

仕方が無い SHIKATA GA NAI: THE RACIALISATION AND SYSTEMATIC TARGETING OF LOS ANGELES' JAPANESE POPULATION PRIOR TO PEARL HARBOR

By Sarah Wheeler



Japs Keep Moving - This is a White Man's Neighborhood [Photograph]. National Japanese American Historical Society. (c. 1920).

“Silence, I discover, is something you can actually hear.”

– Japanese Proverb

Special note to the reader:

The action perpetrated against Japanese American citizens and immigrants by the United States of America during 1942-1945 is often defined as “internment.” However, I feel these words have historically been politically motivated to soften and erroneously undermine the true reality of an egregious offence committed by the United States government. Henceforth, I will refer to “internment” as “incarceration” and describe “internment camps” rightfully as “concentration camps.”

Introduction

As Los Angeles emerged as a dominant economic powerhouse in the early 1900s, it projected itself as a beacon of prosperity and opportunity for the national and international community alike. Immigration was already steadily increasing across the U.S., but for many The City of Angels became the new focal destination. One of many immigrant groups beckoned by opportunity was the Japanese, who answered the city’s insatiable demand for labour; a demand brought about by the city’s rapid growth. Ironically, the increased demand for labour stemmed not only from the necessity to forge a growing empire, but to replenish curtailed immigrant workers. Preceding groups, specifically the Chinese, were targeted by xenophobic exclusionary laws after being labelled as economic threats. Over time, the Japanese faced the same xenophobic barriers, but the alleged threat in this case was due to their uniquely established economic independence in California. As a result, economic fears from Anglo natives fuelled increasing anti-Japanese sentiment, and gave way to exclusionary measures and laws enacted to target ethnic Japanese residents. However, many of these targets were naturalised U.S citizens, or U.S. citizens by birth.

Ultimately, the United States specifically and intentionally targeted the Japanese Americans of California—especially those in Los Angeles—for expulsion or incarceration in the 1930s. It was irrelevant that by at this point many of the targeted residents were U.S. citizens. Essentially, oppression was carried out with the ultimate intention of eliminating the Japanese presence from California as a threat of economic competition, but this threat was poised under the guise of a racial threat to Anglo supremacy. Evidence for this can be seen by the treatment of Los Angeles’ population of Japanese American

residents via targeting by way of government agencies as evidenced through government documentation, land lease records, ballot measures that specifically identified the Japanese as a “problem”, and the extent to which such legality was enacted. Subsequent laws and vocal opposition further fuelled anti-Japanese sentiment to purposefully sow hysteria into popular imagination, which intensified in the 1920s and 1930s. This xenophobic agenda utilised methods including rhetorical tools of oppression via propaganda, such as the so-called “Yellow Peril”, increased enforcement and amendments to existing discriminatory and exclusionary laws, and collective ethnic scapegoating.

As a result, the eventual attack on Pearl Harbor allowed policymakers and vocal opponents alike to capitalise on premeditated hysteria and xenophobia, which allowed for the most egregious unconstitutional offense in U.S. history: the forcible incarceration of approximately 70,000 U.S. citizens on the basis of ancestry.[1] In fact, plans of government-initiated “internment” had been discussed in government documents well before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Unfortunately, the attack merely created the perfect storm to execute the aforementioned agenda to curtail economic influence in the economy through their forced dismissal. However, despite these challenges, Japanese communities in Los Angeles—particularly Terminal Island—sought to maintain normalcy, ultimately showcasing their resilience.

Well into the 1920s, the Progressive Era’s residual racism was conspicuous and omnipresent in journalism. Preoccupied with concepts of tough love moral reform and eugenics, newspapers and government records alike alluded to the racial presence of the Japanese as an economic threat. When viewing such documents, it is important to determine whether the argument being made is racial or economic. At times, it is hard to ascertain when Japanese citizens were not solely the subject of racist rhetoric or the subject of blame concerning another subtle underlying problem overshadowed by methodical ethnic scapegoating. To put it bluntly, racism was ubiquitous in public discourse; derogatory remarks—especially by contemporary standards—littered official and unofficial documents, making any and all secondary attacks that deviate from race difficult to decipher.

However, a disturbing trend emerged from the pre-war years up until Pearl Harbor, and that is the fact that Japanese Americans were caught in the crosshairs of the primary driver of Anglo Los Angeles: money. Ultimately, by capitalising on racial sentiment sowed in the public consciousness, the U.S.—and California specifically—facilitated the passing of exclusionary laws which sought to economically undermine the alleged Japanese threat by means of

racism. In turn, this marriage of rhetoric and sentiment perpetuated the most grievous act a democracy can commit: the stripping of constitutional and civil rights from its citizens.

Brief Background and Timeline of Exclusionary Measures

Between 1880 and 1940, the U.S. had already enacted more than a dozen laws and subsequent amendments regarding immigrant policy.[2] Japanese Americans were not only subjected to various elements of these existing laws, but additional exclusionary acts and quotas were created to target ethnic Japanese specifically.[3] At the heart of these laws were economic concerns, and Japan itself was privy to the first unofficial attempt to curb Japanese immigration with the Gentleman's Agreement of 1906.[4] Essentially, the Gentleman's Agreement stipulated a non-formalised restriction on immigration to the U.S. from Japan, unlike the formalised restriction the U.S. had previously imposed on China. The U.S. honoured the non-formalised pact, and in exchange Japan revoked passports to the U.S.

In Senator James D. Phelan's 1919 publication, *The Japanese Evil in California*, he criticized President Theodore Roosevelt for his soft stance on the bargain with Japan over immigration: "Japan had just emerged from successful war against China; she had taken Formosa; she had assumed control of Korea, and she had beaten Russia".[5] In other words, because Japan had established itself as an emerging power, the U.S. had, from Phelan's perspective, bowed to Japan. This was the impetus from which many anti-Japanese immigration opponents drew the imaginary line for the failure of the U.S. to halt Japanese immigration sooner. However, as Phelan pointed out, this did little to address what his contemporary colleague, journalist V.S. McClatchy, dubbed "The Japanese Problem".[6]

Essentially, the California Alien Land Law of 1913 excluded Japanese and other immigrant groups, such as Chinese, Koreans, and Indians, from owning land, but land could be leased, albeit for significantly reduced periods of time.[7] However, the act was further amended in 1920, further decreasing time on leases, which prevented Japanese from owning stock pertaining to agricultural land. It additionally required aliens—or their guardians—to submit an annual report on their activities.[8] Although never mentioned exclusively in the land code itself, this particular law targeted Japanese as seen in the ballot guide from 1920:

“Its primary purpose is to prohibit Orientals who cannot become American citizens from controlling our rich agricultural lands [...] Orientals, and more particularly Japanese, having commenced to secure control of agricultural lands in California. [...] the proportion already controlled in some counties being from 59 to 73 per cent. Control of the products of the soil by a unified interest such as the Japanese will lead to economic control of the country. That will be followed in time by political control through force of numbers induced by the heavy birth rate”.[9]

In 1940, the Alien Act was imposed that automatically made all non-U.S. born Japanese “alien.” All subsequent “aliens” were required to register and be fingerprinted for government record.[10]

The Perceived Japanese Economic Threat and Subsequent Racial Threat

Foremost, what made Japanese immigrants unique from most other immigrant groups was a penchant to seek out arable land rather than typically residing in urban centres, which historians Brian Gaines and Wendy K. Tam Cho covered extensively in surveying the impact of California’s Land Act and Immigrant Act of 1924.[11] For this reason, Japanese Americans ultimately found themselves in the public crosshairs of U.S. economic whistle-blowers as early as 1901, as noted by The Industrial Commission on Immigration which was keenly that Japanese Americans migrated out of urban centres. As its 1901 report concluded: “In the state of California alone there is today a great army of Japanese coolies...They do not colonize as do the Chinese; they are scattered throughout the state”.[12] Additionally, it further implied they had nefariously infiltrated California in that they had gone “almost unnoticed, and without exciting either suspicion or alarm. [The Japanese labourer] crept into the country and established itself in almost every line of industry along our Pacific coast”.[13]

As economist Masao Suzuki noted, the Japanese provided a service to California, and Los Angeles in particular, by strengthening the economy through agriculture.[14] Historian T.H. Watkins, in writing about the Great Depression, concurred by attributing most of the economic prosperity in the pre-war depression to this agricultural labour, and posited that the decline of such was a strong factor in worsening the depression. As Watkins argued, there was a “monoculture” which required a “large and cheap labour force” that the Caucasian population could not fill, due to the fact that “the white population had been thin from the outset” because of “too many superior jobs” in Los Angeles required for “a state still building its population and its

economy”.^[15] Furthermore, with cheap labour, agriculture was lucrative in that “costs and revenues could be most easily calculated and controlled and where volume could help to offset market fluctuations”.^[16] Japanese Americans provided an invaluable service to the U.S., not only by providing cheap labour, but by incorporating what historian Linda Ivey dubbed “conservative methods”^[17] and what Suzuki credited as introducing new crops to further drive output.^[18]

However, as Suzuki outlined, as Japanese Americans sought self-sustainment—as is the dream of every U.S. citizen and immigrant alike—suspicious opponents turned volatile when Japanese American labourers advocated for better treatment, pay, and initiated self-ventures into agriculture by way of leased land.^[19] Carey McWilliams, a journalist sympathetic to the cause of migrant labourers, composed a detailed breakdown of the perceived economic threat posed by the Japanese in his 1939 book, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labour in California*. McWilliams highlighted that the presence of Japanese Americans was tolerable as long as they assumed vacancies left by the shortage of migrant labour due to the aforementioned exclusionary acts. However, their place as labourers, and nothing more, was the only stipulation for their continued welcome. This was made ominously clear by John D. MacKenzie, the Commissioner of Labour Statistics, who succinctly stated in 1909 that “the moment this ambition [land-ownership] is exercised, that moment the Japanese ceases to be an ideal labourer”.^[20] As Gaines and Cho both note, the issue of Japanese immigration was economic; racial rhetoric was merely employed as the means to dually demonise the Japanese in the agenda to disenfranchise them.^[21] As McWilliams also concluded, “The real prejudice against the Japanese, however, dates from the time when they began to be small owners, rather than farm labourers”.^[22]

Accordingly, the language in both government documents and press outlets increasingly portrayed the Japanese as duplicitous, inferior, and dangerous. The economic element prevailed as ammunition, but the weapon became racial. Even those unopposed to the dominance of Japanese Americans in agriculture, directly or indirectly, adopted racial undertones. In a 1910 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Forrest Crissey remarked that “Californians owe a distinct debt to the dark invaders for demonstrating—as they themselves have not demonstrated—the productive possibilities of their soil and climate.”^[23] However, this statement, while arguably positive, contained racially charged elements that stereotyped and exotified the perception of the agriculturally inclined Japanese—a trend incorporated by critics and coupled with retaliatory racial remarks. Crissey further added racial tones by arguing

that Europeans had effectually grown lazy due to industrialisation and would benefit from instruction by “peasants of the Old World”. [24] Regardless, Cho and Gaines, Suzuki—and even Crissey—all came to the conclusion that the Japanese farmer essentially outperformed its Anglo counterpart.

In once more examining Senator James D. Phelan’s 1919 publication, *The Japanese Evil in California*, Phelan erroneously predicts that Los Angeles, being “one of the most fertile counties in the State”, would experience a future population of “White 48 percent, Japanese 33.4 percent, Mexican 8.2 percent, Chinese .1 percent, and Negro .3 percent”. [25] Additionally, in trying to support his survey, he enlisted a County Health officer to confirm that Japanese residents would experience a “three thousand per cent increase!” and then stated that “one-third of the births in Los Angeles” would be Japanese, thus “the unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that, where the Japanese come, the whites go”. [26] However, upon examining his figures closely, he carefully added toward the end of the booklet that the information he used to equate such numbers of Japanese American residents came from “the rural sections of Los Angeles County”. [27] In other words, Phelan reported the overall Caucasian birth rate from the entirety of Los Angeles County, but then disproportionately juxtaposed it with Japanese birth rates from selected areas in rural regions. [28]

Additionally, the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW), an organisation that sought to preserve California history (which, as of this writing, still exists today under different principles), published in their 1924 edition of the monthly newspaper, *The Grizzly Bear*, equally misleading information about the “unassimilability of Japanese Americans [sic]”, and birth rates. [29] Furthermore, while they declared their organisation was open to any Californian-born person, they purposely sought to “stigmatize all Japanese Americans, including American-born”. [30] Unsurprisingly, the NSGW partnered with the California Joint Commission to pressure representatives to “lobby for exclusion of all Asian immigrants” and maintained close relationships with like-minded contemporaries of the time, most notably Senators and a State Attorney General. [31]

In 1921, Irwin Wallace’s book, *Seed of the Sun*, entered the public imagination as he fictitiously portrayed the Japanese intent to overthrow the U.S. The characters engage in various acts of subversion, such as intentionally sabotaging harvests, opposing assimilation, resisting Americanisation, and ultimately poisoning themselves to impregnate American women in order to populate the U.S. with Japanese—which he implied could result from the influence the Japanese Emperor had over Japanese Americans. [32] In 1929,

V.C. McClatchy, a newspaper publisher, further added to anti-Japanese sentiment by publishing a pamphlet “On the Japanese Problem.” McClatchy, along with Phelan, vehemently advocated for passing the California Land Act, and also like Phelan, McClatchy grossly and egregiously produced erroneous projections of speculative spikes in the Japanese population. He argued that a “grave racial problem” would occur as Japanese might “colonise favourable sections of the United States” to ultimately “serve the ambition of Japan in world subjugation”. [33]

However, McClatchy’s rhetoric quickly honed in on the racial component, and equated superiority with population, ownership of land, and proposed that Japanese language schools, churches, and other elements in Japanese communities subverted youth with Japanese propaganda. [34] This was detrimental, as children were reprimanded when caught speaking Japanese in school, and Japanese textbooks were consequently pulled from schools. [35] The racial element was front and centre in the debate over the “Japanese Problem”, as McClatchy’s pamphlet only cited one economic fact, which claimed in “1920 the Japanese had secured control through ownership or lease of from 50% to 85%”. [36] Although the estimates varied, the alarming trend was the preoccupation with Japanese economic stability.

As a contemporary of McWilliams, Charles Roger Hicks, a journalist and former middle school teacher in Kyoto, wrote his sympathetic and aptly titled 1921 article “The Japanese Problem in California”. Hicks tried to objectively examine “sympathizers” and “opponents” but ultimately rebuked those similar to Phelan and McClatchy, and stated that “there is no Japanese problem except in men’s minds. But some minds are very active in this respect”. [37] Hicks argued there were “three divisions” which concerned the alarmist attitudes towards Japanese Americans; all of which he claimed were categorised as either economically motivated proponents of anti-Japanese sentiment, or “practical men” that recognised the logical fallacies presented by writers such as Phelan and McClatchy:

“First, men who for economic reasons have found, or think they are going to find, the Japanese of advantage to them. Second, men who for economic reasons have found, or think they are going to find, the Japanese of disadvantage to them. Third, practical men who have not become particularly interested economically in the problem”. [38]

Additionally, Hicks further argued that the core nature of anti-Japanese sentiment was economic and driven by political agendas in writing he

contemplated creating a “fourth group”, which comprised “certain types of politicians who find it in their advantage to shout from the housetops their vituperations against the Japanese”.^[39] However, as he cynically remarked: “I have rather thought of these men of yellow-journalistic capacities as coming under vision ‘two,’” as they used “personal economic advantage to make capital of what hysterical tendencies they can manipulate conveniently in agitating for a political or journalistic following”.^[40] Furthermore, Hicks honed in again on the economic nature of anti-Japanese sentiment and argued that “no matter what basic problem may lie hidden...moral or racial from practical economics, little disturbance follows”.^[41] However, once rhetoric and hysteria perpetuated some “underlying fundamental” it would inevitably “manifest an economic situation where action comes like a whirlwind”.^[42] Hicks also argued the economic element revealed itself in relation to the fear of interracial marriages. He stated that opposition to interracial marriage acted as “the ultimate base upon which the economic considerations stand”.^[43] According to Hicks, this manifested ultimately as heightened arguments of assimilation with the initiation of a superficial argument concerning the threat of intermarried Anglo women. He further argued that in the case of “the Negro”, there was little argument which concerned whether African Americans could assimilate, because unlike Asian populations, “the Negro has too little economic push and initiative to worry us”.^[44] Although Hicks maintained a proactive stance in his article, he and others like him were drowned out by the “yellow media”.

Ultimately, the reaction to Japanese Americans was so vehement that the ballot guide for the 1920 California Land Act stated: “Better to let some land lie idle, and a few large landholders make less profit, and even see production decrease somewhat” and urged landowners to refrain from hiring Japanese labourers because “At present the small farmer who needs labour can get none from the Japanese, because they demand leases and cooperative management.”^[45] However, the ballot blatantly took a much more racial approach and attempted to sow alarm as it declared that “land tends to fall into possession of the race occupying the pivotal place in the labour supply”.^[46] In one notorious photo, a woman stands defiantly in front of a house. Her finger points up to highlight the infamous sign hanging from the roof of her house: “Japs keep moving this is a white man’s neighbourhood”.^[47] This image is often erroneously cited as a post-1942 photo, but in actuality the photo was taken in the 1920s, and it was to demonstrate that those of Japanese ancestry were not permitted to live in Anglo neighbourhoods.^[48]

Consequently, the effects of the Land Act are demonstrated in various letters found by apprehensive lessors. A plethora of these leases and accompanying personal correspondences between the lessors and lessees can be found in the California State University, Dominguez Hills Japanese American Digitization Project archive. In 1926, James Kobata, whose letterhead identified him as a grower from Gardena, pleaded in a letter: “I would like to know if it is possible for us to renew the lease on the land in Torrance. If you will let us have it again, will you let us know. This year we will use only about one half of the land” [sic].[49] Literally hundreds of documents pertaining to land leases are archived, such as the above one from Kobata. These act as evidence which illustrated the ever-decreasing amount of time allotted for leasing land, and the desperation of Japanese farmers.[50]

Resilience and Search for Normalcy

In surveying the Japanese American communities of Los Angeles, the most resonant theme is resilience. Where there were no opportunities, Japanese Americans often created them. One notable example was presented by historian Sandra Davies; when there was no housing for students of Japanese descent at USC, students simply created their own fraternity: Gakusei Kai.[51] In the case of assimilation, many sought to assert their American-ness through something as simple as a name. In recalling how he came to be named Bruce, Bruce Kaji shared this humorous story:

“Everybody was trading comic books, and I liked the name of the Batman, Bruce Wayne, so I started using Bruce as my personal name. And it wasn’t legal, but I used it every opportunity I could. So when I got out of the service I had Henry Tsurutani, an attorney in Little Tokyo, legalize it, and from that time on I used that as my legal name”.[52]

Perhaps one of the most interesting stories of the Japanese American experience in Los Angeles occurred on Terminal Island. The island offered some seclusion, and allowed an arguably easier life for Japanese Americans than most other places in Los Angeles. The impetus behind the establishment of a community on Terminal Island was when Japanese fishermen made the extraordinary find of abalone. In 1903, a successful tuna canning company, the California Fish Co. opened, providing a steady place of employment, and Los Angeles experienced a steady output in fishing.[53] Sadly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a new state law arose that banned fishing for abalone in 1905 in efforts to undermine Japanese entrepreneurship.[54] Regardless, Terminal Island evolved as a self-sustaining community predominantly populated by Japanese Americans. Terminal Island granted Japanese culture a rare respite;

as one former resident, Susumi Iwasaki, noted: “It was good. One good thing about it was all Japanese, you know. And we have a few Caucasian kids.”[55] Iwasaki also recounted how the island maintained both a church, a Buddhist temple, and a Japanese school. While he maintained that they “mostly spoke Japanese”, if they were caught in their Christian school they “were pretty strict” about speaking English, and one child caught speaking Japanese “got a spanking”. [56] One former resident, John Muramoto, also recalled how the community was close: “The families lived as one close, tightly knit family bound together by a common bond. Having the fathers go out to sea for long periods of time was a way of life”. [57]

Additionally, residents kept Japanese culture alive by celebrating events, such as New Year’s Day, and enjoyed traditions of mochi and sake making, judo, kendo, and even threw annual Fish Flag and Doll festivals to share their culture with other Los Angeles residents. [58] Iwasaki also recalled how his father had put him through kendo, and that his kendo teacher had also been both a dentist and a teacher. He further shared enjoying playing baseball with his team, the “Skippers”, and joked that it was “the only entertainment for the older people to go and see”. [59] Iwasaki also recalled Deadman’s Island, a place in Los Angeles reclaimed for other reasons, where he went “in the summertime...and we used to make our own pup tents with gunnysacks”. [60] One surreal lesson that Iwasaki shared was when a reverend came to from East L.A. to teach the boys Morse code. The irony of learning Morse code was not lost on Iwasaki, as many close to the shore were accused of disloyalty and accused of attempting to contact Japanese spies. Iwasaki also recollected his last day on the island during the evacuation:

“When the war broke out, I was in the eighth grade and fourteen years old. And I remember the day when the, the army personnel came and delivered that message that we had to leave Terminal Island in forty-eight hours. And that was pretty rough. I mean, for, you know, my dad. And it was... he never left Terminal Island to begin with and so there was no storage area or nothing. But somehow or another he managed to store some of the stuff someplace. I don't know how he ever did that. And then we, we had, one of the few fortunate people that used to have a car. And all that stuff that's, was in the store, the barbershop, he left it. And we couldn't take it. The mirrors and the chairs and furnitures and beds and everything was left all there. The worst thing that ever happened to me was on, when everybody left, my dad and... it was what? Four more other kids, my mother, and they left for L.A. And I was left there by myself. And I was sitting on the porch and some guy came on a pickup and says, 'Hey, what are you doing here?' I says, 'Well, I'm waiting for my folks to pick me up.' And of course they never came, came back”.[61]

While Iwasaki eventually met up with his parents in Los Angeles, no one returned to Terminal Island. Old family photographs and the recounted memories from those such as Iwasaki and Muramoto are all that remain to preserve the unique culture which existed on Terminal Island.

The Plan for Interment before Pearl Harbor

In 1937 and 1938, the Empire of Japan attacked Shanghai and Nanking, respectively. News headlines fed into public hysteria as the U.S. shifted uncomfortably concerning its place—or as yet, a lack of—in the war. The *Los Angeles Examiner* published a front page article in 1937 that detailed possible scenarios for an attack on the U.S., which included the ominous possibility of an attack on Pearl Harbor.[62] William Randolph Hearst, the notorious newspaper tycoon, acted as a catalyst for the hysteria as he churned out headline after headline feeding the public with sensationalist threats the Japanese posed, and propaganda which resembled that of “Yellow Peril”.[63] At this point, the need to present an economic argument was supplemental, and all rhetoric was almost entirely racial in nature.

Michi Weglyn, a self-described internee turned author, researched the years prior to the attack extensively to understand her own experience. The information she accumulated was damning. Similarly, Alice Yang Murray, a historian and history professor for UC Santa Cruz, also focused on the preemptive measures used against Japanese Americans that appeared to be economic in nature. Although both provide insights on the economic factors that disenfranchised Japanese American residents before and after

incarceration, the running theme is once again racial. However, in constructing a broad narrative made from their arguments and uncovered government documents, the original argument from 1901 is still the crucial piece to a complex puzzle that is part of pre-WWII Los Angeles' Japanese xenophobia. As a result, it is imperative to view the following evidence chronologically.

In 1940, after the passage of the Alien Act, whereby all non-U.S. born Japanese registered with government agencies and were fingerprinted, all Japanese—born in the U.S. or not—who had travelled outside the U.S. after June 17th, 1940 had their assets frozen. For those who had not travelled outside the U.S., it became a requirement to file a Federal Inventory Form (TFR-300) if assets had a value of \$1,000 or greater.[64] Additionally, this came with the stipulation that property was not allowed to depreciate.[65] At this period in time, a special commission disclosed that at least 50 percent of Japanese worked in agriculture, their land was appreciated at \$279.96 per acre versus the California farmer's which averaged a comparatively measly \$37.94 per acre, and a rough estimate found Japanese American farms to be worth roughly \$78 million in 1940.[66] The message became quite clear: keep the Japanese contained, restrict travel, and maintain surveillance of assets.

Ultimately, before the decision was made to “relocate” the Japanese, several cities—notably San Francisco and Los Angeles—held hearings between February and March of 1942, discussing implications and concerns with relocation to concentration camps.[67] One particular meeting of note was The House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration (or Tolan Committee Hearings), where transcripts of testimonies revealed two sources who specifically identified the root concern as economic. The first testimony from Clarence E. Rust, noted in the transcripts as a lawyer, argued that the motivation to incarcerate was simply a bid to acquire property and financially dispossess the Japanese competition in agriculture:

“The clamor seems to come from chambers of commerce, Associated Farmers, and the newspapers notorious as spokesmen for reactionary interests. In view of this fact, effort should be made to determine whether there is any connection between the clamor for the dispossession of the Japanese farmers and the desire of these clamoring interests to get possession of the Japanese farms and the elimination of the Japanese competition”.[68]

Likewise, in describing public fear over the Japanese, Esther S. Boyd argued that the fear of Japanese was “not due to fear of sabotage, it [was] due to economic reasons” because ultimately “the white farmer would have more

land and more water if he could get rid of the Japanese, and he could demand a higher price for his farm produce”.[69] Overall, the hearings were in favour of relocation, with “elected political leaders, American Legion representatives, and business owners” advocating for removal, while those opposed were described as providing “ambiguous or timid statements”.[70] While the hearings were meant to provide supplemental feedback to the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the final report was not published until May of 1942—months after relocation.[71] As Robert Shaffer, a historian and professor for Shippensburg University Pennsylvania, noted, the Tolan committee “represent[ed] the abdication of responsibility by mainstream liberalism during World War II for the mistreatment of Japanese Americans”.[72]

Regardless, the testimonies from the Tolan Committee and the itemisation of Japanese assets represent the agenda that disenfranchised the Japanese. This began first behind closed doors with an economic agenda, but came to fruition as racial persecution virulently manifested into a public forum. There is damning evidence to assert that government powers surveyed assets and land values as a premeditated act for the ultimate goal of seizure and redistribution pending forced Japanese incarceration. Accordingly, in the following declassified government documents, there is clear evidence that detailed the intent to incarcerate Japanese U.S. citizens—which were all documented before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

In a correspondence dated August 18th, 1941—more than 3 months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor—between Congressman John D. Dingell of Michigan and President Franklin Roosevelt, Dingell maintained that the Japanese retention of American citizens would not go unpunished. Rather, he argued, Japan should keep in mind that “the Government of the United States will cause the forceful detention or imprisonment in a concentration camp of ten thousand alien Japanese in Hawaii” and “it would be well to further remind Japan that there are perhaps one hundred fifty thousand additional alien Japanese in the United States who will be held in a reprisal reserve whose status will depend upon Japan’s next aggressive move”.[73]

In further declassified government documents procured by Murray, the U.S. revealed yet another a more nefarious motive. On October 28th, 1941—roughly a month and a half before Pearl Harbor—a mutual agreement between Panama and the U.S. outlined the “if” of the U.S. possibly “interning” Japanese Americans, or Nisei. Namely, if the U.S. incarcerated Japanese residents, Panama would willingly do the same and, without question, deport Japanese Panamanians to the U.S.[74] As the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, Edwin C. Wilson, wrote:

“My conversations with the Foreign Minister regarding the question of internment of Japanese in the event that we suddenly find ourselves at war with Japan. The attitude of the Panamanian Government is thoroughly cooperative. [...] Briefly, their thought is this: Immediately following action by the United States to intern Japanese in the United States, Panama would arrest Japanese on Panamanian territory and intern them on Taboga Island [...] The United States Government would agree to hold Panama harmless against any claims which might arise as a result of internment”.[75]

Essentially, these documents incriminate the U.S. government by proving that it had, in fact, planned Japanese American incarceration well before Pearl Harbor. It appears that the U.S. was not only anticipating the possibility of interment, but rather fully expected it. These documents, a declassified few out of many that may never be seen, also reveal how far the U.S. was willing to go to orchestrate such a devious agenda. Alarmingly, this showed intent to unconstitutionally strip a U.S. citizen of several constitutional and legal rights strictly on the basis of a descendant’s birthplace. It is also important to note that the U.S. was not at war with Japan, nor had they entered the European theatre, with the exception of a few American volunteers in the U.K. Additionally, the U.S. encouraged sovereign countries in South America to join the U.S. in circumventing national and international law to engage in systematic disenfranchisement, regardless of legality. As a result, during the incarceration of Japanese Americans in the U.S., some estimated 2,200 Japanese Peruvians were transported across the U.S. border, and, being officially stateless and “illegal” in the U.S., there was no means for justice for these incarcerated persons to be sought.[76] Essentially, once transported across U.S. territory, these people all but ceased to exist and were at the mercy of the U.S. government.

On November 7th, 1941, the *Report on Japanese on the West Coast of the United States*, or simply the “Munson Report”, was delivered to President Roosevelt.[77]The report was commissioned as a barometer to sense the tide of Japanese American sentiment for Imperial Japan, and, despite some outliers, it concluded that there was no reason to suspect any loyalty to Japan.[78] In fact, the report took the issue so lightly, it quoted the nonsensical poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter” from *Alice Through the Looking Glass* to convey the tediousness in finding disloyalty to the U.S.[79] Additionally, on its opening page, it ironically defined the Nissei as showing “a pathetic eagerness to be Americans.”[80] Unfortunately, this report fell on deaf ears following Pearl Harbor, only marked with a receipt in January 1942 that the administration had reviewed it.[81]

Conclusion: Shikata ga Nai

On December 7th, 1941, the Empire of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Many Japanese Americans condemned the attacks, although a miniscule few pledged loyalty to Japan.[82] On February 19th, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the U.S. virtual *carte blanche* to retain persons of Japanese ancestry in unconditional incarceration at the discretion of the government. While those of “Japanese descent” were the only ethnic group forcibly incarcerated, the order left plenty of loopholes to incarcerate other groups if necessary. The original wording was aimed towards “control of alien enemies,”[83]not the Japanese exclusively, which the infamous posters often alluded to with the wording of “Instructions to all persons of Japanese ancestry”.[84] However, with the exception of suspected saboteurs and spies, no other group was collectively targeted, and certainly no other group was targeted solely by race. The newly formed WRA “evacuated” the West Coast of an estimated 110,000–120,000 people of Japanese ancestry—70,000 of whom were U.S. citizens—and placed them into ten camps spread in sparse areas of the U.S.[85] Hauntingly, one camp survivor, Shizuko Ina, wrote in her diary: “I wonder if today is the day they’re going to line us up and shoot us”.[86] The process by which U.S. citizens lost their assets was not unlike the Aryanisation of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Although many Japanese Americans returned to Los Angeles in attempts to resume their lives, most would not return to their original homes. More disturbingly, the losses witnessed by Japanese Americans were never fully accounted for, nor was any attempt made to tally their losses.[87] In other words, there is no known report that attempted to document or estimate the amount of land and assets that were seized. In 1988, more than 40 years after incarceration, President Ronald Regan signed the Civil Liberties Act, offering 73,000[88] survivors a symbolic and conciliatory sum of \$20,000.[89] Arguably, no amount of money could ever rectify such an egregious act, but acknowledgement was crucial.

Immigration is the foundation upon which the United States was and continues to be forged—the cornerstone of a nation whose identity is theoretically defined by free enterprise and self-determination. This continues by virtue of successive cultural and generational interjection, expression, and the inevitable layers of intersectionality which exist within society. Japanese Americans were denied a voice early in this process, they contributed significantly to forging the landscape and identity of Los Angeles. The conundrum of Americans seeking to project a singular or homogenous national identity emanates from a simple contradictory assumption: that

identity emerges from adherence to static concepts within interminably dynamic societies. Multiplicities of expression—from immigrants and “natives” alike—endlessly subject the idea of a singular identity to incessant scrutiny and validation, thus verifying the transitory nature of the U.S. and the inevitable fluidity of national identity. It is impossible to reconcile the concept of a fixed national identity with that of a dynamic national identity in constant flux due to immigration. The result is the cyclical hallmark of the alarmingly problematic and definitively American oxymoron: static transitory xenophobia.

Historically, immigrants and “minorities” are tolerated at best if they do not pose an economic threat. Immigrants are at their most vulnerable until they are citizens, yet Japanese American citizens were subjected to further hardship due to the actions of the government of their ancestral homeland. If immigrants or other ethnically designated undesirables ascend to the realm of economic sustainability, they pose the threat of potentially subverting Anglo racial supremacy. If this threat is perceived by the Anglo majority, they thus come under the real, tangible threats of being declared subversive, disenfranchised, or branded as social pariahs under the umbrella of different buzzwords which serve as shortcuts for racial animus.

An example of this xenophobic political strategy can be examined in a more contemporary context. In 1981, Lee Atwater, an advisor to Presidents Reagan and Bush Sr., candidly admitted that it was acceptable in 1954 to say “n****r” to describe a specific ethnic group. However, “by 1968 you can’t say ‘n****r’—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like uh, forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract”.[90] Additionally, he ceded that other buzzwords, such as “cutting taxes”, also alluded to the same topic at hand, and admitted that “all of these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a by-product of them is, Blacks get hurt worse than whites”.[91] In the case of 1920s Los Angeles, racial epithets came to form buzzwords which addressed the perceived economic threat imposed by the Japanese. It is thus crucial to read between the lines when one examines the language used by those who target a particular group. Is this an economic argument, or a xenophobic argument? While no other U.S. immigrant groups have—knowingly—been subjected to such an egregious mistrial of justice as the Japanese, the future naturalized citizens of this country are at risk from the cyclical nature of xenophobia and elusive idea of identity.

In Japanese culture, the phrase “shikata ga nai,” meaning “it cannot be helped”, is often raised to address such emotional conundrums.[92] It does not mean to resign oneself to injustice, but rather to motivate oneself to

remain resilient when dealing with a situation that is beyond one's control. It is the Japanese equivalent to the British colloquialism "Keep Calm and Carry On." Unfortunately, the systematic disenfranchisement of an immigrant group is not something new in the U.S., but the treatment of Japanese Americans is a particularly dark chapter in U.S. history, as no previous group had ever been stripped of their constitutional rights in such a manner. Not to belabour a point, but these were largely American citizens who were vital to their communities and fully bought in to patriotic ideals. The age-old adage that history repeats itself has become something of a cliché, but, in this case, Japanese incarceration remains a sobering reminder of how easy it is to strip citizens of their rights—in full public display.

When we study history, we strive to restrain our knee-jerk reactions concerning the present or attempts to draw parallels which might be tenuous or non-existent. This is often because we are often living in the eye of the storm, and as such, we cannot be objective. However, when immigrant policies are enacted in the U.S., it is important to stop and ask ourselves what the ulterior motive may be. Is it a racist agenda or an economic one? Is it one built on policies of nationalist isolation, or one built on racial supremacy through the veiled words of preserving culture? To what extent do these distinctions matter, and where do the lines blur? As human beings, these should be red flags we cannot ignore, nor should we allow ourselves to abdicate our moral authority and duty to speak out under the guise of maintaining objectivity. Regarding currently persecuted immigrant groups and, tragically, the inevitable persecution of the next group that emerges in this historical and cyclical pattern, we must not collectively utter "shikata ga nai."

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