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## Freedom of Speech in America's Concentration Camps: The Press and Public Discourse for Japanese Americans at Manzanar

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### Recommended Citation

Botti, Anna-Sofia Andrea, "Freedom of Speech in America's Concentration Camps: The Press and Public Discourse for Japanese Americans at Manzanar" (2019). *Senior Projects Spring 2019*. 147.  
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Freedom of Speech in America's Concentration Camps  
The Press and Public Discourse for Japanese Americans at Manzanar

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Anna-Sofia Botti

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2019



## DEDICATION

To Grammy and Grandpa Jeff, who have led by example in every way and cultivated a love of history, learning, and human life from the beginning.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the many people who played a part in creating this project. First and foremost, I owe a huge thank you to my advisor, Rob Culp. His always-thoughtful and inspiring feedback, generosity of time, helpful organization, and all-around wonderful support gave me the crucial grounding needed to write this paper. Thank you to my two other board members: Greg Moynahan, who has been an invaluable mentor in my years of studying history at Bard, and Tabetha Ewing, who offered critical and thought-provoking feedback during the progress of this project. Thank you also to the wonderful members of the history faculty who have worked with me over the years, Alice Stroup and Miles Rodriguez. I'm grateful to David Wollner for coming to Bard to offer feedback at my midway conference and for offering himself as a contact. I'm also grateful to Paul Chihara for meeting with me for an afternoon of stimulating conversation about his experiences of incarceration and for his generosity in sharing his thoughts and music, and to Susan Botti for setting up the contact. Thank you to Jeremy Hall for the crucial help in finding my primary source material, and to the rest of the library staff for their incredible knowledge and hard work. Thank you to my wonderful friends Mac, Ellie, Isabella, Sarah, and Hope for offering love, support, solidarity, and humor. Thank you especially to Eric, who has exchanged feedback, given advice, and offered constant support to me this year. Finally, thank you to Grammy for the advice when I started the project and the years of exciting history discussions that led me here in all sorts of ways. Thank you to her and the rest of my family for their love, guidance, and support: Mom, Dad, Chris, Aaron, Ali, and Marisa.

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## INTRODUCTION

“An old wound opened up again, and I found myself shrinking inwardly from my Japanese blood, the blood of an enemy.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Monica Sone narrates her moment of panicked self-recognition after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. She was not alone in this feeling of ethnic self-hatred. The attack on Pearl Harbor spurred rampant anti-Japanese sentiment in the mass public and fear in a Japanese-American community that was already struggling for acceptance in the U.S. Following Pearl Harbor, she and her family destroyed all traditional Japanese relics in their household, fearing it would be used to connect them with what was now an enemy nation.<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing weeks, her family watched neighbors and friends slowly disappear as they were arrested by the FBI, some of them to be separated from their families for years. Her mother even kept a packed suitcase next to the door, preparing for their father’s sudden arrest to be next.<sup>3</sup> Sone recalls in her memoir, “I knew instinctively that the fact that I was an American by birthright was not going to help me escape the consequences of this unhappy war.”<sup>4</sup>

She was not wrong. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, permitting the incarceration of thousands of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast, over sixty percent of whom were United States citizens. Dispossessed Japanese-Americans were sent to various locations across the country, the majority to one of ten so-called “relocation centers.”<sup>5</sup> The first occupants arrived in camps as early as March 1942, a wave of Japanese Americans who had volunteered to make the move first. The entire West Coast

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 1979 ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*,

<sup>3</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*,

<sup>4</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 146.

<sup>5</sup> Glen Kitayama, "Manzanar," (*Densho Encyclopedia*: accessed Dec 3 2018).

population of Japanese Americans followed in the ensuing months, moving to unfamiliar parts of the countries and inhospitable new homes.

Barely a month after the first arrivals set foot on Manzanar Relocation Center, the first mimeographed issue of the camp newspaper appeared, optimistically and democratically named the *Manzanar Free Press*. Lest anyone miss the implication, the words “FREE PRESS” were displayed loudly at the top of the page, surrounded by sketched mountains imitating the imposing Sierra Nevada mountains that framed the camp’s California desert. Run by Japanese Americans, the paper declared itself to be “America’s youngest paper, and in our opinion, one of America’s most unique newspapers.”<sup>6</sup> It enthusiastically thanked General John L. DeWitt, who was outspoken in his racially-driven support for incarceration, and his staff for “the way in which they have handled the Manzanar situation.”<sup>7</sup> It exclaimed that, “This, to a newspaper man or woman, is plain Utopia,” and concluded that, “We should be able to devote all our creative efforts to make this sheet one of the liveliest ever published in the world. And the most democratic.”<sup>8</sup>

The dissonance between the infringement on civil liberties that placed Japanese Americans in camps for three years and the democratic, upbeat voice of the *Manzanar Free Press* is what first sparked my curiosity on camp newspapers. Why would the newspaper mirror an experience and sentiment seemingly so far from reality? Was it in fact so different from reality? How did the paper interact with the camp community and experience as a whole? Was the newspaper’s particular character the result of censorship, administrative pressure, genuine staff opinion, or some combination of these factors?

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<sup>6</sup> "Editorial," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), April 11, 1942, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-i125-00391-1/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Our Sincere Appreciation,” *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), April 11, 1942, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-i125-00391-1/>.

My investigation of the paper led me to a central question: what does it mean for a “free press” to exist in a concentration camp?

The institution of the camp newspaper became a central aspect of life in the camps. Newspapers or some form of regular bulletin sprang up in camps almost immediately, serving as a central disseminator of information for camps holding thousands of inmates. They functioned similarly to any regular local newspaper, reporting on happenings within the camps and publishing familiar items such as sports sections, classified ads, and regular editorials. Entirely staffed by Japanese-American inmates, they were required to operate under “supervision”<sup>9</sup> of camp administration. Since subscriptions to larger regional newspapers were available in the camps, they rarely commented on outside events, relying on these subscriptions to provide this information. In all but three camps, newspapers were typed and mimeographed; newspapers at Manzanar, Minidoka, and Heart Mountain Relocation Centers eventually switched to using a printing press.

The documentation of camp life presented in these newspapers provides an important window into the camp experience. Updates on construction of facilities, such as the addition of bathroom partitions months into camp operation, convey the conditions in which the inmates lived; notices about church services and other religious activities, both Christian and Buddhist, portray lively religious communities; and announcements of dances, theater performances, musical concerts, and other recreational events demonstrate active community engagement and efforts toward occupation and normalcy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Takeya Mizuno, "The Creation of the 'Free' Press in Japanese-American Camps: The War Relocation Authority's Planning and Making of the Camp Newspaper Policy," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 506, JSTOR.

<sup>10</sup> *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 1942.

However, the picture of camp life presented in these newspapers is complicated by the newspapers' relationship with camp administration, the outside world, and the camp community itself. The "supervision" of federal camp administration varied in its extent across the camps, but in every case the administration exercised a degree of control over what was printed. Circulation of camp newspapers outside camp boundaries, as well as language within administration policy on the newspapers, indicate that to some extent the newspapers were expected to shape public opinion and represent the Japanese-American community and the incarceration program to the rest of the world. Deep-running cultural differences within the ethnic community divided Japanese-Americans along lines of generation, citizenship, camp occupation, and even personal psychological reactions to being incarcerated. The existence of this multiplicity of perspectives, along with the fact that newspaper staff was often composed of a certain class of Japanese Americans, meant that the newspapers often could not accurately represent the voices of inmates.

The failure of the newspaper to capture the wide range of opinions and discursive activity in the camp necessitates looking elsewhere for other voices and the media that advocates for them. In an effort to locate voices that would have contradicted with the ideology put forth by the press, I look to the Manzanar Riot of December 1942, an uprising of inmates that turned violent. The riot engages voices that the paper does not necessarily represent and provides an example of contrasting discursive activity to that of the newspaper. The presence of these contradicting voices raises another series of central questions: Where in the camp are there alternative modes of public expression? How can the people without access to the public forum of the newspaper represent themselves? What forms do these representations take, and how does this form of public activity compare with the newspapers'?

In addressing these questions, I focus on the case of Manzanar Relocation Center. Located in the Owens Valley, California, Manzanar housed ten thousand inmates at its peak, the vast majority from Los Angeles.<sup>11</sup> The success of publications on memories of Manzanar, such as the famous book and movie *Farewell to Manzanar*, makes Manzanar perhaps the most well-known camp today. Its newspaper, the *Manzanar Free Press*, was the longest-operating camp newspaper in its 1942-1945 run: its longevity makes it the only paper to have covered the camp both during its existence as a temporary “assembly center” and after its transition to a more permanent “relocation center.”<sup>12</sup> It was one of three papers that came to be printed rather than mimeographed.

My central primary source for this paper is the *Manzanar Free Press*, most issues of which I accessed through the Center for Research Libraries. I largely limit my discussion of the *Free Press* to the year of 1942. This is in part because of the limits of time and scope on this paper, but also in part because the public of the camp changed considerably after the 1942 Manzanar Riot; I chose to focus this paper on the conditions of the camp and newspaper as they were originally established. It is also important to note that, while I accessed the first issue of the *Manzanar Free Press* that was published in early April 1942, I was not able to access the issues between then and the beginning of June. Because of the gradual arrival of inmates between March and June of 1942 and a change in administration beginning in June that lasted for the rest of incarceration, I have not considered this month-and-a-half gap to be a big gap in my understanding of the paper.

Other sources I have used extensively have been memoirs and interviews of former inmates. Wherever possible, I have tried to refer to these for accounts of the camp experience

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<sup>11</sup> Glen Kitayama, "Manzanar," Densho Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar/>.

<sup>12</sup> John L. DeWitt, *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast 1942* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, 1942), 151.

rather than other secondary sources that generalize the experience. Memorialization of the period of incarceration often makes the mistake of generalizing the experiences of the inmates into an easily digestible narrative. It has been important to me to keep my understanding of the camps grounded in a multiplicity of primary-source perspectives.

Another source of information that warrants acknowledgement is Densho, a non-profit organization founded in 1996 that provides an extensive base of primary source material, including documents, photographs, and oral histories, and secondary source material in the form of an encyclopedia. Much of my perspective has been shaped by the information provided by the project. I have used the interviews extensively, and by using them in conjunction with the memoirs, have tried to create well-rounded profiles of former inmates in order to accurately represent different perspectives.

Finally, I have also used official government documents to illuminate this history, mostly reports for and by the War Relocation Authority. The inclusion of these allows me to work with a layered archive of sources. Government documents provide an administrative account of this period; newspapers provide a public account; and memoirs and interviews provide more private, personal accounts. By studying this period through multiple lenses, I have hoped to create a balanced picture of this history.

Throughout this paper, I have tried refrain from using euphemistic language to refer to the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Terms such as “internment” and “relocation” (as well as related terms “internment camp,” “relocation center,” and “internee”) indicate the legal detainment of citizens of a country with which the United States is at war. The majority of the Japanese Americans affected by E.O. 9066, however, were United States citizens, and their

incarceration was ruled unconstitutional by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.<sup>13</sup> Because of this, while I recognize the imperfections of such loaded terms, I refer to the mandate as “incarceration,” the designated living spaces as “concentration camps,” and the people as “inmates.”

The term “concentration camp” is loaded enough to warrant some further explanation. Though the most common association with the term is the concentration camps of the Holocaust, I do not mean in any way to compare the incarceration of Japanese Americans to the atrocities of Nazi Germany. “Concentration camp” has come to be defined as forced confinement in purposefully bad conditions for the purpose of weakening a political enemy or scapegoat; however, it can also refer simply to the forced confinement of civilians outside the legal justice system, in which case the term would apply to the situation of Japanese Americans. As Densho’s statement on terminology says: “As prison camps outside the normal criminal justice system, designed to confine civilians for military and political purposes on the basis of race and ethnicity, these sites also fit the definition of ‘concentration camps.’”<sup>14</sup> For this reason, and because of the way that other terms like “internment” fail to capture the harshness of the confinement, I continue to use the term “concentration camp” despite its connection with the Holocaust and in full acknowledgement of the imperfect range of options offered in the terminology.

The first chapter of this paper attempts to situate the newspaper in relation to the camp and ethnic community, and establish the foundation of the cultural landscape that becomes

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<sup>13</sup>Roger Daniels, "Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of the Japanese Americans - Part 1 of 5" (Discover Nikkei: February 1, 2008) <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2008/2/1/words-do-matter/>. See also: “Terminology.” Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment. Last modified 2017. Accessed April 29, 2019. <https://densho.org/terminology/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Terminology.” Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment. Last modified 2017. Accessed April 29, 2019. <https://densho.org/terminology/>.

important in the scene of public discourse. What is the context in which the newspaper exists, culturally, socially, and politically? How did the cultural history of Japanese Americans shape the pathways of the ethnic community at Manzanar? How did it shape its relation to the newspaper?

The second chapter dives into a deeper analysis of the newspaper itself, looking to clarify the power dynamics at play and characterize the voice put forth by the paper. To what extent did the newspaper voice the complaints and opinions of the inmates, and to what extent did it behave as a more oppressive or exclusionary power? How much did it serve administrative purposes? To what extent could it subvert the disenfranchisement of incarceration?

The third chapter explores other avenues of public cultural expression, focusing on the Manzanar Riot of December 1942 as an example of public expression very different from the kind put forth by the newspaper. Through what other mediums could public discourse happen at Manzanar? Where were alternative spaces of public expression to be found, and how did they operate? How can these different modes of discourse be compared in their power and subversion of the circumstances of incarceration?

This project becomes an exploration of a rich discursive landscape at Manzanar and a discussion of power through public discourse. It examines how cultural divisions within the ethnic community shaped differing responses to incarceration and differing approaches to public discourse. It examines the nuances of the discourse published by the newspaper, discussing how it managed to be subversive in some ways but alienating in others. It attempts to decipher and characterize the voice of the newspaper, looking to analyze the kind of ideology it puts forth. It questions other areas of public discourse and places them in dialogue with each other, analyzing



the dynamics of power and resistance. Overall, this project asks: how did inmates at Manzanar respond to their incarceration through avenues of public discourse?

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXTUALIZING THE NEWSPAPER

Japanese-American history prior to incarceration gives vital context to the newspaper and lays the foundation of cultural divisions that would shape the course of public discourse in the camp. This chapter attempts to contextualize the existence of public discourse in the camp by providing an overview of the history of Japanese Americans before incarceration, exploring the experience of the camp through accounts of former inmates, and examining the way in which the newspaper operated. The context in which the newspaper was published is important for understanding the role it played in the camp and how it gave expression to various voices. The nuances of the camp experience illuminate the way in which the newspaper functioned in the context of this specific social and cultural world.

#### Before Incarceration: Issei and Nisei

The pre-incarceration history of Japanese Americans established a structure in the ethnic community that became the foundation of camp social dynamics. Generational, linguistic, and cultural differences shaped the layout of the ethnic community, along with class dynamics and differences in citizenship status.

Japanese immigration to the U.S. began slowly in the late nineteenth century. Since the seventeenth century, Japan had maintained a practice of isolationism; however, after the Meiji Restoration restored imperial rule in 1868 and brought massive social and economic change to Japan, many began to consider the prospect of emigration. Japan began to drop legal barriers to

emigration beginning in the 1880s, and turned to encouraging the migration of Japanese men, especially towards the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

In the U.S., the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 left employers seeking a new population to undercut wages, and it was in the period following the act that the Japanese American population began to grow exponentially.<sup>16</sup> Historian Ronald Takaki compares the growth of Japanese and Chinese American populations: “Eight years after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, there were only 2,039 Japanese on the U.S. mainland. But within two decades, the Japanese had surpassed the Chinese in number--72,257 to 71,431. Twenty years later, while the Chinese population had remained virtually constant, the Japanese had nearly doubled to 138,834.”<sup>17</sup> In this period, Japanese Americans quickly became a vital work force in the U.S.

The early waves of immigrants were largely men, either single or separated from their families while they worked to establish an American livelihood. Arriving in America, they were met with fierce racial antagonism and a limited and discriminatory labor market. Early in the twentieth century, most Japanese immigrants became migrant workers, concentrating most heavily in agriculture, railroads, and canneries.<sup>18</sup> These non-English-speaking laborers depended on Japanese labor contractors, *keiyakunin*, to secure employment<sup>19</sup>: the presence of these contractors made the employer relationship more distant and assisted in removing a sense of employer responsibility for workers’ welfare. The contractors were also paid out of the laborers’ wages, diminishing the already meager earnings of manual labor. The conditions of this labor

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<sup>15</sup> Library of Congress, "Immigration: Japanese," Library of Congress, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/japanese.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Library of Congress, "Immigration: Japanese," Library of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1989), 180-181.

<sup>18</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> Yuji Ichioka, "Japanese Immigrant Labor Contractors and the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railroad Companies, 1898-1907," *Labor History* 21, no. 3: 325, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00236568008584583>.

were harsh and inhumane; they worked extreme hours in weather ranging from 120-degree heat to cold enough that “our excrement froze immediately when we went to the toilet outside the tent,” one worker remembered.<sup>20</sup> They suffered the physical ramifications of their work, experiencing night blindness from malnutrition or the indelible “Alaskan smell” from canneries.<sup>21</sup> Having virtually no power against employers, Japanese laborers suffered hellish conditions.

As the Japanese immigrant population increased, they began to develop separate economies and communities. In cities, the Issei often became entrepreneurs, running hotels, grocery stores, fruit and vegetable stands, and other small businesses. In rural areas, the Issei largely shifted into their own agricultural development: this well-timed movement made Japanese-run agriculture a huge contributor to the market for fresh produce. Takaki provides revealing statistics: “As early as 1910, they produced 70 percent of California’s strawberries, and by 1940 they grew 95 percent of the state’s fresh snap beans, 67 percent of its fresh tomatoes, 95 percent of its spring and summer celery, 44 percent of its onions, and 40 percent of its fresh green peas.”<sup>22</sup> Through agriculture and entrepreneurship, the Japanese were able to develop sustainable livelihoods.

The development of these economies went along with the growth of supportive networks of Japanese-immigrant communities, arising in what Takaki calls “ethnic solidarity.”<sup>23</sup> He argues that agriculture was particularly important to the establishment of such communities, since it employed so many--in 1925, approximately 46% of “gainfully employed” Japanese were in agriculture--and because it allowed Japanese immigrants to become settlers rather than

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<sup>20</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 183

<sup>21</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 184.

<sup>22</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 189.

<sup>23</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 193.

sojourners.<sup>24</sup> Beyond this, he credits aspects of Japanese tradition, saying, “The principle of group cooperation was embedded in Japanese culture.”<sup>25</sup> Japanese immigrants learned to lean on each other in networks of mutual-support systems, and Takaki argues that it was through agriculture and ethnic solidarity that the Japanese community was able to become established in America.

This history shaped the culture of the Issei, literally meaning “first generation” Japanese, during the time of incarceration. Having spent childhood and sometimes parts of adulthood in Japan, they remained connected with Japanese culture and traditions. They spoke Japanese while having a generationally inconsistent grasp of English. They had experienced severe racial bigotry and economic discrimination in America, and in response had formed highly organized and supportive Japanese-immigrant communities to establish and sustain themselves. However they responded to the lack of acceptance from white America—by giving it up or continuing to fight for it—they were accustomed to an exclusion from American-ness and a necessity to trust in and depend on their closed internal community of fellow Japanese.

The Nisei, or “second generation,” provided a stark contrast to the culture of their parents. In terms of simple demographics, the generational gap was abnormally large. The Immigration Act of 1924, a response to backlash against the influx of immigration, put a sudden stopper in the flow of Japanese immigration to the U.S. While it didn’t cut it off entirely, the sudden slowing of incoming Japanese meant the Issei population stopped being replenished with immigrants in the intermediary ages between the Issei and their children. This resulted in an unusually stark generational separation that was compounded by differences in culture.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 193.

The Nisei were in many ways culturally American, contrary to their parents who remained connected with Japanese culture, tradition, and principles. They spoke English with varying skills in Japanese—most at least understood it, from being spoken to in Japanese by their parents—and were otherwise immersed in American culture. They listened to American music, followed American pop culture, and attended American schools. Perhaps most crucially, they were American citizens by birth, something that set them apart from their legally alien parents. Nisei sociologist S. Frank Miyamoto creates a vivid image of the difference between Issei and Nisei subcultures:

On the streets when two Issei met, one would see much bowing and hear the soft modulations of the Japanese language. Ritual acknowledgements of obligations incurred and to be incurred were an almost invariant part of such conversations. Also, references often were made to families, relatives, friends, and the *kenjin* (prefectural countryment)—in short, to the network of relations which bound community members together....

By comparison, the Nisei subculture was rudimentary. Basically, the Nisei were Americans. They spoke English, knew its idioms and slang; they knew the popular songs and danced the latest dance steps; and their idols were the favorites of all Americans: Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Clark Gable, and Katherine Hepburn.<sup>26</sup>

In these ways, the Nisei stood in stark cultural contrast to their Issei parents.

However, the Nisei could not be complete and ordinary Americans. Many Nisei struggled with a confusing duality of identity, feeling torn between their American and Japanese roots. While they were American in the many ways listed above, they also retained part of their Japanese identity. They heard Japanese in their homes and experienced the Japanese culture of their parents; most attended Japanese school in addition to their American education; and many grew up in heavily Japanese- or Asian-American neighborhoods, in this way experiencing more peripherally the close Japanese communities created by their parents' generation. The two-ness

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<sup>26</sup> S. Frank Miyamoto, "Introduction to the 1979 Edition," introduction to *Nisei Daughter*, by Monica Sone, 1979 ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), x-xi.

in identity was especially clearly represented in the tendency to have two names, an American one in addition to the birth-given Japanese one. Those who didn't have two names often changed or Americanized their names, resulting in a generation of Japanese Americans with names like "Betty Yamaguchi," "Sue Kunitomi," or "Frank Miyamoto."

Takaki names a Nisei "drive to succeed"<sup>27</sup> as being a defining generational trait. Issei parents saw American education and good English skills as the key to success in America, and encouraged their children to study hard. Yoritada Wada recalled, "We Nisei were told over and over about the importance of school and education--how knowledge and one's mind could never be taken away and that learning could be the ladder toward success and security and equality."<sup>28</sup> As a generation, the Nisei outstripped the national average level of education with an average of two years of college.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their education, however, Nisei were seldom able to secure a job in their field. On top of the job restrictions brought about by the Great Depression, racial discrimination in the job market left Nisei trapped in limited options for their future, performing domestic work or being employed exclusively by other Japanese. Takaki again provides revealing statistics: "A study of 161 Nisei who graduated from the University of California between 1925 and 1935 found that only 25 percent were employed in professional vocations for which they had been trained. Twenty-five percent worked in family businesses or trades that did not require a college education, and 40 percent had 'blind alley' jobs."<sup>30</sup> The exclusion of vast numbers of highly educated Nisei from higher level careers built a palpable frustration into the Nisei as a generation, which expressed itself through a high level of organization and activity.

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<sup>27</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 217.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Takaki, *Strangers from*, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 218.

<sup>30</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from*, 218.

Monica Itoi Sone reckons with the Nisei identity in her 1953 memoir *Nisei Daughter*. In Frank Miyamoto's introduction to the 1973 edition, he points out that the entire story is framed around a search for identity. It opens with Sone's recollection of her first realization of her Japanese ancestry, the very first words being: "The first five years of my life I lived in amoebic bliss, not knowing whether I was plant or animal....One day when I was a happy six-year-old, I made the shocking discovery that I had Japanese blood. I was a Japanese."<sup>31</sup> This realization comes with her parents' announcement to their children that they will begin attending Japanese school after regular grammar school. While the initial reaction of the six-year-old Kazuko (Sone's childhood name) mostly centers around her distress at having to attend extra school, the older Sone's retelling acknowledges a deeper upset and confusion at the new duality that her Japanese-ness introduced to her life. She describes, "I had always thought I was a Yankee, because I had been born on Occidental and Main Street....I didn't see how I could be a Yankee and a Japanese at the same time. It was like being born with two heads. It sounded freakish and a lot of trouble."<sup>32</sup> Through her account of this memory, Sone establishes this struggle to reconcile a Japanese-American identity as a central conflict of the memoir.

This theme—the confusion of feeling not fully Japanese, not fully American—runs throughout many of Sone's recounted memories. When she was a child, her father was arrested on unfounded accusations of selling alcohol; she frames the story in an explanation of her unease around police and speaks of the trial results as the end of a battle, saying, "At least it had been a tie. The police had put him into trouble, but they had failed to extract money from him."<sup>33</sup> She writes of her father's refusal to let her take ballet lessons out of his sweeping disapproval of Western dance; of the time her father chased away an angry and potentially violent customer by

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<sup>31</sup> Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 1979 ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 42.



bluffing that he was trained in judo; and of the night after Pearl Harbor, when her family destroyed everything Japanese in the house that they could bear to lose, fearing that it would be used to tie them to the attack. She describes the particular trauma of the last experience: “It was past midnight when we climbed upstairs to bed. Warily we closed our eyes, filled with an indescribable sense of guilt for having destroyed the things we loved. This night of ravage was to haunt us for years.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout these experiences runs not only an exclusion from American-ness, but also a necessary separation from Japanese culture. Her story provides a window into the ever-present identity crisis that shaped the Nisei as a generation, of being somehow both and neither simultaneously.

Sone’s conclusion to her story completes the arc of her questioned identity, and the way she frames it acts as a further window into a Nisei mentality. The last memory she recounts is of visiting her parents in Camp Minidoka, where they had to remain after she was permitted to leave in 1943. From there, she faces the prospect of attending Hanover College (which she refers to as Wendell College) on a scholarship. She writes,

I had discovered a deeper, stronger pulse in the American scene. I was going back into its main stream, still with my Oriental eyes, but with an entirely different outlook, for now I felt more like a whole person instead of a sadly split personality. The Japanese and American parts of me were now blended into one.<sup>35</sup>

The ending ties together the narrative arc of her growth into a Nisei identity, and ends the story on a note of hope and optimism.

This upbeat and stoic attitude toward what many would consider a period of suffering resonates beyond the personal psychology of Monica Sone. Karen Ishizuka, film director and

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<sup>34</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 156.

<sup>35</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 238.

chief curator at the Japanese American National Museum, argues on the subject of the attitude of the Nisei,

We need to remember that although the incarceration was not a matter of choice—and to that extent [inmates] were victims of the government’s misuse of power--how [inmates] positioned themselves in relation to it was. When one sense shuts down, others become more acute. When physically confined, you rely on your spirit. This spiritual stamina, in their words, was to “make the best of things.”<sup>36</sup>

While the universality of this attitude among inmates is debatable, this “spiritual stamina” is reflected in the way Sone frames her story and in the writings and memories of many formerly incarcerated Japanese Americans. Sue Kunitomi Embrey, Nisei Managing Editor for the *Manzanar Free Press* who became an activist and teacher post-incarceration, remembers how her mother dealt with the pain:

My mother told me years later that she used to walk up there [to the orchards near the camp] after we had all left, after breakfast, and go up to the orchard and sit there and cry, and she said she did that every day for a couple of weeks and none of us knew that. And then, then she decided that that was kind of a useless thing to do, so she stopped doing that and she looked around for things she could do in the camp.<sup>37</sup>

The attitude of Embrey’s mother exemplifies a cultural reluctance toward self-pity.

In short, the different experiences and worlds of the Issei and Nisei shaped the emergence of generational subcultures. These subcultures in turn shaped the experience of incarceration, on an individual level by affecting one’s psychological and emotional reaction to the circumstances, and on a broader sociopolitical level by shaping factional divisions and relations among camp inmates. How did the worlds of the Issei and Nisei change after Pearl Harbor and the issuing of

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Colborn-Roxworthy, "Manzanar, the Eyes," 196.

<sup>37</sup> Sue Kunitomi Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi Embrey," interview, Densho Digital Archive, last modified November 6, 2002, accessed April 30, 2019, Segment 11, <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-manz-1/ddr-manz-1-2-transcript-2a4331d8c0.htm>.

Executive Order 9066? What were the experiences of being incarcerated, and how did the newspaper involve itself in them?

### The “American Concentration Camp”

Karl Yoneda, a *Manzanar Free Press* editor and Kibei Communist activist, writes in his autobiography that “the first week in Manzanar was like living in a madhouse”<sup>38</sup> and recounts the dismal and underprepared status of the camp facilities he experienced upon his arrival.

Those who had arrived earlier took us to the barracks. There were no lights, stoves, or window panes. My two cousins and I, together with seven others, were crowded into a 20 x 25 foot room. We slept on army cots with our clothes on.

The next morning we discovered that there were no toilets or washrooms. The one outside faucet was frozen. We walked around and saw that the construction of army-type barracks was progressing in two shifts. Building materials were strewn everywhere. The administrative building, post office, and clinic had been completed and were ready for business.<sup>39</sup>

He recalls the reaction of another inmate arriving with him: “So this is the American-style concentration camp.”<sup>40</sup>

What did it mean to have concentration camps on American soil, for concentration camps to exist in the world’s oldest democracy? What form was taken by these “American-style” concentration camps? Accounts of former inmates along with photos and WRA documents paint a picture of the circumstances under which Japanese Americans left their homes and the conditions that met them afterward. In terms of a generalized experience, however, the consensus is less clear. Generational, cultural, educational, and class differences shaped individual experiences of incarceration. Opportunities that were empowering to some were

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<sup>38</sup>Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year*, 129.

<sup>39</sup>Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year*, 126.

<sup>40</sup>Karl G. Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles Asian American Studies Center, 1983), 127.

exclusionary to others. Personal psyche also played a role in such an intimately intrusive and personally formative experience. For this reason, I have included as many varying accounts of incarceration as possible in my construction of the camp experience. The result falls somewhere in between the two caricatures of extreme victimization and a government-funded holiday. Many accounts abhor self-pity and are quick to remind that this was no “Nazi-style” concentration camp. However, the camps represent an abuse of government power, the results of which mark generations of Japanese Americans in ways that exist today.

### *Relocation and Camp Conditions*

Sue K. Embrey recalls that her family only received about five days’ notice of their “evacuation”--though she says, “Most of us knew it was coming, so we had prepared.”<sup>41</sup> Her family sold their grocery store, “not really” for a fair price, though she notes that “I think we got better prices than most of our neighbors. Some of them, you know, people just come and say, ‘Well, I’ll give you a dollar for that; I’ll give you five dollars.’”<sup>42</sup> So it was for many families, who, with no more than a week’s official warning, sold their homes and means of living at undervalued prices and were transported to often-unfamiliar parts of the country to ponder what was left for them when (or if) they returned.

The official notice came after what was, for many, a period of intense anxiety. The very night of Pearl Harbor, over 1,200 Issei men were arrested by the FBI on suspicion of having connections with the attack. Many were detained and taken from there to a prison camp, separate from the camps that housed the rest of the West coast Japanese Americans; for some families, it was the last time they saw their husbands or fathers until they were allowed to reunite

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<sup>41</sup> Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 6.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, Segment 6.

at the end of incarceration.<sup>43</sup> Monica Sone, twenty-two at the time, describes the state of her family in the weeks following Pearl Harbor:

We wondered when Father's time would come. We expected momentarily to hear strange footsteps on the porch and the sudden demanding ring of the front doorbell. Our ears became attuned like the sensitive antennas of moths, translating every soft swish of passing cars into the arrival of the FBI squad.<sup>44</sup>

She describes how her mother, on the advice of the neighbors, kept a packed suitcase for their father in the front hall, preparing for him to be whisked away at a moment's notice. The awareness of their state as the enemy permeated the psyche of the Japanese Americans. Issei Toku Shimomura wrote in her diary on December 12, 1942, "Starting today we were permitted to withdraw up to \$100 from the bank. This was for our sustenance of life, we who are enemy to them. I deeply appreciated Americans' large heartedness in dealing with us."<sup>45</sup>

Notifications for "evacuation" came to Japanese Americans on the West coast beginning in March 1942. Early notices offered the chance to leave voluntarily; some took this opportunity, including Karl Yoneda, who left ahead of his wife and young son with the hopes of establishing a comfortable life for them in the camps. Mandatory evacuation began in April. Japanese Americans were moved first to temporary assembly centers run by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA), which were shoddily constructed and often offered appalling living conditions. From there, they were moved to more permanent relocation centers beginning in June 1942, headed by a new organization, the Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA) which administered the camps until the end of incarceration.

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<sup>43</sup> Densho, "About the Incarceration," Densho Encyclopedia, last modified 2019, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/history/>.

<sup>44</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 151.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Joe Nickell, "Imprisoned in Minidoka: Grandmother's Diary Memorializes Life as an Interned Japanese American following Attack on Pearl Harbor," *The Missoulian*, accessed April 28, 2019, [https://missoulian.com/lifestyles/territory/imprisoned-in-minidoka-grandmother-s-diary-memorializes-life-as-an/article\\_02cb6524-af96-11de-857e-001cc4c002e0.html](https://missoulian.com/lifestyles/territory/imprisoned-in-minidoka-grandmother-s-diary-memorializes-life-as-an/article_02cb6524-af96-11de-857e-001cc4c002e0.html). Translated from Japanese.

When the time came for families to leave their homes, they were not permitted to take more than two suitcases' worth of items. Having parted with their homes, livelihoods, and whatever possessions they couldn't carry, Japanese-Americans flowed into camps that were vastly underprepared to house them. Yoneda's account of the Manzanar barracks paints a vivid picture of the initial "madhouse" conditions there, while Shimomura writes of her first night in camp, "We were all very dissatisfied with our army cots and cotton mattresses. Until late at night we heard a mixture of hammering and the crying voices of children."<sup>46</sup> Shimomura's assembly center—Puyallup, WA, also known as "Camp Harmony"—was set on a fairground. The shabby construction of these assembly centers was not uncommon: the centers at Santa Anita and Tanforan were constructed clumsily on old racetracks, forcing many families to live in former horse stalls.

For most, living conditions improved slightly upon movement from assembly centers to the more permanent relocation centers. Manzanar, however, was unique in being converted to a relocation center after acting as an assembly center, requiring no movement of its occupants. Former inmates at Manzanar recall the work they did to make their abodes more homelike. Yoneda recalls "[gathering] all the scrap lumber I could to build shelves, a table, and chest, and [using] empty nail kegs as chairs, as others did."<sup>47</sup> Embrey remembers her brother stuffing the mattresses with hay.<sup>48</sup>

The living quarters were constructed to a military standard. Groups of approximately eight people were assigned a 16 x 20 foot room, sometimes 20 x 25, with no furniture apart from canvas cots. Families were grouped together; people who were single or without a large family were assigned to share these rooms with strangers. The cramped living quarters were only the

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Nickell, "Imprisoned in Minidoka," *The Missoulian*.

<sup>47</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi," interview, *Densho Digital Archive*, Segment 7.

beginning of the lack of personal space. Bathrooms, while in separate buildings for men and women, were constructed as communal outhouses without partitions; showers were organized similarly. At Manzanar, though partitions were added eventually, it was only after inmates had spent months unable to go to the bathroom or shower in privacy.

This lack of privacy seems to feature especially prominently in the memories of former inmates. Embrey describes that “in the beginning, people like my mother would stay up late hoping to take a shower when her neighbors weren't around, but they all stayed up late. They all wanted to take their shower in privacy.”<sup>49</sup> For traditionally modest Issei women, the humiliation of showering almost publicly was considerable. Yoneda writes that his wife, Elaine Yoneda, confronted the administrative office about the lack of partitions in the bathrooms because “many young girls hesitated to use the facilities.” Service Director J.M. Kidwell “shrugged his shoulders and told Elaine, ‘It is army specifications.’”<sup>50</sup> Apart from the lavatories, the lack of privacy became an underlying feature of daily life. Embrey remembers, “My girlfriend and I used to walk every night around the camp, which would be a mile square, so that we could talk because we had no way to talk without people hearing us. People sat on the steps outside the door and they would sit and gossip with the neighbors, but if we wanted to do teenage talk we had to go somewhere else.”<sup>51</sup>

The space allotted to the housing of approximately ten thousand inmates was highly limited. Manzanar was enclosed in barbed wire; eight security towers holding machine-gun-armed guards were positioned around the border of the camp, visible to everyone who lived there. In the beginnings of camp operation, no internees were allowed outside the camp boundaries. Eventually, these rules were changed to allow some internees to walk around the

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<sup>49</sup> Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 8.

<sup>50</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 8.

surrounding area or do agricultural work nearby. However, the camp security would not hesitate to assume guilt: it was not unheard of for inmates to be unjustly murdered by guards. At Tule Lake Segregation Center, Shoichi James Okamoto, age thirty, was hit with the butt of a rifle and shot to death by a guard when he refused to show his pass while driving between the camp and an off-camp worksite.<sup>52</sup>

The substandard living situations and apparent apathy of the camp administration garnered resentment among some inmates. Yoneda remembers being promised work before he arrived at Manzanar, yet was told there was no guarantee upon arrival:

...[we] went to the front office to inquire about the construction helper jobs that the Maryknoll priests and the army had promised us. One of the officials said, 'We don't know anything about such promises, the contractor is doing work with union members.' We related what had happened to the other volunteers who became mad as hell. Somebody said, 'The goddamn lying American government!'<sup>53</sup>

Conversely, other inmates kept up a seeming refusal to involve the administration in their complaints. Shimomura writes in a diary entry during her time that "Kazuo (son) got passes for papa and I to go to the isolation ward to visit Roger who has the chickenpox. The building was miserable and looked just like a jail. It is truly pathetic, but I guess it is for the protection of the public health."<sup>54</sup> Shimomura's account shows an acceptance of the administration's sub-par care for camp conditions while Yoneda's relates anger.

All of these factors played together to create a complex psychological impact on the inmates. The removal from the hard work of everyday life provided inmates with a degree of leisure time, something that many hadn't ever experienced in their American lives. Embrey describes the adjustment to this new rhythm of life:

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<sup>52</sup> Tetsuden Kashima, "Homicide in Camp," *Densho Encyclopedia*, last modified 2019, accessed April 30, 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Homicide\\_in\\_camp/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Homicide_in_camp/).

<sup>53</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year*, 127.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Nickell, "Imprisoned in Minidoka," *The Missoulian*.



For the first time, I think our parents had leisure time that they had never had before. People who had their businesses worked ten, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Farming people worked every day from sunup to sundown, and all of a sudden now they had free time, and I think a lot of them enjoyed that, that free time that they were having. My mother learned to roll bandages for the Red Cross and she joined an a cappella choir, or a group that sang Japanese songs a cappella, and she took care of her grandson, the first one. I think she really enjoyed life for a while anyway, but it was -- for those people who didn't work, it was kind of boring. The rest of us, we worked and kept the camp running, and I think that helped in terms of our, you know, mental state.<sup>55</sup>

Embrey's statement captures the ambiguity in this adjustment to concentration camp life.

Incarceration provided some with a stability and a freedom in time that was unavailable in the working life of Japanese-Americans, especially for the many who worked on farms. Issei women were particularly affected by this, suddenly relieved of a large portion of housework and often additional farm duties. Historian Greg Robinson quotes a young Nisei woman who referred to incarceration as a "camping vacation."<sup>56</sup> Nisei young enough not to understand the implications of their situation also sometimes experienced the incarceration as a happy time. Filmmaker Robert Nakamura, who was five at the start of his family's incarceration, confesses, "[w]hen I [later] learned about the injustice of it all, I felt guilty for having had a good time in the camp, apologetic even."<sup>57</sup> To many young people, the camp was a safe haven of fellow Japanese, away from the world of people who considered them the enemy.

However, the purposelessness of living in a concentration camp weighed heavily on others. Robinson quotes another young inmate's perspective: "Camp was demeaning. I felt like I was a piece of shit, actually. As kids we made the best of what was available, but deep down it

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<sup>55</sup> Embrey, "Sue Kunitomi," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 9.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 162.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Emily Colborn-Roxworthy, "'Manzanar, the Eyes of the World Are upon You': Performance and Archival Ambivalence at a Japanese American Internment Cam," *Theatre Journal* 59, no. 2 (May 2007): 196, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2007.0120>.

still felt like I was filthy. I was never cleansed of that feeling.”<sup>58</sup> The ordeal of being stripped of home and property, forced to live without privacy even in the bathroom, and thrust into a structurally changed lifestyle was deeply dehumanizing.

Though these conditions were emasculating to much of the inmate population, a fraction of inmate power could be claimed through the existence of camp self-government. Inmates elected representatives to block councils, which had responsibilities over the utilization of space and food, the mediation of inmate disputes, and the running of a camp court, among other things. However, this democracy was limited. Only American citizens were eligible to be elected, and meetings were held in English, something that disqualified Issei and most Kibei (Japanese-educated Nisei). The self-government was toothless in some regards; as Robinson notes, “they had no power over the WRA...and were often ineffective in representing inmates against the administration or in petitioning for redress of grievances.”<sup>59</sup> However, the empowerment of Nisei organization it offered should not be dismissed. Karl Yoneda’s election to block council, among other things, provided him with a platform to become one of the most politically active Nisei at Manzanar.

From these accounts, it appears that camp life could be full of contradictions. It could be stabilizing for some and unstabilizing for others, in some ways democratic and in some ways authoritarian. Most importantly, the experience of incarceration was nuanced, existing as neither extreme victimization nor a “camping vacation.” Personal responses might be stacked like layers of an onion: relief and despair, emasculation and mobilization. The temptation to categorize the camp experience as either victimization or holiday, and its necessary existence in between these

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<sup>58</sup> Robinson, *A Tragedy*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, *A Tragedy*, 169.

two poles, marks the history with an ambivalence that makes it hard to grasp. However, the ambivalence of this wide array of experiences has more truth than the caricature.

How did the newspaper interact with this complex array of incarceration experiences? What role did it take in the camp, and how did it ultimately serve the inmate population?

### *The Manzanar Free Press*

The *Manzanar Free Press* issued its first bulletin on April 11, 1942, only twenty days after the first “voluntary” internees arrived. The early establishment of the camp paper meant that the *Free Press* began its run while Manzanar was still officially dubbed an “assembly center,” run by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA), and continued across Manzanar’s transition to a more permanent “relocation center” administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The *Manzanar Free Press* staff, as with the staff of all concentration camp newspapers, was entirely formed of Japanese-American inmates; this gave inmates a degree of agency in forming their own press. However, during WCCA administration, the *Manzanar Free Press* was subject to outright military-style censorship that, among other things, prohibited printing in Japanese and subjected the issues to multiple administrative reviews throughout the publishing process. This policy only lasted until June 1, 1942, when the WRA took over camp administration. The WRA, by contrast, adopted an explicitly anti-censorship policy, stating in a May 29, 1942 “Tentative Policy Statement” that “There will be no censorship by WRA of any written or published materials going into or out of projects, or circulating within the projects”<sup>60</sup>; however, the press was subject to “supervision” by

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Takeya Mizuno, “Newspapers in Camp,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, last modified 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Newspapers\\_in\\_camp/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Newspapers_in_camp/).

administrative officials, which limited its freedom.<sup>61</sup> Amid these policies, what degree of press freedom did the inmates actually have?

### ***“Democracy” in the Free Press***

As previously noted in the introduction, the *Manzanar Free Press* imparts a positive spirit around incarceration, centering around a running theme of democracy. It regularly invokes the American ideal of the free press, identifying itself with this constitutionally protected institution and portraying itself as being a voice of the people. It speaks with a consistently patriotic and optimistic editorial tone, seemingly regarding incarceration as an opportunity to display one’s commitment and devotion to America. Close readings of a few editorial selections demonstrate the way in which it speaks toward a certain image of these concentration camps.

This democratic emphasis is particularly exemplified by the introductory editorial, printed April 11, 1942. The paper’s very introduction of itself as the “free press” portrays it as being under the same constitutional protection as every other American newspaper. In fact, it presents itself as *more* free than other American newspapers, celebrating the absence of bureaucratic and economic constraints: “We don’t have a policy....Politics are out! We don’t have to worry about what our advertisers think!”<sup>62</sup> Perhaps most striking is the claim previously cited the Introduction: “This, to a newspaper man or woman, is plain Utopia.”<sup>63</sup> This claim of freedom, especially such a degree of freedom that makes the concentration camp into a kind of press utopia, is overtly misleading considering the military-grade censorship that was applied to the newspaper in its early days under the WCCA. Despite this, the editorial continues to reinforce the democracy of the paper.

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<sup>61</sup> Mizuno, "Newspapers in Camp," *Densho Encyclopedia*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

Even after the WCCA censorship was lifted after June 1, 1942, the paper did not drop its optimistic viewpoint and its editorials continued to emphasize its democratic qualities. A headline on June 9 proclaims, “Help Us Live Up to Our Name...The Free Press: The Free Press Belongs to You,” while the body states “that the Free Press belongs to the people of Manzanar, that, instead of being merely the mouthpiece of the administration, it strives to express the opinions of the evacuees in the solution of immediate and unforeseen problems.”<sup>64</sup> This statement outlines a central claim from the *Free Press*: that it served the inmate population over the administration and prioritized their voices. The extent to which this claim was true is a subject of this paper’s debate.

The insistent patriotism of the newspaper is exemplified by another front-page editorial piece from the very first issue. Entitled “Our Sincere Appreciation,” it expresses gratitude on behalf of the entire camp to “General John L. DeWitt and his Chiefs of Staff, Tom C. Clark and Colonel Karl R. Rondotsen”<sup>65</sup> for their handling of the camps as they were being established. General DeWitt was known for his outspoken racialized support of incarceration, on one occasion asserting that the “large, unassimilated, tightly knit racial group, bound to an enemy nation by strong ties of race, culture, custom and religion along a frontier vulnerable to attack constituted a menace which had to be dealt with.”<sup>66</sup> His overt anti-Japanese sentiment casts doubt on the sincerity of the editorial’s gratitude.

Additionally, the editorial refers to the “excellent comforts” provided by General DeWitt for the internees, a description nearly unanimously refuted in private accounts. The editorial

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<sup>64</sup> “Help Us Live up to Our Name...the Free Press,” *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 9, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>65</sup> “Our Sincere Appreciation,” *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), April 11, 1942, 1, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-i125-00391-1/>.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Linda L. Ivey and Kevin W. Kaatz, *Citizen Internees: A Second Look at Race and Citizenship in Japanese American Internment Camps* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2017), 34.

closes with an assertion of satisfaction made on behalf of the entire camp: “‘Can’t be better,’ is the general feeling of the Manzanar citizen. ‘Thank you, General!’”<sup>67</sup> The absence of a signature on the editorial allows its voice to stand in for the generalized masses of inmates; here, in addition to this, the editorial literally adopts the voice of the “Manzanar citizen.” The use of the word “citizen” is also of note. It discounts the alienation from American statehood brought on by such an infringement of the constitutional rights of Japanese-American citizens, and renames these disenfranchised Americans as “citizens” of Manzanar.

Throughout the paper, there is little deviation from this patriotic tone. In a paper that claims to “express the opinion of the evacuees,” conflicting opinions and complaints about camp conditions are notably absent. Why are these voices excluded from the *Manzanar Free Press*, and what can account for this consistency of editorial stance?

### ***WRA “Supervision”***

A partial explanation for the uniformity of editorial voice can be found in the WRA’s policy of newspaper “supervision.” The exact nature of the “supervision” policy remains unclear; however, the *Manzanar Free Press* was never truly free from WRA control. Though accounts of what it specifically entailed are scarce, Takeya Mizuno notes that “one common method of press supervision was the convocation by camp administrators of ‘talks’ or ‘meetings’ with the newspaper staff to inform them of the WRA’s wishes in the form of ‘advice’ or ‘suggestions.’”<sup>68</sup> WRA ideas could be instilled in newspaper staff through these meetings. In other situations, administrative staff were known to leave comments on drafts of newspapers. These unofficial forms of steering editorial tone can also account for a degree of self-censorship

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<sup>67</sup> “Our Sincere,” 1.

<sup>68</sup> Mizuno, “The Creation,” 514.

exercised by inmate reporters. This degree of self-censorship also remains unclear, but it is clear at least that the writers of the paper knew what was and wasn't acceptable to print. As Embrey noted, "We knew if we wrote about a certain thing, it wouldn't get in the paper."<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the WRA's vague definitions of its "supervisory" policy and what kind of editorial opinion was prohibited—"libel, personal attack, and other utterances contrary to the general welfare"<sup>70</sup>—gave it the discretion to monitor camp papers to accord with its own interests. This vague criteria was paired with high punitive power given to the project directors that included the ability to terminate papers considered "noncompliant."<sup>71</sup>

Aside from its "supervision," the WRA possessed other forms of control over the newspapers. The WRA conducted all initial staff selection, giving it authority over which inmates wrote for the papers. To varying degrees, the newspapers were also economically dependent on the WRA. While support for some papers—Manzanar, Heart Mountain, and Minidoka—were eventually taken over by a cooperative association, which made them financially independent from the WRA in the most overt sense, all papers relied on amenities, such as printing facilities, provided by the WRA.<sup>72</sup> Even beyond this, all living facilities were still WRA property, and the WRA retained the ability to pay staffers in "monetary compensation or clothing allowances."<sup>73</sup> These factors gave the WRA a consistent degree of editorial control that was visible in all camp newspapers.

The WRA's control can account in part for the univocality of the paper, but explains little of the camp social dynamics surrounding the paper. How did this newspaper and its dubious

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<sup>69</sup> Diana Meyers Bahr, *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 68.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Mizuno, "The Creation," 510.

<sup>71</sup> Mizuno, "The Creation," 510.

<sup>72</sup> Mizuno, "The Creation," 509.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 509.

message fit in with the larger camp community? Who was its readership, and how was the univocality of the press received? Who were its writers? Did inmates find any expressive, discursive, or empowering value in the *Manzanar Free Press*?

### ***The Press and the Camp Community***

Sue K. Embrey remembers her reporting work as a time of enjoyment and personal significance. Not only did the work provide a respite from depressing camp life, but it also formed a significant period of political development for her. She describes her experience on the *Free Press* staff as being one of exposure to new political and social ideas that initially shocked her, remembering her first meeting with then-editor Chiye Mori: “I marveled because she was smoking and swearing. One time I heard her say to a guy: ‘How come you didn’t bring me a bottle of whiskey?’ A Nisei woman who smoked and swore and drank whiskey! Most Nisei around her age, 22 or 23, were very conservative.”<sup>74</sup>

The work provided her with a community of largely-liberal intellectuals and political thinkers. Embrey describes, “They used to have these long discussions and I would sit there and listen to them, talking about what was happening in Europe and the Pacific,” saying about its impact on her, “I began to think that you could voice your own opinion and even criticize those in government. They were very free [in their discussions].”<sup>75</sup> In this way, for Embrey, the *Manzanar Free Press* became a medium of free discussion and exposure to new ideas.

However, what was discussed in the community of staff writers did not necessarily make it to the pages of the *Manzanar Free Press*. Embrey says,

The human element did not appear in the printed pages. There were no personal views of the writer. We did not write about what was happening to us, the poor

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Bahr, *The Unquiet*, 66,

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Bahr, *The Unquiet*, 67.



food, the poor medical care, the lack of privacy, having to take showers together. We knew if we wrote about a certain thing, it wouldn't get in the paper. The complaints of the internees were not voiced in the *Free Press*.<sup>76</sup>

This disparity between what writers could say privately and what they could say publicly is captured in the way that Embrey remembers their political discussions: "Chiye (the editor) would criticize Roosevelt, not in the paper, of course, but in the office."<sup>77</sup> This absence of free discussion of internment did not go unnoticed by the inmate readership. As Embrey says, "They would complain about the stories we wrote. [They said,] 'You're not giving a balanced picture.'"<sup>78</sup> Embrey's testimony suggests that *Manzanar Free Press* provided very different discursive experiences to different parts of the inmate population, and the *Free Press*'s failure to provide the kind of discursive freedom to its readership that it provided to its writers was a source of tension.

Similarly, the fact that all concentration camp newspapers were staffed exclusively by inmates did not necessarily mean that all parties of Japanese Americans were represented in the staff. The staff tended to be composed of educated Nisei, the same demographic that was most likely to claim leadership positions in the camp. How, then, did the newspaper position itself in relation to the larger Japanese American community?

### ***Cultural-Political Conflict and the Press***

The narrow representation of voices in the *Free Press* played into already-existing cultural divisions in the camp that fell along generational, cultural, political, and class lines. Some pockets of inmates worked cooperatively with the WRA and therefore dominated camp leadership; these included members of the Japanese American Citizens League, a civil rights

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<sup>76</sup> Bahr, *The Unquiet*, 67-68.

<sup>77</sup> Bahr, *The Unquiet*, 66.

<sup>78</sup> Bahr, *The Unquiet*, 68.

advocacy organization that was known for being somewhat exclusionary for allowing only citizen Nisei to be members. Other inmates rejected the administration's authority and assumed a more resistant political stance, expressing outward support for Japan in the war. Still others fell into pockets based on their cultural and class backgrounds without meaning to make a political statement. Conflict across these divides was common.

Yoneda recounts his own political conflict within the camp. A Communist, elected block leader in camp self-government, and otherwise politically active citizen, he was a staunch anti-fascist and supporter of the United States in the war. His memories of conflict focus around a radical pro-Japan group, largely Kibei, that formed in the first month's of the camp's existence. They called themselves the Manzanar Black Dragons after an extreme right-wing group in Japan called the Black Dragon Society.<sup>79</sup> The Black Dragons spread rumors about the war and distributed pro-Japan or anti-U.S. leaflets; Yoneda and other inmates of similar cultural and ideological standing soon after formed the Manzanar Citizens Federation (MCF) to counter what Yoneda calls "[their] destructive anti-U.S. activities."<sup>80</sup> He describes how hostility between the two factions escalated: "It became a daily routine for the Black Dragons to call us 'FBI dogs' or 'Korean dogs.' Elaine was called *keto baba* or old foreign hag. Some of (son) Tommy's playmates called him '*keto boy*.'"<sup>81</sup> This antagonism resulted in frequent violence against leading camp members, such as those in JACL or MCF. Yoneda writes about physical attacks on his colleagues Joe Blamey and James Oda, both MCF members and writers for the *Manzanar Free Press*, and recounts his own experience of being threatened with violence in his home.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte*, 133.

<sup>80</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte*, 138.

<sup>82</sup> Yoneda, *Ganbatte*, 139.

Conflict among these subsets of the ethnic community, and the way in which the *Manzanar Free Press* fit into it, is particularly exemplified in the Manzanar Riot of December 1942. Violence arose out of escalating tension between the governing sector of the camp and a group of Kibei over food shortages and suspicion of FBI informers in the camp. When the administration arrested kitchen worker Harry Ueno on a slim connection with the beating of a prominent JACL member, a number of inmates assembled in protest and demanded that he be released. The protest became violent and produced a blacklist of administrative collaborators and suspected spies to be killed. Significantly, a number of *Manzanar Free Press* staff members were on this list.

The *Manzanar Free Press*'s presence in this explosion of conflict is perhaps indicative of its role in larger-scale camp dynamics. The naming of *Free Press* staff members on the blacklist demonstrates the extreme mistrust and fear built in the camp readership by the paper's exclusion of inmate voices and, as Embrey calls it, the "human element." To add further significance to the riot, the *Manzanar Free Press* halted its run for twenty days around the violence, marking the only interruption to its approximately four-year run. Not only was it shut down during the rioting, but when it started up again, it made no acknowledgement of the turmoil within the camp, cementing its role during this period as an arm of the administration. The newspaper's failure to respond to the riot underlines its inability to engage with conflict and certain groups of the Manzanar population.

In sum, the *Manzanar Free Press*'s dubious representation of inmate voices and its inability to respond to camp conflict cast doubt on its ability to operate as the beacon of free expression it claims to be. The administrative control of the newspaper appears to conflict with its ability to voice the opinions of many inmates and engage with the less-savory aspects of camp

life. However, the testimonies of people who worked there show that the paper offered an empowering medium of expression and organization to some of its Nisei writers. Was the newspaper able to be subversive in any way, or was it limited to operating as an arm of the administration?

## CHAPTER TWO

### COLLABORATION AND SUBVERSION IN THE *MANZANAR FREE PRESS*

The *Manzanar Free Press* existed in the context of a complex series of power dynamics, serving a diverse and factionalized readership while under an ambiguous but ever-present degree of administrative control. The reporting style and editorial content failed to uplift a wide variety of inmate voices, and in many ways the newspaper appears to have served an administrative agenda. However, the Nisei staff still retained some agency in the writing and publishing of the paper. Did the paper solely operate as a tool of administrative power, or did it also contain the potential to challenge administrative authority or otherwise uplift inmate voices?

This chapter attempts to understand the voice of the paper by studying the world of the writing staff and analyzing the newspaper's editorial content. It looks to understand the degree to which different voices were present in the paper and to read a larger ideology or value system in the arguments put forth by the editors. While the reporting remains an insightful window into camp life and the aspects of it that the newspaper wished to highlight, this chapter largely focuses on editorials in an effort to gauge political voice, allowing the reporting to take a more supplementary role. The editorials provide rich source material because they are the place in which the paper most directly makes an argument, as well as the most direct point of contact with the people writing the paper. Through understanding the human source of these arguments, the newspaper can be understood not as an abstract voice but as a means of expression for a number of different facets of camp society.

## American Conformity and Western Idealization

The paper takes on a specific voice in the context of the camp social dynamic: refined, cultured, intellectual, and in keeping with bourgeois civility. It displays the attitudes and ideas of liberal education, but maintains a rigid commitment to discursive civility and condemns actions in the camp that depart from it. Policy-wise, the editorial voice is staunchly pro-U.S. and largely defends the ideals of democracy against doubt brought on by incarceration, encouraging a near-religious faith in them. The paper also reflects a high level of collaboration with the WRA, promoting a cooperative attitude toward the administration and portraying it favorably. In these senses, the paper upholds what historian Lon Kurashige calls “the cosmopolitan, educated, and cultured idealization of Western society,”<sup>83</sup> and includes cooperation with the WRA in its cultured and civil Western attitude. How did such an editorial voice emerge, and how were these ideas expressed in the editorials?

### *Editorial Staff*

The attitude of the paper was shaped by the people who wrote it. While the administration exercised a degree of control over the newspaper, it was the Japanese-American writers who gave form to its particular voice. Their personal and cultural backgrounds shaped the perspective of the newspaper and offer some explanation as to why the paper acted as it did in the context of the camp public.

The newspaper was operated largely by educated, liberal, and politically active Nisei. As previously discussed, Nisei tended to be more highly educated than their Issei parents, and having been born in the U.S., they were more completely and comfortably American in their

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<sup>83</sup> Lon Kurashige, "War and the American Front," Enclave to *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990*, American Crossroad Ser. 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 89, digital file.

cultural identity. Their education and American roots made them as a generation more likely to be politically active and to be supportive of the U.S. in the war. This made them attractive candidates for leading positions in the camp such as working in the press.

Opportunities to work in the paper or other leading positions favored this class of Nisei in part because of the linguistic requirements of these jobs. Though it had a frequent supplementary Japanese-language section, the *Manzanar Free Press* was first and foremost an English-language paper. Aside from the fluency in English required to write for the newspaper, meetings with the administration and most likely among the press staff would have been conducted in English. Similarly, meetings for administration-sanctioned organizations, like the system of self-government through block councils or Karl Yoneda's Manzanar Citizens' Federation, were conducted in English. This linguistic requirement in a dual-lingual community effectively excluded primarily-Japanese-speaking people from work in the paper, with the administration, or in other forms of leadership. Members of the community whose primary language was English had a linguistic cultural capital that gave them an advantage in their position in camp society. For these reasons, the newspaper staff was largely composed of members of a certain linguistic community that was advantaged over the other.

The members of the writing staff are distinguished not only by their Western cultural and linguistic orientation, but also by their class. Again, education played a large role in this, and the particular story of Nisei education—the fact that many Nisei wanted to educate themselves in order to escape the class and employment restriction that their parents experienced—highlights the class distinction even further. It shows that linked to the Nisei's connection with Western culture was a drive to experience a more bourgeois lifestyle. Many Nisei could be seen as being in pursuit of a cultured Western modernism that counteracted the traditional Japanese-ness of

their parents' generation. This perspective appeared in the newspaper, as the paper grew to express itself as a proponent of this Western idealization.

The nuances of this generalized profile of the Nisei staff writer are best shown through individual profiles of staff writers. Their lives and personal backgrounds display differences as well as common underlying threads.

Togo Tanaka was a *Manzanar Free Press* editor who also worked for the WRA as a "documentary historian," noting the everyday goings-on of the camp life for the purpose of sociological and historical record.<sup>84</sup> Tanaka was born in Portland, Oregon and grew up in Los Angeles in a neighborhood outside of the isolated ethnic community, surrounded by a community of white Americans in his personal and professional life. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from UCLA and ran the *Rafu Shimpo*, a prominent Japanese-American newspaper, prior to incarceration. Lon Kurashige writes on Tanaka's attitude toward administrative collaboration:

...he urged the ethnic community to turn the other cheek to its persecutors. He saw internees who returned hate with hate as no better than the racists responsible for the internment. Both were victims of a narrow-minded, emotionally charged, belligerent clannishness that was at odds with the intelligent, rational open-mindedness he believed was at the core of American society.<sup>85</sup>

Tanaka's close proximity and opportunity for cultural exchange with white America shaped his worldview and response to incarceration. He had also enjoyed higher-status employment than many Nisei, something that contributed to the outlook of civil Western idealism that Kurashige describes. Tanaka's background and worldview is consistent with the cosmopolitan Western ideal put forth by the paper.

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<sup>84</sup> Brian Niiya, "Togo Tanaka," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed April 30, 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Togo\\_Tanaka/#Manzanar\\_Chronicle](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Togo_Tanaka/#Manzanar_Chronicle).

<sup>85</sup> Lon Kurashige, "Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest," *Pacific Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (August 2001): 406, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2001.70.3.387>.



From a different background was Karl Yoneda, who was a Kibei Communist active in Manzanar as a newspaper writer, a block council leader, and a founder of the Manzanar Citizens' Federation. He was born in Glendale, California to parents who worked in agriculture, and at the age of seven moved back to Japan, where he spent his teenage and early adult years. He developed an interest in progressive and socialist ideas while in Japan, and joined the Communist Party shortly after his 1926 return to the U.S.<sup>86</sup> Rare for someone of his generation, he married a white woman, Elaine Black, whom he met through his association with the Communist Party. He was active in labor organization prior to incarceration. Yoneda's progressive views made him a staunch anti-fascist, and he advocated for the right of the Nisei to display their loyalty through military service, leaving Manzanar in 1944 himself to join the Military Intelligence Service.<sup>87</sup> Though Yoneda's background was different from Tanaka's in class and urban environment, Yoneda's marriage to Elaine Black likely gave him a similar intercultural understanding in his worldview, and his anti-fascism led him to be a steadfast supporter of the U.S. government.

Sue Kunitomi Embrey's background also influenced her perspective during incarceration. Embrey grew up in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, a thriving ethnic center that was also in close proximity to other white neighborhoods. She was one of eight children to parents who owned a grocery store. At Manzanar, she found her first work in camouflage net production, a government project utilizing inmate labor to assist the war effort. After incarceration, she

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<sup>86</sup> Yuji Ichioka, introduction to *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker*, by Karl G. Yoneda (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles Asian American Studies Center, 1983), xi.

<sup>87</sup> Glenn Omatsu, "Karl Yoneda," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed April 30, 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Karl\\_Yoneda/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Karl_Yoneda/).

married a white man named Garland Embrey, pursued college degrees up to a Master's degree in education, and became a teacher and prominent activist in the memorialization of Manzanar.<sup>88</sup>

Though each of these writers has a unique individual perspective and set of experiences, they are also linked by common threads. Somewhat crucially, each of them experience some level of immersion in or exposure to white America prior to incarceration: Tanaka and Embrey lived in urban centers where they experienced more intercultural interaction than other Nisei growing up in isolated rural communities, and Yoneda married into a white family and had a biracial son. This previous interaction with white America gave them a comfort in working with Caucasian camp officials that inmates who had grown up in a more isolated ethnic community would not have had. The ways in which these backgrounds both relate and contrast displays the way in which people of varying backgrounds joined to create a coherent perspective through the newspaper.

Analysis of the paper itself reveals the way in which the paper built a coherent perspective and defined itself in relation to the rest of the camp. It highlights a cooperative relationship with the administration, a cultured American perspective, and finally, a subtle degree of subversion.

### *Administrative Collaboration*

In many ways, the paper reflects a close collaboration with the WRA. It provides a platform for the dissemination of administrative messages, and encourages camp-wide adoption of a similar policy of administrative and federal cooperation. The paper itself plays a large part in creating the administration to the Manzanar public. It writes of the administration as a

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<sup>88</sup> Martha Nakagawa, "Sue Kunitomi Embrey," Densho Encyclopedia, accessed April 30, 2019, [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sue\\_Kunitomi\\_Embrey/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sue_Kunitomi_Embrey/).

friendly partner, underlining the ways in which the administration's desires are the same as the inmates'. While there is irony considering the opposing positions they occupied as incarcerator and incarcerated, the newspaper's attitude also displays the way in which it seeks to empower itself and its constituents through allying itself with forms of authority. In the dichotomy between collaboration and resistance to authority, the paper largely chooses collaboration.

One of the ways in which it does this is by assisting with administrative interests, commonly by conveying a favorable portrait of the administration to the Manzanar public. It frequently focuses on administrative personnel, drawing on their personal traits to portray them as relatable and likeable figures. A particularly strong example of this is the paper's introduction to the new Assistant Project Director in late June, 1942. It presents it in an eye-catching, boxed-off corner on the second page of the issue, featuring a cartoon sketch of the subject's smiling face. Rather than introduce him along the lines of his professional background, it begins, "Ned Campbell, dynamic thirty-six year old assistant project director, looks more like a tough tackle on a football team than a seasoned executive."<sup>89</sup> The two short columns skim over his Texan roots, his first full-time job with the American Red Cross, his management experience, and his previous positions with the WRA, before closing with, "The enterprising assistant project director claims only one hobby and passion which he thoroughly enjoys—eating."<sup>90</sup> The focus on these personal, relatable traits points to the way in which the paper marketed the individual to the Manzanar public and created a perception of personal connection.

Similarly, the relationship between inmates and administration is often characterized as equal and harmonious. One early editorial exclaims,

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<sup>89</sup> "Introducing...Ned Campbell," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 27, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

It's hard to take but it's true. More old friends in the administration are leaving us this week. Our sincere and fond farewell go to these leaders who guided us through the early days of our settlement here, who watched the community grow from the first barack to the present city of ten thousand.<sup>91</sup>

Through this dubbing of WRA officials as “old friends,” the paper negates the intrinsic hierarchy of incarcerator and incarcerated, and replaces it with an image of an amicable partnership. Even when they are not “old friends,” they are “leaders,” a highly euphemistic term for those running the operation of an incarceration camp. In fact, the entire editorial gives a euphemistic treatment to the premise of incarceration, evoking sentiment over the development of the “community” and claiming a bond with administrative officials who were present for this “growth.” Through this language, the editorial projects a picture of a friendly and equal relationship between administration and incarcerated public, one that is absent from and refuted in other accounts.

It is possible that the writers of this editorial were genuine in their sentimentality over the growth of the camp, or at least in their motivations for publishing a piece that afforded Japanese Americans some agency in the development of the camp community. It is also difficult to refute entirely that there may have been personal connections between administrative officials and inmates or press staff. However, the attitude of the editorial leaves no room for reasonable complaints about administrative treatment or camp life in general, showing the limits on dissent that go along with such a collaboration with administration. Whatever the intent, the misleadingly rosy depiction of the camp development and the relationship with the administration serves WRA interests by ingratiating them to the public, and limits potential for resistance by negating the power dynamic inherent to an incarcerator-incarcerated relationship.

In addition to lending its support to the administration and forging a favorable presentation of it to the Manzanar public, the paper frequently becomes a mouthpiece for

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<sup>91</sup> "Editorial," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 4, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

administrative voices. Notes and messages from the Project Director or other officials appear frequently throughout the *Free Press* pages, making the paper a channel through which administrative voices can speak. These messages from the administration discuss any topics from the localized and mundane--a call to make efforts for the “beautification” of Manzanar, congratulations for net production exceeding quota, an open letter from the department of education at the start of the school year--to the philosophical and political. The latter is exemplified in a message from Project Director Roy Nash published on the front page on Independence Day, 1942. Nash writes,

The conditions imposed on American citizens of Japanese descent and those other Japanese who, although long resident on the Pacific Coast, never achieved American citizenship, admittedly are hard. Are we then to nurse our sorrow, water the weeds in our garden of misery...? Or shall we throw into the building of Manzanar the creative energies of a gifted people, the labor of a folk to whom toil is traditional, the gaiety of young men and women who know that the human soul can be defeated by nothing except itself.<sup>92</sup>

The piece moralizes on the Japanese-American response to incarceration by condescending to understand and speak for their experiences. Nash generalizes the varied camp population into a stereotype, calling them a “gifted people” and “a folk to whom toil is traditional.” On the inmates’ experiences and identities, there is an assumption of both same-ness and accessibility: an implication that they are able to be understood as a collective, and digested and commented on from the outside. Even on the topic of maintaining morale, the newspaper gives a platform to the administration more than to its inmate readership. Through publishing these words, the paper allows the administration to assume a “representative-ness” of the camp population and experience. The administration becomes the voice of Manzanar to the outside world, something

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<sup>92</sup> Roy Nash, "A Message," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 4, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

that both strengthens the power of the administration and undermines the ability of Manzanar inmates to create a representation of themselves.

This promotion of an administrative voice and its “representativeness” of Manzanar is consistent even when the administration is not speaking directly through the paper. One headline announces “Project Director to Speak Over KGO (radio station),” saying, “Keep your dials tuned to station KGO tomorrow evening at 6 p.m. as Project Director Roy Nash takes to the air lanes in describing ‘Manzanar from the Inside.’”<sup>93</sup> There is more than a little irony in the highest-level administrator’s move to speak for “inside” the experience of Manzanar. As the notice continues, “from the inside” is explained to mean “the problems encountered by the administration in the maintenance of the center.” That the exploration “inside” Manzanar is centered around an administrative viewpoint is significant. The interest in the administrative viewpoint carries racial undertones: the administrative, and therefore white, experience of the camps can act as the eyes and ears for the rest of white America. The white perspective is the “inside” one to which the rest of white America can relate; the incarcerated people are the ones to be “analyzed” from a distance like zoo animals. The paper’s endorsement of the administrative voice on this subject supports the ability of the administration not only to represent the Manzanar experience but to be the authoritative voice on it. More generally, it strengthens the presence of the administrative voice in the newspaper.

### ***Cultural Belonging***

The paper projects a code of thought and conduct in keeping with the previously discussed cosmopolitan Westernism. It promotes a kind of Americanism that includes staunch

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<sup>93</sup> "Project Director Nash to Speak over KGO," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 31, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

patriotism and support of the U.S. government as well as a kind of discursive behavior that abides by bourgeois civility.

The paper regularly affirms loyalty to America and faith in supposedly-American principles. An editorial from Flag Day 1942 affirms a belief in American principles that sustains throughout the trials of incarceration: “Even in this outpost of civilization, our inherent faith in democracy and respect for the flag will reach the hearts of the rest of the world as we pledge allegiance to Old Glory.”<sup>94</sup> Another editorial exhorts the people of Manzanar to “have faith” in America through the hardships of incarceration, reminding them that “ours is not a voice crying in the wilderness” and concluding, “Let us have faith, and build here in Manzanar our testament to democracy, a system so perfect that other Americans may emulate it in years to come.”<sup>95</sup> Another declares, “the truth is clear and evident that democratic forces of the world are defending the most elementary human rights of freedom.”<sup>96</sup> Editorial affirmations of faith in American democracy build a picture of a loyal population enduring a hardship for the sake of a beloved country.

Reporting on patriotic activities also projects a collective spirit of patriotic citizenship. One of the best examples of this is the camouflage net project, which was the biggest Manzanar production initiative directly pertaining to the war effort that took place in the first year of Manzanar. From approximately June 1942 to April 1943, Manzanar inmates offered their labor in assembling camouflage nets to be used in the war. The extensive coverage and editorial support it received reflects the newspaper’s interest in promoting the patriotic project and

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<sup>94</sup> "Editorial: Flag Day," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 13, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>95</sup> "Let Us Have Faith...," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 27, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>96</sup> "Open the Second Front Now...," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 29, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

galvanizing the Manzanar population to active support. Updates on the camouflage net project appear regularly, in almost every issue for some periods, until the project closed.<sup>97</sup> Headlines, pertaining to the project and beyond, proudly mark patriotic spirit and actions from the populace: Manzanar Center Citizens Join Net Project En Masse<sup>98</sup>; “Manzanar Youth Answers Fifth (Draft) Registration Call<sup>99</sup>”; “Manzanar Celebrates Fourth (of July)<sup>100</sup>”; “New Record Set by Five Men Crew at Net Project<sup>101</sup>”; “Girls Lead in Camouflage Net Production.”<sup>102</sup>

Particular self-consciousness of the implications of the success or failure of the camouflage net project is exhibited in one editorial, which states, “The camouflage net production is our test.” It also asserts, “We have been placed in centers because our loyalty was tacitly questioned, because we, as a united group, did not take a firm stand regarding the war.”<sup>103</sup> The editorial’s language positions incarceration as justified—more than justified, it is described as almost the fault of Japanese Americans whose stance was not “firm” enough. This assumption of responsibility for their circumstances and the positioning of the net task as the “test” to rectify the doubt adopts a narrative set by the WRA and federal government: that

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<sup>97</sup> "Camouflage Net Workers Begin War Production," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 11, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; "Manzanar Center Citizens Join Net Project En Masse," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 18, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; "Health Dept. Pronounces Net Project Safe," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 20, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; "Net Project Moves Full Speed Ahead," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 23, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; ""Net Workers Bid Residents to 'Open House,'" *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 27, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; "Rating Set for Net Factory," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 27, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>; "New Record Set by Five Men Crew at Net Project," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 30, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>98</sup> "Manzanar Center," 1.

<sup>99</sup> "Manzanar Youth Answers Fifth (Draft) Registration Call," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 30, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>100</sup> "Manzanar Celebrates Fourth," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 4, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>101</sup> "New Record," 1.

<sup>102</sup> "Girls Lead in Camouflage Net Production," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), August 3, 1942, 1, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

<sup>103</sup> "Where Do We Stand?," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 18, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.



service is required of Japanese Americans to earn their American-ness. Without this service, their American-ness invites constant questioning.

This doubt of American-ness fits in with what historian Ronald Takaki called the “stranger” identity of Asian Americans. This quality of being a “stranger” is racially based, since while white European immigrants could blend in within a generation by changing clothes and adopting a new culture, Asian Americans remained noticeably differentiated by race. As General DeWitt said, “A Jap is always a Jap....You can’t change him by giving him a piece of paper.”<sup>104</sup> By subscribing to the parameters of this narrative, the paper shows its adherence to the established administrative perspective and declines to publish opposing opinions.

In keeping with this, the paper admonishes the public for deviations from steady patriotism or good civic behavior. One editorial entitled “Squelch Those Rumors” details a fictional anecdote in which harmless events spotted by “Mr. Suzuki” become full-fledged crises when they travel through word of mouth, as a tongue-in-cheek reminder not to participate in spreading rumors. Not so light-hearted is another editorial from the same month, which censures some parts of the Manzanar population so severely that it should be provided in full.

#### Back to Barbarism

The thrill of pride that surges down our spine when we view the miracles wrought in a few months time is dampened when we hear of increasing cases of vandalism and mob rule here.

Ruffians who have taken the law into their own clenched fists have escaped with a reprimand from the police who were powerless to do more than maintain surveillance. This was due to the lack of any recognized court of law that could enforce order.

Now the situation has changed. Even though it is temporary, we have a judicial committee empowered to pass judgement. Every case of gang warfare and unrefereed fisticuffs should be severely punished. The Manzanar Free Press promises full publicity in these cases.

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<sup>104</sup>Alan Walker, "A Slap's a Slap: General John L. DeWitt and Four Little Words," *The Text Message* (blog), National Archives, entry posted November 22, 2013, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/2013/11/22/a-slaps-a-slap-general-john-l-dewitt-and-four-little-words/>.

If the prospects of cooling their heels in the iron cage will not deter these hotheads, perhaps the threat of having their names smeared on the pages of a documentary newspaper will make them hold back that punch.

We cannot revert to barbarism!<sup>105</sup>

The paper's condemnation of civic unrest shows it to be protecting administrative power over the inmates' right to protest. The writers likely never meant to make such a prioritization, but the denunciation of disorderly challenge to authority displays a similar subscription to an administrative narrative. Misbehaving inmates who might once have been referred to as "Manzanar citizens" are now "ruffians" and "hotheads" who take "the law into their own clenched fists"; the change in language conveys a distance between the newspaper and those who do not cooperate with camp authority. Set apart in its own paragraph, the cry "We cannot revert to barbarism!" concludes the editorial with desperation. The way in which the newspaper distances itself from dissenting inmates and threatens to use its power to dissuade further disorder reveals an underlying ideology of the newspaper: the best way to prove loyalty and American-ness is for Manzanar inmates to behave solely as cooperative and patient American citizens.

The implications of this ideology and the newspaper's steady stream of patriotism and Americanism are nuanced. Immersion in Americanism could be empowering to the extent that it refuted the questioning of American-ness imposed on Japanese Americans. To a degree, it also went hand-in-hand with political mobilization. Karl Yoneda was one proponent of staunch patriotism who was fueled by his beliefs to write for the *Manzanar Free Press*, participate in founding the Manzanar Citizens' Federation, and become an elected block council member as a way of having a voice in and against the administration. However, the *Free Press's* intolerance of dissenting or qualifying voices to its staunch patriotism limits the degree of empowerment to

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<sup>105</sup> "Back to Barbarism," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), August 3, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

be found in its Americanism. It robs its readers of agency in asserting cultural identity by prescribing a strict brand of patriotism to a diverse population of Japanese Americans with varying connections with Japan. Its condemnation of dissent or civic unrest subscribes to a larger anti-Japanese narrative that citizenship must be earned through an overt loyalty and service that is not required of white Americans. Whatever varying degrees of empowerment may be discerned, the unwavering Americanism of the *Manzanar Free Press* still alienates much of the Manzanar populace and goes along with a racialized program of Americanization.

With the paper's strong ties to administrative narratives and disconnect with parts of the Manzanar population, could it still have the capacity to voice resistance? Further examination of the editorials reveals subtle ways in which the paper voiced subversive views.

### Editorial Resistance

While the paper never becomes a voice of outright resistance to camp administration, it manages to express critiques of incarceration throughout its run. These critiques generally appear in the editorials, built into the larger message the editorial conveys. Veiled criticisms are woven into messages that more overtly support an administrative agenda. Though the criticisms are never the focus of the editorials, they manage to disrupt the purely favorable image of incarceration and challenge the narrative that their citizenship should be earned through a service and sacrifice not required of other Americans.

### *Critiques in Editorials*

The same editorial encouraging Manzanar people to “have faith” in America exemplifies the way in which such a message of patriotism can contain subtle critiques. It characterizes incarceration as something more shocking and intrusive than a service to be taken for granted.

Evacuation was a staggering blow to the nisei’s deeply ingrained belief in democracy. We had unquestioningly believed the textbook axiom “regardless of color, creed, or previous condition of servitude...” Now in the narrow confines of Manzanar many are wondering.

Whirlwinds of catastrophe seem to engulf us. The Native Sons of the Golden West would deprive us of our precious right of franchise. “A Jap is always a Jap,” rants a responsible public official.

But have faith, fellow nisei! Though the axis sword brandishers are our enemies[,] those in this country who would deny democratic processes, who would snatch away our inherited prerogatives are equally guilty.<sup>106</sup>

Though the overall message encourages Nisei to maintain their belief in a good America, the language used to set up the Nisei’s plight challenges not only their incarcerated condition of but also the powers that put them there. The phrases “staggering blow,” “whirlwinds of catastrophe,” and “narrow confines of Manzanar” all firmly make the case that the Japanese-Americans do not want to be there, a sentiment that might appear obvious but still appears guarded based on the upbeat conclusions of many editorials. This editorial defends both their loyalty and their rights as citizens: though they had “unquestionably believed” in the principles of America, they were to be “deprived” of their “precious right to franchise.” On top of this, it holds public officials responsible for their “rants” and assigns guilt for the deprivation of rights. Perhaps the strongest assertion is that “those in this country who would deny democratic processes...are equally guilty” to fascist powers. Without bringing in names, the editorial implicates anyone involved in incarceration as being guilty of working against democracy, carrying the *same* guilt as the fascists—a guilt that extends to overt racists like General DeWitt or to President Roosevelt himself.

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<sup>106</sup> "Let Us Have," 2.

Patriotic holidays often become occasion for reflection upon incarceration. One early editorial discusses Flag Day as follows:

Somewhere in your childhood memory, the American flag stands out vividly as a symbol of freedom and equality.

You saluted allegiance to the American flag with your Chinese, German, Greek and Irish classmates.

With youthful passion you believed those words: "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Tomorrow is Flag Day.

Even in this outpost of civilization, our inherent faith in democracy and respect for the flag will reach the hearts of the rest of the world as we pledge allegiance to Old Glory.<sup>107</sup>

The use of past tense in recognizing their loyalty to the flag serves a dual purpose: it argues for the long-standing "allegiance" of Japanese-Americans to the U.S., and it implies that their belief in the principles of the flag has been challenged by their placement in concentration camps. The latter point is affirmed by the assertion, "*Even in this outpost of civilization, our inherent faith in democracy and respect for the flag will reach the hearts of the rest of the world...*" The editorial recognizes the difficulty of maintaining faith in democracy while living in a concentration camp, and frames the incarceration as a question of "the rest of the world's" acceptance of their loyalty, rather than a question of the Japanese-Americans' need to be more loyal.

Less subtle is the editorial on July 4, 1942, which introduces the challenge of remaining faithful to the principles of democracy as follows.

Fourth of July this year will have poignant meaning and value for an America gripped in a death struggle for the very principles affirmed in the Declaration of Independence.

For American citizens of Japanese ancestry herded into camps and guarded by the bayoneted sentries of their own country, it will be a doubly strange and bewildering day. For they remember, too well, the carefree Fourth of last year, when they stood along Broadway to cheer the nisei soldiers who marched shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers of all races.

But let us think twice, lest in our understandable and human bitterness, we dismiss this day with an ironic shrug and a customary wisecrack.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Editorial: Flag," 2.

It acknowledges America's current "death struggle" for the principles of democracy, a clear reference to the war against fascism but also a phrase that invites speculation about a dual meaning. The challenges leading to a "death struggle" for democracy could conceivably come from the U.S.'s own abandonment of the rights of its citizens. More pointedly, the editorial underlines the contradiction of celebrating a day of freedom when Japanese-American citizens are incarcerated on the basis of ancestry. It highlights this contradiction by referring to July 4th as a "doubly strange and bewildering day," and invokes the memory of a previous Independence Day to underline the steadfast good citizenship of the Nisei.

This scene briefly painted in the editorial provides a powerful and multi-leveled argument. Not only does it highlight the loyalty and ready sacrifice of the Nisei, but its description "...shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers *of all races*" conveys an American ideal that the editorial implies has been abandoned. In its projected memory, it envisions the Nisei as one of many populations joining in an American current of multiculturalism and acceptance. By framing this memory, or perhaps more accurately, this idealistic vision of America as a time gone by, cut off by Japanese-American incarceration, the editorial presents an argument that incarceration directly contradicts the fundamental values of America.

The way in which the editorial turns the corner to introduce a solution or make a statement of action, as it does when it begins, "But let us think twice...", exemplifies a rhetorical structure that is nearly ubiquitous throughout the editorials. Throughout the editorials, criticisms are articulated as a way of laying the groundwork of the problem the editorial will address. The same editorial that argues "Let us have faith" devotes two paragraphs to the disaster of incarceration that build to its reminder to maintain faith despite obstacles. Another editorial

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<sup>108</sup> "Editorial," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 4, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

encapsulates this rhetorical structure in just one sentence: “Many of our rights as free men have been encroached upon, but we must make this sacrifice to preserve and strengthen the national morale.”<sup>109</sup> The critique is built into the moralizing conclusion, showing the “sacrifice” to be required *because* their “rights” have been “encroached upon.” Through this formula, the critique manages to be expressed without becoming the focus of the entire editorial.

A larger example of this rhetorical device can be found in this editorial argument for the formation of a labor council.

Sometimes we wonder if our boys who left for the beet fields of Idaho really knew what they were bargaining for. Many left here for the novelty of adventure. Any change was good for them, but we are afraid that many were victims of too much honesty.

The time has come for this community to form a labor council to act as a collective bargaining agent with employer groups and safeguard our volunteer workers. We do not want them to work below the normal scale of wages paid American laborers. We do not want to be stigmatized as scabs.<sup>110</sup>

Again, a critique of the administration is built into a proposal for a solution, and the key to the criticism is the language. The workers are “victimized” by their honesty and those who would take advantage of it. The need for a “bargaining agent with employer groups” implies that employers work against their laborers enough to warrant protection for them. Though these criticisms are less veiled than others, they are still imbedded in a proposal for a solution, lending the same positive and forward-thinking appearance to the editorial. It’s also significant that the proposed solution, the formation of a labor council, is a form of cooperative and “civilized” political organization, one that would be deemed appropriate by the administration. By weaving criticisms into the proposal of an acceptable solution, the newspaper finds a way surreptitiously to publish complaints about incarceration.

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<sup>109</sup> "Where Do We Stand?," 2.

<sup>110</sup> "Editorial," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 23, 1942, 2, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/16251>.

In this way, the newspaper manages to exhibit some subversive expression in the midst of administrative control. By expressing criticisms of incarceration in editorials that address how to handle the circumstances of incarceration, the newspaper is able to voice complaints without reading as too pointedly critical. This way of expressing critiques reflects the cultural perspective of its writers, who tended to respond to incarceration by exhibiting cooperation and patience as proof of their good citizenship.

This covert form of expressing complaints also reflects the framework in which the newspaper was allowed to exist. Administrative supervision kept the newspaper within the constant control of the WRA and created a degree of self-censorship in the writers that is not measurable in the available historical documentation. While it is not possible to know the exact form of administrative pressure under which the writers may have worked, it is clear at least that attempts to express a more outwardly resistant political message may have undermined the newspaper's ability to exist as a discursive medium at all. In order for the newspaper to operate as a center of discourse, it needed to comply with what the administration found acceptable. In this way, the newspaper's subversive potential is constrained not only by the natural limitations of one cultural group's point of view, but by the necessary framework in which the newspaper operated.

### *Limitations on Resistance*

Though the newspaper finds a way to voice challenges to incarceration and camp administration, the ways in which it did limit its subversive potential. The editorial voice of the paper itself is limited not only by administrative oversight but also by class, generational, and cultural divides throughout the camp. The perspective voiced by the newspaper is geared towards a certain segment of the Manzanar population, and the critiques are similarly oriented.



Large parts of the Manzanar population are not included in the newspaper's advocacy and subversion.

This reveals itself in one way through the class dynamic in which the newspaper operates. As previously discussed, the writers of the *Free Press* largely belonged to a subset of the Japanese-American community that was in pursuit of a cosmopolitan Western ideal, and this ideal was promoted in the newspaper. The paper advocated for expression and activity that fit in with this type of Americanism, but dismissed and censured activity that differed from it.

The class dynamic reveals itself partially in the editorial that argues for a labor council. It advocates for the formation of such an organization by speaking on behalf of the working class that left to work in Idaho beet fields, assuming an absence of agency and critical thinking in these laborers. It wonders if the workers "really knew what they were bargaining for" and argues a labor council is needed to "safeguard" them. The assumption of misjudgement on the part of the volunteer workers displays the absence of these workers' voices in the formation of this argument, and highlights the condescension of the educated writers in speaking for them.

This class dynamic is also present in the ways in which the newspaper adopts the position of a scolding authority towards its readers. The editorial "Back to Barbarism" particularly exemplifies this. In the editorial, the newspaper adopts a moral authority over its reading public and condemns the expression of dissent through forms other than itself or other administration-approved organizations. The centrality of the word "barbarism" particularly highlights the class dynamic. Its implication of a complete lack of civilization paints the dissenters addressed in the editorial as primitive and brutish, the very opposite of the cultured Western picture the newspaper seeks to create.

The “barbarism” editorial also highlights a discrepancy in opportunities to express dissent or simply to have a voice in the context of the camp. Higher educated and younger camp members with U.S. citizenship are offered more opportunities to have a political voice and express their American-ness in ways that are acceptable to camp administration: they could join the JACL or Manzanar Citizens Federation, write for the newspaper, or run to be an elected block council leader. While these opportunities provide a picture of a functioning mini-democracy, they are limited along the lines of class, generation, and culture. Election to a block council requires citizenship; working for the newspaper requires fluency in English. Because of the exclusionary quality of these positions, camp leadership does not accurately represent the community of inmates, and the editorial voice of the newspaper cannot represent the whole of its readership. The kind of subversion expressed through the paper is for a limited audience of similarly educated, liberal, and pro-U.S. Nisei. Subversion through other forms like civil disruption is condemned as “mob rule” and dismissed. In this way, the subversive potential of the newspaper is limited by class, generation, cultural upbringing, and political ideology.

The limitations of the newspaper as a subversive tool and an inclusive medium of discourse necessitate looking elsewhere for instances of cultural expression and resistance. If not in the newspaper, where could resistance be expressed?

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MANZANAR RIOT AND ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

In the last chapter, I analyzed early editions of the *Manzanar Free Press* for their subversive potential and examined the degrees of collaboration versus resistance in the paper. I found that while the paper found a way to voice genuine complaints about incarceration, the camp administration, and the racially subordinated status of Japanese-Americans, the paper's empowering potential was limited by various factors, with class, generation, citizenship status, and gender being among the most prominent. This raises the question: If the paper was primarily collaborative toward the administration and its discourse reflected that, where else in the camp could other views be expressed?

This chapter examines the Manzanar Riot not only as a distillation of underlying cultural conflicts and divisions among Japanese American inmates, but as an alternative outlet of public political expression. First, the riot acts in a way as an encapsulation of underlying tensions within the ethnic community. Analyzing the substance and main actors of the riot clarifies where these divisions arose within the Manzanar population and what issues were the most polarizing. Second, the riot itself can be read as a form of discourse. Reading the riot as text in this way gives insight into the alternative forms that were available for Manzanar inmates to express themselves publicly, and reveals a larger issue of access to modes of public discourse. What modes of discursive expression were available outside of the newspaper, and how did these media function in comparison?

## Manzanar Riot

On December 5, 1942, prominent JACL member Fred Tayama was severely beaten by six masked men with clubs. In the investigation immediately following, Tayama named Harry Ueno as one of his attackers. Ueno was a Kibei who worked in the mess halls and was the head of the only partially-successful attempt at labor organization in Manzanar, the Kitchen Workers' Union. WRA reports portray Ueno and the Kitchen Workers' Union as the symbolic forefront of burgeoning resistance to the administration within camp boundaries. Upon Tayama's accusation, Ueno was arrested immediately and held for questioning.

The next day, a crowd of inmates organized at a mess hall and approached the administrative office calling for Ueno be released, prompting camp administration to call in military backup. Negotiations between the Director Ralph Merritt and the crowd, led by spokesperson Joe Kurihara, ultimately failed. While the administration offered to release Ueno on the condition that all organized opposition would come to a halt, the protestors refused to agree to these terms and demanded Ueno's unconditional release. Gathering again after the failure of these negotiations, the crowd produced a blacklist of people in the camp they wanted executed, with Tayama at the top of the list. Significantly, the blacklist included many *Manzanar Free Press* staff members.

The military that had been called at the start of the riot released tear gas in an attempt to break up the crowd, and then fired at random into the smoke. One protestor was killed on the spot, one died later from serious wounds, and at least nine others were injured. The gunfire

broke up the crowd immediately, ending the riot. In the days following, inmates wore black armbands in commemoration of the killed protestors.<sup>111</sup>

The Manzanar riot marked a crucial turning point in the history of not only Manzanar but the entire institution of WRA incarceration. Throughout the WRA, it provoked concern over cultural clash and assimilation that inspired a series of administrative changes to the structure of the incarceration program. It goes down in history as the only uprising in the history of Japanese-American incarceration not to resolve peacefully. What made the riot so significant and disruptive? Why did all attempts at mediation fail up until the point of violence? How does the Manzanar riot clarify the internal conflicts of the Japanese-American community during incarceration, and how does the riot itself behave as a form of public discourse?

### ***Cultural Conflict***

The riot provides a useful distillation of a specific divide within the ethnic community. The explosion of cultural and political differences appears the most overt explanation of the riot. An ideological clash about whether to collaborate with or resist the WRA administration contributed substantially to the divide within the ethnic community. This “collaboration-resistance” conflict has been present throughout this paper’s discussion of the *Manzanar Free Press*: Sue K. Embrey described resentment in her discussion of the *Free Press*’s reception among inmates, saying that many inmates did not feel their voices were expressed in the paper

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<sup>111</sup> War Relocation Authority Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study, *Report on Manzanar Riot with Addenda and Clippings*, by Togo Tanaka, report no. 2 (n.p., 1943), [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/jarda/ucb/text/cubanc6714\\_b211o10\\_0012\\_2.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/jarda/ucb/text/cubanc6714_b211o10_0012_2.pdf). Additionally, Togo Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar Riot with Addenda and Clippings*, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (1943), accessed April 31, 2019, <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/28722/bk0013c990m/> and information from Brian Niiya, "Manzanar Riot/Uprising," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed April 31, 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar\\_riot/uprising/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar_riot/uprising/); Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

and complained that it was “not giving a balanced picture.”<sup>112</sup> As discussed in the preceding chapters, the paper tended to cater to a sphere of liberal, educated, Americanized Nisei who worked closely with the administration, limiting the subversive potential of the paper even while it managed to voice real complaints about the experience and premise of incarceration. Why, however, did the paper’s behavior garner distrust and resentment to the extent that people on its staff were singled out to be attacked or killed during the riot? Why was this sphere of inmates so resented, and why was collaboration with the administration seen as such a betrayal of the ethnic community?

Internal distrust of collaborating members of the ethnic community was rooted in a history of Japanese-American espionage. The FBI had employed Japanese-American informants in the decades before Pearl Harbor to keep tabs on the Japanese-American populations of continental U.S. as well as Hawaii and the Philippines. It was not unheard of for Japanese-Americans with close ties to white communities to prioritize their allegiance to white America over the protection of their ethnic community. The JACL was known to collaborate with the FBI in identifying potentially disloyal Issei, and some JACL members who formed the Anti-Axis Committee publicly declared that they would report any disloyal activity they saw to the FBI. It was after Pearl Harbor that this informing began to seriously harm the lives of Japanese Americans. The night of Pearl Harbor, over 1,200 men were arrested along the West Coast on suspicion of having had a hand in the attack, in some cases separating them from their families for years. Even after incarceration, informants still remained active, resulting in further detainment and removal to prison camps of Issei known to have pro-Japan leanings. Informers, called *inu*, literally meaning “dog,” were not regarded kindly within the camp. It was violence

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<sup>112</sup> Diana Meyers Bahr, *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 68.

toward suspected *inu* that provoked the two major camp uprisings in the early history of incarceration, first in Poston, Arizona and then in Manzanar. The harm brought about by the *inu* garnered deep-running suspicion and resentment toward WRA-collaborating members of the ethnic community.<sup>113</sup>

This mistrust partially explains the newspaper's particular position in the riot. The newspaper was specifically targeted not only because of its inability to be an accurate representation of the camp and to provide a platform for a broad range of voices; it was also because its ties to the WRA provoked suspicion that its staff were informers. In addition to the administrative collaboration, the reporting activity of newspaper staff provoked further suspicion: the investigation that went along with their reporting would make it easy for them to inform the WRA of their findings. This dimension of mistrust formed another degree of separation between the newspaper and areas of its public, and sheds light on the nature of the animosity toward the newspaper that exploded during the riot.

This political and cultural distrust may seem to provide ample motivation for the uprising. However, Lon Kurashige argues that other dimensions of the riot must be examined to understand it more completely. He argues that previous generations of scholarship have limited their understanding of the riot by focusing on purely conscious actions and motives. By expanding the study to include unconscious motives and consequences, he argues, historians can gain a broader understanding of the underlying cultural factors that shaped the explosive divide. He focuses on tensions between class and gender specifically as being areas previously unexplored to their full potential.

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<sup>113</sup> Brian Masaru Hayashi, "Informants/Inu," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed April 31, 2019, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Informants/\\_%22inu%22/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Informants/_%22inu%22/).

I find Kurashige's exploration of class to be particularly insightful in relation to the newspaper. Kurashige defines class in this context *not* to mean a difference in means of production—in which sense, most Japanese-Americans would belong to the subordinated classes—but to mean a difference in cultural capital. Different levels of cultural capital, which might appear in the form of “education, occupation, or family lineage status,”<sup>114</sup> played a large role in the degree of interaction and cultural exchange Japanese-Americans might have with mainstream America.

Kurashige underlines the differences in socioeconomic background between WRA collaborators and inmate protesters. For instance, one contemporary study found that the majority of protesters came from a rural background and had certain types of non-intellectual occupations, i.e. “gardening, farming, fishing, and small business.”<sup>115</sup> These rural ethnic communities remained more isolated from white America than, for instance, an ethnic neighborhood in a city like Seattle or Los Angeles. By contrast, the WRA collaborators were more likely to come from urban backgrounds and have a college education. Educated people in a non-agricultural occupation and urban environment would have had more contact with white America than those from isolated rural communities, and would have had more opportunity to experience culture as porous through interacting and exchanging with mainstream white America.

This separation between the agricultural and urban cultured sects of Japanese-Americans traces back to the beginning of Japanese immigration. As Kurashige describes,

While the vast majority of migrants came from the farming classes and were of Buddhist faith, there was a small but significant migration of (often Christian) students, professionals, and intellectuals who quickly established themselves as the immigrant

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<sup>114</sup> Lon Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration, and Manzanar Protest,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (August 2001): 400, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2001.70.3.387>.

<sup>115</sup> Morris Opler, “A History of Internal Government,” quoted in Kurashige, “Resistance, Collaboration,” 401.



leadership. These people ventured to America not merely to make a quick buck and return to Japan but to settle permanently and adapt to what they called the 'cosmopolitanism' of the West.<sup>116</sup>

The difference in intentionality--between those who never intended to stay in America, or did but wanted to preserve their culture, and those who came with a more explicit purpose of becoming part of this Western cosmopolitanism--laid the groundwork for a divide along the lines of cultural capital. Those who embraced this Western ideal were more likely to collaborate with camp authority and appreciate a goal of Japanese-American assimilation. People who settled without aiming to join this "cosmopolitanism" did not have a goal of assimilating into white America beyond for the purposes of being accepted and successful. The origins of this cultural divide in both a Japanese class difference and an intentionality in coming to the U.S. show that the disparity in class at Manzanar was not the result of who could "make it" in America, but a product of a complex mix of factors that handed some inmates a higher degree of cultural capital and interaction with white America than others, and therefore greater ease with and desire for assimilation.

Kurashige illustrates this difference even more starkly by discussing the backgrounds of key figures in the riot. He contrasts the background of Togo Tanaka, *Manzanar Free Press* reporter who was on the protesters' blacklist, with that of Harry Ueno, the Kibei kitchen worker whose arrest sparked the uprising. Tanaka, as outlined in Chapter 2, came from an urban background that surrounded him with intercultural interaction. He was highly educated and worked a high-status job, running the *Rafu Shimpo* newspaper prior to incarceration. He had an attitude which saw "internees who returned hate with hate as no better than the racists

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<sup>116</sup> Kurashige, "Resistance, Collaboration," 400-401.

responsible for the internment,"<sup>117</sup> and worked closely with the administration in a number of ways.

By contrast, Ueno was born on a Hawaii plantation and at age eight was sent to be educated in Japan. While Tanaka's parents had a Samurai background and his father was "trained in the Chinese classics,"<sup>118</sup> Ueno's family was from the farming class and was intending to return to Japan after making money in the U.S. Ueno found that, upon returning to the U.S. at age fifteen after leaving school, his years abroad had left him detached from American society. He was alienated by his poor English skills and low education level, from both the white community and the ethnic one. Kurashige explains, "It was only at Manzanar that Ueno began to embrace, and indeed to feel embraced by, the ethnic community."<sup>119</sup> It was during his time at Manzanar that Ueno became a more prominent activist and community leader. Again, Ueno's background of isolation from white America parallels his anti-collaboration views. Kurashige's assessment of cultural capital helps define the divide that drove the uprising and position the newspaper in relation to it. The *Manzanar Free Press* espoused an ideology that grew from a class of people more culturally connected with white America, more in favor of assimilation, and more in search of a Western cosmopolitan ideal. In some ways, it was the embodiment of this Western ideal, in the paper's utopian introduction of itself; its optimistic editorial stance; its faith in democracy and insistent patriotism; and its curiously democratic title, the "free press."

There are multiple reasons for the riot's targeting of the paper. The paper was in collaboration with the WRA, something that to many people felt traitorous to the ethnic community and raised suspicion of the newspaper staff as being *inu*. As previously discussed,

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<sup>117</sup> Kurashige, "Resistance, Collaboration," 406.

<sup>118</sup> Kurashige, "Resistance, Collaboration," 404.

<sup>119</sup> Kurashige, "Resistance, Collaboration," 405.

the paper was not representative of the full range of politics, cultures, and worldviews held throughout the camp, even while on some level it claimed to be. It was controlled by a segment of the inmate population that dominated camp leadership and mainstream public discourse. The newspaper became not only a symbol of this dominance but an active tool in it, providing a platform for this group both inside and outside the camp.

The newspaper failed as a mediator across camp-wide divisions in part because it failed to engage a public that did not have the same background of cultural capital and assimilationist ideology. The bigger question is, why did forms of public discourse in general fail to engage a public in a way that mediated the rising tension? What alternative forms of public discourse existed, and what avenues of public expression were available to people who did not feel represented by the *Manzanar Free Press*? Addressing these questions requires a closer study of the riot from the point of view of the non-collaborating inmates. For this, I look at the figure of Harry Ueno.

### ***Harry Ueno and Alternative Public Forums***

Harry Ueno's testimony on the riot provides a crucial window into a less-documented world of Manzanar inmates and the workings of public discourse from their perspective. A 1994 interview with Harry Ueno becomes a central source for this section. Emiko and Chizuko Omori conducted the interview for their 1999 documentary on incarceration, *Rabbit in the Moon*, that explored currents of resistance within the camps. The nearly four hours of footage ranges through topics that cover the whole of Ueno's life, but focus particularly on the Manzanar riot, and Ueno speaks extensively of his role in the riot and camp resistance in general. Having passed away in 2004, Ueno was in his late eighties at the time of the interview. He speaks

slowly but earnestly in halting English, and remembers sharply the details of the events at Manzanar.

The tensions leading to the riot began to build months prior, when mess hall worker Ueno began to notice large perpetual shortages in their food rations, notably in deliveries of sugar. He noticed the discrepancy of sugar particularly because of his habit of crisping leftover rice with sugar into sweet rice balls to give out as a treat to the youngest Manzanar children. When the shortages continued, he complained to Assistant Director Ned Campbell and investigated Campbell's claims about where the food was going. On one occasion, he was told that extra sugar was needed by the hospital, but when he asked hospital employees about it, they told him that the hospital didn't use much sugar because of its dangers to diabetes patients, and only used its assigned amount. Another time, he was told that the sugar was needed for manufacturing soy sauce, but when he asked the manufacturer, the amount of sugar they reportedly used again fell within the limits of their ration, leaving no need to use the rations of another mess hall.

The continuous disappearance of not only sugar but a variety of food, such as meats, oranges, and cookies, without reasonable explanation led Ueno to suspect that the administration was hoarding it for the Caucasian camp workers and selling the rations on the black market. According to the account given in his interview, this was more than a groundless conspiracy theory. Ueno explains that, during a time when sugar was so scant in his mess hall that there was not enough to provide for coffee, he visited the Caucasian mess hall and saw sugar bowls on every table. He heard from Japanese-American camp policemen who inspected cars coming in and out that Campbell carried hundreds of pounds of sugar in his trunk. He was given more and more ludicrous explanations from the administration for the disappearance of food, and he claims

that a wide range of people witnessed this food shortage and subsequent administrative cover-up and were afraid to speak up.

The psychological significance of the food shortage issue is partially made clear by its relation to rapidly changing gender dynamics within the Japanese-American community. The removal from the usual structure of work and home life brought about by incarceration disrupted the boundaries around gender roles and responsibilities. Men were no longer charged with providing for their families, since food and housing was government-provided; women found themselves with much fewer responsibilities in housework, since the “house” was such a limited space. The new predominance of leisure time, for Issei especially, allowed men and women to move beyond the traditional bounds of gender responsibilities. Women and children particularly became less house-bound: women had the time to join clubs or even find employment themselves, and most of children’s socializing took place outside of the home, since privacy and personal space was so hard to find in the barracks. As a result of this, the traditional family structure was profoundly disrupted and the traditionally patriarchal Issei men lost a power and leadership over their families, something that felt highly emasculating and invasive to a culture that placed such value on the family structure.

In this context, Ueno’s act of providing treats for whom he calls the “minor children” takes on new meaning. There’s a paternal quality to his action of providing treats for the children of Manzanar and even a kind of masculine leadership in his resourcefulness of reusing leftover rice. This is especially important considering Ueno’s position in a traditionally feminine occupation. Ueno’s work in the kitchens seems symbolic of the plight of incarcerated Japanese-American men, who often found themselves in a reversal of gender roles that compounded the indignity of being stripped of property and rights. In the context of an often-emasculating

environment, it becomes clear why this ability to provide for the children of Manzanar was so important to Ueno, and what it means to be robbed of even this semblance of power and paternalism by an apparently cheating administration.

Seeing that complaints, food-shortage-related and not, were amassing from mess halls across the camp, Ueno sought administrative permission to organize. Ueno remembers obtaining permission both from Director Harvey Coverley and from the mess steward to organize, explaining his reasoning that it was a way of putting “everyone’s complaints in...one package.”<sup>120</sup> By October 1942, Ueno’s initiative had formed the Kitchen Workers’ Union, the only partially successful attempt at organized labor in Manzanar. Despite Ueno’s claim that he organized with full permission from various levels of authority, WRA documents show that the Kitchen Workers’ Union was never formally recognized by the administration.

The way in which Ueno handled the food shortage problem shows his limited means to assert himself as an American citizen and participant in the Manzanar “democracy.” After corroborating his concerns with other mess hall workers, his first course of action was to contact the administration privately by meeting with Ned Campbell, Assistant Project Director.<sup>121</sup> His choice to contact administration first reflects an expectation of authority figures to behave as moral actors; perhaps it also shows the effects of the newspaper’s portrayal of the administration as personable, ethical, and caring to Manzanar residents who did not yet have much contact with them. This discrepancy in contact with the administration, as previously discussed, falls along the lines of cultural capital and status within the camp. Most importantly, however, Ueno’s

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<sup>120</sup> Harry Ueno, "Harry Ueno Interview," by Emiko Omori, Densho Digital Archive, accessed April 29, 2019, Segment 16, <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-densho-1002/ddr-densho-1002-7-transcript-d49f070806.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> As Ueno explained in the interview, Ned Campbell was “a real power in Manzanar,” since the other Project Directors came and went but Campbell stayed in a more long-term capacity as Assistant Project Director. Ueno, "Harry Ueno," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 14.

move to speak directly to administration rather than make some form of public statement reflects the difficulty for someone like Ueno to express himself publicly.

Because of his relatively low status in the camp as a mostly Japanese-speaking kitchen worker rather than a English-fluent camp leader, Ueno may have been reluctant or at least apprehensive about the idea of organizing publicly—but whatever he felt, his interview conveys a fundamental lack of opportunities for him to join public discourse. Ueno had no paper or publication that would print his complaints, no regular communal meetings for the purpose of expressing his experiences, and in general no forum in which he could address a larger public of Manzanar residents. What he had, as he describes, was a network of oral communication through his individual interactions with other mess hall workers. His connection with other Manzanar residents was limited to this network of individual communication.

Ueno's lack of a public forum shows the shortcomings of the *Manzanar Free Press* as a democratic medium of public discourse. The *Free Press* should have been an available platform for Ueno to express his concerns about the food shortage, especially according to its claims about itself: that it was a democratic “free press” that entirely “belong[ed] to the people of Manzanar.” However, over the course of Ueno's interview, he never once mentioned the newspaper as a potential recourse and seemingly never considered it as an option for him to express himself publicly. The paper's failure to provide an outlet to people like Ueno underlines the way in which it was ultimately an exclusionary medium of public discourse, primarily serving the most Americanized, administration-collaborating, and cultural-capital-rich inmates at Manzanar.

Ueno's path to labor organization shows the absence of opportunity for him or people of his class, ideology, or linguistic community to contribute to public discourse; it was only after being unsuccessful in his private relationship with the administration that Ueno sought to

organize. The failure of the *Free Press* to be an accessible public forum to many segments of the Manzanar population reflects the way in which camp public forums were dominated by a class of government-supporting Nisei. No public forums of similar scale existed for people in Ueno's community of kitchen workers. Ueno's only way to contribute to public discourse was to create a public for himself by organizing his web of individual communication into a public. In the context of Ueno's lack of options to express himself publicly, his organization of the kitchen workers can be read as an attempt to create a public space in which an alienated faction of Manzanar residents can have a voice.

### ***Administrative Backlash***

The reception of this organization again underlines the exclusionary nature of the public of the *Free Press*. The administration refused to formally recognize the Kitchen Workers' Union, despite Ueno's attempts to organize with full permission and claims that he was given permission by multiple parties. Beyond this, the WRA and collaborating inmates portrayed Harry Ueno and the Kitchen Workers' Union as politicized, threatening, and radical entities.

A closer look at Togo Tanaka's report on the riot for the WRA shows both the administrative characterization of Ueno and the Kitchen Workers' Union and the ways in which a writer like Tanaka attempted to distance himself from them. In a three-page profile of Ueno, not including a page-long transcription of Ueno's writing, Tanaka appears to give a balanced and objective picture of Ueno, citing quotes Ueno gave about himself to people close to him and refraining from characterizing him outright as a dangerous radical. However, through his language, Tanaka subtly frames Ueno as being "other" than the class of inmates to which Tanaka belonged. He employs the class divide to characterize Ueno as simple and non-intellectual,



saying, “He is not the academic or educated type.”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, he includes details of Ueno’s previous profession and salaries, even when he admits the information requires verification, to delineate him as belonging to a certain rural and low-salaried class.

Tanaka also writes about Ueno as if he were a cunning political rival. He writes that he is a “persuasive speaker in Japanese,”<sup>123</sup> a descriptor that affords Ueno a power over the people of Manzanar and, in an ironic twist, particularly implies his dominance over a kind of public space. It is significant to note that Ueno is a “persuasive speaker” in *Japanese*, especially since Tanaka later notes that his abilities in English are “below average.”<sup>124</sup> This identifies Ueno as belonging to a subordinated linguistic community, consistent with Tanaka’s characterization of Ueno as belonging to a lower culture and class. There’s also a slight implication of duplicity in that Ueno speaks to his public in the language of the enemy nation, a language that can’t be understood by the Caucasian camp officials with whom Tanaka collaborates.

Beyond this, Tanaka subtly references racial stereotypes to negatively characterize Ueno. In his single sentence describing Ueno’s looks, he includes that Ueno’s “complexion is described as ‘sallow.’”<sup>125</sup> The descriptor—sickly, unhealthy yellow—does more than imply an unhealthy complexion; the word itself carries negative connotations pertaining to temper or spirit. More importantly, the specific kind of complexion it describes draws on Asian race stereotypes and the twentieth century’s “yellow peril.” It seems to imply an especially concentrated Japanese-ness or Asian-ness in Ueno, further “othering” him from the more Americanized Japanese population and classifying him as anti-American. Furthermore, Tanaka writes, “He has the habit...of dropping his eyes when talking or conversing with another person, seldom looking the individual

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<sup>122</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 20.

<sup>123</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 19.

‘in the eyes.’”<sup>126</sup> While Tanaka notes that this observation came from a close friend of Ueno’s, his inclusion of this detail in a political profile of Ueno for the administration is significant. The failure to meet eyes while talking implies dishonesty or untrustworthiness, and while Tanaka does not go so far as to draw any conclusion after including this detail, the observation itself builds this subtle sense of untrustworthiness into Ueno’s profile. Again, this descriptor is close enough to a prominent Japanese stereotype that it warrants recognition. An image of Japanese duplicity became particularly prevalent in anti-Japanese propaganda after Pearl Harbor. One editorial cartoon from the *Chicago Tribune* in December 1941 features a screen bearing the words “Japanese Honor” knocked over to reveal a racial caricature of a Japanese man holding a smoking gun that spells out “Japanese Perfidy.”<sup>127</sup> The characterization of Ueno as untrustworthy folds into this image of Japanese deceit. These descriptors work to characterize Ueno as having a negative Japanese-ness, in a way that other Japanese-Americans, like Tanaka, do not.

Lastly, Tanaka’s profile contains gender-loaded language that characterizes Ueno as unmanly. He notes that Ueno is physically “slight,” only about five foot three and 120 pounds, and that “his features are thin.”<sup>128</sup> More pointedly, he later notes that he has a “high pitched” speaking voice and that “he often becomes excited,”<sup>129</sup> observations that paint a stereotypically feminine image and convey a flighty temperament and irrationality. In the context of the changing gender dynamics within the Japanese-American community brought about by

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<sup>126</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 20.

<sup>127</sup> Shared in Emily Colborn-Roxworthy, "Manzanar, the Eyes of the World Are upon You': Performance and Archival Ambivalence at a Japanese American Internment Cam," *Theatre Journal* 59, no. 2 (May 2007): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2007.0120>.

<sup>128</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Tanaka, *Report on Manzanar*, 20.

incarceration and the feelings of emasculation that were so widespread among men, these stereotypically feminine details serve to further undercut Ueno's credibility as a public actor.

Tanaka's report, along with characterizations of Ueno and the Kitchen Workers' Union in other WRA documents, show that the administration and collaborating inmates responded to the organization of the labor union as if it were a dangerous political rival. The WRA official report following the riot names Ueno as "a known trouble-maker in camp."<sup>130</sup> Another report speaks of Ueno as follows:

He chose as his bargaining weapon a story manufactured out of wholecloth, without any basis of fact, that the administration was stealing sugar which belonged to the evacuees and was selling it outside at black market prices. He was able to stir up a great deal of excitement among the evacuees, but was unable to use this to any advantage with the administration. He did manage, however, to get himself thoroughly disliked by the then Assistant Project Director who, on several occasions, threatened to throw the organizer bodily from the room.<sup>131</sup>

The report dismisses Ueno's complaints and portrays him as a sensationalist radical, acting only to "stir up excitement." Its tone reflects the larger administrative attitude toward Ueno.

The administration's responses to Ueno's organization show that they regard the voices of other, subordinated public of inmates to be intrinsically antagonistic and anti-American. Why is the response so extreme? Why does the administration regard an organization of kitchen workers with complaints about missing sugar as something so threatening, and so subversive?

### ***Power in Organization***

Part of the answer lies in the kind of power that Ueno afforded his community by organizing the Kitchen Workers' Union. Through organization, Ueno's community gained the ability to define itself, both in terms of the common experiences that united the community and

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<sup>130</sup> War Relocation Authority, *Final Report*, Appendix: Appendix I.

<sup>131</sup> War Relocation Authority, *Final Report*, Chapter V: V Kitchen Workers' Union.

in its relation to the mainstream public of Manzanar, and to advocate for itself based on its self-identity and understanding of itself in the context of the camp. Organization gave Ueno's community the ability to have a voice and occupy public space in Manzanar.

An important shift in the formation of Ueno's community is indirectly documented in Ueno's account. The way in which Ueno talks about his relationship with other kitchen workers before the creation of the union highlights a centrality of individual relationships. In fact, most of the information Ueno pieced together about the suspicious food shortages came from individual communication with other Manzanar inmates. He describes how he heard that Ned Campbell was allegedly driving sugar in and out of the camp:

And I hear from policemen, every time that any cars going out, in, they open the trunk and inspect it. I hear from several policemen, some of these acting director, Kimball, he had two-three hundred pounds of sugar in a, stored up in the trunk there. But he's a powerful man and nobody opened their mouths and say anything. But I hear that from several policemen.<sup>132</sup>

Ueno's relationships with these Japanese-American policemen made him privy to this private information. Similarly, a revelation about missing oranges came from pieced-together interactions with other inmates. Ueno describes,

...before we organized, they used to give us a box of orange a month. And box of little cookies for the minor children's snack.... Then about a month later, we didn't see nothing. Then all of a sudden my friend coming back from canteen, she's carrying the orange and I said, "Where'd you get those oranges? The same thing we used to get 'em," I told her.... So she said, "I buy in the canteen." And she had the cookies, same thing, too. So I went to the Block 16, his name is -- he's a *Kibei* and name is Tateoka. I asked him, "Would you ask the administration what's happened to the orange and the cookies we used to get for the minor children?" And he said, "No, no, no, no, no." He was kind of, "We cannot talk against the administration." So I went to Tateishi....And I asked him, "Could you speak up in the block manager meeting and ask Mr. Kimball what happened to those orange and the cookies they used to supply us for nothing? Now people have to buy." So he went over the administration and I went in the afternoon and watched what he's going to say.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ueno, "Harry Ueno," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 15.

<sup>133</sup> Ueno, "Harry Ueno," interview, Densho Digital Archive, Segment 16.

In puzzling out the disappearance of food items, Ueno moves from private relationship to private relationship. He depends upon the individual relationship he has with each person to put together this information and make movements toward the administration. It becomes easy to see how limiting this kind of organization, or lack thereof, can be for Ueno's ability to assert himself as a resident of Manzanar. The information he is able to gain and share, as well as the people he is able to mobilize, can depend on a host of variable conditions: the friendliness of the relationship, the mood of the other person, the way in which Ueno presents a question, or the relationship of the other individual with the administration.

The power of Ueno's organization can be better understood in the framework of public-sphere theory. Jürgen Habermas, who introduced public-sphere theory with his 1963 treatise *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, defines a public sphere as "a domain of our social life in which such a thing as a public opinion can be formed."<sup>134</sup> In other words, public spheres occur anyplace where a public or communal opinion can be formed, particularly through kinds of serendipitous and engaging social interaction. While this social interaction does not need to be organized on the level of a labor union for it to form a public sphere, I want to argue that Ueno's community could not form a public sphere in and of itself before the organization of a communal political entity such as the labor union. This is because, while Ueno and his community of kitchen workers always belonged to the general and mainstream public sphere of the camp by interacting with camp-wide text and media such as the *Manzanar Free Press*, they did not have public space or text of their own that was not dominated by a separate and more privileged faction of inmates.

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<sup>134</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics*, ed. Steven Seidman (n.p.: Beacon Press, 1989), 231.

To help understand these different kinds of publics, a look at another contribution to public-sphere theory is helpful. Michael Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics* introduces the idea of “counterpublics,” which he describes as “publics which are aware of their subordinate status” to the larger and more generalized public. These publics often stand in opposition to some of the norms and values of the general public: his primary illustration throughout the book is queer culture of the late twentieth century. Warner’s conception of “counterpublics” introduces the idea of multiple public spheres, each with its own communal experiences, set of values, and sense of self-definition, that can exist simultaneously in a society. One can belong to the mainstream, dominant public and a counterpublic at the same time, based on the public-creating media to which one gives attention.

The idea of the counterpublic is useful to understanding the ways in which different kinds of publics developed within the camp. While Ueno’s community belonged to the mainstream public of the *Manzanar Free Press* as Manzanar residents who gave their attention to such media, the community did not constitute a counterpublic until Ueno’s organization of the labor union. This organization transformed the communication among kitchen workers from private to public discourse: rather than being connected through a series of private interactions, the community was now established as a self-advocating institution with organized modes of communication that was for the sake of the community. It was able to move from being an unconscious collective connected by individual interaction to a self-defining, voluntary association that advocated for its own interests and place in the world of public discourse.

In this way, Ueno empowered his community by organizing its connections of scattered private interactions into a self-defining and advocating counterpublic. In the context of this

struggle for public discursive space and Ueno's organizing of public space for his community, how did the riot itself play a part? How can the riot itself be read as public discourse?

## The Public Discourse of the Riot

In understanding the riot itself as a form of public discourse, it is useful to read it as text, analyzing what the riot itself is saying. Considering the extensive and sometimes conflicting scholarship on the Manzanar riot, I am not in a position to make claims about what the riot was "truly" about. However, in the context of this discussion about both cultural divides within the ethnic community and a struggle for space in public discourse, the riot can be read as being in part a response to both of these underlying issues. Examining the riot in the framework of these issues shows the longevity and depth of these struggles through their expression in public protest. This two-point framework leads me to focus on two points in the riot that also hold significance as some of the most concrete instances of self-definition by the protestors themselves. The first is the negotiation between the protestors and administration that led to the crowd's refusal of the administration's terms; the second is the blacklist that targeted prominent camp leaders, primarily for being *inu*.

The protestors first approached the administration with demands that Ueno be released, as they argued he had been falsely accused by Tayama and was being held unfairly. In the negotiations between the protestors and administration, Director Ralph Merritt offered to spokesperson Joe Kurihara that Ueno be released, on the condition that the opposition would cease. In the context of the protestors' long-running struggle for space in public discourse, this requirement that the organized opposition be disbanded carries a particular weight. In other words, the administration would release a figurehead of communal organization, in exchange for

discarding the newly realized power of public organization that had given the protestors this negotiating power in the first place. The administration's terms display its recognition of the implications on public expression that accompany the riot, and similarly, the protestors' refusal of these terms marks a moment of self-recognition as an voluntarily-assembled entity with advocating power.

In this way, the riot can be read as a rejection of the existing hierarchy of public discourse. It is in part a reaction against the denial of public forums to this less-privileged segment of the Manzanar populace, and by extension, a reaction against the dominant public that speaks for them. It can be read as a rejection of the mainstream representation for the camp and a meaningful disruption of the picture of Manzanar both inside and outside the camp.

The second important element of the riot is the blacklist. Significantly, the blacklist is the only form of a textual public statement put forth by the protestors themselves. It points to one of the most overt currents of the riot: outrage at members of the ethnic community acting as informers. The targeting of these suspected informers, especially on the extreme level of execution, shows the underlying process by which the riot marked a redefinition of the ethnic community. It demonstrated a new exclusion of *inu* and other administrative collaborators from the ethnic community, and by extension, asserts the right of the ethnic community to behave as such: ethnically and culturally Japanese. In this way, the riot can be seen as a rejection both of internal betrayal of the ethnic community like that of the *inu*, and of assimilationist attitudes that invalidated and criminalized Japanese-ness.

While these struggles for public space and ethnic identity existed on the small scale of Manzanar society, the riot's incorporation of these issues can be read as a distillation of larger issues facing Americans of Japanese descent. The panic following Pearl Harbor had made many



Japanese-Americans afraid to show any ties to Japan for fear of being criminalized. The riot in this way can be seen as a reaction against the large-scale criminalization of Japanese-ness that had been at a fever pitch since Pearl Harbor. Similarly, the right to space in public discourse has ties to a larger issue. The premise of incarceration removed the most basic right of West Coast Japanese-Americans to exist in the same *literal* space as the rest of America, and the internal politics of incarceration removed the ability of many Japanese-Americans to occupy discursive space as well. In this way, the riot can be read as an expression of the rights of the inmates as American citizens to realize their freedom of speech and participate in public discourse without being criminalized by the camp administrative officials or the federal government.

### ***Representative Power***

It is important to consider the riot as a discourse in the larger American public. For most of Manzanar's lifespan, the *Manzanar Free Press* had dominated not only the mainstream public discourse within the camp, but also the discourse on incarceration outside the boundaries of the camp. Its circulation among local populations outside of the camp provided them with a window into the everyday operations of the camp, and provided an opportunity for *Free Press* staff writers to convey an image of the Japanese-American community. The writers of the *Free Press* assumed a representative-ness of the camp experience that did not go unnoticed by administration. A WRA report articulates its power as a representative medium to a larger public, saying, "Outgrowing earlier criticism of news suppression and impotence, the *Free Press* functioned effectively as a public relations medium representing Manzanar to the nation at

large.”<sup>135</sup> The administration recognized the public relations potential of the paper and allowed it to become an ambassador for the camp and the Japanese-American community. The newspaper thus became a primary voice of Manzanar, dominating national public discourse on the camp.

The riot broke into the national press where previous currents of resistance in the camp had failed to do so. It disrupted the picture of the camps put forth in the newspaper of a happy and Americanized ethnic community making a sacrifice for country that “really wasn’t so bad.” With that, it disrupted the dominating representative-ness the newspaper had over the camp, challenging its ability to gloss over the incarceration experience with a more palatable picture.

That being said, the riot was limited in its expressive tools as a piece of public discourse to the nation. *Los Angeles Times* headlines following the riot seized on the coinciding dates to connect it with Pearl Harbor. One cried, “Violence Flares When Pro-Axis Japs Celebrate Bombing of Pearl Harbor,”<sup>136</sup> while others proclaimed it the “Pearl Harbor Riot”<sup>137</sup> and emphasized the necessity for military backup to “quell” the violence.<sup>138</sup> This immediate reframing of the riot’s intentions shows the limitations of the riot’s public performance without accompanying text. Without the means to assert their intentions to the greater American public through text, the meaning of the riot was lost to a larger public that was free to impose its

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<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Takeya Mizuno, "The Creation of the 'Free' Press in Japanese-American Camps: The War Relocation Authority's Planning and Making of the Camp Newspaper Policy," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 512, JSTOR.

<sup>136</sup> "Troops Called to End Riots at Manzanar," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1942, <http://ezproxy.nypl.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/docview/165413638?accountid=35635>.

<sup>137</sup> Times Correspondent, "Jap Killed at Manzanar Believed From Pasadena: Schools at Center Closed and Quiet Restored After Pearl Harbor Riot Quelled by Soldiers," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1942, <https://search-proquest-com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/hnplatimes/docview/165405830/E2ACE2ECA7B24BA0PQ/5?accountid=35635>.

<sup>138</sup> "Guns Halt Jap Manzanar Riot: One Killed and Nine Wounded at Owens Valley Camp," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1942, [Page #], <https://search-proquest-com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/hnplatimes/docview/165410672/E2ACE2ECA7B24BA0PQ/3?accountid=35635>; "Segregation of Japs at Manzanar Begins: Small Group, Known to Be Loyal to America, Shifted to C.C.C. Camp and Axis Men Jailed," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1942, <https://search-proquest-com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/hnplatimes/docview/165378026/E2ACE2ECA7B24BA0PQ/7?accountid=35635>.

circumstantial assumptions. The failure of the riot to convey a coherent message exemplifies the ultimate limitation of “event” in comparison to “text.” It shows the ultimate limitations of public performance in and of itself, and conversely, conveys the comparative power of text in shaping public discourse.

***Epilogue: A Note on Alternative Public Spaces***

In concluding this chapter, it is important to note the presence of other alternative spaces of cultural expression outside of those discussed, i.e. the Kitchen Labor’s Union and the Manzanar Riot. Emily Roxworthy discusses the significance of the performing arts in Manzanar, highlighting the mix of cultural performance and the way in which these performing arts centers interacted with the surrounding community of the Owens Valley. She argues that the way in which these cultural performances were recorded created a “spectacle-archive” that transformed modes of cultural expression into “spectacles” consumable for the outside public. She notes that the majority of the archived performances fell into the category of American culture— “Manzanar internees twirling batons and tap dancing, swaying to big band tunes and staging Christmas pageants, and even participating in beauty pageants that crowned ‘Miss Manzanar’”<sup>139</sup>—without much recording of more traditional Japanese cultural performances. She argues that this is important not because of a failure to archive certain kinds of performances, but because of the significance of such a decision not to record them:

...internees entrusted to record camp performing arts did not fail to archive traditional Japanese cultural displays or their intercultural contexts in order to deny such performed resistance to enforced assimilation. Rather, the decision not to document such intercultural performances *fortified* the enactment of this

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<sup>139</sup> Emily Roxworthy, "Manzanar, the Eyes of the World are Upon You": Internee Performance and Archival Ambivalence to *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma: Racial Performativity and World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 125.

resistance by allowing it to opt out of the vicious cycle of spectacularization imposed upon Japanese Americans during World War II.<sup>140</sup>

Roxworthy argues that the refusal to archive certain kinds of cultural performance allowed them to escape the transformation from cultural expression to consumable spectacle.

In Roxworthy's case, she argues that not the presence but the *absence* of text archiving cultural performance is subversive. The absence of documentation is what allowed these smaller-scale cultural performances to escape the kind of criminalizing and sensationalist commentary attached to the riot. What Roxworthy describes is a different kind of alternative public space than that discussed in this chapter. While my focus has been on the accessibility of public forums and opportunities for communities to formalize around the intention of contributing to public discourse, the public space depicted by Roxworthy is more centered on cultural expression for the sake of cultural expression. In a subtler way, the kinds of publics that were built around cultural performance were subversive to the assimilationist policies of camp administration simply by virtue of maintaining ties to Japanese culture, especially when they evaded the kind of representative performativity that was projected onto most forms of cultural production at Manzanar.

The subtleties of the different kinds of public spaces that existed at Manzanar, as well as the scant degree of documentation of many such public spaces, require that this chapter be left open-ended. How did these other public spaces behave in comparison with the more overtly political organizations discussed in this chapter? To what degree were these public spaces subversive to the ethnic hatred preached by assimilationist factions of inmates? To what degree did they assist in the movements toward organization and creation of public forums? Future

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 125.

research projects may pick up on these questions to refine the understanding of public discourse at Manzanar.

## CONCLUSION

The *Manzanar Free Press* managed to be a source of empowerment for many. It projected an ideology reflective of the cultural position of a class of educated, Westernizing Nisei who prioritized collaboration with the camp administration and support for the American government as their means of defending their American citizenship. It managed to voice critiques of the WRA and the premise of incarceration while maintaining an uncompromised attitude of faith and dedication to American democracy. It became a potent outlet of cultural expression for Nisei for whom America was their only home and cooperation with authority felt like the only option.

However, the paper was also an exclusionary medium of public discourse, especially to those in the camp who felt differently about their future in America. For people who were not entirely acculturated to America, incarceration may have signaled doom for their hopes of living comfortably in American culture. For these people, who were arguably the most alienated by incarceration, the paper offered no recourse but instead behaved as a source of further alienation. The riot illustrated how the educated Nisei class's dominance of public discourse, inside the camp and beyond, estranged other less-Westernized communities within the camp to the point of violent uprising. The riot's particular relationship with issues of public discourse shows that it spoke to this exclusion and made a statement on behalf of the right to public expression.

The various divisions in the Manzanar population reflected pre-existing cultural clashes that influenced the way in which various sections of the community responded to incarceration. More relevantly, these divisions reflect a stratification within a disenfranchised community between collaboration with and resistance to oppressors, and the developments on each side of the divide show the varying levels of power and subversion to be found in each. Most obviously, collaboration wins the power of administrative favor, winning with it the chance to succeed

within the established system. The writers of the *Manzanar Free Press*, by working with the administration and writing in a way that was deemed acceptable to it, were able to secure more freedoms for themselves in the camp society than those who were disliked by the administration, having opportunities for camp leadership and a medium for genuine cultural expression. They had a format through which to concretize an ideology in response to the unique circumstances of incarceration, and a platform through which to address public opinion and present their ideas persuasively. With these freedoms, the writers found a way to subvert their disenfranchisement in some form. They subtly voiced critiques of incarceration and continued to practice their right to public expression, using the paper as an outlet to voice a certain cultural positionality and worldview.

Conversely, the path of resistance loses the favor of the administration and the powers that come with it. When Harry Ueno began voicing inconvenient complaints to the administration, he noticed a markedly negative shift in the administration's attitude toward him, and the administration's dislike became a recurring obstacle to his ability to experience free speech. However, operating outside the administrative structure of the camp allowed Ueno to become an advocate for the people neglected by collaborating inmates and institutions like the *Manzanar Free Press*. While subversion of the basic disenfranchisement of incarceration was impossible, Ueno was able to subvert his community's disenfranchisement within camp society by formalizing his community into a voluntary association intent on public expression and recognition. In this way, Ueno was able to be a better advocate for a segment of the Manzanar population with the least recourse from camp authorities and the mainstream public.

The case of Manzanar speaks to the way in which public discourse, and text in particular, operates as a medium of power. The controlled environment and limited avenues of public

discourse in the camp meant that the text put forth by the *Manzanar Free Press* became the dominant discourse of the camp and constituted a dominant, mainstream public. Control of the discursive world of the camp in part allowed a class of Nisei to dominate leadership positions and the representation of the Japanese-American community to the rest of America. The newspaper's centrality to this discursive dominance reflects the power inherent in text.

Published text carries authority through the weight of its institutional association, the formality and standardization of its format and tone, and the selectivity and refinement of the publishing and editing process. The printed word has a longevity in lifespan and a reach in audience that oral communication cannot rival: printed text lasts longer than words spoken out loud, and has the ability to represent ideas to a public far beyond the reach of the individual. For these reasons, printed text is a crucial medium of power. Manzanar shows the way in which control of printed text allows for dominance in the sphere of public discourse, and highlights the danger of restricting access to text as a public forum.

The example of public discourse at Manzanar also speaks to the particular importance of discursive freedom when other freedoms are held hostage. The outlet of discursive expression has a history of being used particularly powerfully under incarceration. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a famous defense of civil disobedience in "Letters from a Birmingham Jail"; Nelson Mandela famously articulated himself through writing letters in prison; Dietrick Bonhoeffer's prison writing became some of his most powerful and widely recognized. Throughout history, people have turned to their freedom of expression through text when their other freedoms have been restricted. Manzanar is an example of how, during a time when the government made a gross infringement on the rights of citizens, the disenfranchised population found particular importance in the existence of public discourse.



This importance of public discourse to the incarcerated Japanese American community is intimately tied with questions of citizenship. The incarceration of Japanese Americans as a whole raises questions on citizenship: when the government has the ability to revoke the rights of huge numbers of American citizens based on ancestry, what meaning is left in the notion of citizenship? This was a question that huge numbers of the incarcerated community grappled with, and the different responses to the circumstances of incarceration can be read as being in part different responses to this question.

The centrality of participation in public discourse to American citizenship joins these two themes of this paper. Freedom of speech, press, and expression are cornerstones of the American democracy, and during World War II, when America was working to identify itself as the antithesis of oppressive fascist countries, these freedoms were held as more definitively American than ever. In this context, the conflicts over participation and representation in public discourse can be seen as defenses of citizenship. Through struggling to realize their place in public discourse, Manzanar inmates struggled to realize their place as citizens of American democracy. When their most basic freedoms were suspended, the Japanese American community continued to fight for a semblance of citizenship in their fight to realize their freedom of speech.

The struggles for Japanese Americans to access their right to free speech, even on top of the suspension of their other most basic rights, underlines a conditionality in American citizenship and the rights that come with it. As central to American history as the notions of free speech and democracy are the histories of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination that interfere with Americans' abilities to act on their citizenship through free speech. The requirement for Japanese Americans to prove worthiness of their citizenship through service and loyalty that was

not expected of white Americans exemplifies this conditionality of citizenship. Similarly, the limits in linguistic and cultural capital that restricted the ability of some to participate in public discourse also restricted their ability to practice their American citizenship; this restriction in expression underlines the centrality of assimilation-centered cultural capital to the ability to behave as a citizen. The very act of organizing a “free press” showed that Manzanar inmates who were more Americanized were able to participate in an idiom of American citizenship in a way that other inmates who were more linguistically and culturally isolated from America could not. The conditionality of access to free discursive expression underlines a hierarchy in ability to experience cultural citizenship.

These cultural differences are mirrored in the archiving of this history. The most prevalent documentation comes from administrative reports and writings from collaborating inmates. Significantly, the archiving of other voices in the camp exists mostly in oral histories and in events such as the Manzanar Riot than can be analytically interpreted, rather than in writings or other forms of textual documentation. This difference in historical representation reflects the political and cultural representation of the time. It is significant that the Manzanar inmates who struggled to find public representation during their time at Manzanar also largely disappear from the present-day archive of Japanese American incarceration.

The period of Japanese-American incarceration is over, but the issues that define it are as current as ever. The conditionality of citizenship and free speech underlines perhaps the most relevant thread of this project. The stories of the people incarcerated at Manzanar are American stories, ones that shaped the cultural DNA of an entire subset of the American population. They explore a side of American history that is less tasteful but no less truthful, and they have the

power to strengthen our understanding of America and shape the future we create for it. They deserve, and need, to be heard.

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