

A PRECARIOUS HOME: JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION,
CITIZENSHIP, AND STRATEGIES FOR BELONGING, 1940S-1960S

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Japanese Americans on the West Coast experienced multiple losses of home before, during, and after their incarceration during World War II. Repeated and coerced migration and exclusion uprooted Japanese Americans from physical and imagined homes, characterizing their experience of belonging in the United States. Their continuing struggle to regain “home” is apparent in the continuing geographic, social, and legal displacement that many Japanese Americans experienced during the postwar period. This thesis explores the relationship between home and Japanese American identity—how identity influenced the “home” and the strategies that they pursued, and how the stakes and longevity of incarceration clarified the boundaries of citizenship and belonging for them. Looking at incarceration as part of a long pattern of uprootedness allows insight to the way that repeated denial of Japanese American access to home and belonging was part of the experience of—and barriers to—conditional inclusion in the United States.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early in November 1958, Toshiko Chuman opened her mail to a crucial verdict. She was, once again, a citizen of the United States.¹ She had been anticipating the letter for quite some time—ever since she submitted her revised legal forms for her ongoing court case in March of the same year.² Her request for citizenship had been denied multiple times before. The most recent denial had also arrived in a letter, and she may have wondered as she opened this envelope if she would find another identical notice. Instead, she found a letter from her lawyer, Wayne Collins. He told her that it would take a month or so before she could “attempt to exercise any of the rights that are peculiar and exclusive to citizens,” but that her twelve year quest for restored citizenship was, for all intents and purposes, over.³ Her path to citizenship was no ordinary one. Toshiko Chuman was born a citizen of the United States in Los Angeles in the year 1918. At the age of twenty-six, she elected to renounce her birthright citizenship. This decision determined the difficulty she would experience in regaining her United States citizenship. The multiple denials she received reflected the Department of Justice’s reluctance to reverse her original decision, likely making this letter all the more surprising. Perhaps she leaned back in her chair and gave a sigh of relief, or maybe she nodded knowingly and put the letter away. Either way, she likely imparted the news to her husband later that day.

¹ Wayne Collins to Toshiko Chuman, 29 October 1958, folder 12, box 7, Wayne M. Collins Papers 1918-1974 (hereafter Collins Papers), Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA (hereafter BANC).

² Affidavit of Toshiko Chuman, 8 February 1958, folder 12, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

³ Affidavit of Toshiko Chuman, 8 February 1958, folder 12, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

Her husband, Hayao Chuman, was all too familiar with her ongoing pursuit of restored citizenship. He, too, had renounced his United States citizenship while incarcerated with over one hundred and ten thousand other Japanese Americans during World War II.⁴ The categorical dislocation and incarceration of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast was framed as a strategic response to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.⁵ Amidst fears of sabotage and espionage from Japanese immigrant communities, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 two months later, authorizing their mass removal from the West Coast. Following the Civilian Exclusion Order issued by the military for their respective neighborhoods, the Chumans were given one week to make arrangements for Hayao's horticultural nursery and for the restaurant Toshiko's parents owned, as well as their homes, belongings, and other

⁴ There are conflicting reports in secondary literature of the total number of people removed and incarcerated, ranging from 110,000 to 120,000. I use 110,000 here as a conservative estimate.

⁵ After some debate, the most common, agreed upon term to describe Japanese American removal from the West Coast and the lack of freedom during the war is "incarceration." This is the primary term that I utilize in this project. Correspondingly, I use "incarcerees" to describe Japanese Americans in confinement and "incarceration camp" or "camp" to refer to the facilities used to detain them. The unique nature of the facilities used to incarcerate Japanese Americans and the circumstances surrounding their removal to, and exit from, these facilities makes *most* terminology—including "incarceration"—problematic in some way. "Incarceration" is linked to an expanding field of scholarship on the carceral system and state tools of control. Some scholars critique the use of this term because it implies punishment for a crime, but I think it aptly captures the way that identity in the United States is often criminalized. It replaces previously popular terms—"internment," "concentration camp," and "relocation center"—that mischaracterize incarceration. I also use "forced removal," "mass removal," and "displacement" based on the context of my analysis, although these terms are never meant to minimize the coerced nature of incarceration. On this terminology, see Connie Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), xiii-xv; Roger Daniels, "Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005). On race and the carceral system, see Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Control* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Torrie Hester, *Deportation: Origins of U.S. Policy* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

affairs.⁶ They moved first to the Santa Anita Assembly Center, then to incarceration camps in Jerome and then Rohwer, Arkansas in the span of a few months.⁷ Frequent migration became a consistent theme in their lives. They uprooted themselves from the spaces they came to call home, as well as the communities that also inhabited these places. The War Relocation Authority (WRA), the federal agency created to facilitate mass removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during the war, distributed a polarizing questionnaire in 1943 to determine the loyalty of the incarcerated population. The Chumans' decision to withhold pledges of allegiance and military service on this infamous questionnaire flagged them as particularly suspect in the eyes of the U.S. government. They were moved, along with others who answered the questionnaire similarly, to a newly founded "segregation center" at Tule Lake.

This flat, barren landscape on the border of eastern Oregon and California is where many stories of migration and "disloyalty" converge. Today, this former lake bed consists mainly of farmland. Brown, arid land stretches out to a distant horizon line, broken up by the shocking green of irrigated fields. The only structure left standing from the rows and rows of uniform barracks that once made up the segregation camp of Tule Lake is the jail. The Chumans never spent any time in what was more commonly known as the "stockade," but the structure was well used during their time at Tule Lake. This one remaining structure symbolizes the atmosphere of unrest within the camp and the

⁶ The military command responsible for defense of the West Coast, the Western Defense Command (WDC) posted Civilian Exclusion Orders in different military zones to notify Japanese American inhabitants of the date and conditions of their impending expulsion. Affidavit of Toshiko Chuman, 8 February 1958, folder 12, box 7, Collings Papers, BANC; Hayao Chuman and Toshiko Chuman to Thomas M. Cooley II Jr., 26 September 1946, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁷ Toshiko Chuman to Wayne M. Collins, 1944-1969 Renunciants, folder 12, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

stigma of disloyalty that incarcerated of Tule Lake carried. In the time the Chumans spent at Tule Lake, they crossed paths with many others similarly uprooted and maligned. Perceptions of disloyalty continued to exacerbate the limitations of their access to stability and community. They even found themselves separated from each other for over a year when Hayao was sent to a detention center in Texas for his participation in the *Hokoku Seinen Dan*, a Japanese nationalist organization. Toshiko joined him in the Santa Fe, Texas, detention center in April 1946.⁸ All in all, both were incarcerated in a total of five different incarceration and detention camps during the war. Political displacement paralleled geographic dislocation; the Chumans were two of the five thousand and five hundred people to renounce United States citizenship in response to their incarceration during the war.⁹

They spent the years after the war trying to rebuild their lives, but the state of uprootedness that plagued them during the war followed them for long afterward. Having lost both their homes and their jobs in Los Angeles when they were forcibly removed to the camps, they found themselves with nowhere to go after they were released from the detention center in Santa Fe. They moved their growing family from Texas to Massachusetts to Illinois, and—finally—back to Los Angeles, California. Together, they engaged in a legal dispute with the Department of Justice as they tried to prove that they deserved—and wanted—the return of their birthright citizenship. Hayao Chuman also received a letter from Collins in 1958. His letter, though, contained news of the second of

⁸ Hayao Chuman and Toshiko Chuman to Thomas M. Cooley II Jr, September 26, 1946, 1944-1969 Renunciants, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁹ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 189.

many rejections he would receive from the Department of Justice.¹⁰ Ultimately, the government decided there was not enough evidence to prove that his decision to renounce citizenship was made under circumstances of “fear, coercion, or duress.”¹¹ In his case, the Attorney General’s office maintained the validity of wartime incarceration, as well as disregard for those who rebelled against it; someone who “freely” decided to give up U.S. citizenship did not deserve it back. With both these letters in hand, Hayao and Toshiko Chuman’s lives continued on in the Los Angeles suburbs. After more than a decade of statelessness and migration, one of them could claim the rights and obligations of citizenship, but the other could not.¹²

The contours of their stories indicate the complexity and longevity of Japanese American dislocation during the war. Their stories also provide insight into the ways that dual nationalism and transcultural identities complicated commitment to continuing life in the United States, as well as perceptions of their viability for conditional inclusion.¹³ Japanese Americans were suspected of disloyalty. This perception did not ultimately result in deportation or criminal sentencing, but it was enough to uproot them from the

¹⁰ Hayao Chuman received rejection letters from the Department of Justice on April 11, 1955, December 26, 1957 (though he was not informed of this rejection until March 20, 1958), March 21, 1960, and February 26, 1964. Warren E. Burger to Lloyd H. Burke, 11 April 1955, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC; George Cochran Doub to Lloyd H. Burke, 26 December 1957, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC; Wayne M. Collins to Hayao Chuman, 20 March 1958, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC; George Cochran Doub to Lynn J. Gillard, 21 March 1960, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC; John W. Douglas to Cecil F. Poole, 26 February 1964, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

¹¹ Precedent established in *Acheson v. Murakami*.

¹² The framing of citizenship as a combination of both rights and obligations comes from Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

¹³ For further reading on the concept of “conditional inclusion,” see Madeline Y. Hsu and Ellen D. Wu, ““Smoke and Mirrors”: Conditional Inclusion, Model Minorities, and the Pre-1965 Dismantling of Asian Exclusion,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 34 (Summer 2015). For further reading on dual nationalism and transcultural identities, see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 200.

nation and their sense of belonging for a prolonged period of time. For some, however, complex national and cultural identities that reflected significant ties to both America and Japan exacerbated the severity and longevity of this uprooting. The Chumans do not represent all Japanese American incarcerated, nor all of those who passed through Tule Lake's gates. They are, however, representative of this correlation. They were both Kibei; they had familial and cultural ties to Japan that made a future there more viable to them.¹⁴ They made choices for their future, in part, based on circumstances and backgrounds not shared by all Japanese Americans. Beyond that, their story is an example of the range of personal and emotional choices made amidst oppressive circumstances. In other words, Japanese American agency during incarceration can not be summed up by any simple narrative.

The ways in which Japanese Americans navigated the choices imposed by “circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted” from their own past and from incarceration varied widely.¹⁵ They were not a monolithic group, though they were consistently portrayed as such by Americans who attributed aberrant qualities to them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—as well as seemingly “positive” traits in

¹⁴ This project utilizes the terms “Issei,” (first generation), “Nisei” (second generation), and “Kibei” (those of the second generation Japanese Americans who received an education in Japan and returned to the United States) to describe individuals’ identities. These terms are useful in understanding the general differences that distinguished immigrant generational identity, but only to an extent. The terms ultimately represent groups with a wide range of ages, experiences, beliefs, and identities that cannot be fully encapsulated by a generational descriptor. Furthermore, I refer to both Issei and Nisei as “Japanese Americans”—a designation previously reserved for Nisei who held birthright citizenship in the United States. Issei were legally barred from citizenship in the United States, but most had lived in the United States for several decades by the 1940s and planned to stay.¹⁴ “Japanese American,” therefore, includes all generations within this immigrant-ethnic community, regardless of citizenship status. On the importance of legal barriers to citizenship and Issei conceptions of belonging, see Connie Chiang’s “Note on Terminology” in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*.

¹⁵ Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History*, 37 (Autumn, 2003): 113-124.

the latter part of the twentieth century.¹⁶ Furthermore, the emphasis on loyalty during the war rewarded self-representations of Japanese American identity as patriotic, upstanding members of their community committed to the task of assimilation into mainstream, heteronormative American society.¹⁷ These self-representations were strategic in many ways, opening up employment and resettlement opportunities and inviting praise. Indeed, the Nisei Japanese American soldier emerged as an iconic figure and symbol of all Japanese Americans' noble sacrifice in the years after the war.¹⁸ These narratives, though instrumental in facilitating avenues to opportunity, obscured the story of people like the Chumans and patterns of loss woven throughout incarceration. The Chumans' story, as well as the stories of others that experienced a similar loss of home, demonstrates the intricate ways in which conditions such as loyalty were constructed and became bound to citizenship, as well as the experience of uprootedness shared by all incarcerated. While perceived disloyalty sometimes exacerbated the frequency and extent of displacement, these patterns extended to all Japanese Americans on the West Coast.

Ultimately, this project asks the following questions: How did incarceration redefine the conditions for Japanese American belonging in the United States? How did incarceration redraw lines of solidarity and dissent within this immigrant-ethnic community? And how can the experiences of those who offered competing narratives to the moderate, patriotic Japanese American identity that emerged in postwar America

¹⁶ For further reading on the "model minority" trope, see Ellen Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), Madeline Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), and Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

¹⁷ Hsu and Wu, "Smoke and Mirrors," 54-60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

inform our understanding of the lengths to which people went to gain conditional inclusion? The answers to these questions lie in the notion of home—meaning the space, community, or common identity that fosters a sense of belonging and stability—as both a physical and an imagined concept. This story is not just about incarceration or ethnicity or citizenship; it is about how the intersection of these concepts can help us understand the multiple meanings of “home,” as well as the power of limiting access to it. The term “home” is applied broadly here in order to avoid normative applications of the term and account for the multiple ways in which individuals may define home: by people, place, identity, access to rights and status, and so forth. The term uprootedness, then, describes the separation from “home” in all its various meanings. It encompasses the experience of coerced changes in relationships to place and community, and to the rights and obligations of citizenship.¹⁹ Incarceration was not a static or isolated condition; it was part of a larger series of compelled migrations, dispossessions, and exclusions. Repeated migration and the looming threat of legal and physical removal from the state upended Japanese Americans’ sense of home and stability. This unstable experience of home provides a lens through which to view the dimensions of the loss that this community sustained and the methods for remediating that loss, as well as the impact of these processes on perceived and lived identities as Japanese Americans.

The scholarship on Japanese American incarceration is vast. Early scholarship focused on the harsh conditions of the camps, fervently dispelling myths of incarceration as “evacuation.”²⁰ The movement for redress in the Japanese American community

¹⁹ Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*.

²⁰ Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

during the 1970s and 1980s likely shaped the creation of much of this scholarship. Historians emphasized Japanese American loyalty and Americanism, reading these concepts backwards upon people and obscuring individual agency. Indeed, not all Japanese Americans would not have identified as loyal Americans—not that this made their decisions any less rational or their incarceration any less unjust. Scholars have clarified the injustice of wartime incarceration by exploring the legal and political motivations for the camps, focusing on specific government figures or the handling of court cases. These narratives often center military or government figures, such as General John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to explore political incentives, racially motivated fears, and the impact that bureaucrat’s personal viewpoints had on incarceration.²¹ Incarceration stood on shaky constitutional ground to begin with and had little precedent to stand on. New bureaucratic entities had to be created, and those entities developed new, often contentious, relationships with other agencies. The most notable agency created during this period was the War Relocation Authority (WRA), which became part of the Department of the Interior. Personal decisions of mid-level bureaucrats and the goals of respective departments shaped the mechanisms and design of incarceration as a system. These decisions determined stipulations for release, infrastructure and employment in the camps, and design of the loyalty questionnaire. Many scholars have investigated the

²¹ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Eric L. Muller, *American Inquisition: The Hunt for Japanese American Disloyalty in World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

incarceration system as a top-down institution, foregrounding bureaucratic agencies or figures, though increasingly some scholars have focused on overt forms of resistance.²²

Although the topics of incarceration's legality, the personal culpability of government bureaucrats, and the harsh conditions of the camps have continued to feature in recent scholarship, the past twenty years have seen an increase in works that frame Japanese American incarceration as a continuation of larger patterns and investigate Japanese American experiences with a keen eye toward agency. Scholars have shifted their attention to incorporate histories of immigration restriction and legal barriers leading up to incarceration in an effort to demonstrate that Asian American history has much to offer the study of race and immigration in the United States. Other scholars have taken a comparative approach, often through legal or political lenses. Mae Ngai, for example, has examined restrictive immigration restriction as a tool the U.S. government wielded against groups in times deemed most politically, economically, and socially beneficial. Her work deconstructs the value of legal status as a category specifically created in order to facilitate the exclusion of others from that exact category.²³ Ngai's work is part of a growing collection of works that analyze the experiences of different racial or ethnic minority groups to interrogate the ways in which the state has created institutions, such as deportation and incarceration, for social control and the reification of

²² Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die for their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment During World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Jason Scott Smith, "New Deal Public Works at War: The WPA and Japanese American Internment" *Pacific Historical Review* 72 (Feb, 2003): 63-92.

²³ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

difference within the United States.²⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernandez, in particular, links the carceral state to the settler colonial project. Her work bridges histories of immigration, settler colonialism, labor, race, and gender to interrogate the use of incarceration as a means of “elimination.” Though her project does not address Japanese American incarceration specifically, her analysis of incarceration as a means to revoke and control the rights and movement of racialized outsiders within a specific territory creates a useful framework for understanding Japanese American incarceration as part of the history of a carceral state. Scholarship has also shifted its lens toward transnational or global perspectives that follow migrant communities and recognize the limitations of the nation as a framework for understanding immigrant identities and movements.²⁵

The use of social and cultural lenses facilitated some of this analysis as early as the 1990s. Most prominently, historian Valerie Matsumoto approached the story of several small farming communities before and after the war, using the changing social and cultural landscapes of these communities to demonstrate the role of incarceration in shifting community needs and identity.²⁶ Her decision to extend her analysis to the years prior to and after the end of the war in *Farming the Home Place* (1993) has been echoed by more recent works. Extending the typical timeline of incarceration beyond the end of the war has facilitated the exploration of a growing breadth of topics and analytical

²⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Dan Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), Hernandez, *City of Inmates*.

²⁵ Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Valerie Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

lenses. For example, a growing body of works evaluate changing family dynamics, Nisei women's role in bridging cultural divides, and the subversion of heteronormative expectations through a gendered lens.²⁷ *Farming the Home Place* (1993) also provides insight to instances in which entire communities were able to return to their homes, but these instances were rare. Most Japanese Americans struggled to return to their original homes, only to find them occupied and others simply chose to resettle elsewhere. The disparate nature of sources that provide insight to Japanese American lives post-war is evident in works like Greg Robinson's *After Camp*, in which he provides "portraits" of Japanese American lives in postwar America.²⁸ Although his analysis ultimately concludes that resettlement followed no distinguishing regional patterns besides the particular characteristics of local communities and Japanese Americans, Connie Chiang's application of an environmental lens suggests the answer to incarceration and resettlement patterns lies in the familiarity of the environment and the labor it requires.²⁹ Her work applies the lens of environmental history to incarceration more broadly, interrogating the values imbued in the landscape and the way that Japanese American relationships to the environment of the camps through labor, leisure, and ideology facilitated key moments of resistance and agency. Valerie Matsumoto's work in *City Girls* suggests that resettlement in Los Angeles was facilitated, at least in part, by Nisei

²⁷ Valerie Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁸ Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

²⁹ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*; Robert Wilson, "Landscapes of Promise and Betrayal: Reclamation, Homesteading, and Japanese American Incarceration," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 2 (2011): 424-444.

women's ethnocultural networks that provided support in facing social and economic barriers.³⁰ These works have paid increasing attention to the period of resettlement directly following the war as a crucial period in understanding changes in family and community dynamics, as well as continuing patterns of hardship.

In more recent years, scholarship has delved into the creation of the model minority trope.³¹ The framework of conditional inclusion—the idea that access to political participation and socioeconomic mobility for certain groups is contingent upon those individuals bearing (or choosing to portray the appearance of) select traits—has guided scholarship in bridging the period of anti-Asian sentiment and the creation of this trope.³² Madeline Hsu discusses the creation of the model minority—and of the “right” kind of Asian—as an alternative method of creating difference and implementing immigration control. Although the model minority trope did not fully appear until 1960s, the conditions of inclusion in the context of wartime America required Japanese Americans to “perform” citizenship in order to access freedom, employment, community, and stability during the period of incarceration.³³

Although implicitly and often explicitly linked to displacement and loss, the focal points of incarceration and resettlement in these works point toward another pattern: the link between home and identity. The use of “home” as a lens allows us to consider the impact of repeated migration and prolonged displacement on identity before, during, and

³⁰ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 10.

³¹ Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front*; Wu, *The Color of Success*; Matsumoto, *City Girls*; Hsu, *The Good Immigrants*; Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*.

³² Hsu and Wu, “Smoke and Mirrors,” 47; Lee, *The Making of Asian America*; Hsu, *The Good Immigrants*; Wu, *The Color of Success*

³³ Hsu and Wu, “Smoke and Mirrors,” 55.

after incarceration. It complicates the link between the state's use of legal and social methods of control and the formation of ethnic identity formation. It builds upon recent scholarship's exploration of citizenship as an unstable and precarious category. Citizenship, while commonly understood through the rights and obligations attached to it, is also constructed in the words and actions of those who conduct themselves like citizens.³⁴ The ways that both citizens and noncitizens alike chose to access belonging destabilizes citizenship as a dividing line between inclusion and exclusion. An examination of the patterns of uprooting allows an examination of the range of ways that Japanese Americans identified home and found their way back to it—sometimes crossing the boundaries of nation or “acceptable” self-representations of ethnic identity to do it.

The first step in understanding the pattern of uprooting is to investigate divisions between “loyal” and “disloyal” Japanese Americans. This project's first chapter will look at the ways that many incarcerated employed the language of loyalty to indicate belonging. Loyalty was often linked to—and used to bolster—Japanese American claims to citizenship, creating an inferior version of citizenship that required performative loyalty in order to leave incarceration and regain access to home. Their forced removal from home made the stakes of belonging very clear. Using loyalty to reclaim belonging was strategic, but restrictive. It opened up conditional avenues to finding “home” again that many were willing to follow. Those who were not willing to or could not pursue these strategies, then, symbolized “disloyalty”—a designation that often exacerbated the degree to which Japanese Americans were uprooted.

³⁴ Martha Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies*.

The topics of chapters two and three examine the patterns of uprooting from physical places, communities, imagined homes, and citizenship. Chapter two follows Japanese Americans throughout the period of incarceration and afterward to draw out the frequency of their movement. All incarcerated experienced frequent migration as a consequence of their identity as Japanese Americans and, as a result, experienced multiple losses of home. This instability and the loss of both physical and imagined homes, then, comprises an important experience shared by all West Coast Japanese Americans. It also clarified the stakes of meeting the conditions of Japanese American belonging in the United States. However, “home” is particular to the individual. Not everyone reacted to the loss of “home” or strategized how to get it back in the same way. Those who chose to renounce their United States citizenship or expatriate to Japan are the subject of this project’s third chapter. The strategies that this group employed help to identify the range of ways that Japanese Americans envisioned “home” and belonging in their future. Appeals for the return of their citizenship status reveal the ways that stateless individuals in the United States and in Japan experienced legal uprootedness as a result of their unwillingness or inability to meet the conditions for Japanese American inclusion.

I ultimately argue that we must look to the concept of “home” in order to understand the legacies of incarceration. Japanese Americans experienced repeated separation from physical and imagined homes during incarceration—but this pattern existed before and continued after incarceration, as well. Forced uprooting from familiar places, communities, and legal and social status exacerbated the trauma of an already precarious relationship to home and highlighted the boundaries of citizenship for them. Japanese Americans were expected to demonstrate that they deserved to regain access to

belonging. Access to home and citizenship for Japanese Americans, then, was *earned*—not given or inherent. Japanese Americans made choices for their future that reflected their adaptation to these oppressive circumstances and conditions for belonging. In other words, the ideal vision of “home” and belonging that they pursued while incarcerated changed based on the strategic choices they saw available to them. Japanese Americans experience of repeated and prolonged displacement, therefore, defined the ways they experienced and pursued conditional inclusion in the United States.

CHAPTER II

“GOOD AMERICANS”: THE CONSTRUCTION OF JAPANESE AMERICAN

“DISLOYALTY” AT TULE LAKE

“O, what is loyalty
If it be something
That can bend
With every wind?

Steadfast I stand,
Staunchly I plant
The Stars and Stripes
Before my barracks door,
Crying defiance
To all wavering hearts.

I am a citizen—
I can take
The bad with good.”¹

—Sada Murayama, incarcerated at Tule Lake, CA

On May 27, 1943 the *Tulean Dispatch*, a newspaper run by Japanese American Nisei incarcerated in the Tule Lake camp, published this poem as part of their special anniversary edition marking one year since the camp opened. Sada Murayama’s poem, printed next to a sketch of one of the camp’s many guard towers, posited loyalty both as a marker of personal strength in the face of adversity and as a characteristic of citizenship. And yet the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution defines citizens as “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof.”² Citizenship consists of a series of rights and obligations to the state. These rights and obligations, though, are not clearly defined and have been applied unevenly; their

¹ Sada Murayama, “Loyalty,” *The Tulean Dispatch* (May 27, 1943), p. 16.

² U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.

application has divided along lines of race, ethnicity, class, and gender.³ Two-thirds of the Japanese American population incarcerated during the war were United States citizens. Incarceration revealed the particular limitations placed upon Japanese American citizen rights, as well as the particular obligations the government asked them to fulfil. Incarcerated without due process and robbed of material possessions, the U.S. government asked Japanese Americans to prove their loyalty to the state. As reflected in Murayama's poem, loyalty to one's country meant nothing if it could not withstand tests of its limits. Strong loyalty was part and parcel of citizenship and belonging in the United States for Japanese Americans; "[taking] the bad" that came with it—in this case, incarceration on the basis of national origin—was simply part of being "American." During World War II, unconditional exclusion from the West Coast revealed just how willing the United States was to differentiate the requirements and stakes of Japanese American citizenship and loyalty from those of the rest of the country's citizens. Incarceration also robbed noncitizens of "equal protections" guaranteed to "all persons."⁴ Citizens or not, though, incarceration represented a violation of constitutional law. Categorical incarceration and simultaneous demands for allegiance demonstrated that Japanese American citizenship—and presence—came with stricter guidelines and fewer benefits. These benefits were tenuous and often fell subject to removal.

The issue of *Tulean Dispatch* containing Murayama's poem opened with a dedication that further contextualizes the poem's discussion of Japanese American citizenship. The dedication identified the gratitude of the *Tulean Dispatch* staff and the

³ Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, xx-xxiv.

⁴ U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.

many other “loyal Americans” incarcerated with them toward Japanese American soldiers serving in World War II. “In their willingness to stake their lives and fight for their native land despite the adversity of their circumstances, they have made known to all free men who are fighting a new and rich concept of American democracy.”⁵ Newspaper staff, though undoubtedly writing for inhabitants of the camp, very likely shaped their publications with an eye toward the War Relocation Authority administrators of the camp. Expressions of patriotic loyalty while incarcerated became one important aspect of many incarcerated’s negotiations for citizenship. The United States government and the American public heavily scrutinized Japanese American loyalty while removing their access to basic rights, revealing the creation of a different class of citizens and noncitizens based solely upon national origin. In the eyes of the American public and its government, Japanese Americans needed to work harder, endure more, and fulfill higher standards in exchange for an inferior version of citizenship and belonging.⁶ Citizenship was not guaranteed. Unlike white Americans, they needed to prove they deserved it. Japanese Americans understood that their acquiescence to fulfilling these requirements could mean the difference between freedom and prison.

The editors’ reference to a “new concept” of American democracy and Murayama’s articulation of loyalty form snapshots of the tenuous nature of Japanese American citizenship during World War II and the specific parameters drawn around their limited access to basic rights and protections. These parameters—expressions of cultural and political Americanism—posed loyalty as a prerequisite for belonging.

⁵ Dedication for ‘A Tule Lake Interlude: First Anniversary,’ *The Tulean Dispatch* (May 27, 1943), p. 2.

⁶ For more on the concept of “conditional inclusion,” see Hsu and Wu, “Smoke and Mirrors,” 43-65.

Incarceration bore significance for citizenship and, more broadly, limited access to former homes, family, community, employment, and security. In other words, it deprived them of access to both the physical and psychological dimensions of home as they previously experienced them. It stole the security of wealth and employment, and left them with the unsettling knowledge that their place in the world and relationship with their family and community could be taken again at a moment's notice. Indeed, incarcerated entered camps not knowing what else lay in store for them. Confronted with the increasingly conditional nature of their belonging in the United States, many Japanese Americans defended their claim to their future in America. Citizenship status obviously did not differentiate them enough to prompt their release from camp, so they leaned on political and cultural expressions of Americanism. Often, this appeared in the form of nationalist sentiment and expressions of loyalty. Proclamations of loyalty, as expressed in this anniversary edition of Tule Lake's newspaper, were not uncommon in incarceration. Faced with escalating discrimination and virulent prejudice, members of the Japanese American community leveraged their position as "loyal" Japanese American citizens in order to preserve their rights and autonomy in the United States.

Many incarcerated seized upon the language of loyalty and American identity in an effort to demonstrate categorical allegiance and ward against further acts of aggression and discrimination from their own government. This chapter aims to examine the ways that Japanese Americans themselves viewed and navigated the issues of citizenship and language of loyalty amidst the narrow choices their incarceration posed. Japanese Americans exercised agency during World War II, often by defining their identities in ways deemed most acceptable by the United States government, in order to negotiate the

best possible outcomes for their future. They defined loyalty and citizenship for themselves in order to regain access to home.

Prominent leaders in the U.S. government distinguished the importance of “loyalty” as a gauge of the danger that Japanese Americans posed. In the preliminary intelligence report for the president on the “Japanese situation” on the West Coast, government investigators denied the probability of espionage due to their evaluation of the Japanese American community as overwhelmingly loyal.⁷ Their report and other reports like theirs, however, ran contrary to the those of the Western Defense Command (WDC). As the army command responsible for defense of the West Coast during WWII, the WDC’s reports ultimately held the most influence, and it assumed responsibility for carrying out President Roosevelt’s executive order. General DeWitt expressed his doubt at the power of “Americanization” due to “the ties of race, the intense feeling of filial piety and the strong bonds of common tradition, culture and customs.”⁸ He concluded that it would be impossible to identify the loyal from the disloyal.

Japanese Americans, then, aimed to make their loyalty irrefutable. Their utilization of these externally imposed prerequisites for belonging, therefore, signifies an important moment of distinctly Japanese American ethnic identity formation. They adopted the language used in establishing discriminatory parameters. This adoption demonstrates that these individuals recognized the shape of the system judging them. This is not to doubt the sincerity of Japanese American expressions of loyalty to the U.S. but to recognize that—unlike other Americans expressing their wartime nationalism at

⁷ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 15.

⁸ Lt. Gen. J.L. DeWitt to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, June 5, 1943, in U.S. Army, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, *Final Report; Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast 1942*, Washington D.C.: Govt. Printing Office, 1943, pp. vii-x.

the time—they did so from behind barbed wire fences.⁹ Loyalty took on new meaning when expressed from within incarceration camps. The ways that Japanese Americans utilized the rhetoric of loyalty and nationalism, therefore, sheds light on the shifting nature of these parameters as those outside and within the Japanese American community continually reshaped and reinforced them.

Murayama’s poem, while perfectly exemplifying these strategies, provides insight into Tule Lake’s incarceration camp as a particularly potent site of negotiations over loyalty and citizenship. One of the ten camps established across the United States, Tule Lake lay on the eastern border of Oregon and California. It quickly gained a reputation as the primary site of civil unrest and potential danger due to a number of labor strikes and wider resistance to the loyalty questionnaire and the military draft. In July 1943, the WRA officially designated Tule Lake as the one and only segregation center and began transferring all Japanese Americans deemed disloyal to its location. Murayama wrote and published her poem only a couple months earlier amidst the turmoil of the loyalty questionnaire, as Tule Lake’s reputation sank further in the eyes of the nation.¹⁰ Read in this context, her poem reads as a plea of recognition and condemnation of those “wavering hearts” that stigmatized the camp in which she made her stand for citizenship. While this poem provides a snapshot of the kinds of fears prevalent in Tule Lake at this

⁹ Connie Chiang asserts that incarcerated engaged with the rhetoric of environmental patriotism and wartime sacrifice to express a commitment to the war effort, but also to improve their own status and point out the ironies of their patriotism from within the camps. This intersects with expressions of loyalty as a demonstration of patriotism that also served both these purposes; Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 123-146.

¹⁰ Mass protests over the loyalty questionnaire led to the arrests of over one hundred incarcerated at and forty-nine percent of Nisei and forty-two percent of Issei at Tule Lake either refused to answer the questionnaire or answered “no” to the loyalty questions; Wu, *The Color of Success*, 81.

time, the narrative presented here also exemplifies more broadly the strategies for survival that continued throughout the war as Japanese Americans faced their uncertain future in America. These strategies hinged upon a specific, exclusionary definition of loyalty and, by extension, citizenship.

Perceptions of Japanese Americans as a distinct and homogenous group amplified the burden of their representation. The decision to identify themselves as loyal Americans became normative—supposedly indicative of the character of Japanese Americans and a central tenant of many individuals’ argument for acceptance back into the fold of American society. Popular discourse pitted “loyal” Japanese Americans against those who did not fit or chose not to fit that mold. However, individuals did not chose to declare loyalty or serve the war effort in a vacuum. They discussed these decisions with friends, neighbors, and leaders in their community.

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) exerted influential presence in the camps. It became an important figurehead and influential organization in shaping hegemonic definitions of loyalty that aimed to aid those willing to or able to fulfill that definition.¹¹ The concept of loyalty as a prerequisite to belonging in the United States did not originate with the JACL, nor does the organization hold responsibility for the fate of those that did not or could not engage in their strategies. Those who employed these strategies did so to maneuver a system stacked against them from the start. The JACL faced the decision to either take a stand against the government and lose the legitimacy and bargaining power they held in the eyes of the government or adopt the state’s stance

¹¹ For more on the influence of the JACL strategies for securing Japanese American citizenship, see Wu, *The Color of Success*, 72-110.

on loyalty in the hopes of achieving safety and citizenship for as many Japanese Americans as possible. They chose the latter as a pragmatic choice to an impossible situation.

While the JACL's influence should not be overstated, the group's adoption of the state's definition of loyalty in order to rescue Japanese American citizenship should be examined as one of many important factors in the creation of discourse around Japanese American loyalty and citizenship during World War II. The group's influence is significant because of the way it demonstrated Japanese Americans' use of state discourse that outlined an inferior version of citizenship to secure their future. These processes reveal the way that citizenship is a continually evolving category, shaped and reinforced both by internal and external expressions of meaning, the correlation between loyalty and citizenship, and the drawing of legal and social boundaries in order to declare belonging—boundaries that simultaneously defined the contours of those deemed unworthy of belonging. The JACL engaged in tactics that aimed to negotiate the best possible outcomes in the context of wartime hysteria and the group members' own incarceration that, regardless of intentionality, supported the state's definition of citizenship and distanced “disloyal” Japanese Americans from the ranks of “loyal” Japanese Americans.

The creation of the Tule Lake segregation camp as a central location for all those incarcerated that gave unsatisfactory answers to the loyalty questionnaire facilitated this distinction. Following the designation of Tule Lake as a segregation camp, its incarcerated comprised the most visible and vilified aberrant group of “disloyals” during World War II; they were held apart, an oppositional example to other Japanese Americans' loyalty

and a token of justification for the states' unfounded, discriminatory policies. The polarization of the Japanese American community, then, held particular potency in Tule Lake. Before Tule Lake's designation as a segregation camp, the poet, Sada Murayama, and a fellow incarcerated, Perry Saito, served as artistic directors of the Little Theater. The Little Theater, a theater group that put on classic dramas from a range of Western genres, received support by camp administrators for its assimilationist message.¹² Expressions of cultural Americanism became a popular way for incarcerated to illustrate loyalty. Their theater existed alongside groups that celebrated Japanese culture. Following Tule Lake's transition to a segregation center, though, their theater group ended its run.¹³ Murayama and others who framed their arguments in terms of loyalty likely transferred to another camp or received clearance to settle in the Midwest or East Coast. Their departure from camp and the subsequent stigma attached to Tule Lake demonstrated the limitations of Japanese American articulations of citizenship detached from ideas of loyalty. The processes by which individuals reshaped Japanese American ethnic identity in the United States during the war worked to the advantage of some, and excluded others from their fold.

Conflict over Japanese American belonging in the United States was not new in the 1940s. Japanese immigrants came to the United States in increasing numbers in the late twentieth century. The majority of this group settled along the West Coast and in the territory of Hawaii and occupied a range of occupations, mostly in the fishing, canning,

¹² Emily Roxworthy, *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma: Racial Performativity and World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 174).

¹³ Robert Cooperman, "The Americanization of Americans: The Phenomenon of Nisei Internment Camp Theater," in *Re/Collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 335-336.

and agricultural industries.¹⁴ Japanese immigrants met with widespread resistance to their presence in the country and participation as full citizens. In 1906, San Francisco's school board decided to segregate their schools—removing Japanese American students to the school for Chinese Americans, who had already been barred from attending public school.¹⁵ As a response, the United States negotiated the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907 in order to decrease the number of Japanese men immigrating to the United States. The diplomatic agreement was negotiated with Japan rather than written into federal law. The status of Japan as a rising imperial and global power remained intricately linked to America's attitude toward and treatment of Japan's immigrant communities in the United States. The agreement reflected the United States' desire to maintain a friendly relationship with Japan, while appeasing strong anti-Japanese sentiment in America. Anti-Japanese sentiment was preceded by strong anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States, which contributed to the construction of "the Oriental" and restrictive immigration legislation that set a precedent for the treatment and racialization of Japanese immigrants.¹⁶ Other legislation, including California's Alien Land Law and the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 aimed to limit immigration from Japan and prevent naturalization and land ownership. Although most of the Issei did not hold the legal title of citizen, this status can be attributed to the long legacy of racialized and discriminatory immigration policies.¹⁷

¹⁴ Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place*; Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 125-127.

¹⁶ Elliot Young, *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era Through World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁷ The Immigration Act of 1924, or the Johnson-Reed Act, prevented first generation, or Issei, immigrants from attaining legal entry. Later Supreme Court decisions, *Ozawa v. U.S.* and *Thind v. U.S.*, solidified the barrier to citizenship for immigrants from Asia. One of the most potent moral arguments against

By the time of their incarceration, many Issei Japanese Americans had lived in the United States for decades, building their families, businesses, and lives with every intention to stay; presumably, many would have become naturalized citizens if they had been legally allowed.¹⁸ As it was, many Issei depended on their children's citizenship status in order to own land. In the months leading up to Pearl Harbor, members of the Japanese American community demonstrated awareness of escalating tension and their tenuous position in American society. Already, Japanese American declarations of loyalty dotted newspapers in the fall of 1941.¹⁹ They demonstrated acute awareness of their perceived connection to their country of national origin.

These legal and social legacies pertaining to citizenship and belonging leading up to World War II demonstrate the tenuous nature of Japanese Americans' positions in the United States and reveal the stakes and imagined futures of their negotiations. Japanese Americans, however, occupied various positions of dual culturalism and nationalism that complicated the ways they drew upon shared elements of past discrimination and of the language of citizenship and loyalty. Dual or migrant nationalism does not necessarily mirror nationalism in the community's country of origin, nor does dual culturalism necessarily reflect the culture in their country of origin. These concepts embody the range

incarceration at the time was that a majority were U.S. citizens, who should have been protected from indiscriminate incarceration by the U.S. Constitution. However, the 14th Amendment established "equal protections" to "all persons"—not just citizens. Therefore, even without taking into account the discriminatory ways in which citizenship was withheld from Issei, citizenship status did not determine the lawfulness of their incarceration; U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.

¹⁸ These considerations on terminology are adopted mainly from "A Note on Terminology" in Connie Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*.

¹⁹ "Whatever Tokyo Does, They're Good Americans," *Seattle Times*, August 28, 1941; "Japanese Proud to Help U.S." *Seattle Daily Times*, July 31, 1941, p. 3; "Japanese Americans Assert Loyalty," *Seattle Times*, October 17, 1941, p. 9.

of ways in which immigrant communities retain and express nationalism and culture.²⁰ Japanese Americans maneuvered these legacies in the context of war and the continuing oppression of the state; those who tempered their claims to the rights of citizenship put them in opposition to those who protested their treatment on the grounds of citizenship. The state ultimately drew upon this factionalism to support the idea that loyalty was a measurable, reliable quality that could be used to predict individual actions and determine that individual's rights within the United States.

“Evacuation” orders uprooted all Japanese Americans from the West Coast between March and August of 1942, but the WRA soon realized the enormous task of building and maintaining ten incarceration centers. Almost as soon as the camps opened, they began to authorize some individuals' release and “resettlement” in the interior or eastern areas of the country on the condition of loyalty. The WRA posed themselves as allies of loyal Japanese Americans. They pursued a policy of dispersal—an early strategy proposed by President FDR that involved breaking up Japanese American community and dispersing loyal members of population throughout the United States.²¹ Beginning in spring 1942, the WRA authorized a small number of incarcerated for “seasonal” leave in order to help with local harvesting. Economic and political pressure from the agricultural industry in response to the labor shortage during the war influenced the WRA's decision to release a controlled population of incarcerated for work. Soon, the leave program facilitated Japanese Americans' release to a variety of other industries and occupations. By the spring of the next year, camps began to release incarcerated who found colleges

²⁰ Mae Ngai expands upon the idea and possibilities of dual culturalism and dual nationalism in *Impossible Subjects*, 170-171, 200.

²¹ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 244.

and jobs in areas in the interior United States willing to take them. Stringent FBI background checks determined whether or not their release was “safe.”²²

Only after the Western Defense Command and the WRA had completed the evacuation of all Japanese Americans from the West Coast did these agencies pause to consider how to maintain the system they put in place. One of President Roosevelt’s public statements in February 1943 indicates the way his administration decided to reframe incarceration. “No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry...Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.”²³ This statement distinguishes loyalty as the most significant feature of American citizens and denied race-based discrimination. This distinction proved crucial to justifying incarceration and its continuation. If all Japanese Americans were “loyal,” then “evacuation” had served no logical purpose for America; if “disloyals” could be distinguished, however, it justified incarceration as a preventative measure and built trust in the government’s ability to sort out “loyal” individuals for resettlement. The success of the resettlement program, therefore, hinged upon the creation of a definitive group of “disloyal” Japanese Americans in order to justify the WRA’s release of “loyal” Japanese Americans.²⁴ Their solution for determining how to sort incarcerated came in the form of the infamous loyalty questionnaire, which sorted out those who failed to participate in or embody hegemonic ideas about loyalty.

²² Muller, *American Inquisition*, 31.

²³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry,” Division of Public Inquiries, Office of War Information, 1943, Washington State University Libraries Digital Collection.

²⁴ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 78.

The WRA's distribution of the four-page questionnaire began early in 1943 and represented a departure from the logic of unconditional evacuation from the West Coast. However, the logics of "evacuation" under the guise of national security were always inconsistent. The racially-motivated, exclusionary nature of incarceration peeked through from the start. For example, the government did not begin implementation of removal until five months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Had the threat been as imminent as they portrayed it, immediacy would have been an essential element of removal. Additionally, Japanese Americans were removed from the West Coast, but not from Hawaii where the attack actually took place. Japanese Americans made up over a third of Hawaii's population, and—while FDR implemented martial law for almost three years—it proved impractical and expensive to remove essential players in Hawaii's economy.²⁵ From the very beginning, holes formed in the government's professed reasons for incarceration.

Indeed, the implementation of the loyalty questionnaire threatened some of the fundamental assumptions of removal. The form was originally created to determine the loyalty of Japanese American men of the appropriate age to serve in the U.S. military. The government expanded its application to test the loyalty of the entire population, changing its original title—"Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry"—to "Application for Leave Clearance."²⁶ The new title and identical questions from the

²⁵ Robinson, *By Order of the President*.

²⁶ "Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry," 1943, Ikeda Family Collection, Denso Digital Repository, <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-densho-72/ddr-densho-72-4-mezzanine-3e26379d38-a.jpg>; "War Relocation Authority Application for Leave Clearance," 1943, Yamanaka Collection, Denso Digital Repository, <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-densho-188/ddr-densho-188-5-mezzanine-948d0f7156.pdf>

original form created much confusion around the purpose and consequences of the form. Whether it was a “statement,” “application,” or “registration”—all terms used to describe the form during this period—it famously became known as the loyalty questionnaire. This popular title best characterizes the purpose of the form—a purpose that many believed to be pointless. General DeWitt, the commanding general of the Western Defense Committee and one of the primary advocates for incarceration, argued that Japanese American loyalty was impossible to determine—and many agreed with him.²⁷ Loyalty was considered inscrutable in Japanese Americans.²⁸ Although the government entertained the idea of restrictions for German and Italian Americans, they ultimately decided against it. The implementation of the loyalty questionnaire, then, contradicted these logics. It did, however, open the door for Japanese Americans to claim belonging by admitting the existence of provable Americanism.

The questionnaire quantified loyalty and lent legitimacy to the implications of the divide between “loyal” and “disloyal” factions of Japanese Americans. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight questions, addressing anything from political affiliation to hobbies to travel.²⁹ A statistician named Calvert L. Dedrick devised a point system by which to filter out the disloyal, giving a picture of the kind of citizen who would be considered for release. Incarcerees received three points if they received their entire education in American schools, two points if they were a member of the Boy Scouts, Masons, Y.M.C.A, or other clubs recognized as distinctly American, and two points if

²⁷ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 17-18.

²⁸ Although the government entertained the idea of restrictions for German and Italian Americans, they ultimately decided against it. For more on wartime stereotypes of Japanese people, see John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (NY: W.W. Norton, 1986).

²⁹ “Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry,” 1943, Ikeda Family Collection, Densho Digital Repository, <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-72-4/>.

they were an instructor in an American sport or hobby. Notably, incarcerated received one point if they belonged to the JACL, whereas they were “referred” for further evaluation if they belonged to any other Japanese organization. The point sheet, however, was mainly occupied with characteristics that subtracted points from their “loyalty” scores: they lost three points if their father was also incarcerated (a reality for many Nisei that were interned alongside their Issei parents), two points for speaking and writing Japanese well (as opposed to one point subtracted for “fair” grasp of speaking and writing), and three points for having family still living in Japan. They lost points for participating in Japanese cultural activities, teaching Japanese language classes, practicing Shintoism or Buddhism, reading Japanese newspapers, being a fisherman or radio operator, and for ever having traveled to Japan.³⁰ The questionnaire broke down every facet of their daily lives and entire histories into a series of points that determined their “loyalty.”

Authorities within the federal government disagreed about the utility of such a questionnaire to determine loyalty. The War Department and the Department of the Interior decided to create the Japanese American Joint Board (JAJB) consisting of representatives from both departments and the FBI in order to streamline their differing stances on loyalty. While the Department of the Interior tended to support less stringent requirements, the War Department often pushed for further limitations to Japanese American movement within the country.³¹ They implemented Dedrick’s point system for only five weeks before finding it impossible to agree on the quantification of the questionnaire answers. The new system used the answers to these questions to group

³⁰ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 46-48.

³¹ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 46-48.

incarcerees into three distinct color groups based on their answers to the questions: white for loyal, black for disloyal, and brown for uncertain loyalty status.³² Eventually, the War Department took over full responsibility for evaluating the questionnaires. The bureaucratic processes by which the JAJB and War Department decided on loyalty status demonstrated the difficulty and often arbitrariness in translating transcultural identities into quantifiable loyalty.

Questions 27 and 29 of the loyalty questionnaire proved most controversial and ultimately determined whether or not incarcerated would be transferred to the Tule Lake segregation center. These questions asked incarcerated if they were willing to serve in the United States military and if they were willing to “swear unqualified allegiance” to the United States, forswear any other national loyalties, and defend the country at all costs.³³ These questions left many confused, unsure of what either a “yes” or “no” would bring, and afraid of separation from their families or communities. Many women were left confused by the possibility of military service, and Issei who had been denied citizenship by the United States balked at forswearing their Japanese citizenship in order to become stateless individuals—unprotected by any national power and devoid of citizenship entirely.³⁴ Some simply felt that they should not be coerced to answer these questions in the context of their incarceration.³⁵ It soon became clear, though, that the WRA felt the

³² Muller, *American Inquisition*, 49-51.

³³ “Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry,” 1943. Ikeda Family Collection, Densho Digital Repository, <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-72-4/>.

³⁴ For more on the threat of statelessness, see Linda K. Kerber, “Toward a History of Statelessness in America,” *American Quarterly*, 57, no. 3 (Sept, 2005), pp. 727-749.

³⁵ Muller, *Free to Die for their Country*, 31-38.

incarcerees' citizenship and their freedom to associate with other incarcerated hinged upon their answers—that is, their “correct” answers.

In July 1943, following the loyalty questionnaire, the WRA converted Tule Lake into a segregation center to hold Japanese Americans that had “failed” their loyalty questionnaire, focusing mainly on those final two questions. Tule Lake gained a reputation as a site of resistance and discord very early on, as several incidents of labor unrest complicated the relationship between incarcerated and administrators of the WRA camp. The mis-administration of the loyalty questionnaire and subsequent refusal of 3,000 Japanese Americans to answer these questions led to further repercussions. The camp administrators imprisoned several hundred individuals who refused to answer the questionnaire at the Tule Lake isolation center without due process, and Tule Lake ended up with the most number of “disloyal” incarcerated of all ten incarceration camps.

The publicity projects of the JACL show traces of the government's proposed definition of Japanese American identity. Their implementation specifically impacted and excluded those at Tule Lake. The JACL operated as the most visible, cohesive organization of Japanese Americans during World War II.³⁶ The organization assumed a prominent position to those outside the community and allied itself with the War Relocation Authority to prescribe appropriate, cooperative responses to discrimination and incarceration. By suggesting appropriate responses and acquiescence to increasingly restrictive policies on Japanese American freedoms and echoing the idea of loyalty as the ultimate determinant of limited rights of citizenship, the JACL contributed its influence to a state system that denied some Japanese Americans' claim to belonging. Criticisms of

³⁶ Wu, *The Color of Success*, 75-78.

the JACL are not new; several Japanese Americans voiced their dissent to the organization's tactics and "exclusivity" during incarceration, and the Japanese American student movement of the 1960s also targeted the JACL's complicity with the United States government.³⁷ The divisions the JACL's stance created ran deep, and Japanese Americans have not quickly forgotten the controversial position the JACL held during incarceration; as recently as 2002, the JACL issued a formal apology for demonizing Japanese American draft resisters and supporting the strongest penalties against them during the war.³⁸ Japanese Americans who protested the state's actions—thereby falling outside the definition of a "loyal" American—did not easily forget the lack of protection and, in some cases, overt condemnation of the JACL.³⁹ Most notably, the JACL's leadership decided to oppose test court cases during incarceration and denounced draft resisters. So, despite the JACL's intention to secure a better future for Japanese Americans in the United States, its role must also be considered in terms of the power and consequences of their campaign to hinge their rights on expressions of loyalty and belonging. Their campaign contributed to the contours of exclusionary lines that guided others' expressions of loyalty. In its quest to create avenues to belonging, the JACL

³⁷ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 47; Cherstin Lyon. "Japanese American Citizens League," and Alice Yang. "Redress movement," both in Densho Encyclopedia <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese%20American%20Citizens%20League/>; Eric Muller, *Free to Die for their Country*, 14, 23-24, 117.

³⁸ Historical scholarship has often turned a critical eye to the "super-patriotic creed" of the JACL and the way that their stance aimed to redraw difference between Japanese Americans and whites by attesting to their cultural distinction. The JACL often appear in historical scholarship on incarceration and other scholars have discussed criticisms of their position. Muller, *American Inquisition*, 14; Wu, *The Color of Success*, 155; Cherstin Lyon. "JACL apology to draft resisters," Densho Encyclopedia <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/JACL%20apology%20to%20draft%20resisters/>.

³⁹ Muller, *Free to Die for their Country*; Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial*, 174.

simultaneously closed off those access points from certain Japanese Americans also searching to find their way home again.

Though the JACL already focused on increasing Japanese American's access to citizenship via legislation prior to World War II, the group hardened its stance on patriotism and loyalty in 1941 as global tension between the United States and Japan intensified. Significantly, it hired Mike Masaoka as the executive secretary of the JACL, who led an aggressive campaign to improve the public image of Nisei Japanese Americans. This campaign can best be characterized by Masaoka's 1941 "The Japanese American Creed," a statement of patriotism distributed widely by the JACL to members, government officials, other organizations sympathetic to its cause, and the media.

Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of American people. True, I shall do all in my power to discourage such practices, but I shall do it the American way—above board, in the open, through courts of law, by education, by proving myself to be worthy of equal treatment and consideration. I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.⁴⁰

Widely cited by others testifying on the "character" of the Japanese American people, the statement appealed to potential allies. Although the statement narrowly defined what it meant to be Japanese American, it also suggested the JACL's strategy: it challenged the government to meet them on the "high road"—to embody the same "American" qualities it demanded of Japanese Americans during the war. Masaoka thus defined the "American way" for both Japanese Americans and other Americans. This creed, adopted as an official JACL statement and printed in its booklets for over a decade, also challenged the

⁴⁰ "For Better Americans in a Greater America," 1950. Shosuke Sasaki Collection, Densho Digital Repository, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-ddr-densho-274-20-1/>.

state to live up to the moral “American” characteristics adopted by Japanese Americans. The creed aimed to secure present and future negotiations over Japanese Americans’ status in America by defining the “American” way and asking both Japanese Americans and their government to play their parts.

The JACL founded the organization on the basis of generational identity; it was an organization for Nisei citizens and utilized the birthright citizenship of its base to gain more leverage. Focusing mainly on issues of citizenship, the JACL excluded Issei and Kibei from membership. Membership requirements during wartime reflected the impact of the government’s position on loyalty and citizenship. On October 10, 1942 a Nisei woman signed the JACL’s Oath of Allegiance in order to join the organization. The oath read:

I, the undersigned, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of American against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I do hereby forswear and repudiate any other allegiance which I knowingly or unknowingly may have held heretofore; and that I take these obligations freely, without any mental reservation whatsoever or purpose of evasion. So help me God.⁴¹

The oath for members closely resembles military oaths of today and reflected the JACL’s strong stance on patriotism. Interestingly, the infamous loyalty questionnaire would not be distributed for another two months after this individual signed this pledge, but—in doing so—she essentially recorded her response to what would become the most controversial questions of the loyalty questionnaire: questions 27 and 28. These questions asked if Japanese Americans were willing to serve their country (in the military or

⁴¹ "JACL Certificate of Identification (oath of allegiance), 1942," Yamada Family Collection, Densho Digital Repository, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-p25-00015-1/>.

otherwise) and if they were willing to swear unqualified allegiance to the United States.⁴²

The oath strategically guaranteed that the JACL's membership fell within the government's definition of desired loyalty, but it also clarified a standard that would be impossible for every Japanese American to meet.

Despite its best efforts to serve as the face of Japanese American loyalty, the JACL's methods proved unpopular for many incarcerated. Sometimes these conflicts resulted in violence, as in the case of Saburo Kido and Fred Tayama. Fellow incarcerated attacked both of these JACL leaders at Poston and Manzanar, respectively.⁴³ Still, considering the limitation of its membership to Nisei adults, the group exerted a significant enough presence in the press, government negotiations, and incarceration camps to draw attention to the power of its discourse.

The JACL's leadership understood the relationship between power and knowledge, and established their organization as a source of the latter in order to gain the former.⁴⁴ The JACL published bulletins to communicate with different regional chapters, their members, and others within ethnic communities. The initial bulletin following Executive Order 9066 attempted to assuage fears and rally a calm, cooperative response. The group posed itself as an official mediator between Japanese Americans and their government and communicated its position as lobbyists and representatives for Japanese Americans. In a special bulletin published on February 20, 1942, one day after President

⁴² Some Nisei still held dual citizenship even though they were born in the United States due to Japan's policy of *jus sanguines*, or right of blood, that granted citizenship to the children of all Japanese nationals up until 1924.

⁴³ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 118.

⁴⁴ For an in-depth analysis of JACL leadership's use of the power of knowledge in shaping their campaigns, see Wu, *The Color of Success*, 150-180.

Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, Mike Masaoka assured his readership of the JACL's immediate action: "National Headquarters is now asking clarification...and will report to you as soon as possible as to its consequences and implications."⁴⁵ Despite the fact that actual membership in the JACL during World War II waned, the group leveraged its close communication with the United States government in order to assure Japanese Americans that it was the most authoritative source of information and most strategically positioned organization for negotiations.⁴⁶ In doing so, its leaders hoped to use their organization's power as a citizen's league to prevent further infractions on the rights of Japanese Americans and gain the trust of the government for future negotiations concerning their place in society. Additionally, by speaking directly to U.S. bureaucrats, the JACL became the primary organization recognized and used as an example of cooperation.

JACL leaders endorsed continuing faith in the United States government and echoed the government's stance on war as an adequate explanation for the necessity of the suppression of basic rights. In response to criticisms leveled at the JACL for cooperating with the government, the JACL's Portland chapter distributed a bulletin on April 17, 1942 that defended its priorities. It is not clear precisely which criticism the Portland chapter aimed to respond to in this bulletin, but the criticism was very likely prompted by the group's lack of support for Minoru Yasui—a Japanese American man arrested in March 1942 for violating curfew and ignoring the exclusion order for Portland. His case eventually made it to the Supreme Court, but without the support of

⁴⁵ Japanese American Citizens League Office of the National Secretary to all chapters, 20 February 1942, folder 11, box 1, Dorothea Lange Papers, BANC.

⁴⁶ Cherstin Lyon, "Japanese American Citizens League," Densho Encyclopedia <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese%20American%20Citizens%20League/>.

the JACL.⁴⁷ The group held fast in its opposition to these cases, fearing they would draw more negative attention.⁴⁸ It continued a campaign based on unconditional patriotism and cooperation. “Our primary consideration as good Americans is the total war effort. Individuals and groups are not important when the life of the nation is at stake. We have been asked to evacuate from the Pacific coast as a military measure designed to strengthen national defense. We will cooperate with the war effort.”⁴⁹ The Portland JACL identified a common goal that, in claiming as its own, aligned the group closely with normative American values in order to emphasize the correlation of their Japanese American identity and patriotism. The group placed the “nation” above any other concerns of the Japanese American community and associated this prioritization with their identity as “good Americans.” This phrase—“good American”—echoes others like it in official announcements and booklets of the JACL.⁵⁰ They identify these “good” or “loyal” Americans as members of the collective “we.” Those unwilling to prioritize commitment to the war effort via incarceration, then, located themselves outside of the “we” represented by the JACL to the government and wider public. Those who aligned themselves within the JACL’s vision of loyalty became part of a specific idea of “the loyal Japanese American” within broader discourse.

⁴⁷ The ACLU also chose not to support him because of his previous connections with the Japanese consulate. For more on Minoru Yasui, see Lauren Kessler, *Stubborn Twig: Three Generations in the Life of a Japanese American Family* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Kessler, *Stubborn Twig*, 158.

⁴⁹ Portland Japanese American Citizens League to Portland Chapter, 17 April 1942, folder 15, box 1, Rose Niiguma Collection, Nikkei Legacy Center, Portland.

⁵⁰ “Japanese American Citizens League: For Better Americans in a Better America,” folder 7, box 3, Gerda Isenberg Collection, BANC.

The JACL published a pamphlet presenting the organization's position and work in the latter years of the war with the title, "JACL: An All American Organization of American Citizens." This pamphlet delivered a message of solidarity with the war effort, reiterated belief in achieving citizenship through education in American values and ideals, and posed the JACL's position as way to achieve an "enlightened public conscience" and secure future benefits for Japanese Americans.⁵¹ It also responded to accusations of the JACL's complicity with racist policies against its own community. Much like the Portland JACL defended its position in the case of Minoru Yasui, the national chapter defended against these accusations by framing its argument as distinctly American. The pamphlet described the JACL's commitment to its message by saying that the group "holds fast its faith in the American precept of individual merit and loyalty as the only true criterion and believes that discrimination against loyal Americans based purely on ancestry or religion undermines national unity and endangers the rights of all citizens."⁵² The JACL posed American values of self-determination and patriotism as essential prerequisites for determining whether individuals received protection from discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. It condemned discrimination, but only toward those deemed loyal. Ultimately, the stakes of discrimination applied only within the realm of citizenship—citizenship based upon the "only true" criteria of loyalty—because the people who qualified as good, loyal citizens were the only people the JACL could realistically afford to protect under the circumstances.

⁵¹ "Japanese American Citizens League: For Better Americans in a Better America," 3.

⁵² "Japanese American Citizens League: For Better Americans in a Better America," 3

One of the ways the JACL defined loyalty was through describing ways in which Japanese Americans could be loyal to the United States government. Definitions of loyalty often called upon more existential and romantic conceptions of American values; the call to place trust in the government, to “face it with FAITH—faith in our government and faith in our God,” aligned the government with those American values.⁵³ Rather than defining loyalty simply in terms of experiences and cultural values as Americans, the JACL associated loyalty with Japanese Americans’ willingness to *wait*—wait for the war to end and for the U.S. government to recognize their rights and privileges. Beneath this message on the necessity of loyalty lay the JACL’s own pragmatic goals to wait out the state’s abuse of power during the war. By urging Japanese Americans to wait, the JACL aimed to delay concrete debate over citizenship until a time at which it could bargain from a more powerful position.⁵⁴ In the meantime, however, this tactic relied upon their ability to obstruct other forms of resistance that arose in response to the legal and constitutional grounds upon which America pursued incarceration.

Alternative forms of resistance, though, carved out space and time for other incarcerated to assert control and claim belonging. A month after Yasui was arrested in Portland, Oregon, Gordon Hirabayashi reported himself to the FBI office in Seattle, Washington, on account of his intention to violate both curfew and the exclusion law. Fred Korematsu was arrested almost a month later in San Francisco for attempting to disguise his racial identity and disregard the exclusion order. All three of these test cases presented viable arguments, yet the Supreme Court upheld both the curfew and the

⁵³ “Japanese American Citizens League: For Better Americans in a Better America,” 3.

⁵⁴ For more on the JACL’s legal and publicity strategies after the war, see Wu, *The Color of Success*, 150-180.

exclusion orders due to the importance of establishing a secure military area; they prioritized the war effort and, in the process, rationalized the principle of racial discrimination. Despite the potentially pivotal nature of these cases, the JACL made its opposition to the defendants clear. Test cases, the group argued, posed a threat to the status of Japanese Americans everywhere.⁵⁵ The JACL's continuing opposition to forms of legal and overt resistance reflected their understanding of the power of representation in America; the actions of one Japanese American could very well be interpreted as representative of a large and diverse group. These test cases, however, challenged the very homogenization that the JACL intended to use to its advantage. They gave voice to different methods of resistance among the ranks of Japanese Americans.

Labor strikes, the most famous of which occurred at Tule Lake, Manzanar, and Heart Mountain, were another way in which some groups exerted control over incarceration camps. After a farming accident at Tule Lake that resulted in five injuries and one death, incarcerated farmworkers went on strike in October 1943 to protest the substandard working conditions at the newly established segregation camp.⁵⁶ Although the WRA broke the strikes by bringing in workers from other incarceration camps and imprisoning the most fervent dissenters in the Tule Lake stockade, strikers' decision to withhold labor at a peak harvest time demonstrates the way that overt resistance aimed to reestablish control over their community. While they chose a different strategy than the JACL, their actions also attempted to restore a sense of belonging—through working conditions and class identity, rather than loyalty.

⁵⁵ "Position of National JACL to All Test Cases Explained by Masaoka," memorandum, 17 April 1942, folder 15, box 1, Rose Niguma Collection, Nikkei Legacy Center, Portland.

⁵⁶ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 107.

Many media outlets were quick to use any and all of these cases of dissent as an indication that everyone in this racialized category shared the same sentiments. Much of the coverage was sensational, typically citing the possibility of a larger pro-Axis network and suggesting whatever punishment they felt appropriate.⁵⁷ Whether or not these news articles distinguished between loyal and disloyal incarcerated, which they often did, the strikes only stood to affirm the presence of danger and discord within the camps. The JACL, then, held valid concerns when it cited these cases as harmful to those helping to build the image of Japanese Americans' collective loyal character. By anticipating and strategizing around the challenges posed to building Japanese Americans' positive public image, the JACL demonstrated its strategies in negotiating these external boundaries. At the same time, the group's disavowal of those willing to pursue legal recourse or other forms of resistance further distanced themselves from the possibilities these strategies offered.

The JACL offered an alternative avenue to acceptance as citizens in the United States—an avenue wholly contingent upon diligent *work* to bring about this reality. This strategy conveyed the responsibility that Japanese Americans held as individuals to protect their tenuous status and to tread delicately when it came to improving that status. As an organization, then, the JACL did not protect Japanese Americans' right to speak freely or protest—at least not protest that would contradict the image of the unquestionably loyal Japanese American character they had honed. Importantly, the JACL released a bulletin in 1942 that defined its ultimate goal to “defeat these powers

⁵⁷ “If They Want to Play Rough, It’s High Time to Be Tough,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, December 9, 1942, pp. 6.

which seek to destroy” the privileges and rights of citizenship.⁵⁸ The JACL recognized outright the severity of these violations, yet posed them as a test of their values as citizens—one that some passed, and others failed.

Military service carried significant ideological power during World War II. The entire country mobilized to aid in the war effort; military service and employment in the military industrial sector came to signify American patriotism and loyalty throughout the United States. After Pearl Harbor, most military units dismissed Japanese Americans from their ranks in fear of sabotage. Exclusion from the draft and dismissal from the military demonstrated the removal of a central tenant of citizenship: “the obligation to risk one’s life in military service, to submit to being placed in harm’s way when the state chooses.”⁵⁹ Many Nisei men opposed the idea of serving the country currently incarcerating them and their families.⁶⁰ But the JACL saw military service as an opportunity for Japanese Americans to reclaim this aspect of citizenship. The group strategized military service as a site on which Japanese Americans could stake their loyalty and demand the rights of citizenship by demonstrating their willingness to fulfill the obligations of citizenship. Military service also held powerful symbolic meaning that Japanese American men could not access from the camps. In discussing the legacy of military service as an opportunity typically reserved for white men to seek honor, historian Linda Kerber observes: “Manliness and honor were sharply and ritually contrasted with effeminacy and dishonor.”⁶¹ Despite the coerced nature of service during

⁵⁸ Portland Japanese American Citizens League to Portland Chapter, 17 April 1942, folder 15, box 1, Rose Niguma Collection, Nikkei Legacy Center, Portland.

⁵⁹ Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, xxii.

⁶⁰ Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country*, 31-38.

⁶¹ Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, 241.

the draft, that service still held powerful ideological potential to challenge race and gender stereotypes. Cognizant of the potential for shaping perceptions of Japanese American loyalty, the JACL lobbied the War Department to accept Japanese American volunteers.⁶²

When Nisei men did not immediately jump at the opportunity to volunteer, the War Department reinstated the draft in the camps. Already stripped of their homes, livelihoods, belongings, and rights, the government asked them, once again, to prove they belonged. Japanese American men served in a segregated unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Unit. This segregated unit came about largely due to lobbying within the Japanese American community and their supporters. Their justification for creating a separate unit for Nisei soldiers was to use their military service to improve public opinion of Japanese Americans and bolster their claims of loyalty.⁶³ They distributed pamphlets and newspapers filled with pictures and descriptions of Japanese American contributions to the war effort.⁶⁴ These pamphlets and other statements on loyalty built upon materials released by the WRA and contributed to building a hegemonic definition of Japanese American loyalty and citizenship.⁶⁵

During this contentious period of registration and calls for volunteers, from February through June 1943, Tule Lake incarcerated watched their camp's reputation decline due to charges of disloyalty. They articulated their disbelief, outrage, and

⁶² Wu, *The Color of Success*, 72-110.

⁶³ Mueller, *Free to Die for their Country*, 23-24.

⁶⁴ "Japanese American Citizens League: For Better Americans in a Better America," folder 7, box 3, Gerda Isenberg Collection, BANC; Wu, *The Color of Success*, 72-86.

⁶⁵ War Relocation Authority, "Myths and Facts About the Japanese Americans: Answering Common Misconceptions Regarding Americans of Japanese Ancestry," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1943), folder 1, box 3, Gerda Isenberg Collection, BANC.

expectations in ways that demonstrated their awareness of the stakes of this charge and the risks it posed to their futures as citizens. They clarified their position from within the boundaries of acceptable definitions of loyalty, reconciling their hurt and their hopes for the future by envisioning a new version of citizenship for themselves. By reimagining their role in a larger battle for citizenship, they exercised resiliency and autonomy as they pursued the best possible outcomes for themselves. Incarceration camp newspapers and magazines contain rich examples of Japanese Americans' perspective on loyalty. It is important to consider the potential censorship involved in the publishing of these sources, because these were public sites of Japanese American expression available to camp administration, and the Nisei leadership within the camps often used their influence to shape public narratives.

At times, these newspapers expressed vehement support for their government and seized upon mythic notions of the American West in order to frame their position in a patriotic light. Yoshima Shibata wrote a piece in the *Tulean Dispatch* in November 1942 that describes incarcerated experiences at Tule Lake as reminiscent of American settlers' experience. He titled his piece "This is Our Colony" and frames Japanese Americans' present circumstances as "a rare experience unparalleled in American History, placing the will of man to an acid test...let us make this Colony a growing concern with life and happiness, to prove now and forever, that we are worthy of being loyal Americans."⁶⁶ He went on to declare that the success of their "colony" depended upon their ability to adopt a "positive and constructive" attitude. He likens incarcerated to other "great men" that, because of their actions in response to dissatisfactory circumstances, stood on the

⁶⁶ Yoshima Shibata, "This is Our Colony," *Tulean Dispatch* 1, no. 4, November 1942, Tulean Dispatch Magazine Collection, BANC.

precipice of greatness.⁶⁷ Framing incarceration camps as “colonies” and invoking tropes reminiscent of the “bootstrap” myth represented their experience in incarceration as echoes of other quintessentially “American” narratives.⁶⁸ Shibata, like the JACL, posited loyalty as something they had to create. Incarceration provided the battle ground upon which they could fight to prove they belonged. Citizenship, then, meant the utilization of certain, meaningful tropes in order to align and ground their experience with the experiences with those of white Americans of the past to demonstrate loyalty.

Another writer, Riley O’Suga, centered his identity within American values through his anger, frustration, and disillusionment at his exclusion from military service and America itself. Through this piece, O’Suga’s frustration at his status as a second-class citizen contrasted with poetic expression about America—of his home. He reconciled the jarring contradictions of his experiences in America—of the “conflicting thoughts of love and duty, scorn and indifference” by recognizing parallels in the experiences of other people and by recognizing America’s “fallibility.”⁶⁹ Simultaneously, he expressed admiration for the landscapes, people, myths, and culture of America. His tumultuous and nostalgic depictions of America resolved in his conclusion: “But with a smile, Caucasian friends, now in uniform say, ‘I am your friend. I wish you could join us, pal; you’re one of us.’ The horror in my heart is melted away and I smile through tears and know.”⁷⁰ In this way, O’Suga reconciled his incarceration with his strong love for America by characterizing his fight to self-acceptance and belonging as the thing that

⁶⁷ Ibid, 4-5.

⁶⁸ For more on how the landscape of the American West was invoked as an assimilationist tool, see Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*.

⁶⁹ Riley O’Suga, “Nisei America: Entrails of a Thought,” *Tulean Dispatch* 1, no. 8, March 1943, Tulean Dispatch Magazine Collection, BANC.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

makes him American. He expressed hurt over his unrequited love of country and accepted responsibility for coming to terms with his feelings of alienation, placing himself squarely among other proponents of Japanese American loyalty. This echoes similar sentiments expressed by the JACL concerning the attainment of citizenship as a journey that must be instigated and facilitated through Japanese American efforts.

Several of these accounts, while ultimately reflecting a recognition and confirmation of the importance of loyalty, engage meaningfully with crises of belonging. Shuji Kimura, another incarcerated at Tule Lake, reflected on the relationship between belonging and loyalty in his reflection on question 28—the loyalty question:

Loyalty in our hearts means having known the bitterness of contempt: the lie, “Sorry, we’re full right now”; having known the poverty of the farms, the squalor and the smells of the city; the helplessness against men who sit in legislatures passing laws to drive us from our farms, from our jobs. It means remembering the pain of auctions before pitiless spectators.⁷¹

For Kimura, the experience of feeling rejected, different, and without the sense that they belonged in America was intricately intertwined with loyalty. His and his fellow incarcerated’ identities as Japanese Americans brought about these special “tests” to their loyalty. Kimura posited the loyalty required from them as distinct—present despite a multitude of injustices carried out against Japanese Americans.

In July 1943, the WRA began transferring Japanese Americans who had refused to answer the loyalty questionnaire or had answered “no and no” on the crucial questions 27 and 28 to the newly established segregation center at Tule Lake. It eventually incarcerated more Japanese Americans than any other camp—18,000 people, all branded as dangerous and unworthy of basic rights and freedoms according to standards of loyalty

⁷¹ Shuji Kimura, “Question 28” *Tulean Dispatch* 1, no. 9, April 1943, Tulean Dispatch Magazine Collection, BANC.

created by the WRA and reinforced by organizations and influencers such as the JAACL. On the eve of segregation, people published their agreement with this definition of loyalty as they aimed to distance themselves from this newly discernible stigma. The Tule Lake segregation center became disloyalty incarnate and reaffirmed the kinds of dialogues that categorized incarcerated as loyal and disloyal.

Tule Lake incarcerated Yoshima Shibata, Riley O'Suga, Shuji Kimura, and Sada Murayama all wrote during months when tensions at Tule Lake arose over a series of labor strikes that started in August 1942 and ended with entire barracks of people refusing to complete registration in the spring of 1943. While the historical record does not detail these writers' involvement in these events, it is clear that all of them engaged with the language of loyalty to frame their own concerns and arguments. The strength of these ideas, externally imposed by an oppressive system and made hegemonic through internal Japanese American negotiations for security and citizenship, all came to a head at Tule Lake. Loyalty categories influenced the stigma that the place and the people incarcerated at Tule Lake carried and would drastically narrow the options and arguments left to those people consigned to remain there. The normative expressions and definitions of loyalty became a part of the process whereby these exclusionary lines around citizenship hardened. Most importantly, perceived loyalty often directly influenced the extent to which incarcerated were uprooted from legal, social, and physical belonging in the United States. Those unprepared or unwilling to adopt this vision of citizenship, then, found themselves vilified and subjugated in more ways than one.

CHAPTER III

ON THE ROAD (AGAIN): PATTERNS OF JAPANESE AMERICAN FORCED IMMIGRATION AND LOSS DURING “VOLUNTARY EVACUATION,” SEGREGATION, AND RESETTLEMENT

On August 7th, 1942, after residing in the central California town of Fowler for five months, seventeen-year-old Akira Jackson Kato and his family packed up their remaining belongings and boarded a train for an unknown destination. Following a long train ride through central and eastern California in the height of summer heat, the Kato family was finally informed of their destination: Gila River, Arizona—home to one of the ten incarceration camps throughout the country at the time. Their forced removal during the scorching summer came months after the Japanese Americans entered the first detention facilities in March 1942. The uncertainty of their destination and the losses incurred upon their exclusion from the West Coast’s “red zone” was not uncommon for Japanese American families at the time. And yet their brief residence in Fowler preceding their forced removal highlights a unique chapter in their experience of incarceration. Following the announcement of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, the Kato family decided to “voluntarily relocate” from their farm in El Monte, southern California, to the San Joaquin Valley in central California to avoid exclusion and incarceration.¹ Only a few months later the military expanded the western exclusion zone to include areas that initially had been safe havens to Japanese Americans.² The War Relocation

¹ Akira Jackson Kato, interview by Melina Takahashi, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, December 19, 1997, <https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft600006bb/?brand=oac4>.

² The Western Defense Command issued Public Proclamation 1 on March 2, 1942, which designated Military Areas 1 and 2, stating their intention to “evacuate” only Area 1. By June 6, 1942, the government

Authority (WRA) initially organized the removal of the majority of Japanese Americans to camps by geographic location, leaving late “evacuees” to be dispersed amongst those camps that had not yet reached capacity--often separating them from whatever community ties they had to other Japanese Americans. Kato, his parents, and his two brothers thus began a pattern of uprooting that followed them throughout their wartime incarceration and afterward.

Over the course of World War II, the Katos were continually impeded from accessing the stability and security of home due to repeated, coerced uprooting. The exclusion order compelled their move to Fowler, a small farming community outside of the initial exclusion zone. The expansion of the exclusion zone led to the family’s incarceration at Gila River, Arizona, and, subsequently, Tule Lake, California. Akira Kato attended five different high schools in the space of a year and a half. And his was not the only hardship. His younger brother left the hospital at Fowler with a serious case of bronchitis in order to prevent separation from his family. Moreover, unable to legally own their own farmland in California, his parents sold the only assets they owned outright--expensive farm equipment and vehicles--at huge losses despite their efforts to escape the reach of the government’s exclusion order. Their movements were constantly marred by financial and material loss, and the threat of separation from family. They returned after the war only to continue this pattern of impermanence and instability, demonstrating the longevity of wartime incarceration on the Katos’ access to home.

had forcibly removed all Japanese Americans from Area 1 and issued another set of civilian exclusion orders in Area 2.

The pattern and frequency of being uprooted throughout and following the Katos' experience of incarceration parallels that of many other Japanese Americans. Upon returning to El Monte after the end of the war, in the winter of 1945, they found themselves unable to return to the land they formerly leased. The Katos struggled to find employment and housing in an unwelcoming community. They stayed with family friends for a period of months before moving first to Orosi, then Indio, then--finally-- Santa Clara County.³ Though not everyone experienced repeated displacement in quite the same way, every instance of uprootedness in Akira Kato's life mirrors that of many others. His story, while not representative in its specifics of Japanese Americans' experiences during World War II, illuminates patterns that resonate more broadly. Japanese American incarceration is already understood as a story of legal and social exclusion and expulsion. Movement, or displacement, is inherently part of these concepts, yet repeatedly being uprooted from temporary places of rest, comfort, and community ties compounded the psychological and economic impacts of expulsion from an ideological or national sense of home. These instances of uprooting occurred far more often than the "standard" account of migration—from assembly centers to incarceration camps to a return to the outside world—would suggest. Additionally, the timeline of these coerced movements was not neatly bookended by the opening and closing of incarceration camps.

This chapter explores these frequent patterns of uprootedness by focusing, in part, on a set of oral interviews given in the late 1990s in San Jose, California. Because of the

³ Akira Jackson Kato, interview by Melina Takahashi, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, December 19, 1997.

predominance of the agricultural industry in this region's history, most of the people interviewed were a part of this industry at some point in their lives. In most cases, these individuals remained active in San Jose's Japanese American community. In addition to these oral interviews, this chapter relies on a set of correspondence between Japanese Americans and a community activist named Gerda Isenberg, who aided the postwar resettlement effort in Palo Alto—a small city about twenty miles north of San Jose. This chapter's analysis, then, focuses on the experiences of a particular community that largely grew up in the agricultural industry of the south San Francisco Bay area and central California and were willing to tell the story of difficult life experiences.

Japanese Americans repeatedly experienced the loss of home—both physical and ideological. Beyond forced expulsion from their homes, incarceration stole or challenged other abstract notions of home—family or community, a sense of belonging, and trust in stability and security. Uprootedness, then, is not a historical experience limited to physical movement; rather, it can also apply to the ways in which an individual found these other crucial notions of home threatened. Oral interviews and correspondence reveal a long, taxing pattern of uprooting and forced migration that extended beyond the years of incarceration and burdened this community in their search to reclaim home. They reveal that incarceration deprived Japanese Americans of the comfort and stability of home—in all its various meanings.

“Voluntary Evacuation”

Like many other Japanese American families in the United States at the time, immigration and citizenship restrictions created the barriers the Kato family faced to

employment, land ownership, representation, and inclusion in the national community. The son of two Japanese immigrants, Akira Kato was sixteen years old on December 7, 1941, when Japan's imperial navy carried out an attack on the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor. His family's position in 1941—as truck farmers growing seasonal produce, leasing land, and linked primarily to the local Japanese American social community—demonstrates both the legal and social legacy of anti-Japanese sentiment during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Limitations on land ownership and discrimination in housing and employment led to often tenuous circumstances. Due to the California Alien Land Law of 1913, which prohibited Issei from owning land and limited their leases to three years, few Japanese American farmers owned land. These restrictions and anti-Japanese sentiment led many Japanese Americans to create social and economic resources specific to their communities and formed networks of support.⁴ These networks, however, could not alleviate the impact of geopolitical factors. The insularity of many of these communities only increased following Pearl Harbor and the ensuing chaos. Kato remembers that he quickly withdrew from public life, and his family quickly reevaluated the options available to them. Later he remembered, “My friends—well, some of them were still friends, but the majority of them, well, they kind of kept their distance. So shortly after that, we didn't go back to school.”⁵ He and his brothers focused their energy on distributing produce in order to minimize their losses, especially after they learned they would likely be evacuated. The concentration of Japanese Americans on the West Coast meant that there were few Japanese Americans willing and able to

⁴ For more on Japanese American farming communities in California, see Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place*.

⁵ Akira Jackson Kato, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 186.

offer support outside of the contested zone. The dismantling of community networks of support during incarceration removed a key resource that Japanese Americans previously relied upon to find economic and social stability before the war.

President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. The executive order gave the military permission to establish zones from which “any or all persons may be excluded” and paved the way for Public Proclamation 1, issued ten days later on March 2nd. Public Proclamation 1 established Military Areas 1 and 2—the former including the westernmost portions of California, Oregon, and Washington, the latter covering the easternmost parts of the same states—and indicated that those of Japanese descent would be forcefully removed from zone 1.⁶ In addition to this ominous warning, General DeWitt encouraged those living in Military Area 1 to relocate further inland to Military Area 2 or the interior states.⁷ However, it proved impractical for more than one hundred ten thousand people to relocate on their own, especially considering the fact that the government froze Issei bank accounts in summer of 1941 and most people did not have the connections or resources to make such a drastic move on short notice.⁸ Furthermore, interior states and inhabitants expressed opposition to opening their states to people otherwise being incarcerated by “military necessity.” The window for “voluntary evacuation” therefore closed quickly, on March 27, with the issuance of Public

⁶ Executive Order 9066, February 19, 1942, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives, accessed through www.ourdocuments.gov; Brian Niiya, “Military Areas 1 and 2,” *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Military%20Areas%201%20and%202/>.

⁷ “Western Defense Command,” *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Western%20Defense%20Command/>

⁸ Brian Niiya, “Voluntary evacuation,” *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Voluntary%20evacuation/>

Proclamation 4, which prohibited Japanese Americans from moving outside of Military Area 1 and put forced removal in motion.⁹

The US Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians estimated that the number of individuals who were “evacuated” during this time was 4,889—less than 5 percent of the total number of Japanese Americans later forcibly removed by the WRA. Although it is unclear whether this figure included those who migrated to Military Area 2 only to be removed later, the experiences of this group rarely invoke more than brief mention in scholarly works. Their experiences are significant nonetheless, in part, because “voluntary evacuation” represented a stage of uproot not captured by discussion of assembly centers. More importantly, “voluntary evacuation” represented an option presented to other Japanese Americans in area 1. Even if the majority of Japanese Americans chose not to pursue this option, it foreshadowed the trials to come and indicated the precarity of their situations.

Historian Susan J. Matt explores the multiple meanings of home, as a place and an idea, in her study of nostalgia and homesickness in America. In discussing the frequency of migration in America and its associated ills, Matt theorizes that people’s nostalgia for home was informed by the distance created by factors like experience and social class. Her analysis conveys the gravity of changing understandings of home and belonging: “both they [migrants] and their homes had changed.”¹⁰ Japanese Americans sense of belonging likely changed before they even left their homes. Despite the fact that many

⁹ General DeWitt issued the first of 108 Civilian Exclusion Orders on March 24, 1942; “voluntary evacuation” is a phrase coined by the WRA at that time. I use it here in order to convey one of the ways in which forced migration and uprooting was portrayed at the time and to distinguish it from later involuntary removal facilitated by government funding and oversight.

¹⁰ Susan J. Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History,” *The Journal of American History* 94 (Sept., 2007): 492.

Japanese Americans were unable to quickly put their lives and assets in order to move or simply chose not to, this intermediary period made it abundantly clear that their homes were no longer stable or even their own. Although previous patterns of discrimination and exclusion already complicated their position in America, the imminent threat of forced removal very likely changed their experience of home before they physically left it. Their legal and social status prior to World War II already made it difficult for them to feel fully rooted in America; the choice for “voluntary evacuation” likely initiated a new sense of uprootedness.

For those thousands of individuals who left Military Area 1 within the three and a half week window, uproot took on a more literal meaning. Kato’s older brother stayed behind to sell what he could of their remaining crop, accepting his imminent incarceration and separation from his family in order to ensure their financial security, while the rest of the family fled to central California with another Japanese American family. Shared or temporary living situations were not uncommon among those who left the West Coast in March 1942. The Katos lived in their truck—the only vehicle of four that they kept—as they moved northeast looking for employment and housing.

“Voluntary evacuees” utilized networks of other Japanese Americans moving east. When the Katos eventually arrived in Fowler, California, they split a converted chicken coop with the other family that had traveled from El Monte with them. Other “voluntary evacuees” experiences echoed these patterns. Katie Hironaka lived in Santa Clara County up until the war began and chose to leave with her parents-in-law and her husband’s seven siblings to escape incarceration. Her husband, who served in the military, was absent at the time. She recalls leaving with a group of families in the middle

of the night for the town of Selma, in Fresno County. They slept on the floor of an acquaintances' garage with four or five other families before they found temporary housing in Reedley with no running water or bathroom. Hironaka was several months pregnant with her first child.¹¹

Although several larger planned “voluntary evacuations” fell through, Hironaka and Akira Kato’s experience of leaving with members of their community demonstrate the collaborative element of many families’ migrations.¹² If they did not travel with other families, some people journeyed to live with acquaintances in other states. Hatsu Kanemoto grew up in San Jose and, as the eldest of twelve children in a sharecropping family, experienced significant hardship throughout her childhood and early adulthood. Both her and her husbands’ families decided to leave California to avoid incarceration, an option open to them because Kanemoto’s father knew a Japanese American man who had established a farm in Colorado. Ultimately, the arranged situation fell through when it became clear that the acquaintance did not plan to compensate Kanemoto’s family for their work on his farm.¹³ Regardless, their experience illustrates the kinds of arrangements and accompanying unpredictability that facilitated movement away from the coast during in this short window of opportunity.

¹¹ Katie T. (Koga) Hironaka, interview by Barbara K. Uchiyama, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, December 5, 1997.

¹² Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 25-29. Chiang discusses how many of these projects involved creating collective farming projects away from the West Coast, but notes that these major farming projects fell through and are useful in “demonstrating how Japanese Americans tried to use their agricultural skill to evade removal” (27).

¹³ Hatsu (Matsumoto) Kanemoto, interview by Karen Matsuoka, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, March 9, 1998.

Many of those who “voluntarily evacuated” likely left with the knowledge that they would struggle to find a permanent home for a long while. Beyond structural barriers such as discrimination in housing and employment and state governments unwilling to offer support for resettlement, the protean nature of the military’s stance on Japanese Americans on the West Coast created uncertainty as to how far the Western Defense Command would go to restrict their rights. As the army command responsible for the defense of the West Coast, the WDC held complete power to compel Japanese American movement.¹⁴ However, the WDC did not always make their ultimate goals or tactics clear. Rumors, frequently revised notices, and an increasingly hostile environment made it unclear as to what Japanese Americans’ future in the United States would look like. The extent to which the U.S. government would “exclude and remove” them and the potential longevity of this process was not clear.

Specifically, they did not know how far they had to go to truly escape their forcible removal. Proclamation 1 indicated that the military did not “contemplate any prohibition or regulation or restriction except with respect to the zones established therein,” giving people the impression that they could remain on the West Coast as long as they moved far enough east.¹⁵ Contrary to this indication, the WDC would later go on to declare all of Military Area 2 within California subject to civilian exclusion orders. Paul Sakamoto, a Nisei Japanese American who grew up in a San Jose farming community and fled the West Coast with his family, recalls his parents’ attempt to outrun

¹⁴ Executive Order 9066 gave the military power to remove or exclude “any or all persons” based on “whatever restrictions” the Secretary of War and military commanders imposed.

¹⁵ Western Defense Command Public Proclamation No. 1 establishing military zones where Japanese residents are no longer allowed, March 2, 1942, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, WA, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/15329/>.

the shifting wartime policies: “My parents had the idea that we would sell everything, and buy a lot of dried foods, folding furniture, and put us on a big truck and keep moving until it was safe, that we would not be evacuated. But unfortunately, they moved into the line of fire.”¹⁶ They moved to Lodi, a town in the California’s San Joaquin Valley, believing that moving to Military Area 2 would save them from forcible removal. The WDC changed its stance on eastern California, though, and incarcerated them in the Stockton Assembly Center soon after they arrived. Paul Sakamoto’s impression of his parents’ intention in moving him and his ten siblings involved foregoing permanent resettlement for the sake of escaping incarceration. While it is unclear what prevented the Sakamotos from moving further than Lodi, California, Paul Sakamoto’s recollection conveys the uncertainty of uprooting their home, essentially gambling on a new location in the hopes that they would escape the camps.

These individuals exerted agency as they navigated the possibility of forced removal by choosing the option that seemed most likely to bring about a favorable outcome. In the end, “voluntary evacuation” brought about the exact outcome these families hoped to avoid. Confusion over the military’s objectives and the limits of their financial resources and social connection led many families to “voluntarily relocate” to areas from which they were later forcibly removed and incarcerated. Kato, Hironaka, and Sakamoto and their respective families found themselves uprooted once more from their temporary circumstances in central California when, in June 1942, the WDC began to post civilian exclusion orders for Military Area 2. Their “voluntary evacuation” simply

¹⁶ Paul Sakamoto, interview by Aggie Idemoto, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, February 16, 1998.

comprised an additional chapter of uprootedness in March 1942. Still, these individuals maneuvered their situations and the possibility of incarceration in often unexpected ways. For example, once Katie Hironaka discovered that the military planned to incarcerate her and her husband's family, she wrote a letter to General DeWitt explaining that she was pregnant and—as her husband was away in the military—wanted to join her own family further south in the Pomona Assembly Center rather than the Fresno Assembly Center. The army granted her wish and incarcerated her with her family, where she gave birth to a baby girl a few weeks later. Hironaka had initially relocated to Fresno County because, as she recalls, her husband's family felt responsible for her and their unborn grandchild's welfare. She reconsidered her decision as she progressed in her pregnancy and as incarceration loomed on the horizon: “it was going to be my first child, and I'm with family who are actually strangers.”¹⁷ Her temporary living situation lacked familiarity, comfort, and—with new civilian exclusion orders posted in central California—the safety she had initially sought. She approached her impending incarceration with the desire to surround herself with a community she felt close to.

Although there was some continuity in community dynamics, new social networks also emerged during incarceration. In discussing the incarceration of the inhabitants of the Cortez farming colonies at the Amache camp, historian Valerie Matsumoto observes “the strength of support networks formed before and during the war, and the continuity of ties of affection and responsibility.”¹⁸ The use of geographic zones to organize forced removal meant that Japanese Americans living in the same town or

¹⁷ Katie T. (Koga) Hironaka, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 87.

¹⁸ Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place*, 147.

region often ended up in the same camps, facilitating this continuation that Matsumoto refers to. For those that experienced this continuation, it constituted a source of comfort. However, she also details the way camps changed family, gender, and community patterns. Individuals spent more time with peers of their own age rather than their family units, women gained access to new jobs and higher wages, and new communities based on barrack blocks and incarceration camp formed. Regardless of these shifts, new communities provided support. Correspondingly, it also constituted a source of regret for those who became separated from their community during incarceration. Masayo Aarii felt as though the splitting of the Japanese American community of Winters, California, irreversibly altered the course of her relationships for decades after the war. Her town spread across the boundary of two different counties; thus, the WRA sent half of her town in Yolo County to Amache, Colorado, and the other half in Solano County to Gila River, Arizona. The two halves of the town consequently experienced incarceration separately and never reformed community ties after the war. Aarii, a musician, became an active member of San Jose's Japanese American community by the late 1990s. Whenever she performed in Central California, she recalled seeing people from her old pre-war town. "They know me because our town was, I think, split and then they... relocated to different towns after the war. So I have a lot of friends that remember me for that reason, that our town split."¹⁹ Few communities, including the community of Winters, emerged from the war unchanged. She remembers these friends from her childhood fifty years after they parted ways and identifies incarceration as the reason that their lives followed

¹⁹ Masayo (Yasui) Aarii, interview by Melina Takahashi, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, February 22, 1998, p. 24.

different trajectories. Her story demonstrates the link between incarceration and the uprooting from community as another way of understanding the loss of home. Paul Sakamoto also experienced separation from community as a result of the geography of military zones, but as a consequence of “voluntary evacuation.” Sakamoto reflected back upon his family’s relocation with regret. In removing them from Military Zone 2, the WRA shipped the family to the furthest possible camp in Rohwer, Arkansas, where they knew no one. “We were with people from Lodi and Stockton, whereas if we [had] stayed here [San Jose], we would have been in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, with our friends.”²⁰ He reflects upon their decision regretfully, imagining an alternative in which he could have experienced incarceration alongside friends. Their decision to leave San Jose in 1942 resulted in a feeling of uprootedness from both community and place.

Furthermore, there is the possibility that the historical archive neglects those who “voluntarily relocated” beyond the government’s grasp yet still bore the burden of their maligned identities as unassimilable, potentially dangerous Others. Hatsu Kanemoto, the woman who moved with her husband and family to Colorado, was never formally incarcerated. Yet, her years of exile from the West Coast held innumerable hardships. The combination of their racial and ethnic identity and their lower-class status both likely influenced the pattern of sharecropping and debt that followed her and her husband in Colorado. They regretted their decision to escape incarceration, later ruminating on the kinds of support and avenues of resettlement they may have gained through it. When asked about her and her husband’s experience of living in Colorado, she responded: “We always said it would have been better if we had gone to camp. Then [my husband]

²⁰ Paul Sakamoto, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 294.

could've gone out—or he could've learned a trade while in camp, because some of his friends became carpenters or things that were available to learn while in camp. We didn't have that opportunity.”²¹ While others who experienced incarceration would likely object to the idea that it presented opportunity, Kanemoto’s words communicate the pain and isolation of being uprooted from California. The military compelled their displacement and, while they retained their right to move freely around the rest of the country, they lost the community support and scant resources afforded those impacted by similar forces. To put it simply, the structural inequalities that created the camps did not end at their gates. The Kanemotos returned to San Jose as soon as the military lifted the exclusion order. Their experience of being uprooted did not garner the same kind of recognition as the experiences of those held in incarceration camps. But they, too, returned with the understanding that “home” as a Japanese American in the United States was not necessarily a guaranteed right—whether or not they “volunteered” to forgo it.

“Voluntary evacuation” is a largely ignored period of displacement in the history of Japanese American incarceration. As the imminence of their removal became clear, these families chose to leave homes and communities in order to try to maintain their autonomy. They leaned on networks of support and felt the pain of leaving homes and communities behind—just as they would in subsequent instances of coerced migration. This movement, then, comprises only the first of several chapters of uprootedness.

²¹ Hatsu (Matsumoto) Kanemoto, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 148.

Migration During the Period of Incarceration

On January 20, 1943 the military announced that, in addition to recruiting Japanese American Nisei men into military service, it planned to launch an investigation into all incarceratedees' loyalty in the process.²² At the time of this announcement, Akira Jackson Kato was still seventeen years old and a junior at Canal High School in Gila River's incarceration camp.²³ Teams of military personnel dispersed to all ten incarceration camps to distribute questionnaires intended to test and categorize Japanese American loyalty to the United States. The loyalty questionnaire included the infamous questions 27 and 28, which asked respondents whether they were willing to serve in the U.S. military and if they promised unconditional loyalty to the United States. The distribution and evaluation of questionnaires continued throughout the spring and summer of 1943. When Kato turned eighteen in June of 1943, he faced these crucial questions along with their unclear consequences. As a young Nisei man, he likely faced military service—a path Kato was willing to follow, but which his father expressly disapproved of.

There are many potential reasons why Kato's father may have felt reluctant for his son to serve in the military. Issei parents juggled fears about their own citizenship status and their children's. Barred from U.S. citizenship, many Issei balked at forswearing their Japanese citizenship by giving unequivocal "yes-yes" answers to the questionnaire—a decision that would render them stateless people. Despite the fact that neither Japan nor the U.S. seemed to offer substantive protections for this population

²² Mueller, *American Inquisition*, 33-34.

²³ Akira Jackson Kato, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 198.

during the war, statelessness is a historically vulnerable position to inhabit. Historian Linda Kerber theorizes: “The stateless are the citizen’s other. The stateless serve the state by embodying its absence...by signaling who will not be entitled to its protection.”²⁴ Unsure of their future in the U.S., many felt that Japanese citizenship offered an avenue to protections and decided to take their chances in the Tule Lake segregation camp rather than detach themselves from citizenship. Furthermore, they feared providing answers that deviated from their children’s lest they result in separation. The lack of clarity concerning the intended targets of the questions and the consequences of their answers contributed to widespread anxiety. Question 27 asked if incarcerated were “willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States,” without specifying if they were signing up for conscription by answering “yes,” and left it unclear as to how women should answer the question. Question 28 asked incarcerated to “forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization” without guaranteeing the protection of U.S. citizenship for those that had been legally barred from obtaining citizenship after immigrating from Japan.²⁵

The criteria for categorizing loyalty, nationalism, and citizenship conflated these concepts considerably. As it became increasingly clear that incarceration stood on shaky legal and constitutional ground, President Roosevelt and the wartime administration aimed to demonstrate a shift from race to loyalty as criteria for incarceration. By administering the questionnaire, they hoped to legitimize the existence of the camps as

²⁴ Kerber, “Toward a History of Statelessness in America,” 745.

²⁵ The "Loyalty Questionnaire," 1943," *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-p72-00004-1/>

well as initiate the process of dispersing Japanese Americans across the country.²⁶ The questionnaire helped to build a foundation for the idea of loyalty as a simple, identifiable category equivalent to or indicative of political and cultural nationalism. Historian Mae Ngai has argued that migrant or dual nationalism “is produced from complex dynamic interactions between official and unofficial outreaches from the nation of origin and the various political and affective needs of people living in diaspora.”²⁷ Likely strengthened by the political and cultural exclusion of Japanese Americans even prior to incarceration, many Japanese Americans maintained a complex political and cultural nationalism that helped form their ethnic identity as both part of, and apart from, the United States.²⁸ Dual nationalism, however, did not fit easily into wartime categories of loyalty, and neither did practical concerns over statelessness and family separation. It is possible, given their incarceration and expulsion from the nation’s body of citizens, that Kato’s father believed there were legitimate reasons why his son should not be forced to risk his life for his country to prove his loyalty. Although this was a sentiment expressed later by Japanese American draft resisters, it was deemed unacceptable in an atmosphere of wartime nationalism.²⁹ Regardless of his motivations, he urged Kato to answer “no-no” to questions 27 and 28. Subsequently, the WRA transferred the Kato family—along with individuals from other camps who had answered “no-no” to the loyalty questions—to the newly established Tule Lake Segregation Center.

²⁶ FDR and the military initially considered “dispersal and resettlement” as a potential alternative to the incarceration camps, and pursued it once they realized that the camps were an unreasonable long-term “solution.”

²⁷ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 171.

²⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 170.

²⁹ Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country*, 76-98.

Segregation in the fall of 1943 comprised another instance of uproot for several thousand Japanese Americans and, regardless of the geographically enforced binary created between “loyalty” and “disloyalty,” was a complex process that created a tumultuous experience of dislocation for both those leaving and entering Tule Lake. The WRA chose to designate Tule Lake a segregation center in July 1943 because of its large capacity and the high number of incarcerated deemed disloyal there during the distribution of the questionnaire. Unsatisfied with registration personnel’s inability to answer clarification questions about the consequences and parameters of the questionnaire, more than three thousand people incarcerated at Tule Lake refused to answer the loyalty questions affirmatively.³⁰ The total number of people who either refused to complete the questionnaire or answered “no” to one or both questions 27 and 28 amounted to forty-two percent of Tule Lake’s population at the time. By comparison, only twenty-six percent of incarcerated at both Manzanar and Jerome answered “no” to one or both of questions 27 and 28.³¹ The army famously imprisoned several hundred young men in county jails and the Tule Lake isolation center for refusing to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, Tule Lake presented a practical location to incarcerate “disloyal” Japanese Americans from all camps. In the end, Tule Lake incarcerated approximately twelve thousand people deemed disloyal and another four thousand people who were family members of those deemed disloyal. Around eleven hundred “loyal” individuals refused to move to another camp and continued to reside in Tule Lake during its phase as a segregation center.³² In the end,

³⁰ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 36; Barbara Takei, "Tule Lake isolation center (detention facility)," *Densho Encyclopedia* [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule%20Lake%20isolation%20center%20\(detention%20facility\)/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule%20Lake%20isolation%20center%20(detention%20facility)/).

³¹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 184.

³² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 185.

around sixteen thousand people experienced another instance of migration as a result of the loyalty questionnaire.

The Tule Lake segregation center was a site of both family unity and disunity. Some, like the Katos, transferred to Tule Lake over the issue of military service, as well as the threat of statelessness and family separation. Others simply endured separation from family members and went through the period of incarceration without knowing when or if reunion was possible. One such person who endured this separation during the war, a Kibei man, was drafted before the war. His parents, however, spent the war incarcerated at the Poston camp in Arizona while his brothers were incarcerated at Tule Lake.³³ The fracturing of this particular family over the course of the war represents the kind of separation that those like the Katos feared.

Still, others held more radical pro-Japan nationalist ideas or anger toward the United States, which often led to repeated movement within the network of detention and incarceration facilities the military and the WRA created. Harry Ueno and his family lived and worked in Los Angeles and were forcibly removed to Manzanar in 1942. Born in Hawaii and educated in Japan, Ueno encountered employment discrimination in several cities across the U.S. upon his return. At Manzanar, Ueno worked as a cook and led the Mess Hall Workers Union. His activism in the union led to conflict with camp administration and the JACL, which frequently positioned itself in opposition to overt forms of resistance in the camps.³⁴ When a local JACL leader Fred Tayama was found

³³ Yoshihiro Uchida, interview by Dr. Alexander Yamato, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, February 20, 1998.

³⁴ Wu, *The Color of Success*, 72-110.

beaten severely in December 1942, the camp administration accused Harry Ueno and two other men of their involvement. The accusation led to a camp riot that resulted in two deaths and Ueno's incarceration in three different prisons over the course of one year before being transferred to Tule Lake in December of 1943, where he and his family reunited.³⁵ Ueno, though in the minority in this respect, vehemently and outwardly expressed his anger toward the WRA's treatment of Japanese Americans. Laughing as he later recalled a letter he wrote to his wife while incarcerated at an isolation center in Moab, Utah, Ueno paraphrased the sentiment he communicated: "They might kill me, but I am glad I die as a Japanese descendent."³⁶ He articulated this anger, not through an expression of cultural or political nationalism, but by defining his identity as specifically Japanese. In an era in which assimilation was seen as a gateway to unhyphenated Americanism, expressing the desire to be anything other than that resulted in conflict and further repeated uprooting throughout the period of incarceration.

Furthermore, an increasing number of incarcerated—almost exclusively centered at Tule Lake—risked the possibility of an even more drastic, international uprooting. Driven by fear, access to resources and support, political or nationalist sentiment, or the desire to avoid the separation of families, Japanese Americans increasingly requested repatriation (in the case of the Issei) or expatriation (in the case of the Nisei). Repatriation and expatriation requests numbered almost twenty thousand by 1944, and the Denaturalization Act of 1944 made renunciation of American citizenship legally possible

³⁵ Harry Ueno, interview by Dr. Wendy Ng, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, January 23, 1998.

³⁶ Harry Ueno, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 496.

for Nisei.³⁷ The loyalty questionnaire and the possibility of the camps closing spurred the largest spikes in these kinds of requests. Because the outcomes of the loyalty questionnaire were so unclear, many thought they would rather take their chances in Japan than face the uncertainty of the questionnaire's consequences. Similarly, when the WRA announced in January of 1945 that the camps would gradually shut down over the course of the year, many feared what waited for them on the outside. Incarcerees reported hearing discouraging and unfavorable reports from the few Japanese Americans who had returned to the West Coast already. These scouts reported damaged or stolen property, housing shortages, and employment discrimination.³⁸ Many cited this fear as one of their primary reasons for wanting to remain in the camps.³⁹ Some incarcerees reported that camp officials posed their options as: leave camp or renounce citizenship. Most of the people who initiated this request, then, saw it as a means to avoid or stall another coerced migration. Regardless, almost twenty thousand people initiated a process that promised to uproot them from the nation entirely. In the end, the vast majority of these requests were not fulfilled because most people ultimately decided they wanted to rescind their request. Their decision to risk legal and geographic uprooting from the nation stemmed from a variety of factors, but were largely made under severe duress and the threat of further dislocation.

The variety of factors that brought people to Tule Lake, along with overcrowding, led to increasing internal conflicts within the camp. While ideological differences and a

³⁷ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 193.

³⁸ By March 1945, only fifteen hundred Japanese Americans had returned to California; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 188.

³⁹ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 176-181.

range of backgrounds existed in every camp, segregation brought the most radical factions into a shared carceral space with families like the Katos. Voluntary military service or—after January 1944—compulsory service served as a major point of controversy across all incarceration camps. Although those brought to Tule Lake chose not to enter the military, by definition, this did not squash disagreement over Japanese American military service and loyalty. Years later when asked what he thought about Japanese Americans who enlisted in the military, Akira Kato remarked: “Well, when I was in Arizona, it didn't bother me, but when I went [to] Tule Lake, you get this other side of the whole war situation. They would rather not see anybody in uniform. At that time it really didn't bother me. If a person wanted to serve, it was okay to serve because I was willing to serve, too.”⁴⁰ He posed his affinity toward those Japanese Americans who joined the service against what was perhaps a normative assumption in Tule Lake of his opposition to it. His response confirms continuing differences of opinion within the segregation center and undermines the assumption of homogeneity of Tule Lake’s population that followed him long after his time there.

Conflicting opinions were not confined to differences over military service, and the tension led to very tangible changes in living situations that influenced those incarcerated’s experiences of uprootedness following segregation. In fall of 1943 a farmworkers strike in protest of poor working conditions led to demonstrations and violence, culminating in the decision to declare a three-month period of martial law from November 1943 to January 1944. Martial law shut down most daily activities, suspended many jobs within camp, enforced a curfew, marked a period of food and supply

⁴⁰ Akira Jackson Kato, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 199.

shortages, and implemented an indiscriminate, camp-wide search for signs of punishable disloyalty.⁴¹ It amplified current tensions within the camp; a pro-Japan nationalist group, the Hokoku Seinen Dan, went so far as to demand further segregation of the camp in order to separate themselves from those who were not “true disloyals.”⁴² This period stained Tule Lake’s reputation further, and the increased prison-like qualities of the camp likely represented a disjuncture from incarceratedees’ previous experiences at other camps.

Incarceratedees who transferred to the Tule Lake segregation center were not the only group to experience additional uprooting during the period of segregation. Those who transferred out of Tule Lake to other camps also likely endured significant changes in their community and their experiences of incarceration, demonstrating the variance between different incarceration camps. Placement in different camps largely depended on region; the military issued Civilian Exclusion Orders which specified a nearby “assembly center” where a specific population was required to report. From there, the military organized “evacuations” of all incarceratedees in a given assembly center to an incarceration camp. Therefore, many incarceratedees joined others who had worked in similar occupations from the same general region or—in some cases—the very same communities they came from. Transfers, however, held the potential to bring Japanese Americans from different class and cultural backgrounds into contact with each other.

One such instance occurred when a group of incarceratedees from Tule Lake arrived at the Topaz incarceration camp in Utah and found themselves “virtually forced” to work

⁴¹ Barbara Takei, “Tule Lake,” *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule%20Lake/>

⁴² Mae Ngai goes into detail on pro-Japan nationalism in camps and the complications it caused between them and other incarceratedees: “pro-Japan nationalists demanded immediate repatriation to Japan and “re-segregation to separate themselves from those who they said were not “true disloyals” but were really loyal, *inu*, or “fence sitters.” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 186.

on the water pipeline replacement crew.⁴³ Utah's environment and its soil conditions made pipeline replacement a regular—albeit despised—job among Topaz's incarcerated. The dirty and unappealing nature of the job, as well as Topaz incarcerated's attitude toward this particular work, imbued the job with unfavorable social meaning. When Topaz workers delegated this job to new arrivals from Tule Lake, they forced them to take on the job with the lowest status. Connie Chiang describes the way that the social meaning associated with this type of harsh labor only worsened other feelings of displacement associated with leaving Tule Lake, where they were incarcerated with other prewar farmers: "Taking this job compounded their feelings of inferiority, as most Topaz residents were urbanites from the San Francisco Bay Area and appeared to be "more cultured and sophisticated than they.""⁴⁴ Their transfer to an unfamiliar camp with unknown incarcerated from largely different backgrounds added to the gravity of their experience of displacement.

Seasonal agricultural leave opened up work for incarcerated outside the boundaries of camp, but required consistent movement and separation from friends and family still in camp. The program simultaneously demonstrated the permeability of camp boundaries and the inescapable nature of the uprootedness and hardship that followed Japanese Americans regardless of their status within or outside barbed wire. Authorized seasonal agricultural work assignments began as early as 1942 in response to growing concern from farmers who reported labor shortages compounded both by the war and

⁴³ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

incarceration.⁴⁵ Eight thousand Japanese Americans were sent to the Midwest to harvest eighty thousand acres of farmland in 1942.⁴⁶ Some incarceratedees stayed in camp while their spouses or family members worked as day laborers outside of camp for extended periods of time. One Japanese American woman's husband worked throughout their time at the Poston camp while she cared for their children, traveling to Iowa, Idaho, and Nebraska to help support their growing family.⁴⁷ Even labor in the camps, then, often required frequent movement or separation.

Camps were not static places. From the very beginning, incarceratedees moved back and forth across camp boundaries for work or as a result of acts of resistance or perceived disloyalty. These movements often separated them from their families and the communities they formed within camps. Despite the harsh environmental conditions, living arrangements, and other restrictions of life in incarceration camps, people managed to find stability and community there—two things that incarceratedees often struggled to find upon leaving the camps. Patterns of migration, however, continued throughout the period of incarceration and continually tore incarceratedees away from any version of home they managed to find or create.

⁴⁵ According to Connie Chiang, farmers in eastern Oregon were one of the first agricultural groups to pressure authorities to provide Japanese American labor to help harvest almost thirty thousand acres of sugar beets in May 1942; Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 128-137.

⁴⁶ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 134.

⁴⁷ Aiko Kitaji, interview by Karen Matsuoka, *REgenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume IV: San Jose Region*, Online Archive of California, August 8, 1998.

Hostels, Temporary Lodging, and Frequent Migration: Rejoining the Workforce and
Finding Housing Post-Incarceration

Prior to incarceration, agriculture comprised a major area in which Japanese Americans found employment on the West Coast. However, California's Alien Land Law of 1913 closed off land ownership and long-term leases to aliens ineligible for citizenship. The Supreme Court case *Ozawa v. U.S.* (1922) rendered virtually all first-generation Japanese immigrants ineligible for citizenship. Many Japanese American families found their way around this barrier by putting their land in their Nisei children's names—who held birthright citizenship—or in that of another party. Oftentimes, Japanese American families ended up leasing the land that they farmed. Of the Japanese American farmers in Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington, only 19.5 percent were full owners and 6.1 percent were part owners, compared with 70 percent who leased their land.⁴⁸

The barriers to land ownership plagued those Japanese Americans engaged in agricultural work before and after the war, leading to patterns of uprooting both before and after the war. Some Japanese Americans managed to preserve their homes and future livelihoods by hiring managers or finding trusted friends to look after their land. Eiichi Sakauye's Issei father had bought farmland in San Jose, California, in 1907—six years prior to legislation prohibiting the sale.⁴⁹ His family left the farm and their home in the care of a neighboring family they had a close relationship with. In December of 1944, right before the military lifted the ban on Japanese American presence in the western

⁴⁸ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 31.

⁴⁹ California's most famous alien land law was put in place in 1913.

defense zone, Sakauye returned to the farm on a special permit to find everything much the same; even his family dog remembered him.⁵⁰ Similarly, those Japanese American families in the three agricultural colonies of Livingston, Cressey, and Cortez who became farm owners by putting their land in the name of the American Land and Produce Company—a Japanese American owned company—hired managers for their land and returned to their old homes and community after the war. This is not to diminish the hardships these individuals experienced upon returning to their land. However, the continued existence of a physical home and place to return to distinguished their experience from those agricultural workers who found themselves drifting from place to place, going wherever they found work and staying in communal housing units.

The Katos were one such family. Because they leased the land they farmed in El Monte prior to the war, they had no permanent residence to return to after the war and struggled to establish a home. Initially, when they left Tule Lake in November of 1945, they returned to El Monte only to find their old house gone—literally and figuratively. It had been razed and replaced with subdivisions. Additionally, they found themselves ostracized from their old community. Although they stayed for a while with a white family with whom they were old friends, they could not find employment or housing. Soon, they moved on to Orosi in central California, where they lived and worked on a ranch owned by a Japanese family, the Katayamas, while they waited out the surge of anti-Japanese sentiment in California after the war. Although they themselves did not experience violence, Akira Kato recounts instances of hostility: “windows were broken, rocks were thrown at cars and things like that. But that eventually went away...after that,

⁵⁰ Eiichi Sakauye, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 342.

we moved out of the Katayama farm, and found housing.”⁵¹ Domestic terrorism against returning Japanese Americans included around twenty shooting incidents, as well as instances of vandalism, arson, and threats with no reported deaths. Although moderate in numbers, these were not isolated incidents and contributed to an environment of trepidation and fear that made many Japanese Americans reluctant to return to the West Coast. Japanese Americans did not necessarily resettle in the place of their choosing. Their resettlement in largely temporary situations was tainted by fear of unwelcoming communities, the continuing threat of family separation, and the discomfort of the crowded conditions of boarding in other families’ homes. The unfriendly climate contributed to the housing and employment discrimination Kato’s family faced—as well as influencing the fear and trepidation they likely felt in facing unpredictable attitudes in their community.

The pattern of temporary housing and frequent migration repeats itself through many peoples’ stories of resettlement. These migrations took many shapes, involved a wide range of collaborators, and altered at least the physical placement—if not ideological understanding—of home. Admittedly, this pattern of repeated uprooting was not unusual for many families employed in agriculture before the war. However, if the same discriminatory factors guided the alien land laws in the pre-war period and during incarceration, these patterns of migration following the war can be understood as an outgrowth of both of these discriminatory periods. The period of incarceration did not simply interrupt these families’ lives; it reinforced and complicated the terms of their migration, putting up further barriers for finding permanent homes. Alien land laws

⁵¹ Akira Jackson Kato, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 205.

remained but, while legal barriers reflected and continued to shape opinions of Japanese Americans, these likely imposed fewer and fewer direct impacts as more Nisei came of age during incarceration and were eligible to hold land titles for, or in concert, with their noncitizen parents.⁵² The loss of revenue and property that accompanied incarceration, however, made property purchases unattainable for several years after the camps closed. Families often continued the practice of sharecropping or, in some cases, migratory farmwork to make ends meet. The Yasui family returned from the Gila River incarceration camp only to face five subsequent moves as they searched for permanent housing and jobs. One of the daughters, Masayo Aarii, describes the way her father coordinated their movements among others in a similar situation: “Every time he moved, I guess some of these friends went along with him. So until he went to Sanger, [California], he had a lot of people with him, and they lived in [a] big—they would find these old houses with many, many rooms, and they would all live there and work out. My dad would take these people in his pickup to different ranches to work.”⁵³ Her father, mother, and youngest sister all moved around with this larger group—a break from their prolonged residence while renting orchards in Winters, California, prior to the war. The economic and physical loss incurred during incarceration certainly deterred socioeconomic mobility following the war.

⁵² Alien land laws stayed on the books until the Supreme Court invalidated them in *Oyama v. California* (1948) and, finally, *Sei Fuji v. California* (1952). Some communities aimed to strengthen alien land laws to deter resettlement. The exclusionist movement in rural Oregon led to the passage of a new alien land law in 1945 that made it a criminal offense for Issei to “live and work on farmlands” they did not own—farmland they were legally barred from owning in the first place. Eiichiro Azuma, “Renewed Oppression and Final Struggle,” in *In This Great Land of Freedom: The Japanese Pioneers of Oregon*, 11 December 2017, <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2017/12/11/oregon-8/>.

⁵³ Masayo Aarii, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 26.

In many cases—as was the case, too, with whole families—hostels offered a temporary solution to housing. Churches and civic groups often ran these establishments, converting old Buddhist churches or large community buildings into temporary shared living spaces specifically for returning Japanese Americans. Ironically, with tight living quarters and shared community spaces, they resembled incarceration camp conditions.⁵⁴ Although the Public Health Department deemed many of these facilities unsuitable living spaces, many Japanese Americans were sent to these shelters or others like them in WRA’s rush to close down the camps.⁵⁵ Still, these hostels allowed individuals a temporary place to stay as they searched for permanent housing. Nineteen-year-old Masayo Aarii and her father both left Gila River as scouts, traveling up and down California looking for work. Unable to find a job to support their entire family, Aarii’s father told her to stay in Los Angeles—which had a number of hostels—to find a job. She stayed at a hostel until being hired on as a domestic servant and watched with guilt as her parents and younger sister spent the next couple years moving from one place to the next.⁵⁶ Two years passed before they found a stable living situation in Fresno, and several more years went by before Aarii’s growing family and her parents pooled their money to buy their own land in Santa Clara County. Their experience reflects the extent to which families leaned on hostels and other communal living arrangements to sustain their return to the West Coast. As it often proved difficult to stay together, hostels provided a necessary establishment for them to manage that separation.

⁵⁴ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 187.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Masayo Aarii, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 27.

In other cases, hostels facilitated family unity and stability in a time of upheaval. Despite their inherently temporary nature, some Japanese American families forged connections to these places and prolonged their stays indefinitely. Aiko Kitaji grew up in San Jose in a farming community. Unlike many of her classmates, her family enjoyed a privileged position in the community, because her father held a management position in a large agricultural company. Although her parents immigrated without promise of success, “everything they did seemed to work in their favor.”⁵⁷ Regardless, they lost their land and most of their belongings when they were sent to Poston, Arizona, leading her parents to encourage Kitaji to marry a man she met in camp “for [her] own safety.”⁵⁸ They feared for their daughter’s ability to make a living for herself outside of the camp. In order to return to a familiar region and be close to family, Kitaji, her husband, and their two children decided to stay at the Gilroy Hot Springs—a converted resort situated thirty miles from her hometown of San Jose. The owner, Kyuzaburo Sakata, converted the resort to a hostel and asked Kitaji’s husband and brother-in-law to help him manage the property upon their return to the West Coast. Sakata opened the living quarters of the resort up to Japanese American families returning to the West Coast for a number of years before slowly transforming it back to a regularly functioning hotel. Kitaji estimates that around fifty people stayed there initially, although they eventually drifted away over the years as they found other living situations and employment.

The design and layouts of hostels mirrored the communal living style incarcerated experienced in the camps. Because the Gilroy Hot Springs was built as a resort, it was not

⁵⁷ Aiko Kitaji, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 238.

⁵⁸ Aiko Kitaji, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 257.

easily equipped for independent living. Residents initially shared facilities and cooked communally: “just like a mess hall again.”⁵⁹ Valerie Matsumoto comments on the ways that the gendered division of labor made these shared living arrangements placed responsibility on the ability of Issei and Nisei women to coordinate their efforts, while simultaneously making them relive the lack of privacy they endured during incarceration.⁶⁰ Kitaji’s story reflects this burden, and she remembers consistent tension between her, her mother-in-law, and other women staying in the hostel. “They all keep looking at [me] to see how I’m managing to take care of my family,” she thought at the time.⁶¹ Despite these discomforts and their lack of reliable transportation to the outside world, the hostel provided Kitaji and her relatives a place to build their family, earn a better income from understanding employers, and feel like a part of a community. For instance, Kitaji remembers taking elderly residents to their doctors appointments to translate for them, and by the time they left, they had built a two-room addition to their living quarters. The hostel became home to the Kitaji family for ten years after they returned from camp; they might have stayed even longer, but they needed to educate their seven children. With no school nearby, they decided to finally move to Watsonville.

Hostels represent one of the crucial responses to the crisis of resettlement. Their very design denied permanence and prolonged the pattern of uprooting for many, but they formed a bridge to more stable homes. They provided a solution, albeit a temporary one, to the problem of returning to find homes occupied or destroyed. Their very structure and the inhabitants’ understanding of the nature of their living situation denied returning

⁵⁹ Aiko Kitaji, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 264.

⁶⁰ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 188.

⁶¹ Aiko Kitaji, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 263.

Japanese Americans the comfort of knowing another move was not imminent. It also made it perfectly clear that their exclusion was not an easily reversible action; hostels comprised one of the waiting rooms in which they lingered as they searched for ways to find their way back to pre-war homes and occupations—or the closest things to them.

While Japanese Americans faced significant trouble finding housing immediately upon leaving the camps in 1945, they were not without allies or resources. In preparation for the imminent closure of the camps, the WRA distributed a modest sum to families as they left incarceration, provided transportation, and shipped their belongings.⁶² Groups like the JACL and local Japanese American resettlement organizations established networks for aiding the transition out of camps. They were not without help from white communities and allies, as well. Some, like the Kato family, stayed with friends following the war. Others, like the Sakauye family, left their property and homes in the hands of loyal neighbors and friends. White allies also advocated for Japanese Americans in the job and housing markets. Gerda Isenberg, the chairman of the Palo Alto Committee on Fair Play and American Principles, corresponded diligently with incarcerated toward the end of the war. She acted as a liaison between women looking for domestic workers for their household and Japanese American men and women looking for employment and housing in California.

Isenberg's correspondence provides insight into resettlement that, although narrow in scope, illuminates larger themes associated with employment and housing after the war. For Nisei women hoping to return to urban areas, domestic work offered the best prospects for employment. Other, less sought-after positions, included work as a

⁶² Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 181.

beautician or as a factory operative.⁶³ For women attempting to return to affluent, predominantly white towns like Palo Alto, housing proved a more difficult barrier to resettlement and favored single women without children. Edith Emerson wrote Isenberg in June of 1945, six months after the military lifted the West Coast ban on Japanese Americans, asking for a “returning Japanese” man to work half a day per week in her garden and “someone for house work” for two half days per week. A couple months earlier, Alice T. Ford wrote Isenberg to inquire about potential “Japanese servants.” She asked for advice on the appropriate amount to pay one such servant, given room and board, and how she could hire a maid from one of the incarceration camps.⁶⁴ These two letters demonstrate the range of available situations offered in Palo Alto at this time. Emerson’s letter indicates the need for workers who might make a living from multiple part-time domestic positions in the area. Additionally, it assumes that those individuals would have lodging elsewhere. As Isenberg made clear in several of her letters to Japanese American individuals writing to her, “housing is the biggest problem here; finding work is no difficulty.”⁶⁵ Some, like Alice Ford, had the means to offer room and board to full-time employees yet these positions also came with limitations since most of these boarding positions accommodated only single people or married couples. For example, Isenberg replied to one Mrs. M. Motoki’s inquiry for domestic positions and housing for her and her husband, implying that the family would be able to accommodate

⁶³ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 191-193.

⁶⁴ Alice T. Ford to Gerda Isenberg, 23 April 1945, folder 1, box 2, Gerda Isenberg Papers, BANC.

⁶⁵ Gerda Isenberg to Miss Suzuki, 6 April 1945, folder 3, box 2, Gerda Isenberg Papers, BANC.

the separate living quarters Motoki specified in her letter.⁶⁶ Housing, then, was attainable, but in Palo Alto it was often contingent upon single or married inhabitants

However, larger families hoping to find domestic jobs in urban areas appeared to have had more difficulty finding housing. Harry Yasumura's experience echoes this theme, as he endeavored to find homes for his parents and brother in San Francisco. He wrote Isenberg in November 1945 to follow up on previous correspondence concerning finding positions in Palo Alto, which Isenberg ultimately was unable to provide assistance with. Only a day prior, he found employment and board for his mother in a house and reported his efforts to find similar positions for his brother and father nearby. "Although this plan is not a satisfactory one, after several family discussions, we have agreed that entering a home separately would [be] a stepping stone to a normal life."⁶⁷ Despite struggles to stay together through the trials of incarceration, resettlement posed a new challenge to families and often resulted in separation, or occluded the possibility of their desired home.

Gender also influenced the particular barriers that incarcerated women faced in finding employment and housing. Eleanor Kubo wrote Isenberg in May of 1945 from Heart Mountain, hoping that Palo Alto held the opportunity for her to work and for her three children to attend school. She inquired after a domestic position for herself and housing for herself and her children. Although her husband was still in U.S. custody, the WRA had begun to pressure incarcerated women to leave camp following their announcement in January

⁶⁶ Gerda Isenberg to Mrs. M. Motoki, 1945, folder 1, box 2, Gerda Isenberg Papers, BANC.

⁶⁷ Harry Yasumura to Gerda Isenberg, 10 November 1945, folder 22, box 2, Gerda Isenberg Papers, BANC.

of 1945.⁶⁸ Isenberg regretfully informed Kubo that there were no houses available to rent in the area and that it was very difficult to find an available boarding situation for so many people. She suggested that Kubo inquire about housing in nearby San Jose—although other letters written to Isenberg indicate that San Jose had gained a reputation as a hostile place for Japanese Americans. Incarceration facilitated and often necessitated the increasing presence of Nisei women in the workforce—a trend that continued after they left the camps. Discrimination meant that Nisei men often found work as manual laborers or were forced to move to find jobs for their specific skill set; by comparison, Nisei women generally found increasing employment prospects in the decade following the war and “for many families, the rise in female economic participation proved vital to entering the ranks of the middle class.”⁶⁹ Incarceration influenced a shift in gender roles, as Nisei women left camps to go to universities or work and took on economic responsibilities that had traditionally belonged to Issei men.⁷⁰ Additionally, as in the case of Eleanor Kubo, incarceration or military service left some women alone to figure things out for themselves and their children during the period of resettlement—ultimately influencing the kinds of positions and housing they found available to them.

The vast number of Japanese Americans who returned to the West Coast indicates the pull to return home. For many, home consisted not of a house or land, but of a familiar region, recognizable community, and milder climate. Sato, a farmer originally

⁶⁸ The military announced the opening of the west coast on January 2, 1945 and the WRA announced that it would close all incarceration camps by the end of the 1945. They began to shut down all but the most necessary services within camps to encourage quick resettlement.

⁶⁹ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 203.

⁷⁰ Matsumoto addresses this shift initially in her earlier book *Farming the Home Place* (1993) and later in *City Girls* (2014), which addresses both women’s paid and unpaid labor as influential during this period.

from Stockton, said in regards to his decision to return west, “Regardless of the obstacles one likes to return to familiar places.”⁷¹ One man hoping to resettle from Chicago lamented, “I am used to [working] under the sun, as [a] gardener, [and] both of us should like to go back [to] very nice state of California, as the climate [is] very nice and also California folks [are] interested] and [have] much understanding of our people.”⁷² He was not the only one to cite California’s climate and environment as reasons to return to the West Coast; those who worked in agriculture and as fisherman prior to the war, especially, had a very real incentive to return to a familiar landscape. Others may have wanted to get away from the unforgiving climates that characterized incarceration camps. Aiko Kitaji’s husband took field labor jobs all over the Midwest while she remained in camp and, in response to her suggestion to move east or stay in Arizona, he responded firmly in the negative. Kitaji remembers him telling her, “I hate this hot weather, especially with whirlwinds. Dust storms. Nothing but sand.”⁷³ They were a few of the seventy-five thousand people who left the camps after January 1, 1945—two-thirds of this group returned to the West Coast.⁷⁴

Many Japanese Americans felt that their future lay on the West Coast. Akira Kato, the sixteen-year-old boy who boarded a train to the unknown in August 1942, returned to California following incarceration and his later service in the Korean War. California was his home. His struggle to find employment and housing, and his subsequent movements all across the Central Valley never shook his resolve to settle

⁷¹ Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 175.

⁷² Unknown to Gerda Isenberg, 9 April 1945, folder 2, box 2, Gerda Isenberg Papers, BANC. 2

⁷³ Aiko Kitaji, *REgenerations Oral History Project*, 261.

⁷⁴ Chiang, *Farming the Home Place*, 181.

down there. And that's exactly what he did. He moved to Santa Clara County for good in 1958, became a gardener, and lived out the rest of his years there. Despite Kato's success in finding a stable home and employment on the West Coast, his story included several moments at which patterns of compelled migrations demonstrated his tenuous position. Frequent movement, uprooting, and uncertainty characterized his experience of incarceration and the opportunities—or lack thereof—he encountered following his release.

CHAPTER IV

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: JAPANESE AMERICAN RENUNCIANTS AND THE TRANSNATIONAL STORY OF THEIR RESETTLEMENT

The Nishibaru neighborhood in the Mii district of Fukuoka, Japan, lies on the northern bank of a small river that meanders through two small, rural towns before leading out to the East China Sea. The neighborhood is sparsely populated today. Small plots of farmland separate houses and low cedar-block fences intermittently line neighborhood roads.¹ Nagasaki lies ninety miles south—close enough that the residents likely saw the cloud of ash rise over the city after the infamous atomic bombing on August 9, 1945. Less than two years after that mushroom cloud rose in the distance, a man named Masayuki Akiyoshi wrote a letter from his new home address in the Nishibaru neighborhood to a San Franciscan lawyer named Wayne Collins. Written in May 1947, the letter was likely only one of many Akiyoshi wrote in his first year living in Japan as a stateless person. His parents, brother, friends, and most everyone he had come to know over the course of his life still resided in the United States following the war.²

Born in Los Angeles, California, in 1917 to two Japanese citizens, Akiyoshi received dual citizenship upon his birth. He went on to renounce his Japanese citizenship in 1937 and served in the U.S. military for a year before the Army honorably discharged him and other Japanese Americans in the armed forces following the attack on Pearl

¹ Street View of Tachiari, Fukuoka, Google Maps, Google, Dec 2013, https://www.google.com/maps/@33.363734,130.6446623,3a,75y,284.14h,78.45t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sguvUxifrgLHL48y6O8V8BQ!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo0.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DguvUxifrgLHL48y6O8V8BQ%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D20%26pitch%3D-10%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656

² Masayuki Akiyoshi to Wayne Collins, May 14, 1947, folder 1, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

Harbor. While incarcerated during World War II, Akiyoshi elected to renounce his U.S. birthright citizenship—a process the U.S. Defense Department designed for the radical factions of incarcerated Japanese Americans. The Hokoku Seinen Dan (Young Men's Association to Serve the Nation), a pro-Japan nationalist and cultural group in Tule Lake, was the most visible of these factions. Akiyoshi counted himself a member of this group and, following his renunciation and request for repatriation, he left the United States for Japan in 1946. It was not his first time living in Japan. As with many other Nisei Japanese Americans, his parents had sent him to Japan from the ages of six to nine to attend school and live with his extended family. He still felt the sinews of these connections twenty years later when, enraged by the U.S. government's treatment of him and other Japanese Americans and demonized for his involvement in the Hokoku Seinen Dan, he made his decision to return. He arrived in Japan to an ailing grandmother, an aunt, an uncle, post-war chaos and scarcity, and an occupying force led by the United States. The letter he wrote to Collins in May 1957 announced his desire to join the lawsuit of five thousand other renunciants in both the U.S. and Japan, which argued that their decision had been made under duress and under unlawful conditions.³

The renunciation program and its subsequent fallout is essential for understanding the extent to which various bureaucratic agencies attempted to uproot Japanese Americans from legal and social belonging in the United States. By initiating the renunciation program during the period of incarceration, the Department of Defense strove to substantiate legal means by which to nullify citizenship and carry out deportation on the basis of national origin. The renunciation program essentially provided

³ Affidavit of Akiyoshi Masayuki, September 6, 1957, folder 1, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

justification for the logic behind the Tule Lake segregation center and, more broadly, incarceration. It ostensibly demonstrated that Japanese Americans posed a threat to some people's vision of America and shifted the responsibility for uprooting from the nation to the renunciants themselves. The prolonged struggle to regain citizenship extended far beyond the end of the war, illustrating one of the tangible ways in which incarceration during the war connected to larger patterns of legal discrimination and exclusion. Renunciants' liminal position on the boundary of citizenship created uncertainty as to what their inclusion in a national sense of home looked like. Stateless Nisei in the United States and Japan during the 1940s and 1950s felt the tangible impact of their legal status in this instability. More importantly, the threat of deportation forced many renunciants to reframe the ways they presented their own transcultural understanding of home in the United States; they reframed their identities as solely and purely "American" in order to bargain for their claim to belonging. These articulations of self, of culture, of belonging did not always sway legal decisions, and the renunciation program created a long, drawn out period of displacement—legally and/or geographically—that played out across national borders, personal relationships, and bureaucrats' desks. The uprooting of renunciants from the sense of home accessible to fellow Americans led them to adopt new understandings of the barriers to belonging that they faced as Japanese Americans in the United States.

Wayne Collins, the lawyer who handled the renunciant cases, was an experienced and reportedly "fiery" lawyer with a reputation for taking unpopular or particularly difficult cases that other lawyers avoided and had worked closely with ACLU lawyers in

the past.⁴ He worked tirelessly to end Japanese American incarceration, arguing Fred Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo's cases in front of the Supreme Court in 1944, and continued to represent Japanese Americans in court until his death in 1974. Tall, with a shock of white hair, foreboding brow, and a penchant for pinstriped suits, he cut an intimidating figure. His work on these cases never brought him exceptional financial gain or unequivocal respect—indeed, some Nisei have reflected on him as a “hero” while others have called him a “fanatic” or a “lunatic.”⁵ These cases consumed his entire life; he burned professional and personal bridges in his uncompromising quest.⁶ In 1972, a Nisei activist organizing a museum exhibit for the California Historical Society suggested Collins as a candidate for writing the exhibit's conclusion with a caveat that summed up the lawyer's character: “He will write you a conclusion that printers will not print. If you haven't met Mr. Collins, you haven't experienced the bitterness of 110,000 evacuees in one fighting Irishman.”⁷ In the twenty-three years that Collins handled the renunciant cases, thousands of documents came into his possession; still, these likely constitute only a fraction of the documents that would reveal the renunciants' entire story.

Renunciants' stories cross national borders and archives, as well as language. It is difficult to track the movements and experiences of Japanese Americans in the United States after World War II and even more difficult to track those repatriated or expatriated to Japan. Those silences, present in the very files of the lawyer determining their

⁴ Brian Niiya and Greg Robinson, "Wayne M. Collins," *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Wayne%20M.%20Collins/>

⁵ Brian Niiya and Greg Robinson. "Wayne M. Collins," *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Wayne%20M.%20Collins/>

⁶ Charles Wollenberg, *Rebel Lawyer: Wayne Collins and the Defense of Japanese American Rights* (San Francisco, CA: California Historical Society, 2018), 106.

⁷ Wollenberg, *Rebel Lawyer*, 106.

citizenship status, suggest the unsuccessful conclusion to their cases. In the documents Collins accumulated, U.S. bureaucrats, lawyers, renunciants, and their families made their respective cases, revealing the ways in which they chose to represent their histories and past decisions to make their arguments. This particular window into their attempts to regain legal status and physical permanence in the U.S. highlights the stakes under which they wrote and their feelings of urgency.

Renunciants were a proportionately small group of the total number of Japanese Americans incarcerated during the war but, significantly, represented the final iteration of a group whittled down by policies imposed by various bureaucratic efforts. In the days and weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Department of Justice arrested 2,192 Japanese aliens, 1,393 German nationals, and 264 Italian nationals.⁸ One important distinction between these groups, besides the numbers targeted and surveilled by the Justice Department, was their race and access to citizenship. The 1924 Immigration Act solidified earlier legislation that barred Japanese immigrants from citizenship entirely, meaning that virtually no first-generation Japanese Americans held citizenship at the outbreak of World War II regardless of time spent in the United States or their social and economic roots.⁹ The Justice Department arrested Issei Japanese American religious, economic, and cultural leaders. They interned these especially “suspicious” individuals in detention facilities and held individual loyalty hearings. The government subsequently kept some of the detainees in these facilities and “paroled” others to incarceration centers.

⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 175.

⁹ The 1917 Immigration Act created an “Asiatic barred zone” that did not include Japan, with whom the United States wanted to maintain a friendly relationship. The 1922 case *Ozawa v. United States*, however, deemed Asian immigrants racially ineligible for naturalization. The 1924 Immigration Act did not specifically name Japanese immigrants, but barred “alien[s] ineligible for citizenship”—a euphemism for Asian immigrants deemed racially ineligible for citizenship—from immigration to the U.S.

Many of these people eventually ended up at the Tule Lake segregation center, especially following the administration of the disastrous loyalty questionnaire in the spring of 1943. Those who gave unsatisfactory answers to questions concerning loyalty and their willingness to aid the war effort gave their answers for a variety of reasons, including those stimulated by fear, anger, and confusion. Many of these individuals, responding to a questionnaire officially titled “Application for Leave Clearance,” believed their answers determined whether they would face a sudden relocation to the unknown and reportedly hostile Midwest or East Coast.¹⁰ Many of those who answered “no-no” on these “applications” hoped to avoid confronting a country that found them suspect. This motivation may have influenced later decisions to renounce citizenship because, ultimately, renunciants likely feared that they would always be treated with suspicion and fear in the United States.

In addition to those whose answers the review board deemed disloyal, three thousand incarcerated requested repatriation or expatriation during the registration period.¹¹ By 1944, the number of people requesting repatriation or expatriation reached twenty thousand.¹² The loyalty questionnaire placed additional pressure on the excluded and incarcerated populations that saw potential for their future in Japan. Family ties, cultural or political affinity, and the potential for legal claims to citizenship in Japan likely made this option more practical. After all, the U.S. government made it very clear

¹⁰ “War Relocation Authority: Application for Leave Clearance,” 1943, Yamanaka Collection, Densho Digital Repository.

¹¹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 184. Initially, the Japanese American Joint Board (JAJB), a collaborative board to coordinate related work of the War Department and the WRA, first reviewed the loyalty questionnaires. Review became the sole responsibility of the military by October 1943.

¹² Cherstin Lyon. "Denaturalization Act of 1944/Public Law 78-405," *Densho Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Denaturalization%20Act%20of%201944/Public%20Law%2078-405/>

that it was all too willing to test the validity and protections of Japanese American citizenship. Additionally, incarceration and the questionnaire signaled to Issei Japanese that the U.S. was unlikely to grant them citizenship anytime soon. The war held the potential to intensify the consequences of their status as “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”¹³ These requests, however, signaled to the WRA that a more radical faction of the group of “disloyals” existed. The roughly eighteen thousand individuals eventually incarcerated in the Tule Lake segregation center represent a group that the War Relocation Authority singled out as disloyal. The identification of these people as “real” threats maintained the illusion that incarceration actively protected the home front. Maligned and labeled as credible threats, 85 percent of incarcerated over the age of seventeen at Tule Lake applied to renounce their citizenship.¹⁴

On July 1, President Roosevelt signed the Denaturalization Act of 1944 into law as a final attempt to justify Japanese American incarceration. Although the courts upheld the validity of the government’s treatment of Japanese Americans in test cases during 1943, a series of test cases that promised to compromise the constitutionality was moving toward the Supreme Court during 1944.¹⁵ Concerned by this threat and the prospect of releasing the incarcerated of Tule Lake, Attorney General Francis Biddle proposed an amendment to the Nationality Act of 1940 to allow Japanese American citizens to renounce their own citizenship. Previously, only those American citizens residing abroad for long periods during times of war could renounce that citizenship. This new legislation

¹³ 1924 Immigration Act, Pub. L. No. 68-139, 43 Stat. 153 (1924).

¹⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 189.

¹⁵ The U.S. Supreme Court heard cases *Hirabayashi v. United States* and *Yasui v. United States* in May 1943 and upheld the military’s right to impose curfew and incarcerate those individuals in June 1943. *Hirabayashi v. United States*, 320 U.S. 81 (1943); *Yasui v. United States*, 320 U.S. 115 (1943).

established an application process for renunciation, requiring specific approval by the U.S. Attorney General. Previous legislation limited allowances for denaturalization because of the potential threat during wartime posed by those attempting to avoid the draft or legal action in cases of treason. This new law made it possible to create stateless people who could be subject to continued incarceration and, eventually, deportation to Japan.

Additionally, the new law justified the government's policy of exclusion, incarceration, and segregation. By demonstrating that it had singled out a group of the most disloyal and dangerous incarcerated of Tule Lake, the government hoped to demonstrate the necessity and effectiveness of both mass incarceration and the loyalty questionnaire. In a heated letter to the Director of the ACLU, Edward J. Ennis—the director of the Alien Enemy Control Unit of the Department of Justice—praised the renunciation program for the “important public benefits” it imparted and painted it as a “victory for civil liberties.”¹⁶ He insisted that there was no scenario in which he could have safely released the members of the Hokoku Seinen Dan and that the renunciation program is what had finally convinced the military to lift the exclusion ban and allow the camps to close, thereby ensuring the freedom of innocent incarcerated. Unable to charge members of the Hokoku Seinen Dan with any crime, the Department of Defense came up with a solution that framed continued incarceration and eventual removal as their own choice. And, as all choices are created from circumstances transmitted from the past, it was a choice.¹⁷ Some renunciants chose to rid themselves of citizenship they came to see

¹⁶ Edward J. Ennis to Ernest Besig, 22 August 1945, folder 6, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

¹⁷ For more on the concept of agency, see Walter Johnson, “On Agency.”

as meaningless. However, camp administrators did not clarify the consequences of their choice, and the context of prolonged incarceration and racial discrimination narrowed alternative choices available to them. Still, some renunciants were likely aware of the potentially negative repercussions, but chose to take a calculated risk anyway. Renunciants chose to apply for renunciation, but from a coerced and vulnerable position in which they had few good options available to them.

Although it did not specifically name any particular group, the law applied solely to Japanese American Nisei. Between 1944 and 1946, 5,589 Nisei renounced their citizenship.¹⁸ All but 128 of these resided in the Tule Lake segregation camp.¹⁹ Although Attorney General Biddle proposed the law with the militant pro-Japan nationalist group Hokoku Seinen Dan in mind, the number of people requesting renunciation far surpassed its membership numbers. Only a small minority renounced out of anger or political beliefs. Historian Mae Ngai argues that these decisions commonly emerged from practical, instrumental considerations.²⁰ Many people later insisted that they were pressured by the pervasive and sometimes violent influence of the Hokoku Seinen Dan. Although this group very well could have been one of the main influences, the timeline of renunciation suggests that some people may have scapegoated the maligned organization to support their own cases and that other factors likely took precedent in influencing the decision. Hokoku Seinen Dan began encouraging renunciations by their fellow incarcerated in October 1944—when the WRA introduced the renunciation to the

¹⁸ Cherstin Lyon, "Denaturalization Act of 1944/Public Law 78-405," *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Denaturalization%20Act%20of%201944/Public%20Law%2078-405/>.

¹⁹ Those other 128 cases of renunciation likely came out of detention centers in Texas and Arizona.

²⁰ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 190.

camps—but the vast majority of renunciation requests poured in after mid-December 1944.²¹ This coincides with the *Ex Parte Endo* Supreme Court decision, in which they declared the continuing incarceration of loyal Japanese Americans unconstitutional. Subsequently, the military ended mass exclusion from the West Coast, and the WRA announced they would close all camps within the next year. Many people expressed intense fear of resettlement within the general population of America. Camps represented a horrible injustice, but also acted as a buffer between Japanese Americans and the nation that chose to exclude them. Furthermore, the military created a list of incarceratedees that would continue to be barred from resettling on the West Coast. Those on this list faced an unknown resettlement without the comfort of returning to their home state and communities.²² During individual exclusion hearings for those who appeared on this list, camp administrators posed only two choices: leave camp or renounce citizenship.²³ Many Nisei chose to renounce their citizenship to put off resettlement, assuming that surrendering legal status would not preclude remaining in the United States. After all, statelessness had not impeded their Issei parents from building their lives in the United States.

Renunciation likely made practical sense for many families who had real economic or familial ties in Japan and anticipated a better, more secure life there. Renunciation gave Nisei the same legal status as their Issei parents. Families often renounced together, replicating patterns of loyalty questionnaire answers intended to keep

²¹ Only six hundred incarceratedees renounced their citizenship between October and mid-December of 1944; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 189.

²² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 189.

²³ *Ibid.*

families together. Many young Nisei later reported that their own Issei parents forced them to renounce their citizenship.²⁴ Because their Issei parents did not have citizenship at stake in these appeals, renunciants may have attributed their decision to their parents' influence to prove "coercion" rather than other, perhaps less acceptable reasons for renouncing. This is not to say that parental pressure may not have played a significant role—indeed, Issei often still had family or community ties in Japan and some even owned property there—but to acknowledge the ways renunciants may have framed these narratives in their legal appeals. Although many Nisei grew up entirely in the United States, many of them had attended Japanese school and had the language skills to communicate effectively in Japan. Some had even lived in Japan during their adolescence and received schooling there. This group—the Kibei—was overly represented at Tule Lake because extensive time spent in Japan was a marker of potential disloyalty that had factored into the loyalty categorization and subsequent transfer to the Tule Lake segregation center.²⁵ Their background in Japan influenced the popularity of renunciation among Kibei. Cultural, political, and familial ties established through experience created the contexts in which many Kibei made this decision in order to pursue the possibility of a future in Japan—a possibility that was less attainable for Nisei without these particular ties.

Japanese nationalists at Tule Lake simultaneously rejected ties to the nation that rejected them and established connections to a new nation. Pressures to declare loyalty to the United States called into question the legitimacy of their presence and their past in the

²⁴ Renunciant cases F-T, August-November 1945, folders 13-22, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

²⁵ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 39-62.

U.S. Most Japanese Americans vehemently confirmed their ties to the U.S. By declaring themselves “truly American” they shaped their origin narrative into one of assimilation and stirring nationalism. However, the challenge that incarceration posed to Japanese Americans’ claim to belonging in the U.S. also prompted expressions of Japanese nationalism. Contrary to these confirmations of assimilation and loyalty, members of the Hokoku Seinen Dan took Japanese language classes, assembled for daily morning drills, and strongly encouraged expatriation or repatriation to Japan.²⁶ Rather than deny accusations of their inherent difference, the Hokoku Seinen Dan leaned into the fissures those accusations created and strove to create new means of belonging through organizing and imagining a place for themselves in Japan. Historian Susan Matt argues that a sense of homesickness amongst immigrant communities can be tied to the creation of specific origin narratives that evoke foreign nationalism.²⁷ The Hokoku Seinen Dan encouraged a shared sense of pride predicated on national origin. The group fostered the idea of a common link to Japan and a narrative that allowed them a legitimate, meaningful claim to belonging to a nation. They found only doubt and exclusion in the United States and chose to seek acceptance elsewhere.

Repatriation or expatriation and renunciation, while indelibly linked during this period, represented differing means of removal. Those who requested repatriation or expatriation indicated a desire to leave the United States altogether. Those who applied to renounce citizenship surrendered their legal status in the United States, but did not necessarily indicate the desire to depart. In the context of geographic and metaphorical

²⁶ Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial*, 170-172.

²⁷ Matt, ““You Can’t Go Home Again,”” 488.

exclusion, these decisions represent distinct choices that incarcerated made to control their movement and status as much as they could. Not everyone who applied for expatriation applied for renunciation, and vice versa. Additionally, these application forms were introduced during different periods of incarceration; incarcerated applied for repatriation as early as 1943 in response to the loyalty questionnaire, but the renunciation application was not introduced until late in 1944. Incarcerated sent renunciation applications to the Justice Department until the end of February 1945, and the attorney general approved 5,049 of those requests.²⁸ The Justice Department attempted to tie legal and physical exclusion together when, in October 1945, the Department of Justice released a notice announcing that all renunciants at Tule Lake needed to immediately apply for repatriation. This notice explicitly conflated renunciation and removal, stating that those who had renounced their citizenship had, in doing so, “indicated [their] desire to be repatriated to Japan.”²⁹ It requested that they complete an application for repatriation in order to prepare for a systematic registration process with the department. The Denaturalization Act had opened the door to merge two programs together to uproot Japanese Americans from their legal claims to protections and belonging, as well as their physical presence in the United States.

Like incarceration itself, however, this process stood on unstable legal ground. As the Department of Justice geared up for a massive slate of removals in November 1945, it experienced pushback from renunciants that stalled government officials in their tracks. In the latter half of 1945, what had once been an abstract idea changed, and they now

²⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 191.

²⁹ Notice to all Japanese Renunciants Tule Lake Center, October 1945, folder 6, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

faced the very real threat of removal. Suddenly, the impact of their distant decision to renounce their citizenship meant removal to Japan—a country in which some renunciants had never set foot. Renunciation initially seemed to offer a reprieve from displacement to an unknown place and community. Now, it promised even more distant and unfamiliar displacement under seemingly irreversible circumstances. Most Japanese Americans grew up watching the older generation maneuver the United States without citizenship. Issei could not own land or vote in elections, but their lack of citizenship did not prevent them from making the United States their home. During the late summer and fall of 1945, the fate of renunciants who decided they wanted their U.S. citizenship back hung in the balance. Neither these renunciants nor the various U.S. bureaucratic agencies involved with renunciation knew the future outcome of these cases with certainty. During these months, federal agencies faced off with renunciants and with each other. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and Japan's surrender in September increased the stakes of the debate and changed renunciants' ideas of the potential home that awaited them if they were deported. This geopolitical context and the conflict among U.S. departments themselves intensified the precariousness of renunciants' situations and feelings of uprootedness. Those who fought for their citizenship did so with the knowledge that their government was ready to strip them of their status as Americans. As statelessness loomed large on the horizon of possibilities, renunciants experienced the terrible vulnerability of their position. Fighting to stay in a nation unwilling to protect them or forgive perceived transgressions, it became clear that they had failed to perform the necessary qualities of conditional inclusion earlier in the

war. In exchange, the government indicated their willingness to uproot them from the nation.

As the end of the war approached, various bureaucratic agencies struggled to uphold their own goals and self-image. Their internal clashes over the renunciants resulted in misdirection and confusion. As renunciants appealed to various agencies and individuals, they received contradictory answers that prolonged the uncertainty of their status. T. Furuya, for example, wrote to the director of the ACLU in late July 1945 asking for help in withdrawing his application for renunciation.³⁰ Despite the WRA's ambitious deadline for closing the camps and its vigilant pursuit of its resettlement program since the beginning of 1943, only fifteen hundred incarcerated had returned to California by March 1945.³¹ By summer 1945, it became clear that the war was winding down, in light of the Soviet Union's agreement to join the fight in the Pacific Theater and the Allies capture of Iwo Jima, and resettlement escalated in anticipation.³² Furuya, along with several other renunciants, began to explore the possibility of resettlement. By this time, renunciants received notice that the Attorney General had approved their application; they knew they would be leaving camp without their U.S. citizenship. Ernest Bresig, the Director of the ACLU, responded to Furuya confused about the legal basis for declaring Furuya an "alien enemy" and suggested he write to the Western Defense Command

³⁰ T. Furuya to Ernest Besig, July 23, 1945, ACLU Renunciant Cases F-T, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

³¹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 188.

³² In February 1945, the Soviet Union agreed to join the fight against Japan in the Pacific and on March 26, 1945 Allied troops captured Iwo Jima.

(WDC) general in San Francisco to appeal his segregation orders.³³ Several other renunciants similarly reached out to the WRA and the WDC, assuming these agencies could authorize their release. One individual wrote, “I am planning to relocate, so I would like to keep my citizenship if I can.”³⁴ All of these renunciants hoped to be released; however, they found that the Department of Defense had other plans in mind. Several people received approval from the WRA and WDC only to be denied release by the Department of Justice.³⁵ By September 1945, Ernest Besig of the ACLU began warning renunciants that the Department of Justice planned to detain them in internment camps until re/expatriation.³⁶ This disconnect between the military, the WRA, and the Department of Defense hints not only at miscommunication and the unintended consequences of the renunciation program, but at the blatant disagreement between agencies. In August 1945, Edward Ennis of the Department of Defense office reported that the Attorney General recently wrote to the WRA requesting detention of all incarcerated on the renunciation list. The WRA acquiesced to this request, but only after approving the release of those renunciants whom the agency planned to release with all the other incarcerated.

As renunciants reckoned with the mixed messages they received from the various agencies detaining them, they also suffered the anxiety imposed by the period of

³³ The WDC distributed segregation orders based on the loyalty questionnaire. Segregation orders resulted in transfers to the Tule Lake Segregation Center; Ernest Besig to T. Furuya, August 1, 1945, ACLU Renunciant Cases F-T, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

³⁴ Kazuo Koga to Ernest Besig, August 22, 1945, ACLU Renunciant Cases, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

³⁵ Edward Ennis to Ernest Besig, August 25, 1945, folder 6, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC; Shigero Kawano to Edward Ennis, August 20, 1945, folder 14, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

³⁶ Ernest Besig to David W. T. Araki, September 5, 1945, folder 10, box 20, Collins Papers, BANC.

confusion. Because renunciants often corresponded by letter with three different agencies and consulted outside parties—such as ACLU Director Ernest Besig—they spent time awaiting these contradictory answers. A reply from one agency, however, rarely contained a final answer and led only to further confusion and correspondence. A few renunciants expressed the hardship of waiting in their written appeals. One individual wrote: “It’s awful to stay in here day after day, wondering what the future has in store for you, until you’re ready to fly off the handle.”³⁷ This correspondent continued to write to both Besig and Ennis through September and, as her case required her parents to both submit affidavits to the court, it is likely her status continued to be unknown for quite some time after. Government agencies and renunciants alike could not foresee the outcome of this conflict. However, this lack of clarity forced renunciants to feel the impact of this uncertainty most acutely.

Even as this conflict played out amongst various government departments and bureaucrats, renunciants made plans for their life in America after the war. They planned to reunite with family and friends, attend school, and go back to work. One Tule Lake high schooler, Shigero Kawano, planned to attend university the following year. He was an excellent student, and Ohio State University and Washington University in St. Louis accepted him to their programs. His teachers and principal describe him as a good student, but “an emotional type of lad, highly receptive to outside influences.”³⁸ Several teachers and members of his school wrote similar testimonies on his behalf. They emphasized his youth at the time of his application, the power of radical groups within

³⁷ Akiko Fukuhara to Edward Ennis, August, 28, 1945, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

³⁸ Kenneth M. Harkness to Edward Ennis, August 9, 1945, folder 14, box 12, Collins Papers, BANC.

the camp, and the educational promise of his future. Regardless of these testimonies, Ennis wrote to Besig later that month denying Kawano permission to leave Tule Lake. It is unclear when they finally released Kawano from Tule Lake, but it was likely not until 1946.

The threat of expatriation for renunciants created new and heightened anxieties around the possibility of separation from family. Since Issei never held U.S. citizenship to begin with, they did not join their children in renouncing their citizenship. Ironically, although many Nisei renounced so as to avoid resettlement and/or remain with their family, some renunciants found themselves trapped in Tule Lake while their parents and friends were released. Kisao Kamada renounced her citizenship at the wishes of her mother, who was concerned that camp officials could not guarantee they would not be separated. Her mother did not hold U.S. citizenship, and her brother was too young to independently renounce his own citizenship. In the mounting pressure to resettle incarcerated, the Relocation Office at Tule Lake told her mother and brother to relocate without her.³⁹ Kamada and her family faced the possibility of indefinite separation across an ocean—Kamada's brother and mother in the United States and her in Japan. The possibility of separation came as a direct result of the devastating bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shoso Jimmie Kanemori renounced his citizenship, planning to join his mother, brothers, and sisters in Hiroshima after a prolonged separation of eight years. He lost his entire family and home in the bombing and wrote the Department of Justice afterward to withdraw his request for renunciation. His only remaining family resided in the United States, and he feared separation from them, as well as the place he knew as

³⁹ Kisao Kamada to Ernest Besig, September 5, 1945, folder 14, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

home for most of his life. Kanemori's case illuminates the varying, shifting ways in which people imagined home for themselves. Kanemori initially chose to reunite with his nuclear family but, when that future proved impossible, he sought other means of connection—other means of finding both a physical and immaterial home.

The decision to renounce and, later, to fight for their citizenship ultimately required renunciants to make key decisions about what home meant to them and the things they were willing to give up in order to attain that real or imagined home. Renunciants' letters, though distinct, follow a similar format. The loyalty questionnaire included several questions about incarceratedees' personal life and family in order to gauge their assimilation into American values and culture. These questions asked incarceratedees to report their membership in "clubs, societies, associations, etc." as well as list their hobbies and the sports they played.⁴⁰ Additionally, the questionnaire asked for a list of presumably native-born white Americans who could give character references.⁴¹ It also asked individuals to provide information about their relatives residing in the United States and, if they served in the military, to indicate whether their service was voluntary or compelled. While it is possible that the inclusion of these specific details in later appeals came about, in part, as a logical response to the values espoused by the loyalty questionnaire, it was more likely the result of standardized legal advice from Collins.

Collins often sent responses to renunciants' affidavits that included pointed questions for them to answer in their subsequent draft. These questions allowed

⁴⁰ "War Relocation Authority: Application for Leave Clearance," 1943, Yamanaka Collection, Densho Digital Repository.

⁴¹ Question 20 did not explicitly state "native-born white American," yet it did state that the reference could not be a relative or former employer. The purpose was obviously to ask if anyone outside of the Japanese American community would be willing to vouch for them.

renunciants to reframe their experiences in ways that would more likely bring about a favorable legal decision. This is not to doubt the truthfulness of their testimony, but to acknowledge the specific way they presented their identities and past decisions. Their letters bear the traces of Collins' coaching and of the tactics they used as a group to regain citizenship.⁴² Many of their letters included their birthdate and birthplace. Several people included this detail directly below their signed name with no introduction or explanation attached—as if attaching a personal title. Its implications obviously needed no contextualization; renunciants hoped to wield the significance afforded to birthplace in the allocation of citizenship for their purposes by attaching their credentials as American-born citizens to their signatures.

Similarly, they included evidence of participation in American culture and society. Several men highlighted their previous military service and honorable discharge. Almost every letter included a description of various family members and discussed their contributions to the United States. They prioritized discussing family members in the military, detailing the location of their service abroad, rank, and injuries or death. Lists of family members also included details about education, especially university attendance. A few renunciants who wrote especially detailed letters outlined their work experience prior to or during the war, emphasizing agricultural work and business—two occupations that often characterized American values surrounding freedom and socioeconomic mobility. One renunciant, David William Takatsune Araki, even went so far as to include his Boy Scout certificate. He discussed his accolades and the leadership positions he held

⁴² Individual Case Files, Renunciants, 1944-1969, boxes 7-21, Collins Papers, BANC; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 198-199.

as a Boy Scout, listing his troop number and leader, and praised the quality of his experiences while part of the organization. Araki also included a portrait of himself in his letter to the Justice Department “for you to see with whom you are corresponding.”⁴³ In doing so, he attempted to humanize himself to the bureaucrats he pleaded with. These details drew a picture of the varied ways in which renunciants remained rooted in the United States. Through their arguments, they articulated their understanding of home and tethered their appeal for citizenship to the things they identified as American. They offered up these threads as evidence that they had indeed made a home and a community for themselves in the United States—that they held deeply rooted ties to American culture and soil.

In doing so, they simultaneously disavowed other understandings of home associated with Japanese culture. Many incarcerated at Tule Lake included on the loyalty questionnaire their membership in Japanese cultural or religious organizations, as well as their proficiency in and propensity for Japanese language, sports, and hobbies.⁴⁴ Japanese cultural activities within their ethnic community held significance, in part because it offered a refuge from the impacts of discrimination and exclusion from society, but also because the creation of varied cultural institutions in America helped these communities create new transcultural identities. Susan Matt describes the way that immigrant communities “re-created a *sense* of home” and the familiar in order to alleviate homesickness while creating new identities.⁴⁵ In creating these identities, they formed

⁴³ David William Takatsune Araki to Edward Ennis, August 13, 1945, folder 10, box 20, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁴⁴ Muller, *American Inquisition*, 44-52.

⁴⁵ Matt, ““You Can’t Go Home Again,”” 487.

new meanings of home and belonging as an ethnic community in the United States. By staking their claim to belonging by emphasizing their assimilation to American society, they may not have this implemented this change in practice. However, it likely influenced the way they conceptualized their transcultural identities and organizations. In this context, those identities and organizations were seen as antithetical to belonging, rather than a gateway to it. The threat of expatriation or deportation forced many renunciants to present their connection to American culture in a new way. In presenting this connection to government officials, they were forced to reframe and rethink the way they presented themselves to the United States.

Renunciation also forced many Nisei to choose between alternative versions of home. Incarceration already highlighted generational differences and often placed a strain on traditional family structures, emphasizing connection with peer groups instead. Differing views on renunciation threatened to rend family relationships indefinitely. The damage to these relationships persisted long after the renunciation cases had been resolved. Some Nisei later reported that their own parents coerced them into applying for renunciation. Atsushi Kagiya and Akiko Fukuhara were both seventeen years old when the WRA announced they would be closing all camps within the year. Their age made them eligible to renounce their citizenship and, at the persistent urging of their parents, they submitted their applications. Both later reported feeling immense pressure from their peers and parents, and confusion as to the consequences of repatriation and renunciation. Kagiya even reported that her parents filed her papers for repatriation without her knowledge. Both young women later worked independently to reclaim their legal status and ability to remain in the United States. Their letters to the Department of

Justice, the ACLU, and the WRA represent, if not a real break from their family, the strategic representation of such a divide. Several Nisei appealing to the ACLU and Department of Justice for help cited the strong influence of their parents in their decision to renounce, but later mentioned that their family had gone on to relocate without them. The representation of the radical nature of their parents plans and politics sometimes did not coincide with their family's situation at the time. While disagreements over their strategies for survival surely created friction and harmed relationships within families, Nisei may have overrepresented the rupture of these relationships at times in order to negotiate their own position more convincingly.

Still, renunciation took a significant toll on Japanese American families. Fukuhara included a postscript to both the Department of Defense and the ACLU, asking them to send their replies to a different address because her parents did not know she was fighting for her citizenship.⁴⁶ Her anguish was prevalent in her letters to both men; she linked her decision to a deep sense of belonging in the United States and her identity as an American. "It is so deeply rooted in me, that it would take more than another lifetime to change it."⁴⁷ Fukuhara identified her imagined home as a place and a set of values tied to an American identity. Although she identified the decision to go against her family's wishes as "one of the most serious of [her] life," her transition into adulthood involved reimagining and prioritizing the people, places, and values that she desired in her future.

⁴⁶ Akiko Fukuhara to Edward Ennis, July 31, 1945; Akiko Fukuhara to Ernest Besig, August 28, 1945; Akiko Fukuhara to Edward Ennis, August 28, 1945; Edward Ennis to Akiko Fukuhara, September 26, 1945, all in ACLU Renunciant Files F-T, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁴⁷ Akiko Fukuhara to Edward Ennis, August 28, 1945, folder 13, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

The impact of decisions such as Fukuhara's led to indefinite family separation—by an ocean and by values pertaining to their meaning of home.

The uncertainty of the consequences of renunciation ended in October 1945 when the Defense Department announced that it required all renunciants to apply for repatriation and that deportation would begin on November 15 of the following month. Ennis, the Director of the Alien Enemy Control Unit, responded to appeal letters for cases in which the Attorney General already finalized their approval in the negative. His responses heavily emphasized the petitioners' responsibility for their "choice" and eschewed any further obligation of the Department of Defense. Furthermore, he leaned on the 1922 Supreme Court decision in *Ozawa v. U.S.* that deemed Japanese Americans "racially ineligible" for citizenship. "There is no power possessed by any government official to restore citizenship," he declared. "Under the existing law, citizenship could be regained only through naturalization, and since, as a person of the Japanese race, you are not eligible for naturalization, I can see no way by which your citizenship can be regained."⁴⁸ Ennis maintained that renunciants chose to step out of the door; the fact that the door slammed behind them was none of his concern. The policy for renunciation, as well as the justification for the legitimacy and legality of their expulsion, specifically targeted Japanese Americans for their cultural, racial, and legal ineligibility for belonging. Faced with this barrage of justifications, renunciants spent the several months leading up to their supposed date of deportation in November not knowing which side of the Pacific would comprise their future home. Legal uprooting—or, in some cases, the

⁴⁸ Edward Ennis to Mr. Yoshio Taniguchi, July 27, 1945, folder 6, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

threat of legal uprooting—from the nation therefore impacted the ways people thought about the appeal or lack of appeal of future imagined homes.

The anxiety of the previous months culminated in collective legal action, headed by the Tule Lake Defense Committee and lawyer Wayne M. Collins. Over a thousand renunciants pooled their resources and prepared materials for their case. On November 13, 1945, two days before their planned deportations, Collins filed two mass habeus corpus suits that halted the planned deportations. Over five thousand renunciants requested mitigation hearings with the Department of Justice and became a part of a fourteen-year-long legal battle for restoration of citizenship. In February 1946, 4,406 people who did not request a formal hearing were served deportation orders and boarded a steamer for Japan. This group included 1,523 Issei, 1,116 renunciants, and 1,767 U.S. citizens.⁴⁹ Children and adolescents largely made up this last group, as they were not of a legal age to renounce citizenship for themselves but accompanied their families to Japan. Of the remaining renunciants who requested hearings, the Justice Department insisted on their continuing incarceration even as the WRA simultaneously struggled to close all camps. Collins eventually secured the release of 2,737 renunciants.⁵⁰ These resettled people, however, were still stripped of their citizenship. The Justice Department shipped the remaining 449 renunciants and their families to the family internment camp in Crystal City, Texas, on March 19, 1946. The WRA closed Tule Lake's gates for the last time, marking the official closure of all camps.

⁴⁹ Barbara Takei, "Tule Lake," *Densho Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule%20Lake/> ; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 193.

⁵⁰ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 193.

The continuing fight for the return of renunciants' citizenship on all sides of the globe exemplifies one of the many ways that Japanese American incarceration escaped a tidy conclusion. The impacts of incarceration continued well beyond the end of the war and the closing of the camps for those unaffected by the renunciation program. The more than three thousand renunciants who remained in the United States while stripped of their citizenship lived through a fourteen-year battle to regain legal rights and recognition in the country of their birth. Lack of citizenship held pervasive, long-lasting consequences and signified a sinister attempt to disenfranchise this particular minority group. Law both reflects and perpetuates societal values, and the stripping of their citizenship during this intermediary period represented the continuation of their status as second-class people in society, depriving them of the right to vote, to run for office, to buy or purchase land in California, and to the basic protections afforded to citizens. Collins and leading members of the Tule Lake Defense Committee continued to fight legal battles on their behalf, following their cases through multiple appeals and updated renunciants on the status of their current legal battle. Collins received heavy correspondence from those incarcerated in various internment facilities after March 1946 and from those renunciants who were sent to Japan, but his correspondence with stateless individuals in the United States was limited. While this gap could be due to other extenuating circumstances, it could also demonstrate the priorities of stateless individuals allowed to stay within the continental U.S. Reclamation of legal belonging in the nation likely seemed less pressing or directly impactful once their physical removal was detached from their legal removal. Indeed, many renunciants who appealed to the Defense Department in the fall of 1945 pleaded

for their parole.⁵¹ Already maligned as disloyal and potentially dangerous, they took what they could get in exchange for their security.

Renunciants whom the Defense Department sent to Japan struggled to bridge gaps formed by generation, experience, and political association. These conflicts complicated family connections and their psychological experience of home. Both Violet Kazue, her husband, and her brother applied for renunciation and expatriation, and the Department of Justice expatriated them to Japan after the war. Kazue's brother was a leader within the Hokoku Seinen Dan, and the WRA sent her husband to a detention center for the second part of the war. Kazue had three young children with her in Tule Lake, and she arranged for their expatriation along with her own. Regardless of disagreement over the degree of her involvement in the Hokoku Seinen Dan, it is clear that Kazue gained no advantages through association with her brother.⁵² Kazue also cited her desire to travel to Hiroshima to take care of their mother who was gravely injured in the bombing. Her husband, however, repatriated prior to her arrival in Japan and married another woman, abandoning her to take care of three children in war-torn Hiroshima. In 1948 and 1951, she sent her two oldest children back to the United States but immigration authorities prevented her from accompanying her children. She finally returned to the United States ten years after her expatriation, but struggled to reshape her relationship with her children. In March 1988, in a presentation on her experiences at Washington State

⁵¹ David William Takatsune Araki to Edward Ennis, August 22, 1945, folder 10, box 20, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁵² Violet Kazue argued that one of the sociologists in charge of the University of California's Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study during the war, Dorothy Swaine Thomas, tarnished Kazue's reputation by publishing damning evidence of her involvement in subversive activities at Tule Lake in *The Spoilage* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1946). Kazue's brother, Tokio Yamane, was one of the famous dissenters who spent November 1943 to August 1944 in the Tule Lake stockade, and organized a six day hunger strike in protest.

University, Kazue admitted that her decision to renounce her citizenship and take her children with her—essentially facilitating their deportation—was responsible for their estrangement.⁵³ Children under the age of sixteen comprised 32 percent of those deported. Deportation of children age sixteen to nineteen comprised nearly another 10 percent.⁵⁴ Unlike the Nisei born before 1924, these children never held dual citizenship with Japan. Because they did not enter Japan as citizens, their migration from the United States to Japan can more accurately be described as deportation. Their lives would crisscross oceans, their legal status would vacillate between nations, and their wartime dislocation promised to leave a mark on their unstable experiences of home and belonging.

The Defense Department's insistence that most Nisei held dual citizenship resulted in deportation rather than expatriation. Up until 1924, Japanese law granted citizenship to the children of Japanese nationals regardless of birthplace—a policy called *jus sanguinis*. Many Nisei held dual citizenship for this reason, although anyone born after 1924 did not. In the 1930s, many Nisei renounced their Japanese citizenship in response to rising geopolitical tension.⁵⁵ Still, some reported ignorance of their citizenship status. The Department of Defense denied responsibility for obtaining or considering this information, arguing that “it is reasonable to presume that a person born

⁵³ Violet Kazue, “A Victim of a Tule Lake Anthropologist” (presentation, Fifth National Conference of the Association for Asian American Studies, Washington State University, Pullman, WA, March 24-27, 1988), Violet Kazue Papers, BANC.

⁵⁴ Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, “Table 99: Age by Sex and Citizenship Status: Residents of Tule Lake Center Who Sailed to Japan November 25, 1945-February 23, 1946,” in *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description* (Washington D.C: U.S. Government Printing, 1946), 196.

⁵⁵ Cherstin Lyon, “Dual citizenship,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Dual%20citizenship/>.

in the United States of Japanese parents who during a war between the United States and Japan voluntarily renounces his United States citizenship and declares his allegiance to Japan is, in fact, a national of Japan.”⁵⁶ They proposed treating renunciation and Japanese citizenship synonymously. As a result, several renunciants arrived in occupied Japan entirely without citizenship. Thus they gained the nickname of “strandees”—stateless individuals sent to Japan without a clear claim to belonging in either nation.

Their ongoing effort to regain citizenship in the United States clashed with practical concerns in post-war Japan. Collins often contacted renunciants with reports he received from the Attorney General’s office informing him of further roadblocks. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a ruling in a lower court that voting in a foreign election made a person ineligible for citizenship in the United States.⁵⁷ Additionally, registering as a citizen of Japan made that person ineligible, as well. Several renunciants in Japan registered as Japanese citizens and voted in Japanese elections in the fourteen years they awaited formal return of their U.S. citizenship. Legal visibility in occupied Japan was required for access to basic needs, such as ration cards for food. Statelessness impacted their children, too. One woman reported her inability to register her newborn daughter in Japan without adding her own name to the family koseki, where births were recorded.⁵⁸ Another man qualified his registration for Japanese citizenship to Collins by explaining that he needed to be a citizen in order to obtain an education for his two children.⁵⁹ Most

⁵⁶ Edward Ennis to Ernest Besig, August 22, 1945, folder 6, box 21, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁵⁷ *Perez v. Brownell*, 356 U.S. 44 (1958).

⁵⁸ Japanese law required this family registry in order to report births; Naoye Furukawa to Wayne M. Collins, September 12, 1955, folder 11, box 8, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁵⁹ Toshikazu Kishi, personal questionnaire, July 27, 1957, 1943-1962 Strandees Individual Case Files, folder 2, box 16, Collins Papers, BANC.

strandees argued that the U.S. General Douglas MacArthur compelled them to participate in the election of 1957.⁶⁰ They faced significant barriers due to their status as “strandees” that impacted their quality of life and ability to adjust to post-war conditions and occupying powers’ demands. They spent years neither wholly divorced from their past in the United States nor fully attached to their future in Japan. Many strandees engaged with the process of regaining U.S. citizenship and held out hope that their return would one day become possible. Still, they could not—and did not—put their lives on hold. They put down roots; they reconnected with family members, sent their children to school, registered as Japanese citizens, and voted.

Individual case files demonstrate a consistent pattern of backtracking and years of back and forth. Progress came in waves, usually in the form of preliminary administrative clearance and then an invitation for them to register for citizenship and passport at the U.S. consul. In March 1958, Collins wrote Masayuki Akiyoshi in Japan to tell him that his application for citizenship had been denied. He doggedly coached Akiyoshi in rewriting and submitting yet another affidavit over the next few months, sending line edits and specific advice for how to answer certain questions. One year later, in April 1959, Collins informed Akiyoshi that his citizenship had been restored.⁶¹ Some iteration of this pattern occurred in almost every case file. Practical concerns such as reclamation of lost property in the United States or survival in post-war Japan guided their decisions. Sometimes they made their decisions based on access to immediate benefits or rights that

⁶⁰ Strandees Individual Case Files, 1943-1962, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁶¹ Masayuki Akiyoshi and Wayne M. Collins, 1947-1959, Individual Case Files, folder 1, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

came from whichever country was ready to give it to them first.⁶² Mae Ngai describes the internal pragmatism that influenced participation in the renunciation program in the first place: “But if renunciants acted out of self interest they were no different from most ordinary people, who are concerned more with their individual and family’s well-being than with the interests of the nation-state.”⁶³ This continued to be true for renunciants in Japan during the decade following the war.

By 1959, Collins had won the majority of the cases filed and had restored citizenship to all but a few renunciants, including those who had resided in Japan for over a decade. In May 1959, he sent out a form letter to renunciants reading:

The Justice Department has reached the conclusion that you personally renounced citizenship because of fear, coercion, and duress. Therefore, it is willing to withdraw the offer of proof it made against you in the mass class equity suits whereupon a judgment can be entered in your favor in the U.S. District Court cancelling your renunciation on the ground of duress and declaring you to be a citizen of the United States.⁶⁴

The letter officially marked the end of a major set of appeals in their court case and opened the door for most renunciants to reclaim citizenship. This was certainly not the last form letter of its kind that Collins sent, nor did this mark the end of his work on the cases of approximately five thousand renunciants in both Japan and the U.S. Collins officially resolved the last of these cases and hung up his hat in 1968—more than two full decades after the end of the war and the closing of incarceration camps. It is unclear how many deported renunciants returned to the United States, but the extended period of time

⁶² Naoye Furukawa discusses this predicament in her letters to Collins, describing how she was simultaneously seeking citizenship in Japan. Individual Case Files, folder 11, box 8, Collins Papers, BANC.

⁶³ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 200.

⁶⁴ Wayne M Collins to Mr. Akira Dick Hashimoto, May 29, 1959, Individual Case Files, folder 16, box 8, Collins Papers, BANC.

in which many people waited for their verdict would suggest that their return would not have been a simple decision. Japan's economy recovered rapidly during the Cold War, improving industry and living standards. Renunciants likely experienced the benefits of this economic boom alongside a community they had become a part of over the course of the decade they lived there. Although close family members often still lived in the United States, they may have felt at home in Japan and averse to uprooting the new life they had built to go through with a long-awaited return.

The story of renunciants in Japan in the many years following the war is an incomplete one. Although some people sent Collins notices of their change in address, others disappear entirely from his record. He diligently sent them reminders of unanswered letters sometimes for as long as a few years since he last heard from them, and reached out to relatives of theirs to try to find their new residence. Collins worked and prepared multiple affidavits with Toshikazu Kishi through 1957 and 1958. However, he stopped receiving replies from Kishi sometime in 1959. He diligently attempted to reconnect with Kishi in order to inform him that he could, in fact, now reclaim his U.S. citizenship. In November 1960, as one of his many attempts to contact the renunciant, Collins reached out to Kishi's cousin in California to inquire whether he knew Kishi's current whereabouts. The cousin simply replied, "still in Japan."⁶⁵

Legal belonging—or lack thereof—put Japanese American renunciants in a vulnerable position in the United States and in Japan. Following incarceration, Japanese Americans understood the potential consequences of social vulnerability acutely.

⁶⁵ Data sheet for Toshikazu Ben Kishi, November 22, 1960, 1943-1962 Stranded Individual Case Files, folder 2, box 16, Collins Papers, BANC.

Citizenship status certainly did not guarantee stability, but it did allow access to a sense of belonging to a national and protected community. Some chose to give up this status in order to pursue other means of belonging and regretted this decision. Yet, they suffered its consequences and bore the weight of responsibility for a decision they made in a very particular political and social context.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On March 8, 1967 Hayao Chuman picked up his pen and addressed a letter to Wayne Collins. He likely had not anticipated further communication with the lawyer. Three years prior, Collins had informed him that the Department of Defense had once again denied his request to cancel his renunciation of citizenship. The government still held that Chuman had renounced his citizenship freely and that, at the time of his decision, he had truly intended to leave the United States—an impression that may well have been true. As Chuman expressed in this letter, he had believed his case was officially over and was surprised to hear Collins that was still working on it. Although the Department of Defense had refused to acknowledge its own missteps, they had agreed that Chuman could apply for naturalization and regain his United States citizenship through that avenue. Chuman's purpose in writing the letter was to tell Collins to drop his case and express his disinterest in applying for naturalization. "I am now fifty-three years old and I'm not sure if I will live another twenty years. Besides, I do not have any ambition to become a politician, an important leader, or a millionaire. I believe when I go to [be] beside God, I do not need any country's passport. [The] only thing I need is how I lived in this world."¹ He filled out and revised affidavits and paid Collins for legal services for over a decade to regain his birthright citizenship only to later deny the opportunity to become a naturalized citizen.

There are a few different ways we can interpret this choice. First, Chuman may have attached very different meanings to birthright citizenship and naturalized

¹ Hayao Chuman to Wayne M. Collins, March 8, 1967, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

citizenship. One involved the reclamation of the rights and status he felt had been taken from him, and the other involved asking the government that incarcerated him for permission to access the rights and obligations attached to legal belonging in the United States. Especially after his wife regained citizenship status in 1958, perhaps he felt that any practical imperatives driving his initial pursuit of citizenship had lost significance. Most importantly, however, his letter demonstrates the way Chuman came to redefine home and belonging in the United States. Inability to access citizenship no longer interfered with what he had come to see as most important in his life. He explained that he saw his priority as raising his eight children to be “decent and well-educated,” expressing pride in the fact that three of them were already attending university.² For him, belonging became divorced from citizenship and the status and potential opportunities it could have granted him. His decision to remain stateless was neither an act of resistance nor passivity. Agency, for him, meant adaptation. For the longest time he could not change his citizenship status, so he reduced its power over his ability to regain an imagined home and sense of belonging. His story, then, demonstrates the often fractured and precarious nature of citizenship for some groups.

The legal, social, and physical uprooting of incarcerated individuals was broadly shaped by their identities as Japanese Americans, but the contours of these patterns were shaped by transnational and transcultural identities, as well. Those who accessed conditional inclusion during incarceration by affirming loyalty as proof of belonging still experienced uprooting, but not to the extent of those who chose other methods of securing their future. The Tule Lake segregation center, therefore, offers insight into the ways that Japanese

² Hayao Chuman to Wayne M. Collins, March 8, 1967, folder 10, box 7, Collins Papers, BANC.

Americans exercised agency to express their relationship to the United States. Those who emphasized loyalty tied this concept to citizenship. This self-representation helped them achieve their objectives, but fostered restrictive ideas of Japanese American “character” and conditions for belonging. The restrictive nature of this strategy reveals itself at the Tule Lake segregation camp, specifically, because those individuals chose a different method of pursuing belonging.

Incarceration prompted a series of forced migrations that echoed previous patterns of movement. Restrictive immigration and land ownership legislation often compelled frequent movement prior to the war, “disloyalty” inspired additional movement during incarceration, and the lack of housing and employment on the West Coast following incarceration meant that many Japanese Americans worked for many years to regain a stable home. Legal uprooting—or changing relationships to the rights and obligations of United States citizenship—represented another way that Japanese Americans experienced uprootedness during the period of incarceration. The decision to renounce citizenship ultimately emerged out of the desire to reclaim belonging, but its consequences fell far outside the narrow definition of Japanese American citizenship.

Looking at incarceration and citizenship as contributors to a long pattern of uprootedness allows an examination of the way that repeated denial of Japanese American access to home and belonging was part of the experience of—and barriers to—conditional inclusion in the United States. Citizenship and belonging are overlapping, but not equivalent, categories. These concepts factor differently into individuals’ conception of home and identity. Certain groups’ experience of home are more precarious, as demonstrated by Japanese American experiences during incarceration. Patterns of

uprootedness ultimately allow us to see the stakes and longevity of incarceration—and the ways Japanese Americans reframed home and belonging in order to find themselves rooted again.

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