

Gaman:

How Japanese Americans Persevered in the Face of Racial Injustice

1941-1988

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by

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For James Makimoto,

Your optimism and bravery will go down in history

"We saw all these people behind the fence, looking out, hanging onto the wire, and looking out because they were anxious to know who was coming in. But I will never forget the shocking feeling that human beings were behind this fence like animals [crying]. And we were going to also lose our freedom and walk inside of that gate and find ourselves...cooped up there...when the gates were shut, we knew that we had lost something that was very precious; that we were no longer free." ¹

-Mary Tsukamoto, 1942

Fences play a curious role in our lives. They are a human-specific invention created by man and for man. Whether it is the all-American white picket fence around our home, the chain-link fence around a local schoolyard, or the barbed wire-topped fences around state penitentiaries, fences serve a single purpose; to separate the desired from the undesirable. I would argue that fences, in addition, create a barrier between danger and stagnation. They protect us, segregate us from the dangerous freedoms of our cruel world and enclose us within the safety of the protected. However, at the same time, living within fences stagnates us in safety and limitation. In the 1940's, during America's participation in the Pacific Theater of the Second World War, we, 'the land of the free and home of the brave,' enclosed ourselves within the fences of racial inequality. We separated ourselves from the "dangerous" undesirable citizens and eviscerated our country's pledge of liberty.

In the 1930's, America watched unwaveringly as the Empire of Japan tirelessly waged war and conquered the nations and Western colonies of East and Southeast Asia. While Asia cried for help after such horrific events as the Rape of Nanjing, America continued to isolate itself and insist on enclosing itself in neutrality. The 'land of the free' chose to construct metaphorical fences as to seal in

¹ Susan Hinsdale, "Our Story: American History Stories." (2012), *OurStory: Life in a WWII Japanese-American Internment Camp*, National Museum of American History, Behring Center, N.D, <http://amhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/more.html> (March 5, 2013).

its peaceful freedoms and separate itself from the cruel realities and turmoil of war-torn Asia. However, on December 7th, 1941, the Empire of Japan would tear down America's fence of neutrality and force us out of our place of hiding. The atrocities of the attack on Pearl Harbor enraged and unified our nation, committing us to years of total war, years that would demonstrate our being the "home of the brave," but test our name as "the land of the free."

While the United States of America was founded as a country of immigrants and has become the great melting pot of the world, it is not free of the hypocrisy of racial prejudice. Our fundamental principles, as stated by our founding Declaration of Independence, guarantees that we, as Americans, have the equal right to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." However, in 1942 with America's declaration of war against Japan, Japanese American citizens would have their liberty stripped and would be confined by fences, racially quarantined as a possible national threat. The Japanese American internment camps would, for the duration of the war, confine the "undesirable" and separate them from their freedom as Americans. Though being segregated would help Japanese Americans escape the hysteria of racial prejudice during the war, it would ultimately cost them their constitutional rights. They were separated from the unpredictable freedoms of the outside world and were left to stagnate in the homogeneous protection of racial injustice. It would contradict the image of the land of the free, and for 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry, prove to be the land of the caged.

Be it the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan that instantly leveled whole cities and killed nearly 220,000 innocent victims, or the racial incarceration of

110,000 Japanese Americans, history textbooks tend to justify the government's decisions as regrettable but ultimately necessary measures of national security. The history widely available to students, such as the popular and reputable online U.S. history textbook "ushistory.org," tends to generalize the notion of the Japanese American internment into a rather obtuse view stating simply that, "the Japanese invasion of the American mainland created an anti-Japanese paranoia that [persuaded] President Roosevelt to sign an executive order to relocate all Americans of Japanese ancestry." Within the single page of information scratching the surface of the otherwise intricate subject, ushistory.org also includes the history of the internment being challenged in the Supreme Court by Fred Korematsu, resulting in "the executive order [being] justified on the grounds of being a wartime necessity."² These sources draw black-and-white conclusions and fail to recognize the infinitely complex series of debates and arguments in approving the incarceration of Japanese Americans. In lieu of including the sensual and horrific consequences of uprooting a hundred thousand American citizens and stripping their freedom, many popular textbooks include cold, rationalized historical fact forged in years of oversimplification.

Though popular books on the subject like Daniel Davis's *Behind Barbed Wire*³ and Michael Cooper's *Fighting for Honor*⁴ describe a generalized panorama of the incarceration, they lack the sense of empathy and sincerity that only the story of an

² Ushistory.org, "Japanese-American Internment." (2008), *U.S. History Online Textbook*, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/51e.asp> (accessed April 11, 2013).

³ Daniel Davis, *Behind Barbed Wire: The Imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II* (New York: Dutton, 1982), 1-153.

⁴ Michael L. Cooper, *Fighting for Honor: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Clarion, 2000), 1-103.

individual can invoke. These books describe information on the camp location and size, the government regulations and surveillance, the population, and the overall functioning of the camps. They include why the government approved the executive order for incarceration and how the government contrived an apology after the war. Though they offer dates and names of key players in historical fact, these books create a distant, seemingly intangible sentiment that makes it difficult for the reader to empathize with. This history lacks the spiritual strength that empowered internees to endure three years of incarceration. These works of literature are written post-historically in a “matter of fact” tone, rather than describing the real-time conflict of those who lived through it. While firsthand literature on the Japanese American internment does exist, it does not get the spotlight it deserves. The American school system teaches little on the history of the Japanese American internment. In consequence, the average student, representative of the American population in whole, retains only the condensed, if not biased, view of the events, and fails to develop empathy in part from lack of example.

Historians, on the other hand, tend to polarize the subject into micro-observation or macro-observation. Under the microscope, historians view the internment through the individual in biographical works like Kenneth Takemoto’s *Nisei Memories*⁵ and take the sensual accounts as gospel. This historiography focuses on a single minnow in a sea of chaos and confusion and often lacks the cohesion of placing experiences in the context of historical events. It studies feeling, rather than fact. Additionally, not unlike the general population of American

⁵ Kenneth Takemoto, *Nisei Memories: My Parents Talk about the War Years* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2006), 1-229.

students, other historians look at the events of the incarceration through macro lenses and study only the factual events of the population as a whole, such as in Wendy Ng's *Japanese American Internment: A History and Reference Guide*.⁶ While both scopes of view are credible, the polarized approach to historiography provides truths out of context. One must blend the microscope, the feeling, with the macro lens, the greater historical context, to create a history that is both empathetic and factual. In this, one can develop truth and compassion towards a subject, perhaps the purest form of understanding our past.

While the American population, in whole, knows the broad events of the Japanese Internment, the majority lacks the firsthand stories and emotion to truly transport them into the shoes of an internee living in the tumultuous 1940's. What was it like for the individual living in confusion under a racially prejudiced government? How did an internee cope with life inside the fences? What are the lasting effects of racial discrimination and American hypocrisy? How did the physical, lawful, and spiritual fencing change the attitudes Japanese Americans had toward their government? In this work, I seek to blend individual truth with historical fact in the face of a largely generalized period of American history and racial discrimination. In this, I aim to marry the views of the microscope and the macroscope to create a more comprehensive picture in understanding history. I wish to rationalize why America chose to construct fences around, and point guns at, its own citizens. Through interviews with my grandfather, who was interned at Tule Lake camp in California and Amache Internment Camp in Colorado, and my

⁶ Wendy Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 1-185

great uncle who volunteered for the 442nd all Japanese-American infantry unit, I will bring forth specific fact in the dilution of oversimplified history. I will give voice to the silenced individuals. As the generation of those who were unrightfully interned over seventy years ago begins to fade away, I will tell their story.

Executive Order 9066: The Exclusion Act

Before studying the specific experiences of the individual living under incarceration, we must first understand why the Japanese American internment occurred in the first place. Following the events of December 7th, 1941, the bombing of the Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, a spark of anti-Japanese hysteria ignited the nation. However, a foundation of kindling in the anti-Japanese sentiment had already existed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the forms of racial prejudice and national fear. In the forging of our nation, generations of settlers from Europe had “transplanted into the [American] culture a traditional European ‘orientalist’ view of Asia as an exotic, backward, and barbaric land.”⁷ Even though the Japanese did not migrate in significant numbers until 1890, “the anti-Japanese movement was in many ways merely a continuation of the long-standing agitation against the Chinese which began in the early 1850’s during the Gold Rush.”⁸ In this respect, American society generalized Asians as all the same. Therefore, the Japanese were seen as “an extension of the Chinese immigrants’

⁷ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 7.

⁸ Maisie Conrat, *Executive Order 9066; the Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (San Francisco: Serimshaw, 1972), 16.

infringement upon the fruits of the American Manifest Destiny.”⁹ Aside from the racial prejudice, the American psyche was also predisposed by the fear of Imperial Japan’s growing expansionism. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the empire of Japan had invaded and occupied Manchuria, Korea, and China, with ambition to control all of East and South East Asia. While at first, the United States sympathized with Japan because they were responsible for Japan’s opening and modernization by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853, by the early 1900’s the United States grew fearful of Japan’s rapid rise to power. The combined racial difference and national fear created a sentiment of Japan being both a threat to national security and a racial scapegoat. Therefore, it would seem more than calculable that the anxiety towards the Japanese in the American population gained traction and begged motion.

To some degree, anti-Japanese groups shared the fear of a second Pearl Harbor, but more so they saw the attack as an opportunity for greed, economic rivalry, and racial scapegoating to overturn constitutional laws on excluding Japanese Americans. Groups including competing private shop owners, the American Legion, and the California Joint Immigration Committee, persistently wrote letters to the Franklin Roosevelt administration urging them to take action against the Japanese. In theory, with Japanese Americans having fingers pointed at them as a measure of national security, competing businesses would profit and Japanese exclusion groups could finally exert their frustration. Through tactful maneuvering of the media, such as publicizing a synonymous link between the terrorism at Pearl Harbor with all Japanese Americans, these passionate anti-

⁹ Conrat, 16.

Japanese groups ignited a fire under the nation that the government could no longer ignore.¹⁰ In making a tempest out of a teapot, these individuals catalyzed the initiation of Executive Order 9066: the relocation of all persons of Japanese ancestry.

Though not a single documented case of Japanese American sabotage or espionage has ever been recorded, the United States military and the vocal opinion of U.S. citizens cornered the government into rash action. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the military was both paranoid and anxious over a possible Japanese invasion of the west coast. Knowing the Pacific region was too small for the ambition of both superpowers, the United States military figured a war with the Empire of Japan was imminent. The only questions were: “when?” and “where?” In a preemptive movement toward security, “US army officers, partnered with politicians and the nativist interest groups eager to drive out the Japs and seize their property, began to press for the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from coastal areas.”¹¹ This triumvirate of anti-Japanese activists singled out persons of Japanese ancestry from other “enemy” groups, such as Italian Americans and German Americans, as “innately untrustworthy on racial grounds.” They were fueled by the logic that “the complete absence of any documented case of sabotage only proved that there must be a concerted plan for future subversion by Japanese Americans at an appointed time.”¹² Though a small minority of trialed Italian Americans and German Americans were incarcerated as well, rather than giving Japanese Americans the opportunity to prove their loyalty in speedy hearings like

¹⁰ Robinson, 90.

¹¹ Robinson, 4.

¹² Robinson, Preface.

the other “enemy” groups, the Japanese Americans were to be completely relocated without trial.

Within the Roosevelt administration, the question of relocating Japanese Americans had become a political tug-of-war. Leading the support of the evacuation, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson rationalized his view as an emergency military measure. On the other side of the card, Attorney General Francis Biddle seconded FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in saying that the relocation was unnecessary. However, on February 11, 1942, President Roosevelt ended the debate through a phone conversation with Stimson granting his consent on Stimson’s judgment by stating, “take whatever ‘reasonable’ action [you] deem necessary.”¹³ Eight days later, Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the army to establish military areas from which any civilian could be excluded. The executive order would allow the United States Army to round up more than 110,000 Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast to put in assembly centers under Army custody. After protesting his detention in 1942, Japanese-American Fred Korematsu would later challenge the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066 in the Supreme Court. He argued that:

Assembly Camps were for ‘Dangerous Enemy Aliens and Citizens.’ In order to be imprisoned, these people should have been given a fair trial in order that they may defend their loyalty at court in a democratic way... many disloyal German and Italians were caught, but they were not all corralled under armed guard like the Japanese --- is this a racial issue? If not, the loyal citizens want fair trial to prove their loyalty!¹⁴

¹³ Robinson, 4.

¹⁴ Ng, 85.

In the case of *Korematsu v. United States*, the Supreme Court found by a 6-3 Majority decision that the exclusion was ultimately constitutional on the grounds that the need to protect against espionage was greater than the guarantee of individual rights. They also ruled that race was not the reason Korematsu or any other person of Japanese ancestry was placed into confinement.¹⁵ This would not only prove to be a tragedy of democracy, but also hypocrisy in the United States' political values. Ironic, that a government fighting a war to preserve democracy was pressured into implementing emergency measures in a "profoundly undemocratic policy."¹⁶

In the spring of 1942, Executive Order 9066 was carried out to the great dismay of over a hundred thousand Pacific Coast Japanese Americans. The order stated that anyone of Japanese ancestry living west of the Cascade Mountains, from Washington to the south of California, would be evacuated into relocation camps run by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). Ironically, my grandmother, who was also Japanese American, was able to live free of incarceration in Colorado, while her future husband was interned in camps for nearly three years, spending eight months in Amache Relocation Camp, just twenty miles away. Curiously, the relocation and exclusion were exclusively conditional to west coast residents of Japanese ancestry. Japanese ancestry was to be defined as including both American-born citizens (Nisei, literally second generation) and the foreign-born aliens (Issei, literally first generation). Citizens would have two weeks to evacuate their homes, sell their property, and pack their personal items, permitted to bring along only what they could carry. The WRA would oversee the evacuation and provide all

¹⁵ Ng, 85.

¹⁶ Robinson, 6.

transportation. Japanese American evacuees would be sent to temporary holding grounds while relocation centers were built. After this, they would be sent to one of ten internment camps along the inland states of Colorado, Arizona, Wyoming, Arkansas, or special desert camps in California. According to the WRA relocation handbooks, the War Relocation Authority would provide: daily-well balanced nutritious meals, living quarters (though construction materials were extremely scarce because of the war), health services (whenever possible), protection and internal security, employment (whenever possible), clothing allowances, elementary and high school education for children of school age, consumer enterprises (such as canteens, barber shops, and general stores), and tolerate freedom of religion, freedom of recreation, and allow evacuee run-newspapers.¹⁷ Though the transition was smooth in theory, my grandfather, who was evacuated in 1942 out of Loomis, California recalls a an experience of confusion, chaos, and a complete lack of the WRA assistance.

Prior to the events of the relocation, my grandfather James Makimoto was an ordinary nineteen-year-old United States citizen. Born in Loomis, California to Japanese immigrant parents, Makimoto lived and worked peacefully on his family's farm. Though he identifies his upbringing as more Americanized than traditional Japanese, the small, tight knit community started discriminating against him and the other local Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. From dirty glances and cold shoulders to "No Japs Allowed" signs, the community, which was almost a third Japanese American, seemed to turn on itself "almost overnight."

¹⁷ D.S. Meyer, and J.A. Krug, *The Relocation Program Volume II, VI, VII, X* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943).

James Makimoto, who had never experienced racial discrimination prior to Pearl Harbor, found himself walking on eggshells in his own hometown. He knew a storm was coming and was both anxious and fearful as to how it would play out. In the spring of 1942, just months after Pearl Harbor, James Makimoto was visited by members of the community Japanese American Citizen's League (JACL) informing him and his family of the mandatory relocation and what they must prepare for. Rather than the WRA, as the history books tell us, Makimoto describes only the local citizen volunteer-run JACL's informing families the orders of the government. Trying to fathom his impending incarceration for being Japanese, my grandfather states, "I understood what I had to do, but I couldn't believe it. I felt like I had a bayonet stuck in my back. I couldn't believe that our country would do this to us as citizens, just because of our heritage."¹⁸ He continues by questioning why the Italian Americans and German Americans in Loomis were not being relocated and why other Japanese Americans east of the Cascade Mountains were able to live without penalty. In a mixture of fear, betrayal, and disbelief, the Makimoto family reluctantly prepared for evacuation, while other members of the community attempted to dodge the incarceration by moving inland. Between packing his few belongings and finding a keeper for their family farm, James Makimoto knew his life was never going to be the same.

James Makimoto was one of the lucky few when it came to property loss. He left his family's home, his parents' car, and the deed to his family's 80-acre farm in the hands of two of his agriculture teachers from high school, with the promise that

¹⁸ James Makimoto (Internee at Tule Lake and Amache Relocation Centers), interview by Derek Koehler, Pleasanton, March 29, 2013.

they could keep all the money from selling the fruit if they promised to maintain the farm and pay its taxes. Though the local churches did allow Japanese Americans to use their houses as storage, many others in the Loomis community were not so lucky. Whether through selling their property for a huge loss, getting it seized, or simply abandoning it, the majority of the incarcerated Japanese Americans in Loomis had their land permanently taken. As Robinson writes,

Although two thirds of the internees were American citizens, they were incarcerated without any charge, trial, or evidence against them. Since they were permitted to take to the camps only what they could carry, there were forced to abandon their homes, farms, furnishings, cars, and other belongings. Thus, as a result of Roosevelt's executive order, the vast majority of the West Coast Japanese Americans lost all of their property.¹⁹

Confusion and frustration were among the main sentiments of the Japanese Americans preparing for the transition from freedom to incarceration. According to James Makimoto, he and his fellow evacuees believed that they had no say in the relocation. Though they knew that no one amongst them had ever thought of sabotaging the United States, they believed that the government was doing what was necessary to win the war. While historiography and the general view on the Japanese American internment focuses on the stigma and humiliation of the incarceration, my grandfather offers another view. He says that he and the majority of the other internees shared "optimism and a sense of understanding, a faith in our government."²⁰ They knew they could not change the events unfolding, but they could grin and bear them, hopeful that their sacrifice would help in contributing to a

¹⁹ Robinson, 4.

²⁰ Makimoto.

national victory. And so, in the spring of 1942, James Makimoto went forth and boarded a train bound for the unknown, both hopeful and anxious.

The Internment Camps

On May 8th, 1942, my grandfather's train, packed elbow to elbow with Japanese American evacuees, stopped at Arboga Assembly Center, thirty-five miles south of Loomis. Run by the Wartime Civil Control Administration, the assembly centers were temporary detention sites quickly constructed in fairgrounds and large public meeting places with the purpose of assembling and organizing internees before they were transported to the more permanent WRA relocation centers that were being build. Arboga Assembly Center, also known as Marysville, was built on a former migrant workers camp and housed 2,465 evacuees. It was but one of the seventeen assembly centers holding over a hundred thousand evacuees throughout the west coast. Accommodations consisted of makeshift army barracks made of tarpaper and 2x4's that completely lacked protection against the pestering infestation of mosquitos and sand fleas.²¹ My grandfather knew this accommodation was temporary, but did not hold his breath. Instead, he redirected his anxiety into faithful optimism and found a job working as a hospital orderly, a position quite fitting as his prewar dream was to pursue a career in medicine. Fifty-three days later, on June 29th, evacuees were uprooted once again and ordered to board the passenger and freight trains. This time, the permanent relocation centers

²¹ J Burton, M. Farrell, F. Lord, and R. Lord, "An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites: Assembly Centers" (September 1, 2000), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74/ce16b.htm, accessed May 13, 2013.

were ready and they would journey to their new homes, where they would spend the remainder of the long war.

The relocation centers, popularly known as internment camps, were run by the WRA and spanned ten facilities in isolated and desolate areas over seven states. Hastily built in mere weeks, the relocation centers received over 110,000 evacuees from the WCCA facilities and were overflowing with chaos and lukewarm satisfaction. According to a 1943 War Relocation Authority report, internees were housed in "tar paper-covered barracks of simple frame construction without plumbing or cooking facilities of any kind... [The camps] were based on military barracks and were unfit for cramped family living."²² To the dismay of most, the relocation center accommodations seemed to be only a more permanent version of those found in the assembly centers. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire enclaves, had unpartitioned toilets, cots for beds, and a budget of only 45 cents for each internee's daily food rations. Armed guards patrolled the camps, ensuring the internees obeyed all the WRA rules and regulations. Though internees were usually treated well if they followed the rules, there were several incidents, such as the case of James Wakasa at Topaz Relocation Center, of guards shooting internees who attempted to walk outside the fences. Aside from the underwhelming facilities, internees also lacked proper clothes and supplies.

"Because most internees were evacuated from their West Coast homes on short notice and not told of their assigned destinations, many failed to pack

²² Dillon S. Myer, War Relocation Authority, "An Anniversary Statement by Dillon S. Myer Director of the War Relocation Authority" (March 17, 1943), http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/japanese_internment/documents/index.php?documentdate=1943-03-00&documentid=16&studycollectionid=JI&pagenumber=1, accessed May 13, 2013.

appropriate clothing for Wyoming winters which often reached temperatures below zero degrees. Many families were forced to simply take 'the clothes on their backs.'²³

The relocation camps proved to be merely a shell for incarceration, demanding internees to create a life for themselves within the fences.

In addition to the ten relocation facilities on the mainland of the United States, there were also several special detention camps throughout Hawaii and Latin America. On the Hawaiian Islands, a U.S. Territory at the time, there were five detention camps hosting only about 1,200 Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans. Though it was the place of the attack on Pearl Harbor itself, the surprisingly low number of incarcerated Hawaiian Americans was a result of successful legal maneuvering and a large ethnic population. "The vast majority of Japanese Americans and their immigrant parents in Hawaii were not interned because the government had already declared martial law in Hawaii [allowing the government] to significantly reduce the supposed risk of espionage and sabotage by the residents of Japanese ancestry."²⁴ Japanese Americans also comprised over 35% of the territory's population (about 150,000), so detaining that many people would be a logistical nightmare.

Several South American countries also shared fear of the Japanese and asked the United States to detain many of their Japanese citizens. The U.S. Department of Justice later ran camps for Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry who were suspected of crimes and enemy sympathy. Over 7,000 Japanese Latin-Americans

²³ Myer.

²⁴ Bob Dye, "How Bigots 'Cleaned' Legislature in 1942," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, December 23, 2009, <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2001/Sep/16/op/op06a.html>, accessed May 16, 2013.

and Japanese were rounded up and taken from 12 Latin American countries and incarcerated in camps in New Mexico. Two thirds of those incarcerated were Japanese-Peruvians, planned to be used as leverage in hostage exchanges with Japan during the war.²⁵ Additionally, a special detention center was assigned in Tule Lake, California for troublesome internees and those believed to be a great security risk. Tule Lake became a notorious segregation center for individuals deemed disloyal and those who were to be deported back to Japan. Unfortunately, as a result of proximity, not lack of loyalty or obedience, my grandfather and his fellow evacuees from Arboga were assigned to Tule Lake relocation center.

After leaving the assembly center at Arboga on June 29th, 1942, my grandfather arrived in desolate northern California at the soon-to-be-dreaded Tule Lake Relocation Center. After spending nearly two years there, my grandfather saw Tule Lake become an increasingly hostile internment camp. With its population at nearly 18,800 internees, many convicted of disloyalty and disobedience, my grandfather was eventually given the opportunity to be transferred to Amache internment camp in southeast Colorado. Also known as Granada, Amache internment camp was the smallest relocation center, hosting only 7,318 internees. It was known for its barren landscape, dust storms, unbearably cold winters, and its regular 110-degree hot summer days. Amache had 720 evacuee apartments in either 8'x10' rooms for small families or 24'x20' rooms to house eight people. Though the dimensions of the rooms seem livable by square footage alone, this was far from the case. The rooms could hardly contain the thin cots they were provided

²⁵ Brian Niiya, *Japanese American History* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 191.

with, and the only room for livable space was occupied as storage for the internees' personal items they brought with them. With no furnishing, no restroom, no kitchen, no dividing walls (only sheets to partition them from strangers), no running water, and only a single window, the barren room was more of a prison cell than a home. There were H-shaped buildings that housed unsanitary evacuee bathrooms, showers, and latrines in the center of each block of 12-14 barracks. Crowded public mess halls were located at the end of each block and served internees with highly rationed substandard meals of restricted nourishment like hot dogs, SPAM, and kidney beans. Milk was restricted to only children under the age of 12, at a meager six ounces a day.²⁶ There also existed a community infirmary with limited supplies that provided internees with inadequate medical care, despite the common prevalence of contagious disease in such close quarters.²⁷ Essentially, the relocation center accommodations that were provided compressed internees like canned sardines. They were barely livable and served only to embarrass and degrade those innocent victims of situational incarceration. However, the internees chose to make their unbearable house into a home.

As my grandfather recalls, Amache internees began making a life for themselves. Church and religious services were conducted in the assembly centers for the Buddhist and Protestant internees. Intramural sports of basketball, football, and baseball were created and were highly competitive and spirited between

²⁶ Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva, "Weenie Royale: Food and the Japanese Internment: NPR" (December 20, 2007), <http://www.npr.org/2007/12/20/17335538/weenie-royale-food-and-the-japanese-internment> (accessed June 3, 2013).

²⁷ Robert Harvey, *Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment In Colorado During World War II* (Dallas: Taylor Trade Pub, 2003), 91-116.

evacuees. Internee newspapers, like the *Granada Bulletin* and the *Granada Pioneer* were created and maintained by residents to disseminate vital information and current events. High schools organized dances in the school auditorium where internees had to opportunity to meet and mix. Clubs, such as groups for knitting, flower making, weaving, woodcarving, and mah jong, were created as a way of entertaining evacuees and passing the time. Internees would open small general stores, drugstores, barbershops, restaurants, and cafés as places residents could supply and enjoy themselves. Amache residents also created for themselves an all-Japanese police force, sanitation department, fire department, and even a community government.

A large majority of internees worked WRA sponsored jobs like being cooks or cleaners, despite being misunderstood, mistreated, and underpaid. However, the WRA had a condition that only Nisei (U.S. citizens) would be considered for jobs and Issei (Japanese-born) would not be allowed to work. My grandfather recalls being hired as a hospital orderly once again and earning an underwhelming \$16 a month (compared to the \$1500 a month Caucasian teachers were being paid in the camp). However, be it orderlies, typists, janitors, mechanics, or farmers, internees made the camp come alive. Each working internee became a gear to maintain and even improve a functioning community. Farmers harvested vegetables and raised livestock to boost the camp nutrition and make Amache nearly self-sufficient. Despite working for low wages and being blatantly overlooked constitutionally, Amache workers worked out of “a patriotic desire to serve their country.”²⁸

²⁸ Harvey: 91-116.

My grandfather recalls camp life to be as ordinary as possible, with people marrying, giving birth, and dying, just as they would have normally been doing. The community around Amache also tried to include internees whenever possible. Youth clubs like the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, YMCA, and YWCA would offer Amache youth opportunities to be a part of a group and occasionally travel beyond the barbed wire fences.²⁹ My grandfather recalls that, despite being restricted from having radios, televisions, or alcohol, and having a strict curfew, he built a life within the fences and had no need to leave them. He remembers guessing that the internment would only last a year, but preparing for the worst. “[Our] entire lives were micromanaged, inspected under a microscope. We were living day-to-day and not focusing or looking forward any amount of time.”³⁰ Though he feared being ostracized for being Japanese the rest of his life, he had no doubt the United States would win the war and he would return to his farm in Loomis. He believed in the “Japanese American Creed” that:

“Although some people may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith... I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and the attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.”³¹

In the coming year, my grandfather would have the opportunity to prove his loyalty in an event that would further segregate internees from one another.

²⁹ Harvey, 117-140.

³⁰ Makimoto.

³¹ Mike Masaoka, “The Japanese American Creed,” PBS Conscience and the Constitution, May 9, 1941 http://www.pbs.org/itvs/conscience/compliance/better_americans/01_creed_t.html, accessed May 16, 2013.

On February 1, 1943, the WRA issued a questionnaire to test the internees' loyalty to the United States of America and determine whether they would be "at risk" if they were released from a relocation center. While Italian Americans and German Americans were treated and tried as individuals since the beginning of the war, only now was there an opportunity for Japanese American internees to prove his or her loyalty on an individual basis. This test, known as the "loyalty questionnaire," was required of all those aged seventeen or older and was popularly controversial on two particular questions. Renowned Question 27 asked, "*Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?*" while Question 28 followed up, "*Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?*"³² Those who answered "yes" to both questions would pass the loyalty test and would be known as the "Yes-Yes's." However, those who answered "no," and refused to swear their allegiance to the United States and revoke any loyalty to Japan, would prove troublesome and would be infamously referred to as the "No-No's."

The "No-No's" perhaps are mistaken in modern historiography. Though history remembers them as disloyal, I would argue that they answered "no" to Questions 27 and 28 in an act of survival. Answering "yes" to Question 27 essentially meant volunteering for combat. Those who refused to fight and favored

³² Densho and The Board of Trustees of The Leland Stanford Junior University, "The Question of Loyalty" (2002), <http://www.densho.org/learning/spice/lesson5/5reading5.asp>, accessed May 13, 2013.

self-preservation were viewed as disloyal. Additionally, the “No-No’s” feared that if they forswore any loyalty to Japan and lived under persecution from the United States, they would truly be citizens of no country. They refused to let go of their Japanese culture and way of life in the gamble of passing a loyalty test to an unconstitutional country. These “No-No’s” were later given the option to renounce their American citizenship and repatriate themselves back to Japan, of which 5,590 internees opted to do so.³³ Understandably, these repatriates wanted simply to escape from the persecution by their own government and end the “mental and physical duress, as well as the intimidation [they] were made to face.”³⁴ As for the other “No-No’s” who wanted to retain their citizenship, they would be shipped to the special detention facility at Tule Lake Relocation Center as disloyal internees who posed potential threats to the United States of America.

Within the population of “No-No’s” carted to Tule Lake, there existed an even more segregated population of troublemakers known as the “No-No Boys.” The “No-No Boys” sought chaos and retribution for their suffering and would instigate labor disputes between administration and workers, start scuffles, and even organize riots against the WRA. The most famous of these, the riot at Manzanar, saw the deaths of two internees and ten others wounded when the riots turned violent as guards tear-gassed internees and fired into the crowds with machine guns, shotguns, and rifles. Many of these “No-No Boys” would be further removed from Tule Lake and imprisoned throughout the country in detention camps run by the Department of Justice itself.

³³ Ng, 60-61.

³⁴ Ng, 61.

Japanese Internment historiography tends to focus heavily on the sorrow and depression of the overall incarceration. However, my grandfather offers an explanation on why the majority of the internees seemed to endure their burden. The phrase *shikata ga nai*, translated as “it cannot be helped,” was a mantra for many internees and seemed to develop empathy that the Japanese American internees were simply victims of circumstance. They lacked leverage in their own lives and the internment was truly something that could not be helped. My grandfather felt that the WRA was trying to make it as comfortable as possible, but the internment was simply something that must be survived. He emphasizes his and every internees’ capacity for optimism and faith in God, their government, and in each other. Contrary to the image that internment historiography tends to create, James Makimoto states that, despite being robbed of three years of his life the government owes him nothing. Though he was incarcerated, his life and his happiness were in his control.

While many internees feel the same way, there seems to be an overarching emotion of humiliation and silence. Author Betty Furuta explains that to overcome the increasing depression, insecurity, and helplessness, the Japanese would hold closely to another mantra, *gaman*, meaning perseverance in overcoming hardship. The internees would use *gaman* to overcome the years of misfortune and discrimination.³⁵ Rather than using this perseverance in a stoic sense, my grandfather believed that endurance could be redirected into optimism. He found the silver lining in it all and knew that this experience being incarcerated would not

³⁵ Niiya, 191.

only test Japanese Americans, but would also be an opportunity to prove their resilience to the doubtful masses.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team

Despite their cycle of racial injustice, Japanese Americans saw the war for what it was, a call to duty as an American. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were nearly 5,000 Japanese Americans serving in the Territorial Guard in Hawaii. Treated with equality, they were valued as soldiers serving to protect the United States. However, after the declaration of war on Japan, the situation turned upside down. While the mainland of the United States was evacuating its citizens and detaining them for being “potentially untrustworthy,” the WRA made a national statement declaring all Japanese Americans unfit for military service. However, due to a shortage of manpower in Hawaii, the existing members in the Hawaiian Territorial Guard would be the only Japanese Americans able to serve.”³⁶ While the Territorial Guard was charged with protecting Hawaii in terms of combat, the University of Hawaii ROTC voluntarily helped with military construction and defense around Hawaii in the case of a second attack. This spirited band of Hawaiian patriots would take any job to assist in the war effort and became known as the Varsity Victory Volunteers. Despite WRA law stating that Japanese Americans were not allowed to serve over seas, the Varsity Victory Volunteers petitioned Lt. General Delos Carleton Emmons, the military governor of Hawaii, to allow them to create a military battalion to be sent to fight the simultaneous war in Europe. Lt.

³⁶ Ng, 61-62

General Emmons reluctantly agreed and on June 15th, 1942 created the 100th Infantry Battalion, also known as the 'One Puka Puka,' to be trained on the mainland for combat.³⁷ Under close watch of army officials and the FBI, the soldiers of the 100th Battalion proved themselves to be hard workers in training and, to the dismay of the U.S. Army, were motivated soldiers who were anything but "disloyal." The General Staff of the U.S. Army, with successful lobbying from JAACL groups throughout the country, began to discuss creating a larger unit of segregated Nisei soldiers to be sent for combat duty in the European theater of war. In their thinking, creating an all-Japanese American unit would: give incarcerated citizens a chance to serve their country, counter Japan's war propaganda stating that Japan and America were engaged in a war of race, and would serve as proof that Japanese Americans are loyal Americans and reproach all those who instigated racial prejudice.³⁸ On February 1st, 1943 the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was created and began recruiting volunteers of the Yes-Yes's from the ten relocation centers and the Hawaiian Islands. 442nd member Tom Kawaguchi recalls the racial stigma, but nevertheless volunteered to serve his country in a time of need:

When the war broke out with Japan, I was ready to fight the enemy, and I had no qualms about whether it was Japanese or German or whatever. This was my country and I was ready to defend it. ...The Army had said Nisei protestations of loyalty [was] hogwash. We had to have a demonstration in blood.³⁹

442nd volunteers like Tom Kawaguchi all came from a similar frame of thinking.

They served not only to prove their loyalty to the United States, but were also driven

³⁷ Ng, 70.

³⁸ The442.org, "Origins and Activation: 442nd RCT/100th Battalion" (September 20, 2012), <http://www.the442.org/home.html>, accessed May 15, 2013.

³⁹ Cooper, 47.

by a distinctly Japanese code of honor and duty that bound them in obligation to their country and to each other.⁴⁰ This duty would not be easily broken and serve to test them in both their tolerance for racial prejudice and in their effectiveness in the fires of combat.

In the recruiting process of the 442nd, the enthusiasm of wanting to serve in the military would fill the ranks of willing Nisei. In Hawaii, where the majority of Japanese Americans avoided the incarceration, recruiting for the 442nd far exceeded expectation. While initially trying to fill a quota of 1,500 Japanese American volunteers from Hawaii, the Army was overwhelmed when nearly 10,000 volunteers showed up at the recruiting offices. In contrast, an underwhelming 1,181 Nisei volunteered from the ten relocation camps on the mainland.⁴¹ The mainlanders were understandably more reluctant to fight for a country that was imprisoning their families. However, in accordance with an Army quota, 3,000 Hawaiian and just over 1,000 mainlanders were eagerly inducted into the 442nd and shipped to Camp Shelby, Mississippi where a further subset of racial prejudice between Hawaiians and mainlanders would clash.

Although both groups were racially Japanese, they held many differences. Most apparent, was the unique language of local Pidgin English that the Hawaiians spoke to each other with. The Hawaiians' broken-worded language created a community impression that the mainlanders were pretentious with their proper English. For this reason, the Hawaiians called the mainlanders "Kotonks" (the sound of a coconut falling on one's head), while the mainlanders derogatorily nicknamed

⁴⁰ Ng, 73.

⁴¹ Ng, 26.

the Hawaiians “Buddhaheads.” The Kotonks and Buddhaheads physically segregated themselves within the unit and monitored each other with distrusting eyes. Curiously, those who were incarcerated and segregated from their own country opted for further segregation from their own kin. However, the apparent enmity towards one another was simply a lack of understanding. On the 4th of July, 1943, 800 Hawaiian Buddhaheads headed to the Jerome relocation center on a daily furlough and were shocked and horrified by the sight of the barbed wire fences surrounding the minimalist internment camps. While the Buddhaheads’ families were safely living in freedom on the Hawaiian islands, they began to empathize with the Mainlander Kotonks in that their families were imprisoned and they had lost most all of their possessions. From then on, the Buddhaheads and the Kotonks unified themselves as proud Japanese American soldiers of the 442nd and would prove fiercely loyal to one another and to the United States.⁴² As author Wendy Ng writes,

Despite their small stature-the average height was 5 feet, 4 inches (125 lbs.), they were exemplary soldiers and trained in all types of army maneuvers. Because there was such a strong group loyalty, they worked together as a tight team. It was said that if a soldier [in the 442nd] had a difficult time completing the training with a full fifty pounds of fighting gear, each member of his team would carry a piece of his gear to lighten the load, and if need be, carry the individual to the finish.⁴³

Trained and united under the 442nd creed to “Go For Broke!” the all Nisei regiment was ready for combat. Soon they would be shipped to fight and, if necessary, die for their country, despite the racial prejudice weighing heavily against them.

⁴² Ng, 64.

⁴³ Ng, 63.

In an autobiographical documentary he made before he passed away in 2001, my great uncle Paul Ushiyama recounts his experience with the 442nd as a memory of blatant racial discrimination.⁴⁴ At the time of Pearl Harbor, Paul Ushiyama was a junior at Swink High School in Swink, Colorado, unaware of ethnic discrimination. However, in the spring of 1942, because of the anti-Japanese war hysteria, racism in his hometown became unavoidable. From hateful name calling to his parents' bank account being forcefully frozen, Paul Ushiyama learned what it meant to be a "Jap."⁴⁵ In April 1942, Paul volunteered for the Army as an act of patriotism. Utilizing his prior skillset and wanting to avoid risking his life, he volunteered to be an airplane mechanic to build and fix fighter jets. History might suggest that, having been allowed to serve in the Army, Nisei soldiers would be given equal rights as any other U.S. soldier, but this was not the case. Through a lack of organizational structure and a mix of racism and mistreatment, he was unwillingly placed on a bus to be trained as a front lines infantryman in the 442nd. Paul Ushiyama would eventually be shipped to Italy and France and participate in few of the bloodiest battles in the war. Having seen the unusually high casualty rate, and personally having been wounded twice, even losing his left hand to an exploding piece of German shrapnel, Paul Ushiyama questioned if he and his compatriots were simply being used as cannon fodder because they were Japanese American. Though he would be hospitalized for the remainder of the war due to the loss of his hand, Paul Ushiyama would witness his unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, as they persevered and

⁴⁴ Paul Ushiyama, "Paul Ushiyama 442 WWII Experiences," VHS, May 1999.

⁴⁵ Ushiyama, 1999.

fought passionately with *gaman* in many essential battles of the European theater of World War II.

The 442nd had a reputation of being a unit with a willingness to accept any assignment the U.S. Army needed of them. This eagerness and utility led to their being the key player in three violent and renowned victories. First, is the liberation of the city of Bruyeres in France. On October 15th, 1944, the 442nd was ordered to Bruyeres, an important communication link to the Germans. After four days and four nights of bloody combat, the 442nd forced the Germans into capture and liberated the helpless local citizens. Against Army instruction, the 442nd shared what meager rations they had with the starving locals and to this day are seen and commemorated as the heroes of Bruyeres.

The 442nd was then shipped to the French Vosges Mountains with the impossible mission of rescuing the "Lost Texas Battalion." The 141st Infantry from Texas, a unit of 275 men known as the "Lost Texas Battalion," found themselves surrounded by German forces and watched as two unsuccessful attempts at rescue were mercilessly slaughtered. Enter the 442nd. Beginning October 25th 1944, the 442nd tirelessly fought for every inch of ground gained. After five days of unrelenting battle, the 442nd rescued the 240 surviving boys of the "Lost Texas Battalion," but suffered a loss of over 1,000 casualties, reducing their size to just 800 soldiers. Though victorious, in the eight weeks of fighting in France, two thirds of the 442nd had been wounded or killed. The nation cheered as those men, who two

years earlier were suspected of disloyalty, were now “American heroes.”⁴⁶ Despite their immense losses, the 442nd would continue to fight vigorously and, in the spring of 1945, would join in the Allied struggle for the Gothic Line in Italy. The 442nd, led in part by Lt. Daniel Inouye, who would later receive the Medal of Honor for his bravery, fought along the Apennine Mountains in Italy during the fighting retreat of the German forces. Their mission to puncture the Gothic Line manifested into a two month long struggle of give-and-take. On May 2, 1945, in a cooperative victory of all the Allied forces, the Nazis in Italy negotiated a cease-fire and, five days later, on May 7th, the German nation surrendered.

Despite perhaps being seen as expendable, the 442nd never failed to fight for the United States. Loyalty was beyond question as the 442nd willingly paid a price in blood. Nicknamed the “Purple Heart Battalion,” statistically each soldier in the 442nd received an average of two Purple Hearts. With 9,486 Purple Hearts, one Medal of Honor, 52 distinguished Service Crosses, 560 Silver Stars, and over 4,000 Bronze Stars, the “One Puka Puka” and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team would become the most highly decorated combat unit in U.S. military history.⁴⁷ Not only did they help win the war, but the 442nd also proved the loyalty and effectiveness of Nisei as U.S. soldiers and helped shed the racial prejudice of Japanese Americans in a new light. Medal of Honor recipient Daniel Inouye said that despite their experiences with racism and discrimination, Nisei soldiers had a duty and obligation

⁴⁶Douglas Sterner, "The Story of the Lost Battalion," Home of Heroes, 1999, http://www.homeofheroes.com/moh/nisei/index7_lost_bn.html, accessed May 16, 2013.

⁴⁷ Ng, 71.

to fight for the country that had given them, and their parents, opportunities.⁴⁸ His valor and model of leadership would make him a household name, and a hero to the nation. His popularity paved the way of his political career and he eventually became a U.S. Senator representing Hawaii and the highest-ranking Asian American politician in United States history. In 2010, after years of lobbying, a special law was passed awarding every member of the 442nd, including my great uncle Paul Ushiyama, a Congressional Gold Medal for their bravery and service.

During the war, in late of 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized the 442nd's effectiveness as soldiers and unquestionable American loyalty and stated,

The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy.⁴⁹

Even though his statement contradicted his approval of the Exclusion Act, Franklin Roosevelt's public acceptance of all racial groups helped make a step towards rebuilding the trust of Japanese Americans and ending the senseless incarceration of 110,000 internees. It was largely in part of the loyalty and vigor of the 442nd that the nation would begin to change their views of Japanese Americans. The 442nd had pulled more than their weight in wartime duties. The U.S. Army and nation as a whole began to establish links of trust with the Nisei and relied on them to get the job done. The brave 442nd was a catalyst that helped pave the way into the shifting thoughts and reacceptance of Japanese Americans into American society.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ng, 74.

⁴⁹ Cooper, preface.

⁵⁰ Ng, 74.

Freedom and the Road to Redress

While the eyes of the nation were upon the brave 442nd during their fierce campaigns in 1944, groups of key figures and politicians began to question the necessity for maintaining the relocation centers on the home front. The WRA, the very organization that ran the evacuation and internment, began considering planning a logical end and a closing of the camps. The WRA lobbied, “if people of Japanese ancestry were being excluded from the West Coast because of suspected issues of loyalty, there would no longer be any need for exclusion once loyalty was assured.”⁵¹ This statement in favor of ending the camps drew much controversy among the organizations within the War Department. The chief concern of the War Department was that if “so-called Loyals” were allowed to return to the West Coast, the War Department would be criticized over the issue of whether the evacuation should have occurred in the first place.⁵²

This division of opinion split the War Department into two groups. The first, subscribed to the belief that “ethnicity determined loyalty.” The other group believed that invasion was no longer a sustainable possibility and, therefore, relocation camps were no longer necessary for the reason they were instituted. However, in a majority decision, the War Department decided that loyalty was a matter of individual choice. In this, it would be possible to begin to distinguish the loyal from the disloyal in an effort to move internees out of the camps. Secretary of

⁵¹ Ng, 95.

⁵² Ng, 95.

War Henry Stimson proposed an actionable end of exclusion at a cabinet meeting in the spring of 1944. On December 17th, the Western Defense Command issued Public Proclamation 21, essentially rescinding the mass exclusion order. Effective January 2nd, internees would be allowed to return to their West Coast homes after being cleared as loyal by military authority. In addition, the evacuees' full rights as citizens would be restored and they would be treated as any other law abiding American.⁵³ Those who continued to be deemed a security risk would remain at Tule Lake Segregation Center until further notice. Public Proclamation 21 intended for the other nine relocation centers to be evacuated and shut down within one year. Internees who chose to leave the camps immediately faced a myriad of racial challenges in reintegrating into the society that had shunned them, especially while the United States was still at war with Japan. Nevertheless, the willing internees were given \$25 in payment and a transportation ticket home, and were released from the familiar gates of imprisonment and protection, sent on their way to a road that lead to both freedom and difficulty.

After returning home, many internees were greeted by a less-than-friendly welcome of residual anti-Japanese hysteria. Though the heroism of the 442nd helped the Japanese American image, racism still existed. The hostility that had been culminating as war propaganda had manifested itself into the physical vandalizing of returning Nisei and using them as scapegoats. Vigilantes destroyed farm equipment, broke windows, ostracized school children, and generally harassed Japanese Americans in whatever way they could. In the town of Hood River, Oregon,

⁵³ Ng, 97.

signs were posted stating “No Japs Wanted, No Japs Allowed.”⁵⁴ Returning Japanese Americans were ostracized and prohibited from entering many public areas and found that no one in town would sell anything to them. They had to rely solely on sympathetic neighbors to help out. Unfortunately, this was seen throughout the West Coast. However, many cities with substantial Japanese communities, like San Jose, California, organized support networks immediately. Buddhist churches functioned as community hostels for returning internees, and those who had settled would volunteer to help expand support.⁵⁵ Luckily, unlike the historically popularized cases of unwelcoming racism, my grandfather returned to Loomis with little discrimination. He recalls a seamless transition back into his farming life because Loomis had such a large Japanese American population.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, those who had returned from the camps would have to rebuild their lives and reintegrate themselves into American society, each facing their own series of challenges, thick or thin.

While the evacuees had spent almost three years in the confined protection of the relocation camps, many returned home to find that their possessions were either lost or stolen. Nearly every internee suffered material loss in one form or another and was left with limited resources to begin anew. After being peppered with vocal concern, Congress in 1948 passed the Evacuation Claims Act to allow people of Japanese ancestry to seek compensation from the U.S. government for the losses they incurred as a result of the incarceration. While filing a claim was limited

⁵⁴ Ng, 98.

⁵⁵ Ng, 99.

⁵⁶ Makimoto.

to “loss of real or personal property,” the process was lengthy and burdensome.⁵⁷ Internees filed a total of 26,568 claims for an amount totaling \$148 million, but were only compensated by the U.S. government for a disappointing \$37 million. On average, due to the complicated process, the government only ended up paying about ten cents for every dollar of property lost. In the case of interracial couple Arthur and Estelle Ishigo (author of *Lone Heart Mountain*) who were interned at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, they had lost everything and left the camps and returned home with only \$25. After years and numerous appeals, they were offered a meager \$102.50 in settlement from the U.S. government.⁵⁸ Irrespective of the inadequate attempt for compensation by the government, there could be no replacement for the sentimental and emotional value lost. There could be no repairing the social and psychological trauma suffered as a result of being unlawfully incarcerated for three years. Despite their devastating losses, the internees chose to rise like the phoenix and rebuild their lives. They coped using *gaman*, which internalized and suppressed their anger and emotion and redirected it into determination and perseverance in creating a new life.

In the decades following World War II, the Japanese Americans struggled with blending themselves back into American society. Families encouraged their children to assimilate and pursue the “American Dream” perhaps as a form of compensating for the discrimination they had experienced in the camps.⁵⁹ While the majority of former internees chose to forget their experience entirely because

⁵⁷ Ng, 100.

⁵⁸ Ng, 100.

⁵⁹ Ng, 103.

shikata ga nai, it could not be helped, few held tightly to their memories and used it to fuel their distrust and resentment toward the U.S. government. Nevertheless, the internees mostly fell silent, repressing their emotion for fear of it turning into harsh feeling or action.

On the other hand, Nisei veterans of the 442nd returned as heroes of mixed reception. They were decorated with awards and commended by President Harry S. Truman, who told them, “You fought prejudice, and you won,” but they continued to struggle with anti-Japanese prejudice.⁶⁰ Despite reveling in some form of welcome, returning veterans of the 442nd made peace with their experience in their own way. In his book *Nisei Memories*, author Paul Takemoto juxtaposes the coping techniques of his mother who was interned, and his father who fought in the 442nd. He explains that his father was haunted by and continually relives memories of his wartime service, while his mother has completely repressed those years in an act of denial. He suggests that there was a differing resentment toward the government as a result of victimization: his father struggled to serve it and his mother was imprisoned by it. Takemoto compares his mother’s experience with victims of rape and compares his father’s experience with being professionally bullied. He concludes by explaining the silence of Japanese Americans is a mechanism of guarding oneself from revealing the depth of their feelings. Takemoto comments that, though silent, the victims of the wartime prejudice will never forget what happened: “the memories would go into hiding, but continue to linger.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ng, 104.

⁶¹ Takemoto, 104.

My grandfather, James Makimoto, had a rather exceptional case in returning to his home in Loomis, California. In early 1944, he was hired on special commission and given seasonal leave from the Amache internment camp to help with the fruit harvest. While on leave, he injured his back and was hospitalized for over a year, during which time his family was released from Amache. Once recovered, my grandfather returned to Loomis and was luckily given his farm back from his Caucasian high school teachers, per their arrangement. While he hosted a few families who did not have a place to go home to, Makimoto recalls his and his community's overall transition as being fairly natural because of Loomis's substantial Japanese population. As a result, returning internees from Loomis did not face any lingering racism. Makimoto recalls the internment as, "just a chapter in [his] book that [he] chooses not to look back on." He knew that things could not be changed, so he instead rationalized his experience and accepted it for what it was. While he understands the tendency for repression and silence, and admits to being silent himself, he wished his family had asked more questions to allow him to tell his story. "After all," he says, "you only answer questions asked of you."⁶² He recognizes the fact that the experience of racial incarceration was humiliating, but has made peace with it. Perhaps a lesson he learned in the camps, he channeled optimism, rather than victimization, to help him rebuild. As shall be seen, in 1988, with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act, he would finally be able to conclude that chapter in his life once and for all.

⁶² Makimoto.

In the 1960's, nearly two decades after the war, groups of Japanese Americans in Seattle, San Francisco, and Southern California began to discuss some type of fair compensation. The word "redress" became the accepted term describing the movement to seek government acknowledgement, apology, and monetary compensation for Japanese Americans.⁶³ JACL served as the main organization that worked to organize support and push forward the redress movement. Finally in 1988, legislation passed in both the U.S. House of Representatives and in the U.S. Senate and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. This measure, to be called the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, provided for a \$20,000 redress payment to about 60,000 (of the 110,000) individuals of Japanese ancestry who were interned during WWII. The estates of those who had already died before the bill were not eligible for payment. By the end of the century the U.S. Department of Justice declared that 82,219 (rather than the proposed 60,000) received the full \$20,000 in redress payments.⁶⁴ However, perhaps more significant than the monetary payment itself was the formal apology that the U.S. government made on behalf of itself and the American people.

During a ceremony held in the Great Hall of Justice Department in Washington, DC on October 9, 1990, Attorney General Richard Thornburgh presented a formal apology, signed by President George Bush. Directed at an audience of nine elderly Japanese Americans, the apology stated,

[Even when the American] system failed you, you never lost your faith in it. By finally admitting a wrong, a nation does not destroy its integrity but,

⁶³ Ng, 107.

⁶⁴ Leslie Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 129-165.

rather, reinforces the sincerity of its commitment to the Constitution and hence to its people.⁶⁵

Senator Daniel Inouye, who was interned himself, declared that by the government providing redress, “We honor ourselves and honor America. We demonstrated to the world that we are a strong people --- strong enough to admit our wrongs.”⁶⁶

In addition, a formal apology letter was sent out to every former internee on behalf of President Bush. Not only did the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 issue redress payments and an apology, but it also initiated an education fund to educate the public about the internment camps. Through curriculum, landmarks, community development, arts and media, and research resources, the word of the incarceration would spread as a way to recognize those who were interned and act as tool to prevent history from ever repeating itself.⁶⁷ At last, the long struggle for redress had come to an end. It was now up to each internee to find closure with his or her experience in incarceration.

From the day the Japanese Americans were notified of the evacuation to the day they were released from incarceration, each internee had to make peace with his or her own demons. Frustration, humiliation, confusion, anger were all valid emotions for those who had been unrightfully locked up and robbed of three years of life. Yet, these children of the “land of the free and home of the brave” never lost faith in their country. True, they were Japanese Americans, but more so they were Americans. They not only endured being confined, but also created communities

⁶⁵ Mitchell Maki, Harry Kitano, and Megan Berthold, *Achieving the Impossible Dream: How Japanese Americans Achieved Redress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 214.

⁶⁶ Maki, Kitano, and Berthold, 214-15.

⁶⁷ Maki, Kitano, and Berthold, 227.

worth living in. Friendships were made, love was found, and laughter was shared. As my grandfather James Makimoto can attest, Japanese Americans have a brilliant capacity to bring forth optimism and *gaman*. Though modern historiography on the Japanese American internment paints a picture of dread and victimization, I would argue that these internees thrived in the face of adversity. At last, my grandfather and the experiences of a fading generation are finally given voice for what they truly were: optimistic. In a high school valedictorian speech given at Amache Relocation Camp in 1943, an interned student named Marion Konishi captured the spirit of the incarcerated Japanese Americans and in doing so created a historical legacy that will persist through the ages:

Sometimes America failed and suffered...Sometimes she made mistakes, great mistakes...Her history is full of errors, but with each mistake she has learned...Can we the graduating class of Amache Senior High School believe that America still means freedom, equality, security, and justice? Do I believe this? Do my classmates believe this? Yes, with all our hearts, because in the faith, in that hope, is my future, and the world's future.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Konishi, Marion. High school graduation. Amache Relocation Center. 1943. Commencement speech.

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