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American Concentration Camps: The Relocation of Interned Japanese-Americans

by

Megan Renee Anders

An Honors Capstone
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Honors Diploma
to

The Honors College

of

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

22 April 2016

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Abstract

As our country's history has grown, more and more of our past mistakes are being pushed to sidelines. The internment of Japanese-Americans is not a widely known aspect in the history of the United States. There are no national holidays or big memorials for those who either died or survived to remember the events that took place. Placed inside concentration camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II, the Japanese-American people lived years of their lives as outcasts behind barbed wire fences while military guards with guns were placed on sentry towers to watch over them. Taken from their homes, these people had to give all possessions, businesses, and outside relationships when entering the camps. Inside the camps, Japanese-Americans faced inhospitable living conditions, backwards education systems, loss of employment opportunities, challenges toward family morals and values, and military service as an escape out. The hundreds of thousands Japanese-Americans living inside the camp faced these problems every day, but every day they also challenged the limitations they had been restricted to. Using the small liberties given to them, these people created a new world inside their camps that challenged the outside world in ways that we are still dealing with today.

Introduction

“I could see the barb wire fence and the sentry towers right outside my schoolhouse windows as I recited the words ‘with liberty and justice for all,’ an innocent child unaware of the irony.” said George Takei on his experience. Takei, later in life to become a high-billed actor, was a Japanese-American interned at age five with his family at the Rohwer Internment Camp in Arkansas. He remembered how every morning during his schooling inside the camps, he and his fellow classmates recited the Pledge of Allegiance like every other child in the United States did. What Takei did not realize until later was that unlike these other children he did not have those same freedoms that he recited awarded to him and his family.¹

Unknowingly at the time to Takei, over 120,000 Japanese-Americans were expelled from their homes and sent to live in American concentration camps during World War II. Among that number almost one-half were younger than twenty-one, and one-quarter were young children. There also were a large number of elderly Japanese-Americans. Responding to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the removal all people with Japanese heritage from highly sensitive military zones, and into relocation centers and concentration camps across the United States. Roosevelt did this without charging, convicting, or going to court against any Japanese-American for crimes against the United States.²

Japanese-Americans were forced to leave their homes and abandon all possessions. These people were required to live their new lives as outcasts behind barbed wire fences for years.³ Life

¹ George Takei, interview by Juan Gonzalez and Amy Goodman, “George Takei on Arizona’s Anti-Gay Bill, Life in a Japanese Internment Camp & Star Trek’s Mr. Sulu,” Democracy Now, 27 Feb 2014, http://www.democracynow.org/2014/2/27/george_takei_on_arizonas_anti_gay.

² Robert “Spark” Matsunaga, “America Should Admit Its Guilt,” in *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches*, ed. Josh Gottheimer (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 372 – 375.

³ Josh Gottheimer, introduction to *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), xxix.

in the camps and relocation centers challenged the education of children, family values and morals, and military service. Japanese-Americans also suffered economic problems, loss of careers, and differential generational responses to internment. The internment though did not stop them from bettering themselves for when the war ended. Everything that had been taken away from them were obstacles that helped them learn more about themselves, their families, and the world around.

Chapter 1: Background Information

The fighting performed by the United States's forces in Europe during World War II was not the only battle that American people faced. Back on home soil, the United States faced the "threat" of the Japanese-Americans. The "threat" that was not as deadly as the one over in Europe, but an attack on Pearl Harbor changed all that. For the longest time, the Japanese-Americans lived in relative peace with their fellow Americans. This changed when ideas of sabotage and espionage came out against these same people fueled by their so-called "neighbors."⁴ Not soon after, the United States government and the military became involved in the matter. The question of how to identify a loyal Japanese-American from a disloyal one became a main concern. With no clear answer, the idea of mass relocation of Japanese-Americans arose. Some officials disagreed while others supported the idea wholeheartedly.⁵ President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on 19 February 1942, which created military zones where certain people were not allowed.⁶

To fully comprehend the reason for internment, one needs to understand the past of the Japanese-Americans up until this point in time. After the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the mistreatments and problems the Chinese immigrants suffered were passed onto the Japanese immigrants. The new immigrants became a new racial problem in the United States. Many called for more laws against the "Orientals." This started happening with the Naturalization Statute of the United States of 1870. The Statute stated that Japanese immigrants could not gain American

⁴ Edward H. Spicer, Asael T. Hansen, Katherine Luomala, and Marvin K. Opler, *Impounded People: Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers*, (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 34.

⁵ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, Opler, *Impounded People*, 43 – 44.

⁶ Franklin Roosevelt, "Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas," Executive Order 9066, 19 Feb 1941, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>, accessed 5 Apr 2016.

citizenship. This decision led to numerous immigrants retaining their Japanese citizenship instead.⁷

The Japanese immigrants became the new favored targets of the American people in the early 1900s.⁸ By this time, Japanese immigrants received new ways of identification. If one was a first generation immigrant and considered a residential alien of the United States, then the term Issei became associated with them. A child of an Issei born in the United States, therefore having American citizenship, was called a Nisei. The word Kibei described a child having American citizenship that returned to Japan for schooling, and late in life came back to the United States to live.⁹ Sansei referred to third generation Japanese-Americans born to Nisei parents.¹⁰ The word Nikkei referred to the Japanese-American community as a whole.¹¹

In 1908, the Gentlemen's Agreement impacted the immigration of other Japanese into the United States. The Agreement between Japan and the United States stated that passports would only be given to non-laborers. With the California Alien Land Act of 1913, the problem of not getting American citizenship came to back to haunt the Issei and their families. The Issei could not purchase land if not citizens.¹² The Issei bought the land with the name of their children as a loophole to get around the act. The damage though was done. Unlike their fellow immigrants of the time, the Issei were reminded daily by the American people of not being citizens. This led to difficulties within the Japanese-American neighborhoods. Arguments over loyalty to Japan or the

⁷ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 46 – 49.

⁸ Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971), 11.

⁹ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of the Japanese Americans*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁰ Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346082>

¹¹ *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present*, s.v. "Nikkei."

¹² Dillion, *Uprooted Americans*, 12.

United States plagued the Issei and the Nisei. The two groups decided to pay homage to both. Japanese and American customs combined to form the new Japanese-American ideals that many Nisei grew up on.¹³

The public hysteria started after the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor cannot be pinpointed to one central thought. While discrimination played a large role, one factor not usually noted was that of the economic gain. Japanese-Americans played a large role in the farming of vegetables and fruits in California. With the Japanese-Americans selling their farms, the white-Californians were able to take over the farming. This ensured the white-Californians would get all the business.¹⁴ Kiyō Sato, a Japanese-American teenager interned, remembered how in the beginning the local farmers banded together to work towards Japanese-American removal.¹⁵ Frank Taylor, a member of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, said to the *Saturday Evening Post*, “If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows.”¹⁶

Japanese-American owned shops were also boycotted. When Japanese-Americans had to sell their shops, the prices of the stores were meager and undervalued. Any type of products on the shelves of non-owned Japanese shops with labels that read “made in Japan” were taken down. This most notably hindered the selling of Japanese art.¹⁷ A seven-year-old Japanese-American interned, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recalled her mother trying to sell off prized possessions like family art and kimono dresses the morning they left for relocation. When a man

¹³ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 49 – 52.

¹⁴ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 90.

¹⁵ Kiyō Sato, *Kiyō’s Story: A Japanese-American Family’s Quest for the American Dream* (New York: Soho Press, 2009), 118 – 119.

¹⁶ Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 23.

¹⁷ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 26 – 28.

only offered fifteen dollars for the mother's treasures set of chinaware, Wakatsuki wrote that her mother started breaking the dishes until the man left. Wakatsuki watched her mother break every dish, cup, platters, bowls, and plate in the chinaware set with tears streaming down her face.¹⁸

The Japanese-Americans continued with this way of life until the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce requested the evacuation of the Japanese-Americans that lived in the city. With these feelings finally being vocalized, numerous people started taking the same stand against the Japanese-Americans. The *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial, before the hate campaign came to full strength, hoping to stop any type of vigilante actions against the Japanese-Americans. This did not stop attacks from happening. Reports of Nisei being spat on and offended while at school, and gunshots fired into homes of Japanese-Americans started popping up along the coast.¹⁹ Charles Kikuchi, a Nisei student studying at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote in his diary "some of the Japanese boys from U.C. [University of California] got beat up" on 9 December 1941. The same entry stated that "all of the students are going to be restricted to campus." Kikuchi deemed this action happening because school officials wanted not only to keep their students safe, but to stop any further attacks against Japanese-Americans.²⁰

Though the *Los Angeles Times* tried to help the Japanese-Americans, most newspapers used the idea of "yellow peril" to keep tensions high. The Joint Immigration Committee members were most notable in their usage of "yellow peril" or the fear of an Asian country conquering the United States.²¹ V.S. McClatchy employed his newspaper, *Sacramento Bee*, to

¹⁸ Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience during and after the World War II Internment* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 13 – 15.

¹⁹ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 89 – 90.

²⁰ Charles Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary: Chronicle from an American Concentration Camp*, ed. John Modell, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 44.

²¹ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 29.

share false stories of Japanese-American sabotage or espionage, and to keep officials on their toes.²² Not all publications spread false happenings. *Bainbridge Review*, written by Walt and Milly Woodward, refused to publish any story that was not true. Throughout the internment of Japanese-Americans, the newspapers and its employees stayed true to this belief. The newspapers became the only one that updated the Japanese-Americans to the rights or restrictions they possessed.²³

Through newspapers stories of false happenings, the press started a new hatred against Japanese-Americans. The spread of calling Japanese-Americans “enemy spies” started via the newspapers.²⁴ If the person was of Japanese ancestry, that person became instantly a mystery to all and was watched heavily. Neighbors became suspicious of their Japanese-American neighbors. Whether the families lived beside each other for years did not matter anymore.²⁵ Kiyoko Sato remembered hesitantly leaving for school in the mornings before internment because of the fear that when she returned her father would have been taken by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Many young Japanese-Americans were afraid of this happening to their own families, and how would they survive without their parental figures. Sato recalled many Japanese-American classmates leaving school because they had to take over roles in the family left by parents who had to be taken in for questioning.²⁶

With the idea that Japanese-Americans were “enemy spies,” numerous families became fearful. Family portraits, priceless books, and rare Japanese doll collections were either burned or

²² Dillion, *Uprooted Americans*, 12.

²³ Murray, *Historical Memories*, 24 – 25.

²⁴ Murray, *Historical Memories*, 21.

²⁵ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 38.

²⁶ Sato, *Kiyoko's Story*, 92 – 97.

thrown out because of fear.²⁷ Americans also started suspecting anyone and everyone as disloyal. This ideology ranged from elderly aged Issei to the young adult aged Nisei college students.²⁸ Myths and questions of Nisei allegiance started rising. People questioned the loyalty of the Nisei because of their dual citizenship between Japan and the United States.²⁹ Kikuchi wrote in his diary on 7 December 1941, “The Anti-Jap feeling is bound to rise to hysterical heights, and it is most likely that the Nisei will be included as Japs” hoping that his fellow Japanese-Americans would not be grouped together with the actual Japs who attacked Pearl Harbor that same day.³⁰

Kikuchi’s hopes were short lived. With Americans voicing their opinions on removal, the idea reached the ears of the United States government and military. The government could not find a clear solution. Attorney General Francis Biddle and others worked together to prevent the removal.³¹ Biddle did not want the Japanese-Americans condemned as a whole, but instead considered individually. Scapegoating was something that Biddle did not want to happen. Curtis Munson, a Chicago business owner, tried sending a report to President Roosevelt on the question of Japanese-American loyalty. The report stated that Japanese-Americans seemed to be loyal to the United States because of being labeled “cultural traitors” by the Japanese people. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover saw the evacuation of Japanese-American people was not based on factual data, but on the rise of public hysteria shown by Americans.³² Earnest O. Hauser as a journalist tried to report factual numbers of loyalty the Nisei presented. Of the Kibei, Hauser reported that they were patriotic Americans. The only way

²⁷ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 29.

²⁸ Spicer, Hansen, Luomala, and Opler; *Impounded People*, 44.

²⁹ Dillion, *Uprooted Americans*, 14.

³⁰ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 42.

³¹ Murray, *Historical Memories*, 35.

³² Murray, *Historical Memories*, 33 – 35.

stories of disloyalty spread were via “alarming patriots.”³³ These stories influenced the minds of many.

The numerous letters sent to Roosevelt were false tales of disloyalty written by angry white Americans. Through these readings, Roosevelt created a false shape of Japanese-American disloyalty.³⁴ When Lieutenant General John DeWitt sent his *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942* to Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, the idea of evacuation became significant.³⁵ Though Stimson knew the idea was not constitutional, he still recommended the proposal to Roosevelt. In trusting the opinion of Stimson and DeWitt, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066.³⁶ Some Japanese-Americans tried to challenge this decision via the Supreme Court, but the decision was upheld.³⁷

³³ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 88 – 91.

³⁴ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 94.

³⁵ Murray, *Historical Memories*, 20.

³⁶ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 105-108.

³⁷ Alison Dundes Rentein, “A Psychohistorical Analysis of the Japanese American Internment,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1995): 620, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/762484>.

Chapter 2: Life Inside the Camps

Camp Set-Ups

Starting in February 1942 Japanese-Americans were moved from the western coast into relocation centers spread throughout the west. Many of these centers acted as midway points to the camps. Many camps were not fully finished so families stayed inside makeshift quarters converted from already established centers. Horse stalls in the Tanforan race track in Sacramento, California were emptied and converted mere hours before families arrived.³⁸

Families stayed in these facilities anywhere from a few days to weeks or even months at a time. Internees then entered camps surrounded by barbed wires and guard towers.³⁹ Barracks were spread out across the plains acting as housing locations, dinner halls, communal bathrooms, kitchens, clinics, laundries, recreational rooms, schools, and churches.⁴⁰

Housing barracks were divided into six units measured sixteen by twenty feet. Each family received only the bare minimum amount of living space. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston remembered that her family of twelve were given two units to divide into three separate living quarters amongst them.⁴¹ Some families were not as lucky. Families with six or fewer people were assigned only one room. Some families with numbers lower than six were often grouped together with other young families, elderly couples, or single men and women.⁴²

³⁸ Robert and Marilyn Aitken, "Japanese American Internment," *Litigation* 37, no. 2 (2011): 60 – 61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23075502>.

³⁹ Dundes Rentein, "A Psychohistorical Analysis," 620.

⁴⁰ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 8.

⁴¹ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 21 – 22.

⁴² Sato, *Kiyo's Story*, 146.

Inside the housing facilities families were provided with steel iron army cots, blankets, mattresses that they stuffed with straw, one or two light bulbs, and a furnace. Many units used blankets to separate sleeping areas or as ways to keep out the elements like snow or dust.⁴³ Kiyō Sato wrote in her diary that many members of her family, including herself, had trouble going to sleep in the first few weeks because of the noise. The partitions used to separate “apartments” were built all the way to the ceilings so all sound from one end of the barrack to the other could be heard. Sato also stated that because her camp, Poston Camp in Arizona, was located in the desert and the barracks had no windows, the heat caused families to move their cots outside at nighttime.⁴⁴

Since many of the “apartments” only provided the bare necessities for living, numerous families used scrap pieces of wood to create furniture. All members of the family were on the lookout for pieces of lumber or random objects that could be used or made into something useful for the family. Sato told of how her father often used small pieces of wood to create shelving and used nails as hooks for towels, clothes, and jackets. Her father’s carpentry skills became so beneficial to their family that numerous other internee families approached him about building shelves in the other barracks including the kitchen and shower facilities.⁴⁵

Kitchen, mess hall, latrine, laundry, clinics and shower facilities were all made in the same style of the housing barracks, but without partitions for dividing up space. Kitchen and mess halls were usually kept somewhat clean, but with food shortages and no places to store dairy products the areas became less and less hospitable. Only internees with infant children or

⁴³Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 21 – 22.

⁴⁴ Sato, *Kiyō’s Story*, 149 – 153.

⁴⁵ Sato, *Kiyō’s Story*, 125 – 126.

with certain dietary restrictions were given dairy products.⁴⁶ With no refrigeration in the kitchens, numerous foods spoiled and created health problems. Different forms of meat were not easily eaten either. Meats that were deemed sacred in Japanese customs or religions were not eaten, and older Japanese-Americans saw problems with this. Some camps, like Topaz located in Utah, convinced their military and government officials to let them build a tofu factory to make food with.⁴⁷

The mess hall part of the barrack housed numerous seating options, but often caused conflict among families who preferred to eat and cook their food in separate environments. Tables were also not able to house all of one family or had to house numerous families which caused troubles with families who valued eating as a family only tradition.⁴⁸

Latrine and showering facilities were the most unsanitary and inhospitable of all the barracks. Neither allowed for privacy. The latrines often only had small barriers between toilets, but the openings were exposed for all to see. This often caused problems for older women who believed that privacy and modesty were attributes of life.⁴⁹

Toilets, large holes cut into the ground, were often designed too wide that children could not use safely. Kiyo Sato often spoke on how each time she went to the latrine she saw a woman having to hold a child over the opening so they could do their business. Sato's mother created a

⁴⁶ Hui Wu, "Writing and Teaching behind Barbed Wire: An Exile Composition Class in a Japanese-American Internment Camp," *College Composition and Communication* 59, no. 2 (2007): 240, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456994>.

⁴⁷ Sandra C. Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 96 – 97.

⁴⁸ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 8.

⁴⁹ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 31 – 33.

small chamber pot that she kept outside their barrack so her young siblings did not have to use the latrine.⁵⁰

Shower facilities did not provide any privacy as they were designed in a communal style. There were areas separated for showering and undressing/dressing, but there no walls, partitions, or curtains between the two. Water flowed throughout the facility's floor because the only drains ran down the center of the barrack.⁵¹

Education

Once sleeping, feeding, and showering situations were set-up the need for schools arose. When creating the camps, the Department of War did not take into account the basic need of school rooms, desks, or tables. In some locations, internees had to build their own teaching facilities and recreational areas for the children. Since schools were not set-up or thought about beforehand, camps did not have teachers, textbooks, or any other form of educational equipment like pencils and paper. The education of many, if not all, children interned was interrupted because of the shortage of teachers and resources.⁵²

Many families relied on their fellow internees to help provide school like functions while the school systems were set-up. Catholic nuns and priests established school centers in the Manzanar camp in California to help keep children out of trouble and doing school activities like reading and writing.⁵³ Students in high school and middle school level courses were afraid of falling behind in their studies because of the stoppage in their education. This led to the creation of curriculums and schools that spread throughout the camps.

⁵⁰ Sato, *Kiyo's Story*, 124 – 128.

⁵¹ Sato, *Kiyo's Story*, 130.

⁵² Wu, "Writing and Teaching behind Barbed Wire," 240 – 242.

⁵³ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 43 – 45.

In the beginning, retired teachers and college students volunteered as teachers until outside help arrived. Caucasian teachers came from across the country to help fill gaps and serve their patriotic duty to their nation.⁵⁴ As one student at the Topaz camp said, “[Teachers] are ordinary people who saw themselves serving their country, while trying to give Japanese American pupils an education.” This meant that a lot of the teachers were not familiar with Japanese-American customs or styles of teaching, which often led to problems between teachers and students.⁵⁵

Some outside teachers brought trouble instead of happiness with them. In the early stage, a few of the teachers were racist against their students. Others did not believe that the Japanese-American children could amount to anything outside the camps so why bother with educating them at all. This led to problems not only between the teacher and the student, but the teacher and the students’ parents. Teachers blamed parents for students’ uncaring attitude. They believed that the parents’ lacking on their children’s discipline because removal and moving allowed the children to lose their manners. In return, parents blamed the military and government officials for hiring teachers that were so close to their children’s ages which hindered the teachers from doing their job and students from getting an education.⁵⁶

While some of the Japanese-American teachers stayed on as teachers and aides they were not paid the same as their counterparts. Kiyō Sato remembered that in the Poston camp white teachers were paid substantially more than their Nisei counterparts, who were paid the same wage of nineteen dollars as the other internee workers were.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Sato, *Kiyō’s Story*, 170.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Jewel in the Desert*, 192.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 192 – 195.

⁵⁷ Sato, *Kiyō’s Story*, 170.

Once teachers settled into their new roles and they became more familiar with their students, they were able to create their own curriculum for the classroom. Teachers and parents soon started using the schooling system to establish forms of extracurricular activities. Cheerleading, ballet classes, baseball teams started popping up because of outside sources willing to come inside the camps to teach classes.⁵⁸

For most college students, education was not available on the west coast, and they had to leave their colleges and universities before internment started. Charles Kikuchi was a student at the University of California at Berkeley when internment began. Kikuchi and his fellow Japanese-American classmates had to leave the campus for lives with their families inside the camps. Local newspapers tried covering the removal from the college when Kikuchi and his friend left, but the Army Lieutenant in charge would not allow it. This was because the military and government did not want pictures getting out to the public of Japanese-Americans being made to abandon their education. The officials were afraid that the American public would become sympathetic to the Japanese-Americans if they did so. Many entered the camps with their families, and then sought relocation through education.⁵⁹

This meant applying to college through the War Relocation Authority. They set-up the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council to look for colleges and universities that would accept students of the Japanese-American race, and that were located farther east in geography. In the beginning, the colleges were sporadically spaced across the country, but closer to the end of internment colleges became more accepting.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 104 – 108.

⁵⁹ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 51.

⁶⁰ Stephanie Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest: Defending Citizens of Japanese Ancestry in North America, 1924 – 49* (Toronto, Canada: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 89 – 90.

Once students left their camps, they had to act in accordance with certain rules and ordinances. Kiyō Sato was the first to leave her camp for education purposes and was the first student at her university accepted through the new program. While attending school Sato received a letter explaining that her placement was well received and it would allow for more internees from her camp to be released for educational purposes. She had to be careful though, one wrong doing would end her release and stop further releases of students from her camp.⁶¹

Besides college and school-aged children, the children under five were also cared for. Nurseries and daycare were set-up to help take care of kids too small to attend school. No outside teachers were brought in because internees were the ones who started the program. The workers though did get paid for their service.⁶² Camps set-up this program to aid in the watching over the smaller children, and in learning their basic education like alphabets and numbers. The programs also allowed for more internees to work from each family.⁶³

Family Values & Morals

As families lived longer inside the camps, their family values and morals started changing. Unlike at homes, families were not always able to eat together because of mess hall tables, schedules, and changing attitudes. Teenagers or young, single adults would often eat together rather than with their families because of the bonding it provided. This often caused problems within family relations. The Amache camp in Colorado created a system to prevent this from happening by assigning families to particular tables in the mess hall. It then became the family's responsible to be sure their family members ate.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 174 – 189.

⁶² Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 161.

⁶³ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 81 – 83.

⁶⁴ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 8.

Marriage and relationships were another familial value that changed. Before internment, many parents did not allow their single daughters to go out with single men without supervision, but inside the camp, many parents did away with this rule. The main reasoning came from the fact that they could not leave the camp so there was no need for supervision. This meant the dating ritual slowly changed over time inside the camp. Young adult Nisei learned that with the less strict parental rules and supervision they could have more fun and leniency with life inside the camp. Charles Kikuchi saw this as a bad sign for the future romantic lives of Niseis. When talking with his younger sisters about possible romantic partners and dating, they responded with sadness about the young men in their camps. The sisters stated that young men in their camps with no romantic futures had started acting vulgar to the young women in camps by whistling and catcalling them, and only wanted women for illicit relations.⁶⁵

Marriages also became less formal and arranged from life inside the camp.⁶⁶ Kikuchi remembered one family trying to do a trial marriage inside the camp, but they were not allowed to because of American customs. In order to make the Japanese-Americans assimilate to their American culture, military and government officials that worked inside the camps would not allow for traditional styles of Japanese culture to be carried like the trail marriage.⁶⁷ Many couples did not marry inside the camps because they wanted to wait until after the war so they could leave the camps for church weddings. This meant most couples stayed engaged over the period of internment. While military and government officials did allow engaged couples to be

⁶⁵ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 124 – 125.

⁶⁶ Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 9.

⁶⁷ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 61.

placed inside the camps, they were not permitted to live together since they were not part of each other's family yet.⁶⁸

Interracial marriage was another problem inside the camps. This led to a number of non-Japanese-Americans living behind barb wire fences. All families with either Japanese-American fathers or mothers were all brought into the camps, but were treated vastly different. Families with young children that had white fathers and Japanese-American mothers were allowed to leave camps and return to the western coast. Government and military officials allowed this because the "Amerasian" children had a better opportunity to grow up in a "non-Japanese" environment. The term "Amerasian" were given to children with both American and Japanese-American parents. Though some Japanese-American mothers and their families were abandoned by their white fathers because they did not want to endure life inside the camps. Some of these non-Japanese spouses did leave the camps, but only on reasons for employment or education. Camp officials did not allow these families to have contact with each other outside the camps. Spouses who left had to return to camps to visit their families if they wanted direct contact.⁶⁹ Families with Japanese-American fathers and white mothers were also allowed to leave the camps, but could not return to their homes on the west coast. This was because of the Western Defense Command jurisdiction that would not allow them to come back because of the children being "more than half Japanese" because of the race of their father.⁷⁰

The familial roles started changing inside the camps also. Since families did not have to worry about paying bills for gas, electricity, medical, or housing, many fathers were not presiding over their families' income. With no household duties like cleaning, cooking, or

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 85 – 86.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Jewel in the Desert*, 85 – 86.

⁷⁰ Dundes Rentein, "A Psychohistorical Analysis," 645.

dusting, mothers had more time on their hands.⁷¹ This allowed the young adult Niseis to start taking more leadership roles inside their households. This meant making choices for the future of families inside and outside the camps.⁷² The parental loss of control their families faced impacted the lives of the children also. Teachers and school administrators often saw children and teenagers acting out in class because there was not any discipline within the family anymore.⁷³

Many Nisei suggested to their Issei parents to start taking English lessons to better their knowledge of the language. The idea was that the more time spent inside the camps caused the internees to revert to the Japanese customs, but in order to enter back into the world outside the camps, Japanese-Americans needed to learn to communicate in English.⁷⁴ While many Issei did not want to do the classes, their Nisei children pushed them to go. Kikuchi remembered his father and mother were not too pleased about going at first either, but once the lessons started they soon became enthralled in the learning process. Both of his parents who once only spoke in English to their children and Japanese the rest of the time were willingly having conversation with other internees in English.⁷⁵

Besides the Issei, the young adult Nisei also had to help watch over the young Nisei children. In many situations, these young Nisei children believed they were going on vacation when being relocated into the camps. Many parents and older siblings did this to try and soften the process of being removed from their homes.⁷⁶ As George Takei recalled, during the

⁷¹ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 82 – 82.

⁷² Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 62 – 63.

⁷³ Taylor, *Jewel in the Desert*, 194 – 195.

⁷⁴ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 66.

⁷⁵ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 136 – 139.

⁷⁶ Sato, *Kiyo's Story*, 116 – 119.

beginning of the internment he could not understand why so many of the older Japanese-Americans were sad about leaving their homes when he believed they were going on vacation, and vacation meant fun and happiness.⁷⁷ Kiyō Sato wrote that her family used this idea when traveling with her younger brothers and sisters. When the family finally arrived in the camps, though, Sato made sure to take her youngest brother, who was three at the time, around the camp and try to explain the situation to him. She did this by telling him they were going exploring and showed him places he was not to go. Sato and her brother also witnessed a truckload of children being dropped off by the mess hall with Japanese-American military officers asking for parents to collect their lost children, which made even him realize at a young age how dangerous wandering off was inside the camp.⁷⁸ At first, Sato only went exploring with her younger siblings, but once the parents noticed it they asked her to do it for their children also. The exploring outings soon enough became a common occurrence during the first few weeks of the camps beginnings in order to help children find their way around the camps.⁷⁹

Employment Opportunities

From the start of internment, internees were eager to find jobs inside the camps that fit them and gave them a purpose. Camps had an abundance of jobs to choose from, but the pay was not good. Teachers and doctors were considered some of the most professional jobs one could attain, but the pay was merely nineteen dollars a month. The wages trickled down from there.⁸⁰ People with somewhat professional jobs, like the running of the kitchen, were given wages of sixteen dollars. A twelve-dollar wage was given to those with a semi-skilled job, and a mere

⁷⁷ Takei, “George Takei on ... Life in a Japanese Internment Camp...” *Democracy Now!* video.

⁷⁸ Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 123 – 125.

⁷⁹ Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 131 – 134.

⁸⁰ Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 9.

eight dollars for workers with undesirable jobs.⁸¹ Internees believed that their pay was low because military and government officials did not want to pay Japanese-Americans more than an American private in service.⁸² Soldiers made twenty-one dollars, but it was still comparably less than wages from the outside. The other Americans were making \$150 - \$200 compared to an interned doctors' mere nineteen dollars.⁸³ One aspect of the wages that many liked was the fact there was no division between gender roles. Women earned the exact wage as men depending on their job respectively.⁸⁴

Many professional and skilled jobs believed they deserved better pay for the circumstances many had to deal with. Doctors and nurses had to deal with insufficient tools, medicines, or low numbers of workers. Often when sickness ran through the camps, nurses and doctors had to work all day and night to stop the epidemics from spreading across the camps.⁸⁵ The kitchen staffs in some camps went on strike because of food shortages, pay, cleanliness, and not enough help. Many kitchen staffs were overworked having to cook over 3000 meals a day while waiters had to serve it on only 1000 plates. Workers often had to endure complaints from the internees and blame for not making eatable foodstuffs.⁸⁶

In the very beginning, some jobs were done with only volunteers. This was because many Issei that came into the camps without jobs were embarrassed when they dropped from high power careers like lawyers or scientists into lonely unskilled jobs like kitchen aide or latrine

⁸¹ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 76.

⁸² Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 114 – 117.

⁸³ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 157 – 158.

⁸⁴ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 9.

⁸⁵ Mikiso Hane, "Wartime Internment," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 2 (1990): 574, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2079186>.

⁸⁶ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 55.

workers. In order to get the camp running many Nisei offered to do the jobs without pay until an employment office was officially set-up.⁸⁷

Some of these Issei never officially did a paid job inside the camps. Kiyō Sato's father was a carpenter outside the camp, but there was no job like that inside the camp so he did not know what to do originally. After setting up his family in their barrack and creating different forms of furniture for the family, numerous internees came to him for different forms of woodworking. Sato's father repaired floorboards and roofs, created school tables and chairs, and constructed shelves and end tables for families' barracks.⁸⁸ Charles Kikuchi and his friends inside the Gila River Camp started a newspaper while working inside of the government offices.⁸⁹

Other Issei stayed active by taking classes to learn new hobbies or skills. Kikuchi's parents did not take on any jobs, but rather started going to adult education class to learn to speak English. Many women used the classes as a way to keep their skills sharp while living in the camps. They gathered together for classes on sewing, flower arrangements, painting, or calligraphy.⁹⁰ Some of these women used their skills to teach the young Nisei in recreational programs.⁹¹

Many Issei and Nisei worked together to create "victory gardens" inside the camps. The gardens were mostly tended by the Issei who could not work because of age and frailty.⁹² The garden gave them the opportunity to grow vegetables and fruits for the kitchens and mess halls.

⁸⁷ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 76 – 77.

⁸⁸ Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 126 – 128.

⁸⁹ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 54.

⁹⁰ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 9.

⁹¹ Wakatsuki, Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 109.

⁹² Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 53.

Beside gardens of food, Issei started planting all different types of trees and flowers to bring character into dismal camps.⁹³ Kiyō Sato remembered once while exploring the camp with her brothers coming across a flower garden just on the other side of the fence. Sato and the children who followed her made weekly trips to see the flowers.⁹⁴

The longer the time Japanese-Americans spent inside the camps they were given more liberties. One of these liberties was outside work. The idea started when farmers needed help because of a shortage of workers because of the war. The War Relocation Authority allowed volunteers to travel back and forth to these farms to assist in labor. How the farmers and families treated the Japanese-Americans could not be predicted. The pay, shelter, and food was all provided by the farmers.⁹⁵ Charles Kikuchi commented that when the outside work started that many Nisei eagerly took on the jobs. Kikuchi, himself, could never take on one the jobs because he was too scared of what was waiting for him on the works. He had heard horror stories about mistreatment of workers with low pay, food shortages, and no shelters from weather concerns like rain or snow.⁹⁶

Military Service

One of the main obstacles that both Nisei and Issei generations had to face together inside the camp was the “yes, yes” or “no, no” answers to questions number twenty-seven and twenty-eight on the War Relocation Authority Application for Leave Clearance.⁹⁷ This application was created to test the loyalty of the Japanese-American men inside the camps. These answers decided if one would or would not get released from the camps via military service. Question

⁹³ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 99.

⁹⁴ Sato, *Kiyō's Story*, 132 – 134.

⁹⁵ Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 9.

⁹⁶ Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 79.

⁹⁷ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 81.

number twenty-seven asked men of appropriate age if they wished to enter the draft for military service. Question number twenty-eight was a bit trickier. The question asked all men in the camps to swear allegiance to the United States. This meant having to give up their right of allegiance to Japan and its emperor.⁹⁸

While the application was only available to males inside the camps, both parents took the situation hard to deal with. Many fathers did not want their sons to use the military as a way out of the camps. These sons saw service not only as an escape from camp life, but a way to travel the country and fight for their country. While many fathers believed that responding “no, no” to the question would save their sons lives this was not the case.⁹⁹ Through military and government officials, it came out the questionnaire was actually used to separate the “loyal” from the “disloyal.” The internees that responded with a “no, no” answer would then be deemed disloyal to the United States. These people were sent to the Tule Lake camp to be watched over. A “yes, yes” deemed you safe from deportation, but also put you on the draft list for military service.¹⁰⁰

Over 1500 Japanese-American men made up the newly minted 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This though was not the first Japanese-American group of military men. Before the 442nd, the military tried out a Hawaiian Japanese-American team called the 100th Infantry Battalion.¹⁰¹ The 100th Infantry Battalion did so well in the field that the military decided to try out a full Japanese-American regiment. The regiment was composed of men from the 100th Infantry Battalion and men who volunteered through the Application for Leave Clearance. The military

⁹⁸ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 148 – 149.

⁹⁹ Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 83 – 87.

¹⁰⁰ Bangarth, *Voicer Raise in Protest*, 33.

¹⁰¹ Matsunaga, “America Should Admit Its Guilt,” *Ripples of Hope*, 372.

hoped with a successful regiment that it would promote acceptance of all Japanese-Americans in society. It was also another way for Japanese-American men to prove their loyalty to the United States.¹⁰²

The regiment was sent into the European theater where it became a driving force in numerous battles across the European continent. One of the most notable contributions to World War II came in 1945. The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, a smaller team inside the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, liberated the survivors of the Dachau Concentration Camp.¹⁰³ The 442nd Regimental Combat Team came back to the United States as one of the most decorated regiments, but also one of the highest in casualties.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest*, 28 – 29.

¹⁰³ *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present*, s.v. “552nd Field Artillery Battalion.”

¹⁰⁴ *Japanese American History*, s.v. “442nd Regimental Combat Team.”

Conclusion

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the lives of every Japanese-American person changed. The way the country thought about Japanese-Americans changed. They were not our neighbors anymore. They were not our friends, classmates or loves anymore. They were the enemy, or at least they had the face of the enemy—the eyes, the smile, the nose, the ears. These people became a victim of wartime hysteria not because of their actions, but the actions of those of a completely other nation. A nation that more than half of the Japanese-American internees had never been to, lived in or had allegiance to.

The Japanese-American people suffered a life that not many in our country can relate to nor would we want to. Removed from homes, discarded of all personal possessions, loss of businesses and jobs, and placed into inhabitable living conditions, the Japanese-Americans faced a fate like no other. These people though did not let the hatred, prejudice, or name-calling get to them. They prevailed in their camps by using the resources they had to better themselves, their children, their community and the world around them. They used education, employment, and military service all as ways to escape the camps, but to also bring respect to their culture again.

Japanese-Americans endured challenge after challenges like overcrowded barracks and numerous food shortages that made their time inside the camps less pleasurable. Unlike the people of Japan, they did not have to endure two atomic bombs that killed thousands of people, and for that reason, many Japanese-Americans found themselves lucky. Their times inside the camps was no vacation, but they were protected via the United States military and government officials. As Mikiso Hane said after internment, “If I, like other Japanese Americans, was

destined to pay for the military actions of Japan because of our race, I am grateful that I paid for them in Poston rather than Hiroshima.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Hane, “Wartime Internment,” 575.

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