

Japanese American Internment:
A Historiographical Analysis and Evaluation of Identity

A Senior Project

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On December 7th (I was 11 years old) I was at the State Theater to watch a Sunday movie and didn't know about Pearl Harbor (lights were on because the movie hadn't started) till a classmate that I had gone to school with since kindergarten pointed at me and said the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. That was a shock and a real embarrassing moment. Then my father, who was a treasurer for a local community Japanese social club, was picked up with other community leaders and put into jail. My grandparents told me to go to the jailhouse to say goodbye to my father since he would be shipped to an unknown camp. I was eleven years old and I went to the jailhouse by myself - which was traumatic. I also remember burying all Japanese music records in the backyard because they might perceive us as enemies. All Japanese at that time had to take all firearms and radios to the jailhouse.

We were living in Marysville at that time and my grandfather was friends with a Chinese family...Next thing the neighbors had reported us to the FBI and they came and searched our house, top to bottom. Our house used to be near the Railroad Depot and I used to wave at all the Japanese in railcars going to Tule Lake. My grandparents thought if we moved to Gridley, we would not have to go to camp. ...We had a 9:00 pm curfew and could not be on the other side of Hwy 99 (west). When it was our turn to go to camp, we went one day before the Marysville people - I remember we arrived at Tule Lake on August 27th, 1942, one day before my 12th birthday with my grandparents, Yoshiko, and Uncle Kay and Nesan. My grandmother had already suffered a stroke and it was very difficult for her and my grandfather.

In camp we were put in the block with the rest of the Gridley people. Each block had about 12 barracks on each side with a laundry room and bathrooms in the center. The toilet stalls and shower stalls did not have doors. So I took my showers with my bathing suit on. There was an old, old, shriveled up old lady who used to use her chamber pot in her room all day and when she came to the restroom to dump her pot - we used to all run out because it stunk so badly. You can't imagine how bad that was. Tule Lake was cold in the winter because it snowed a lot. The roads would be so icy that if we fell and got up, we would immediately fall again. We had terrible dust storms that if we got caught in one, we had to take refuge in a bathroom wherever we could.

Camp was an adventure for us because we didn't have any responsibilities, but it really took the spirit out of my grandfather. He used to lease farmland from a fellow named Bossen and when we left Marysville, he left everything in the ranch house, plus he sold his pickup truck to Bossen. After we got

in camp, I remember my aunt writing letters to Bossen asking for the money till a letter came saying that Bossen had died. He was alive and kicking when we returned in 1945. Never did pay anything for the truck.

In December of 1945, my grandparents and I left Tule Lake for Gridley. I was 15 years old at that time and we traveled on the train and then had to find the bus station at Redding I think - with my grandmother who could barely walk because of her stroke. It was pretty scary at my young age. When we got to Gridley on the bus, we arrived around 10 pm and had to find a taxi going out to the ranch. I had to go to high school in Gridley and it was tough not knowing anyone and thinking that everybody hated us for being Japanese. Then when we returned to Marysville, it was harder yet to see all my old classmates who knew we were incarcerated like we were criminals.

– Lorraine Komatsubara, 2009¹

This summarized account of an internment experience comes from the memories of Lorraine Komatsubara. I used to have a vague idea about how my grandma, Lorraine, was interned at the Tule Lake Segregation Center during World War II but did not know much about her experience other than the name of the camp. However, when the internment of Japanese Americans was covered in my high school history class, it reminded me of my grandma and I became curious to learn more and wanted to know what my grandma went through. After asking my grandma about her internment experience and hearing her story I was disheartened that she had been subjected to such treatment. In addition, Lorraine's account about Japanese internment illustrates the detrimental effects of being singled out based on simply being born into a particular race. Therefore, it is through memoirs that Japanese internment camps should be examined as way to understand how the unusual violation of constitutional and human rights occurred. This experience can then be seen as a catalyst that facilitated a reevaluation of American identity for the Japanese community in the United States, especially people of Japanese

¹ Lorraine Komatsubara, interview by author, 23 February 2009.

ancestry living on the West Coast.

One can gain important insight by studying the memoirs from those who were in the internment camps. Kiyota Minoru, who was sent to the Tule Lake Segregation Center in 1943, notes, “although documentary studies can relate the facts of the event, they can never adequately convey the frustration and anxiety, the fear and uncertainty, the hope and aspiration of an individual who is subjected to government-sponsored harassment and injustice.”² Through the analysis of primary sources of the Japanese internment camps, there will perhaps be a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the factors that allowed this subjugation to transpire. There is also the hope that learning from Japanese internment will help prevent wartime hysteria or other moments of crisis leading to irrational actions being taken against an innocent ethnic group.

However, there are some discrepancies in the historiography of the Japanese internment. It appears that there have been significant differences in the way that the Japanese internment has been documented. These variations of historical record appear to be a reflection of the period’s respective context of sociopolitical understandings as well as a means to gain governmental redress. For about two decades after the camps were closed in 1946, historians largely focused on race to explain why internment took place.³ Brian Hayashi, in the 2004 book *Democratizing the Enemy*, finds that the focus on race during this period was because the United States “seemed less vulnerable to invasions after 1942.”⁴ Therefore, many historians rejected framing internment

² Minoru Kiyota, *Beyond Loyalty: The Story of a Kibei* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 247.

³ Brian Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 2.

narratives around Japanese Americans as threats to national security but rather as a result of racism and “negative attitudes toward individuals based on physical features, amplified by economic interests.”⁵ Jacobus tenBroek, Edward Barnhart, and Floyd Matson’s *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution* (1954) exemplifies the racial reasoning behind many authors’ arguments on internment in that this account places part of the blame of having war relocation camps due to anti-Asian sentiments in the United States and in particular, the West Coast.⁶

Conversely, the 1960s and 1970s marked a turn in the historiography when authors began to expand on previous reasons for Japanese internment by citing wartime hysteria and failure of political leadership. The difference in explanations for internment could be traced back to how authors during these two decades witnessed the federal government attempt to “rally public support for a widely perceived immoral war against a weary military opponent in Vietnam.”⁷ Peter Irons’s *Justice at War* (1983) highlights how many historians began to view the decision for Japanese internment as a result of a government gone astray in a wartime context by illustrating how the decision makers in the government knew that Japanese Americans were not a true security threat.⁸

Additionally, historian Gary Okihiro notes how during the 1980s authors started to portray Japanese Americans as “downtrodden victims of a racist America gone hysterical.”⁹ The emphasis on depicting loyal Japanese Americans whose civil rights

⁵ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 2.

⁶ Jacobus tenBroek, Edward Barnhart, and Floyd Matson, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

⁷ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 4.

⁸ Peter Irons, *Justice at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁹ Gary Y. Okihiro, “Japanese Resistance in America’s Concentration Camps: A Re-evaluation,” *Ameraisa Journal* 3, no. 2 (1973), 20.

were violated by the government appeared to be a result of how the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) wanted reparations to the extent that, in Lyon's words, their "political agenda drove what became a complete reinvention of history to fit the political needs of the redress movement."¹⁰ Lyon notes how Bill Hosokawa's account *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* "inflates the numbers of volunteer [soldiers] and portrays Nisei as visionary patriots."¹¹ Likewise, Hayashi asserts that before a redress was given to those who were interned, many writers did not contradict the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians and "shied away from depicting Japanese Americans as anything but loyal to the United States, fearing that they might undermine the commission's drive for redress."¹²

After the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 passed and redress payments were issued, a broader history of Japanese internment, including narratives from draft resisters, was able to gain more mainstream acceptance. However, even after the governmental apology and redress was issued, there was also the disconcerting and curious instance of how the JACL hired attorney Deborah Lim in 1989 to investigate the JACL's activities during World War II but then did not publish the report after she found potentially negative information on the JACL's history. Through her research, Lim discovered that the JACL had cooperated with the government by providing names to the FBI and suggested the use of relocation centers.¹³ This information is also significant in revealing a different means of assimilation by part of the Japanese American community and complicating

¹⁰ Cherstin Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2011), 180.

¹¹ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, 180.

¹² Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 7.

¹³ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, 180-184.

what is often simply a victim narrative.

Likewise, it is also important to analyze the impact of internment on post-camp life. How is one's worldview and identity altered, or perhaps even destroyed, when the government and many other Americans believe you are an enemy alien and a traitor? In this paper I will show that the interment of the Japanese was detrimental to their culture. In some cases these effects have caused Japanese Americans, particularly Nisei (second generation) who experienced internment, to repress or downplay their Japanese heritage as means to assimilate into White American society and as an attempt to prove their American identity as well as with the hope that such discrimination will never happen again.

Terminology

While many historical accounts regarding Japanese interment often include a section on terminology preceding the main text, an analysis of the language used and definitions help reveal more information on the historiography as well as the larger relative social norms that change in society as well. It is also important to continue to clearly define terms being used, especially since there is no real general consensus on which words are correct or incorrect and that "scholars still grapple with the most appropriate terminology for these policies."¹⁴

While there is discrepancy regarding which words are most appropriate for describing and talking about Japanese internment, the terminology often used to describe the distinctions between different Japanese generations is widely accepted, but

¹⁴ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi.

nevertheless warrants explanation. Classifying different generations is also important in that there appears to be different experiences based on whether Japanese Americans were born in the United States. Of the different generations, the Issei are the first generation and were born in Japan but later immigrated. The subsequent generations are known as the Nisei (Second), Sansei (Third), and Yonsei (Fourth). Other distinctions found in the historiography of Japanese internment include Nikkei, which is the “Japanese word for all Japanese Americans and does not differentiate between Japanese-born and U.S.-born persons of Japanese ancestry” and the Keibei, who are “U.S.-born Japanese Americans whose parents sent them to Japan for their education.”¹⁵

As for clarity, I think it is best to use the term “Japanese Americans” with regards to Japanese internment because if “American” is not included with Japanese, there is the risk of confusion on who is actually being interned. Also interestingly, Lyon highlights the power of how a word is constructed and the connotations it can subtly convey. In her work she asserts she does not include a hyphen in “Japanese Americans” because unhyphenated American groups (e.g. African American, Chinese American, Japanese American, etc.) allude to those ethnic groups as being partial Americans. In addition, she notes, “scholars argue that hyphenating such terms as “Japanese-American” implies that the individual is half of each nationality and wholly nothing. Leaving out the hyphen promotes the idea that ethnic Americans choose for themselves elements of more than one culture to create their own unique identities.”¹⁶

Conversely, William Minoru Hohri argues for the rejection of identifying people as “Japanese Americans” in favor of “Japanese-Americans” because the unhyphenated

¹⁵ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi – xii.

¹⁶ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi.

form excludes the Japanese immigrants who were, and are, permanent resident aliens in the United States. However, I disagree with Hohri's assessment of the use of "Japanese-Americans" over "Japanese Americans." The distinction does not seem relevant given the contemporary diversity of cultures in the United States; the majority of ethnic groups do not even make the distinction of incorporating "American" in their names; it just is an implied given that they are from or live in the United States.

And I agree with Lyon's analysis in that the hyphen seems to connote that a particular ethnicity is a sub-culture of Americans. While any particular ethnicity can be considered a co-culture within a larger group, which in and of itself is not necessarily a negative distinction, such terminological constructions should be composed mindfully, particularly given an ethnicity's history, especially with a group that has experienced noted inequality and a subordinate power distance position.

Although there are certain cases where some groups have adopted "American" in their identification, such as African Americans and Native Americans, this seems to be because previous names used to categorize them were pejorative. However, despite the injustices experienced by the Japanese community during the World War II era, none of their names used today are charged with racism so it seems applicable to use "Japanese," "Japanese American," or "Japanese-American."

Another aspect of the terminology that bears a variety of applied names is the words for the camps themselves. While "internment camp" is colloquially accepted and used for all of the centers, technically "internment" refers to the centers run by the Department of Justice and is reserved for a "a very specific legal category of category of

confinement”¹⁷ that were designated for the custody of “enemy aliens or individuals suspected of specific and documented threats.”¹⁸

While “internment” only refers to a few of the centers, I find it noteworthy that out of the other terms that could be applied, this is the most commonly used one. Even though “the federal government never used the term ‘internment’ to describe the confinement of the majority of Japanese Americans”¹⁹ it is interesting that the government’s usage of the euphemistic terms of “relocation” or “evacuation” centers did not remain as popular. Perhaps this is because that while “internment” may not be officially correct it seems more appropriate of a description than “relocation” or “evacuation,” unless of course “forced” is placed before either of those words. Tetsuden Kashima also notes how “at the time, the U.S. government used its own euphemisms to identify its wartime camps and actions. Terms such as ‘assembly centers,’ ‘relocation camps,’ and ‘evacuation’ mask the unpleasantness of people removed involuntarily from their homes.”²⁰ In addition, William Minoru Hohri asserts that the period of Japanese internment during World War II should not be worded as an “evacuation” or the Japanese who went to internment camps as “evacuees” because these words are misleading and were imposed on the Japanese by the United States. It appears that discontinuing the use of the term “evacuation” could be necessary for the future documentation of this period since the connotation “evacuation” does not feel as if it bears the same seriousness and gravity as “internment.”

¹⁷ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi.

¹⁸ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi.

¹⁹ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xi.

²⁰ Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment During World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 22.

However, even with twenty-first-century historiography (e.g. Hayashi's *Democratizing the Enemy* [2010], Kashima's *Judgment Without Trial* [2011], and Lyon's *Prisons and Patriots* [2011]) authors have divergent views on the proper terminology. For example, Lyon explains she prefers to use "detainees" when writing about Japanese Americans in the camps, because the word emphasizes the lack of freedom, the sense of limbo, and the lack of legal clarity that they experienced, not knowing how long they would be forced to live in the camps."²¹ Conversely, Tetsuden Kashima finds "the most accurate overall descriptive term is concentration camp – that is, a barbed-wire enclosure where people are interned or incarcerated under armed guard."²² Likewise, Brian Masaru Hayashi notes concentration camps is also an accurate term since Japanese Americans were forcibly removed and detained well beyond the "accepted norms"²³ and also asserts that in order to "grasp the painfulness of the process, the terms 'removal' and 'internment' rather than 'evacuation' and 'relocation'" are preferred since the latter imply an impending natural disaster from which citizens are saved."²⁴ However, both authors acknowledge that "concentration camps" are not the most widely used terms since it often bears the connotation to the Holocaust. Therefore, the Nazis' use of "concentration camp" as a euphemism for death camps has further contributed to the usage of "internment camp" as acceptable terminology regarding the relocation centers the United States had during World War II.

Historiography

²¹ Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots*, xiii.

²² Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial*, 22.

²³ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, xv.

²⁴ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, xiv.

The historiography warrants particular interest in that it reveals one of the ways the Japanese community worked to gain redress as well as to further assimilate into American society. Given how Japanese Americans have been in a subordinate position in the sociopolitical power balance with Whites and the United States government, one of the most critical aspects of Japanese internment is its historiography and the way it was used to convey particular images and messages to the public. Since the legal and political systems have not typically ruled in favor of Japanese Americans (e.g. Executive Order 9066 [1942]²⁵; *Korematsu v. United States* [1944]²⁶), it appears that many internment memoirs published in the postwar period and up until the early 1990s were used to ingrain images into historical memory of Japanese Americans who were, and remained, loyal despite the injustices suffered. Here I will begin with a discussion of a memoir from the late 1940s from the perspective of a Nisei (second generation), and then analyze Ansel Adams's photographs of Manzanar, as well as an internment memoir of an Issei (first generation).

Citizen 13660, Miné Okubo

Of particular interest is Miné Okubo's memoir *Citizen 13660*. During her time in the Tanforan Assembly Center, and later the Topaz War Relocation Center, Okubo documented her experiences, particularly through drawings, that she later compiled into a memoir, *Citizen 13660*. *Citizen 13660* is a valuable primary source for gaining

²⁵ United States presidential order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942 that authorized the Secretary of War to prescribe military areas in which any or all persons may be excluded and the right of any person to enter, remain, or leave is subject to the restrictions of the Secretary of War.

²⁶ The United States Supreme Court case that ruled in a 6-3 decision that Executive Order 9066 was constitutional.

perspective on daily life of the Japanese internment and is unique in that when Columbia University Press published Okubo's story in 1946, it became "the first personal documentation of the evacuation story."²⁷

On the onset of World War II, Miné Okubo, an American citizen, was stranded in Switzerland "with nothing but a toothbrush"²⁸ and the hospitality of her European friends when England and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. Okubo had been traveling across Europe on an art fellowship from the University of California, Berkeley and all her belongings were in Paris. After eventually being able to return to Berkeley, on Friday May 1, 1942, Miné and her brother were relocated to Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, California.

Citizen 13660 includes 189 black and white pen and ink drawings, one per page, and complementary text below the image. While most of the text is more or less a daily documentation of her internment without significant analysis and almost a feeling of detachment from the situation, her memoir nevertheless exposes the emotional toll it had on evacuees, but in a very subtle manner. However, despite her experiences, Okubo reflected in an updated preface in the 1983 publication of her work that she was not bitter about being interned and hopes that "things can be learned from this tragic episode, for I believe it could happen again."²⁹

Whether or not Okubo's publicly stated sentiments on internment are true, it is still important to note that *Citizen 13660* was uniquely situated in two different eras of the historiography of Japanese internment. First, Okubo's memoir was published in

²⁷ Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1946), ix.

²⁸ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 3.

²⁹ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, xxii.

1946, a year after World War II had ended, placing her account in a period that would have been advantageous to promote an image of loyal Japanese Americans who endured internment and injustice. And secondly, *Citizen 13660* was re-released again in 1983 with a revised preface. This was also the same year the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), which was established by Congress in 1980, issued *Personal Justice Denied* that stated:

The promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it—detention, ending detention and ending exclusion—were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership. Widespread ignorance of Japanese Americans contributed to a policy conceived in haste and executed in an atmosphere of fear and anger at Japan. A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who, without individual review or any probative evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.³⁰

Given the context of the time periods *Citizen 13660* was released in, it seems that Okubo might have been constrained to portray a particular message. However, if Okubo felt that she would not be able reveal the injustices experienced during internment explicitly, it appears that her drawings add an extra layer of depth and a more subtle and nuanced depiction of camp life. Likewise, Xiaojing Zhou notes how Okubo seemingly tells two different stories in that her memoir “contains two narratives – one overt, of a patriotic but persecuted American, and the other covert, protesting the injustice of the internment.”³¹ In addition, Elena Tajima Creff asserts, “the genius of Okubo’s book is that unusual combination of visual and literary narrative that allows her to tell both

³⁰ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 18.

³¹ Xiaojing Zhou, “Spatial Construction of the “Enemy Race”: Miné Okubo’s Visual Strategies in *Citizen 13660*,” *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 32, no. 3 (Fall, 2007), 54.

stories.”³² While the text may indicate she’s not bitter about internment, her pictures appear to suggest otherwise in that no one is really smiling in the drawings and Okubo often looks tired and upset.

Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans, Ansel Adams

Another important visual documentation and representation of Japanese internment that was also published during the war was photographer Ansel Adams’s *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans*. Adams’s book contains both photographs of the Manzanar internment camp as well as accompanying text. Ansel Adams was able to capture the camps while they were still in operation and photograph internees because in 1943 Ralph Merritt, the director of Manzanar, invited Adams to take photographs.³³ 104 photographs were compiled into *Born Free and Equal*, which was published in 1946, as well as a shorter photographic essay featured in *U.S. Camera*, November 1944. Through his photographs Adams aimed to “clarify the distinction of the loyal citizens of Japanese ancestry, and the dis-loyal Japanese citizens and aliens...that are stationed mostly in internment camps.”³⁴

However, even though it seems Adams’s intention was to help portray Japanese Americans in a positive image, his photographs and statements, at times, often come off as if he is romanticizing the camp to the point that it diminishes the injustice of internment itself. In addition to his photographs depicting the natural beauty of the

³² Elene Tajima Creef, *Imaging Japanese Americans: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation and the Body* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 78.

³³ Dolores Flamiano, “Japanese American Internment in Popular Magazines: Race, Citizenship, and Gender in World War II Photojournalism,” *Journalism History* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2010), 28.

³⁴ Flamiano, “Japanese American Internment in Popular Magazines,” 51.

landscape surrounding Manzanar, Adams asserts, “I believe that the acrid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the people of Manzanar. I do not say all are conscious of this influences, but I am sure most have responded in one way or another, to the resonances of the environment.”³⁵ Likewise, he also notes that the “huge vistas and the stern realities of sun and wind and space symbolize the immensity and opportunity of America – perhaps a vital reassurance following the experiences of enforced exodus.”³⁶

And if *Born Free and Equal* is looked at relatively in a contemporary context it is disconcerting that Adams dedicates his book “with admiration and respect”³⁷ to Manzanar camp director Ralph Merritt with a note on how Merritt “has given thousands of our fellow-citizens a renewed faith and confidence in democracy.”³⁸ Even if that statement is not perceived through a contemporary understanding of history, it seems difficult to believe that one would agree unjustified internment would stimulate any sense of democracy. Despite that Adams is trying to find positives in internment camps, it comes off as insensitive that he suggests all of the potential opportunities America has to offer are embodied in nature behind the fence that imprisons internees.

As the subtitle “*The Story of Loyal Japanese Americans*” suggests, Adams chronicles the various ways in which he finds the internees at Manzanar have positively adjusted to internment and it is based off these friendly attitudes he has observed, that has

³⁵ Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans* (New York: U.S. Camera), 9.

³⁶ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 9.

³⁷ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 1.

³⁸ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 1.

led him to the conclusion that it is a testament to how loyal Japanese Americans are despite being thought of as enemies. Adams notes:

There is no outward evidence of the “refugee” spirit, no expressed feeling of an endured temporary existence under barrack-life conditions. Part of this is due to the good administration of the Center by the W.R.A; the larger part is due to the basic character of the people. I do not recall one sullen face in Manzanar. Many of course, are bitter, but that bitterness is expressed in terms of argument and discussion – not in terms of unpleasant reaction to life.³⁹

While internees could have been outwardly cordial to Adams during his visit it seems odd that someone would mistake or come to the conclusion that common civility and politeness also equates acceptance with being forced into an internment camp.

However, Adams does effectively question the discrepancies in how the majority of the United States seemingly handles perceived enemy ethnicities differently in his remark that he finds it “interesting to note that they [Americans] do not make this assumption of disloyalty in regard to our citizens of German and Italian descent.”⁴⁰

While Adams is not explicitly stating how Japanese American internment seems to be fueled from racism, he at least acknowledges that certain cultures are being treated differently.

In addition, Adams also tries to establish Japanese Americans as Americans through photographs that attempt to show that internees share a similar culture and beliefs with White Americans. Many of the photographs are of internees in military uniform, which is clearly showing that Japanese Americans are nevertheless loyal and are willing to fight for America. Dolores Famiano also finds that “the overrepresentation of

³⁹ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 44.

⁴⁰ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 101.

Japanese Americans in uniform highlighted both their loyalty and their assimilation into the American military and law enforcement intuitions.”⁴¹

Likewise, Adams emphasis of Japanese Americans in the military is consistent with the political agenda to promote an inclusive armed force during the war. Even though Adams was not commissioned by the United States government to photograph Manzanar, his aim to promote Japanese Americans as loyal citizens happened to be similar to the goals of the government. For example, on October 2, 1942, Elmer Davis, the Director of the Office of War Information (OWI), wrote to President Roosevelt that he thought that loyal Japanese Americans in the army and navy could be used as a means to counter propaganda in Asia that fostered images of racial conflicts in the United States.⁴² Milton S. Eisenhower, the first director of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), also noted that Japanese American’s presence in the military would make it so “the enemy could no longer claim that we are discriminating against this minority; and we could press a vigorous story of Japanese American participation to the enemy, laying the groundwork for a Free Japan movement when the time is ripe.”⁴³ Likewise, John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, Colonel Pettigrew, chief of the Far Eastern Group within the War Department’s Military Intelligence Service (MIS), and Colonel Oscar N. Solbert, head of the Psychological Warfare Branch of the MIS, all voiced similar opinions of the propaganda value of including Japanese Americans in the military.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Flamiano, “Japanese American Internment in Popular Magazines,” 28.

⁴² Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 97.

⁴³ Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 101.

⁴⁴ Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 97 – 98.

Many of these photographs of internees are also close up portraits that seem like they could have been taken anywhere and there is nothing in the composition that denotes they were in an internment camp. Perhaps these portraits of internees, who were often smiling, served to contribute to Adams' assertion that Japanese Americans were loyal and happy internees, but now it seems rather bizarre that anyone would be in such high spirits after being sent to an internment camp.

Likewise, Adams also has several pictures that highlight Japanese Americans' Christianity, which seems to be another way in which he establishes internees' Americanism. However, Famiano does note that while there were Christian Japanese Americans, "half of the residents [at Manzanar] were Buddhist"⁴⁵ but none were shown in Adams's photographs.

Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawaii Issei,
Yasutaro Soga

While Yasutaro Soga's memoir was written during internment and covers through 1948, his account *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawaii Issei* was published in 2008. Even though Soga's memoir was initially written in 1948, it was published 60 years later. This might have been partially because it needed to be translated from Japanese to English, which understandably takes time, but it is still noteworthy that it took a while for this process to take place.

Soga also provides an important contrast to the historiography of Japanese internment in that he was an Issei, or someone who was born in Japan and is a first

⁴⁵ Flamiano, "Japanese American Internment in Popular Magazines," 28.

generation immigrant. The Issei perspective is significant as well since it is divergent from the internment memoirs from their children, the second generation Nisei who might have a different point of view on relocation camps given that the Nisei were born and raised in the United States and seem to be used more to promote loyalty to America, given their citizenship status.

Life Behind Barbed Wire also is unique in that Soga's internment experience was different than what most internees experienced since he was "one of 1,466 Hawai'i Japanese who were imprisoned during World War II"⁴⁶ and was "arrested on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack, incarcerated at Sand Island, Oahu and placed in camps on the Mainland."⁴⁷

In addition, it appears that it might have been difficult to have Soga's memoir published or well-received by the general United States public when it was written because his account does not fit in very well with the loyal Japanese American image that was being promoted during and after Japanese internment. It is particularly telling and interesting that Soga acknowledges in a postscript written in 1948 that he received criticism that his work "was too candid."⁴⁸

However, his candor does provide an insightful primary account of internment camp life. And it is through his frankness of the already apparent loss of morale among many internees that reveals the detrimental effects of incarcerating innocent people. In his memoir Soga depicts the emotional and psychological toll of camp had on internees:

⁴⁶ Yasutaro Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawaii Issei* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 12.

⁴⁷ Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, 12.

⁴⁸ Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, 255.

On the first day of 1942, our first New Year's Day since our arrest, we did not get even a piece of mochi (rice cake) and did not feel festive at all. We were filled with anxiety, frustration, and hopelessness— not only for ourselves, but also for the families we had left behind. Unless a man was extremely confident and optimistic, it was to be expected that here he might develop “nerves” or begin to display odd behavior. I noticed that men who had been fond of “talking big” outside were now depressed, turning into shadows of their former selves. Still others, refusing to face reality, clung to their prewar social status, which created problems for everyone. When we are reduced to living at the most basic level, our good and bad points are clearly exposed. On the whole, educators and priests showed themselves to be the worst of the lot. I was not the only one who felt this way. Of course there are always exceptions: There are many respectable teachers and priests. I regret to say, however, that in the camp I was disappointed in most of them.⁴⁹

Perhaps it was not only Soga's honesty about the injustice of internment camp that made his memoir unsuitable for the post-war image rehabilitation for Japanese Americans but also given his perspective regarding the situation. Throughout his memoir Soga accepts internment as something he has no control over in relating his incarceration anecdotally saying, “the fish on a cutting board cannot escape no matter how much it struggles.”⁵⁰ While Japanese Americans did not really have much control over their internment it might have been demoralizing to publish accounts explicitly stating people's lack of agency and control over their own lives. In addition, Soga's memoir is also divergent from the “politically correct” accounts that sustain the historical memory of the unrelenting loyalty and victimization of Japanese Americans.

Contributing Factors that Led to Japanese Internment

⁴⁹ Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, 35.

⁵⁰ Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, 21.

Given that there has been little evidence indicating that Japanese Americans were a threat to the national security of the United States,⁵¹ it appears that racism was an integral factor of why Japanese Americans were interned. Racism seems to have been a pervasive reason that underlined the decision to put Japanese in internment camps, particularly since many Americans seemed to misinterpret the intertwined nature of ethnicity and race. Although ethnicity and race do not have to be mutually exclusive, within the context of World War II it seems that Japanese Americans easily became enemy aliens to other Americans when the understanding of the differences between ethnicity and race were blurred. Additionally, in the wake of World War II it appears that Japanese Americans were seen as both racially and ethnically Japanese with no consideration that they perhaps were ethnically rooted in American culture. Seeing Japanese Americans as culturally tied to Japan as well seems to have helped enable internment to be viewed as a reasonable security measure.

In addition, Takashi Fujitani notes how the Census Bureau counted Japanese Americans in a different manner than others, which subsequently allowed for “tabulations concerning Japanese in the United States based on the race item, but [not] the same for their European counterparts.”⁵² Fujitani details the difference between how certain ethnicities were accounted for in census data was a result of how:

While the Census Bureau employed the concepts of ‘German’ and ‘Italian’ only to signify countries of birth, the term ‘Japanese’ indicated both a birth country and a race of people. Put differently, according to the census Japanese Americans remained conceptually ‘Japanese’ regardless of their birth in the United States, while German Americans and Italian Americans did not remain ‘Germans’ and ‘Italians.’⁵³

⁵¹ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 5.

⁵² Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 79.

⁵³ Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 79.

This census data was then used by the military to assist in figuring out the number of Japanese Americans who were to be interned.

The actions taken prior to Pearl Harbor by the government and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicate that Japanese Americans were purposefully being singled out on race. At the onset of World War II, the federal government initiated plans for the internment of specific individuals.⁵⁴ What is particularly telling, is that within the first 60 hours of war, the FBI selected more than 5,000 Japanese Americans and brought them to camps in New Mexico, Montana, South Dakota, Los Angeles and San Francisco.⁵⁵ The relatively fast implementation of incarceration suggests that the government had premeditated plans and suspicions regarding Japanese Americans. Even though these decisions were based on who the FBI thought were the “greatest risks – those who held leadership positions within organizations that had ties to the homeland, owned property there, and traveled frequently between the two countries,”⁵⁶ Lawrence M.C. Smith, the head of the Special Defense Unit, criticized the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover for “emphasizing ‘loyalty’ rather than security threat” and “detaining too many harmless individuals.”⁵⁷

Therefore, Pearl Harbor was a contributing factor that allowed for mass internment of the Japanese, but it should not be seen as the sole reason for internment camps. It appears Pearl Harbor did serve as a platform to garner public support for agencies that wanted to implement Japanese internment. However, since there was not

⁵⁴ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 76.

⁵⁵ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 77.

⁵⁶ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 77.

⁵⁷ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 77.

compelling evidence that Japanese Americans were an enemy threat, it suggests that the reasons behind internment camps were convoluted and racially charged.

Likewise, the general sentiments held by many White Americans regarding Japanese Americans prior and during World War II also helps provide understanding to the relative context in which enabled the implementation of internment camps. The instances of overt dehumanization of Japanese Americans promoted by the media and military appeared to possibly contribute to racist attitudes against Japanese Americans. For example, a *Los Angeles Times* article asserted “a viper is a viper wherever the egg is hatched — so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents — grows up to be a Japanese, not an American.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Fujitani notes how “in May 1942 the governor of Idaho advised that all the Japanese in his state be sent back to Japan and that the island should then be sunk. His reason: ‘they live like rats, breed like rats and act like rats.’”⁵⁹ Therefore, given how such racist remarks regarding Japanese Americans were more or less accepted, we can see how many Americans could find internment camps necessary.

Camp Resistance

While many Japanese leaders and apologists purported a loyal Japanese American image, the resistances that occurred at the camps provide insight into a counter-narrative and reveal a divergence in intercommunity ideals. However, while there were different forms of opposition to being in camp, the reasons and sources of this struggle is not exactly clear. Greg Robinson notes how “...it is not always easy to judge how much the

⁵⁸ W. H. Anderson, “The Question of Japanese Americans,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1942, p.4.

⁵⁹ Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 80.

actions of Japanese Americans were intended as conscious acts of rebellion against oppressive authority, and how much they resulted from frustration, confusion, nihilism, survival instincts, or sympathy for the Japanese enemy.”⁶⁰ Of particular interest are the Manzanar and Tule Lake protests that helps shed light on the various injustices and conflicts experienced by Japanese in internment camps.

Manzanar

Tensions among internees and also between internees and camp administrators erupted with about 1,000 internees protesting the arrest of Harry Ueno, a Kibei resistance leader.⁶¹ On December 6, 1942 Harry Ueno was arrested by Manzanar police for allegedly assisting in the beating of Fred Tayama, a member of the Japanese American Citizens League who was “believed to have assisted FBI agents in the arrests of numerous Issei immediately after Pearl Harbor.”⁶² While waiting for negotiations of Ueno’s release from jail, resistance leaders and about 1,000 internees went to “finish off”⁶³ Fred Tayama. However, this attempt on Tayama’s life was thwarted and protesters continued their resistance demonstrations at the police station. Ultimately, the Manzanar Riot resulted in the deaths of two internees and at least nine injuries “after military police botched an attempt to disperse demonstrators with tear gas and instead fired submachine guns into the smoky chaos.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, 164.

⁶¹ Lon Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (August 2001), 393.

⁶² Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 392.

⁶³ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 392.

⁶⁴ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 388.

Lon Kurashige notes how, following the riot, the media framed the Manzanar protest as a “Jap uprising in honor of the first anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack.”⁶⁵ However, while Kurashige reports how the media and newspapers presented the event as a riot celebrating Pearl Harbor, his journal article “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest” as well as his book *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict* are both absent of primary source citations for this account.⁶⁶ Further research was necessary in order to find primary sources that support Kurashige’s claim.

Despite the anti-American Japanese agenda set by the press, the War Relocation Authority investigation on the protest found “no credence to this unfounded accusation.”⁶⁷ After the Manzanar Riot the WRA directed an analysis of what happened and was conducted by a team of anthropologists, their internee research assistants, and the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS), which was privately funded and headed by University of California, Berkeley sociologist Dorothy Swaine Thomas and a research team of internees and graduate students.

Through their research JERS concluded the riot was a result of the culmination of frustration with the Manzanar administration and there was “no indication that a

⁶⁵ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 393; Troops Called to End Riots at Manzanar: Violence Flares When Pro-Axis Japs Celebrate Bombing of Pearl Harbor,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1942, 1; “Army Halts Rioting By Coast Japanese: Pro-Americans are Attacked at Camp Containing 10,000,” *The New York Times*, 7 December 1942, p. 16; “Guns Halt Jap Manzanar Riot: One Killed Nine Wounded at Owens Valley Camp,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1942, p. 1; “Japanese Boy Scouts Saved Flag in Riot: Held Off Mob of Countrymen in Outbreak at Relocation Center,” *The New York Times*, 10 December 1942, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 393; Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 102.

⁶⁷ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 393.

celebration of Pearl Harbor had anything to do with the affair.”⁶⁸ Likewise, Kurashige indicates that some Japanese Americans resented the JACL leaders and how Fred Tayama not only “led the FBI to arrest innocent Issei on the suspicion of being disloyal and conspired with government officials to bring about the internment”⁶⁹ but also allegedly stole relief monies earmarked for certain internees.

With a closer analysis of the Manzanar Riot there appears to be a divergence with the stereotypical loyal Japanese American who compliantly went along with internment and sought to prove their Americanism. This protest further highlights the turns in the Japanese internment historiography. For example, in 1943, a year after the Manzanar Riot, researchers found in an analysis of the Manzanar Nisei who renounced their citizenship “neither familiarity with Japanese language and culture nor political ties to Japan had much to do with rejecting the United States.”⁷⁰ Instead, the Manzanar Nisei renounced their United States citizenship because of the “violation of their civil rights, the inherent racism, and its devastating economic consequences.”⁷¹

Therefore, the information on the Manzanar Riot as well as the Nisei who renounced their citizenship seems to suggest that accounts of Japanese internment were utilized by Japanese elites in favor of assimilation in order to work towards redress and Americanization.

Tule Lake

⁶⁸ Morton Grodzins, “The Manzanar Shooting” [manuscript], January. 10, 1943, p. 38, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records, BANC MSS 67/14c, O 10.04.

⁶⁹ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 393 – 394.

⁷⁰ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 398.

⁷¹ Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” 398.

Even though Tule Lake was a camp mostly designated for those who seemed to be larger threats than other Japanese Americans, the demonstrations that erupted as a result of tensions is nevertheless important in contextualizing the injustices endured. One of the major protests that occurred was over a disagreement between camp officials and internees over how the funeral of an internee should be handled.

The four-day demonstrations resulted in Tule Lake being put under martial law and was caused by the escalation of disagreements between camp officials and internees. Minoru Kioyota describes in his memoir how the protests started on October 15, 1943 when a truck overturned while taking internees to work on a farm, killing one man and injuring several others.⁷² After this accident occurred, internees asked for compensation for the victims' families and increased safety measures. However, camp director Raymond R. Best refused these requests and also barred internees from being able to do any more agricultural work. Internees became further agitated when camp officials also did not allow there to be a public funeral for the man who died in the accident. The culmination of these grievances led to mass demonstrations on November 1, 1943. By November 4, the army had to intervene at Tule Lake and subsequently imposed martial law on November 13 after the demonstrations were deemed too large.

Oddly, there is a wide range in the documentation of the amount of people who partook in the demonstrations. In one account to MIS Agent Glasgow, camp director Best estimated 200 protestors, but later Best told the FBI he saw "30 or 40 Japanese with

⁷² Minoru Kioyota, *Beyond Loyalty: The Story of a Kibei* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 104.

clubs circling around his house.”⁷³ While there is no consensus on the amount of protesters (other reports vary from 25 to 2,500⁷⁴), the act of demonstrations does seem to indicate that at least some internees did not stoically accept the injustices against them but took an active role demonstrating the apparent flaws of the situation.

Post-Camp Understandings of Identity

Given that Japanese internment appeared to be racially charged it is also important to explore how Japanese Americans, and Americans as a whole, reconcile their schemas of identity in a post-war and post-camp context as well as how historical memory has perpetuated Japanese Americans as the “model minority.” In addition, even though there is the “model minority” stereotype for Japanese Americans, racism against Japanese and Asians still persists with American identity still being negotiated for minority groups.

While Japanese Americans were seen as “enemy others” by Americans during World War II, it is this racism that Mire Koikari argues led Japanese American men to join the United States military. Koikari notes that “despite, or because of, virulent anti-Japanese racism during the war, Japanese American soldiers strove to prove their loyalty by shedding blood on the frontline.”⁷⁵ Therefore, anti-Japanese sentiments prior to and during the war appear to have influenced how Japanese Americans attempted to

⁷³ Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 139.

⁷⁴ Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 139.

⁷⁵ Mire Koikari, “Japanese Eyes, American Heart: Politics of Race Nation, and Masculinity in Japanese American Veterans’ WWII Narratives,” *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 5 (2009), 549.

assimilate into American society, particularly with how the military served as one of the means to facilitate the reconfiguration of identity.

However, this should not be generalized to all Japanese Americans in interment camps. While some felt the need to prove their loyalty others were confused not only about why they were in camps but also why they should defend a nation that betrayed them. Emi Somekawa, who was interned at Tule Lake, exclaims in his memoir “in camp the JACL was going around telling people that we have to go prove our loyalty. And then I said to myself, for Christ sake, what the hell do we have to prove for? We haven’t done nothing.”⁷⁶ Understandably, it might be difficult to be motivated to fight in a war for a country that initially designated you as a threat to the nation but then allowed and heavily pressured enlistment into the military.

In addition, the experiences of the Japanese American Military Intelligence Service (MIS) who served in the Asia-Pacific region exemplified the lack of recognized identity and being more or less adrift in between two cultures. Japanese Americans in the MIS also faced an added facet of danger in that there was confusion by both Japanese and American soldiers who were often unsure whether Japanese Americans were on the Allied or Axis side, so Japanese American soldiers unfortunately ran the risk of being considered enemies by everyone in the war.⁷⁷

However, in a post-war and post-camp era, Japanese Americans’ ascension to model minority status was multifaceted and particularly rooted in politics. As the United States transitioned from World War II to the Cold War, Japan was needed as an

⁷⁶ Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, 173.

⁷⁷ Mire Koikar, “Japanese Eyes, American Heart: Politics of Race Nation, and Masculinity in Japanese American Veterans’ WWII Narratives,” *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 5 (August 2009), 551.

anticommunist ally. Therefore, the United States government's attempt to reincorporate Japanese Americans back into a more favorable cultural and socioeconomic status seems to have been more than just an apologetic recognition of injustices against Japanese Americans. In order to gain favor with Japan, Japanese Americans, and other Americans, it appears the United States government first wanted to demonstrate that Japanese Americans were a part of the American community again. The government helped initiate the shift in identity for Japanese Americans through instances such as when President Truman pardoned internee draft resisters who were imprisoned in 1947 and in 1952 when Congress rescinded "the exclusion of Japanese immigration and the legal barrier preventing the Issei from becoming naturalized citizens."⁷⁸ However, it is a bit tragic that during World War II the government found Japanese Americans to be enemy aliens and then in turn needed Japanese Americans to be assimilated into American society as means to potentially gaining more allies against America's new enemy, communism.

Since interment camps uniquely singled out Japanese (with the exception of some Germans and Italians who were interned), it is important to analyze the types of impacts it might have had in identity formation and identification. In one case study, sociologist Hisako Matsuo's analyzed identity and assimilation of a sampling of two successive Nisei and Sansei generations from Portland, Oregon in 1989. Matsuo measured ethnic identity (a continuum between Japanese and American), generation, socioeconomic status, childhood social networks, adult social networks, proportion of Japanese American organizations, and perception/experience of prejudice/discrimination as

⁷⁸ Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 123.

variables. Through this research Matsuo concluded that the third generation Japanese American Sansei have “achieved a greater degree of identificational assimilation (where assimilating people establish ‘peoplehood’ with the members of a host society and are able to function in the host community without encountering prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory behavior) than the second generation”⁷⁹ while this is not complete identificational assimilation and that “Japanese Americans still maintain primordial ties that contribute to the retention of ethnic identity of the Sansei.”⁸⁰ Matsuo also notes “historical incidents, including World War II, mass evacuation, destruction of the Japanese American communities, and desegregation after the civil rights movement, have contributed to structural assimilation.”⁸¹

Beyond Redress

Almost forty-two years after internment ended, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that provided \$20,000 to each internee. Three years later, President George H. W. Bush issued formal apology letters with the redress payments. The formal apology letter aptly captures the gravity of Japanese American internment by declaring:

A monetary sum and words alone cannot restore lost years or erase painful memories; neither can they fully convey our Nation’s resolve to rectify the injustice and to uphold the rights of individuals. We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize the serious injustices were done to Japanese Americans during World War II.

⁷⁹ Hisako Matsuo, “Identificational Assimilation of Japanese Americans: A Reassessment of Primordialism and Circumstantialism,” *Sociological Perspectives* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 506.

⁸⁰ Matsuo, “Identificational Assimilation of Japanese Americans,” 519.

⁸¹ Matsuo, “Identificational Assimilation of Japanese Americans,” 519.

Currently, almost seventy years have passed since the end of Japanese American internment and in this period there have been significant developments in opening the dialogue on Japanese internment. With each succeeding generation it appears that time has allowed for a more nuanced history. After redress payments were issued it seems that some authors were no longer as compelled to promote the “loyal Japanese narrative” and more expansive accounts, which at times even challenge historical memory, has gained more coverage. Hopefully continued scholarship will further our understanding and develop the discourse on Japanese internment.

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