

OUR NEED FOR HEROES: ASIAN AMERICAN AND BLACK AMERICAN  
RECONSTRUCTIONS OF DRAFT RESISTANCE AND JAPANESE AMERICAN  
INCARCERATION NARRATIVES

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **OUR NEED FOR HEROES: ASIAN AMERICAN AND BLACK AMERICAN RECONSTRUCTIONS OF DRAFT RESISTANCE AND JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION NARRATIVES**

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The construction of a white American heroism through uncritical celebrations of World War II, within public spaces, accompanied with the recurring antagonistic anthem of “Never Forget Pearl Harbor!” serves simultaneously to reinforce the perception of Asian Americans as foreign and un-American, legitimizing the physical and symbolic violence perpetrated against them post-World War II. Problematically, World War II heroism is centered on a seemingly inclusive discourse of Americanness and patriotism while counter-narratives of non-white resistance are constructed almost exclusively from the specificity of distinct racial communities. I focus on the significance of a handful of racially intersecting “moments” in which Japanese Americans drew parallels between their experiences and the racial exclusion of Black Americans and similarly when Black Americans drew parallels between their experience and the racial exclusion of Japanese Americans. While the feeling of shared racial exclusion were not expressed by most Americans of color, this dissertation centers on historical and literary expressions of shared strategies of resistance towards their racial exclusion during World War II

*Our Need for Heroes* is an interdisciplinary study grounded in an American

Studies perspective incorporating history, literature and contemporary popular culture. I locate racially intersecting moments that surface within the memoirs and oral histories of Japanese American incarceration by both Nisei and Issei as well as various articles in the Black Press, two critical sites for documenting the history of non-white American World War II resistance. These moments also surface in how resistance is remembered in post-World War II literature. Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) and John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) raise questions of whether or not fighting in the war was politically advantageous for Americans of color by critiquing the racially exclusive constructions of patriotism and citizenship. Draft resistance is constructed as a legitimate response to this exclusion as the novels attempt to reheroize the performance of draft resisters through a process of remasculating each protagonist. Laureen Mar's short story *Resistance* (1993) and Shawn Wong's *American Knees* (1995) remember and rewrite the Japanese American incarceration history as a narrative of empowerment as each protagonist's nostalgic search for heroism is reflected in the absence of heroism in their current lives.

This dissertation explores the memory of draft resistance and Japanese American incarceration, considering processes of rethinking and reheroization through which these experiences are transformed from a history of shame into one rooted in agency. I argue Asian American and Black American reconstructions of narratives of draft resistance and Japanese American incarceration histories during World War II are critical for rethinking the exclusive racialized constructions of patriotism, dissent and citizenship.

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For Jai Kozar-Lewis

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When I began my PhD program in American Studies many years ago, I was an excited graduate student full of motivation and enthusiasm for learning with the single purpose of obtaining my doctoral degree. In the years following, I became a mother and began a full-time job outside of trying to complete my graduate studies. In a nutshell, life happened. Despite the wonderful opportunities I have been blessed with, the years have also been met with agony over my unfinished dissertation. More days than not were spent wondering if I would ever finish, tempted to just throw in the towel. It is for this reason, these acknowledgements are so important to me. If it were not for the wonderful people I have had the privilege of meeting, my frequent thoughts of giving up might have won.

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## INTRODUCTION

### FIGHTING BACK: HISTORIES OF RESISTANCE

I had no language to talk about all of the feelings I had about being different until I started to read works by people of color. I began to unlock parts of myself.

-- David Mura<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

When you enter the doors of the East Lansing Hannah Community Center located in downtown East Lansing, Michigan just to the right of the receptionist desk is a framed newspaper cover of the December 7, 1941 *Honolulu Times* that reads in bold capital letters: "WAR! OAHU BOMBED BY JAPANESE PLANES." Next to the newspaper there are seven mid-sized display cases commemorating the memories of World War II veterans. The display of veteran photos, a familiar performance of patriotism, is offset by the abrasive memory instigated by the newspaper. The brashness of an exclaimed "WAR!" coupled by the enemy identifier of "JAPANESE," implicates Asian faces with potential to be mistaken as Japanese. It is a familiar juxtaposition of celebrated Americanness sought in unity but leaves me cringing against the racialized perpetuation of Asians as enemies. I am still haunted by the memories of my high school days and the violence directed at my Asian face. Each time I was within eyesight, the same group of white boys morphed into imaginary soldiers armed with invisible machine guns. As they pointed their weapons in my direction, they excitedly

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Montgomery, "Poet Mura reads/performs works," accessed April 25, 2012, [http://www.emory.edu/EMORY\\_REPORT/erarchive/1995/February/ERfeb.27/2.27.95poet.mura.read.html](http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_REPORT/erarchive/1995/February/ERfeb.27/2.27.95poet.mura.read.html).

shouted, “Shoot the communist!” viewing their symbolic attack heroically. Images such as the veteran display demarcated with the newspaper’s marked enemy create binaries of good vs. evil, friend vs. enemy, hero vs. villain and reinforce the actions by my high school tormentors masked as pride in one’s country.

The notion of celebrating World War II heroism is not what I take issue with; it is the way in which these celebrations function to exclude and villainize Asian Americans who are implicated by the recurring racialized rhetoric of “Never forget Pearl Harbor!”<sup>2</sup> Asian Americans must endure violence perpetrated by those justifying their abuse as righteous in the name of American patriotism. In the 2009 comedy, *The Goods*, Don Ready (played by Jeremy Pivins) is a fast talking arrogant car salesman who uses the familiar adage “remember Pearl Harbor” as a way of rallying his employees to sell more than 200 “American” cars over the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. Firing up his employees, immediately after the lowering of the American flag on the dealership’s building, Ready passionately shouts “It’s July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend everybody and we are going to war. Don’t even get me started on Pearl Harbor. We are the Americans, and they are the enemy! Never again!” As the employees begin chanting “Never again, Never again!” an older white male stares down the Asian male, Teddy, played by Ken Jeong. As Teddy looks nervously at both Ready and the older white male, he participates in the chanting to position and affirm his American loyalty. Inspired by Ready’s speech the older white male slaps Teddy across the face and shouts “Let’s get

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<sup>2</sup> Marylou Tousignant Washington, “Anniversaries Reflect Lessons,” *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1991 (Proquest).

him!” jumping on Teddy as the other employees help in piling on him simultaneously landing a flurry of punches. The violence against Teddy is overshadowed by the unified performance of Americanness as the other males, in understanding their cue as Americans, justify the comical assault.<sup>3</sup>

Recurring celebrations of World War II marking Asians as the enemy in mainstream films like *The Goods*, or the newspaper at the community center, significantly trigger not only humiliating memories but also my lack of resistance. Indeed, my traumatic experiences as a teenager could have been contested with a voice of protest. Instead I remained silent. But how does the bullied respond to the bully, when the bully’s actions are affirmed through celebrations of war? How can Asian Americans, viewed as enemies, protest when their voices are silenced by the constructions of patriotic heroism? How do we resist these familiar performances of patriotism in ways that do not implicate Asian Americans further as foreign, non-American, and that do not lead to the animosity instigated by anthems of “Never Forget Pearl Harbor!”? Nothing in my K-12 education armed me with language or a consciousness of resistance.

This dissertation centers on strategies of non-white resistance during and after World War II specifically examining instances of Asian American and Black American narratives that reconstruct draft resistance and Japanese American incarceration histories.<sup>4</sup> These narratives challenge contemporary constructions

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<sup>3</sup> Neal Brennan, Director, *The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard*, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Historian Roger Daniels clarifies the use of the term “incarceration” as a more accurate description of the mass removal of Japanese Americans during World

of World War II in which the celebration of American heroism posits performances of proving loyalty over the complex histories of non-white resistance. When uncritical celebrations of World War II materialize within public space and are accompanied with an antagonistic anthem of “Never Forget Pearl Harbor!,” Americans are motivated by performances of patriotism that reinforce and legitimize the physical and symbolic violence perpetrated against Asian Americans. Our memories of World War II are distorted by *how* the war is remembered in which voices of opposition are silenced. Problematically, World War II heroism is centered on a seemingly inclusive discourse of Americanness and patriotism while counter-narratives of non-white resistance are constructed almost exclusively from the specificity of distinct racial communities. Japanese American internment is a history retold primarily by / for Japanese and Japanese Americans while Jim Crow segregation is a history retold primarily by / for Black Americans. While I am not suggesting that these histories are so similar in that we should overlook their complexities and particularities of their racial community’s history, I am suggesting these histories are even *more* complex because of the moments of alliance that each racial community had with the other.

*Our Need for Heroes* is an interdisciplinary study grounded in an American

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War II into prison camps as the term internment “should only be used to describe those eight thousand” Issei enemy aliens who were “interned beginning on the night of 7-8 December 1941.” Daniels’ explains “what happened to the rest of the West Coast Japanese Americans was without precedent in American law and whatever one wishes to call it, it was not internment.” Roger Daniels, “Incarcerating Japanese Americans,” *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 20.

Studies perspective incorporating history, literature and contemporary popular culture. I am interested in how histories are told and remembered, how literature offers a vehicle to either perpetuate or resist traditional approaches to histories and the implications of these constructions within popular culture. I focus on the significance of a handful of racially intersecting “moments” in which Japanese Americans drew parallels to the racial exclusion of Black Americans and similarly when Black Americans drew parallels to the racial exclusion of Japanese Americans. These moments surface within the memories of Japanese American incarceration by both Nisei and Issei documented in their memoirs and oral histories and in various articles of the Black Press, two critical sites for documenting the history of non-white American World War II resistance. These moments also surface in the ways in which this resistance is captured in post-World War II literature first by members within these respective communities and second by diverse Asian Americans who have transformed an ethnic specific history of Japanese American incarceration into a narrative of Asian American resistance. This process of rethinking the memory of Japanese American incarceration and draft resistance is what I refer to as a process of reheroization in which these histories have transformed from a history of shame into one rooted in agency. My interest is in the ways that these particular Asian Americans and Black Americans reconstruct the narrative of Japanese American incarceration and draft resistance histories during World War II in which their racial exclusion from American society instigated a rejection of hegemonic performances of patriotism. While the feeling of shared racial exclusion were not



embraced by the majority of Americans of color, this dissertation centers on those that did by examining the shared strategies of resistance towards their racial exclusion during World War II.

Despite the hostile racial exclusion from American society, many Americans of color believed that World War II offered an opportunity for American inclusion by proving their loyalty. The legacies of the 442<sup>nd</sup> / 100th all Nisei Regimental Combat teams, “the most highly decorated unit for its size,” and the Tuskegee airmen, the first Black American aviators to serve in the United States’ military, have become the poster figures for Asian American and Black American World War II heroism not only because of their accomplishments in breaking racial barriers in segregated units but also because their aggressive choice to fight in World War II is unquestionably a demonstration of valor and bravery.<sup>5</sup> Historian Ronald Takaki explains that his motivation for writing his book, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (2001), was prompted by the absence of African Americans in the 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*. As Takaki notes that although “‘Saving Private Ryan’ also was entertainment,” it “managed to reinforce the notion that World War II was fought solely by whites, even though the Normandy invasion included African Americans

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<sup>5</sup> Nisei is in reference to first generation Japanese Americans born in the United States. Mike Mackey, *Heart Mountain: Life in Wyoming’s Concentration Camp* (Casper: Mountain States Lithographing, 2000), 104. See also Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 123. Houston reflects on the heroism of the 442<sup>nd</sup> commenting, “The 442<sup>nd</sup> Combat Regiment was famous now, full of heroes, fighting in Europe to help the Allies win the war, and showing that Niseis too could be patriots.”

who assisted the troops during the attack.”<sup>6</sup> Takaki’s work repudiates an incarnation of an American hero into the image of a singular body—the white male. The reclaimed legacies of Americans of color have broadened the white male hero construction only because they follow scripted versions of acceptable performances of patriotism reinforcing an ideological belief that patriotism must be proven.<sup>7</sup>

Equally important to the stories of those that fought in the war are the stories of resistance and the voices within the United States contesting the dehumanization of legalized segregation and incarceration of America’s racial war. For Japanese Americans, while voices of protest began upon the issuance of Executive Order 9066, the presidential order for removing Japanese and Japanese Americans along the West Coast into incarceration camps, a more vocal protest emerged in response to the 1943 loyalty oath questionnaire,

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<sup>6</sup> “‘Pearl Harbor’ Wariness: New Movie Brings Worries of Anti-Asian Sentiment in U.S.” *SFGate*, Last modified May 13, 2001. Accessed June 15, 2012. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2001/05/13/MN105426.DTL>.

<sup>7</sup> While I am not implying these men have been fully embraced and remembered by America, in comparison to the histories of draft resisters who are constructed as cowards, the recuperation of a particular type of hero is easier than remembering those that are dismissed for their cowardice. Consider the controversy over the 2012 film *Red Tails* centered on the Tuskegee airmen in which the George Lucas was faced with questions about marketability over a predominant black cast. Jessica Paris, “George Lucas” on “Red Tails’ Controversy,” WGN-TV, Last modified January 18, 2012. Accessed July 29, 2012, “<http://www.wgntv.com/news/deanslist/wgntv-george-lucas-talks-red-tails-controversy-20120118,0,2991545.story>.”

required to be completed by those within the American “prison camps.”<sup>8</sup> A year later, in 1944, when the Nisei 4-C status marking them as “enemy alien” was overturned and a draft was implemented, over three hundred Nisei protested by resisting the draft. These voices of resistance have been overshadowed by the legacies of those that fought *in* the war and have been silenced as a history of shame. For Black Americans, while voices of protest were complex, they manifested into two primary groups: proponents of the Double V campaign (led by Black Americans’ rejection of Jim Crow while supporting the war effort) and draft resisters (those refusing to fight or support the war effort until the dismantling of a Jim Crowed army). Though both of these groups are important when understanding World War II resistance by Black Americans, the voices of the latter group are erased by a more vocal and accommodating campaign of the former.<sup>9</sup>

For Black Americans the impassioned Double V mantra of “Victory at

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<sup>8</sup> See William Minoru Hohri use of “prison camps” terminology over “camp.” Hohri explains he uses the official names of the camps such as Heart Mountain War Relocation Center over the less descriptive reference to “camps.” However, when he does make reference to the locales in general he chooses the more “descriptive” term of “prison camps.” William Minoru Hohri, with Mits Koshiyama, Yosh Kuromiya, Takashi Hoshizaki and Frank Seishi Emi, *Resistance: Challenging America’s Wartime Internment of Japanese-Americans* (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2001), 8.

<sup>9</sup> While I recognize that Jim Crow spans over eight decades, I focus on segregation practices and resistance specifically during World War II that challenge the construction of an American heroism and the saving of democracy worldwide.

Home, Victory Abroad!” exposing the hypocrisy of fighting Hitler’s fascism while racism remained at home, utilized a hegemonic version of patriotism centered on proving Americanness when appealing for Black inclusion into American society.<sup>10</sup> Originated by James G. Thompson after he wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Thompson’s letter questions the sacrifice Black Americans fighting in the war were making for a “life to live half American.” Ronald Takaki notes that two months after Thompson had published his letter he entered the army, a measurement of his willingness to “die for his country.”<sup>11</sup>

In comparison with those that fought in the war, Black draft resisters bravely chose a stance steeped in a radical rejection of the war effort until the desegregation of the Jim Crow army. Japanese Americans were confronted with a similar set of choices either to fight or to resist. The draft resistance performed by Japanese Americans, incarcerated within American prison camps, was especially radical in contrast with the accommodating views of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), a civil rights advocacy group who claimed to be the voice for Japanese Americans. The JACL “petitioned the President and the War Department to reinstate selective service for Japanese Americans” so

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<sup>10</sup> “Major Courier Campaigns that Changed the World,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 20, 2010 (Proquest).

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Takaki *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 20.

they could prove their Americanness.<sup>12</sup> But how does one prove oneself American if others are unable to conceive you as American? This notion of proving one's Americanness as a performance of patriotism is a recurring theme that is challenged throughout this dissertation. The history of Asian Americans and Black Americans racially constructed as un-American have racially excluded them from inclusion within an American identity despite their citizenship status and despite their participation within both the U.S. military and previous wars.

### **Literature Review**

My work considers both the contributions and limitations of Asian American scholarship in addressing Asian / Black interactions and the Japanese American incarceration history. In reviewing the current scholarship within Asian American Studies, I consider three questions: First, what has been written about Asian American and Black American intersections? Second, how has Asian American (and African American Studies) considered World War II resistance? While I do consider World War II resistance as it relates to African American Studies, the focus of this study is centered on an Asian American historiography. Finally, how has Asian American Studies considered performances of resistance and histories of Japanese American and Black American racial intersections as they relate to the Japanese American incarceration history?

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<sup>12</sup> Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 166. Robinson cites Donald E. Collins, *Native American Aliens: Disloyalty and the Renunciation of Citizenship by Japanese Americans during World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 22-23.

While there is emerging interest in scholarship centered on Asian and Black relationships, this focus has either been on the early part of the twentieth century examining Black America's relationship primarily with "Japan" and "China" or the contemporary relationships vis-à-vis the Black and Asian power movements of the late 1960s and 1970s to the more recent influence of hip-hop.<sup>13</sup> Reginald Kearney's *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition* (1998) and Marc Gallicchio's *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (2003) are two important works that uncover a pre-World War II admiring of Japan by "tens of thousands" of Black Americans.<sup>14</sup> Japan was viewed by many black leaders including W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey as the "Champion of the darker races" seeing "Japan as a positive force in the struggle for racial equality."<sup>15</sup> Marc Gallicchio builds on Black American early views of Japan and an

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<sup>13</sup> See Thien-bao Thuc Phi, "Yellow Lines: Asian Americans and Hip Hop" in *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, ed. by Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Sujatha Fernandes *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation* (London: Verso, 2011); Mimi Thi Nguyen *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Marc Gallicchio *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Reginald Kearney, *African American Views*, xxvvi.

articulation of Black Internationalism, or a “view of world affairs” that linked race and the fight against white supremacy to world politics. Gallicchio further examines Black America’s relationship with China noting that post-Pearl Harbor, an interest in China strategically allowed Black Americans “to continue to emphasize the importance of race in World politics while insulating them from charges of sedition.”<sup>16</sup> Focusing primarily on the linkages of Blacks with Japan (and minimally with Japanese Americans), Kearney and Gallicchio uncover how an early admiration between Black Americans and Japanese triggered the collection of counterintelligence by the FBI compiling files on “Negro subversion” decades before the creation of COINTELPRO’s plot to break up the Black Panthers in the late 1960s.

This is not to say the racial interactions between Japanese Americans and Black Americans centered on World War II have been neglected. However, the scope of research by such scholars Scott Kurashige and Helen Heran Jun has centered on either pre- or post-wartime America. Both Kurashige and Jun have centralized their research on racial intersections between Asian Americans and African Americans by uncovering the implications of histories of racial exclusion as Asian and Black racial communities strive for American inclusion. Scott Kurashige’s *Shifting Grounds of Race* (2007) focuses on the resettlement of Japanese Americans after incarceration back into interethnic Los Angeles revealing the split between Black and Japanese American communities reacting against racialized constructions of one another either “actively distancing

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<sup>16</sup> Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter*, 5.

themselves” or “passively accepting the distance created by white denigrations of the other group.” Kurashige uncovers the implications of constructions of Japanese Americans as the model minority enabling them to “promote a sense of national belonging and greater white acceptance.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Jun’s *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (2011) examines the intersecting histories of Asian Americans and Black Americans by examining how these groups have been “racially defined in relation to each other since the early nineteenth century.” Jun examines the construction of citizenship forcing “racialized subjects to produce developmental narratives of inclusion” appropriating racialized constructions of the other in their quest for American inclusion.<sup>18</sup>

As World War II resistance narratives have been explored by Americans of color the primary focus has been on the histories of specific racial communities centering either solely on Jim Crow segregation or the Japanese American incarceration.<sup>19</sup> However, Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Race Rebels* (1996), Scott Kurashige’s *Shifting Grounds* and Matthew Briones’ *Jim and Jap Crow* (2012)

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<sup>17</sup> Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4; Helen Heran Jun *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Helen Jun, *Race for Citizenship*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Maggie M. Morehouse *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.); Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President*.



have helped to rethink isolationist versions of historical representations. By embracing the intersecting and overlapping of racial histories specifically throughout the World War II years informed by a shared white American racism, these texts consider the limitations and possibilities of isolated histories by rethinking the role of race as a manifestation of non-whiteness.<sup>20</sup> Problematically Japanese Americans and Black Americans have been removed from each other's narratives of World War II racism and resistance as if they lived in two different countries within America. In fact, their histories overlap. Briones' recent publication, *Jim and Jap Crow* does address the intersecting histories of Japanese Americans and Black Americans specifically during this time period, however, his research centers on the life of Charles Kikuchi, a prolific recorder of Japanese American incarceration experience. Through the 100,000 pages of Kikuchi's life, Briones examines the influence Black Americans had in shaping a racial consciousness absent in Kikuchi's early life by focusing on his Gila diary as well as his resettlement diaries in Chicago.<sup>21</sup> My incorporation of Kikuchi's life returns to his original Tanforan diary, documenting the first four months at Tanforan Assembly Center by examining what this diary reveals about Asian Americans and Black Americans who are included within its pages. A de-emphasis on Kikuchi opens up a missing narrative of historical racial

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<sup>20</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley's *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); See also Fred Stanton, ed. *Fighting Racism in World War II* (New York: Pathfinder, 1980); Matthew Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*, 2.

intersections between Asian Americans and Black Americans overlooked within this text.

My work centers on the racial consciousness of those Asian Americans and Black Americans whose voices despite, speaking from a minority point-of-view, understood the prison camps within America as an articulation of American racism. While it is not my aim to prove more Black Americans opposed internment than supported it or to romanticize the relationship between Blacks and Japanese Americans during World War II, I am interested in rethinking the ways the narrative of Japanese American incarceration can be understood by more Americans of color. Yet World War II resistance narratives must compete with narratives of World War II celebration. Even while Ronald Takaki's groundbreaking *Double Victory: A Multicultural View of World War II* (2001) significantly makes visible marginalized stories (and greatly influenced my interest in World War II narratives), it falls short in making tangible connections between racial communities. Rhetorically each chapter is assigned to a racial community's history reminiscent of separate celebratory ethnic heritage months. The attention he gives to Americans of color that fought in the war overshadows those that resisted. Black draft resistance is nearly absent while the resistance by Japanese Americans in prison camps is relegated to only a few pages.<sup>22</sup>

While Asian and Black World War II resistance came decades before the vocal anti-racist movements of the Civil Rights, Black Power and Asian American Movements, it remains overshadowed by the tangible achievements of these

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory*, 157-158.

larger movements and the celebrated legacy of World War II. In drawing from Robin D. G. Kelley's notion that we need to "not only redefine what is "political" but question a lot of common ideas about what are 'authentic' movements and strategies of resistance," this dissertation examines Asian and Black resistance during World War II and argues for the significance of these voices of dissent as integral to the larger political identity movements, post-World War II.<sup>23</sup> The memory and symbolism of World War II resistance resurfaces during the power movements of the 60s and 70s and continues to emerge in reconstructed narratives of World War II specifically by Asian Americans. These narratives transform a Japanese American incarceration history of shame and compliance into one of defiance. If it were not for the efforts of Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan, Lawson Inada and Shawn Wong, after they rediscovered John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), this history would have remained silenced. Known for their groundbreaking text *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), the first Asian American literary anthology instrumental in ideologically framing the Asian American Movement, Chin and his partners helped to embrace the heroism of draft resisters.<sup>24</sup> Chin describes the feeling evoked in rediscovering *No-No Boy* stating it was "like a white writer feeling gloomy and alone in a literary history, discovering Mark Twain." As Chin

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<sup>23</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Chin, Frank., et. al. *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1975). See William Hohri, *Resistance*, 156. Takeshi Nakayama, "Heart Mountain Draft Resisters Honored at DOR: Members of the Fair Play Committee, internees who refused to report for induction during World War II, are given NCRR's Fighting Spirit Award" (February 24, 1999)

describes the encounter with Okada's family he writes, "They thought of me as a 'yellow activist', a troublemaker, for even bringing the book back to their minds."<sup>25</sup> Prior to the rediscovery and redistribution of Okada's novel, the majority view within the Japanese American community centered on highlighting the accomplishments of those that fought in the war while trying to forget the incarceration history and especially the no-no boys, a symbol of shame and embarrassment. But this collective of Chinese Americans (Chin, Chan, and Wong) with one Japanese American (Inada), embraced their struggle understanding the importance of resistance for racialized Asian Americans who are silenced and ignored by history books. The recuperation of *No-No Boy* was instrumental in transforming an ignored Japanese American history of resistance into a collective Asian American history remembering those that not only suffered as other Americans of color but also fought back.

Japanese American incarceration narratives have focused on the loss of American civil rights as Japanese Americans were forcefully removed from the West Coast into incarceration camps. The heroic portrayal of the United States fighting against the villainy of Japanese enemies and Nazis seems contradictory to the notion of concentration camps within the United States. This argument is led by historian and prolific writer, Roger Daniels and supported by the plethora

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Chin, afterward in John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 256.

of internment memoirs by prisoners within the camps.<sup>26</sup> These memoirs share an attention toward injustice while locating agency for victims within the camps to remember and document a history that for many triggers memories of pain and humiliation. In *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973) Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston describes the liberation she feels after finally documenting her incarceration experience as “a way of coming to terms with the impact these years had on my entire life.”<sup>27</sup>

Other scholarship has focused on those responsible for imprisoning Americans in the camps. Glen Robinson’s *By Order of the President* (2001) scrutinizes Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “motives” for incarceration as the signer of Executive Order 9066, an order that contradicted the “democratic principles he so eloquently espoused.” Robinson traces Roosevelt’s social history in the U.S. that would lead to racist and xenophobic views toward Japan and anything Japanese. Both similar and opposite to Robinson, Brian Masaru Hayashi’s *Democratizing the Enemy* (2004) explores the trajectory of the camps resulting from an initial “military necessity” to an opportunity for government and social scientists to “democratize” its prisoners believing it would have an eventual

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<sup>26</sup> See Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971); Roger Daniels *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> 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), x.

impact beyond national borders. He writes, “For social scientists the camps provided them with a chance to ‘do good’ as well as use captive audiences to work out their ‘applied’ anthropological methods in service of not only the victims they sought to help, but also of their academic fields and of the American Occupation of Japan.”<sup>28</sup> Hayashi’s work reveals the ironies of instilling within Japanese Americans an understanding of democracy while their removal into camps was implemented through an absence of democracy.

As scholars have sought to reclaim histories of protest within the incarceration camps have contested the singular image of Japanese American victimization during World War II. Eric Muller’s *Free to Die for their Country* (2001), William Minoru Hohri’s *Resistance* (2001) and Frank Abe’s documentary *Conscience and the Constitution* (2000) are important works that centralize the significant story of over 300 Japanese American resisters of conscience who bravely refused to fight for the U.S. while they along with their families remained in camps behind barbed wire.<sup>29</sup>

The central focus of Asian and Black resistance scholarship has centered on reclaiming Asian American activists / activism politically influenced by the Black liberation movements of the 1960s. Activists such as Yuri Kochiyama (a friend of Malcolm X) and Richard Aoki (a member of the Black Panther Party)

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<sup>28</sup> Glen Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die for their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance* (2001) and *Conscience and the Constitution*, dir by. Frank Abe (PBS, 2000).

have framed the work of Diane C. Fujino and Daryl Maeda. Both Kochiyama and Aoki (as well as Grace Lee Boggs, Fred Ho and others) have influenced the emergence of several significant Asian/Black anthologies including: *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (2006), *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (2006), and *AfroAsia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Crossings between African Americans and Asian Americans* (2008).<sup>30</sup>

While these works vary in breadth and content, they share a response to Asian and Black stories of conflict within the media. The stories of Korean and Black conflict instigated by the 1992 Rodney King beating and riots, the Latasha Harlans case, the denigrating lyrics of Ice Cube's "Black Korea" or Shaquille O'Neal's mocking of a Chinese accent in reference to Yao Ming serve as the impetus for a scholarship of racial understanding between silenced and misunderstood Asian and Black histories.<sup>31</sup> On one hand it is important not to

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<sup>30</sup> Diane C. Fujino, *The Revolutionary Life of Yuri Kochiyama: Heartbeat of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Diane C. Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers: Richard Aoki on Race, Resistance and a Paradoxical Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Daryl J. Maeda *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds., *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Hazel M. McFerson, ed., *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006); Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *AfroAsia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Crossings between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Fred Ho, ed. et al *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America* (San Francisco: AK Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> See Jeff Chang, "Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment: On Ice Cube's 'Black Korea'," *Amerasia* 19.2 (1993): 87-107; Abelman, Nancy and John Lie.

underestimate the conflict between these racial communities; on the other hand, we cannot allow our scholarship to be dictated by only reactions against conflict. My work considers that while scholarship centered on Asian and Black tensions is important for opening up dialogue between Asian and Black communities, scholarship centered on mutual spaces of resistance is equally important.

### **Racial Intersectionality**

In the spring of 2008 at the *American Literature Association's* annual conference in San Francisco, California, I participated in a roundtable session centered on the complexities of publishing, representing, and teaching Asian American literature. Present in the audience was Shawn Wong, co-editor of previously mentioned *Aiiieeeee!*, a revolutionary text for the Asian American movement as well as his empowering novel, *American Knees*. As several participants engaged Wong into the discussion, he shared with us that when he and the other editors of *Aiiieeeee!* tried to find a publisher in the early 1970s, white publishers were not interested in reading about "Asian America." Wong explained it was the Black publishing company at Howard University Press that first gave them a chance.

The articulation of racial histories in isolation within scholarship and in popular culture is instigated through the formation of an identity politics that breeds racial competition. As Elaine Kim notes, "in a society held together by hierarchical arrangements of power and privileging of competitive individualism, it

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*Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).



is difficult for groups of color to deal with each other on an equal basis, without falling into competition, ranking, and scrambling around hierarchies of oppression.”<sup>32</sup> This implicit (and explicit) competitive spirit compounded both by a limitation of resources and time pushes communities of color to concentrate exclusively on their particular racial group, which is nearly always in relation to the dominant white group. The histories of Americans of color are kept isolated forcing racial communities to compete with one another rather than building, learning and resisting together. Kim explains, “Historically, for example, much of our teaching and research has emerged from the impulse to educate ourselves and challenge exploitation in our communities by accusing, protesting to, trying to convince, and even beseeching the dominant about our histories, needs, and interests.” The result in “always speaking to the dominant” is that we are “rarely speaking to each other.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, my aim is to rethink the articulation of resistance as agency in shared histories drawing from those influenced by racial communities outside their own.

To begin with, the concept of intersectionality conceptualized by Kimberle Crenshaw, originally was intended to allow a platform for engaging in the ways women of color are implicated by both racism and sexism that had historically

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<sup>32</sup> Elaine Kim, “At Least You’re Not Black: Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations,” in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Community*, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 209.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine Kim, “At Least You’re Not Black,” 206.

delineated “feminist” with “antiracist practices.”<sup>34</sup> This ideological shift forcing scholars to think about the implications women of color face marginalized both by their race and their gender challenged the privilege of white females who voiced their feminist needs often participating and maintaining racist practices.

Indebted to Crenshaw and others, my work draws upon this concept by arguing racial histories do not act independently of the other.<sup>35</sup> Yet our identity politics has prevented racial communities from articulating their intersecting histories by privileging separate racial histories over histories that intersect. For Asian and Black Americans, the benefit for telling histories in isolation or in juxtaposing stories of tension and opposition are much more politically advantageous than speaking of histories of solidarity. The continued isolation of Japanese American incarceration history scholarship suggests it is still viewed as a Japanese American history first, Asian American history second, politically removed from other Americans of color. In fact, this history offers an opportunity to deescalate tensions between Asians and Black Americans in the present in general and reparation competition narratives in particular.

The image of Japanese Americans receiving reparations further isolates Asians from Black Americans as the favored “model minority” and the notion that minorities should learn from Asians’ successful assimilation. While reparations

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<sup>34</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991).

<sup>35</sup> See Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins & Mainstreams* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

acknowledged the injustice against Japanese Americans during World War II, many Black Americans take offense to the lack of acknowledgment for injustices committed against them. Although Japanese Americans received limited compensation in reparations for their incarceration, Black Americans have also sought reparations for their years of enslavement but received no similar compensation.<sup>36</sup> The distorted judgments of reparation rhetoric in the present forgets the Black American support in the reparation campaign in the late 1980s while overlooking how this act of “apology” toward Japanese Americans specifically benefitted America’s image of benevolence, the legacy of World War II while silencing Asian American racism. The suggestion that Japanese Americans (and Asian Americans by default) do not experience racism because they received reparations is similar to illogic arguing that Americans have overcome racism because they elected a Black President.

My decision to focus on Asian/Black intersectionality recognizes the established and visible space Black Americans occupy within contemporary American society compared with the invisibility of Asian Americans. With the presence of hip-hop culture within mainstream America along with a recognizable presence within popular culture, the visibility of Black Americans has drastically transformed from the milieu of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1947). Ellison poetically illustrates the nameless protagonist’s quandary of having to legitimize his existence “simply because people refuse to see” him significantly coalescing

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<sup>36</sup> See Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, “Getting to Reparations: Japanese Americans and African Americans,” *Social Forces* 83.2 (2004): 823-840 and Daniel Tetteh Osabu-Kle, “The African Reparation Cry: Rationale, Estimate, Prospects and Strategies,” *Journal of Black Studies* 30.3 (2000): 331-350.

in his desire to affirm his humanity, provoking him to “bump people back.” He explains, “You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you’re a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it’s seldom successful.”<sup>37</sup> Sixty years after this novel was published Black Americans have consistently “bumped back” asserting their presence within almost every aspect of American culture. While I am not implying that a Black American visibility assumes their end of racial oppression, it complicates discussions of racism in similar ways Asian Americans are often dismissed within a racial discourse under the guise that they have achieved economic success as the “model minority.” My interest in this passage from *Invisible Man* recognizes how an experience assumedly specific to one group can also racially transcend to speak to another’s.

The notion of invisibility not only profoundly elucidates the historical exclusion of Black Americans and the magnitude of resistance now as the “most visible Americans” (next to whites) but also articulates the experiences of Asian Americans as the “most invisible.”<sup>38</sup> I propose that by situating our experiences amid the visibility of Black Americans, racial intersectionality provides a schema for illuminating and legitimizing the Asian American “experience” to an audience unfamiliar with our history. By recognizing the impact the Black Panthers, for

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<sup>37</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1947, 1948, 1952, repr., New York: Quality Paper Book Club, 1947). 3

<sup>38</sup> Thien-bao Thuc Phi, “Yellow Lines,” 296.

example, had in shaping strategies for liberation for racial communities other than the Black American one, it destroys the dominant perception of the Black Panthers as an exclusively racist, terrorist group.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the movement towards Third World liberation—of ending war and colonialism against Africans, Asians and Latin Americans—was integral in influencing the struggle of the Black Panthers who viewed their plight in America as an incessant war for their freedom. In 1969 from a prison cell, Bobby Seale, a co-founder of the Black Panther Party, urges Black GIs fighting in Vietnam to fight oppression in their own communities:

They [the Vietnamese] have NEVER oppressed us. They have NEVER called us 'nigger'. . . The leadership of the Vietnamese is that of heroic people. This is also true of the Vietnamese people who are heroic people, fighting for their right to self-determination. And so, the same goes for Black people here in America living in the wretched ghettos and oppression.<sup>40</sup>

In the material conditions of war manifesting into war protests and draft resistance, in the fight for liberation is where we find vital alliances among people of color. A long time activist and friend of Malcolm X, Yuri Kochiyama observes the linkages made between Asians and Blacks within various American wars.

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<sup>39</sup> See Diane Fujino and Eric Maeda's work on reclaiming the significance of the Black Panthers to the Asian American community. Diane C. Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers* and Daryl J. Maeda *Chains of Babylon*.

<sup>40</sup> Bobby Seale cited in Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1995), 88.

She writes of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the kinship felt by Black soldiers “with their ‘brown brothers,’” noting “the Black soldiers risked their lives by joining the Filipino guerillas.” Later commenting on the protests of the Korean War in the 1950s, Kochiyama cites the words of renowned Black American actor and activist, Paul Robeson who “urged Blacks to resist being drafted.” Robeson shared his alignment with Asians, stating, “it would be foolish for African Americans to fight against their Asian brothers.”<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, Kochiyama’s affirmation of Asian and Black resistance during World War II highlights the global and national support Black Americans shared with Japanese and Japanese Americans. She states:

Inter-action was common between African-Americans and the Japanese as well. In the midwestern United States, immigrant Japanese related to the newly emerging Nation of Islam (NOI), and some made ties for the purpose of friendship and trade. In early 1940, Elijah Muhammed and others of the NOI went to jail because they would not support World War II against Japan and spoke out against it; they also opposed the concentration camps where Japanese Americans were sent at the time.

First generation Issei Japanese worked with militant Black nationalists in those years.<sup>42</sup>

The racial crossing of the Nation of Islam and other “militant Black nationalists”

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<sup>41</sup> Yuri Kochiyama. "A History of Linkage," *modelminority.com*, [http://www.modelminority.com/joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=202:a-history-of-linkage-&catid=40:history&Itemid=56](http://www.modelminority.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=202:a-history-of-linkage-&catid=40:history&Itemid=56).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

through their inclusion of Japanese and Japanese American community disrupts our racial constructions of Black militancy as racist and isolationist. We have so much to relearn from what we think we know of history. Where Kochiyama ends, my dissertation begins.

## **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter One, “Japanese American and Black Solidarity: Reading Resistance in Japanese American Incarceration Narratives,” begins by recognizing the way celebrations of World War II history function through an erasure of Japanese American incarceration history. This history is positioned as inconsequential in comparison to the memories of American heroism and patriotism affirming the necessity of World War II. As scholars have sought to reclaim a narrative of injustice toward Japanese Americans, the specificity in how this history is remembered and written perpetuate indifference among Americans of color who are removed from this struggle under the premise that they are not Japanese / Japanese American. While I am not implying that we should approach histories holistically by ignoring the targeting of specific racial or ethnic groups, I am interested in ways we can reconsider more inclusive narratives of histories of resistance. The history of Japanese American incarceration articulates a familiar narrative of racial profiling, violation of civil rights and the insignificance of citizenship directed towards Japanese Americans that parallels other histories within the United States. I am interested in the ways history can function not only to document the particularities of histories but also to demonstrate common themes of struggle, resistance and solidarity.

In this chapter, I suggest ways of rereading the Japanese American incarceration history by locating specific interactions between Japanese Americans and Black Americans recorded in Nisei and Issei memoirs and oral histories. While these interactions were infrequent and appear minimally, I am interested in how and why these moments are included. As Mary Tsukamoto experiences a brief moment outside the Jerome relocation camp, her moment of freedom is marred by witnessing the hostility of Jim Crow segregation both on the bus and at the YWCA conference in which the “step forward for black and white YWCA leaders” to meet at the conference was contradicted when “black delegates were not allowed to eat with whites.”<sup>43</sup> Other Japanese Americans not only shared in documenting these moments of racial prejudice towards Black Americans but also in documenting performances of racial solidarity. Charles Kikuchi’s diary, for example, records the words of Black American, Melvin Stewart who demonstrates his support stating, “You know who are your real friends now. A lot of us are behind any moments that will fight this thing because we have had to face a lot ourselves and so are opposed to anything so un-American.”<sup>44</sup> Part of the way this history has unintentionally removed the voices

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Tsukamoto’s temporary leave from the incarceration camps was not as accessible as one might assume. In fact persons “allowed by the government” to leave had to undergo a series of loyalty tests proving they were not “risks” toward their country. (See next chapter on loyalty oaths). Mary Tsukamoto and Elizabeth Pinkerton, *We the People: A Story of Internment in America* (Elk Grove: Laguna Publishers, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> John Modell, ed. *The Kikuchi Diary: Chronicle from an American Concentration Camp* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 126-127.



of other Americans of color from its narrative is the lack of attention toward those Americans of color who were present and stood beside Japanese Americans in solidarity. By centralizing on these less visible but significant moments in which Japanese Americans recorded specific interactions and observations with Black Americans, this chapter aims to capture an emerging consciousness of racial solidarity by Japanese Americans and Black Americans moved by a sense of shared racial exclusion.

Chapter Two “A Collective Voice of Dissent: Japanese American and Black American Draft Resistance During World War II,” questions the construction of patriotic performances that function to silence the histories of World War II draft resistance and the reasons behind their resistance. Dismissed as cowards, draft resisters and their legacy are viewed as the antithesis of patriots. This chapter reclaims the histories of Japanese American “resisters of conscience,” no-no boys and Black American draft resisters by not only helping to rethink how patriotism and dissent is racialized but also to rethink their performance of resistance as patriotic. While this chapter is not a historiography of Black American draft resistance during World War II, the selective case studies of Black American draft resisters are illustrative (not exclusive) of a sentiment of draft resistance. This resistance was steeped in a radical discourse, critiquing America’s racism within its borders during World War II similarly to how Japanese American “resisters of conscience” understood and interpreted their racial exclusion. Despite the complexities in diverging histories, I am interested in the ways Japanese American and Black American draft resister histories

intersect specifically in examining their strategies for justifying their resistance. My aim is to rethink the limitations of a one-dimensional construction of patriotism reinforcing a myth that American inclusion can be achieved by proving one's loyalty. The history of Japanese American draft resisters shatters this myth, as their proof of Americanness was irrelevant in comparison to their racial markers that justified their incarceration. Regardless of whether Japanese Americans (or Asian Americans in general) have been in the United States for one day or for generations, they are still perceived as foreign. While draft resistance from these two communities is not limited to these years, the World War II years are especially important because of the perpetuation of World War II celebrations within contemporary society that posits a white American heroism against a non-white Asian face of villainy. By focusing on how dissent is racialized, I examine performances of draft resistance by Japanese American and Black American resisters that helped to redefine racial discrimination as a moral objection for their families and communities.

Chapter Three centers on methods of reconstructing the history of Japanese American and Black American draft resistance and Japanese American incarceration histories through the production of post-World War II literature by examining Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) and John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957). Both novels written in the years following World War II are a response to racially exclusive performances of American patriotism. Shaped by an anti-draft position and the influence of intersecting racial communities on their minority subjectivities, the novels attempt to reheroize the

performance of draft resisters through a process of remasculating each protagonist.<sup>45</sup>

Chapter Three begins by focusing on Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. As Himes' protagonist, Bob Jones, witnesses his Japanese American neighbor Riki Oyana and his family being removed from their home and forced into the Santa Anita concentration camp, his subjectivity as a Black American male and as an American of color is deeply affected. Himes reconstructs a Japanese American incarceration narrative beginning with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The history of Pearl Harbor serves as a guiding force throughout the novel initiating Bob's persistent fear, his rejection of the war and serves to foreshadow *his* eventual removal from society after he is falsely accused of raping a white woman. Contrasting with narratives used to affirm (white) American heroism through its symbolizing of American sacrifice and unity, Pearl Harbor is remembered by Himes as a space of violence directed toward non-whites. Himes writes, "It was the look in the white people's faces when I walked down the streets. It was that crazy, wild-eyed, unleashed hatred that the first Jap bomb on Pearl Harbour let loose in a flood."<sup>46</sup> Rhetorically, Pearl Harbor functions to affirm Bob's shared isolation from American society while demonstrating the insignificance of citizenship shared with Japanese Americans.

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<sup>45</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy* (1957; repr., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); Chester Himes *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945; repr., New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 4.

This chapter centers on Bob's response towards the hostility directed at Americans of color manifesting into a performance of resistance. Bob lashes out at symbols of American patriotism beginning with Pearl Harbor, American soldiers and the symbolism associated with their uniforms. As the novel ends, Bob's forced removal from society and into the army mirrors the fate of Japanese Americans who similarly shared the consequences of a failed American justice system. But the fate is still not unique to these groups as Himes incorporates the history of yet another group of Americans who were also brutally abused by a rejection from American society. The imagery of the zoot suit riot history in which "zoot suiter" youth (mostly Mexican American) were victims of malicious attacks by white American GIs is conjured up by Bob as he witnesses tensions rising when two white soldiers and a white woman enter a predominantly black club. Himes captures this sense of shared racial solidarity and struggle with the other communities of color not only through this memory but also through the symbolism of skin color in which Bob's skin is described as yellow like the Japanese and brown like the Mexican American youth who are also sent off to the Army with him at the end of the novel. Himes captures the solidarity of these three histories within this novel as each group's consequences result from the performances of an exclusive patriotism that justifies acts of violence as patriotic.

I then turn to examine John Okada's *No-No Boy*, a novel centered on the protagonist, Ichiro Yamada, and the implications of his decision to defy the draft during World War II. While Ichiro faces social ostracism for his "mistake," the novel demonstrates that Japanese American veterans who chose to fight in the

war have not found the social acceptance that Ichiro seeks. In fact, Okada intentionally diminishes the heroism of Japanese American veterans in order to critique the exclusive constructions of patriotism. The construction of Japanese Americans as foreign prevents them from participating in performances of patriotism. Regardless of their citizenship or their proof of service as American soldiers in World War I, the bombing of Pearl Harbor instantly targeted them as America's enemy. While this story centers on the specificity of the Japanese American incarceration history, it also speaks to the racism faced by Black Americans during this time. I examine the inclusion of intersecting racial communities in which the struggles of Ichiro, as a Japanese American, is contextualized through the response to racial struggles faced by Black Americans included within the novel. These hostile and supportive interactions between Japanese Americans and Black Americans are framed either by how Black Americans resist or how it triggers a response of resistance for Japanese Americans. These moments are critical for initiating Ichiro's process of remasculination in reclaiming his agency as a man confronting, rather than cowering behind, his decision of draft resistance.

Chapter Four, "In Search of Heroes in Laureen Mar's *Resistance* and Shawn Wong's *American Knees*: Contemporary Symbolism of a Japanese American Incarceration History" focuses on the production of post-World War II, late twentieth century narratives of resistance centered on reclaiming an American of color heroism that resists the mainstream assumptions of accepted patriotic performances. I examine methods for remembering draft resistance and

Japanese American incarceration history that intentionally resignify World War II symbols of resistance. By focusing on Laureen Mar's short story "Resistance" anthologized in Jessica Hagedorn's *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1995) and Shawn Wong's *American Knees* (1995), I examine the motivation and implications for remembering and celebrating the histories of Asian American resistance that challenge the hegemonic celebrations of World War II's white American patriotism.<sup>47</sup>

The construction of Shawn Wong's protagonist, Raymund Ding, demonstrates the affinity for reclaiming a lost non-white heroism of the past, through the histories of draft resistance, as a method of asserting his agency within the present. Wong demonstrates the significance of certain histories and the attachment to narratives of historical empowerment (even if they are distorted and misrepresented) specifically for non-white subjectivities whose heroes in the present are absent. Central to remembering World War II resistance demonstrated through the Japanese American incarceration camps and the history of the no-no boys is the important process of reheroization and remasculation for Asian American men who are implicated by stereotypical representations as effeminate, weak and stripped of agency as a "model minority." I argue the political significance of these men would be less effective,

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<sup>47</sup> Jessica Hagedorn, ed., *Charlie Chan is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1993); Laureen Mar, "Resistance," in *Charlie Chan is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*, ed. Jessica Hagedorn (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1993); Shawn Wong's *American Knees* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1995).

perhaps even irrelevant if their reheroization did not accompany a process of remasculating their emasculating representations within the present.

This process of reheroizing and remasculating Asian American men, however, through the legacy of the no-no boys has served to simultaneously apoliticize and ahistoricize Asian American women who remain absent and missing from a narrative centered on Asian American male heroism. In the examples of Mar's short story and Wong's novel, women are indifferent or unaware of the significance Asian American history has towards Asian American subjectivity in the present. In many ways the women serve as an obstacle for men seeking to reclaim histories of resistance. At the same time Asian American women are deliberately constructed as assertive, challenging their stereotypical representations as passive and submissive. Their assertive stance in the present, demonstrating a new Asian American female modernity, counters a need to hold onto a historical past, which works against their assumed progress. As Asian American men search for their heroes, a missing heroism in the present, Asian American women assert their new subjectivity and independence. They are in a sense their own heroines.

The imagery of heroism is utilized throughout this dissertation in rethinking the exclusive constructions of patriotism that produces white American heroism against the villainy of Asian enemies. These images are reproduced in popular celebrations of World War II in which the recurring imagery of Pearl Harbor's bombing by Japan creates a powerful motivation for real Americans to unite through American sensibilities of sacrifice, loyalty and patriotism. Asian

Americans are written out of this narrative of American heroism because they look like the enemy, which triggers both physical and symbolic violence in the name of American patriotism. While I am not seeking simply to replace or reinscribe narratives of hero-worshipping, I am seeking to understand the process for how we create meaning in our use of history that challenges the implications of singular narratives of World War II within our popular celebrations. I am interested in the process of reheroization that helps us understand the reasons behind why Americans of color have resisted a war that is celebrated for promoting freedom. This process is critical in helping reshape how we think about our past in the present.



## CHAPTER ONE

### JAPANESE AMERICAN AND BLACK SOLIDARITY: READING RESISTANCE IN JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION NARRATIVES

My best friend was Roland, a young Japanese child, the same age. I would never forget, Mr. Chairman, never forget, because the moment is burned indelibly upon this child's memory, six years of age, the day the six-by trucks came to pick up my friend. I would never forget the vision of fear in the eyes of Roland, my friend, and the pain of leaving home.

My mother, bright as she was, try as she may, could not explain to me why my friend was being taken away, as he screamed not to go, and this six-year-old black American child screamed back, 'Don't take my friend.'

-- Ron Dellums, *The Total Community*

(in *Only What We Could Carry*)<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1 Introduction

Under the banner cry of "Double Victory," signifying a dual war against fascism abroad and racism at home, World War II offered a unique opportunity for Americans of color to confront the hypocrisy of segregated America as they fought to defend freedom across seas.<sup>2</sup> However, America's history of their Japanese American incarceration camps has been conveniently and purposely

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Dellums, *The Total Community*, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Takaki includes the letter written by James G. Thompson to the *Pittsburgh Courier* in January 31, 1942. A cafeteria worker who later joined the army, Thompson writes, "The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great

forgotten against the horrific concentration camps of Nazi Germany. In *An Absent Presence* (2001), Caroline Chung Simpson observes what was at stake for America in remembering the camps arguing that the incarceration history “threatened to undermine the reputation of U.S. democracy because the internment exposed the arbitrariness of the very enterprise of national history and the myth of exceptionalism that history sustains.” Thus the denial of civil rights as well as the documented inhumane conditions under which Japanese Americans were forced to live has been silenced juxtaposed with celebrations of World War II’s victory within popular culture. The context and circumstances of actual camp life are stifled through the production (and reproduction) of a distorted version of camp memory focusing on its “positives.” Observing an absence of media coverage about the camps, Simpson comments, “One of the few featured articles on the internment appeared toward the end of the war period in a March 1944 edition of *Life* magazine, and in it the emphasis was on the functional normative aspects of camp life and the celebration of the spirit of many Japanese Americans’ loyalty to the nation.”<sup>3</sup> Problematically, this celebration overlooks the turbulence and resistance within the camps.<sup>4</sup>

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conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within.” Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>4</sup> See Densho Digital Archives <http://www.densho.org/archive/>. There were ten prison camps: Gila River, Granada (Amache), Heart Mountain, Jerome,

As historians and scholars have attempted to resituate the significance of the camps as a violation of civil rights, the history of Japanese American incarceration has been documented in which other Americans of color remain absent from its narrative. The absence of voices, specifically in the most visible and politically vocal of U.S. minority groups—Black Americans, further add to racial tensions in the present. While the racial animosity toward Japanese “faces” post-Pearl Harbor was not committed exclusively by the white community, as Blacks even other Asians participated in verbal and physical violence toward “enemy” Japanese, the heightened racism also triggered sympathetic responses.

Elaine Kim observes we rarely hear the voices of Black Americans opposed to internment that “stood, practically alone and certainly at no direct gain to themselves, against the abrogation of Japanese Americans’ civil rights during World War II.”<sup>5</sup> Drawing from this lack of historical representation, this chapter suggests ways we can rewrite exclusive narratives of the past that motivate racial groups into reaching out to other racial communities within the present. My purpose in locating a Black American presence with Japanese American incarceration narratives aims to disrupt the binaries that reduce this history to Japanese / Japanese American (victims) versus white American (victimizers). The inclusion of Black Americans intentionally complicates a distorted, misrepresented and complex story that typically ends in a debate “for”

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Manzanar, Minidoka, Poston (Colorado River), Rohwer, Topaz (Central Utah) and Tule Lake.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Kim, “At Least You’re Not Black,” 206.

or “against” Japanese American incarceration as either a national security solution or as a violation of civil rights problem. Although it is a history beginning with racism, the ending is of resistance and an emerging consciousness of racial solidarity.

This chapter asks how do we read intersecting performances of resistance when the effort is made to keep groups apart by racially codifying struggles and histories. Black Americans were present shedding tears as they watched their neighbors forced to leave, offering support as visitors to the detained prisoners, and remained alongside their spouses inside the camps.<sup>6</sup> These moments of racial solidarity are rooted in discreet performances of resistance in navigating the policing of Jim Crow and America’s concentration camps. My work relies greatly on Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Race Rebels* and his rethinking the significance of “everyday forms of resistance at work and in public space,” by the black working class. While he notes these acts of resistance have “been largely ignored by chroniclers of black politics and labor activism,” Kelley argues, “These daily acts often inform organized political movements.” Located in “everyday strategies of resistance,” the political is in the performance of resistance where seemingly powerless working class blacks “maintain and define a sense of racial

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<sup>6</sup> Claire Gorfinkel, ed., *The Evacuation Diary of Hatsuye Egami* (Pasadena: Intentional Productions, 1995), 21. See also Ron Dellums, *Total Community*, 33-34. See also Paul R. Spickard, “Injustice Compounded: Amerasians and Non-Japanese Americans in World War II Concentration Camps,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5.2 (1986), 6. Spickard documents, “Among those imprisoned were at least fourteen hundred intermarried Japanese Americans, a few of their non-Japanese spouses, and at least seven hundred people of mixed racial ancestry.” Elaine Black Yoneda, Statement to the Commission, 154.; Elaine Kim, “At Least You’re Not Black.”

identity and solidarity.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly to Kelley, this chapter examines “everyday strategies of resistance” performed by Japanese Americans and Black Americans covertly (sometimes overtly) in support of each other acting against the security of hegemonic performances of patriotism. My use of racial solidarity is not aimed in defining blackness, but in recognizing an emerging (not yet defined) alternative shared racial consciousness of two different communities demonstrated by Japanese Americans and Black Americans. While it is not my goal to prove that more Black Americans opposed the incarceration than supported it or to map out larger trends of how much opposition there was to incarceration within the Black community, my interest is in those that did through everyday performances of resistance on the job as black stewards, as visitors to those incarcerated and in solidarity as fellow prisoners. At the same time, I am also interested in moments of racial solidarity performed by Japanese Americans protesting Jim Crow segregation of Black Americans. These significant moments of racial solidarity are ignored through the exclusive constructions of narratives focusing on the victimization of Japanese Americans. Despite the hostile aftermath of Pearl Harbor and an American hegemony threatening both Black and Japanese Americans into demonstrating their Americanness through proof of loyalty, many protested through performances of resistance against each other’s racial oppression. These courageous men and women who risked their freedom through dangerous performances of cross-racial solidarity are often dismissed as

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<sup>7</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels*, 4-5.

insignificant compared with the visibility and achievements of later larger political movements post-World War II. I argue these moments of racial solidarity are important, even if they do not represent larger trends of Black opposition to Japanese American incarceration or Japanese opposition to Jim Crow. They are important because of the conscious decision to record or include them within larger memoirs or narratives about World War II injustice in America. In demonstrating a shared history of racial exclusion and resistance by Japanese Americans (in American prison camps) behind barbed wire and Black Americans (within Jim Crow) behind “for coloreds only” signs, this chapter locates a history of racial solidarity as a model for racial solidarity in the present.

## **1.2 America’s Racial War**

In her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Maya Angelou writes, “A person unaware of all the factors that make up oppression might have expected sympathy or even support from the Negro newcomers for the dislodged Japanese. Especially in view of the fact that they (the Blacks) had themselves undergone concentration camp living for centuries in slavery’s plantations and later in sharecroppers’ cabins. But the sensations of common relationship were missing.”<sup>8</sup> Angelou’s astute observation of racism’s simultaneous ability to create and take away opportunity for two racial communities trying to survive contextualizes further the social structures that keep racial communities divided.

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<sup>8</sup> Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 1971). 178.

While Japanese Americans have always been racialized as non-white within the United States, their non-whiteness did not manifest itself more profoundly than when they were rounded up and forced into the horse stables, fairgrounds and racetracks of the incarceration camps. In *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (2000), Helen Zia notes a sudden dramatic immediate animosity toward Japanese Americans instigated in the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor:

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and seven hours later, Japanese planes turned the Philippines into a war zone. Suddenly China and the Philippines were important allies of the United States against Japan. Almost overnight, the much maligned Chinese and Filipino ‘rat-eaters,’ ‘monkeys,’ and ‘headhunters’ were praised as though they were much beloved—especially compared to Japanese. Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, *Time* magazine gave readers tips on how to distinguish between a Chinese ‘friend’ and Japanese ‘enemy,’ complete with photos.<sup>9</sup>

Instantly, Pearl Harbor not only delineated between Japanese and Chinese but also between “enemies” and “Americans” creating an opportunity for “real” Americans to perform their patriotism.

Founded in 1911, the US naval base known as Pearl Harbor is remembered only for what happened 30 years later in 1941 when it was attacked

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<sup>9</sup> Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 39. See also Lawson Fusao Inada, from *Only What We Could Carry*, “Editorials in the Wake of Pearl Harbor,” 11-32.

by Japan serving as the catalyst for the US's entry into World War II. Although the words "Pearl Harbor" describe a location in Hawaii, the words connote more than simply a geographical space. The contextualization of this image articulated again and again as the "attack on Pearl Harbor" has solidified its immortality within not only American history books but also American popular culture. The mere mention of Pearl Harbor conjures images of white American heroes against Asian enemies. For many Asian Americans (specifically the Japanese) the "Remember Pearl Harbor!" anthem affirms their racial exclusion from American society. In fact, nearly all Nisei and Issei narratives of their incarceration years either begin or return to the memory of Pearl Harbor as the moment when their lives would be forever changed. Most of the Nisei and Issei comment on Pearl Harbor as an obscure, puzzling and unfamiliar phrase but one that would prove haunting and permanent. The title of Jeanne Houston's first chapter "What is Pearl Harbor?" reflects on the question asked by a relative and her mother after the announcement was made "the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor."<sup>10</sup> Frank Emi's response to the news triggered the incredulousness of a Martian invasion in an Orson Welles "radio drama." He remembers, "I thought it was another drama like that, a dramatization of a war with Japan. . .they sure make it sound real."<sup>11</sup> Sumi Seo recalls a similar surreal response that turned starkly real and dangerous, "We learned about Pearl Harbor in the afternoon when our

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<sup>10</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away From Freedom: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 16.



Caucasian neighbor came by. He had a gun and he started shooting at my dad. He was yelling, 'You Japs started the war. You bombed Pearl Harbor!' Who knew where Pearl Harbor was? I didn't."<sup>12</sup>

Houston and other Japanese Americans would find out the significance Pearl Harbor would play in their lives. About two months later, on February 19, 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 removed all persons of Japanese ancestry along the West Coast quickly stealing the freedom of many Americans uprooting their families, homes and jobs. While Jim Crow remained outside of the prison camps, Japanese Americans were undergoing their own "Jap crow."<sup>13</sup>

With the increase in Nisei and Issei memoirs about their experiences, however, years of repression and silence triggered by the humiliation of these years have finally been broken exposing what really happened within the American "prison camps." Beginning with the early memoirs in the late seventies of *Farewell to Manzanar* to the more recent memoirs of Mary Matsuda's *Looking Like the Enemy* (2005), Toyo Suyemoto's *I Call to Remembrance* edited by Susan B. Richardson (2007), Yasutaro Soga's *Life Behind Barbed Wire* (2008) to name a few, this history is still clearly relevant. At seventy years of age, Mary Matsuda confesses she was finally able to write down and document her story

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*. See also Jason Morgan, "'No Jap Crow': Japanese Americans Encounter the World War II South" *The Journal of Southern History* 73.1 (2007).

explaining, “For most of my life I was afraid to deal with those years of repressed shame and anger.”<sup>14</sup>

These memoirs have been instrumental in shattering the myths of these camps ranging from a propagated “military necessity” to an extension of the government’s benevolence. Houston’s *Farewell to Manzanar*, a memoir of her incarceration years at Manzanar Relocation Center during World War II, one of the earliest memoirs documenting the incarceration of Japanese Americans, is eerily reminiscent of Richard Wright’s description of the run-down and infested kitchenettes. In his photo illustration *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), Wright captures in graphic detail what he witnesses in the overcrowded run-down tenements of Northern housing known as “kitchenettes.” He writes, “The kitchenette is our prison, our death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks. The kitchenette, with its filth and foul air, with its one toilet for thirty or more tenants, kills our black babies so fast that in many cities twice as many of them dies as white babies.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the memoir’s subtitle “A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment”

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Matsuda, *Looking Like the Enemy: My Story of Imprisonment in Japanese-American Internment Camps* (Troutdale: NewSage Press, 2005); x. Toyo Suyemoto, *I Call to Remembrance*, ed. Susan B. Richardson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Yasutaro (Keiho) Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai’i Issei* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wright *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1941), 106-107.

conjugates the need to legitimize her story evoked in Black slave narratives of the past.<sup>16</sup> Houston documents the unsanitary condition in vivid detail of food spoiling from the summer heat causing vomiting and diarrhea known as “the Manzanar runs.”<sup>17</sup> These images of the foulness of latrines whose “floor was covered with excrement, and all twelve bowls were erupting like a row of tiny volcanoes” create very impressionable images contrasting to the suggestions that Japanese Americans were benefiting from their evacuation.<sup>18</sup> The lack of privacy in the latrines absent of an enclosed door and the open showers was compounded by an inability to secure any type of privacy as families endured the sounds of humanity in their twenty by sixteen feet ceiling-less living spaces. Mary Matsuda recalls:

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<sup>16</sup> Historically many slave narratives included the phrase “Written by himself/herself” as a means of distinguishing authenticity of the author’s work. David W. Blight explains, “Ex-slaves were constantly under suspicion about the veracity of their stories and the authenticity of their writing. Some of the more famous narratives, such as Sojourner Truth’s (1837), were narrated through an amanuensis, since the author was illiterate. Many slave narratives were published with letters serving as endorsements from important white abolitionists, attesting to the authenticity of the author’s work – Lydia Maria Child for Harriet Jacobs, and William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips for Frederick Douglass. And many narratives include the phrase in their titles, “Written by Himself” or “Herself.” David W. Blight, “The Slave Narratives: A Genre and a Source,” *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*. Accessed June 29, 2012. <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/literature-and-language-arts/essays/slave-narratives-genre-and-source>.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 53. Mary Sakaguchi also recalls the rotten food and lack of hygiene at Manzanar in a comical way. “The food was so bad, we called it ‘SOS’ food—Same Old Slop. Everybody would get diarrhea. We called that the ‘Manzanar Twins’—Diar and Rhear. Everybody had the twins.”

<sup>18</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 30-31.

While we could not see our neighbors, we could hear everything that went on anywhere in the barrack regardless of the time of day or night. We could hear family quarrels, babies crying, laughter, hushed giggles, and at night snoring, coughing, and grinding teeth. I was mortified as I gradually realized that nighttime moans, sighs, and repetitious thumps meant that some couple was having sexual intercourse.<sup>19</sup>

Toyo Suyemoto remembers other revolting aspects at Topaz Relocation Center such as the pervasive “strong animal odor.” Trying to stay somewhat hopeful, she explains, “At least we could tell ourselves, we were better off than other people residing along the center edge of the racetrack. There, the horse stalls had been built right on the ground and were infested by strange insects, as well as rats and mice.” Adding to the ruthless conditions of the camps hastily assembled at horse tracks, stables and fairgrounds, families had to endure the shifting temperatures of “one-hundred to one hundred fifteen-degree heat” to the freezing cold, to the “unpredictable dust storms.”<sup>20</sup> Matsuda recalls, “Fainting was a common occurrence. Some people showed concern when someone fainted, others did not unless it was a relative. The extremely hot climate and the strange, controlled environment of the camp added to everyone’s agitation. People complained everywhere, every day.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mari Matsuda, *Looking Like Enemy*, 48-49.

<sup>20</sup> Susan B. Richardson, *I Call to Remembrance*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Mari Matsuda, *Looking Like Enemy*, 56.

Understated in our memories of these camps is the violence (both real and symbolic) as a method of policing and forcing compliance. Matsuda recalls her father's description of a man who was shot by a guard after "he was gathering some scrap lumber near the fence to take home and make some furniture for his family." Matsuda's father explains, "The guard reportedly ordered him to stop, but he didn't and started to run away. So the guard shot him. People say the man was shot from the *front*, not the back. . . Papa-san added, 'I heard that at Topaz apparently an old man was shot when he tried to prevent his puppy from escaping under the barbed-wire fence.'"<sup>22</sup> These random acts of violence were accompanied by responses to riots and protests that took place in such camps as Manzanar, Poston, Minidoka and Tule Lake and beginning at Santa Anita.

At Manzanar, riots were the result of "social unrest" and tensions instigated when "members of the pro-American Japanese-American Citizen League (JACL)" began giving names of "so-called 'troublemakers'" to camp administrators. While this took place at many of the camps, the riot at Manzanar was most brutal. After Harry Ueno first accused white guards of stealing "sugar and meat" from the prisoners food allotment, Ueno was then targeted for having beaten a JACL member. Ueno's arrest triggered a mass protest of an "anti-JACL crowd" demanding Ueno's release. Ueno remembers, "They had maybe thirty-six soldiers with guns lining up in there behind the sandbags. One of the sergeants

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 126-127; The puppy was a stray dog that had entered the camps (See insert title); Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 75.

was saying, 'Remember Pearl Harbor! Hold Your line!'. . .The captain was excited. He was walking all over yelling, 'Remember Pearl Harbor! Remember Pearl Harbor!'"<sup>23</sup> In the end, the additional troops called for maintaining security "opened fire, killing two internees and seriously wounding nine others." Sue Kunitomi remembers, "One boy who was killed was eighteen or nineteen. He had a brother in the service." She describes the ruthlessness of the assumed violation as, "I have a report of the ambulance driver about the night. He said both of the young men had already died by the time the ambulance got there. They were shot at close range in the back. The teacher who was walking the dog told me more would have been killed if the machine gun hadn't jammed." For two weeks after the riot, martial law was imposed on the camp.<sup>24</sup> But the reports of the violence and protest were minimal and mocked through distortions of media characterizations. Sohei Hohri explains, "The papers had a report that the rioters were trying to enter into the bedrooms of the white teachers. They had cartoons: 'I predge arregiance to the frag' with the fingers crossed behind the back."<sup>25</sup>

The lack of attention to the outright violence is overshadowed by the continued symbolic violence Japanese Americans had to face day in and day out behind barbed wire and under the constant watch of armed guards. Toyo Suyemoto recalls, "The barbed wire fences and the sentry towers around our

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<sup>23</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 76-78.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

enclosure testified to our detention.”<sup>26</sup> All of the incarceration narratives comment on the intimidation while recognizing the contradiction in how these camps were propagated as “protecting” Japanese Americans from the societal animosity and violence directed toward them post-Pearl Harbor. Houston recalls how she initially was duped stating, “They had all heard stories of Japanese homes being attacked, of beatings in the streets of California towns. They were as frightened of the Caucasians as Caucasians were of us. Moving, under what appeared to be government protection, to an area less directly threatened by the war seemed not such a bad idea at all.”<sup>27</sup> Their realities were quite different once they arrived at the camps under the constant watch of surveillance with all actions closely monitored. In *Voices From the Camps* (1994), Larry Dane Brimner writes:

Everywhere there was supervision. Religious services were monitored for fear they might be used for propaganda. . . . Armed military police patrolled the perimeters of the assembly centers and manned the guard towers, while an internal police force composed of deputized evacuees took care of matters inside the barbed wire. . . . visits to the camps were controlled, as they are in prison. Some visitors arrived with cakes and pies, only to have them cut in half to ensure that they contained no weapons or contraband. Some assembly centers permitted evacuees and visitors to speak only

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<sup>26</sup> Susan B. Richardson, *I Call to Remembrance*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 17.

through a wire barrier. At others, each family was issued only one visitor's permit a week, and the visit was limited to thirty minutes.<sup>28</sup>

Mary Sakaguchi Oda remarks about the contradictions of the government's protection asking, "There are some. . . who say that we were there for our protection. If so, why were the guns pointed toward us rather than away from us?"<sup>29</sup>

The underlying disbelief that Japanese Americans "suffered" or were wronged in any way stems from both the silencing of what happened inside the camps with the distortion of images and memories highlighting Japanese / Japanese Americans as "happy campers." This construction of a false contentment was used similarly to depict slaves in the post-bellum period as "happy slaves" perpetuated through the caricatures of the "carefree Sambo" or "happy darkies." The documentary, *Ethnic Notions* (1986), traces Black caricatures and stereotypes perpetuated within American popular culture used to both control slaves while justifying slavery and the perceived inferiority of Black Americans. Historian Barbara L. Frederickson describes the strategic perpetuation of happy slave images loyal to their kind masters within popular culture as reinforcing a mythological plantation life as "a kind of paradise."<sup>30</sup> In

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<sup>28</sup> Larry Dane Brimner, *Voices From the Camps: Internment of Japanese Americans During World War II* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1994), 44.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>30</sup> "Ethnic Notions transcript," accessed June 14, 2012, <http://newsreel.org/transcripts/ethnicno.htm>.



similar ways, the racism, pain, humiliation of Japanese American “Internment” is distorted by perceptions suggesting Japanese Americans were better off inside the camps than outside. This distortion of memory is offset with celebrations of World War II and “business as usual” images captured within the prison camps of children going to school, women doing laundry, kids laughing, and men at ease. The pictures do not show how the days were met with boredom and monotony. Suyemoto comments, “As the days and weeks merged into routine, a pattern evolved from the daily rising, eating, sleeping, and enduring the inconveniences of our stable-room existence in the Tanforan Assembly Center. Little by little we adapted to the restriction of our narrow living quarters.”<sup>31</sup> Robert S. Saito remembers:

The young men feel oppressed, with their freedom taken away, and helpless because they are imprisoned with family members, unable to do anything about it. Afraid that the soldiers will harm their parents and family if they revolt, the young men spend days and days of wandering around the camp like rats in a cage, talking to other men of their same age, building up their hatred for being imprisoned because they are Japanese Americans.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Susan B. Richardson, *I Call to Remembrance* 44.; Ellen Levine explains, “the fight against boredom and loneliness was constant. Some children and teenagers say they had ‘fun’ in camp, free from the accustomed family discipline. But for most it was a paper-thin veneer of fun covering the pain and stress.” Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Robert S. Saito, *My Life in Camps During the War and More* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2006), 9.

Still how do we reconcile the happy images of kids going to school or sledding on the hills? We rarely hear if ever the ingenuity of those in the camps who built furniture and made a small room livable through “scraps of lumber,” of schools taught by incarcerated teachers who saw children who needed to be educated, or the punishment received by the children “caught riding homemade sleds on a hill just outside of a proposed Army fence line.”<sup>33</sup>

### **1.3 Sites of Resistance: The Back of the Bus, Our Homes and Our Memories**

Incarcerated at eighteen years of age at the Gila River prison camp, Amy Hiratzka comments, “all I want is not any reparations for what happened. I just want to work towards the fact that this doesn’t happen to anyone again. I accepted the \$20,000 for my daughter. I think of the blacks. I think of American Indians. Their plight has been just a chronic series of ups and downs and unfair

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<sup>33</sup> Toyo Suyemoto writes, “We attend to the interesting details of establishing schools, a library, and livable quarters and admire the often-ingenuous survival techniques of camp residents.” Ibid., xxxv. “The need for stabilizing influence of schools was recognized by a group of recent graduates from the universities in the Bay Area. After an exchange of suggestions, I and the other graduates met to discuss the possibility of establishing a high school in the assembly center with a standard high school program. . . To the amazement of the volunteer evacuee teachers, five hundred high school students registered for classes on the first day even though we could not assure them that our courses could be accredited.” Ibid., 51. The word of the teaching got to the outside and “outside schools began to send in discarded textbooks, and these were gladly received and used.” Ibid., 52; Frank T. Inouye, “Immediate Origins of the Heart Mountain Draft Resistance Movement,” in *Remembering Heart Mountain: Essays on Japanese American Internment in Wyoming*, ed. Mike Mackey (Casper: Mountain States Lithographing, 1998), 122-123.

treatment, lack of justice.”<sup>34</sup> Contemplating the insignificance of her reparation’s award compared with “what happened,” Hiratzka’s choice to align her unjust experiences with that of Blacks and American Indians shatters a perception of racial ethnocentrism. Hiratzka, however, was not the only Japanese American to contemplate their racial positioning by aligning Black Americans’ racial exclusions with their own. These moments of cross-racial reflection resurface in some incarceration narratives, but remain neglected by scholars of “internment” history because these interactions seem tangential even trivial to the larger narrative of Japanese American injustice. I would argue, however, a discussion of Black American inclusion within Nisei and Issei narratives offer insight into the ways Japanese Americans articulated not only race but also a politics of resistance rooted in racial solidarity with racially excluded Americans of color in which a reflection, question, observation about Black Americans becomes synonymous to a reflection, question, observation about *race*. While this is not to suggest there were not racial tensions between Japanese Americans and Black Americans, my goal is to focus on racial connections.

Mary Tsukamoto, a Japanese American from Florin, California incarcerated with her husband Al in the Jerome Relocation Camp in Arkansas recalls her reaction towards the shocking treatment of black passengers differing from her treatment as a Japanese American. Allowed to temporarily leave the confines of her incarceration, she observes the blatant discrimination against black passengers on the bus. Tsukamoto recalls:

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<sup>34</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 202.

Amy Murayama and I were chosen as delegates to represent Denson YWCA at this conference. What an eye opening experience it was for us, victims of racial discrimination, to travel far into the deep South. We learned first hand about two centuries of degradation of blacks that was still taking place in wartime America of 1943. The bus ride was shocking. We could not believe the bus driver's tone of voice as he ordered black passengers to stand at the back of the bus, even though there were many unoccupied seats in the front. . . We were relieved but had strange feelings; apparently we were not 'colored.'

As Tsukamoto reflects on her privileged position compared with Black Americans her awareness of racial oppression is intensified as similar "victims of discrimination."<sup>35</sup> My interest in the inclusion of this scene recognizes Tsukamoto's ability to move beyond the comfort of her temporary freedom to comprehend the extent of another race's continued imprisonment. As she explains the conflicting sensations of being both "relieved" and "strange" not viewed as "colored," her subjectivity, from a space of marginalization, simultaneously allows her to internalize this paradox knowing that she and other Japanese / Japanese Americans remained in prison camps, monitored by guards and enclosed behind barbed wire because they were viewed as "colored." Her descriptions of these few days of release intensify as she recognizes the continued contradictions of freedom and constraint revealing the sham in

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Tsukamoto and Elizabeth Pinkerton, *We the People: A Story of Internment in America* (Elk Grove: Laguna Publishers, 1988).

celebrating liberation narratives that remain only theoretical as she explains, “The National YWCA leaders were triumphant that we could all meet together. This was a historic step forward for black and white YWCA leaders to meet. But, never once did we eat together at a luncheon or banquet because the black delegates could not eat with us! My heart was heavy and sad to know the deep shame of hatred and prejudice in America.”<sup>36</sup> Tsukamoto’s inclusion of a seemingly trivial moment in her incarceration frames the emergence of a racial consciousness rooted in a space of racial solidarity. Her temporary freedom seems insignificant contrasted with an enduring space of racism still occupied by Black Americans affecting her positionality as a freed prisoner. Her resistance, a sort of quiet indignation, triggers a memory not of freedom but of racial restriction.

As Japanese Americans found themselves in this space in-between, not considered “colored” in most Jim Crowed public spaces, some performed their support of Black Americans’ racial exclusion by challenging not only Jim Crow but also whites who enforced it. Catherine Embrey Harris explains her husband’s surprise when Blacks were only permitted to ride in the back of the bus in the South. Although she recalls her awareness of Jim Crowed movies and restaurants in Virginia, she recalls their busses were “‘interstate’ and integrated.”<sup>37</sup> She explains her husband and other Nisei’s reactions to the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Embrey Harris, *Dusty Exile: Looking Back at Japanese Relocation During World War II* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1999), 117.

segregated buses explaining, “The neighboring towns accepted them [Nisei] as ‘white, ‘but they often gave bus drivers a hard time by insisting on sitting in the rear when seats were available or getting into fights with the driver when he wouldn’t stop for Negroes along the bus route.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Paul Takemoto, who served in the U.S. Army writes of his awareness to racial segregation and the treatment towards Black Americans. In an interview with his son, Takemoto is asked if he was aware of segregation. Remembering the Jim Crowed buses, Takemoto recalls, “Oh sure. If we went on weekend pass, to, say, New Orleans, we’d have to go by bus, and at the bus station the restrooms would have signs for whites and coloreds,” Still further he recalls, “The blacks had to sit behind that panel. . . One time the bus driver came back. He said, ‘You boys have to sit up front.’ He didn’t want us sitting with the blacks. We said, ‘No, we like it here.’ This made him angry. He said, ‘If you don’t come to the front I’m not moving this bus.’ We said fine, and just sat there. [Laughs.] Eventually he got tired of waiting—he had to keep a schedule—so he went back to the front and drove off.”<sup>39</sup>

In both of these two memories the back of the bus is reconsidered not as a space of exclusion but as a site of resistance as the Nisei men are empowered by aligning with Blacks while rejecting whiteness. Despite the conciliation that Nisei were “accepted” as white (only in Jim Crowed spaces) their refusal to align themselves with whites debunks the assumption that Asians embrace the

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Takemoto, *Nisei Memories: My Parents Talk about the War Years* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 117.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Takemoto, *Nisei Memories*, 86-87.

“honorary white” designation.<sup>40</sup> The rejection of whiteness is demonstrated through strategies of resistance performed by Japanese Americans “insisting on sitting in the rear” or refusing to move to the front of the bus.

The example of Don Seki’s resistance on Jim Crowed busses, a volunteer for the 442<sup>nd</sup>, demonstrates not only his antipathy towards segregation and participation in defying it but also locates a mutual space of resistance as Blacks also aligned themselves with Japanese Americans. He recalls:

Downtown the black people were segregated. Ach, we were sick. We don’t have segregation in Hawaii, so we felt real bad, you know. White water fountain, black water fountain, upstairs for the blacks in the theater, back of the bus.

We had an orientation. Our colonel says, ‘This is Mississippi. The South. For the whites. Not for the blacks. But you, you’re right in the middle. You could go anywhere you prefer.’ But on the bus they told us not to go in the black section. To spite them, we used to ride in the back. The busman stops and he says, ‘Get up front.’ We just stayed. We said, ‘Damn it, we’re going to stay.’ The blacks don’t say anything.

We made a lot of trouble. They’d never seen us kind of guys before. We were strange people. We were there one year. We were sure glad to get out of that place, Mississippi.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Asians/Asian Americans are often referred to as having an “honorary white status.” See Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

Similarly, Seki found little comfort in his privilege over the segregation of Black Americans. Defying the orders of both his colonel and the bus driver, Seki shares that he and other Japanese American soldiers intentionally chose to demonstrate their solidarity with Black Americans by sitting with them in the back of the bus. Later as Seki ponders the paradox of his military service, he recalls how Black Americans also performed their support of Japanese Americans explaining, “There were a lot of troops, white, black, us. We were fighting with the white guys, and the blacks came to help us. The whites were fighting us because they think we’re dirt, you know.”<sup>42</sup> Significantly, neither Black nor Japanese Americans are positioned as the primary victims. Both are represented on the receiving end of discrimination while both participate in performances of resistance rooted in the common linkages of racial solidarity.

The resistance of Tsukamoto, Takemoto, and Seki serve simultaneously to disrupt the perception of Asian passivity and compliance. The focus on victimization rather than as agents shaping and challenging their racial exclusion is the central narrative of Japanese America in World War II in general and Japanese American incarceration history in particular. These records documenting the assertive responses toward discrimination through demonstrations of racial solidarity help directly challenge this singular narrative

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<sup>41</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 124-125.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



remembered as the ‘silent generation.’”<sup>43</sup>

By aligning Japanese American struggles with Black Americans or interpreting Japanese American struggles as sharing a similar discrimination faced by Black Americans, Japanese Americans spoke with a type of courage in articulating the injustice imposed upon them. Dollie Nagai remembers, “Ever since the camp, I don’t like Arkansas, and I didn’t like anybody from Arkansas unless they were black, because I knew what they had gone through.” Years after her incarceration, during a specific moment in Arkansas, Nagai shares her reaction toward an instance when both her family and the “black fellow at the counter” didn’t get served. Observing, “He knew what I was feeling,” Dollie courageously confronts the waiter explaining: “I went up and said, ‘Are you prejudiced? We’ve been sitting here for the longest time and you’ve served everybody around us but us. If you’re prejudiced, just say so and we’ll walk out.”<sup>44</sup> These parallels of racial oppression faced by Black Americans were key in helping Japanese Americans understand the danger in their racialized positions. Theresa Takayoshi remembers her husband’s comments of suspicion toward white Americans were a response to the negation of Black Americans within society. Takayoshi recalls, ““But in Indianapolis they made a fuss if you were black. The population was one-third black. I remember my husband used to

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Matsuda’s reference to the “silent generation” is because “most of us did not speak about our experiences –even to our children.” Mary Matsuda, *Looking Like the Enemy*, x.

<sup>44</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 215-216.

say, you know, I worry about these guys who are always condemning the blacks because I wonder what they're saying about me behind my back."<sup>45</sup> Ben Tagami remembers, "In the camp, I felt like I was a "Jap," the ones they used to have signs for that said, "No Blacks, No Mexicans, No Japs, No Jews, No dogs allowed here. Those were common signs in those days. They had them all over the South. They always put in the dogs." While Tagami's use of this parallel is followed by a sort of self-degradation confessional explaining how "Camp was demeaning" and how he "felt like I[he]was a piece of shit, actually" there is a sort of agency when likening his struggles as similar to others all of whom are suffering with him.<sup>46</sup>

In many ways, this move from a more inclusive understanding of racial crossings towards the isolation of Japanese Americans into prison camps from the rest of American society also serves as a point of resistance. Capitalizing on contemporary society's assumed acceptance of diverse racial communities, the memories of Japanese American incarceration history serves to trigger an emotional response in how Americans were physically removed from their communities and its "melting pot." The everyday interactions with Black Americans and other racial communities such as Mexicans along with other Asian communities are told both in a matter-of-fact way and in reflection of childhood innocence free from contemplations of race and racial exclusion.

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<sup>45</sup> Theresa Takayoshi, "Oral History Interview," Interviewed by John Tateishi, in *And Justice For All* (New York: Random House, 1984), 221.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen Levine, *A Fence Away*, 63.

Susan Richardson recalls childhood friends, which includes Blacks alongside racial groups observing that in “grammar school” she “chummed, quarreled, sided with children of other nationalities” and explaining “Our home was often the gathering point for the children of other races, who were always welcomed by our parents.”<sup>47</sup> Jeanne Houston describes living in “a ghetto neighborhood that included many Asians, Blacks, Mexicans, and other white migrants from the south” reflecting on the experience removing barriers as she notes “we had ended up close to being social equals.”<sup>48</sup> And Amy Uno Ishii, incarcerated at Santa Anita then later at Heart Mountain, recalls the freedom she had growing up in East Los Angeles as the best years of her life stating, “I knew all the Indian, Mexican and black kids in the neighborhood, and they all knew me.”<sup>49</sup>

With the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans, the awareness of Black Americans’ racial segregation and exclusion triggered a racial consciousness that was previously absent. A draft resister Tak Hoshizaki stated, “I never thought about black people’s situation. . .until I hear their stories at McNeil—no money, no jobs, discrimination.”<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Tashiro’s ‘Wase

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<sup>47</sup> Susan B. Richardson, *I Call to Remembrance*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Amy Uno Ishii, “California State University, Fullerton Oral History Program,” Interviewed by Betty E. Mitson and Kristin Mitchell,” in *Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project*, ed. Aurthur A. Hansen (Westport: Meckler Publishing, 1991), 49.

<sup>50</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 169.

*Time!*: A Teen's Memoir of Gila River Internment Camp (2005), recalls being ridiculed by other teenagers who called him a "nigger" because of his dark skin. After the name calling and the teasing, Kenneth ponders this act by aligning a shared dehumanizing faced by both Black and Japanese Americans. He reflects, "Why did Tomato have to call me the 'N' word? . . . Didn't he know that 'nigger' is a word hated by the Negro people just as 'Jap' is by the Japanese people?"<sup>51</sup>

The inclusion of Black Americans within Japanese American memories of their incarceration offered an opportunity to both contextualize a shared racial exclusion and to demonstrate ways Black Americans aligned themselves with the injustice toward Japanese Americans. Despite the lack of solidarity that Maya Angelou previously observes, Japanese Americans documented ways Black Americans performed their support within the camps and on trains en route to the camps. Minoru Yasui, a Japanese American who spent two years in the Minidoka War Relocation Center, remembers interactions with Black American stewards who demonstrated their support despite the limitations of their job. He recalls, "Mostly, I guess, I remember we were allowed to have meals in the dining car, and the black stewards would indicate their sympathy toward us as though to say, without speaking, that they empathized with us."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Mary Tsukamoto observes, "The train ride itself was exciting, for many of us had

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<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Tashiro, *Wase Time!*: A Teen's Memoir of Gila River Internment Camp (Bloomington: Author House, 2005), 136.

<sup>52</sup> Minoru Yasui, "Oral History Interview," Interviewed by John Tateishi, in *And Justice For All* (New York: Random House, 1984), 75-76.

never been on such a long trip. We were impressed with the black waiters wearing white jackets who served us meals. They treated us with warmth and understanding and seemed to have a special sensitivity to our unjust treatment.”<sup>53</sup> Although Blacks porters and stewards were unable to communicate directly to Japanese Americans, the authors were made aware of their concern and sympathy. In a more daring scene describing the risk that a black porter took to help provide Harry with paper to write to his family under the watch of the military police, Harry Ueno “thirty four and the father of two children” incarcerated at Manzanar, remembers:

That night about nine o'clock, a porter came over and fixed the beds. We have to stand up on the side and wait for him. I asked the porter, ‘Could you get me a pencil and paper and a envelope? I want to write a letter to my family.’ He didn’t say nothing but he show with the eye where he going to put them. So after he fix the bed—MPs going to sleep in the bottom bunk; we sleep in the upper bunk—we wrote a letter to the camp. . . That black porter, he really take chance because even the bathrooms, they wouldn’t let us shut the door. The MP was standing right there.<sup>54</sup>

While these few moments of racial support demonstrated in a nod of sympathy or through the shedding of tears, they counter the singular narratives of this history that capitalized on the assumed absence of Black Americans and this important

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Tsukamoto, *We the People*, 120-121.

<sup>54</sup> Harry Ueno, “Oral History Interview,” Interviewed by John Tateishi, in *And Justice For All* (New York: Random House, 1984), 202.

act against civil rights that was directed towards Japanese Americans.

#### 1.4 The Kikuchi Diary

The *Kikuchi Diary: Chronicle from an American Concentration Camp* (1973) documents Charles Kikuchi's first four months of his World War II incarceration (from May through August 1941) revealing its impact on the consciousness of many young Japanese Americans grappling with their identities as marked Americans.<sup>55</sup> Most visibly within this diary compared with other Japanese American incarceration narratives is the frequency with which Black Americans are present (or referenced) serving as a racial answer to many Nisei questions about incarceration. As Japanese Americans find themselves negotiating between the tradition of the Issei and their experience as an "American," whether to endure or fight back, they often turn to find meaning in Black American histories of racial exclusion within the United States.<sup>56</sup>

As scholars have been motivated by the plentiful documentation provided by Charles Kikuchi, he has understandably remained the primary focus centering on a rare interethnic consciousness during this specific historical period. Matthew M. Briones draws upon the significance of his middle name applauding the anomaly of Kikuchi's racial consciousness writing:

Fittingly, given the meaning of his middle name—Tatsuro, or standing man—Kikuchi always stood tall for social justice and firmly against

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<sup>55</sup> John Modell, ed. *The Kikuchi Diary*.

<sup>56</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, Chapter Two "Shikata Ga Nai," 9-20.

xenophobic and racist assaults on individual liberties and group rights.

While a deep emotional involvement with African Americans remained the constant baseline in his life, one can infer from his organizational affiliations that he broadened his interracial concerns over time: Japanese American internees from the 1940s had as much in common with African American freedom fighters of the 1960s.<sup>57</sup>

While I do not necessarily disagree with Briones' conclusion of the sum of Kikuchi's life, the Tanforan diary provides a very different perspective, one that seems contradictory of this praise. Pre-internment, Kikuchi seems the anomaly, not for his racial consciousness but by his participation in xenophobic rhetoric toward other Japanese (specifically the Issei) following him through most of this diary. He professes agreement regarding a rumor to "lock up the Issei." He writes, "if they are spies, I don't see anything wrong with that. That's war."<sup>58</sup> His opinion of Black Americans or race relations strays away from a racial discourse turning into an objective recorder when they are mentioned. Indeed, Kikuchi's racial consciousness did not take place until much later, in the Gila Relocation Center and during his resettlement in Chicago. While there are hints of racial understanding within his Tanforan diary, he still participates in distancing himself from his race and other racial communities. For this reason the Tanforan diary seems less important than Kikuchi's Gila diary and his resettlement

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*, 233.

<sup>58</sup> John Modell, ed. *The Kikuchi Diary*, 45-46.

communications where Kikuchi had more interactions specifically with Black Americans that helped shape his racial consciousness. For Briones, however, the inclusion of the Tanforan months are critical for it provides a trajectory for measuring the growth of Kikuchi's racial consciousness that came to fruition in the Gila Relocation Center.

I am drawn to Kikuchi's Tanforan diary not because of the obvious record of his life but for the rich documentation of racially intersecting performances of Asian American and Black American communities revealed within this diary. My interest in the Tanforan journal, in particular, demonstrates an overlooked interethnic consciousness shared by several Asian American and Black Americans documented within this text who understood the linkages in their racial struggles. Problematically the attention toward Kikuchi alone overlooks the everyday performances of resistance by other Asian American and Black Americans as friends and visitors in the camps, who found agency in understanding the shared struggles of each other's racial oppression. My point in centralizing an intersecting racial consciousness outside of Kikuchi is to challenge our willingness to accept these histories as absent specifically during the World War II years. Moreover, Kikuchi's Tanforan diary is significant because it documents the suppression of coalitions between Asian American and Black American communities.

To begin with, Black Americans appear in Kikuchi's diary when discussion of Japanese Americans leads to questions about race. Kikuchi's friend, C.A, makes the connection of similarly shared racial struggles and the implications



Japanese Americans will face after the war by turning to the examples of “Negro history” post-Civil war.<sup>59</sup> Although we do not learn much about C.A. who appears as an anonymous figure, whose identity is dismissed as insignificant, C.A.’s racial consciousness allows him to link the struggles of Japanese Americans within a framework of minority racial struggles. Despite Kikuchi’s dismissing of race as a determining factor in justifying the incarceration camps, C.A. draws from historical racial inequities in helping to understand “Japanese problems.”

*May 13, 1942*

C.A. thinks that we are in for great disillusionment after the war. He sees no hope for any solution to the racial problems and points out the Negro history since the Civil War as the prime example. Somehow he persists in drawing a close parallel between the Negro and the Japanese problems; but I told him that I did not believe that there was any comparison. If any comparison was to be made, the Japanese in America are more closely identified with the Jewish people. Fear of both

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<sup>59</sup> In editing the diary, John Modell writes, “The names of persons mentioned in the edited texts who seem to me to have neither historical importance nor special importance to the young Kikuchi himself either have been given pseudonyms (where it has seemed necessary in order that the reader may be able to identify them from one mention to the next) or have been identified by initials only. (In some cases the original diary includes only initials.) The only names abbreviated are Japanese; to distinguish them, Caucasian names are always given in full, even if pseudonymous.” Even in Modell’s editorial liberties, he has decided that certain people are not as significant to Kikuchi as others. This admission supports my claims that the interactions between persons of color are often viewed as tangential or insignificant to the overarching themes of the diary and the centralizing of the main figure. I would argue, however, that these moments speak volumes to the privileging of historical memory and the erasing of significant moments of racial intersections. John Modell, ed. *The Kikuchi Diary*, 41. (from “A Note on the Editing)

groups has arisen from economic competition and, unlike the Negro, this motive has been stronger than any feeling of actual racial inferiority.”<sup>60</sup>

The debate engaged between Kikuchi and his friend mark what will be a frequent discussion of race and place for Japanese Americans within American society. C.A.’s subjectivity as a racialized minority mirrors other non-white subjects within the diary with the exception of the JACL and Kikuchi.<sup>61</sup> At a panel discussion entitled “What Should the Nisei Attitude as Christians Be towards the U.S. Government?” held by the College Fellowship, Kikuchi records Bill Sasagawa’s testimony inciting others within the camp pointing to the example of “Negroes [who] only get things because they fought for their rights.” Sasagawa offers an important moment of racial solidarity but is diminished by Kikuchi’s re-interpretation. First he explains:

Bill Sasagawa, who testified on the Tolan Committee in Los Angeles, was the only other person to speak up. He pointed out that the group was too complacent and that religion was not the only answer. He said that the Negroes only get things because they fought for their rights and we should do the same. He even went as far as to tell them about the Negroes who came back from the last war and returned to Chicago just in time to bear the brunt of discrimination which became bitter due to the fact that the Negroes had been brought in from the South during the war to handle

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<sup>60</sup> John Modell, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Ironically, despite Kikuchi sharing a pro-American agenda with the JACL, they differ on the means for proving their Americanness.

defense jobs. After the war the Caucasians made a determined effort to drive all Negroes out. The returning Negroes refused to turn in their guns, but use them instead to stand for their rights.<sup>62</sup>

Immediately after this journal entry, Kikuchi explains, “Bill did not mean to say that we should use guns, but that we should fight for what was our and we would if we really felt like Americans and believed in the democratic principles” not “to fight the government orders with physical actions. . .What a story this would have made for the Joint Immigration Committee and the American Legion to use as an argument for deportation!”<sup>63</sup> It is unsure if Kikuchi’s apologetics are a result from his position as a JERS (Japanese Evacuation and Relocation Survey) reporter. My suspicion is that it stems from both the scare of incarceration to his feelings of racial self-hatred instigated by an absence of positive Japanese or (Asian) identity earlier in his lifetime. In “Through the JERS Looking Glass,” a collection of essays from JERS reporters, Kikuchi reflects on his experience as part of the JERS project. He writes, “This process seemed to be acute and threatening because I did not have any exposure to the Japanese-American community until after college graduation.”<sup>64</sup> This absence of a Japanese American community

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<sup>62</sup> John Modell, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 113-114.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Kikuchi, “Through the JERS Looking Glass: A Personal View from Within,” in *Views from Within: The Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study*, ed. Yuji Ichioka (Los Angeles: University of California Resource Development and Publications, 1989), 180.

explains how he could view those within his community so negatively stating, “Sometimes when I hear Japanese being spoken I have an urge to shut the whole thing out as if I were in a nightmare experience. I don’t hate the Japanese here, but their conventional ways get me sometimes. Perhaps they would be better off if they were not so law-abiding. They should really let themselves go occasionally, but you can’t tell what is going on behind the Oriental mask.”<sup>65</sup>

Such blatant prejudiced comments explain Kikuchi’s positionality starkly contrasting from other racial communities captured within his diary. Kikuchi’s contemplations are interwoven with both ill feelings toward other Japanese and his attention toward other races as similarly unflattering or indifferent, what John Modell refers to as an “ethnic ambivalence.”<sup>66</sup> At times Kikuchi is outraged at the pejoratives used to denigrate Japanese Americans commenting, “I can’t blame the Nisei for being resentful when they read about ‘Jap soldier in U.S. uniform arrested!’ I do so myself.” But then his thoughts quickly shift as he participates in self-deprecating rhetoric toward Japanese vehemently stating how the bigoted article could implicate the minds of the young Nisei. He explains, “One of the dangers of this is that many of the Nisei are getting more race conscious than ever before because of this very thing—we are lumped together as disloyal Japs. . . Furthermore, the growing Japanesey attitudes among some of the Nisei are unhealthy.” While the expanding “race conscious” and “Japanesey attitudes” of

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<sup>65</sup> John Modell, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 97.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Nisei is disturbing to Kikuchi, it demonstrates how Nisei began comprehending their camp experience within a racialized lens.<sup>67</sup>

As Kikuchi serves as the point of opposition in degrading and mocking Issei and the Nisei, others are informed enough to align their racial plight with the racist histories inflicted against Black Americans. Racial alliances of resistance within the camp are created not by Kikuchi but by the influence of his diverse friends outside the Japanese American community. In reference to potentially contentious camp elections determining council positions, Kikuchi explains the JACL “don’t think that the Young Demos or any individuals should make an issue over civil rights at a time like this. This is an extremely shortsighted approach if ever there was one. My Negro and Jewish and Chinese friends are greatly concerned as they recognize what a dangerous precedent that they will be setting and they are already working or fighting it.”<sup>68</sup> Later his reaction toward a “statement trying to justify the evacuation” made by Colonel Bendetsen, one of the chief proponents of Japanese American incarceration, raises concerns prompted by his “Chinese, Negro, and Jewish friends.” Kikuchi records their challenging remarks stating, “The contradiction would be too obvious to ignore. Many of the American Chinese, Negroes and Jews can see that a dangerous precedent can be set, which could easily include them later if this thing is not handled democratically. Already my Chinese, Negro, and Jewish friends have

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 88.

made remarks about the possibility.”<sup>69</sup> Contrasting from Kikuchi’s typical opinionated recordings, these observations are recorded objectively. We know where his friends stand on racial relations but are unsure of Kikuchi’s stance as he removes himself from these conclusions. Even his father articulates an understanding of the implications of incarceration. Kikuchi writes that his Pop “doubted the promises of the Allies to give more equality to all races. He based his conclusion on the results of the last war, plus the treatment of the Japanese and Negroes in the U.S.”<sup>70</sup>

Importantly, the secondary figures in this diary, Kikuchi’s friends, family members and acquaintances are the ones to assert a positionality of resistance demonstrated in a racial solidarity absent in Kikuchi’s voice. Others utilize the example of the continued racial treatment towards Black Americans as a way of negotiating the current incarceration of the Nisei and Issei. In a lengthy discussion among his brothers and sisters about “how much democracy meant to us as individuals,” the discussion turns toward the exclusion of minority groups from participation in democracy. Kikuchi writes, “Jimmy suggested that the colored races of the world had reason to feel despair and mistrust the white man because of the past experiences. The treatment of minority groups even in this country is contradictory to democracy. Jack thought this was the reason why so many minority groups did not feel for democracy, because they have never had

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 197.

it.” While Kikuchi includes himself within some of the conclusions stating, “We did not know. . .or we hoped and believed” suggesting his leaning toward a racial consciousness, he also ends the recollection with an out of place comment that trivializing the discussion. He concludes his recording by stating, “Jack ate almost a whole box of crackers during the conversation.”<sup>71</sup>

While the majority of the diary centers on the Issei and Nisei within the camps, Black Americans share in vocalizing their support of those incarcerated as they were frequent visitors. As Kikuchi documents “The Negroes are coming down here in increasing numbers” as visitors to Tanforan, he also includes their performances of resistance demonstrated through words of solidarity. He writes:

Walt Gordon, Jr. the well known Negro football player at Cal, was also here today visiting Bobby O. and Joan N. Melvin Stewart introduced me to him. Melvin is also a Negro. When he saw all the Negroes around he said, ‘You know who are your real friends now. A lot of us are behind any movements that will fight this thing because we have had to face a lot ourselves and so are opposed to anything so un-American. The trouble with the Negroes is that we have been so involved in our problems that we didn’t see the danger of this war hysteria against the Japanese soon enough. It’s so impersonal with us, but when we actually see you people in camps, we go out mad as anything and want to do something about this great injustice because we know you Nisei are just as loyal as we are. The

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 184.

color of skin is no indication of loyalty—we can testify to that.<sup>72</sup>

Again Kikuchi records this moment matter-of-factly emotionally detached from the supportive display of racial solidarity. On one hand we could consider that Black Americans as visitors was more familiar than assumed.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, implicated by surveillance and censorship enforced by the guards and camp administration, Kikuchi must have understood not to cause a spectacle towards the diversity of racial visitors (see conclusion).

But the comments of racial solidarity by Melvin Stewart, Kikuchi's friend, along with the support of the other "Negroes" are an important missing link in Japanese American incarceration narratives that keeps Black Americans absent.<sup>74</sup> In fact, more Black Americans utilized rhetoric of racial solidarity than we assume understanding the incarceration of Japanese Americans as an indicator of their shared status as non-white or colored.

In what way does the silencing of support from other communities mythologize the incarceration's necessity? If this support is absent questioning of this history is minimal. If the support of Black Americans aligning their racial struggle with Japanese Americans' racial struggle is visible, it challenges the assumed benevolence of the camp. This silence, however, could not have

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

<sup>73</sup> Kikuchi In addition to Black American visitors, Kikuchi notes the Chinese who came with their Chinese buttons as well as Filipinos were guests. Note also the number of visitors was 7000. Ibid., 157.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*, 159.



worked without maintaining racialized images of Japanese Americans as foreign, dangerous, and threatening. In a sardonic observation of the Army's orders prohibiting soldiers from communicating with the internees, Kikuchi crystallizes a process of racially constructing Japanese Americans as un-American. He writes, "The Army evidently wants no inter-group friendship formed for fear that the soldiers will also see that we are not treacherous spies but average Americans." Again Kikuchi's detached observation informs the very real racial constructions of Japanese Americans during World War II that remain in the present. The construction of a visibly defined enemy marked as un-American insinuates suspicion while affirming Americanness as its contrast. Moreover, the historical constructions of Japanese Americans as un-American inform the ways Asian Americans in general are racially excluded within the present viewed as "perpetual foreigners."

### **1.5 Conclusion**

As Charles Kikuchi notes the increase in "Negro visitors" at the Tanforan Assembly Center, he documents significantly the specific measures taken by camp administration in policing the interactions between Japanese Americans and Black Americans. After Kikuchi's revelation, he vocalizes his antipathy toward the discovery of a notice he finds on the wall. He writes, "In checking up on the number of visitors at the gate, I was burned up by a notice I saw on the wall. The police chief has ordered that all Negro visitors be checked closely and their slips be kept in a separate file. Evidently they think that there is a great

danger of the Japanese stirring up the Negroes. (They call it race hatred.).”<sup>75</sup> At last we witness Kikuchi in a moment of outrage in which the evidence of prejudice against Japanese Americans and Black Americans is too great to dismiss through a reporter’s objectivity. This awareness seems to trigger a newfound willingness to articulate situations and circumstances through a racial lens, one that he previously either overcompensated for or had troubling acknowledging. In a moment of critical reflection from within barbed wire walls, he writes, “The injustices of evacuation will some day come to light. It is a blot upon our national life—like the Negro problem, the way labor gets kicked around, the unequal distribution of wealth, the sad plight of the farmers, the slums of our large cities, and a multitude of things.”<sup>76</sup>

Kikuchi’s encounter with the deliberate attempt to prevent Japanese Americans from interacting with Black Americans is critical not only in understanding a critical moment in his racial transformation but also the deliberate attempts at silencing alliances among Americans of color. The historical erasure of these obstructions both creates the perception racial communities did not support one another while maintaining segregated histories within the present. This chapter attempts to challenge the malevolence of historical erasures that sucks out the humanity in those marginalized. We can no longer accept that if persons of color are missing from our histories their absence

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<sup>75</sup> John Modell, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 157.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

was rooted in either their indifference to or their ignorance of social issues. We must challenge the structures that not only silence these histories but also impact the production of knowledge that allows us to passively accept absence as truth.

The framework of this chapter is aimed in redirecting the discussion of racial solidarities as a form of agency while challenging our willingness to accept the isolation of racial histories. The presence of other racial communities historically, however great or small, affects the formation of identity politics. During an era of Jim Crow (and Jap Crow), Japanese Americans and Black Americans understood their racial identities through their interpretation of the other group's racial marginalization from American society. Demonstrating this in a 1945 article for the *Militant*, Charles Jackson compels other Black Americans to stand in unity with Japanese Americans against their shared racial struggles:

Soon after the shooting stage of the war with Japan began, these citizens, in flagrant violation of their civil rights, were yanked from their farms and homes and were herded into virtual concentration camps, known officially by the polite name of relocation centers. This illegal repression was carried out by the law-enforcement agencies after a campaign by the capitalist press to whip up racial prejudice under the guise of national patriotism.

The real motivators, however, were a big-business outfits called the Associated Farmers, along with other reactionary interests which stand to profit—war or no war—by the elimination of competitors and by the persecution of a minority within the working class. . .

In addition to that, through our Negro organizations we must go to bat for a Japanese-American just as quickly as we would for another Negro. These people are obviously being denied their full citizenship rights just as we are. They are pictured in the capitalist press as toothsome, 'brown-bellied bastards' and are described by the capitalist commentators as 'half-man and half-beast.' This vicious type of prejudice indoctrination is familiar to every Negro.

The Japanese-American workers are not only our comrades in the world class struggle for socialist liberation, but they are also our brothers through oppression in this capitalist 'democracy'.

Let us not fail to rally to their side and fight back against the attacks of the common enemy!<sup>77</sup>

Undoubtedly while some Black Americans chose to participate in capitalizing upon the racially constructed foreignness of Japanese Americans, just as some Japanese Americans chose to sit as "honorary whites" in the front of the bus, there were those moved by the mutuality of their racial struggles. The excerpt above demonstrates Jackson's urgency in waking Black Americans up to the shared racial struggles as victims of racial denigrations justifying the removal of Japanese Americans' presence not only from society but also from the economy.

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<sup>77</sup> Charles Jackson, "Plight of Japanese-Americans," *Militant*, March 10, 1945 in *Fighting Racism in World War II: A Week-By-Week Account of the Struggle Against Racism and Discrimination in the United States During 1939 – 1945*, ed Fred Stanton (New York: Pathfinder, 1980), 423-425.

The erasure of intersecting racial histories is fueled also by the threat of contaminating pure racial histories meant for empowering singular racial communities. Does the inclusion of Black Americans (or other Americans of color) within a dominant history that largely involves the Japanese American community lessen our empathy or anger about why Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II? Conversely, does the support of Black Americans for Japanese Americans during the incarceration diminish Black identity and history? My response is an emphatic no! These intersecting histories not only strengthen these emotional responses but also create possibilities for understanding racial resistance, pride and solidarity. The negative implications for isolating racial histories is that it participates in mythologizing and erasing histories, the basis of our arguments against white power structures centered on mythologizing white American history at the expense of Americans of color.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **A COLLECTIVE VOICE OF DISSENT: JAPANESE AMERICAN AND BLACK AMERICAN DRAFT RESISTANCE DURING WORLD WAR II**

The members of the FPC unanimously decided at their last open meeting that until we are restored all our rights, all discriminatory features of the Selective Service abolished, and measures are taken to remedy the past injustices thru Judicial pronouncement or Congressional act, we feel that the present program of drafting us from this concentration camp is unjust, unconstitutional, and against all principles of civilized usage, therefore, WE MEMBERS OF THE FAIR PLAY COMMITTEE HEREBY REFUSE TO GO TO THE PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OR TO THE INDUCTION, IF OR WHEN WE ARE CALLED IN ORDER TO CONTEST THIS ISSUE.

-- Fair Play Committee Steering Committee, March 4, 1944<sup>1</sup>

I cannot accept the responsibility of taking the oath upon induction into military service under the present anti-democratic structure of the U.S. Army, and ask to be exempted from military training until such time that my contribution and participation in the defense of my country can be made on a basis of complete equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Emi, "Fair Play Committee: Frank Seishi Emi," in *Resistance* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2001), 104-105. The Fair Play Committee Steering Committee was inspired after a meeting was held at Heart Mountain among the men and women discussing how to respond to questions 27 and 28 (discussed later in this chapter). Kiyoshi Okamoto, a Nisei man around fifty years old, encouraged others to stand up for their rights and "not follow a policy of appeasement." Frank Emi recalls how Okamoto referred to himself as the "Fair Play Committee of One," which then became the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee led by Okamoto and Emi.

## 2.1 Introduction

In 1966, when boxing legend, Muhammad Ali adamantly stated "I Ain't Got No Quarrel With The VietCong. . .No VietCong Ever Called Me Nigger" he was both embraced and rejected by a country contesting the United States' "necessary" involvement in the Vietnam War. His words were controversial in many ways but most importantly because it signified his anti-draft position. Nearly forty years later, however, what was once viewed as an act of betrayal toward his country was celebrated in the recreation of his life story in the box office hit *Ali* (2001). In recreating this moment, Ali's act of resistance transcended him into a hero vindicating his earlier life, and a boxing career cut short as a consequence of his dissent. In a very poignant scene in the film, Asians abroad embrace Ali's heroism, a contrast from the isolation he receives from "Americans" at home. Problematically, the significance of Ali's story also functions to dehistoricize the histories of numerous draft resisters and voices of dissenters before him. As Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores observe, "today many Americans believe that refusing to join the Army and fight began during the

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest Calloway, the educational director for the United Transport Workers of America and a member of the COAJC (Conscientious Objectors Against Jim Crow). "Balks Call To Arms: Cites Jim Crow," *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 11, 1941 (Proquest); "Swear They Will Not Fight For Uncle Sam," *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 25, 1941 (Proquest).

Vietnam War.”<sup>3</sup> This in large part is due to public criticism of the Vietnam War but also in reclaiming the legacy of Muhammad Ali and the commercialization of his image and words within contemporary society.<sup>4</sup>

The representation of Vietnam as the dubious war while World War II serves as the righteous “Good War” silences voices of dissent and narratives that questioned World War II’s “necessity.” Sarah Jaffe sarcastically highlights the 2011 film, *Captain America*, centered on the transformation of a young man’s numerous rejections by the draft board into a super-American hero. The young, scrawny Steve Rogers makes the ideal candidate to experiment upon in becoming Captain America because of his persistence and willingness to do whatever it takes to risk his life for the greater cause of justice. Amid a diverse cast of soldiers, the film chooses to mythologize World War II’s legacy by recreating a fictitious landscape of racial harmony over the realities of segregation and racism. Jaffe notes the film’s uncritical appeal as a “decent, uncomplicated superhero movie set in a time most Americans look back on fondly as a decent, uncomplicated time in our history. The Nazis were evil,

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores, “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight it,” *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar/story.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “Muhammad Ali in media and popular culture,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad\\_Ali\\_in\\_media\\_and\\_popular\\_culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_in_media_and_popular_culture) (accessed June 8, 2012).



America was good, we fought them, we won.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the reproducing of World War II narratives positing U.S. heroism against Nazi Germany’s villainy coupled with recurring anthems of “Never forget Pearl Harbor” silence our memories of performances of dissent under the guise that *real* Americans were in favor of the war.

Twenty years before Ali hundreds of Black American and Japanese American draft resisters vocalized an unpopular radical dissension toward the U.S. involvement in World War II. While the stories of these Black Americans and Japanese Americans contrast in many ways, there are as many connections as there are tensions. As Blacks navigated through racist Jim Crow and Japanese Americans their incarceration in American prison camps, both protested their community’s racial exclusion by challenging America’s assumed righteousness in fighting fascism abroad that overlooked the racism at home.

While Americans of color remember World War II for its Double V campaign of “fighting abroad for democracy at home,” this memory often positions those that fought in the war overseas as owners of this double victory while dismissing the contributions made toward racial equality among those that fought “at home” against its policies toward Americans.<sup>6</sup> Central to our memories

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Jaffe, “Captain America, the Problems With Nostalgia and the Search For a Hero,” *AlterNet*, Last modified July 25, 2011. Accessed June 2, 2012. [http://www.alternet.org/story/151771/captain\\_america,\\_the\\_problems\\_with\\_nostalgia\\_and\\_the\\_search\\_for\\_a\\_hero?page=1](http://www.alternet.org/story/151771/captain_america,_the_problems_with_nostalgia_and_the_search_for_a_hero?page=1).

<sup>6</sup> “Make Democracy Real,” Says Double V Originator,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 18, 1942 (Proquest).

of Black Americans in World War II are the Tuskegee airmen and the example of Dorie Miller, an unknown mess attendant and “the first Negro hero of World War II,” lauded for his heroism during the attack on Pearl Harbor when he “downed four Japanese bombers.”<sup>7</sup> For Japanese Americans, the legacies of the 442<sup>nd</sup> / 100<sup>th</sup> regimental combat squads serve as the central figures for Asian American World War II celebrated heroism. While Miller, like other Black Americans in the Navy were “assigned to menial jobs,” his asserting a combative stance aligns itself with our social understandings of acceptable acts of patriotism.<sup>8</sup> Because patriotism is understood by how it is performed, it is interpreted by utilizing a masculinist discourse revealed in language of “sacrifice,” “honor,” and “bravery.” Miller, the Tuskegee airmen and the 442<sup>nd</sup>’s identities as “heroes” are reinforced by how they have *proven* their loyalty. Conversely because of the absence of a masculine performance of patriotism in the draft resister narrative, draft resisters become the hero’s antithesis—the visible cowards. While my aim does not seek to diminish the contributions of the Nisei 442<sup>nd</sup> combat team, Miller or the Black Tuskegee airmen as insignificant, I want to recognize that they function within socially accepted acts of patriotism that inherently excludes the similarly significant acts performed by draft resisters.

This chapter attempts to reclaim (and reheroize) the histories of World War II Japanese American and Black American draft resisters by interrogating

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<sup>7</sup> “Freedom’s Contrast,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Jan. 1, 1944 (Proquest). See also Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> “Freedom’s Contrast,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*.

the racialization of two social constructs, patriotism and dissent. They are emotionally charged words conjuring a range of images and instigating strong opinions. Depending on one's political affiliations, they are viewed synonymously or in contrast. Because patriotism connotes loyalty to the nation, patriots are praised because they assumedly speak from collective voices of unity while dissent is perceivably spoken from a singular voice, a disruption of unity. In turning to the history of Japanese American and Black American World War II draft resisters, I examine the patterns of resistance by groups of draft resisters geographically dispersed but whose rationale for resisting was consistent with an objection towards racial oppression that moved beyond their individual subjectivity. I argue that dissent in the performance of draft resistance is a demonstration of patriotism because resistance was articulated from a collective voice for their racial community, family, and friends in response to their racial exclusion from American society. I begin by demonstrating the ways Japanese Americans and Black Americans articulated their racial community's racial exclusion as the motivation for draft resistance as morally indefensible and worthy of conscientious objectionable status. In so doing, they framed their racial exclusion from American society strategically by invoking a radical discourse of resistance. Black Americans paralleled their racial injustice as no different than Hitler's fascism, while Japanese Americans centralized their argument around the violation of civil and constitutional rights. And finally, both groups sought to repudiate the assumption that American inclusion could be attained through performances of proving one's loyalty. My aim is to debunk the perceptions of

compliance, cowardice, and anti-Americanism associated with draft resisters by repositioning their performances of dissent as critical toward the shaping of their American “minority” subjectivities.

## **2.2 Draft Resisters, No-Nos and COs**

The stories of Japanese American and Black American draft resisters have been overshadowed by popular celebrations of World War II and dismissed by a quick verdict of guilty erasing histories of racism. Across the ten prison camps imprisoning Japanese Americans, there were over 315 Nisei draft resisters.<sup>9</sup> The numbers of Black American draft resisters were even greater reaching in the thousands. Robin D. G. Kelley notes, “By late 1943, African Americans comprised 35 percent of the nation's delinquent registrants, and between 1941 and 1946, over 2,000 black men were imprisoned for not complying with the provisions of the Selective Service Act.”<sup>10</sup> Critical towards rethinking draft resistance as a response to racially exclusive constructions of patriotism and reclaiming the heroism of these World War II draft resisters is an examination of their strategies for performing resistance as well as their “motivation.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 44. Hohri also notes that there were 350 Issei resisters in Santa Fe.

<sup>10</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 172. Kelley cites Gerald R. Gill, “Dissent, Discontent, and Disinterest,” 164-165 and George Q. Flynn “Selective Service and American Blacks during World War II,” *Journal of Negro History* 69 (Winter 1984), 14-25.

<sup>11</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 4.

Japanese American protest was a response not only to their incarceration behind American prison camps without due process but also at the outrage of being forced into proving their allegiance to the United States initiated through the loyalty oath. What began as National Secretary for the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), Mike Masaoka's overzealous mission for achieving American inclusion turned into a "disaster."<sup>12</sup> In November of 1942, Masaoka lobbied to the government to allow Nisei within the camps to prove their loyalty by overturning their recent 4-C status indicating they were "aliens not acceptable for the armed services." He believed that Japanese Americans within the camps would readily jump at the opportunity to volunteer in the armed forces as Masaoka became the first volunteer for the 442<sup>nd</sup> regimental combat team, a segregated unit. As Eric Muller notes the need for thousands more volunteers instigated the creation of a loyalty questionnaire to "sift the loyal from the disloyal." Included in this form were two controversial questions aimed in measuring Japanese American loyalty.

Question 27: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?"

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 141, 20. The Lim report: "After almost five decades of rumor and a relentless undercurrent of suspicion within the Japanese-American communities, 'The Lim Report' put together for the first time the documentary evidence that describes the breadth and depth of the JACL's wartime role." Masaoka went so far as to suggest a volunteer suicide battalion. Hohri documents, "In April 1944, Mike Masaoka, National Secretary for the Japanese Am. Cit. League, issued his 'Final Report' in which he reveals the League's discussion with 'a high military official' on forming an all-volunteer suicide battalion, 'which would go anywhere to spearhead the most dangerous missions.'

Question 28: Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?<sup>13</sup>

The response was quite the opposite of what the government and Masaoka had expected. The questions were met with a range of emotions from outrage, to humiliation, to uncertainty, as many were conflicted and confused behind the questions' meanings and the implications for their families in responding. For those Issei excluded from American citizenship forced to cling onto their Japanese citizenship, a "yes" response to Question 28 meant "asking them to make themselves stateless."<sup>14</sup>

The recruitment of volunteers was a failure causing only resentment and chaos and greater hostility in the camps. Of the 1,700 eligible men at Heart Mountain, only 42 volunteered. The failed attempt at recruiting volunteers instigated more bitterness and hostility toward the government creating a snowball effect for those within the camps. As Muller notes, "Almost one in four of the draft-eligible men answered 'no' to question 28, the question probing their

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Matsuda, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 115. Women were given a different set of questions. Mary Matsuda records the questions asked "For Isseis both sexes and all female Nisei over seventeen years of age: Question 27. If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or WAAC? Question 28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?"

<sup>14</sup> Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die*, 51.

loyalty to the United States. Even more tellingly, 329 Nisei filed requests for 'expatriation'—requests to abandon their American citizenship and to be transported to Japan. One hundred fifty-one Issei filed similar requests for 'repatriation' to Japan.” Instead those that filed for expatriation or repatriation, the “no-no boys” who responded “no” to questions 27 and 28 (specifically 28), and the family members of these two groups were sent to Tule Lake, known as the segregation center.<sup>15</sup>

While the registration process went well at Poston and Minidoka, the introduction to this process was different as Poston was provided a Gala dinner and Minidoka, viewed as the “WRA model camp,” recruited volunteers based on misinformation. Muller explains, “Poston rolled out the red carpet. The members of the registration team and the young volunteers they had recruited were feted at a gala dinner sponsored by the camp administration in a mess hall decorated in red, white, and blue. Guests were treated to patriotic speeches, a floor show, an orchestra concert, and a humorous skit, and ended the night dancing.” However, at Tule Lake the registration was met with greater hostility than Heart Mountain as internees met at “block meetings” to discuss the questionnaire resulting in the production of “a dizzying list of nearly 150 questions about the registration process that internee leaders presented to the registration team.” Eventually the hostility grew even greater as whole blocks refused to complete

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<sup>15</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 133-134.

the registrations prompting officials to threateningly use the Espionage Act.<sup>16</sup> As Muller explains, “In the final analysis, registration at the ten WRA centers was a failure for everyone concerned—the military, the WRA, and the internees. The military got barely one-third of the volunteers it was expecting from the camps; it would end up staffing the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team primarily with Nisei from Hawaii who had never been deported and interned and who therefore eagerly volunteered by the thousands. The WRA was left with a fractured and restive internee population, of who nine in seven had either refused to register entirely or answered, ‘no’ to the loyalty question.”<sup>17</sup>

On January 14, 1944 the government put into effect a “policy of conscription,” finally overturning Japanese Americans’ 4-C status, sending draft notices to eligible Japanese American males compelling a few hundred throughout the camps to formulate a voice of protest. As these men received their draft notice those that intentionally sought to resist the draft simply refused to show up for their physicals. Refusing the draft was not based solely on selfish reasons but grounded in protest for those that remained incarcerated. At 19 years of age, Yosh Kuromiya, a Heart Mountain draft resister explains, “I had no intention of fighting on foreign soil for principles I was denied here at home. I was confident of my loyalties. . . I would certainly not comply while my family was still behind barbed wire. I would certainly not endure further humiliation of being

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<sup>16</sup> Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die*, 52-53, 56.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.



conscripted into a racially segregated combat unit.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Mits Koshiyama, another Heart Mountain draft resister explains, “I was 19 when I became a draft resister. I protested the loss of my constitutional rights to the government. . . I insisted I was willing to serve in the U.S. Army when my citizenship rights were restored and when our family was released to live as we did before the camps.”<sup>19</sup>

Both Kuromiya’s and Koshiyama’s demonstration of draft resistance moves beyond the subjectivity of the individual as their protests were directed toward a collective family and community, those that remained in the prison camps. Despite his response of “yes” to both the loyalty questions, Koshiyama felt deeply the significance of resisting the draft for his community. He explains, “I qualified 27 by answering that I wanted the return of my constitutional rights as a condition of yes. . . I decided to become a resister until my constitutional rights were returned to me and all Japanese Americans were freed from the camps.”<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Kuromiya’s and Koshiyama’s history elucidates the continued confusion over draft resisters and no-no boys because the labels of “no-no boys” and draft resisters have often been used interchangeably.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, “no-no

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<sup>18</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. William Minoru Hohri writes that this confusion probably came in the wake of Okada’s *No-No boy*. Frank Emi challenges Sus Satow’s comments that the resisters answered “no, no” to Questions 27 and 28 along with other

boys” were those that responded “no” on questions 27 and 28 of the loyalty questionnaire given in 1943 a year before the reinstatement of the draft in 1944. While some qualified their response of “yes,” as in the situation of Koshiyama, he was not considered a draft resister until he refused to answer his draft notice after the government put into effect the conscription policy for Nisei men, a year after the loyalty oath. William Hohri explains the intricacies of “no-no boys” versus draft resisters:

First, the reference may refer to those who responded negatively to the two ‘loyalty’ questions. Second, it may refer to draft resisters. Both usages are inaccurate. In the first, only the second ‘loyalty’ question, Question 28 was used to identify and segregate ‘disloyals’. . . And the segregees were both male and female, not just ‘BOYS.’ Moreover, segregation occurred in 1943. The draft was reinstated in 1944. Segregation was independent of draft resistance. Most of the resisters were not segregated and had answered yes to Question 28. Still the term ‘no-no’ was widely used by internees to identify those who were segregated at the Tule Lake camp.<sup>22</sup>

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statements Emi sees as inaccurate. Emi writes that Satow’s comments are “wild, fallacious statements” clarifying the difference between the loyalty oath originally intended to locate volunteers for the 442<sup>nd</sup> in 1943. Many of the draft resisters answered “yes, yes” among them was Kiyoshi Okamoto. While Tule Lake Center was used to segregate those that answered “no, no” Okamoto was taken there because he was “perceived by the WRA as a ‘troublemaker’ because of his outspoken stand on civil rights.” Conscience and the Constitution, “Letter to the Editor Rafu Shimpō and Pacific Citizen,” [http://www.resisters.com/news/apology\\_emi.htm](http://www.resisters.com/news/apology_emi.htm) (April 12, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 133-134.

While the decision to protest the draft was made individually, their response was rooted in a performance of protest for the loss of rights of others that remained in the camps. Interestingly this notion of acting out of one's freewill rather than being coerced into draft resistance was highlighted by Hohri after interviewing several Heart Mountain draft resisters. Hohri remarks his surprise that many of the resisters did not know each other prior to their arrival in jail. He writes, "I had assumed there had been some sort of meeting in camp of those who agreed to resist. They established proximity only as part of the mass meetings in the mess hall. So that each acted on his own. And part of their message is that their acts of resistance were singular and personal."<sup>23</sup> It is important, however, that we recognize although draft resistance functioned through an individual's protest, the motivation moved beyond the interest of one person. In the voices of draft resisters, their responses were rooted in protest toward the treatment of their family and their community.

Draft resistance as a response toward the collective injustices faced not only by the Japanese American community but also for all Americans of color was the foundation for the most vocal and organized resistance at Heart Mountain backed by the Fair Play Committee (FPC) and led by Frank Seishi Emi and Kiyoshi Okamoto.<sup>24</sup> Their protest was rooted in fighting for justice and racial

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>24</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 100.

equality for “the future of all minorities.”<sup>25</sup> As Emi explains, “we felt we now had to challenge the legality of conscripting the inmates of a concentration camp.”<sup>26</sup> In an integral bulletin announcement, the FPC emphatically voiced the rationale of their protest debunking the perception that aligned draft resistance with “draft dodging.” They clarified they were “not afraid to go to war.” Rather their principle was rooted in a larger conscientious decision for the benefit of a larger community. An excerpt of the bulletin read:

We, the members of the FPC, are not afraid to go to war—we are not afraid to risk our lives for our country. We would gladly sacrifice our lives to protect and uphold the principles and ideals of our country as set forth in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, for on its inviolability depends the freedom, liberty, justice, and protection of all people, including Japanese-American and all other minority groups. But have we been given such freedom, such liberty, such justice, such protection? NO!! Without any hearings, without due process of law as guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights, without any charges filed against us, without any evidence of wrongdoing on our part, one hundred and ten thousand innocent people kicked out of the greater part of their life, and herded like dangerous criminals into concentration camps with barb[ed] wire fence and military police guarding it, AND THEN, WITHOUT RECTIFICATION

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 109.

OF THE INJUSTICES COMMITTED AGAINST US NOR WITHOUT RESTORATION OF OUR RIGHTS AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTION, WE ARE ORDERED TO JOIN THE ARMY THRU DISCRIMINATORY PROCEDURES INTO A SEGREGATED COMBAT UNIT! Is this the American way? No! The FPC believes that unless such actions are opposed NOW, and steps taken to remedy such injustices and discriminations IMMEDIATELY, the future of all minorities and the future of this democratic nation is in danger.<sup>27</sup>

In a very forthright assertion of the U.S. government's violation of their rights, this bulletin was a "call to action" for the other members of the FPC to protest the draft by refusing to fight until the government first restored "to all internees their freedom and civil rights and compensate[d] them for their economic losses."<sup>28</sup>

While not all members of the FPC participated in the draft resistance, "forty percent" did. The result of this bulletin motivated sixty-three male prisoners of "the Heart Mountain draft resisters of conscience" to resist the draft resulting in the "largest mass trial in Wyoming's history." All the men were convicted and sentenced to "three years of imprisonment for violating the Selective Service Act of 1940." Although Emi was not officially drafted because he was married and had two children, therefore making him exempt from the draft, he was one of eight additional men arrested and "charged with conspiracy to violate the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 103-104. This is excerpted from the original bulletin.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 103.

Selective Service Act and with counseling others to resist the draft.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the hundreds of Nisei draft resisters and Issei protesters throughout the ten prison camps an important voice of resistance was James Omura, the Editor of *The Rocky Shimpō*. Omura was “the object of relentless attacks by the camp’s newspaper editor” and “was one of the few Japanese Americans who publicly objected to the policy of removing and incarcerating people of Japanese ancestry.”<sup>30</sup> In a profound editorial of dissent that challenged the assumption that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was an opportunity to prove their Americanness, he argued, “Not until restrictions are wholly lifted can the Nisei feel that he has been accepted as an American citizen. . . . When a Nisei goes to the army, he is ostensibly prepared to give his life to the nation. The nation owes him his every rights and considerations.”<sup>31</sup> Omura, like the Nisei draft “resisters of conscience,” sought to frame the resistance as a moral violation.

Meanwhile outside of the incarceration camps and across the country, other Americans of color participated in their own performance of draft resistance demonstrating their rejection of Jim Crow segregation. From as early on as October 26, 1940 in an article titled, “Conscientious Objector to Fight Jim-Crow

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<sup>29</sup> Frank Emi, *Resistance*, 108-110. The other seven men included: James Omura, Paul Nakadate, Sam Horino, Minoru Tamesa, Ben Wakaye, and Guntaro Kubota.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>31</sup> Densho Digital Archives, “Reading: The Question of Loyalty,” <http://densho.org/learning/spice/lesson5/5reading5.asp>.

units,” Black American presses included the voices of Black Americans resisting the World War II draft. Led by the vocal protest of Ernest Calloway and J. G. St. Clair Drake Jr., both members of *Conscientious Objectors Against Jim Crow* (COAJC), Black Americans protested the hypocrisy of fighting fascism abroad while Jim Crow remained at home in the U.S.<sup>32</sup> As one newspaper described, the COAJC was “made up of a number of young men who have already indicated that under no circumstances will they answer Uncle Sam’s call for service until equality is granted all men in the nation’s armed forces.”<sup>33</sup> According to the documentary, *The Good War: and Those Who Refused to Fight It* (2000), there were “over six thousand COs who refused to serve in the Army and in Civilian Public Service camps, or whose draft boards deemed them insincere, went to Federal prison. In fact, one out of every six men in U.S. prisons during World War II was a draft resister. Among them were Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, and legendary musician Sun Ra. War resisters found themselves behind bars for up to six years.”<sup>34</sup> Ernest Calloway stated emphatically he could not “conscientiously serve in the armed forces of this nation so long as it adhered

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<sup>32</sup> “Balks Call to Arms: Cites Jim Crow Youth Makes Issue of Army Race Policy,” *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 11, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>33</sup> “Won’t Serve In U.S. Army; Cites Bias,” *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 11, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>34</sup> Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores, “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight it,” *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar/story.html>.

to a policy of segregation.”<sup>35</sup> His words of protest were echoed in the shared sentiment among other Black draft resisters. J. G. St. Clair Drake Jr., secretary of the COAJC who stated, “under no circumstances will they answer Uncle Sam’s call for service until equality is granted all men in the nation’s armed forces.”<sup>36</sup> Joining both Calloway and Drake were Preston Bowie and Barefield Gordon in “vowing never to fight in the armed forces of the United States so long as its announced policy of racial segregation is maintained.”<sup>37</sup>

Although this group identified themselves as conscientious objectors, they broadened the scope of who was (was not) included within a definition of conscientious objection by asserting racial segregation practiced within the U.S. military as “morally indefensible.”<sup>38</sup> While there were many Black COs who claimed religious opposition, such as Black Muslims with the National of Islam, their refusing to enlist for both religious and racial reasons was very groundbreaking. Historically conscientious objectors, primarily associated with the Quakers, were rooted in an opposition toward war, as pacifists, for primarily religious reasons and allowed to carry out service to their country through civilian

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<sup>35</sup> “Won’t Serve In U.S. Army; Cites Bias,” *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 11, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> “Swear They Will Not Fight,” *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 25, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>38</sup> “Bayard Rustin Defies Draft; Goes to Prison,” *The Chicago Defender*, Mar. 4, 1944 (Proquest).



service camps.<sup>39</sup> Conscientious objection was perceived, however, to be ideologically reserved for certain Americans those within an exclusive group privileging many within a certain socio-economic class and race. As Michael Simmons highlights the tensions endemic within claiming a conscientious status, he explains conscientious objection was seen “as this precious little group of narrow, upper-middle-class strata, and then they saw people like me as riff-raff, who would dilute conscientious objection.”<sup>40</sup>

Although Simmons references his struggles, as a conscientious objector, during the Vietnam War, similar perceptions and exclusions existed during World War II. Takashi Hoshizaki, a Japanese American draft resister at Heart Mountain relocation center, recalls the varied perceptions towards draft resistance and conscientious objection that led to lenient consequences for conscientious objectors compared with draft resisters. After the Heart Mountain trial (mentioned above), Hoshizaki explains, “Each of us had received a three-year sentence. We later found out that most of the ‘normal’ draft resisters, that is, the ‘regular’ U.S. citizens who were being drafted and then resisted (conscientious objectors and others) were given one to two-year sentences.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “2 Negroes Among First Conscientious Objectors,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 24, 1941 (Proquest). See also “Conscientious Objectors At Least Are Free From Race Discrimination,” *The Chicago Defender*, Mar. 15, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>40</sup> “A Black Man Fights the Draft” Interview with Michael Simmons by Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors 2003, accessed June 8, 2012, <http://www.crmvet.org/comm/draft.htm>.

<sup>41</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 86.

Black draft resisters understood conscientious objection to affirm anything that was morally indefensible asserting the treatment of Blacks within the military fit within these restrictions only to find themselves having to legitimize their objections.<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that conscientious objectors did not experience prejudice or hardships, rather it is to demonstrate the racialization of dissent that further isolated Americans of color from claiming the right to civil disobedience. The COAJC advocated for “conscientious objector rights on a large scale by members of the race” and to be able to “claim legal exemption from military service on the grounds of conscientious objections because of the jim crow policy of the armed forces.” Another article asserts, “We feel we have the right to be treated as conscientious objectors just like the Quakers.”<sup>43</sup> In an article entitled, “Release of 500 Martyrs is Demanded: Editors Plead for Youths Who Struck Against Segregation,” an author parodied the status given to conscientious objectors by recreating an imaginary story centering on Black Americans’ response to their exclusion from World War II by recreating a story in which 500 Black Americans were “denied the status of conscientious objectors and were imprisoned for a year in Leavenworth,” while later making the claim that they were transported out of the country into a “concentration camp at the United

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<sup>42</sup> “Balks Call to Arms: Cites Jim Crow Youth Makes Issue of Army Race Policy,” *The Chicago Defender*, Jan. 11, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

States naval base in Jamaica.”<sup>44</sup>

To be fair, many Black Americans who claimed a conscientious objection status differed from the pacifism associated with the Quakers who were anti-military, anti-war. Most Black Americans, conversely, were ready to enlist and fight upon the condition of desegregation in the military. Their objection was both moral and political. Like the Japanese American draft resisters, resistance to the draft did not mean they were unwilling to fight in the war. Conscientious objector Bayard Rustin, who also served as “Co-secretary of the Race Relations Department of the Fellowship of Reconciliation” as well as a “leader in non-violent direct action against Jim Crowism,” captured his disapproval of the Conscription Act on his draft application. He wrote, “Such segregation is based on the moral error that racism (American) can overcome racism (Fascist), that evil can overcome evil, that men virtually in slavery can struggle for a freedom they are denied. This means that I must protest racial discrimination in the armed forces, which is not only morally indefensible, but also in clear violation of the Act.”<sup>45</sup> Aligning America’s assumed benevolence as similarly evil to fascism, Rustin blurs the line between good versus evil, friend versus enemy in challenging America’s racial contradictions of democracy. In an article “C.O.s on strike for democracy” the author satirically wrote, “It is ironic indeed that these

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<sup>44</sup> “Release of 500 Martyrs is Demanded: Editors Plead for Youths Who Struck Against Segregation,” *The Chicago Defender*, Sept. 28, 1940 (Proquest).

<sup>45</sup> “Bayard Rustin,” *The Chicago Defender*, Mar. 4, 1944 (Proquest).

young men, who are such unflinching believers in democracy, have been placed in solidary [sic] confinement for adhering to democratic ideals that many thousands of anti-fascists have died for in Hitler's concentration camps."<sup>46</sup>

In the above mentioned parody, the author's construction of character's centers on a Black American, Sam Brown, who first begins his critique of American racism by situating U.S. practices of racism with that of Hitler stating that "Hitlerism" and the Nazis would end only by first "licking Adolph Jim Crow."<sup>47</sup>

Following this denunciation he asserts his willingness to enlist while also noting the shared feelings by other Black Americans. Brown clarifies:

As soon as Jim Crow is abolished in the United States army, I shall volunteer for the air corps. Everyone of us fellows is ready to take his place in either a combatant or non-combatant unit as soon as this happens. We will rot here, however, before we will fight in a Jim Crow army. We feel we have the right to be treated as conscientious objectors, just like the Quakers. How can we fight for a lie? America is not defending democracy when she treats Negroes as she does."<sup>48</sup>

Strategically, Brown's testament is not only in making these claims against racism and racial segregation within the army as conscientiously objectionable

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<sup>46</sup> "C.O.'s On Strike For Democracy," *The Chicago Defender*, Nov. 27, 1943 (Proquest).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

but also, most importantly his reliance on a radical rhetoric of resistance that struck to the core of the U.S. entry into World War II through the juxtaposition of Hitler's criminal acts with the United States' racism.

Even the CPS (Civilian public service) camps were constructed around segregation and racial inferiorities mirroring the Jim Crow army serving as a catalyst for draft resistance. Consequently, many black COs also refused to show up for their enlistment into these camps, which resulted in serving time in prisons with a sentence "up to six years [while] some were even held up to two years after the war ended."<sup>49</sup> Absent in the comments provided by Rustin (and other draft resisters) is the fear associated with cowardice. Present is an earnestness to volunteer for the army or noncombatant areas of the military "as soon as" Jim Crow was removed. His words and most importantly bold accusations reveal a rare confidence that counters the imagery conjured up of "draft dodgers."<sup>50</sup> The example of Black draft resisters willing to sacrifice their lives to "rot" in prison to fight racial equality parallels the men fighting in battle. As J. G. St. Clair Drake argued, "Jim Crow in the army puts the seal of approval on jim-crow in jobs and housing. We must protest to the bitter end against it."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Judith Ehrlich, *The Good War*.

<sup>50</sup> See also "11,551 To Jail as Draft Dodgers," *The Chicago Defender*, Feb. 8, 1947 (Proquest).

<sup>51</sup> "Conscientious Objector to Fight Jim-Crow Units," *The Chicago Defender*, Oct. 26, 1940 (Proquest).

Encouraging draft resistance among Black Americans, A. Philip Randolph, the National Chairman of the League of Non-Violent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation asserted, "Negroes would and should ignore the call to arms and willingly go to prison instead."<sup>52</sup> In vocalizing the importance of "solidarity among Negroes" he insisted "that persons about the draft age should stand squarely behind the draft resisters."<sup>53</sup> Similarly Rustin advocated support of Randolph's stance in promotion of a "civil disobedience program against a Jim Crow draft."<sup>54</sup> Individual voices of Black American draft resisters were mirrored by a larger sentiment of Black Americans asserting their protest of the war. One article cited "over a thousand Negroes observed Race Relations Sunday and the opening of Negro History week Sunday, Feb. 9 by marching down South Parkway."<sup>55</sup> The implication of these protests were made visible on banners and signs that read, "To Defend Democracy Extend Democracy,' 'Before a Negro Fights He Should Demand His Rights." Other banners read, "'Separate Units

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<sup>52</sup> "VIEWS and Reviews," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 10, 1948 (Proquest).

<sup>53</sup> "Don't Serve on Draft Boards, Randolph Warns," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Jul. 24, 1948 (Proquest).

<sup>54</sup> "5 Leaders Back Randolph in Jim Crow Army Boycott," *The Chicago Defender*, Apr. 24, 1948 (Proquest).

<sup>55</sup> "Democracy Parade Hits Defense Jim Crow: Throngs Brave Snow To Rap Segregation Event Inaugurates Negro History Week and Race Relations Sunday," *The Chicago Defender*, Feb. 15, 1941 (Proquest).

Aren't Right If You Want Negroes to Fight.”<sup>56</sup> Indisputably, these messages asserted the willingness of Black Americans to fight for their country upon the condition that their rights as Americans were recognized.

### 2.3 Proving Loyalty

The injustice and forced incarceration provoked many Japanese Americans to react and resist challenging the belief that American inclusion can be obtained through proof of one's loyalty. As Yosh Kuromiya argues, “Who in their right mind, would feel a need to prove their loyalty to a government which illegally, held them and their families captive in a concentration camp?”<sup>57</sup> Still the notion that Japanese Americans should have felt obligated to go to the camps despite their loss, the disruption toward their lives and the violence endured was widespread. In highlighting this contradiction in how World War II is remembered, Kuromiya critiques the representation of patriotism at the *Japanese American Monument of Patriotism* in Washington, D.C., which includes not only the names of Japanese Americans that died in World War II but also “the names of the 10 relocation camps.”<sup>58</sup> Sacrifice, a signifier of patriotism, is implied as proof of Americanness by not only the lives lost in the war but also with those that

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Yosh Kuromiya, “Eulogy for Frank Emi,” *PBS*, Last modified December 10, 2010. Accessed June 2, 2012. [http://www.resisters.com/news/emi\\_eulogy\\_yosh.htm](http://www.resisters.com/news/emi_eulogy_yosh.htm).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

demonstrated their Americanness with time spent peacefully in the camps.<sup>59</sup>

The belief of American inclusion through performances of sacrifice was what motivated the JACL, who saw their mission to “sell Japanese Americans to the government and the public at large as good Americans worthy of their heritage.”<sup>60</sup> The JACL strategized ways Japanese Americans could achieve acceptance as loyal citizens beginning with being allowed to fight in the war. This view overlooked the ironies that prior to Japanese American incarceration and the reinstatement of Nisei 4-C status, the number of Nisei serving as soldiers in the armed forces was “nearly five thousand.” Muller notes their loyalty and service proved nothing, explaining: “Within a month of Pearl Harbor, these soldiers had been reassigned to menial labor; stripped of their weapons, ammunition, and other combat gear; forced to drill with wooden rifles; heaped with verbal and physical abuse; and in some cases, even discharged.”<sup>61</sup> The implications of the JACL’s accommodating views “as the self-anointed leader of wartime Japanese America” worked simultaneously to silence voices of protest.<sup>62</sup> The JACL was positioned as patriotic in comparison with the perception of Japanese American draft resisters as unwilling to put their country first. As William Minoru Hohri argues, “proof of loyalty through military service

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Eric L. Muller. *Free to Die*, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>62</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 4.



turns lame when we realize that hundreds of Japanese Americans who served in combat in the U.S. Army in the First World War were excluded and detained along with the rest: their military service proved nothing.”<sup>63</sup>

The debates centered on whether one could (or could not) attain American inclusion through demonstrations of proving one’s loyalty similarly emerged within the Black American community. While Black Americans volunteered for the draft, they were often rejected. In a 1941 article, “Army Rejects Negroes, First to Volunteer in Chicago,” the author records how “3 Negro men who immediately went to enlist into the draft. . .were turned down while they saw others accepted without hesitation.” The author includes that the men “confronted the army officials” and asked, ““Don’t you accept American citizens in the army?””<sup>64</sup> Others were met with similar indifference to Black Americans’ desire to prove their loyalty by enlisting in the draft. One reporter captures the rejection of photographer, Barefield Gordon who “answered a call of the air corps for young men to serve as aerial photographers and was rejected because of race.”<sup>65</sup>

As Black Americans continued to get rejected from the draft despite their willingness to enlist, many became disillusioned by America in the same ways

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>64</sup> “Army Rejects Negroes, First to Volunteer in Chicago,” *The Chicago Defender*, Dec. 13, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>65</sup> “Swear They Will Not Fight,” *The Chicago Defender*. See also “High Rejection Rate of Negro Draftees Continues,” *The Chicago Defender*, Aug. 21, 1943 (Proquest) and “Detailed Report on Draft Setup Bares Discrimination in Army and War Jobs,” *The Chicago Defender*, Sep. 4, 1943 (Proquest).

many Japanese Americans responded to their racial exclusion. The story of Paul Brewer is one that transforms from a willingness to “be a soldier” to a *patriot* who “has completely lost that desire.”<sup>66</sup> According to the author, Paul’s story mirrors “the story of thousands of young, brown-skinned Americans who are beginning to believe that Uncle Sam is a hypocrite—a cheat—maybe, a liar.” Strategically, the author embraces a socially constructed definition of patriotism by positioning Paul’s actions as proof of his patriotism and devotion to his country. The author explains that Paul “didn’t want anything to happen to HIS country. If being a patriot meant loving his country then Paul knew he was a patriot. And if he WAS a patriot, then it was obvious that he should do something about it. And the obvious thing was to become an actual defender of his country. Especially when Uncle Sam had urged all young men to do so.” Yet as Paul participates in the “obvious” acts of patriotism by enlisting, he is vehemently told “There are no vacancies in the United States army for Negroes.”<sup>67</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusion

The story of Japanese American resistance towards their incarceration profoundly challenges our perceptions of compliant Asian Americans and the assumption that Japanese Americans remained passively in the camps until they were released silenced by the stereotype of “the model minority.” However, the

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<sup>66</sup> “It’s Sad, But It’s True: Uncle Sam’s Brown-skinned Nephew Has Change of Heart About Patriotism and American ‘Democracy’ When He Learns that the Army and Navy Don’t Want Him,” *The Chicago Defender*, Feb. 1, 1941 (Proquest).

<sup>67</sup> Frank Abe, *Conscience and the Constitution*.

draft resister story remains suppressed amid the stigma of “draft resistance” and the legacies of *accepted* acts of patriotism demonstrated by the memory of the all Nisei 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. For Asian Americans viewed both as a model minority and a perpetual foreigner, uncovering a history of racial oppression coupled with remembering those who defied their position as second-class citizens has consequences. In *Conscience and the Constitution* (2000), a documentary detailing the No-No Boys’ legacy, the filmmakers write:

Two generations of Americans have grown to adulthood believing a single master narrative: that Japanese America endured the loss of all their rights, and three years in camp, with a mixture of passive resignation and patriotic sacrifice. For 50 years the story of organized resistance inside the camps had been written out of history. The Nisei soldiers were celebrated for securing the postwar acceptance and assimilation of the Japanese American community, while the resisters and their wives endured the scorn of their neighbors and were eventually forgotten.<sup>68</sup>

Through the efforts of the *Conscience and the Constitution* documentary and the emerging scholarship embracing draft resister histories, narratives of Asian American compliance is slowly being replaced by Asian American heroism. The shifting of which histories are embraced and which histories are rejected is dependent upon how we choose to remember. Until the retelling of the story of draft resister and no-no boy histories, our historical interpretations were incomplete implicated by the assumption of their disloyalty as anti-Americans and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

anti-patriots. This perception, in part, is due to the removal of a racial discourse amid perceptions that patriotism must be proven. By rethinking the role of race when articulating this history alongside a shared history of racial exclusion with Black Americans, this history debunks the notion that Americanness can be attained through proof of loyalty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REHEROIZATION IN CHESTER HIMES' *IF HE HOLLERS LET HIM GO* AND JOHN OKADA'S *NO-NO BOY*

Every time a colored man gets in the Army he's fighting against himself. Of course there isn't anything else he can do. If he refuses to go they send him to the pen. But if he does go and take what they put on him, and then fight so he can keep on taking it, he's a cowardly son of a bitch.

– Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945)<sup>1</sup>

They think just because they went and packed a rifle they're different but they aren't and they know it. They're still Japs.

– John Okada, *No No Boy* (1957)<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and John Okada's *No-No Boy*, two wartime novels, challenge the construction of World War II heroism reminding us that for many Americans of color this memory is rooted in a history of racism, exclusion and injustice. Contradicting the message of fighting fascism abroad, American soldiers of color were implicitly asked to ignore their lack of freedom within a U.S. Jim Crowed army while Japanese American soldiers' family members remained behind barbed wire within American incarceration camps. These novels explore the contrasting responses by Americans of color faced with embracing or rejecting an opportunity to prove their Americanness by

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<sup>1</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 120.

<sup>2</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, 163.

fighting in the war. Stan Yogi observes the similarities in these decisions despite their assumed differences arguing, “both tried to prove themselves American, but by different means: veterans chose to demonstrate their loyalty by fighting for the U.S. while many ‘no-no boys’ tried to live out the principles of America by confronting the government with its unjustness.”<sup>3</sup> On one hand, in the eyes of the larger mainstream society these two decisions were not viewed equally as the latter was often reduced and dismissed as an act of cowardice. On the other hand, those that chose to enlist had to overcome similar misperceptions by a vocal minority from within racial communities viewing their performance as giving in to a racist (white) American society.

The choice made by Himes’ protagonist, Bob Jones, and Okada’s protagonist, Ichiro Yamada, was a rejection of the war manifesting into an anti-draft stance. While Bob’s position as leaderman in a Navy shipyard provided him a “draft deferment,” he demonstrates angst towards the draft and an opposition to the war haunted by nightmares of military soldiers in uniform.<sup>4</sup> Ichiro’s anti-draft position is more obvious as the novel centers on his decision to reject orders for conscription serving two years in a prison cell for what he now perceives as his “mistake.” Throughout these two novels there is a blatant critique of the racially exclusive constructions of patriotism and citizenship raising questions of whether or not fighting in the war was politically advantageous for

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<sup>3</sup> Stan Yogi, “You Had to Be One or the Other”: Oppositions and Reconciliation in John Okada’s *No-No Boy*,” *MELUS* 21.2 (2006): 68.

<sup>4</sup> James Lundquist, *Chester Himes* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1976), 29.

Americans of color. These novels intentionally explore the complexities of draft resistance while challenging the celebrations of World War II that have silenced the histories of American racism directed at Americans of color. While neither Bob nor Ichiro embrace an ideology of draft resistance outright, the complexities of their situation coupled with their exclusion from an American identity have impelled them to resist.

Ostracized from their communities, Bob and Ichiro represent voices of dissent, draft resistance and Americans of color who refused to give up the fight for their freedom within America's racial war. Consequently, Bob and Ichiro are not only emasculated by the heroism of those that fought in the war but also from their fear of American racism and self-contempt instigated by their unpopular decisions. Ichiro's mistake follows him upon his release after serving two years in a prison cell. Bob's rollercoaster four days shifts from the security of his supervisory position, to falsely accused of raping a white woman, to plans of marriage and a future with his girlfriend, to being physically removed and forced to enter into the Army. At the same time, Bob and Ichiro's alienation in the present and inability to control their circumstances allows Himes and Okada the chance to critique hegemonic constructions of Americanness that prevent Americans of color from being accepted as full Americans despite their citizenship.

In Okada's novel, while a critique of draft resistance begins at the title (*No-No Boy*), the critical reviews of this novel have glossed over the context of draft resistance by primarily focusing on the psychology of Ichiro, lulling readers into

an apologetic or sympathetic reader-response.<sup>5</sup> In Himes' novel, the effect is similar though varying in our response toward the protagonist. As Bob is inundated by racism, he is often dismissed by stereotypical readings of this novel dismissed as another angry black male, wavering between evoking both sympathy and repulsion triggered by his self-centeredness and misogynistic view toward the females in the novel.<sup>6</sup>

Central to the construction of these two novels are the interactions each protagonist has with members outside of their racial community that inform a racial consciousness rooted in racial solidarity while underscoring the limitations of their citizenship. This awareness of shared racial exclusion serves simultaneously to initiate a process of remasculation for Bob and Ichiro whose recent encounters have served only to strip them from their agency as men. Ichiro is admonished as a no-no boy, while Bob is castigated as a rapist. Himes' novel begins as Bob Jones witnesses the unjustified removal of his Japanese American neighbor, Riki Oyana and his parents into Santa Anita, an American incarceration camp. As Bob describes the horrifying reality of "taking a man up by

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<sup>5</sup> See such works as Floyd Cheung and Bill E. Peterson, "Psychology and Asian American Literature: Application of the Life-Story Model of Identity to No-No Boy," *CR: the New Centennial Review* 6.2 (2006): Fu-Jen Chen, "A Lacanian Reading of No-No Boy and Obasan: Traumatic Thing and Transformation into Subjects of Jouissance," *Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association* 31 (2007): and Bryn Gribben, "The Mother that Won't reflect Back: Situating Psychoanalysis and the Japanese mother in No-No Boy," *MELUS* 28.2 (2003):

<sup>6</sup> Eileen Boris, "You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing with Your Wife": Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50.1 (1998): 77.



the roots and locking him up without a chance. Without a trial. Without a charge,” he is reminded of the insignificance of his citizenship, scaring him into acknowledging his vulnerability as an American of color.<sup>7</sup> In *No-No Boy*, Ichiro Yamada similarly internalizes the racial exclusion faced by Black Americans as he remembers a time before his “mistake” of rejecting orders of conscription. Ichiro witnesses the racism directed toward an older Black American gentleman as church members refuse to acknowledge the man’s presence. The shunned Black American mirrors Ichiro’s current social alienation. In both these instances, the interactions with other racial communities inform Bob and Ichiro’s racial consciousness as they are more aware of their racial subjectivities by witnessing shared spaces of racial exclusion by members within other racial communities.

By the end of the novel, Bob’s alienation from his community, his Blackness, and citizenship is countered by his willingness to move beyond the confines of his political racial identity as a Black American acknowledging what he shares with other Americans of color. His desire to be viewed as an “ordinary man” unrestricted by his racial identity as a Black man is somewhat attained as he demonstrates through metaphoric references of shared skin color, yellow like the Japanese and brown like the Mexicans.<sup>8</sup> While he is suffering in the immediacy of his current predicaments his male subjectivity is affirmed knowing his anguish is neither greater nor less than what other Americans of color are experiencing. Despite the traumatic events that have recently taken place, Bob’s

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<sup>7</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 203.

response of “I’m still here” to the almost upbeat greeting he receives from the Mexican youth, as they are forced alongside Bob into the army, reveals Bob’s resiliency and perseverance suggesting he will also endure this temporary obstacle.<sup>9</sup>

The process of Ichiro’s remasculation begins as he remembers the time before his mistake when he not only recognized injustice but also unhesitatingly challenged it. The result of his current humiliation and isolation from his community as a no-no boy has made him cower and retreat from moments of conflict as he internalizes what has estranged him from his community. As he hears the story of Birdie, a Black American male who stood up for Gary, another no-no boy, against the ridicule by other Japanese American veterans, Ichiro is brought back to his memories and a time before he lost his voice. Ichiro’s encounters with vocal Black Americans differ from white American protest because Black American protest comes from a space of shared racism. Moreover, the novel demonstrates that white American subjectivity rooted in performances of dissent have less concern from fear of reprisal in comparison to Americans of color whose loyalty to Americanness is already viewed suspiciously. Ichiro’s moment of vindication centers on the climactic scene in which he physically strikes Bull, a Japanese American veteran who uses his status to “bully” Ichiro and other no-no boys. Ichiro’s performance of masculinity against an emasculated Bull crying like a baby begins Ichiro’s healing process as a man.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 203.

Consequently, I have chosen *No-No Boy* (1957) and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), although they are over a decade apart, for their intersecting racial histories, the centrality of other racial communities on the reassertion of the protagonists' masculinity and the blatant critiques of America that begin with critiquing the complexities of draft resistance.

### **3.2 Rethinking Patriotic Symbols of Americanness**

The bombing of Pearl Harbor, initiating America's entry into World War II provided Black Americans an opportunity to move beyond the confines of service-oriented jobs in the American workforce. Lynn M. Itagaki writes of the demographic change in Los Angeles in the 1940s noting "the growing local African American community" began "finding increasing political and economic opportunities in the wartime boom economy."<sup>10</sup> The increase in Black Americans amid a shortage of white labor and the simultaneous disappearance of the Japanese Americans from both the economic and social landscapes provides the backdrop for Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*.

Surprisingly, however, Himes' novel intentionally challenges the perception that Black Americans were unconditionally in support of the war, despite the perceived benefits, as well as the assumed "necessity" of incarcerating Japanese Americans. As Bob Jones, Himes' protagonist, witnesses the forced removal and incarceration of his neighbor, Riki Oyana and his family into an American concentration camp, Bob is profoundly shaken by the tangible consequences of American racism. The example of racial injustice toward

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn. M Itagaki, "Transgressing race," 65.

Japanese Americans serves to awaken Bob's racial and political consciousness as a Black American legitimating his dissonant critique of American patriotism. As an American of color whose skin was "the same colour as the Japanese" Bob understands how fragile and phony his "status" as an American has become.<sup>11</sup>

While many literary critics have written profusely about race, racism, racial taboos, "racialized bodies," and racial subjects revealed within the novel, many have glossed over the significance of the protagonist's subjectivity defined within a nationalist discourse as a racialized "American" subject.<sup>12</sup> The novel begins with Bob's ability to circumnavigate his Black (or Negro) racial identity because he functions through performances of Americanness that work to maintain an illusion of his American inclusion. The consequence of Pearl Harbor is that Bob's "American" identity is disrupted. The benefits and material representations, a car, a promotion to leaderman, even a prized (nearly white) girlfriend do not mask his blackness, his color, his racial marker that despite his economic success could immediately be taken from him as it did to Riki Oyana and his family. As Bob

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<sup>11</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> On racialized bodies see Eileen Boris, "You Wouldn't Want One;" and A. Robert Lee, "Violence Real and Imagined: The Novels of Chester Himes," in *The Critical Response to Chester Himes*, ed. Charles L. P. Silet (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 68. On racialized "American" subject, see Richard Yarborough, "The Quest for the American Dream in Three Afro-American Novels: *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, *the Street*, and *Invisible Man*," *MELUS* 8.4 (1981): 37. Richard Yarborough writes briefly of Bob Jones' embrace of an American identity. But Yarborough's reference is in terms of Bob Jones' strive for the American Dream and does little to develop Bob's subjectivity within a nationalist lens.

notes, “A yeller-bellied Jap’ coulda meant me too.”<sup>13</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that Bob’s subjectivity as a quasi-assimilationist transforms into a radical rejection of Americanness manifesting itself in to a performance of anti-Americanness and draft resistance.<sup>14</sup> In so doing, my aim is to demonstrate the implications of race and gender on Americans of color who are forced into assuming a non-normative performance of Americanness marked as anti-patriotic. It is not that Bob wholeheartedly embraces draft resistance; rather the novel explores how his subjectivity as a racialized American of color has provoked him to *become* a draft resister. Yet because of the stigma associated with draft resisters as cowards, Himes pays close attention towards affirming Bob’s masculinity. It is only through this simultaneous affirmation that allows Bob’s heroism as the novel’s protagonist to manifest.

Himes’ critique begins with deconstructing familiar symbols of patriotism that reaffirm an exclusive (white) American heroism. By rethinking the significance of Pearl Harbor, known not only as the largest attack on U.S. soil (pre-9/11), but also as the catalyst for entry into World War II and the “saving” of democracy worldwide, he points to Pearl Harbor as a divisive marker of racial

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<sup>13</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The protagonist, Bob Jones, is often cited by literary critics as semi-autobiographical to Himes own life and revealed in the ironies of his transformation embracing his American identity then through his self-exile to France in rejection of America. During a 1948 speech, Himes “proclaimed that the ‘negro novelist’ and indeed all American blacks were Americans: ‘the face may be the face of Africa, but the heart has the beat of Wall Street,’” Fred Pfeil, “Policiers Noirs,” in *The Critical Response to Chester Himes*, ed. Carles L. P. Silet (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 37.

exclusion. Symbolically when Pearl Harbor is mentioned within the novel it functions to remind Himes' protagonist of his shared exclusion with other Americans of color. His critique continues through an intentional mocking of another familiar patriotic symbol, the revered military uniform and the unquestioned reverence paid to soldiers. Finally he deconstructs whiteness as the symbol for assumed patriotism by satirizing the character of Madge, the white woman, embraced for her patriotism, amid her false accusation of rape.

The final moments of the novel are critical in Himes' attempt to reheroize his protagonist, whose implications with racial exclusion, emasculation against whiteness appallingly mirrors the experiences faced by many Black American males. The function of other racially excluded Americans of colors, in Japanese American and Mexican American communities, works to legitimize Bob's subjectivity. He is not an anomaly; rather he demonstrates how his experiences are a normal occurrence for American men of color. At the novel's conclusion, as the Mexican American men, also being taken away to the army, for unknown charges, address him repeatedly as "man" in an almost "exaggerated" affirmation, Bob's subjectivity as a man, the only thing that has not been stripped from him, is affirmed suggesting that despite the traumatic events that transpired, he will endure yet another racial barrier. This time, he is not alone as he has felt throughout the novel. This time there is a hint at the power of racial solidarity as his forced removal from society is with the camaraderie of two other Mexican American males and the thousands of Japanese Americans who have already been removed.

Set in 1940s Los Angeles, the novel begins its four-day span centered on Black American, Bob Jones and the “racial antagonism” that permeates his life.<sup>15</sup> Recently promoted to a leader man at the Atlas Shipyard, Bob navigates his new responsibility as a supervisor with the rejection he receives by white workers who refuse to receive orders from a Black man. As Bob encounters Madge, a white woman employee, he is both annoyed and intrigued by her racially and sexually charged “scared-to-death act” game that culminates in her falsely accusing Bob of rape.<sup>16</sup>

Rhetorically, Himes delineates the novel into two contrasting historical moments, pre and post-Pearl Harbor. Pre-Pearl Harbor Bob speaks of (almost boasts) of his racial autonomy, “Race was a handicap, sure, I’d reasoned. But hell I didn’t have to marry it. I went where I wanted and felt good about it” while describing most time he “forgot about it.”<sup>17</sup> Post-Pearl Harbor, he is tormented by a ubiquitous fear haunting him asleep and awake. His arrogance gone, Bob describes “living every day scared, walled in, locked up. I didn’t feel like fighting anymore.” The result of witnessing the removal of his neighbor Riki Oyana lessens the control that Bob once confidently spoke of. Now he explains, “It was taking a man up by the roots and locking him up without a chance. Without a trial. Without a charge. . . It was thinking about if they ever did that to me, Robert

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<sup>15</sup> Graham Hodges, forward to Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945; repr., New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1986), vii.

<sup>16</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Jones, Mrs. Jones's dark son, that started me to getting scared. After that it was everything." Where Pearl Harbor serves as a symbol of heroism for many white Americans participating in performances of masculinity, (going to war, fighting an enemy), Himes resists this image and strategically uses it to demonstrate its positioning Americans of colors outside the realm of Americanness.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.3 Pre-Pearl Harbor

Contrary to what becomes of Bob, he does not initially assume the caricature of an "angry young African-American" and rather in many ways fits the description of a quasi-assimilationist, frequently complaining, "I don't want to always be thinking about my race."<sup>19</sup> As the line suggests, Bob's hopes to not think about his race while "obsessed with a desire to be ordinary" are compounded both by the contradictory lessons of his educational upbringing and his encounters with white Americans that consistently remind him not only of his relegated status as "non-white" but also, and most significantly, as "non-American."<sup>20</sup> It is this exclusion Bob feels from an *American* identity, which surpasses his feelings of racial exclusion as a black male. He laments, "They kept thinking about me in connection with Africa. But I wasn't born in Africa. I

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<sup>18</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Eileen Boris, "You Wouldn't Want One," 77; Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 168. See James Lundquist, *Chester Himes*, 27. Lundquist notes that *If He Hollers Let Him Go* "is written in reaction to *Native Son* and at many points is in direct contrast to it."

<sup>20</sup> James Lundquist, *Chester Himes*, 28.



didn't know anyone who was.”<sup>21</sup>

Reflecting upon his childhood education, Bob's racial (and cultural) emasculation began in the confines of an exclusive American educational system where race was absent and the illusion of his American inclusion originated. In a striking passage, Bob contemplates the teachings of his education and what he “learned” remarking, “that much of the white folks’ teaching was still inside” of him.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Bob's current resistive consciousness, his childhood recollections describe a psychological surrendering to an American ideological belief system. Bob reflects:

Being black, it was a thing I ought to know, but I'd learned it differently. I'd learned the same jive that the white folks had learned. All that stuff about liberty and justice and equality. . .All men are created equal. . .Any person born in the United States is a citizen. . .Learned it out of the same books, in the same schools . . .o'er the land of the free and home of the brave. . .' I thought Patrick Henry was a hero when he jumped up and said, 'Give me liberty or give me death,' just like the white kids who read about it. I was a Charles Lindbergh fan when I was a little boy, and thought George Washington was the father of my country—as long as I thought I had a country.

I agreed with the Hearst papers when they lauded the peoples of

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<sup>21</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

the conquered European countries for continuing their underground fight against 'Nazi oppression'; I always bought the *Los Angeles Sunday Times* too, and the *Daily News*; read the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Reader's Digest* sometimes.<sup>23</sup>

Bob's memory of his education drilled into him during his youth is the condensed, edited and familiar version of American history told from a white, male, patriarchal lens, one that maintains a discourse of white superiority, amid an assumed non-white inferiority. Americans of color, the experiences of women (white and non-white) are erased. In his controversial book, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism* (1999), Afrocentrist, Molefi Kete Asante challenges Eurocentric curriculums problematizing American hegemonic teachings that posit white European history and culture as "universal" through its negation of multicultural, multienthic histories.<sup>24</sup> An education that erases "the history of enslavement, oppression, dispossession, racism, or exploitation" toward Americans of color under the guise of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson's liberation values, those that "believed in the inferiority of Africans," Asante argues, "provides a psychological justification for the dominance of European culture in America over others," perpetuated through a "white self-esteem curriculum." Asante warns of the "psychological and cultural danger"

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>24</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1999), 18.

powerful enough that “kills the soul of a people.”<sup>25</sup> Asante’s description resonates throughout Himes’ novel and mirrors the type of detail used to describe Bob’s state of mental chaos post-Pearl Harbor.

As Bob remembers his (white) education he does so by affirming his American identity by rehearsing familiar names Patrick Henry, Charles Lindbergh, and George Washington that embody a (white male) American heroism. The description of George Washington as “the father of my country” with the disclaimer of “as long as I thought I had a country” suggests the transformation of his subjectivity, the former his psychological assimilation, while the latter his rejection. As Bob jokingly ends this memory stating, “Like the guys said out at the yard, ‘Ah believe it,’” it is both with laughter and embarrassment of his “painful growth from naiveté to cynicism.”<sup>26</sup> As Himes positions Bob as a victim of American assimilation, he contextualizes the power of an educational system’s impact on one’s subjectivity. The ideological framing of a logical Americanness contradicts realities of an illogical racial exclusion.

While Bob previously understood his Americanness to signify a privilege, explaining, “All I had when I came to the Coast was my height and weight and the fact I believed that being born in America gave everybody a certain importance,” he struggles with understanding the value of his Black racial identity. Reflecting on his relationship with Alice, his eventual fiancée, he

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Yarborough, “The Quest for the American Dream,” 36.

contemplates, “All I had to do was marry her and my future was in the bag. If a black boy couldn’t be satisfied with that he couldn’t be satisfied with anything. But what I knew about myself was that my desire for such a life was unconditional. It only caught up with me on the crest of being black—when I could accept being black.”<sup>27</sup>

It is this acceptance of his racial identity, however, which eludes Bob and distinguishes him from other Black Americans within the novel who Bob ironically, views as assimilationists, as “Uncle Toms” in their attempts to be white revealed in his interactions with the Harrisons (Alice’s parents). In fact, Himes positions Bob as the one who is implicated by his devaluing of his black identity as Bob pleads, “I needed some help. I had to know that Negroes weren’t the lowest people on the face of God’s green earth. I had to talk it over with somebody, had to build myself back up.”<sup>28</sup> Despite the economic success Dr. Harrison and his wife have achieved, it reminds Bob of his further racial alienation as having to give up his male subjectivity in order to appease white America. The example of Alice, though seemingly naïve is grounded in her subjectivity, empowered, disciplined, respected and not tied to her racial (even sexual identity) as Bob is. In a profound moment, Alice confronts Bob asking him “Do you want to be white?”<sup>29</sup> Bob’s inability in knowing how to be black is

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<sup>27</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

overshadowed by his knowing how to be white and American. It is only when he is reminded that he belongs to neither of those categories that instigate a psychological displacement, an incomprehensible out of body experience.

Consequently Japanese American, Riki Oyana's loss of rights affects Bob most profoundly because he feels betrayed by his country that glorified its uniqueness because of its attention to "liberty and justice and equality" for "all men."<sup>30</sup> The imagery of "Little Riki Oyana singing 'God Bless America'" then transported away to a prison camp the next day with his family contradicts the lessons of his boyhood igniting within Bob the insignificance of citizenship and feelings of betrayal.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Bob observes, "If I couldn't live in America as an equal in the minds, hearts, and souls of all white people, if I couldn't know that I had a chance to do anything any other American could, to go as high as an American citizenship would carry anybody, there'd never be anything in this country for me anyway."<sup>32</sup>

### **3.4 Post-Pearl Harbor**

In contrast to the familiar usage of post-Pearl Harbor battle cries of "unity," Himes frames the aftermath of Pearl Harbor's legitimating war hysteria for Japanese Americans and anyone who "looked like the enemy" as also

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 154.

implicating Black Americans.<sup>33</sup> Himes writes, “It was the look in the white people’s faces when I walked down the streets. It was that crazy wild-eyed, unleashed hatred that the first Jap bomb on Pearl Harbour let loose in a flood. All that tight, crazy feeling of race as thick in the street as gas fumes.”<sup>34</sup> While Pearl Harbor prompted white Americans to band together, it created even further division between white Americans and those that were not while stabilizing an exclusive American identity rooted and legitimated through patriotic or nativist racism. Angelo N. Ancheta describes the consequences of “patriotic racism” explaining “Intimidation and violence against Asian Americans is still common on December 7 because of the hostility that arises on the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan”.<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, it is only after Pearl Harbor and the United States’ entry into war that the unjustified removal of Japanese Americans becomes the catalyst for Himes’ protagonist in understanding his position as a racialized target. Bob describes a perpetual fear inducing nightmares “ever since the war began.” Even while he is awake he describes a psychological control white people have on him “day and night, asleep and awake, conscious and unconscious,” leaving him

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<sup>33</sup> “Looking like the enemy” is a common phrase used to discuss Asian American racism. *Looking like the Enemy* is the title of Mary Matsuda Gruenewald’s memoir and the Chapter Three title in Angelo Ancheta’s *Race, Rights and the Asian American Experience*.

<sup>34</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights*, 12.

feeling “torn all loose inside, shriveled, paralysed, as if after a while I’d have to get up and die.” He explains, “Maybe I’d been scared all my life, but I didn’t know about it until after Pearl Harbour.”<sup>36</sup> Critical to this novel is an understanding that Pearl Harbor impacted Bob not with a sense of American pride but his rejection from an American identity.

### **3.5 Constructing a Patriotic Whiteness**

Himes then moves into a deliberate deconstructing of familiar images of patriotic pride and heroism, beginning with not only an American soldier but also more specifically a soldier’s uniform. In so doing, Himes strategically deconstructs this image to continue his critique of America’s flaws. While the typical American landscape informs us that soldiers must be greeted unconditionally with signs of respect, whether a salute or a reverential pause, Bob views each American in uniform suspiciously. For Bob, uniforms are further reminders of his alienation from an American identity, stating, “The place was filled with solid white America. . . There was a group of elderly Army officers, a brigadier-general, two colonels, and a major; and apart from them a group of young naval officers looking very white—ensigns perhaps. . . ‘The great white world,’ I said flippantly, leaning slightly toward Alice as we walked the gauntlet of the room. ‘Strictly D-Day. Now I know how a fly feels in a glass of buttermilk.’”<sup>37</sup> Throughout the long and tiring four-day span of this novel, men in uniform

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<sup>36</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

constantly surround Bob, inducing a feeling of claustrophobia exclaiming, “every second man was in uniform.”<sup>38</sup> In a related passage he disgustedly contemplates the familiar scene of “black sailors aboard [ships] waiting on the white.” Sarcastically he thinks to himself, “In the good old American tradition. . . the good old American way.”<sup>39</sup>

In one of his haunting dreams, Bob is reminded of the façade of his assumed status as a leaderman aiming to position himself further outside of Americanness. He describes in graphic detail being beaten by “peckerwoods” while the president of the shipyard maliciously stands by ordering the beating. Bob remembers, “I turned my head and looked up to see who was talking and it was the president of the shipyard corporation dressed in the uniform of an Army general and he had a cigar in one side of his mouth and his eyes were calm and undisturbed. . . The president of the shipyard said, ‘Niggers can take it as long as you give it to them.’”<sup>40</sup> The severity and rawness of his dreams reinforce the authenticity of his feelings of isolation in his real life serving to legitimate his reactions toward representations of Americanness or symbols of Americanness.

In contrast from the patriotic symbolism of an American uniform, Himes incorporates the history of different uniforms, zoot suits worn by American men of color (mainly Latino and Black Americans) representing a “subversive refusal to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 69.



be subservient.”<sup>41</sup> As young working-class males donned on their zoot suits, they created a new identity, a counterculture in “opposition to the dominant culture.” For Black Americans the construction of a zoot suit identity mocked racial stereotyping as they created a “fast-paced, improvisational language which sharply contrasted with the passive stereotype of the stuttering, tongue-tied Sambo.” Moreover the suits were viewed as “an explicitly un-American style” dismissing the regulations for wartime fabric rationings and “seen by white servicemen as a pernicious act of anti-Americanism.”<sup>42</sup>

As Bob finds himself contemplating the previous night’s events, a dinner with his girlfriend, Alice, who briefly hints at having an intimate moment with another woman and being trapped by the lure of Madge’s whiteness, he enters a bar in Little Tokyo. Inundated with feelings of humiliation, self-contempt and self-pity, Bob reflects on his earlier life and his brief stint on the college football team dreaming of being powerful and strong, of being the team’s hero. As his thoughts return to Madge, his feelings of powerlessness emerge triggering a “cold scared feeling” that crept back in him. He felt “weak, and black and powerless.”<sup>43</sup> His thoughts are slowly interrupted as he eyes a white soldier getting into a contentious dispute with the Black bar owner. As Bob witnesses the scene, he

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<sup>41</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 166. See also Mary Matsuda, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 89. Asian Americans also took part in this counterculture also wearing zoot suits.

<sup>42</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 77.

hopes to witness a fight, contemplating:

If the boy got hurt, or if there was any kind of rumpus with the white chick in it, there wouldn't be any way at all to stop a riot—the white GIs would swarm into Little Tokyo like they did into the Mexican districts during the zoot suit riots. Only in Little Tokyo they'd have to kill and be killed, for those spooks down there were some really rugged cats; they say they wouldn't drink a white cow's milk. I wanted it to come and get it over with. But the white boy caught himself and didn't say anything; I felt a sense of disappointment.<sup>44</sup>

By introducing this uniform through the Zoot Suit Riots' history, Himes critiques and resists the power and privilege unabashedly granted to Americans who don an American military uniform. As Robin D. G. Kelley explains, the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles demonstrated the abuse of power by white American soldiers who justified "racist attacks on black and Chicano youth, during which white soldiers engaged in what amounted to a ritualized stripping of the zoot."<sup>45</sup> Critics Edward Margolies and Michel Fabre comment on Himes' increasing awareness toward other communities of color explaining Himes was first interested in "the plight of the interned Japanese Americans" then turned toward "the appalling treatment of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles who were

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 173.

attacked and beaten by soldiers and sailors during the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943.”<sup>46</sup>

The graphic inhumane beating in Bob’s dream not only mirror the beatings of Mexican and Black Americans by white servicemen during the time of the riots but also signifies the manipulation of patriotism to justify acts of violence. Where the soldier’s uniform is placed virtuously above those that wore the zoot suits, Himes’ inclusion of this history aligned with the paralleled dream repositions and reprioritizes a neglected history of Americans of color.

Himes’ clear knowledge of the historical “race riot” contextualizes a clear condemnation of American soldiers within this novel. As Keith Wilhite explains, “For Himes, as evident in this barrage of indictments, the events of June 1943 connect regional racist practices to national identity and the imperial ambitions of U.S. international policy. He refuses to overlook the symbolic resonance of uniformed, World War II servicemen carrying clubs down the streets of Los Angeles in search of ‘youths with darker skins,’ and his essay effectively undercuts the celebratory rhetoric of military heroism in the L.A. Times.”<sup>47</sup> As Wilhite observes, in recalling the Zoot Suit Riots Bob transforms from feeling “weak and black and powerless” empowered with thoughts of vengeance toward

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Margolies and Michel Fabre, *The Several Lives of Chester Himes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Keith Wilhite, “Mapping Black and Brown L.A.: Zoot Suit Riots as Spatial Subtext in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 66.2 (2010): 129-130. Wilhite refers to Himes’ essay “Zoot Riots are Race Riots.” Chester Himes, “Zoot Riots Are Race Riots,” *The Crisis* (July 1943): 200-01, 222.

white soldiers.<sup>48</sup> Reflecting on the white soldier, Bob contemplates, “If the boy got hurt, or if there was any kind of rumpus with the white chick in it, there wouldn’t be any way at all to stop a riot—the white GIs would swarm into Little Tokyo like they did in the Mexican districts during the zoot suit riots. Only in Little Tokyo they’d have to kill and be killed, for those spooks down there were some really rugged cats; the saying was they wouldn’t drink a white cow’s milk. I wanted it to come and get it over with.”<sup>49</sup> By deconstructing the reverential act of paying homage to an American soldier’s uniform, Himes has created a space that rejects the pretense associated with superficial performances of patriotism. In so doing, he also deconstructs our understanding of who is (is not) assumed to be an American patriot. This historical demarcation is rooted in a racist delineation that has posited white Americans as pure patriots while non-whites have been viewed suspiciously. Marked by the heightened xenophobia during times of war, Himes resists the manipulation of patriotic rhetoric that has legitimated racist policies and violence upon communities of color, amid the Japanese Americans, the Mexican Americans and amongst Black Americans

Himes then turns his critique toward the soldier “in” the uniform challenging our willingness to regard them as the highest embodiment of patriotism based on their intrinsic need to fight for a right cause, protect us from harm and to always do the right thing. Bob dreams a highly decorated Marine

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<sup>48</sup> Keith Wilhite, “Mapping Black and Brown,” 76.

<sup>49</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 77.

sergeant is following him. The Marine's ease in which he can laugh, a laugh so loud "that it woke up the neighborhood" about a checklist of murder and rape but regretting that he "ain't killed a nigger yet" seems surreal. Under the guise of patriotism and serving one's country, the Marine proudly boasts "Hell, I've raped all kinda women, white women, black women, yellow women, red women, and the only reason I ain't raped no green women is 'cause I couldn't find none."<sup>50</sup> Thoroughly amused, the Marine continues stating, "I done killed all kinda sonabitches, raped all kinda women"—pointing to the decorations on his chest—"see these, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Presidential Memorial Citation, even a Good Conduct Medal. I got these for killing a lot of sonabitches I ain't even seen until after they was dead."<sup>51</sup>

The above dream follows Bob's arrest after Madge, a white woman and subordinate at his job, falsely accuses him of rape, serving as a reminder of a hierarchy associated with race. Despite Bob's authority as a leaderman, a ranking above her position as a tacker, her whiteness makes him powerless in asserting any authority over her. Bob's first encounter with Madge begins with her flirtatious performance using her whiteness against Bob's blackness as Bob describes, "She deliberately put on a frightened, wide-eyed look and backed away from me as if she was scared stiff, as if she was a naked virgin and I was

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

King Kong.”<sup>52</sup> This repeated “scared-to-death act” instigated by Madge eventually leads to a confrontation between the two after Bob, in need of a tacker, asks her for her help. After she shouts her response, “I ain’t gonna work with no nigger!” Bob reacts with his own insult stating, “Screw you then, you cracker bitch!” The confrontation ends with Madge’s indignation, as she seeks help from two nearby mechanics, asking them, “You gonna let a nigger talk tuh me like that?”<sup>53</sup>

The character construction of Madge intentionally aims to demonstrate the linkages between race and gender and its implications towards Bob’s male subjectivity. Madge’s whiteness, despite Bob’s advanced position as leaderman, leaves him feeling both helpless and emasculated. Thus, Himes’ close attention to describing Madge, her features, her gestures, contrary to our perceptions of beauty, is critical in understanding her manipulation of her whiteness to trap Bob.

She was a peroxide blonde with a large-featured, overly made-up face, and she had a large, bright-painted, fleshy mouth, kidney-shaped, thinner in the middle than at the ends. Her big blue babyish eyes were mascaraed like a burlesque queen’s and there were tiny wrinkles in their corners and about the flare of her nostrils, callipering down about the edges of her mouth. She looked thirty and well sexed, rife but not quite rotten.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 19.

There is nothing in the above description that suggests Bob's interest in Madge was from a physical attraction. In fact, the description is to suggest and describe a repulsiveness aimed in dehumanizing Madge (the same dehumanization directed toward Blacks by whites) who becomes a familiar caricature, a "white monster" often depicted within Himes' novels.<sup>55</sup> As Stephen Milliken describes, Himes' construction of whites within his novel are of "pathetic and dangerous emotional cripples, obsessed psychotics, whenever their racist impulses are triggered."<sup>56</sup>

As Bob awakens from his nightmare, just as the Marine is about to add Bob to his checklist of murders, Bob wakes up in his cell reminded about what had transpired between himself and Madge. The dream then metaphorically establishes the very real types of racist ideology that Bob has had to navigate throughout the past four days dodging racial epithets, Madge's false accusation of rape, and an ineffective American justice system. As his thoughts return to him, he explains, "Then I began remembering the incidents the day before, the stretch of Madge's big brutal mouth yelling, 'Rape.'"<sup>57</sup> Prior to the final scene between Madge and Bob where she falsely accuses him of rape, Bob visits her at her hotel room after he is taunted by a co-worker who provides Bob with Madge's telephone and address asserting, "What she needs is a good going over

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Milliken, *Chester Himes: A Critical Appraisal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 52

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>57</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 200.

by someone.”<sup>58</sup> The interaction between Madge and Bob waver between unsure threats and warnings to him about what he can and cannot do while asserting that she knows what he wants to do. Madge admonishes Bob, “That’s all you niggers do. . .Lie up and get drunk and dream about having white women.”<sup>59</sup> Madge then in claiming her innocence states, “I’m a Christian woman.” Yet the lines that follow contradict her assumed purity as Himes writes, “She opened her robe. She was naked except for her shoes.” In tempting Bob, she ironically asks, “Ain’t I beautiful? Pure white.”<sup>60</sup> As Eileen Boris writes, “The problem was less her race but more her awareness of using her position as a white woman to manipulate black men.”<sup>61</sup>

Madge’s performance of using her whiteness is rooted in the historical tensions between whites and black men and rooted in a “rape-lynching complex.”<sup>62</sup> Upon the emancipation of slaves, “savage black men,” if let loose, were believed to attack and rape white women destroying not only the purity of white womanhood but also to destroy civilization. Beginning with D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915), this fear was popularized, inducing a “climate of racial

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>62</sup> Eileen Boris, “You Wouldn’t Want One,” 78.



hysteria [that could be seen] in every aspect of popular culture.”<sup>63</sup> Adapted from Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* (1905), *Birth of a Nation* introduced the Ku Klux Klan as defenders of America, saving white womanhood from the “Brute Negroes, played by whites in blackface [that] pursued white virgins.”<sup>64</sup> The underlying message from *Birth of a Nation* centered on the protection of white womanhood as the measure for preservation of the Jim Crow state. The incorporation of this film’s ideology within American culture justified racial violence against Black Americans revealing itself countless times within America’s history from the 1930s Scottsboro Boys’ trial to the murder of Emmett Till in the mid-1950s.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, the image of Madge using her whiteness to lure and trap Bob then screaming “rape” metaphorically symbolizes the lure of America’s promise of inclusion to Bob (and other Americans of color) only to be dismissed and vehemently rejected. The actual accusation of rape takes place when Bob

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<sup>63</sup> D.W. Griffith, Director, *Birth of a Nation*, 1915; Marlon Riggs, Director, *Ethnic Notions*, 1986.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905 repr.; Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing Company, 2011); Marlon Riggs, Director, *Ethnic Notions*, 1986.

<sup>65</sup> Both the Scottsboro Boys trial of 1931-1937 and Emmett Till’s murder in 1955 were centered on the protection of white womanhood against blacks. The Scottsboro trial centered on an alleged rape of a white woman and the murder of Emmett Till was the consequence of his whistling at a white woman. “The Trials of the Scottsboro Boys,” accessed June 14, 2012, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scottsboro/scottsb.htm> and “The Murder of Emmett Till,” PBS, accessed June 14, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/>.

unknowingly is caught in the locker room with Madge. Upon his rejection of *her* advances and knowing there are several workers just outside the locker room, she screams, “Help! Help! My God, help me! Some white man, help me! I’m being raped.”<sup>66</sup> As he is forcefully taken away to a jail, Bob reflects on the gravity of his situation. Yet ironically while he reflects previously he had “been instinctively scared of being caught with a white woman screaming, ‘Rape.’ Scared of the mob; scared of the violence,” now he “was scared in a different way. Not of the violence. Not of the mob. . . But of America, of American justice. The jury the judge. . . of the inexorability of one conclusion—that I was guilty. The whole structure of American thought was against me; American tradition had convicted me a hundred years before. And standing there in an American courtroom, through all the phoney formality of an American trial, having to take it, knowing that I was innocent and that I didn’t have a chance.”<sup>67</sup> According to Stephen F. Milliken, “His panic is that of a man who has always believed absolutely in the sanctity of the law and who suddenly discovers that the law can be abrogated when it becomes an inconvenience to a sufficiently large and powerful group.”<sup>68</sup> Bob’s epiphany of his insignificant American citizenship, beginning first with the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and the “arbitrary internment” of Japanese “Americans” reinforced through Madge’s ease in crying rape has

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<sup>66</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 180.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Milliken, *Chester Himes*, 76.

allowed him to finally name his fear.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.6 Draft Resistance

The notion of fighting in the war as a gesture into acceptable acts of Americanness is offered to Bob, after his false accusation of rape and subsequent arrest. Judge Morgan states, “If I *let* you join the armed forces—any branch you want—will you give me your word you’ll stay away from white women and keep out of trouble?”<sup>70</sup> (my italics). The positioning of the judge’s reconsidered and “benevolent” decision keeping Bob out of jail “to fight racism abroad” is described by Milliken as an “ironic finale to what Bob Jones has just begun to realize was his own private war for simple justice at home.”<sup>71</sup> To add insult to injury, Mr. Houghton juxtaposes Madge as “tolerant and intelligent” and “capable of weighing personal vengeance against national good,” next to Bob’s assumed lack of appreciation for being “the first Negro to be employed in a position of responsibility.”<sup>72</sup> Houghton then dismisses Bob through a metaphoric appraisal of Madge’s “patriotic gesture compared only to the heroism of men in battle.” He then turns toward a comparison of Bob with other Black Americans who have chosen to demonstrate their loyalty to their country explaining, “To do a thing like this, at a time when Negroes are making such rapid progress, when

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>70</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 203.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Milliken, *Chester Himes*, 83.

<sup>72</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 201.

Negro soldiers are earning the respect of the nation, and when Negro workers are being employed in all branches of industry is more than a disgrace to yourself, it is a betrayal of your people.”<sup>73</sup>

The condescending remarks of both Houghton and the Judge do little to shake Bob who has already been through his personal war, and rather reinforce Bob’s psychological state of resistance. The comparisons of both Madge and the “Negro soldiers” do little to sway Bob as he thinks to himself, “I wanted to just break out and laugh like the Marine in my dream, laugh and keep on laughing.”<sup>74</sup> Despite the continued series of negative events against Bob, his response of sarcasm rather than remorse affirm his resistance both toward the sham of a liberating war and the hypocritical performances of patriotism masked by those in uniforms.

Bob’s resistance to the draft is first revealed when describing “that crazy, scared feeling I’d woke up with” one morning, reflecting, “It happened in a second; my job was gone and I was facing the draft; like the Japanese getting pulled up by the roots.”<sup>75</sup> His fear instigated by “facing the draft” coupled with his mocking of American symbols of patriotism demonstrate his rejection of using the war to prove his citizenship.

Intentionally, Himes positions his critique of America’s flaws strategically

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 30.

throughout the novel, aimed in rationalizing Bob's actions, his hyper-sensitiveness to race, and struggles to reclaim his manhood. In an earlier scene after an encounter with Madge, he turns to the assistance of the union representative though it falls upon deaf ears dismissing Bob's complaint by pointing to Bob's assumed failures. The union representative responds admonishingly, "That's the trouble with you coloured people,' he shouted, getting agitated. 'You forget we're in a war. . .We're fighting fascism. . .We got to have unity in the union and unity on the job—.'" Sarcastically, Bob responds to the union steward referring to him as "Comrade Marx," reminding him of the domestic war Bob (and other Americans of color) are fighting that white Americans, like himself and Madge are removed from. He states, "Let's you and me unite and start right here fighting fascism. Let's go down and give this cracker dame some lessons in unity and if she doesn't want to unite let's tell her about the war—." <sup>76</sup>

Mirroring Himes' own "burning conviction" that Black Americans could contribute to the war only by fighting for their rights as Americans within America, the anger and hostility demonstrated within Bob is rhetorically intentional, especially revealed in his denunciation of the war. <sup>77</sup> Bob's sarcasm turns to animosity shouting back to the steward, "And as for all that gibberish about unity! Get these crackers to unite with me. I'm willing. I'll work with 'em, fight with 'em,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Milliken, *Chester Himes*, 61.

die with 'em, goddamnit. But I ain't gonna even try to do any uniting without anybody to unite with. . .what the hell do I care about unity, or the war either, for that matter, as long as I'm kicked around by every white person who comes along?"<sup>78</sup> Furthermore the narrative device of Bob's anger functions to delineate himself from the passive Black characters (the Harrisons, "the big fat black Hollywood mammy" within the novel) whose compliance and accommodationism serve as his embarrassment. His anger serves to remasculate him amid his moments of self-doubt and humiliation.<sup>79</sup>

It is not that Bob inherently assumes an anti-war or anti-patriotic stance. Rather his refusal to assume a subservient position under whites prevents him from participating in a façade of patriotic unity. His affinity for draft resistance moves beyond the confines of his subjectivity and functions as a solution to the elusive racial problem frequently discussed within the novel. "I wondered what would happen if all the Negroes in America would refuse to serve in the armed forces, refuse to work in war production until the Jim Crow pattern was abolished."<sup>80</sup> Notably it is not that he seeks to avoid the draft, rather his stance is based upon both the continued racist segregation performed by the army and his exclusion from an American identity. Contrary to popular opinion many draft resisters, whether they officially claimed this title or not, refused to participate in

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>79</sup> Chester Himes, *If He Hollers*, 79.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

the war not because of cowardice (though we see moments of Bob's self-doubt), but rather because they rejected American policies.

Consequently, the typical ostracizing of draft resisters as cowards is strategically resisted in an important shipyard scene at Bob's job. Significantly it is among the Black men and women workers. Initiating a conversation about who should (should not be viewed) as cowards, Ben "a graduate of U.C.L.A." and someone who "didn't take anything from the white folks and didn't give them anything" challenges the notion that only those that do not fight should be viewed as such.<sup>81</sup> In fact, he recognizes that imprisonment as a result of refusing the draft holds greater purpose than those that would fight but "keep on taking it."<sup>82</sup> The scene strategically works by seeking to defend the positionality of draft resisters contemplating not only the complexities of draft resistance versus patriotism but also to scrutinize the winless decisions Black Americans were forced to make. Still further, despite the boldness of Ben, the demonstration of his uncertainty of not knowing "what the hell I'd do if they called me" is integral because it provides clarity on the difficulty of the decision the average, unsure, non-vocal Black American had to negotiate. Ben starts the following conversation with Smitty, his co-worker:

'Every time a coloured man gets in the Army he's fighting against himself. Of course there isn't anything else he can do. If he refuses to go

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 120.

they send him to the pen. But if he does go and take what they put on him, and then fight so he can keep on taking it, he's a cowardly son of a bitch.'

'You can't call coloured soldiers cowards, man'. . . They can't keep the Army from being like what it is, but hell, they ain't no cowards.'

'Any man's a coward who won't die for what he believes,' Ben flared. 'If he's got principles he'll die for them. If he won't he's a cowardly son of a bitch'.

'Any time a Negro says he believes in democracy but won't die to enforce it—I say he's a coward,' Ben declared. 'I don't care who he is. If Bob lets them put him in the Army he's a coward. If you let them put you in the Army you're a coward. As long as the Army is Jim Crowed a Negro who fights in it is fighting against himself.'<sup>83</sup>

Ben's diatribe strategically functions to resist notions of cowardice of draft resisters by framing the hypocrisies endemic within the war and the principles behind which draft resisters resisted. While many Black Americans were duped into believing the benefits of proving their Americanness others adamantly rejected America's racism toward Black Americans and Americans of color. Lynn M. Itagaki notes, "African Americans in the military served as models of black courage during and after the war, these returning servicemen would eventually face the contradiction that, while they were celebrated war heroes abroad, they

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 120-121.



faced exploitation at home.”<sup>84</sup> Their service did not erase the racism that remained at home.

Himes challenges the illusion that complying with performances of patriotism would bring greater acceptance into American society by satirizing those in the novel that viewed the war as an opportunity to prove their worth. In one scene after Bob’s demotion, Kelly, his white supervisor, condescendingly tells Bob, “Take your punishment like a man, then make a comeback. That’s the American way, my boy. Prove yourself.” Kelly’s perspective is shared by Alice’s mother, Mrs. Harrison who is repeatedly mocked by Bob. In several scenes Bob intentionally toys with Mrs. Harrison ridiculing her naiveté about issues of race and racism. Knowing how to upset her, Bob shares his plan to “get even with the white folks.” Himes describes the scene of horror that overcomes Mrs. Harrison as, “She couldn’t have looked any more startled and horrified if I’d slapped her.” The accommodationist view of Mrs. Harrison is strategically opposite of Bob’s state of resistance as her character is constructed as submissive and subservient. She responds, “Bob you frighten me. . .you must accept whatever they do for you and try to prove yourself worthy. . .White people are trying so hard to help us, we’ve got to earn our equality. We’ve got to show them we are good enough, we’ve got to prove it to them.” Mirroring the sentiment of Kelly, Mrs. Harrison’s pitiful view that Black Americans should only feel gratitude toward whites allows Himes to reveal the connection this view has in reinforcing exclusive performances of patriotism. Bob’s feelings of Mrs. Harrison, who has tears in her eyes, is not

anger but sympathy as he observes how assimilated she has become. He remarks, "She was genuinely concerned; I felt sorry for her."<sup>85</sup>

Bob's resistance to the war, the draft and patriotism is critical in affirming his subjectivity as a man, what he seeks throughout the novel. Himes suggests that Bob can retain his manhood by, ironically, staying out of the war and not enlisting. But as the circumstances of his situation force him to fight in the war as a sign of the Judge's "kindness" for keeping Bob out of jail, Bob feels dejected rejecting the notion that the army and the war would help him assert his male (and American) subjectivity. Significantly, Bob's glimmer of hope is in a seemingly insignificant interaction with two other Americans of color. Waiting to be taken away to the army, "two Mexican youths" acknowledge him with both a grin of solidarity as well as recognition in addressing him as "man" a contrast to the Judge's repeated denigration of Bob as a "boy." Describing this scene, Lynn Itagaki writes:

Although appearing on the last page of the novel, these Mexican Americans are the first characters to acknowledge Bob's struggle as a racial war, forging a momentary understanding that allows Bob to assert his subjectivity as a black man in America, however briefly. Most importantly, the slangy repetition of man to describe and address Bob reasserts and acknowledges their commonality and subordinated racial and gender identity as men of color. Voicing his presence and affiliation with these young men, Bob responds to their superficially lighthearted

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 52, 174.

banter: 'I'm still here.'<sup>86</sup>

Devastated by the sudden turn of events destroying plans for starting a life with Alice by the vengeance of a white woman, Bob's final words are critical in understanding the beginning process of his remasculation. Aside from his material loss, one of the most important things for men of color in general and Black men in particular is the affirmation of their survival. While *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is a familiar story of Black American racism, its intersection with the racial struggles of other Americans of color is not only unfamiliar but also inspiring. Bob understands his struggles as neither greater nor lesser as his removal from society mirrors Riki Oyana's earlier removal while his ending entry into the army is shared with the two Mexican youth.

### 3.7 "As of that moment"

John Okada's *No-No Boy* examines a type of existential dilemma faced by a World War II Japanese American draft resister post-incarceration who is burdened by his "mistake" for refusing to comply with U.S. governmental orders of conscription. The response to *No-No Boy*, immediately following its publication in the mid-1950s, was one of criticism, cited as having "no literary value" and for its inaccuracies, dismissed by the community it seemingly represents.<sup>87</sup> The novel's use of "no-no boy" in its title blurs the histories of draft resisters with no-

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<sup>86</sup> Lynn Itagaki, "Transgressing Race," 76.

<sup>87</sup> Frank Chin, *Aiiieeeee!*, 20.

no boys perpetuating the myth of confluence despite their diverging histories.<sup>88</sup>

Highlighting its shortcomings observing the misrepresentation of draft resister history, William Minoru Hohri comments, “In my discussions with the draft resisters, I sense little pain and resentment.”<sup>89</sup> While I am not concerned with proving how accurate this novel is to the original history of Japanese American draft resistance; I am interested in what it says about Asian American and intersecting racial histories of resistance.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover because there is so little written about World War II no-no boys or draft resisters not only in their defense but also as a record of this history, Okada’s *No-No Boy* is all the more important. *No-No Boy* is among the first major works that created not only a voice for Japanese Americans in particular but for Asian Americans in general.<sup>91</sup> After Jeffery Chan rediscovered the novel in the

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<sup>88</sup> An understandable converging of these two histories has emerged as both are interpreted as performances of resistance. To clarify, no-no boys not only answered “no” to one or more of the infamous questions 27 and 28 of the loyalty oath aimed in separating the loyal from the disloyal but also those that answered “no” specifically to question 28 were sent to the segregated camp of Tule Lake. As Okada explores, their decision to answer “no” was complex rooted not in cowardice but in support of family as well as protest both against the United States and their confinement in incarceration camps. Draft resisters performed their resistance to the draft one year after the loyalty oath was in place as many, in fact, answered “yes” to the questions with specific disclaimers for the release of their community in general and families in particular.

<sup>89</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 134.

<sup>90</sup> Insert some examples of though there are many who vouch for its historical accuracy.

<sup>91</sup> Frank Chin, *Aiiieeeee!*, 20-21.

1970s in a bookstore in San Francisco, he along with Frank Chin, Shawn Wong and Lawson Inada helped redeem the forgotten novel for Asian Americans. Prior to finding *No-No Boy*, Frank Chin describes that Asian Americans were made to believe that they were “born of a people who have no culture, no literature, no writing, no writers, except in some past across an ocean.” The rediscovery of John Okada helped fill the sensation of cultural absence as Chin describes Okada as “proof of our yellow soul.” While today Okada’s *No-No Boy* is a respected and frequently referenced Asian American novel, as Jinqi Ling explains, prior to Okada’s novel, Asian American literature was “reduced to making sociological documentation of the immigrants’ struggle and their children’s accommodation as assimilation. Asian American writers found that autobiography was almost the only commercially publishable form available to them.”<sup>92</sup>

I argue the significance of this novel contextualizes the formation of a racially conscious Asian American identity by reframing Japanese American racial exclusion and resistance during World War II as an American minority story. It is centered on the response of either assimilation or resistance by Americans of color negotiating an entry into, and exclusion from, American society. The contradiction faced by Japanese Americans, who were initially asked, then forced, to defend the country that kept Japanese American families and communities behind barbed wire is silenced by an understanding that patriotism must be proven. The racialization of Japanese Americans (or any

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<sup>92</sup> Jinqi Ling “Race, Power,” 361.

Asian face) as foreign, however, prevents them from participating in performances of patriotism that would affirm their American identity. This novel explores not only the diverging responses to racial exclusion but also the converging outcomes despite those compelled by the notion that American acceptance could be gained through proof of one's loyalty.

In this chapter, I explore Okada's aim in diminishing the heroism of Japanese American World War II veterans next to reheroizing the history of no-no boys and draft resisters as a method for critiquing the exclusive constructions of Americanness. This process of reheroization first begins by unraveling the complex histories provoking no-no boys and draft resisters into performances of resistance that are silenced by perceptions of their cowardice. Second, I explore the formation of a racial consciousness as Okada aligns the no-no boys and draft resisters' stories as neither greater nor lesser than the racial exclusion shared with Americans of color in general, and Black Americans in particular. The symbolic imagery of Black Americans within the novel demonstrates a performance of defiance either by Black Americans or in triggering thoughts of protest by Japanese American characters. Finally, the construction of resistance serves as the foundation for a racial consciousness of locating agency not only in understanding the exclusive space Americans of color occupy within the United States but also suggests a favoring of draft resister and no-no boy resistance over veteran compliance. Despite Ichiro's self-effacing outlook throughout the novel burdened by his perceived mistake, he is the one vindicated in the novel's climactic scene. As Ichiro is remasculated by his performance of resistance

symbolically he reheroizes the legacy of no-no boys and draft resisters.

*No-No Boy* opens the day Ichiro, is released after four years of incarceration, “two in camp and two in prison.”<sup>93</sup> Ironically, however, his day of liberation becomes the beginning of his psychological imprisonment induced by the permanency of his “mistake.” Certain his homecoming will be marked by rejection, he thinks to himself bitterly, “Best thing I can do would be to kill some son of a bitch and head back to prison.”<sup>94</sup> Yet this image of Ichiro as a ruthless murderer is highly implausible as he lacks a shred of self-confidence. Spotting his boyhood friend, Eto Minato, Ichiro is consumed with panic, worried about the accusation and questions that are certain to emerge. Appearing as “God in a pair of green fatigues, U.S. Army style,”<sup>95</sup> Eto’s presence forces Ichiro to confront his past providing a glimpse into what he will encounter throughout the novel. As a brief interaction unfolds between the two, it doesn’t take long for Eto to understand why Ichiro was never in the army thereby admonishing Ichiro a “No-no boy.”<sup>96</sup> Referencing both Ichiro’s cowardice as well as castigating him “a pariah,” Eto taunts, “No-no boy, huh?”. . . “Rotten bastard. Shit on you” and then

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<sup>93</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 3.

proceeds to spit on him.<sup>97</sup> Juxtaposed to Eto, his uniform, his profane comments and actions, Ichiro appears weak, emasculated by not only his decision but also his inability to defend himself. Consequently, Eto's visibility as a soldier heightens the shame Ichiro already feels, marking him a visible coward.

However, Eto's grandiose patriotic entrance into the novel, as a heroic soldier, isn't as it appears. Where Eto exploits his decision to enlist in the army antagonistically toward Ichiro, Freddie, another no-no boy mockingly states, "six lousy months and he wangled himself a medical discharge."<sup>98</sup> Moreover when comparing Eto's self-aggrandizement with the humility of another soldier Kenji, who is wounded from the war and who befriends Ichiro, Ichiro contemplates, "If Eto had been a brave man, if Eto had been wounded and given a medal, he would have dramatized his bravery to any and all who could be cornered into listening, but he was not a brave man and so he would never have gone into battle and displayed the sort of courage of which one might proudly speak."<sup>99</sup> Thus in contrast to Eto's shortcomings, Kenji's humility becomes a representation of an idyllic heroism functioning to counter Eto's superficial performance of patriotism.

Despite the impulse to dismiss Eto's character as revolting, he proves

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 4. See also William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 134 for his description of a "no-no boy" as a "social ostracism" and "a pariah" not in reference to draft resisters.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>99</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, 60.



instrumental in demonstrating social constructions of patriotism framed in ways that excludes persons who do not fit within this construction. Eto's mocking of Ichiro and no-no boys, while silencing their intent, is indicative of the implications of a familiar hyper-patriotism justified as proving one's loyalty. Eto is especially important in the novel because he demonstrates the realities faced by no-no boys and other draft resisters who have historically been ridiculed and emasculated by those that willingly or unwillingly registered for the draft.

At the same time, Okada does not seek merely to villainize Japanese American veterans as he incorporates characters also implicated by their decision to enlist. Beginning with the preface our introduction toward the history of Japanese American draft resisters is not by way of Ichiro, the no-no boy but through the introduction of an anonymous Japanese-American soldier, "patterned after the author himself."<sup>100</sup> As the Japanese-American soldier reveals the circumstances of his family and community's incarceration into American "concentration camps," he likewise reveals the implications of others who made the choice to reject the draft then were shipped off to federal prisons. Rather than a boastful reflection of his bravery in the war, the soldier's thoughts center on the circumstances of "his friend who didn't volunteer for the army because his father had been picked up in the second screening and was in a different camp from the one he and his mother and two sisters were in." Called before the judge, his friend adamantly responds, "he wouldn't be drafted" until his father was released

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<sup>100</sup> Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald "After Imprisonment," 19.

from “the other camp” so he could return to be with his wife and daughters.<sup>101</sup>

While critiques of this novel have often been focused on the psychological trauma of the protagonist, Ichiro Yamada, the preface informs us the novel’s argument moves beyond the subjectivity of Ichiro. Ichiro’s social castration from both an American and Japanese/Japanese American community serves merely as a point of entry into critiquing the limitations of a flawed American justice system and more specifically about the linkages between race and patriotism. In many ways this novel mirrors the arguments raised in Chester Himes’ novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, by deconstructing performances of patriotism represented through the revered soldier’s uniform and the divisive celebrations of Pearl Harbor.

As Okada, frames the animosity toward Japanese faces (or anyone that appeared to have a Japanese face) after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he describes the setting of a divisive America in which Japanese Americans were

immediately stripped of their Americanness, stating:

The indignation, the hatred, the patriotism of the American people shifted into full-throated condemnation of the Japanese who blotted their land.

The Japanese who were born Americans and remained Japanese because biology does not know the meaning of patriotism no longer worried about whether they were Japanese-Americans or American-Japanese. They were Japanese, just as were their Japanese mothers and Japanese fathers and Japanese brothers and sisters. The radio had

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<sup>101</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, xi.

said as much.<sup>102</sup>

The mere mention of the “bombing of Pearl Harbor” instantaneously demarcated real Americans from the fake, as race became an instantaneous demarcation of friend versus enemy.

While racial constructs serve to categorize people and communities in a seemingly non-threatening way, during moments of crisis, they serve to mark Americans of color forcing them into a performance rooted in *proving* their Americanness. Scholar, Robert G. Lee examines the historical role of media in foreignizing the Asian body reduced to yellowfaced Orientals described as “buck-toothed, squinty-eyed and pigtailed.”<sup>103</sup> As Lee explains, “race is a mode of placing cultural meaning on the body. Yellowface marks the Oriental as indelibly alien. Constructed as a race of aliens. . . Aliens, outsiders who are inside, disrupt the internal structure of a cultural formation as it defines itself vis-à-vis the Other; their presence constitutes a boundary crisis. Aliens are always a source of pollution.”<sup>104</sup> In marking the Asian body as foreign or “outsiders who are inside,” racial constructs work simultaneously to stabilize an exclusive white American identity while destabilizing Asians (the “racial opposition to whiteness”) who are

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., viii-ix.

<sup>103</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

viewed suspiciously.<sup>105</sup> “As of that moment,” Okada reminds us, “the Japanese in the United States became, by virtue of their ineradicable brownness and the slant eyes which, upon close inspection, will seldom appear slanty, animals of a different breed. The moment the impact of the words solemnly being transmitted over the several million radios of the nation struck home, everything Japanese and everyone Japanese became despicable.”<sup>106</sup> Following December 7, 1941, over a hundred and twenty thousand Japanese/Japanese Americans were rounded up into the horse stables or “camps with barbed wire and ominous towers supported by fully armed soldiers.”<sup>107</sup> Their single crime was that they looked like the enemy.

In describing the animosity created by Pearl Harbor, Okada notes how quickly communities became bifurcated as Americans were led by their performances of patriotism while Japanese Americans were no longer viewed as American. The disparate character constructions provided by Okada demonstrating this racially divisive “moment” center on ways white Americans were implicated as well as benefitted from racial imaginings. Okada’s purpose for including a blend of contrasting characters whose only commonality was their whiteness demonstrates the privilege granted to white Americans over

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., vii; Jeanne Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, vii. See also Houston’s chapter on Pearl Harbor.

<sup>107</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, ix.

Americans of color. As Pearl Harbor created instant enemies it also united unexpected white Americans, bridging social divisions through the ways in which they could distance themselves from a visible enemy. Okada's description of unifying class divisions is demonstrated as both the college professor and the tavern drunk share their alienation of Japanese Americans. The college professor's suspicion of his "now too Japanese-ish star pupil," mirrors the explicit criticism from the tavern drunk who let "it be known to the world that he never thought much about the sneaky Japs and that this proved he was right."<sup>108</sup> Where in normal social settings the tavern drunk would clearly be ostracized, his subordinate status disappears as his performance of patriotism and critiques of Japanese parallels the majority opinion. Moreover, his instinct towards understanding his cue as a patriotic American is demonstrated as he proudly exclaims he would "be first in line at the recruiting office the very next morning."

### **3.8 Proving Americanness**

For Japanese Americans, their demonization as the enemy prevented them from participating in performances of patriotism that would affirm their Americanness. Incorporating the narratives of several Japanese Americans who served in the First World War, Okada demonstrates how absurd it is in knowing their service and proof of Americanness was invalidated forcing many to respond by similarly now rejecting America. Mike, "a veteran of the first war," is described as acknowledging "there might be justification in interning some of the outspokenly pro-Japanese aliens, but he scoffed at the idea of the government

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., vii.

doing such a thing to him.” However, when he finds out that the government cared little about his demonstrations of proven loyalty, “he burst into a fury of anger and bitterness and swore that if they treated him like a Japanese, he would act like one.” Mike’s resistance manifests in becoming “a leader in the troublemaking, the strikes and the riots” at Tule Lake. Eventually Mike would expatriate to Japan “a country he didn’t know or love.”<sup>109</sup>

The example of Mike and others like him enraged to discover their proof of Americanness was disrespected also serves to help Ichiro understand his isolation was not unique. Ichiro reflects “what about the young kid on Burnside who was in the army and found it wasn’t enough so that he has to keep proving to everyone who comes in for a cup of coffee that he was fighting for his country like the button on his shirt says he did because the army didn’t do anything about his face to make him look more American.”<sup>110</sup>

The dismissal of past performances of Americanness through military service was also amplified as Japanese Americans were forced to fight for their country that held their families and communities captive. The decision to fight or resist was embedded with intense emotions of anger, guilt, and humiliation upon those forced to choose amongst all the contradictions. These varied emotions demonstrating the complexity of the decisions faced by Japanese American men are captured within the dialogue between the “good Japanese-American who had volunteered for the army” (two years after he spent time in the camps) and the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 159.

lieutenant, “a blond giant from Nebraska.”

The lieutenant from Nebraska said, ‘Where you from?’

The Japanese-American who was an American soldier answered:

‘No place in particular.’

‘You got folks?’

‘Yeah, I got folks.’

‘Where at?’

‘Wyoming, out in the desert.’

‘Farmers, huh?’

‘Not quite.’

‘What’s that mean?’

‘Well it’s this way. . .’ And then the Japanese-American whose folks were still Japanese-Japanese, or else they would not be in a camp with barbed wire and watchtowers with soldiers holding rifles; told the blond giant from Nebraska about the removal of the Japanese from the Coast, which was called the evacuation, and about the concentration camps, which were called relocation centers.

The lieutenant listened and he didn’t believe it. He said, ‘That’s funny. Now, tell me again.’

The Japanese-American soldier of the American army told it again and didn’t change a word.

The lieutenant believed him this time. ‘Hell’s bells,’ he exclaimed, ‘ if they’d done that to me, I wouldn’t be sitting in the belly of a broken-down

B-24 going back to Guam from a reconnaissance mission to Japan,<sup>111</sup>

Okada's identification of the soldier redundantly as an "American soldier" serving in the "American army" attests to how non-white Americans are forced into proving their Americanness because they are viewed first as non-American. What begins as two soldiers casually introducing themselves to one another transforms into the Japanese-American soldier relaying the unimaginable happenings that transpired not only to his family but also to so many like him. The lieutenant's instinctive response to dismiss the event as fictitious reveals what Fu-Jen Chen describes as a history "relegated to national unconsciousness" so that our ideological constructions of Americanness prevent us from accepting certain injustices have been committed.<sup>112</sup> When the lieutenant finally recognizes that he heard correctly, his instinctive response "if they'd done that to me" functions in support of the Japanese-American soldier prompting a process of reflection about the complex lack of awareness of what this war has done to Americans of Japanese descent within the United States.

As the Japanese-American soldier contemplates his position in choosing to fight against the decision by those that chose to resist, our understanding of which person's decision was correct is blurred:

He was thinking about a lot of things but mostly about his friend  
who didn't volunteer for the army because his father had been picked up

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., x-xi.

<sup>112</sup> Fu-Jen Chen, "A Lacanian Reading," 106.



in the second screening and was in a different camp from the one he and his mother and two sisters were in. Later on, the army tried to draft his friend out of the relocation camp into the army and his friend had stood before the judge and said let my father out of that other camp and come back to my mother who is an old woman but missed him enough to want to sleep with him and I'll try on the uniform. The judge said he couldn't do that and the friend said he wouldn't be drafted and they sent him to the federal prison where he now was. 'What the hell are we fighting for?' said the lieutenant from Nebraska.

'I got reasons,' said the Japanese-American soldier soberly and thought some more about his friend who was in another kind of uniform because they wouldn't let his father go to the same camp with his mother and sisters.<sup>113</sup>

The subtlety of the Japanese-American soldier's response "I got reasons" works to elicit a sympathetic reader response. On the other hand, the Japanese-American soldier appears weak compared with his friend, the draft resister, who demands the return of his father to his family. Moreover, his response juxtaposed to the lieutenant's more aggressive one works to reinforce the perceived weakness and constructed effeminacy of Asian males while reaffirming the masculinity of the lieutenant.

This novel helps articulate the ways in which the perceived foreignness of Asians prohibits them from simultaneously participating in either performances of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., xi.

patriotism as Americans or performances of dissent as Americans without the threat of repercussion, a privilege benefitting white Americans. If Asians participate in demonstrating their patriotism, their perceived foreignness makes them targets of suspicion so that their participation in acts of patriotism is rooted not in demonstrating their pride but in proving they are not the enemy. And conversely if they are to participate in acts of justifiable dissent, their perceived foreignness further criminalizes them affirming the assumption that they are indeed, the enemy. Thus this novel explores this dual isolation and the privilege allotted to white Americans in voicing dissent without fear that their patriotism is in question.

After Ichiro returns to the university he had attended prior to the war, he meets with his former engineering professor revealing not only the privilege of white Americans to voice dissent but also most significantly the flippancy with which Professor Brown speaks of what happened to the Japanese American community. As Ichiro enters the professor's office, he is reminded of his foreignness and alienation as the professor blurs his identity with other Japanese sounding names, arrogantly embracing his memory and stating, "You're Su. . . Suzu. . .no. . .Tsuji. . ." As Ichiro corrects him, Professor Brown raises the concern about the injustice towards the Japanese American community. He cajoles, "Tough about the evacuation. I really hated to see it happen. I suppose you're disturbed about it." Despite Ichiro's response of "No, sir. Not too much, that is" the professor adamantly states, "Of course you are. Who wouldn't be? Families uprooted, businesses smashed, educations interrupted. You've got a

right to be sore.” Professor Brown continues his critique by stating, “You fellows are as American as I am. And you’ve proved it. That outfit in Italy. Greatest there ever was. You were there too, I suppose?” But as Ichiro contemplates Professor Brown’s comments, he observes a type of insincerity behind the words of support. He describes the interaction as “It was seeing without meeting, talking without hearing, smiling without feeling. We didn’t talk about the weather at all only that’s what it felt like all the way through.” Although he dismisses his feelings observing “Brown is still Brown” and it is Ichiro who is the one to “reduce conversations to the inconsequential,” the interaction demonstrates the ease with which Brown can move in between defending and critiquing his country. In articulating his critical view of America to Ichiro, he does so easily unafraid of accusations of disloyalty.<sup>114</sup>

When Ichiro’s search for a job leads him to Mr. Carrick, Ichiro is met with Carrick’s unwavering opinion of the “evacuation.” With “great feeling and exuberance,” Carrick attempts to apologize “for the error of a big country.”<sup>115</sup> He states, “The government made a big mistake when they shoved you people around. There was no reason for it. A big black mark in the annals of American history. I mean that. I’ve always been a big-mouthed, loud-talking, back-slapping American but when that happened, I lost a little of my wind. I don’t feel as proud as I used to, but, if the mistake has been made, maybe we’ve learned something

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

from it. Let's hope so."<sup>116</sup> Yet, despite Carrick's offer of a job, Ichiro turns it down to Carrick's surprise. As Ichiro responds "Mr. Carrick, I'm not a veteran because I spent two years in jail for refusing the draft," Carrick is undeterred and continues his apology to Ichiro stating, "I am sorry, Ichiro. . .sorry for you and for the causes behind the reasons which made you do what you did. It wasn't your fault, really. You know that, don't you?"<sup>117</sup>

The examples of the "big blond lieutenant," Professor Brown and Mr. Carrick's critiques of America are not unique as others within the novel also critique the mistake made by America. Yet, what is most revealing is the ease in which they can shift from critiquing their country without the threat or concern of backlash, of being questioned for their disloyalty towards their country. What's more is their ability to speak for their country from a position of ownership despite their claims that Ichiro and other Japanese who were evacuated are "as American as" they are.<sup>118</sup> Significantly, the white male characters within this novel, despite demonstrations of their support towards Ichiro, represent an American subjectivity unattainable to Ichiro. Despite the parallels between their critiques and those provided by non-whites, these critiques represent an assertion of white privilege (even as they attempt to disavow this privilege) as Okada reveals throughout the book. As Ichiro contemplates, "It must be nice to

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 55.

be white and American and to be able to feel like this no matter where one goes to.”<sup>119</sup>

### **3.9 Ichiro's Remasculatation**

The presence of Black American characters within the novel demonstrate not only the shared space of racial exclusion by Americans of color but also a shared response of resistance toward this exclusion that help inform Ichiro's racial consciousness integral in the reassertion of his masculinity. Early on, however, we are introduced to Black Americans who are hardly sympathetic to Ichiro's cause and actively participate in mocking not Ichiro, the no-no boy but Ichiro the “Jap.” Encountering a group of “Negroes,” Ichiro is racially taunted. “Jap!” “Go back to Tokyo, boy” they shout and then proceed to chant “Jap-boy, To-ki-yo; Jap-boy, To-ki-yo.” Ichiro follows up the racial epithet with his own, only he utters it to himself “Friggin’ niggers,” lacking the confidence to challenge the Black Americans head-on. Ill-equipped to handle another confrontation Ichiro bows away from defending himself, struggling with his feelings of incompetence.<sup>120</sup>

Ironically, those that occupy a shared space of racial exclusion often participate in racially degrading those who share their ostracism from American society. In the same ways that the Black Americans capitalized on ridiculing Ichiro, Okada describes a parallel moment of racial antagonisms as a Japanese

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 5.

youth attempts to enter Club Oriental with “two Negroes.”<sup>121</sup> Okada describes the hostility of the scene in which Kenji is present to witness the prejudice directed toward Black Americans describing, “A Japanese beside Kenji shouted out sneeringly: ‘Them ignorant cotton pickers make me sick. You let one in and before you know it, the place will be black as night.’” As the Japanese American youth is refused admittance because he is with two Black Americans, Okada describes Kenji’s reaction toward what he witnesses leaving the club with “his drink unfinished” and “without returning any of the farewells which were directed toward him.”<sup>122</sup>

However, these moments of prejudice between Blacks and Japanese are each strategically accompanied with a narrated commentary contextualizing the racial undertones that instigate the actions. As the group of Black Americans tells Ichiro to “Go back to Tokyo,” this is paired with an integral moment of sympathy as Okada forgives the blatant derogatory comments describing the interaction and the shared space of racial exclusion as, “Persecution in the drawl of the persecuted.”<sup>123</sup> Ichiro’s utterance to himself of his own racial epithets is followed by a description explaining the ironies of the racial name-calling. Okada writes the hostility comes “from the same place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 5.

and too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than did those who were white and average and middle class and good Democrats of liberal Republicans, the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up.”<sup>124</sup> As we follow the scene at Club Oriental, we participate in Kenji’s thoughts and unanswered questions as he contemplates the “bigotry and meanness and smallness and ugliness of people.” Tormented by witnessing such a hostile scene full of hatred, Kenji deliberates, “One hears the voice of the Negro or Japanese or Chinese or Jew, a clear and bell-like intonation of the common struggle for recognition as a complete human being and there is a sense of unity and purpose which inspires one to hope and optimism.”<sup>125</sup> By providing a response to each racist action performed by a marginalized group within the novel, the Japanese American draft resistance story becomes an American “minority” story. These integral moments demonstrate that despite the hostility directed toward one another and the ease in pointing fingers of accusation, Okada sought to inspire understanding.

Contradicting moments of racial animosity between Japanese Americans and Black Americans, Okada introduces three Black Americans whose encounters with racism as well as their responses to it help influence Ichiro’s consciousness of resistance. When Ichiro inquires about a job at the Christian Rehabilitation Center, he meets Gary, another no-no boy who shares with him

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 134.

the heroism of Birdie, “a colored fellow” who protected him against the ridiculing of veterans that chose a “yes” response.<sup>126</sup> Disinterested by Gary’s assumed anti-patriotic performance, Birdie is described and remembered for performing his support both of Gary and his position of protest. Gary explains, “Birdie pretty near got into a couple of fights over me, but only because it seemed to bother him for some reason. I kept telling him not to go to bat for me, that I didn’t mind not being spoken to or being called names, but he couldn’t see how that could be. He was suffering for me, really suffering.” Admiring Birdie’s actions, Gary comments, “There’s still plenty of good people around, you know.”<sup>127</sup> The result of Birdie’s support, however, prompted him into becoming the target of the other vets’ malevolence forcing Gary to leave his position. The memory demonstrates the camaraderie between Americans of color sharing in racial isolation while also resurfacing at the end of the novel as Birdie is on the list of those Ichiro feels gratitude towards.

Ichiro’s contemplation of Birdie’s actions and consequences for supporting another no-no boy trigger a memory centered on another Black American whose racial ostracism was ignored where no one stood up on his behalf. The memory begins as he accompanies his friend, Tommy who finally finds a welcoming church after experiencing racial prejudice from several previous churches. At last this was “a true, Christian church where they are glad to have us.” After attending

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 226.



the church for several weeks basking in how inviting the church was to Tommy and himself, he notices during one service a “white-haired Negro standing in the back.” As other guests come after him, they are offered chairs while the Black American is ignored creating an obvious tension in the air as those around him pretend as if he is not there. As soon as he leaves, Ichiro describes the surreal scene and the blatant unspoken moment of prejudice as “suddenly, the people came to life like actors on a screen who had momentarily been rendered inanimate by some mechanical failure of the projector.”<sup>128</sup>

While Ichiro is outraged at the church’s hypocrisy and blatant prejudice against the Black American, Tommy’s position is to ignore this prejudice because of his feelings of gratitude for the church’s willingness to welcome them. Tommy explains the moment as, “Things which we cannot hope to understand.” Infuriated by Tommy’s acquiescence with the church’s prejudice, Ichiro responds, “Save the holy crap for yourself. . . seems to me like you goddamned good Christians have the supply spread out pretty thin right now.”<sup>129</sup> Tommy’s accommodating view is motivated by his desire to feel included rather than reminded of the times where he felt ignored and racially ostracized. Rather than feeling a sense of solidarity with Americans of color in a shared struggle, Tommy is described as having “revealed himself for the poor, frightened, mistreated Japanese that he was.” Accepting the church’s behavior, Tommy asserts, “they

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 230-231.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

like us. . . They treat us fine. We're in no position to stick out our necks when we've got enough troubles of our own." Rejecting Tommy's explanation, Ichiro responds in an aggressive tone, "Good deal. You hang on to it, will you? Son of a bitch like you needs a good thing like that."<sup>130</sup>

This memory of a time when Ichiro was not afraid to use his voice and where he once spoke confidently contrasts from the voiceless, apologetic Ichiro he has become. He is reminded of the time when he not only understood what was unjust but also felt compelled to speak against injustice, reflecting on the time before he had to "make the choice." Ichiro's sense of protest has alluded him internalizing the indictments of "yes, yes boys" misguided by their sense of righteousness. Now Ichiro has become the "poor, frightened, mistreated Japanese" that Tommy once was. At the same time the memory triggers a feeling of hope as Ichiro regains confidence from his past. Symbolically as Ichiro's memories are met with a familiar Seattle rain, he feels a renewed sense of confidence within him seeing this as a sign of his diminishing troubles murmuring to himself "after the rain, the sunshine." Although he is not naïve to think he can easily overcome the psychological trauma his four years of incarceration has produced, he is still hopeful, newly inspired in knowing there is "a lot of goodness that he had not expected."<sup>131</sup>

Coincidentally, the next day Ichiro encounters yet another interaction with

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

a Black American, “a white-haired, scrawny Negro” named Rabbit, a shoe shiner and pimp, whose unapologetic critique of American injustice influences Ichiro’s returning sense of confidence.<sup>132</sup> The encounter begins as Freddie asks Rabbit for a mistress for Ichiro. It is not that Ichiro seeks a woman but this opportunity allows Freddie the chance to assert his masculinity as someone who is able to acquire women on a whim. Pleading to Rabbit to find Ichiro a female companion after two long years away, Rabbit immediately understands Ichiro’s absence. Turning to Freddie, Rabbit questions, “Same deal?” Freddie replies “Yeah, yeah. Same as me.” Contrasting from the negativity associated with “no-no boys,” Rabbit responds in confident and approving tone, “Good boy. If they had come for me, I would of told them where to shove their stinking uniform too.”<sup>133</sup> In the next breath, dispassionately Rabbit turns to Ichiro and asks, “Shine?” As Ichiro responds “no thanks,” Rabbit still runs “the rag lightly over Ichiro’s shoes.”

Rabbit’s instinctive words of protest coupled with his immediate disinterest that Ichiro is a no-no boy influences Ichiro who is slowing gaining back his self-confidence stolen from him through his seemingly cowardly choice. Rabbit’s aggressive response, uncaring that it could be perceived as anti-patriotic, stem from a shared understanding in what it is like to feel excluded from American society. Moreover, Rabbit’s dissent differs from the white Americans in the novel in that he understands the circumstances of Ichiro’s decision immediately rather

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 238.

than the initial response of disbelief demonstrated by the blond lieutenant from Nebraska. And unlike Mr. Carrick who apologizes for his country without stating anything too negative against it, Rabbit's support of Ichiro is a clear unapologetic, rejection of the injustice he has faced and of America as Rabbit intentionally defiles the assumed sanctity of military uniforms. Rabbit's vulgarity and aggressive tone mirrors the tone Ichiro had previously taken with Tommy as Ichiro had felt compelled to vocalize his outrage in the church's prejudice.

While these encounters with Black Americans in this novel are brief, the stories of Birdie willing to stand up for Gary, the shared space of rejection faced by the socially ostracized elder Black man in church, and the unapologetic response of Rabbit are integral moments that help shape Ichiro's sensibilities in the present. These moments are introduced consecutively and strategically in proximity to the climactic scene of Ichiro's redemption. They serve as critical markers that challenge Ichiro's feelings of regret left powerless against the boastfulness of World War II veterans.

In the final pages of the novel, Ichiro and Freddie are greeted by the arrogance and meanness of Bull, a Japanese American veteran who has bullied Ichiro and Freddie throughout the book instigating yet another fight with Freddie.<sup>134</sup> As they encounter each other outside a pool hall, this time Bull succeeds in inciting a physical altercation with Freddie. Unlike Ichiro, Freddie and his "to-hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world attitude," actively seek the opportunity to engage in physical confrontations when he can as a way of defying the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 246.

construction of no-no boy cowardice.<sup>135</sup> Bull degrades Ichiro and Freddie admonishingly stating, “you goddamn Japs think you’re pretty smart, huh? I wasn’t fighting my friggin’ war for shits like you.” As Freddie makes a move to counter the attack against Bull, Ichiro sees Bull’s retaliation and steps in the way to prevent it. Okada’s construction of Bull’s self-righteous attitude in using his veteran status is not reflective of the heroism associated with veteran soldiers, but in demonstrating how bullies use their power to manipulate others. It is Ichiro who has now “managed to gain the top position” as he successfully strikes a now powerless Bull.

Okada narrates, “Driven by fear, urged by a need to fight this thing which no amount of fighting would ever destroy, Ichiro raised his fist and drove it down. He saw the eyes flinch, the head trying to avert the blow, and then the nauseating gush of blood from nose and mouth.” As Bull responds a vehement warning of “I’ll kill you,” Okada describes how Ichiro “looked into the angry eyes and saw that to quit now would mean to submit to that unrelenting fury. He raised his fist again, sick with what he was having to do.”<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile as Freddie attempts to escape to his car, Bull follows him continuing to fight through the moving car. Losing control of the car, Freddie is flipped over and instantly killed.

As Ichiro releases the punch, he also releases the years of repressed anguish for his misunderstood decisions that have left him isolated and rejected

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 247.

from society. The “thing” that Ichiro is fighting is pretense of goodness associated with those that enlisted. Wounded with pain distraught by the fight and death of Freddie, Bull loses himself in an uncontrollable fit of crying. Okada describes the scene of Bull’s profuse crying “not like a man in grief or a soldier in pain, but like a baby in loud gasping, beseeching howls.” As a father cradles his son, Ichiro places his “hand on Bull’s shoulder” and gives him a “tender squeeze.” Despite Ichiro’s unwillingness to lavish in witnessing Bull’s transformation from a hardened man to “an infant crying in the darkness,” Ichiro is vindicated of his assumed weakness portrayed throughout the novel in an inability to defend himself. In a whirlwind of events, the devastation of the fight, the death of Freddie, and the breakdown of Bull all happening within minutes. Ichiro’s assertion of his masculinity is Okada’s attempt at remasculating Ichiro the no-no boy into the no-no man. Both metaphorically and literally, he is the last man standing and no longer left with feelings of hopelessness. Despite the traumatic moments that just took place, Ichiro can only feel hopeful remembering the good in the people he’s encountered by such people as Birdie, “the Negro who stood up for Gary.” The signs of goodness coupled with Bull now reduced to a crying infant leave Ichiro with a “glimmer of hope.”<sup>137</sup>

### **3.10 Conclusion**

Among the few final words left by John Okada are those from a letter he wrote to Charles Tuttle, his publisher, pertaining to his newly anticipated novel on the Issei and their experiences in America. Okada wrote, “This is a story which

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<sup>137</sup> John Okada, *No-No Boy*, 250.

has never been told in fiction and only in fiction can the hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of people be adequately recorded. I feel an urgency to write of the Japanese in the United States for the Issei is rapidly vanishing and I should regret if their chapter in American history should die with them.”<sup>138</sup> But Okada was never able to finish his Issei novel passing away from a heart attack at the age of forty-seven.

Replace the word “Issei” with “draft resisters” and it eerily describes *No-No Boy*. Without this novel, the history of Japanese American draft resisters during World War II would find itself “rapidly vanishing” from our memories. Most significantly, the reclaiming of this forgotten novel informs us it is not only in the novel’s construction but also in the modes of rethinking it as a narrative of heroism embraced by its re-discoverers Chin and his partners. Part of the rediscovery process is intentionality in reheroizing the novel’s protagonist along with the other no-no boys and draft resisters who have historically been dismissed and emasculated by their dissidence. As players in the Asian American movement of the late 1960s—early 1970s, these discoverers understood the importance of contextualizing this history through a racial lens one that revealed an obvious exclusion of Japanese Americans (and other Americans of color) from hegemonic constructions of patriotism, Americanness and the autonomy to participate in performances of dissent. Okada’s awareness of the potency of American racism directed at Americans of color coupled with his unwillingness to shy away from it viewed him as dangerous to an audience

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<sup>138</sup> Frank Chin, afterward in *No-No Boy*, 256-257.

mesmerized by a mythology of World War II (both in celebrating and forgetting) who were not ready to listen to his honest critiques.

My interest in Okada's novel celebrates his attention towards framing the implications of a Japanese American history of racism as a history shared with other Americans of color mirroring the narrative construction of Chester Himes' novel. The awareness of exclusive constructions of patriotism and Americanness implicated by the construction of race in both novels are amazingly reminiscent of the other. Moreover, while critics have focused on each protagonist's connections to and ostracism from their specific racial community, these novels demonstrate they are equally about and influenced by the interactions with other racial communities.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### IN SEARCH OF HEROES IN LAUREEN MAR'S *RESISTANCE* AND SHAWN WONG'S *AMERICAN KNEES*: CONTEMPORARY SYMBOLISM OF A JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION HISTORY

Our memory of World War II continually contours the cultural landscape of our identity as Americans—who we are and what our nation stands for. But how do we remember this “past”? History is our remembering of what happened, directly through personal recollections and indirectly through scholarship. For the study of World War II, whose stories will we retell?

- Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory* (2000)<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction

In his 1967 speech, Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party conjured up the image of World War II Japanese American concentration camps within the United States warning Black Americans of the governmental ease in justifying racial acts of violence against non-whites. Newton emphatically stated:

At the same time that the American government is waging a racist war of genocide in Vietnam, the concentration camps in which Japanese Americans were interned during World War II are being renovated and expanded. Since America has historically reserved the most barbaric treatment for nonwhite people, we are forced to conclude that these concentration camps are being prepared for Black people, who are

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory*, 4.

determined to gain their freedom by any means necessary.<sup>2</sup>

As Newton aligns Black American racial struggles with Asian Americans framed within both a historical (Japanese Americans during World War II) and transnational (Vietnam War) context, his articulation of concentration camps transcends racial delineation.<sup>3</sup> The threat of incarceration, even genocide, not only implicates but also conjoins Americans of color in a fight against racism.

Nearly 20 years after the publication of Chester Himes' novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Newton capitalizes on the significance of the Japanese American incarceration narrative as a method for articulating a Black American racial struggle within the United States. Similarly, while Himes' novel centers on the racial exclusion or "castration" of protagonist Black American, Bob Jones, Bob's fear is only actualized after he witnesses Riki Oyana, his Japanese American neighbor and his family being forced from his home after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan. For Himes and Newton, Japanese American incarceration within concentration camps was viewed both as a tangible consequence of racial exclusion against Americans of color, while their rhetorical use of the memory served strategically to politically motivate Black Americans into questioning their fragile space as Americans many uncritically embrace. Despite the specificity of

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<sup>2</sup> Huey P. Newton, "In Defense of Self-Defense: Executive Mandate Number One," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 40. See Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 40. Newton's statement was a response to California's 1967 Mulford Gun Bill. Newton and other panthers viewed this as a way of keeping them disarmed.

<sup>3</sup> Although Newton was wrong about the concentration camps, he was right in another way: the mass incarceration of black people, particularly black men in the years since this statement.

the Japanese American incarceration history, both Himes and Newton understood it symbolically as a recurring example of racism rooted deep within an American social structure repeatedly directed toward non-white communities.

The imagery of “concentration camps,” used to describe the facilities confining Japanese Americans, ironically utilized by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, became a familiar rhetorical device invoking the racism perpetrated within American borders against Americans of color.<sup>4</sup> While the specificity of Japanese American concentration camps was utilized in both Newton’s speech and in Himes’ novel, others have utilized this imagery in a more broad scope demonstrated in George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother* (1970). Jackson likens the American prison systems as America’s version of concentration camps indicating the justified violence inflicted against Black Americans, stating that their, “mortality rate is almost what you would expect to find in a history of Dachau.”<sup>5</sup> The symbolism of “concentration camps” moves beyond the confines of Nazi Germany or of an ethnic specific Japanese American history politicized within the narratives constructed by diverse Americans of color to signify a racial exclusion from American society. Rhetorically, the imagery of America’s concentration camps creates an impetus for motivating Americans of color to resist and redefine their Americanness. This chapter expounds upon the symbolic imagery within a Japanese American incarceration narrative as a strategy for resistance

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory*, 148.

<sup>5</sup> George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 21.

through the reconstruction of its memory.

Dominating our historical memories of Japanese American incarceration within critical scholarship and popular culture is an in-group perspective limited to the experiences and perspective of Japanese Americans in the camps at the exclusion of perspectives from diverse Americans. While my intention is not to minimize the stories of specific Japanese Americans who suffered during these years or the importance of retelling this history from a Japanese American perspective and for Japanese American communities, this dissertation focuses on the ways that Americans of color in general and non-Japanese Asian Americans (the focus of this chapter) have interpreted and written about this history. It remains an ethnic specific Japanese American history implicitly undermining its transformative articulations from a history of shame to one of resistance instigated by a diverse group of Japanese and non-Japanese Asian Americans who brought this history to the larger public. For many years the history of the no-no boys was deliberately silenced both from within the Japanese American community and without viewed shamefully as cowards. Sparked by “the efforts of Frank Chin” and the other editors of *Aiiieeee!* this history has carved an invaluable space of heroism within the assumed stories of compliant Japanese Americans willingly entering into the camps without a fight.<sup>6</sup>

Through the rediscovering of John Okada’s novel *No-No Boy*, no-no boys and draft resisters have been repositioned as Asian American heroes remembered for their performance of protest and defiance while used

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<sup>6</sup> William Minoru Hohri, *Resistance*, 156.

interchangeably despite their differing histories. As Okada's novel examines the implications for those answering "no" to the loyalty questions, there is also a strong message of protest against exclusive constructions of Americanness and draft resistance as explored in the previous chapter. While these two groups have been used interchangeably, they have morphed symbolically into a shared image of protest and defiance missing from the stereotypical caricatures of Asian Americans as passive, silent and compliant. In so doing, the memory of the no-no boys' resistance is critical to an Asian American discourse of race and gender by countering emasculated representations of Asian American males within larger society. Symbolically it functions to reheroize Asian Americans by rewriting and reaffirming an Asian American legacy of resistance.

This chapter examines Laureen Mar's short story *Resistance* and Shawn Wong's *American Knees*, both written by non-Japanese Asian Americans who remember and rewrite the Japanese American incarceration history as a narrative of empowerment. Returning to history, specifically an Asian American one is central to their male protagonist's racialized subjectivity as emasculated Asian American men within contemporary society. Each protagonist is inspired by a legacy of Asian American male heroism through the narratives of the no-no boys' resistance during World War II, despite the authors' blurring their history with draft resisters. Both protagonists' nostalgic search for heroism is reflected in the absence of heroism in their current lives. On one hand the rearticulation of the Japanese American incarceration narrative through the reheroizing of the no-no boys' history serves to empower; on the other hand the limitations of a

masculinist discourse, implicitly isolating Asian American women, used to remember serves simultaneously to disempower.<sup>7</sup> Because the reclaiming of this history is steeped in remembering the legacies of both the 442<sup>nd</sup> all-Nisei (male) Regimental combat team and the no-no boys (aimed in remasculating Asian American males) it has implicitly functioned to silence Asian American women. This chapter examines the construction of Asian American heroism while interrogating the gendered tension in which Asian American women are rendered both apolitical and ahistorical. In choosing a text by a female author alongside a male author my aim is to consider the limitations in remembering singular versions of historical narratives with the hopes of impelling us to consider keeping this history dynamic and fluid so that its heroism can empower both men and women.

## 4.2 Asian American Heroes

Included within Jessica Hagedorn's anthology *Charlie Chan is Dead*, "a 1993 collection of Asian American fiction," Laureen Mar's short story *Resistance* demonstrates the nostalgia for a forgotten Asian American past. As Hagedorn's title alludes, this collection rejects Asian Americans as objectified Orientals, dehumanized through caricatures as "sinister villains, dragon ladies, brute hordes, helpless heathens, comical servants, loyal sidekicks, Suzy Wongs, or wily asexual detectives." Beginning with the influence of popular images,

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<sup>7</sup> The use of no-no boys in these stories although rooted in historical truth are versions of this history. No-No boys have been used interchangeably with draft resisters. While these histories sometimes overlapped the majority have different histories and responded to the loyalty questionnaire differently and for different reasons.

Hagedorn adamantly rejects the mid-1920s fictional television character Charlie Chan, played by Swedish American, Warner Oland in yellow face, whom Hagedorn describes as “our most famous fake ‘Asian’ pop icon—known for his obsequious manner, fractured English, and dainty walk.”<sup>8</sup> The construction of these seemingly benign caricatures have not only had lasting implications in how Asian Americans are racially dismissed and otherized but also how Asian Americans have contemptuously viewed themselves. Consequently, Mar’s short story embodies the notion of history as resistance by turning to the past as a method for carving out a new Asian American masculinity.

Set in Seattle during the late 1980s, *Resistance* centers on the protagonist, Grant Kiyoshi Ito, a newspaper journalist who feels emasculated by the banality of his job, the domineering women in his life and the embarrassment of a pitiful father whose perceived compliance and lack of resistance in Japanese American incarceration camps during World War II influences Grant’s ashamed perception of him within the present. Nearing his forties, Grant is described by his Chinese girlfriend, Marianne, to be “at the beginning of a long and terrible mid-life crisis.”<sup>9</sup> As the story opens, Grant witnesses his father’s pathetic attempt at “trying to hang himself” and is described by Mar as studying him “dispassionately.” Disturbed by the sight of his father, his failure and embarrassment as the family’s patriarch, Grant wonders, “Since when had his

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<sup>8</sup> Jessica Hagedorn, *Charlie Chan is Dead*, ix.

<sup>9</sup> Laureen Mar, *Resistance*, 305.

father tried anything new, taken any kind of risk—only now, when it couldn't possibly matter. One lousy, loud yellow cord that only someone as plastic as Mickey Mouse could successfully hang himself on.”<sup>10</sup> The suicide “attempt” is critiqued not from a sense of compassion or concern but from a space of shame. Ironically in Grant's mind a successful suicide would have garnered more respect than what Grant witnesses. He describes his father, “a timid man still eager to please. To commit suicide was probably his idea of doing just that, Grant figured, and wondered if then he'd consider him a failure.”<sup>11</sup>

The sight of his father's inept attempt at suicide and uninspired by his working class status as a gardener, Grant returns to Asian American history attempting to remasculate his Asian American male subjectivity within the present. Recovering the history of the no-no boys counters not only the image of his father's passivity as a “model minority” but also Grant's model minority tendencies, unable to sway the decisions directing his life decided upon by women who control his life.<sup>12</sup> As Grant is drawn to a constructed narrative of no-no boy heroism embodying the masculine characteristics lacking in both his father (and himself), he is offered an opportunity to reclaim what he feels is lost.

Impassioned into retelling the overlooked heroism of the no-no boys' story, he pleads with his managing editor to let him uncover this history. “But Gala, it is

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 287-289.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 300.



a disaster, it's a disaster!' he cried. 'If we don't report this, we're participating in a distortion of history. A couple hundred guys tossed into prison for resisting the draft, their protests, the fact of their existence even, squelched by community leaders who instead left us this legacy of the myth of the model minority."<sup>13</sup>

Gala's decision to cover the story of orphaned animals over the no-no boys' history functions to show her as not only ahistoricize but also to apoliticize her subjectivity. She is constructed as indifferent to history motivated by the predictability of her female sensibilities that draw her to the feel good story of rescuing animals over the injustice of the no-no boy history.

Interestingly Mar's story is situated in the late 1980s as Ronald Reagan is about to sign the reparations bill awarding 120,000 Japanese / Japanese Americans reparations for the injustice brought upon their lives. Mar plays with the notion of reparations as the answer to World War II racism against Japanese Americans. An apology tied to a sum of money sealed by the signing of a bill within a couple of minutes cannot compare to the years spent inside the camps or the implications to families and communities in the years to follow. Grant's awareness of this contradiction positions his historical authenticity over those duped into embracing the solution of reparations. Grant reflects:

He knew the script. 'Right. We zoom to the pen while President Reagan signs this unprecedented bill making an apology and a billion dollars in payments to 120,000 Japanese Americans who proved their loyalty, obeyed the law, went to camp, volunteered for the 442<sup>nd</sup>, the most highly

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

decorated unit in World War II. Yadda yadda yadda. Okay, we died. We coped. And forty-eight years later, a check arrives in the mail. My father, when he gets his payment, will go out and buy a new truck. A happy ending to a sad story'. . .He wanted more; a week-long series of special reports, two minutes a night, investigating the inside story, the missing chapter of Japanese American history, without which the war would never end.<sup>14</sup>

As Grant's producer chooses the reparations celebration over Grant's preference of the no-no boy history, we are reminded both to think critically of the function of history in general and the silencing of histories of resistance in particular. Grant is positioned as an expert of Asian American history while women are represented as mocking it. It is his managing editor, after all, that kills his hopes for reporting about the no-no boys' significance.

Similarly, his girlfriend, Marianne, views Grant's attachment to the past as a nuisance. With sarcastic undertones, she reflects:

He wanted both a memory and youth he'd never even had, a history, a time, a place all happening in the decade before he'd been born. He pursued the past with so much vigor, she thought, it was as if he felt he'd been left out of history, not just uninvited to the high school prom. That the subject of his obsession should be Japanese American history specific to World War II she felt in her guts was symptomatic of emotional

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 300.

immaturity.<sup>15</sup>

Opposite of a stand-by-your-man moment, Marianne's sarcastic critique of her man's perceived failings dismiss the relevance of history. In fact, Marianne blames his mother, trivializing Grant's attachment to the past as his not being properly socialized in the same way that some men are "completely incapable of remembering to flip down the toilet seat."<sup>16</sup> His mother's lack of historical knowledge is a further demonstration of a gendered historical ignorance. When he asks his mother to reflect on her experience during incarceration and about no-no boys of the past, she responds with a chilling look denying any recollection of the history and stating (to Marianne), "Grant's always asking me questions about the past, and do you know what? I can't remember."<sup>17</sup> Both Marianne and his mother serve in silencing the Japanese American incarceration narrative by their unwillingness to recognize the significance of a no-no boys' history of resistance.

Irritated with his inability to get the historical nurturing he seeks, he makes a feeble attempt at reasserting his masculinity by imagining his mother and Marianne transformed into the image of the JACL (Japanese American Citizens League). Where the JACL were once viewed heroically for their demonstrations of Americanness and patriotic loyalty at all costs, the reconstructed no-no boy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 311.

narrative remakes the JACL's role in World War II as villainous. Grant pictures, "a diabolical alliance between his mother and Marianne. They would send him off to a school for assimilation, aaaagghhh! The JACL! He thought. The Japanese American Citizens League! Those native do-gooders who'd sold them out, making them all look like happy campers!"<sup>18</sup> Grant's brief moment of liberation, considering what he "should" say to his girlfriend and mother, inspired by his private subversive thinking is soon shattered, aware of his inability to challenge either of them publicly. Despite Grant's disgusted thoughts of his father and ease in lashing out with thoughts of him as inept, Grant is silenced by the assertiveness of Marianne juxtaposed with Grant's awkwardness. He is rendered speechless. "What's wrong with being a gardener?" Marianne asks. Grant responds (like father, like son) in a timid, non-confrontational response of "nothing."<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.3 Romanticizing the Past**

Shawn Wong's novel *American Knees*, made into an independent film, similarly rewrites the Japanese American incarceration history from the perspective of a non-Japanese Asian American author.<sup>20</sup> Like the male protagonist in Laureen Mar's *Resistance*, Shawn Wong's protagonist, Raymond Ding, is also knee-deep in a mid-life crisis, recovering from his recent

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Byler, Director, *Americanese*, 2006.

emasculating divorce. The relationship between Wong's protagonists Raymond, a Chinese American and recent divorcee from San Francisco, California and his new girlfriend, Aurora Crane, a biracial (hapa) Japanese and Irish-American who grew up in the Midwest, plays a greater significance for Asian Americans in particular that moves beyond merely a reading of this text as a love story.<sup>21</sup> It is the love story between two Asian Americans rooted in an American experience that is so groundbreaking and perhaps even shocking to those who are implicated by representations of Asians as stoic, emotionless, and one-dimensional.

However, there is something disconcerting about the love that Raymond and Aurora share. As Aurora observes, "Their union was never just love and desire and friendship to him."<sup>22</sup> For Raymond, in many ways his relationship with Aurora becomes a performance of Asianness in which becoming Aurora's teacher both inside and outside of the bedroom (as a sexual expert and Asian American historian) is a response to his divorce, a divorce that emasculated and stripped him of his Chineseness by both his Chinese ex-wife Darleen and her family. His divorce becomes more than the dissolving of a marriage, becoming rather, a marker for his failures as a man, but specifically as a "good Chinese son." As he dejectedly considers an explanation for his divorce, he wonders if he could tell people, "I used to be Chinese, but my wife got custody of my

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<sup>21</sup> Hapa is a term in reference to bi-racial Asians.

<sup>22</sup> Shawn Wong, *American Knees*, 54.

ethnicity.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, his divorce signified the splitting of his body from the confines of a seemingly repressive Chinese tradition in which sons (and daughters) assume a scripted role.

Raymond’s desire to be freed from his past manifests into a romantic relationship with, Aurora, a much younger woman offering him an opportunity to reassert his masculinity. Literary scholar Wenying Xu observes that “American Knees successfully negotiates Chinese American and Asian American masculinities to give his protagonist, Raymond Ding, a sexy, sensitive, and secure-yet-vulnerable manhood.”<sup>24</sup> I would argue, however, Raymond undergoes a transformation from an insecure Chinese American male to more *secure* “Asian American” male rooted in the political history of an Asian American movement sought in resisting emasculated images of Asian American men. For Asian American males in particular rediscovering an identity rooted in resistance and an affirmation of masculinity—demonstrated, for example, through Raymond’s performance as the aggressive sexual teacher—serve to counter the injurious years of effeminate popular caricaturizations of “Charlie Chan and Hop Sing.”<sup>25</sup>

In many ways, Raymond’s desire to assert a collective Asian American

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>24</sup> Wenying Xu, “Masculinity, Food, and Appetite in Frank Chin’s Donald Duk and ‘The Eat and Run Midnight People,’” *Cultural Critique* 66 (2007): 80.

<sup>25</sup> Shawn Wong, *American Knees*, 96.

identity becomes his process of remasculination. Aurora's biraciality (a perceived incomplete Asian American racial identity) provides the opportunity for Raymond to reclaim his split self, reasserting his masculinity as an Asian American male without the specificity of an Asian ethnicity. In Raymond's view, Aurora's life experience has been limited to predominantly white settings of the Midwest (an environment absent of Asian American culture compared with San Francisco). Her limited exposure to cultural diversity and ignorance to the nuances of Asian cultural specificities provides Raymond the opportunity to live out his fantasy of becoming "some other Asian ethnicity."<sup>26</sup> In many ways Aurora's experiences as an Asian American in predominantly racist white environments where Asian Americans are invisible crystallizes and articulates Asian American issues more effectively than the Bay area environment where Asians are visible.<sup>27</sup> Marked by his biases of Asian Americanness lured by the romanticism of a multifaceted Asian American identity, Raymond's meeting Aurora offers him the autonomy he lacks within the restrictions faced as a Chinese American male in which "he becomes just another son, another brother."<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, his performance of Asianness framed first as an

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>27</sup> Meaghan Kozar, "Inauthentically Authentic: Deconstructing Representations of 'Real' Asian Americans in Shawn Wong's *American Knees*." Paper presented at the annual conference for the Association for Asian American Studies, Chicago, Illinois, April 19-20, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Shawn Wong, *American Knees*, 16.

experienced lover is then revealed in a rehearsing of an Asian American history. As Aurora observes, “The first few months with Raymond had been like being in a college ethnic studies class, as they compared notes about being Asian in America and being biracial.” Peculiarly, however, Raymond’s interest in an Asian American history moves beyond the implications of a past, rather his concentration on it aims in identifying Aurora’s assumed weaknesses. Juxtaposed with Aurora, Raymond is the perceived expert. Accusingly, Raymond provokes her, “If you don’t know what questions to ask, you lose your history.”<sup>29</sup>

Raymond’s admonishment of Aurora comes after an interrogation of what she remembers of her mother’s experience in the Japanese American incarceration camps. He questions, “what did your mother tell you about the camps?” Aurora responds, “She was a little girl, Raymond. She said she didn’t notice what the adults noticed. She remembered being able to play all day. She said it was dusty.” Unfortunately, Aurora’s recollection of her mother’s response does not satisfy Raymond. He proceeds his questioning not only of Aurora’s mother’s experience but also to determine Aurora’s investment into what Raymond deems an important part of one’s racial identity (as an Asian American), that is, an understanding of how Asian Americans have actively contributed, sacrificed, and constructed this nation. Raymond’s questioning juxtaposes Aurora’s lack of knowledge with his expertise continuing in an aggressive authoritative tone. Raymond continues, “did she end up in the Midwest because of the War Relocation Authority’s prohibition that families not

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 53.



settle in the western so-called military zone?”<sup>30</sup> His wealth of knowledge of Asian American history juxtaposed to Aurora’s lack of awareness even indifference posits himself as the teacher despite his inquiry of Aurora for more information on the camp history.

History functions to position Raymond as an authentic Asian American while Aurora is viewed inauthentically despite the assumed edge she has to this history through familial ties. The Japanese American Incarceration history functions in this novel to centralize the connection to identity, history and race. Raymond argues, “When you lose your history, you lose your sense of self.” Symbolically this history represents for Raymond more than what happened in the past. It symbolizes an unjustified and racially motivated act against an ethnic group that he consciously identifies with as an Asian American, in which the specificity of his Asian identity (as Chinese) could not provide him.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, the novel centers on Raymond’s construction of a new Asian American subjectivity rooted in a romanticized version of Asian American heroism demonstrated through the legacies of Asian American men during World War II. As the discussion shifts from Aurora’s mother’s experience in the camps to her uncle who served in the army, Aurora offers a rare bit of information “as proof she knew something.” Raymond’s questions of the incarceration history continue this time centered on the implicit heroic spaces occupied by Asian

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 53.

American males. Raymond asks, ““Was he in the all-*nisei* 442 Regimental Combat Team or the 100<sup>th</sup>. . .were any of your uncles *no-no boys*?””<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, it is Raymond’s failures from his earlier life that he attempts to recreate and rescript through his attachment to the legacy of Asian American males. The stripping of his masculinity took place during a brief stint when he was drafted for the Vietnam War and mocked as the enemy. He recalls being ridiculed by a returning U.S. sergeant who degrades Raymond. Vehemently, the sergeant yells, “Get that fuckin’ gook out of my office. . .I don’t give a shit if he’s a Chinaman—in ‘Nam a gook is a gook.” Further ridiculing Raymond, the sergeant condescendingly states, “Wait till the gook bitches get a load of you, a gook brother with an American passport. Let freedom ring, Ding!””<sup>33</sup> But Raymond never fought in the Vietnam War and never had the opportunity to prove his manhood or become the hero he wished. He was quietly discharged for a “congenital murmur” in his heart. Unable to play the role of soldier, Raymond remembers this moment as “never raising his voice.” His dread arises not from the intensity of war, rather from “the fear he’d felt when the sergeant had called him a ‘gook’.” While Raymond became an easy target in the army because he looked like the enemy, he redirects his insecurities by targeting Aurora. He questions:

‘You are a beautiful and politically correct Asian American woman when

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 58.

it's convenient for you. Other times you let things pass without comment. Men think you're beautiful, and you're quick to point out that they're being racist when it affects your identity, but you're not being responsible at other times for the race. Each time you let something pass that's generally insulting or racist about Asian people and it isn't specifically directed at you, you're in a sense passing for white, or at least non-Asian.'<sup>34</sup>

Raymond's accusation triggered by his self-doubt is redirected at Aurora's disloyalty to an "Asian American" history and subjectivity. His questioning of Aurora's loyalty and responsibility to her racial identity as an Asian American becomes a reenactment of sorts to the loyalty oath questions asked of the Nisei men and women who were cornered into affirming their "allegiance" to America.

While Aurora appears to be included within Raymond's education, her resistance to a politicized Asian American history (coupled with the other female characters within the novel) serves to isolate her even further within narratives of Asian American history. On one hand, Wong pays attention to the character development of the females within the novel. They are assertive, antithetical of stereotypical representations as submissive and passive. Aurora unhesitatingly challenges Raymond stating to him, "I'm your lover, not a case history" followed by a more aggressive admonishment, "Sometimes you're a natural teacher, Raymond, and other times you're like all other men—full of bullshit." Brenda Nishitani, Aurora's friend quickly and frequently vocalizes her opinions accusing

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 55-57.

Raymond of brainwashing Aurora during their relationship, “You made her start talking all that nonsense about being an Asian American woman.” On the other hand, their indifference to history and specifically an Asian American history problematically culminates in their apoliticization of something that has served critically in the formation of a racially conscious Asian American identity. As Wong narrates, “it wasn’t that Brenda was insensitive to Asian American issues. She was simply capable of separating questions of loyalty to the race from her personal everyday life.”<sup>35</sup> The reflection leads to a trivial description of Brenda’s Asian male preference as she states her affinity for “Thai boys at the Thai Takeout because they were polite and had beautifully smooth skin.”<sup>36</sup> In many ways, Brenda’s superficiality and over-interest in men mirrors Raymond’s overly sexualized persona. In the end, they are both jerks.<sup>37</sup> But Raymond’s interest in Asian American history and politics, a presumption of something meaningful, helps to redeem him as compassionate versus Brenda’s apathy. How do these dichotomous positions contribute to the tensions between Asian American men and women, where men are redefined within masculinist discourse as heroes while women are ignored?

While the Japanese American incarceration history functions to empower Raymond, both Aurora and Brenda are depicted as disinterested despite the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, “Aiiieeeee! and the Asian American Literary Movement: A Conversation with Shawn Wong,” *MELUS* 29 (2004): 99.

immediacy of their familial connections—Aurora’s mother and uncles and Brenda’s aunt were all in the camps. Brenda’s assertiveness as an Asian American woman coupled with her mocking of the incarceration history mirrors her aunt’s rationale for marrying a white man upon her release from Minidoka Relocation Center. According to her aunt, her marriage was her protection “so that the next time the country wanted to round up the Japanese and haul them off to camp they wouldn’t be able to recognize them, like the Germans and the Italians who got off easy during the war.” The defeatism of Brenda’s aunt contrasts with the resistance narratives associated with Asian American male / no-no boy heroism during World War II. Moreover, Brenda’s aunt’s stance toward the Asian American movement further captures Brenda’s apolitical views toward Asian American issues and speaks of the tension she has with Raymond. In Brenda’s aunt’s view, “the kids got it all wrong in the sixties with their endless search for identity and their self-determination crap.” In addition, Brenda’s aunt mocks the efforts of the redress movement described as taking “their kids to Disney World with the twenty-thousand-dollar redress money and bought a new fishing boat they named Camp Harmony, after the first camp she had been sent to.”<sup>38</sup>

A final notable female character represented in the novel is Betty Nguyen, Raymond’s love interest in between his encounters with Aurora. Mirroring the assertiveness of other Asian American female characters, Raymond is intrigued by her independence as he reflects, “Who said Asian women were demure and

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<sup>38</sup> Shawn Wong, *American Knees*, 93.

docile?”<sup>39</sup> While Wong succeeds in providing Betty and other Asian American women agency in guiding their identities, decisions, and challenges to males within the novel, Betty is implicated by a past that leaves her emotionally weak in the present. Betty’s painful experiences of abandoning her daughter function as an attachment to an unavoidable history. For her, however, history functions as both a barrier and burden stealing her pride, her humanity and mostly her daughter “who thinks she is dead.” She tells Raymond, “I didn’t want you to have to wonder what’s painful and what isn’t. If you knew you wouldn’t take me to a movie if it was about a little girl, or a divorce, or an abusive husband, or a war in Vietnam, or any number of subjects that have touched my life.” Unable to understand Betty’s desire to forget her past, Raymond’s attempt at supporting her traumatic memories results in his insensitive accusation, “You can’t ignore the past.” Rejecting Raymond’s solution, Betty responds, “Yes, you can.” In a moment of sorrow and liberation, she confronts Raymond stating, “We don’t share the same history.”<sup>40</sup>

Crystallizing the demarcation between women and men within this novel, Raymond and Betty’s differing perspectives on the past is the impetus for their eventual break-up. Raymond’s desire to reclaim a heroic past contrasts with Asian American women written as ahistorical represented in Aurora’s lack of history, Brenda and her aunt’s ridicule of it along with Betty’s desire to run away from it.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 189.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

Within the limits of American popular cultural representations where an Asian American visibility is often reduced to the pairings of Asian Americans with either a white male or female partner, where an Asian American experience is erased and placed within the borders of Asia, where sexuality is objectified as an exotic other, the explicit love story of a central Asian American male and female that refuses to censor the couple's passion is clearly refreshing. Wong's strength is in the creation of a story that humanizes Asian Americans (and their stories) antithetical to their objectification in mainstream society. As Wong shared in an interview about his novel, Asian American literature has been limited to tragedy, death and suicide explaining he "wanted to write a book that my wife would read; I wanted to write a book that my students would read."<sup>41</sup> The book's flowing narrative entices all the senses making topics of race, identity and history surprisingly compelling. In fact these issues are at the root of this story's narrative normalizing these issues as everyday discussions, questions, and confrontations between men and women. It is in the intricacies and complexities in how Asian American men and women communicate, remember, and construct their identities that determine the depth of their interactions with one another.

As the leading men in both Wong's *American Knees* and Mar's *Resistance* feel empowered by historical narratives of the past, women's interest in the past is trivialized. In articulating the importance of Asian American men remasculated through the reconstructions of history, Asian American women are represented

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<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, "Aiiieeeee! and the Asian."

through their rejection of it. We might consider that the notion of female modernity within contemporary society, a response to traditional images of women rooted in a historical past and explaining a desire to move women away from historical references. Yet as Asian American men are reconstructed to challenge their historical emasculation we cannot do this at the expense of Asian American women who are rendered invisible.



## CONCLUSION

[The soldier] must know that resisting an authoritarian government at home is equally important to fighting a foreign aggressor on the battlefield.

-- Lieutenant Ehren Watada<sup>1</sup>

2012 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man whose chance encounter with two white males ended in his brutal death in Detroit, Michigan. As Detroit's car industry experienced an economic crisis fueled by the competing production of import cars from Japan, Ronald Ebens and his stepson, Michael Nitz targeted Vincent Chin as America's enemy. Instigating a fight with Chin, Ebens stated accusingly, "It's because of you little motherfuckers that we're out of work." The night ended as Ebens and Nitz pummeled Chin to death with a baseball bat. Neither Ebens nor Nitz ever spent a night in jail for the crime described by Judge Charles Kaufman as not "the kind of men you send to jail."<sup>2</sup>

The targeting of Chinese American Chin, presumed to be Japanese and un-American, articulates the construction of an Asian face as a threat pushing Asian Americans outside of an exclusive construction of Americanness. Helen Zia, the journalist instrumental for uncovering the Chin case, portrays the animosity directed toward anyone with an Asian face in the 1980s:

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<sup>1</sup> Naomi Spencer. "US Army officer faces court martial for refusing Iraq deployment order." *World Socialist Web Site*, Last modified January 3, 2007. Accessed June 2, 2012. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2007/jan2007/wata-j30.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights*, 60.

Anything Japanese, or presumed to be Japanese, became a potential target. Japanese cars were easy pickings. Local unions sponsored sledgehammer events giving frustrated workers a chance to smash Japanese cars for a dollar a swing. Japanese cars were vandalized and their owners were shot at on the freeways. On TV, radio, and the local street corner, anti-Japanese slurs were commonplace. Politicians and public figures made irresponsible and unambiguous racial barbs aimed at Japanese people. Lee Iacocca, chairman of the failing Chrysler Corporation and onetime presidential candidate, jokingly suggested dropping nuclear bombs on Japan while U.S. Representative John Dingell of Michigan pointed his fury at ‘those little yellow men’. Bumper stickers threatened ‘Honda, Toyota—Pearl Harbor.’ It felt dangerous to have an Asian face.<sup>3</sup>

Zia’s portrayal resembles the hysteria in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor’s bombing during World War II. The hostility toward Asians as the enemy is a familiar recurrence serving simultaneously to create a sense of American unity against a common enemy. The verbal and physical violence directed toward Asians is rationalized as an act of patriotism often understood implicitly (and explicitly) as an accepted act of heroism.

In 1989, Chinese American, Ming Hai “Jim” Loo’s murder could be mistaken as a staging of the Vincent Chin murder similarly set at a bar with the attackers (Robert Piche and Lloyd Piche) being two white males, though this time they

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 58.

were brothers. After watching Loo and his friends play pool, both Robert and his brother Lloyd verbally instigated a fight with Loo and his friends by “stating their dislike for Asians, particularly Vietnamese,” and blaming Loo for the Vietnam War. Loo was murdered after Robert Piche struck him on the back of the head with the butt of a pistol.<sup>4</sup> In almost a formulaic construction of recurring anti-Asian sentiment leading to Asian violence, Angelo N. Ancheta describes, “In early 1992, when the talk of ‘trade wars’ with Japan escalated, racist rhetoric tied to ‘Buy American’ campaigns escalated as well. In Pasadena, California, a resident put a sign on his front lawn that read “‘RECESSION: IT’S YOUR FAULT / DON’T BUY JAP PRODUCTS / BUY AMERICAN / WE’RE MAD AS HELL.’”<sup>5</sup>

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has also revealed the same anti-Asian rhetoric through the premise of recovering an American pride. In 2008, OC Welch, owner of several car dealerships in Georgia aired five different radio ads asserting his disapproval of the government’s bailout of the Big Three (Chrysler, Ford and GM) arguing “the loan wouldn’t have saved any car dealerships and won’t stop more from closing.” In one of his ads “Wake up America,” Welch warns Americans of the consequences of not buying American stating, “All you people who buy Toyota and send your money to Japan. When you don’t have a job and can’t make a payment, don’t come crying to me.” Villainizing Japanese, OC Welch deliberately

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<sup>4</sup> AsianWeek.com, accessed May 28, 2012, [http://asianweek.com/081999/feature\\_timeline.html](http://asianweek.com/081999/feature_timeline.html). Unlike Ebens and Nitz, Piche was sentenced to 37 years in prison.

<sup>5</sup> Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights*, 75.

capitalizes on racial caricatures of foreign Asianness as a way of triggering an American pride. Welch adds, “One thing I wanna ask you, with those Japanese cars. Even when they are brand new, how come they don't smell like a new car? They are rice ready, not road ready.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet beyond the violence, what the history of the Vincent Chin murder also demonstrated was the resistance of a Pan-Asian American collective who came together in understanding that despite their differences in cultures, what they shared within the U.S. are the commonalities of race and the signifiers associated with an Asian face. Around the nation the lack of justice in what appeared to be an obvious salvaging of white life over Asian life was met with outrage. Asian Americans banded together embracing their commonalities and histories in America igniting a sense of shared racial struggle and protest. Even the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration via googlehangout has selected its motto: “Vincent Chin 30: Standing up Then & Now” invoking a spirit of resistance.<sup>7</sup>

But Asian Americans were not the only group to come together in protest as other Americans of color were compelled by a sense of shared racial injustice. Yen Le Espiritu documents the contributions from the Black American community. She explains that the “Chin case also received critical support from non-Asians, especially from the black and Jewish American communities. . .

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<sup>6</sup> Logana, Don. “New OC Welch radio ads cause controversy.” *WTOC-TV*, Last modified December 8, 2008. <http://www.wtoc.com/Global/story.asp?S=9479262>.

<sup>7</sup> “Vincent Chin 30: Standing Up Then and Now.” *Asian Pacific Americans for Progress*, Last modified May 3, 2012. Accessed May 30, 2012. <http://www.apaforprogress.org/vc30>.

According to a former ACJ executive direction, ‘Experienced hands from the NAACP, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith and the Detroit Association of Black Organizations provide invaluable contacts and information’”<sup>8</sup>

Psychologically the mere knowledge that communities of color banded together with the Asian American community (in protest of the Chin murder and other historical acts of racial violence against Asians such as the Japanese American incarceration) has potency to knock away at our stereotypes and misperceptions of one other. It is not only in knowing our histories but also through a deliberate attention to how communities have fought back in support of one another that makes these histories critical within the present.

These histories, however, are slowly becoming silenced and forgotten by an emergence into a post-racial colorblind discourse along with a slowly dissipating solidarity within a collective “Asian American” racial identity as more persons of Asian descent are choosing ethnicity over race.<sup>9</sup> Consider the campaign to authenticate Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders as separate from Asian Americans arguing that their histories of U.S. colonization are different. More recently the 2010 U.S. Census seemed to grant this desire for separation privileging Asian ethnicities over a singular Asian race as persons identifying as

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<sup>8</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>9</sup> See Amina Gautier, "On Post-Racial America in the Age of Obama." *Daedalus* 140, no. 1 (2011): 90-94,7.  
<http://ezproxy.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/849016361?accountid=12598>. Adding to the premise of a post-racial U.S. is the passing of Prop 2 (Anti-Affirmative Action) in Michigan in 2004.

Asian could check off their specific Asian ethnicity rather than an Asian/Asian American category.<sup>10</sup> These changes coupled with an emerging post-racial society create further distance from the importance of Asian American history.

But there is nothing “post” about the perpetuation of Asians as foreign or the enemy continually mocked, bullied, and attacked in which violence against Asians is dismissed as light-hearted humor. Demonstrated in the 2009 film, *The Goods*, the antagonizing chant, “Never Forget Pearl Harbor!” not only motivates car salesmen into selling American cars but also serves as the catalyst for assaulting an Asian American male fellow employee. These constructions of racial exclusion continue to end in a pattern of verbal and physical violence against Asians within the United States. This past year in 2012, an American soldier, Private Danny Chen was verbally and physically abused by his fellow American soldiers, calling him a “dragon lady” and mocking him as “Jackie Chen” after the martial arts action star, Jackie Chan. After weeks of torment “forced to crawl 100 metres on gravel with his equipment on as fellow GIs threw rocks at him,” Private Danny Chen decided to end his nightmare by committing suicide. Serving his country in Afghanistan, Chen’s proof of Americanness and masculinity did not make him less of a target to those guided by familiar racial

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<sup>10</sup> “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010.” *Census Bureau*, Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>. U.S. Census <http://www.census.gov/>. The categories provided for “What is this person’s race? White; Black, African Am., or Negro; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian Indian; Japanese; Native Hawaiian; Chinese; Korean; Guamanian or Chamorro; Filipino; Vietnamese; Samoan; Other Asian (e.g. Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on); Other Pacific Islander (e.g. Fijian, Tongan, and so on).

constructions of Asian Americans as foreign thirty years after Vincent Chin's murder or seventy years after the Japanese American incarceration history.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation considers the implications in uncritical World War II celebrations with specific attention toward the construction of Pearl Harbor in creating an American heroism against an Asian villainy. The legacy of World War II is ubiquitous and iconic within American history and popular culture. It is not a matter of questioning the legitimacy of America's entry into war but rather considering how this mythologizing of American heroism has simultaneously occurred through the demonization of Asian Americans while silencing the histories of racism within America. I am not implying we cannot or should not celebrate World War II, its veterans, the fallen soldiers or the freedom it has provided to many; rather, I am clearly stating it is unacceptable to appropriate a World War II heroism to bully, threaten and justify the racial violence directed toward those that are not included within that legacy. These histories have real consequences in which the celebration of one leads to the violence perpetrated against another. Ironically, despite Asians being repeatedly attacked and threatened sometimes ending in death, their perpetrators have rationalized their violence because they felt threatened by an Asian face, even an "Asian

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<sup>11</sup> See details of Private Danny Chen's abuse consisting of being put in a "simulated sitting position" and kicked by other soldiers using their knees" and "made to do push-ups while holding water in his mouth" and more. "Shocking Details of Private Danny Chen Case Revealed." *Bowery Boogie*, Last modified January 6, 2012. Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.boweryboogie.com/2012/01/shocking-details-of-private-danny-chen-case-revealed/>.

stance.”<sup>12</sup>

In challenging these constructions, we must understand how they are maintained both through a visible demarcation between assumed heroes over assumed enemies isolating Asian Americans further by silencing the support provided by Americans of color motivated through shared racial exclusion. Racism against Americans of color in general and Asian Americans in particular is alive despite the feeble attempts of apology to Japanese Americans through reparations or the fictitious characterization of Asians as the “model minority.” As the most bullied racial minority in the United States, Asian Americans need to be reminded of those heroes that resisted fighting back for their families and communities.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, our need for heroes is part of every community’s core in advancing toward the future motivated by the goodness and bravery of those within our society. In the blockbuster superhero movie, *Avengers* (2012), a glorious moment was constructed not around the narrative of the superheroes, rather it centered on the heroism of a regular man, a civilian who stands up

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<sup>12</sup> “The Police Murder of Kuanchung Kao.” *Revolutionary Worker Online*, Last modified September 28, 1997. Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://revcom.us/a/v19/920-29/925/kao.htm>. “The day after the Kao murder, Detective Roy Gourley issued a statement that completely cleared the police. In it, he concluded that, “Office Shields came under attack by an obviously out of control Asian male...in possession of a long wooden rod that he was twirling in what eye witness’s (sic) described as in a ‘Marshall Arts’ (sic) fashion.”

<sup>13</sup> Adela Uchida, “More than half of Asian –Americans teens bullied at schools across US.” *ABC-13*, Last modified November 7, 2011. Accessed June 2, 2012. <http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=noews/local&id=8551103>.



among the crowd of kneeling people bravely resisting the villainous Loki's orders to bow down before him. The powerful scene is a reenactment of victims of Nazi, Germany during World War II and the resiliency of those who survived their concentration camps. In recounting the emotionally charged scene of heroism, one online reviewer recaps the significance of the man's performance of resistance describing, "Loki prefers to think of Freedom as an aberration, that mankind was made to be ruled by strong rulers and gods. Great scene of an old man, no doubt a Holocaust survivor, at the Stuttgart, Germany orchestra scene, where the man stands up against Loki - and Cap makes an appearance, makes a speech alluding to the Nazis, before beating up on Loki."<sup>14</sup> As Loki is unmoved by the man's performance, Captain America and the others come whooshing into the scene ready to defend the man's bravery.

Returning to real life, the scene triggers other memories of World War II, when other regular men (Japanese Americans and Black Americans) did the same thing by standing up for their rights. By refusing to bow down amid the compliance of those within their community, these Americans protested an unobvious villain in the U.S. government driven by the premise that Japanese Americans and Black Americans did not deserve freedom. In response, hundreds of Japanese Americans and Black Americans bravely protested an American hypocrisy of fighting for freedom abroad while racism remained within the U.S. Through performances of draft resistance, Japanese American "resisters of

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<sup>14</sup> "Avengers—Sequel to Four Films! Great Job!." *Amazon.com*, Last modified May 7, 2012. Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.amazon.com/review/R2U0TXB2JFGF53>.

conscience,” no-no boys and Black American draft resisters stood up unwilling to kneel before a racist U.S. government. Yet despite the parallels in these stories, why are histories of European resistance during World War II remembered as heroism while Japanese Americans and Black Americans who also protested their unjust treatment rejected as cowardice? How do I explain to my son the difference in the two examples, that one is embraced while the other is rejected, when his histories as an Asian-African male (or “Blasian” as he calls himself) are rooted in the histories that have been rejected in their fight to defend the right to be accepted as an American?

For the past five years my son (now eight), like many young boys has been an avid superhero fan lavishing in the thrill of each characters’ powers. Around the age of four, I remember him asking me why are all the superheroes white? Not knowing if I should celebrate his astute critical race theory critique of superheroes or if I should be concerned that he was internalizing racism at such an early age, I asked him what color should they be? His response was “brown.” A few seconds later, he responded, “or maybe blue.” His initial response reflected a desire to match his brown skin color, as a child of mixed race, while the second response demonstrated his awareness of a lack of diversity, an articulation of something missing.

As he grew older this attention to what was missing manifested in his choice for Halloween costumes demonstrating both a passion for superheroes but also an early race consciousness. Two years ago he was Aang from the film,

*The Last Airbender* (2010), modeled from the Asian character, Avatar.<sup>15</sup> Last year he was the Black Panther Avenger, T'Challa, the first mainstream Black American superhero. Needless to say as excited as we were for the new *Avengers* movie to premiere, we were equally disappointed at Black Panther's absence. Despite Black Panther's exclusion from the movie, it did not prevent him from enjoying *Avengers* nor has my son forgotten who is missing frequently commenting he wishes Black Panther were included. To his delight, we came upon the recreated 2010 television animation of Black Panther produced by BET (Black Entertainment Television) in which Black Panther is not only included but also centralized as the dominant hero over Captain America. Their introduction occurs as a response to Captain America's unwelcomed visit to Wakanda, Africa. As he leads a group of Americans into stealing the valuable mineral resource known as vibranium from the Wakandan people, Black Panther heroically defends his nation as he proceeds to kick Cap's butt. This is the version that my son enjoys.<sup>16</sup>

Each year as the legacy of World War II grows stronger and another superhero film comes and goes, we cannot forget that what is on the big screen is both fictitious and reflective of our society in which our need for heroes is

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<sup>15</sup> "The Last Airbender—A Timeline of the Protest." *Racebending.com*, Last modified February 18, 2012. Accessed June 2, 2012. [www.racebending.com/v4/campaigns/airbender/the-last-airbender-timeline/](http://www.racebending.com/v4/campaigns/airbender/the-last-airbender-timeline/). Even though Aang is modeled after an Asian character the film chose a white actor for the role along with other white actors to play the Asian characters. Despite enjoying the film and wanting to model his costume after the film, my son is well aware of the problems of representation that this creates.

<sup>16</sup> *Black Panther* (BET Networks/Viacom; Marvel Animation, 2009).

determined by the presence of villains. If there were no villains, superheroes would be out of a job. As Asian Americans are absent within World War II narratives of heroism they simultaneously are very present as its visible villains justifying acts of violence perpetrated against them in the name of patriotism. Yet time and again Asian Americans (and Americans of color) have resisted America's racial exclusion by redefining and reconstructing their own heroes. This is the premise of my work. While not all Asian Americans or Black Americans may agree with my selection of heroes, my research explores the heroism of World War II Asian American and Black American heroes not only through my perspective but also the perspective of those who similarly are inspired by their audacity to resist. In so doing, the reconstruction of narratives of a new heroism arms us, empowers us with a language of resistance and the tools ready to stand up against injustice or any bully. We all need heroes. But we need heroes that look like us, who stand up for us while encouraging us to do the same. So when our voices are silenced, our histories are forgotten and our heroes are misrepresented, our most powerful form of resistance is to recreate our own versions of heroism.

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