-Japanese War. The slogan from the original flag had been changed from “the rise and fall of our great country depends on this one battle” to “the rise and fall of our brotherhood (or race) depends on this one battle.”⁵² This change is crucial in understanding the mindset of the internees, because they were showing support for

⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

⁵² Ibid, 17.

the Japanese *race*, not Japan itself. The Japanese flag was simply a way of expressing such support, even though it was viewed as “pro-Axis,” militaristic sentiment. In this sense, the label of “pro-Japanese” did not fit the message of racial solidarity that the internees were demonstrating, even though their actions were often seen as signs of support for the Japanese empire as a whole. For the internees, any sort of expression against the U.S. government was automatically construed as “pro-Japanese,” yet for those involved in the strike, staying silent was not a viable option anymore. No matter what the internees said or did, there would be negative consequences, so expressing their support for the Japanese “race” in such a way was the most appealing option.

Similarly, the internees’ use of the dog as a symbol reveals this need to defend the Japanese race against the influence of American ideals. A man named Masaki gave a lecture on dogs, highlighting that Japanese dogs begged for food while American dogs were consumed with getting money.⁵³ His need to outline this difference reveals the fact that some internees felt disdain for Americans’ prioritization of money and the selfishness that often came along with it. There was a clear need to separate from American values and adhere to economic and social principles of everyday American life, especially after removal and internment. Discussions also took place between Issei parents and their children, warning them not to become dogs.⁵⁴ This fear on the part of some Issei showcases the undesirability of being associated with the administration and supporting an institution that only caused mistreatment and oppression.

The end to violence eventually occurred on November 24th, after a series of negotiations between the Executive Committee of the Emergency Council and the WRA.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that the

⁵³ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁵ The Emergency Council had been elected by the blocks of Unit I, with each block appointing one Nisei and one Issei. They approved the strike, and as events unfolded, they became involved in the negotiation process. On November 20th, The Emergency Council selected an Executive Committee with nine members, and placed those individuals in charge of communicating directly with the WRA administration. The Executive Committee created proposals to discuss with Project Director Head and his team, and the proposals were 1) “Establish a Public Relation Committee to mediate with and settle all problems affecting personal reputations and damages out of court,” 2) “the Poston residents to be given the right to select and appoint all evacuee personnel in the administrative and important positions,” and 3) “establish a City Planning Board based upon the present Emergency Council within

strike only lasted for about a week, exploring the nuances of it and unpacking the motivations of the strikers is instrumental in gaining a truer picture of life in Poston. It is a misconception to say that all individuals who participated in the strike were Issei or Kibei, or that all of them were pro-Japanese and supported Japan's actions in the war. A 1946 WRA memo that looked back on the strike emphasized the overwhelming presence of pro-Japanese propaganda that emerged immediately after the event. Despite its positionality as a governmental institution, the WRA pointed out the "large number of over-simplified stories and headlines about 'pro-Axis' activity at the center, [which] tended to deepen...the widespread public attitude of suspicion toward the evacuated people."⁵⁶ While the universal application of the "pro-Axis" label might have seemed natural to some individuals, there were many internees who made use of Japanese symbols and employed certain language regarding the U.S. and U.S.-sympathizers to display their unwillingness to accept internment. In this sense, they were not attempting to spread Japanese propaganda, they were simply expressing their frustrations and opinions on the internment experience.

Aftermath of the Strike: Continuation of Tension

Arguably more important than studying the strike itself, understanding the reactions to it and the changes that occurred in Poston provide insight into the dynamics of different groups in the camp. There was a reluctance to discuss the strike, as is evident in a block managers' meeting from November 30th. This meeting date was important because it was the first block managers' meeting after the strike, and in it, Evans discussed the resignations that he had received from the block managers during the strike and the need to select new representatives. Notably, he states "I received your resignation. I felt badly. I received it at the time I needed your help. I felt that I trusted you and that you did not trust me. Maybe some of you still do not trust me, but right now we have the job of

the framework of the WRA which shall create the necessary administrative, legislative, and economic organizations." These conditions were accepted. Ibid, 8-29.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior and War Relocation Authority, "WRA: A Story of Human Conservation," 1946, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015002213968&view=1up&seq=8&skin=2021>, 48-49.

getting the ball rolling again for the sake of all our people here.”⁵⁷ He is clearly aware that his “trust” for the block managers was not reciprocated. In fact, the WRA was in many ways dependent on the block managers to help enforce their policies and communicate important information to the rest of the internees—a fact that is not often acknowledged but comes through in Evans’ comment. It was also very bold of him to suggest a return to normalcy after the strike for the sake of “our” people, as he attempts to position himself as a member of the internee community with the same concerns and interests. After the strike, the administration tried to create a false sense of unity, which involved positioning themselves as “one” with the internees. Evans’s views were by no means unique—many WRA administrators framed the strike as “a healthy release for pent-up emotions,” and were “generally agreed that Poston emerged as a stronger and more stable community.”⁵⁸ The overall impact of the strike was continually minimized, and the WRA’s view that the tension in the camp had dissipated did not align with the reality of the camp experience following the strike.

In the months following the strike, there was also a need to redefine the roles of the block managers and clarify their position in the camp hierarchy. In the block managers’ meeting from December 1, 1942, it was established that “The Block Managers are not a governing body. They have nothing to do with the government of the community. They are in an administrative capacity. This is a Government Project, and there is need to pass physical items to the people from the Government through the Block Managers to the people.”⁵⁹ While there was not much discussion of the strike in the block manager meetings, there was still a concern about the dynamics between internees and the administration. The above quote establishes that the Block Managers must be responsible to the administration and emphasizes that they are not a governing body, thus undermining the power of these representatives. In essence, the WRA’s status as the ultimate authority was reconfirmed, even

⁵⁷ “Block Managers Meeting,” November 30, 1942, BANC 67/14 c, folder J13.03, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1941-1953, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 2.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior and War Relocation Authority, “WRA: A Story of Human Conservation,” 48.

⁵⁹ “Block Managers Meeting,” December 1, 1942, BANC MSS 67/14 c, reel 251 frame 0153 (folder J13.03), Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1941-1953, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 1.

though they later asked for suggestions that would help smooth out tensions between the internees and the administration.

Despite these attempts to bridge gaps in the post-strike environment, there were still many problems in the camp for the duration of the internment process. Some examples of this were criminal activity, negative views towards the army and army officials, and concerns about wages and employment outside of the camps. A sociological journal compiled by Tamie Tsuchiyama contains different diaries/writings of internees in the Poston camp. Tsuchiyama was a Nisei born in Hawaii, and was the only woman to work for the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS) during the war.⁶⁰ She was assigned to Poston for the study, yet her work was kept a secret from the internees and she served as a government informant. One notable entry from her sociological journal is from April 26, 1943, and describes the policy of a new military police officer who arrived in Poston. The entry reads “In the barber shop in block 46 a few peoples were discussing the Wakasa case in Topaz. One M.P...was a member of the newly arrived unit of M.P’s. He claimed that he returned from Guadalcanal and overhearing the Wakasa case he said: ‘If there is any Jap who disobeys orders I will shoot him without asking any questions.’”⁶¹ Briefly, Wakasa was an internee who was walking his dog inside the boundaries of the Topaz internment camp, and he was shot by a military police officer.⁶² The brutality of this remark highlights the cruelty of some of the M.P soldiers and provides more context into camp life. The fact that the internees were discussing the Wakasa case indicated their fear or at least concern about the power of the Military Police, which this M.P only confirmed through his statement. He also exuded a white supremacist racial view, making it evident that these sorts of tensions were still prominent in Poston even after the strike. While the strike in and of itself was

⁶⁰ Densho Encyclopedia Contributors, “Tamie Tsuchiyama,” Densho Encyclopedia, last modified October 16, 2020, accessed November 3, 2022, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tamie_Tsuchiyama/.

⁶¹ Tamie Tsuchiyama, “Sociological Journal,” April 1943, BANC MSS 67/14 c, reel 240 (folder J6.26:1), Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1941-1953. University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 1.

⁶² “The Wakasa Memorial Rediscovery,” Friends of Topaz Museum, <https://friendsoftopaz.org/wakasa-memorial>.

notable, it did not really solve any core problems in the community, such as the behavior of the administration and the discrimination that internees faced even within the camps.

Along with negative views of the MPs and the administration, internees also responded negatively to the U.S. Army itself after the strike. This is important given the fact that the government began creating a system for drafting “loyal” Japanese Americans into the army in the early years of 1942. There were certainly individuals who supported the U.S. Army and looked forward to being involved in the draft, but there were still many internees who criticized the U.S. Army and belittled their abilities. When an army plane crashed near Camp II in April of 1943, “the camp residents...made derogatory comments upon this fact. Some said: ‘I didn't know we were still in L.A.’ Another comment: ‘They don't know where they are going.’ ‘That's how good American fliers are.’ ‘I thought they were all good fliers in the newspapers.’”⁶³ Internees’ responses to an otherwise banal event are indicative of the resentment that was harbored towards the U.S. Although it is not specified if Issei or Nisei made these remarks, the quotes are still significant because they demonstrate prominent attitudes in the camp that could have easily influenced different people. Specifically, the comment “‘I thought they were all good fliers in the newspapers,’” challenges the way the U.S. portrayed itself to the public as compared to the perceived lack of flying skill in this crash. It also suggests that the U.S. had the tendency to show the public a side that did not always reflect reality—which could be applied to many situations in addition to this one. As a whole, these comments reveal that even after the strike, the same tensions existed and continued to resurface among the internee population.

General Acts of Resistance and Camp Dynamics: Manzanar

Another well-known demonstration of dissent during the internment years was the Manzanar Riot, which occurred less than a month after the Poston Strike. As was the case in Poston, tensions had been building in Manzanar months before the riot, and many problems were left unresolved even after

⁶³ Tsuchiyama, “Sociological Journal,” 6.

the conflict had ended. Both the Manzanar Riot and the Poston Strike were misunderstood by WRA and government officials, resulting in flawed assumptions about the individuals involved. During both demonstrations, the government attributed stereotypes to the different internee subgroups as opposed to investigating the motives of the resisters. In turn, they implied that pro-Japanese Kibei and some Issei were responsible for the unrest. Having acknowledged these misconceptions in regards to Poston, the Manzanar Riot requires a similar analysis of internees' motivations and thought processes.

Similar to the Poston Strike, the spark of the Manzanar Riot was the arrest of Harry Uyeno as a suspect in the beating of Fred Tayama.⁶⁴ Tayama was the former president of the Southern California JACL Chapter, and was notoriously disliked at Manzanar. This was primarily due to the fact that “the J.A.C.L. attempted to represent the people as a whole and acted as spokesman for the entire Japanese community” and “often voiced opinions contrary to the thoughts of the population.”⁶⁵ In many cases, this included poor treatment or complete neglect of the Issei, along with instances of turning people in to the FBI for profit. While the JACL and government informers continued to support the administration's policies, they continuously clashed with those who were frustrated with the government's actions. This constant source of disagreement underscored the Manzanar Riot, just as it did in Poston.

Manzanar did not contain a Nisei population that was fully in support of the administration and its policies. In fact, there was considerable resistance on the part of young Nisei of high school age, and more generally, there were instances where Nisei expressed frustration for being interned despite their citizenship status. In a letter written to John Embree, a Nisei internee born in Hawaii chronicles his experience with Nisei from California while living in Manzanar. He explains that:

⁶⁴ “The Manzanar ‘Incident,’” December 1942, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder O7.00, The Manzanar Riot, [see also: NARA Reel 75, Folders 21 and 23], Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

“Life among the California niseis is a novel experience for their psychology is at much variance from the kanaka-Japanese outlook on politics and life...their previously isolated community life that gave them little opportunity to mingle with the haoles and the ever-present economic and social discrimination have warped their thinking, embittering them and causing them to lose faith in the white politicians particularly.”⁶⁶

This letter provides insight into the minds of individuals who were disillusioned with the internment process, despite the fact that they spoke English “flawlessly” and had been born and raised in America. The writer argues that coupled with isolation from the white community, removal led the California Nisei to adopt a negative outlook towards white politicians. The author’s use of words such as “warped” suggest a disapproval with this way of thinking and his possible support for the U.S. Regardless, the writer highlights a perceived sense of mistrust towards the administration and the tension between internees, even those who belonged to the same subgroups.

Along with acknowledging the frustration that Nisei experienced in the removal process, the author explains the tension amongst the Nisei and Issei in regards to leadership. In traditional Japanese culture, the Issei were seen as the rightful leaders, but not all Nisei agreed with this cultural ideal. The same author explains, “When I evacuated from Los Angeles, I anticipated that in Manzanar and the other centers, the niseis will take the leadership. The war and the precipitate evacuation should have made the Japanese, both citizens and residents, realize that the time has come for changing hands in leadership among us.”⁶⁷ For some Nisei, the wartime era was the perfect opportunity for them to take greater responsibility in the community—especially given their citizenship status. However, these expectations were shattered as “The block leaders which were elected by the people here comprise

⁶⁶ Anonymous to John F. Embree, June 4, 1942, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder O3.00, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records, 1941-1953, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 1. The term “haoles” is used by native Hawaiians to refer to white individuals, whether they be visitors to Hawaii or residents there. In her book *Haoles in Hawaii*, political scientist Judy Rohrer focuses “on [the term] haole as a colonial/neocolonial form of whiteness situated in Hawai‘i” and frames the term in the history of colonization of the island. Judy Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010), 33.

⁶⁷ Anonymous to John F. Embree, 2.

mostly isseis, and they manifest no hesitancy in running the only representative (do not take the word literally) group of the Japanese residents in camp in the customary Japanese manner.”⁶⁸ At the same time that the Nisei resented the way in which removal took place, some of them also resented the continual leadership of the Issei in the camps and their “customary Japanese manner” of handling issues that arose. The author explains that the presence of Issei leadership “must be lamented,” indicating a need amongst some Nisei to distance themselves from Japanese society and culture.⁶⁹ In many ways, some Nisei saw themselves as more fit to lead the internees in the camps, with the author using phrases such as “should have” to indicate the need for a leadership change in the community. This reveals another layer of complexity in the internment camp experience. In addition to the tension amongst the Nisei and the white politicians that stemmed from the removal process, there was conflict within the camps. Nisei who wanted to have greater responsibility in the internee community disagreed with the traditional Japanese custom of elevating the older generation, only adding to the resentment that they already harbored.

As some Nisei expressed frustration for their inability to assume leadership roles, others closely followed the desires of their parents. Due to the abrupt end to Japanese language classes when removal occurred, there was an eagerness amongst many Issei for classes to resume—they wanted their children to be able to attend and learn Japanese. The same author highlights that “Many young people feel that better knowledge of this enemy language is bound to be useful to them, particularly for securing specialized jobs requiring knowledge of that language.”⁷⁰ The characterization of Japanese as an “enemy language” is indicative of the author’s uncertainty when it came to Nisei learning Japanese, but his discussion of the topic reveals the varied opinions that existed. Japanese language schools were seen as suspicious in the eyes of the U.S. government in the pre-war era, but knowing Japanese

⁶⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 10.

became a useful skill for Nisei later on. However, the Issei response in this matter showcases that they were influential in driving the activities of Nisei, and contributed to their later actions of resistance. Historians Arthur Hansen and David Hacker capitalize on this generational influence in their article “The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective,” advancing a revisionist view of the riot. Their analysis was grounded in the cultural elements of the Japanese American community in the pre-war context. They suggested that the “usual picture of Nisei as thoroughly Americanized is far from accurate, for countervailing forces were diminishing the social distance [between Nisei and Issei].”⁷¹ An example of this pressure was the mandated participation of the Nisei in Japanese clubs, which the Issei employed as a tool to undermine American values.⁷² While there were broader societal challenges to the assimilation of the Nisei, such as racial discrimination and a lack of employment despite having higher education degree(s), the parental influence of the Issei is an element that cannot be ignored. This connection did not disappear with the start of internment; instead, Issei influence also manifested in motivating the Nisei to speak out against the WRA and the U.S. government. In other words, some Issei pushed Nisei closer to the Japanese language and their heritage, thus motivating them to get involved in resistance.

Manzanar was also the site of many so-called “underground” groups, which sparked considerable fear in the minds of the WRA. Instead of keeping the presence of these organizations under wraps, the administration reported the groups’ activities. This contradicts the idea that the problems in the camps originated from a small portion of the internee population because multiple underground groups concerned the administrators. Of course, the resistance in Manzanar was not limited to underground groups, but their presence is important in understanding camp dynamics. Ralph P. Merritt, Project Director, reported that the bulletins of the Southern California Blood Brothers Corps and the Manzanar Black Dragon Society were distributed across the whole center and appeared in all

⁷¹ Hansen and Hacker, “The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective,” 122.

⁷² Hansen and Hacker, “The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective,” 122.

thirty six blocks.⁷³ Allegedly put together by clandestine militant pro-Japan groups, these bulletins positioned themselves against self-government and were also opposed to the camouflage net factory program, which would task internees with producing materials for the war effort.⁷⁴ The underground organizations set themselves against internee self-government, furthering themselves from U.S. interests. They refused to participate in any activities that would benefit the government and the army, reflecting their bitterness over the internment decision. It was contradictory for the U.S. to expect help from the internees in a war to save democracy while the government was currently restricting their freedoms and discriminating against them. The anonymity of these underground organizations indicates the oppression of such divisive voices and the need to protect themselves to continue sharing their messages.

Notably, the report highlights a connection between the younger “gangs” at Manzanar and the underground organizations.⁷⁵ There were many known acts of resistance from high school students and the younger population in the camps. Such events increased in the period leading up to the riot, and in particular, the personal diary of Lucy Adams is helpful in exploring these so-called “disturbances.” Adams was temporarily replacing Dr. Carter, who was the superintendent of education at Manzanar. She arrived on November 17th, 1942, and was informed of incidents such as “beatings, breaking of windows, intimidation of the police, the organization of the mess hall workers and their demands, accusations against staff members, [and] the fears of some of the people on the project that gangs were out to ‘get’ them.”⁷⁶ The discussion of these actions is notable because it highlights the “smaller” acts

⁷³ Project Reports Officer to E. R. Fryer, memorandum, “Preliminary Findings Surveys on ‘Underground’ Groups,” December 1, 1942, Reel 76, RG 210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington D.C., 1. These underground groups are not the focus of my thesis, but are important in establishing the complex nature of the internment camp environment. The following are two other primary sources discussing these groups: “FBI Raids Jap Terrorists,” *The San Francisco News* (San Francisco, CA), March 31, 1942, accessed December 1, 2022, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist8/terrorists1.html>. Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Report and Minority Views of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities on Japanese War Relocation Centers, H.R. Rep. (Sept. 30, 1943). <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102360725>.

⁷⁴ Project Reports Officer to E. R. Fryer, memorandum, “Preliminary Findings Surveys on ‘Underground’ Groups,” 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ Lucy Adams, “Notes on Manzanar Disturbances 1942,” 1942, folder O 10.00, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records 1930-1974, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 2. Adams referred to any sort of unruly or rebellious actions

of resistance that led up to the Manzanar riot and reveals how much the administration feared these actions. The WRA did not know how to control these individuals and they were unsure how much of a threat these groups posed. There was a clear disconnect between the WRA and the internees, as the WRA did not know why internees were engaging in such acts or how to manage them. The riot was not a one-off incident spearheaded by a crazed, pro-Axis minority—tension was a constant part of the camp atmosphere from the start. The internees involved in the riot acted in a deliberate manner and knew their motivations, just as they expressed their frustrations in these “smaller” disturbances.

Manzanar Riot

Given this background, the arrest of Harry Uyeno as a suspect in Tayama’s beating was extremely frustrating to many members of the internee population, leading to a mass meeting on December 6, 1942—the day after Uyeno had been arrested. This meeting consisted of 2,000 people, and they planned to go to the jail to demand Uyeno’s release.⁷⁷ What is important to note about this meeting is the fact that a considerable number of people gathered in support of Uyeno, at least partially because of the resentment that many internees held against the JACL. Despite its claims of representing all Nisei, the JACL was severely discredited to the point where it struggled to amass support in the period leading up to removal.⁷⁸

Much of the support for Uyeno stemmed from disdain for the JACL, but Uyeno’s own actions as a mess hall worker are also key to understanding his centrality to the riot. Uyeno organized a Kitchen Hall Workers’ Union based on his dissatisfaction with the Work Corps. He attended a Work Corps meeting as a representative “from the mess workers of Block 22...and he reached the

as “disturbances,” which explains why she named her journal account “Notes on Manzanar Disturbances.” To her, the demonstrations of discontent that she witnessed were not rooted in deeper dissatisfaction. However, a deeper analysis of the use of the word disturbance reveals that in this context, the word minimizes the significance of the riot. “Disturbance” implies a minor inconvenience as opposed to a culmination of resistance and resentment.

⁷⁷ “The Manzanar ‘Incident,’” 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

conclusion that it would not take sufficient steps fully to protect the interests of the kitchen workers.”⁷⁹ This realization led him to form a separate union for the mess hall workers, which became a reality by September 1942. Interestingly, Fred Tayama served as the chairman of the Work Corps and led the meetings, adding to the personal tension between the two men. People such as Tayama, who affiliated themselves with the JACL and “pro-American” attitudes, did not focus on the interests of people who worked in the mess halls. Instead, they aimed to advance the internee population’s interests in ways that did not alienate the government and WRA. However, Uyeno’s choice to create a separate union did not make him “anti-American”—it simply made him someone who was thinking practically and who sought to protect mess hall workers’ interests. By viewing the two sides in this way, “pro-American” and “anti-American” are clearly more complex than the labels imply. Understanding the motivations of internees conceptualizes the Manzanar Riot and the dynamics in the camps more generally.

Anger over sugar shortages led internees to support Uyeno’s Kitchen Workers’ Union. Unionized workers initiated an investigation into the WRA’s responsibility for the sugar shortages which took place in July and October of 1942. The Union set out to determine whether the internees had been receiving the eight ounces of sugar that they were entitled to per week. When they concluded that the WRA did not meet this allowance, it fueled the tension between the administration and the internees.⁸⁰ On November 29, 1942, the Union held a private meeting in Japanese, and they did so without the approval of the Project Director.⁸¹ The subject matter of the private meeting revolved around the sugar shortage, and the Union compiled a list of demands; this list revealed the frustration, confusion, and lack of communication between the administration and the internees. For example, one

⁷⁹ Robert B. Throckmorton to Ralph P. Merritt, memorandum, “Report on Personal Interviews in the Independence Jail,” December 19, 1942, Documents from Harry Ueno Re: Manzanar 1942-1943, Japanese American National Library, San Francisco, CA, 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

of the list items (#11) described a permit that allowed for the production of Shoyu and Miso.⁸²

However, once Shoyu production commenced, the sugar that was needed for it was taken out of the residents' rations.⁸³ The internees had not been informed of this fact, resulting in shock when their sugar rations were suddenly cut. Because they knew larger sugar deliveries were being made to the mess halls of white administrators, anger at the sugar shortages also reflected anger at those involved.⁸⁴ The meeting itself is important because it occurred only a few days before the riot and without the permission of the WRA's own committee investigating the sugar shortage. The internees' choice to hold the meeting in Japanese reflected their mistrust and outward defiance of the white administration.

In contrast to the Poston Strike, which lasted for over a week, the riot at Manzanar was short lived. After the December 6th meeting, a large group approached the police station to advocate for Uyeno's release. Merritt attempted to manage the situation by informing the group that he would not give into the demands of an unruly mob. He expressed his desire to speak with a committee, urging the group to go home so that he could do so.⁸⁵ When that failed, he and other prominent administrators concluded that the best way to prevent violence was to release Uyeno from the community jail at Independence, CA and return him to Manzanar.⁸⁶ More specifically, he would be incarcerated in the Manzanar jail and "stand trial before the Judicial Committee, who would decide whether Uyeno should be tried here or in an outside court."⁸⁷ Merritt then suggested that once the immediate issue had

⁸² Shoyu was a Japanese sauce that was made from soybeans, and a shoyu factory was constructed in Block 1. Miso was a fermented soybean paste common in Japanese cuisine. In 1944, 36,000 pounds of miso were produced for the mess halls, and the shoyu plant made 1,500 gallons a month. Harlan D. Unrau, *Historic Resource Study/Special History Study*, vol. 1, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry during World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center* (Denver, CO: National Park Service, 1996), 270, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556032019739&view=1up&seq=1>. Harlan D. Unrau, *Historic Resource Study/Special History Study*, vol. 2, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry during World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center* (Denver, CO: National Park Service, 1996), 560, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.10078098274&view=1up&seq=5>.

⁸³ Throckmorton to Ralph P. Merritt, memorandum, "Report on Personal Interviews in the Independence Jail," 10.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁵ "The Manzanar 'Incident,'" 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

been resolved, the committee would have a chance to discuss other grievances and find the person guilty of Tayama's beating. This attempt at compromise reveals the administration's misunderstanding of the rioters' motivations—they failed to understand why Uyeno's release was so important, and how it tied into the greater conflict between internees who supported the government and those who resented it. The Manzanar administration thought that the compromise would actually lead to a solution, but instead, the group met again later that night.

The subject matter of the December 6th evening meeting highlights the tensions that existed in the camp and the way in which this inflamed the riot. Once again, a key topic of conversation at the meeting was the sugar shortage, emphasizing the group's preoccupation with the administration's abuse of power. Notably, the group felt that Uyeno was arrested for his knowledge about the shortage and his background with the Union.⁸⁸ Additionally, "a list of 'Dogs in Camp' was read off—'All must be killed.' The group cried for the names which are as follows, Toku Slocumb, Togo Tanaka, John Sinoda, Fred Tayama, George Hayakawa, and Tom Imai."⁸⁹ The group's ability to target specific individuals for their supposed betrayal of the community reveals the depth of the conflict in the camps. Tensions between internees proliferated, demonstrating the negative impact that FBI informers and government sympathizers had on those who actively fought back against the government.

Opposing internee viewpoints of the riot are instrumental in understanding the acts of the resisters, making the accounts of Tokutaro Nishimura Slocum particularly compelling. More commonly known as Tokie, Slocum had a long history of supporting the U.S. and the WRA. By the time of the riot, he had been an FBI informant and was also an intelligence officer for the Manzanar police.⁹⁰ In a hearing before the Committee on Military Affairs, he explained that his duties were "to

⁸⁸ Ibid, 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 10.

⁹⁰ "Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate Seventy-Eighth Congress First Session on S. 444 A Bill Providing for the Transfer of Certain Functions of the War Relocation Authority to the War Department," January 1943, Documents from Harry Ueno Re: Manzanar 1942-1943, Japanese American National Library, San Francisco, CA, 121-122.

make observations and analyses, trace down the rumors, gossips, and various subversive activities in the camp and make reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigation,” to which he added, “during that time I believe I was of some help to our Government.”⁹¹ This background on Tokie is important because it confirms the presence of FBI informants amongst the internee population. These informants cultivated mistrust and fear in the community because they constituted a constant, overbearing presence of authority. It also hints at the resentment and betrayal that some internees experienced as a result of encountering such informants who were actively helping the U.S. government, even after the tragedy of removal.



Figure 7: Tokutaro Slocum in front of the Japanese American Citizens League headquarters in Los Angeles. This photo was taken on April 11, 1942, one month prior to the end of the mandatory removal of Japanese-descended individuals from the West Coast. Source: War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, University of California Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

Interestingly, Tokie also discusses the Blood Brothers and instances of “pro-Japanese” activities in the camp, speaking with disdain about their actions. This opposing account of so-called “subversive” groups further highlights the fact that the divisions in the camp were extremely hard to

⁹¹ Ibid, 122.

overcome. Neither side truly understood the motivations behind the other, and Tokie's account criticizes other internees' use of radio broadcasts, the Japanese language, and their intimidation tactics, emphasizing his negative perception of "pro-Japanese" factions. Tokie viewed these groups as troublemakers, as evidenced through his discussion of a sign which read "Watch these pro-Americans. They are taking down our signs. We will take care of them."⁹² The escalation from unrest to violence can be traced through signs such as this one. In general, signs reflect the deep-rooted sentiments of frustration, anger, and resentment against "pro American" groups. Tokie also mentions the JACL in his testimony, which is crucial because he delves into the JACL agenda at the Salt Lake City meeting and the plan for Nisei enlistment in the army, both of which were extremely distressing to the "pro-Japanese" faction.⁹³ Rumors about drafting Nisei into the army had only just begun to spread, as the loyalty questionnaire was only distributed in 1943. Tokie explains that the Kibei were particularly angry about these developments, leading to the beating of Tayama and their desire to "kill" other "pro-Americans." Therefore, while Tokie had a basic understanding of certain events that inflamed the minds of the "pro-Japanese" internees, he did not comprehend the profound nature of these tensions.

When asked about estimations of loyalty within the camps, Tokie expressed that the Kibei were the disloyal element, thus silencing the stories of Nisei who also participated in the riot and other acts of defiance. He explains that 75% of the individuals in the camps were loyal Americans, but only 25% of this 75% were 'militant' Americans, and the other 50 were loyal but not outspoken in any way.⁹⁴ The 25% who are not loyal are classified as Kibei, which is limiting because this erases the stories of people like Nisei who were swayed to anti-American views after life in the internment camps or those who had consistently been wary of the U.S. government. One of the ways in which the

⁹² "Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate Seventy-Eighth Congress First Session on S. 444 A Bill Providing for the Transfer of Certain Functions of the War Relocation Authority to the War Department," 123.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 123.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 124.

involvement of Nisei in the Manzanar Riot surfaces is through the casualties. After the December 6th evening meeting, the crowd split up into two groups, with one group storming the police station.⁹⁵ Amidst confusion and throwing of rocks by internees, military police shot the rioters.⁹⁶ In a report of the Manzanar Riot compiled on December 14, 1942, there is an injury summary which contains the names, ages, and subgroups of the individuals who were injured or killed.⁹⁷ Notably, four out of the eleven names on the list were Nisei, one of which was killed. James Ito was a 17 year old, and died of a gunshot wound to the abdomen and heart, while Tom Uatanaka, 25, remained in critical condition after his perforated intestine was removed.⁹⁸ The two other Nisei were classified as being in good physical condition after sustaining leg injuries. Given that Issei, Nisei, and Kibei were injured, the riot cannot be taken as the irrational actions of a pro-Axis mob. Strikingly, there was a clear involvement of Nisei, even though they were typically considered to be loyal. Therefore, despite the stereotypes that were attributed to each of the subgroups, it is clear that the labels that were placed on individuals in the camps were not always indicative of their beliefs or views on internment life.

As seen through the meetings of the resisters, and the accounts of FBI informants such as Tokie, the chronology of the riot is not enough to understand the dynamics of the camp before and after the riot. A true analysis of the riot takes into account all viewpoints, and challenges the stereotypes of “pro-American” and “pro-Japanese” by trying to understand the very real fears, thoughts, and anxieties of the internees. The mindset of the internees derived from their past experiences, their thoughts about the future, and their frustrations at the present. For those who were a part of the group of resisters, Uyeno’s arrest was seen as suspicious given the timing of the sugar

⁹⁵ While one group went to the police station, the other group went to the hospital to find Tayama. The group arrived between 6:25-6:45pm (accounts vary), and Dr. Gate called for assistance but no one was dispatched. However, Tayama was hiding under a bed in one of the hospital wards, so the group did not find him. “The Manzanar Riot, [see also: NARA Reel 75, Folders 21 and 23],” 13-15.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁹⁷ David J. McFadden, “Report on the Disturbance and Riot at the Manzanar War Relocation Project,” December 14, 1942, Documents from Harry Ueno Re: Manzanar 1942-1943, Japanese American National Library, San Francisco, CA, 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 16.

investigation. They also respected him as a member of the community for his desire to protect the interests of mess hall workers instead of supporting the Work Corps. For those who supported the government, the actions of the resisters were seen as unruly and disgraceful. They had fears about the perceived “pro-Japan” messages and rhetoric that went along with such demonstrations, which could have been rooted in the need to gain acceptance from the U.S. at large. Perhaps these mindsets were more common in one subgroup over another, but they were certainly *not* restricted to certain groups. In many cases, internees operated outside of the stereotypes that were attributed to them, adding a new dimension to the conflict in the camps.

Aftermath of the Manzanar Riot: Fear and Rumors

In the wake of the Manzanar Riot, tensions remained prominent in the camp and acts of defiance remained present in the minds of some internees. Many individuals refused to work after the riot took place, as is described in a letter from December 21, 1942:

“Monday, today, every one was supposed to go back to work. But they only worked half day. The furnel [sic] was held for the two fellows who died of bullets two weeks ago. They couldn’t hold it within camp because there wasn’t anyplace where such a big group could gather and since Lone Pine or Independence didn’t care to have the Japanese population in their city, (town) the people had to go out to the woods and have it. They took about ten trucks with the families and three rep. from each block.”⁹⁹

As opposed to going to work, the internees chose to honor those who died in the riot, despite the possible consequences.¹⁰⁰ Their efforts to find an area outside of the camp to hold the funeral services also reflected their determination to make accommodations amidst discriminatory conditions and the

⁹⁹ Letter, December 21, 1942, Documents from Harry Ueno Re: Manzanar 1942-1943, Japanese American National Library, San Francisco, CA, 8.

¹⁰⁰ On Monday, December 21, internees were required to go to work but when they decided to go to the funeral instead, the WRA administrators fired the internee administration workers, post office workers, and warehouse workers. This disrupted the lives of internees even more because they had to walk a mile or more to get their mail, and those who got fired had to deal with the emotional repercussions of losing their jobs. Ibid, 8.

oppressive nature of camp life. The author explains that “the Japanese population didn't care to go to work,” for honoring the rioters who died for their beliefs was more important to them. For many internees, the loyalty that they had to the members of their community was far more important than any sort of connection to the U.S. and the WRA.

In the days immediately after the riot, school closures reflected the tension and fear that proliferated in the camps. However, it is crucial to emphasize that these closures were not issued by the administration by any means. McFadden's report stated that “Elementary schools were closed because of the failure of the students to attend,” demonstrating a clear choice on the part of the students' parents to keep them home from school.¹⁰¹ Parents could have acted this way out of fear, but it could have also been an intentional form of resistance against the WRA, or both. Regardless of which motives different internees had, the closure of the schools reveals the impact that the riot had on all elements of the population. Young children were affected by the riot through the experiences of their parents, and there was a clear struggle for internees to move forward. Accounts of the riot that demonize a small, antagonistic, “pro-Japanese” minority are severely limiting in that they fail to acknowledge the tangible effects that resulted from the event itself. By focusing on one group as opposed to looking at the riot more broadly, an inaccurate picture of post-riot Manzanar is constructed—one that suggests that no major changes occurred after the riot and that the population reverted to an otherwise identical pre-riot environment.

Along with school closures, there were also many rumors that took hold of the internee population in the period following the riot. These rumors elucidate the broad and longstanding effects of the riot, which further invalidates the official dismissal of its significance. Some rumors were published in Project Report 77, released in January 1943. Prominently, the rumor that Manzanar would be evacuated took hold of multiple blocks: 14, 16, 24, and 27. Internees thought that blocks 1-15

¹⁰¹ McFadden, “Report on the Disturbance and Riot at the Manzanar War Relocation Project,” 10.

would be evacuated, and looked to the army for an answer to their concerns.¹⁰² The administration argued that without definitive answers to this evacuation question, internees would not be motivated to work and farm. Some rumors centered around more practical topics, such as shoe repairs and clothing allowances. Interestingly, there were accusations that Poston had better clothing allowances than Manzanar did, demonstrating that the internees were very aware of their position in the internment camps and were fairly knowledgeable of the events in other camps as well.¹⁰³

A rumor related to the riot involved Reverend Oda, who also served as a block manager of Block 28. The residents of block 28 were consumed with the idea that he was an FBI or government informant, due to the fact that he did not attend several block manager meetings after the so-called “disturbance” had occurred.¹⁰⁴ The Manzanar Peace Committee, which was created in the wake of the riot, investigated the matter and concluded that the rumors were false. Internees from each block created the Peace Committee after the riot ended, looking to ensure harmony in the wake of the resistance. Seigoro Murakami, a judo instructor and Japanese language instructor led the Peace Committee, and consulted with Project Director Merritt.¹⁰⁵ The formation of the Peace Committee and their investigation of the rumors did not quell the uneasiness in the camp. The fear of informants within the camp reveals how the riot and the other instances of conflict were not spurred on by a crazed minority. Some rumors became so widespread that the Peace Committee felt the need to address them, proving the existence of a broader population in the camps that resented those who

¹⁰² “Project Report No. 77,” January 30, 1943, Reel 76, RG210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington D.C, 1. Archival documents demonstrate that rumors existed in the camps, but it is unclear how much they impacted the course of events. Other sources that discuss rumor are: Unrau, *Historic Resource Study/Special History Study, vol. 2, The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry during World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center*, 504-505. Adams, “Notes on Manzanar Disturbances 1942,” 3. Other historians have explored rumors and their impact on society throughout history. Some examples include: Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁰³ “Project Report No. 77,” 3.

¹⁰⁴ “Manzanar Peace Committee: Block #28 and Rev. Oda,” January 10, 1943, Reel 76, RG210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington D.C, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Unrau, *Historic Resource Study/Special History Study, vol. 2, The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry during World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center*, 537.

collaborated with the government. The beating of Tayama and the events of the riot only heightened internees' awareness of such individuals, and impacted their day to day lives.

As is seen through these rumors and school closures, uncertainty and fear proliferated in the camp after the riot. Internees continually displayed mistrust for one another, and feared being reported to the FBI or the WRA by informants. They also resented the administration for not being able to provide adequate answers to their grievances. While the Manzanar Riot was certainly an expression of some internees' disdain for the conditions in the camp and the internment process as a whole, it did not lead to any resolution of the tensions that were embedded within camp life. In fact, it only heightened these tensions and created a sense of greater instability due to the violence and deaths that occurred. Overall, the Manzanar Riot did not usher in resolution and peace—there were plenty of struggles that persisted into the new year and for the remainder of the internment period, coloring the internee experience.

Conclusion: Understanding Motivations Behind Resistance

Regardless of the messages that were sent by the government and publications within the internment camps themselves, the transition to internment camp life was nothing short of complicated. The WRA's claim that internees would overcome the challenges of camp life within the first few months and usher in a new spirit in 1943 were not accurate representations of the tensions within the internee population and the administration. Internees' actions reflected their past experiences, their current interpretations of camp life, and their fears about the future. While life in the camps was by no means pleasant, internees also harbored concerns about what life would look like upon release from the camps.

One topic of discussion was wages outside of the camps, which were believed to be better than those within the camps themselves. However, Saburo Kido, who had received leave clearance, wrote a

letter to Elmer Yamamoto, presumably a friend who was still in the camp.¹⁰⁶ He explained the “difficulty in earning enuf to live in Salt Lake...[and stated] ‘If you think it is easy to get 200-\$300 a month you are greatly mistaken.’”¹⁰⁷ He reflected on the rumors that he had heard while still incarcerated, which suggested that there were high wages outside of the camps; the highest wage for a Japanese individual in Salt Lake was \$150 a month, which was not sufficient given high costs of living. He went on to say that ““those who have wild dreams about high wages should remain in camp,”” implying that for some, camp life was obviously distasteful but provided a certain set of expectations, unlike the outside world.¹⁰⁸

It was in this ever-changing, unpredictable environment that conflict took place in the camps. The camps themselves might have been isolated, but the minds of the internees did not operate in a state of separation from the rest of the world. Major events of resistance such as the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot were not the only instances of resistance in the camps, but truly understanding these events uncovers how divisions manifested themselves. Part of this process involves looking outside of traditional stereotypes associated with Issei, Nisei, and Kibei. Assuming that all Kibei and Issei were disloyal, or that all Nisei were loyal distorts the rioters and strikers’ motivations, as well as those of FBI and WRA collaborators.

Setting aside stereotypes allows practical reasons for resistance to come to light. Those who participated in the strike and the riot did not do so merely because they were “pro-Japanese” or had extreme hatred for America. People involved in these events had a variety of different perspectives and motivations. In Poston, some internees looked to gain respect for the Japanese community by aligning themselves with the government, some experienced anger at Poston’s location on an Indian

¹⁰⁶ Saburo Kido became the President of the JACL in 1940, and was crucial in advancing the JACL’s narrative of cooperation and the idea that all Japanese Americans possessed a deep devotion to their American citizenship. For more on Kido, see Densho Encyclopedia Contributors, “Saburo Kido,” Densho Encyclopedia, last modified October 8, 2020, accessed November 3, 2022, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Saburo_Kido.

¹⁰⁷ Tsuchiyama, “Sociological Journal,” 7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 7.

reservation, and others were driven by their resentment towards the WRA. In regards to Manzanar, the rioters operated with the knowledge of Uyeno's background in the Kitchen Workers' Union, and many distrusted the administration as well as FBI informants. There were many other considerations that inspired populations in the camps to act, but regardless of what they were, none of them were exclusive to one subgroup over another.

Internment life centered around conflict, tension, and division, profoundly affecting the ways in which internees acted with one another and with the WRA. Exploring the true motivations behind the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot reveal the complex nature of the internee population. Resisters did not belong to one group and did not reflect "pro-Japanese" values in every instance. Instead, the internees that chose to fight back recognized the injustice in their situation and looked to remedy it by making their voices heard. They could belong to the Issei, Kibei, or Nisei subgroups—no subgroup was solely responsible. JACL supporters and government informants understood the undemocratic nature of internment, but they looked for acceptance through government cooperation. The strike and riot directly challenged the conventional (accepted) ideas of "disloyalty" and "loyalty," and a closer analysis creates a more accurate understanding of who took action and why.

Conclusion: Restoring Division, Embracing Ambiguity

In February 1942, under the rationale of “military necessity,” the U.S. government mandated the internment of 120,000 individuals of Japanese descent. The concept of “military necessity” suggested that there was no possible way to determine the loyalty of Japanese descended people due to their close racial ties to the enemy. These deeply racialized ideals about the Japanese population were part of a long history of anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast, amplified by social, economic, and cultural considerations. Many Americans saw the Japanese population as a major economic threat, taking away jobs and income from hardworking Americans. Additionally, knowledge of the Japanese language and prolonged exposure to Japanese cultural practices called one’s loyalties into question and augmented the perceived need for internment.

Despite the efforts of those that labeled the government’s behavior as extreme, internment became a reality with the passage of Executive Order 9066. One of the most notable voices in the arguments against internment was the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). Claiming to represent the entirety of the Japanese American community, the JACL attempted to dissuade the government from viewing internment as the only solution to the so-called wartime “Japanese problem.” However, the JACL’s strategy involved the alienation of the Issei and Kibei, as well as distancing the Nisei from Japanese culture and everyday life. In essence, the JACL aligned itself with what the U.S. government deemed acceptable while simultaneously arguing against internment, even if it meant creating a divide between the Nisei and the rest of the Japanese community. Ultimately, the JACL pledged its full cooperation to the government and promised to abide by its directives, even if internment was decided upon.

Beginning in the pre-war era and persisting into the internment period, stereotypes regarding the Issei, Kibei, and Nisei were solidified. In their administration of the camps, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) tended to view Issei and Kibei as suspicious or “disloyal” due to their cultural ties to Japan. On the other hand, the Nisei and the JACL were often labelled as “loyal” due to their

citizenship status and the JACL's willingness to cooperate with the government. In order to expose the limiting nature of these labels, I analyze the Poston Strike (Nov. 1942) and the Manzanar Riot (Dec. 1942). The U.S. government and the media vilified these acts of resistance as the product of an irrational "pro-Axis" minority, suggesting that only extremists demonstrated discontent about life in the camps. In reality, many internees of all subgroups (Issei, Nisei, and Kibei) participated in the strike and the riot, reflecting the inaccuracy of the stereotypical labels that the government assigned to each subgroup. The government uncritically applied the labels of "disloyalty" and "loyalty" to all internees, leading to a great deal of misunderstanding in the camps. In this way, internment camp life was one marked by division, conflict, and dissent. While the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot are often recognized as violent outliers in an otherwise peaceful experience, internment was a constant series of power struggles between the internees and the government along with internal fracturing within the Japanese community.

After the dissemination of the loyalty questionnaire and the creation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the pervasiveness of the subgroup labels persisted. The government leveraged the segregated army unit as a way to prove its non-discriminatory stance, publicly acknowledging the accomplishments and capabilities of the unit. When viewed against earlier portrayals of the Poston Strike and the Manzanar riot as "pro-Axis," the oversimplification of the internment experience is evident. By suggesting that the large majority of internees did not show disdain for the government and the WRA not only minimizes the traumatic experiences of forced removal, but it obscures the constantly tumultuous internment era. The government effectively erased the narratives of dissenting individuals for the purpose of upholding the image of patriotic Nisei willing to sacrifice themselves for their country.

In other words, the strict application of the terms "disloyal" and "loyal" resulted in false portrayals about internment life, taking away the agency of those who chose to resist the government. Historians and social scientists in the post-war era have reproduced these silences in internment

history, adopting the perspective that the WRA and the JACL cultivated in the internment years. My analysis adds to the contributions of revisionist historians, exploring the complexity of the internment camp experience and challenging the idea that certain subgroups were “loyal” or “disloyal.”

In many ways, the silences of the wartime era have pervaded the legacy of Japanese American internment. The contributions of Japanese Americans who agreed with the JACL’s ideology of cooperation and who also supported idealistic portrayals of the Nisei community dominated the narrative, just as they did in the wartime context. The JACL continued to emphasize the successes of the Japanese community and their ability to assimilate into American society, resembling their rhetoric in the pre-internment era as a way to defend themselves. A 1966 *New York Times* article articulated a similar message, asserting that “the history of Japanese Americans...challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities...barely more than 30 years after the end of the wartime camps, this is a minority that has risen above even prejudiced criticism.”¹⁰⁹ The timing of this article is noteworthy because almost thirty years after internment, Japanese Americans were being elevated as a minority success story. Not only did this erase their own history, but it minimized the struggles of other minority groups.

It is undeniable that there have been recent efforts to uncover more about acts of resistance in the internment era, but there are still blind spots when it comes to telling the stories of dissenters. A prominent example is the 1999 film *Rabbit in the Moon*, directed by Emiko Omori.¹¹⁰ Omori produced the film with the intention of exposing dissenting narratives, delving deeper into the Poston Strike and the Manzanar Riot by incorporating testimonies from former internees. The film *Rabbit in the Moon* is effective in challenging the idea that “incidents” in the internment camps were not isolated outbursts; they were connected to one another through the shared grievances of the resisters. However, the film

¹⁰⁹ William Petersen, “Success Story, Japanese American Style,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), January 9, 1966, 180, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1966/01/09/356013502.html?pageNumber=180>.

¹¹⁰ *Rabbit in the Moon*, directed by Emiko Omori, Wabi-Sabi, 1999.

fails to tease out the greater implications of the characterizations of loyal and disloyal, indirectly enforcing the division in the Japanese community that it advocates against.

In its discussion of the loyalty questionnaire, the film effectively explores the uneasiness of the internees when it came to answering questions twenty-seven and twenty-eight. One of the interviewees, Frank Emi, emphasized that saying “No” to the questions would require the Issei to “forswear allegiance to Japan...[which] would have left them without a country.”¹¹¹ As discussed in Chapter Three, this fear of becoming stateless persons is often minimized in WRA accounts of the questionnaire, especially in suggesting that the revision of question twenty-eight put an end to all of the uncertainties within the internees’ minds. This point of view is far too simplistic, which the film effectively challenges through the firsthand accounts of internees. At the same time that the film sheds more light onto the realities of the internment experience, it also emphasizes the WRA/JACL perspective in the way it outlines the different groups in the camps. The film highlights that the camps consisted of “disloyal” and “loyal” groups, labeling the JACL and Nisei as “loyal” while the “disloyal” internees consisted largely of Issei and Kibei. Although this view is helpful to an extent, it further cements the notion that there were only two groups in the camps, attributing labels to the Issei, Kibei, and Nisei without further consideration. Building on the interventions made by the film and other recent reinterpretations of the internment experiences and narrative, my thesis has directly challenged the strict labels that have been used to describe the wartime Japanese American history and thus demonstrates the centrality of dissents, divisions, and conflicts to their internment experiences.

In considering the continual erasure of many aspects and nuances of the Japanese American experience, it is clear that the exclusion of dissenting voices is not merely a matter of the past. These silences dominated the wartime period but have since been reproduced by the media, organizations such as the JACL, and even the government itself. The divisions that arose between the internees and

¹¹¹ *Rabbit in the Moon*, 00:43:59-00:44:06.

more specifically amongst the Nisei did not fade away after the end of internment. Instead, these differences have persisted, but are now rooted in questions of how Japanese Americans should be portrayed in American society and how members of the community should see themselves in relation to the United States. Understanding the complexity of internee perspectives and challenging the limiting nature of governmental narratives not only brings the stories of the past to the forefront, but illuminates the present.

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