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“We Were Japanese Too”: The Liminality of the Nisei Identity Told Through Three Memoirs of
Japanese American Incarceration in World War II

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Senior Thesis

Dickinson College Department of English

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A Note on Terminology

I grew up knowing Japanese American Incarceration as “internment” or “camp.” In school, when I learned about Japanese American Incarceration in textbooks, I had never seen the word “incarceration” appear nor did I see the 10 camps ever referred to as “concentration camps” because when studying World War II, because “concentration camps” was the phrase used to describe Nazi death camps in Europe. The terminology of Japanese American Incarceration is important because until recently many Americans used the language that was created by the War Department during World II, words like “internment” and “evacuation” and “relocation centers.” All these words fail to convey the severity of Japanese American Incarceration (“Terminology”).

I use the term “incarceration” instead of “internment” to describe what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II because “internment” refers to the specific detention of “enemy aliens” during war, meaning people who were considered enemies and were also registered “aliens” of the United States, not U.S. citizens. “Internment” becomes a confusing term when discussing the forced removal of Japanese Americans because of those Japanese Americans almost two-thirds were American citizens, not enemy aliens. While I still catch myself saying the word “internment” out of habit, in this thesis I use the term “incarceration,” in effort to accurately describe the forced removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II. I refer to the camps as both “incarceration camps” and “camp” instead of “internment camp,” “relocation center,” or “assembly center” to eliminate the lessening language of the World War II era War Department. Similarly, the words “evacuation” and “relocation” which the government used in 1942 to describe the forced move of Japanese Americans from the West Coast into incarceration camps, do not convey the severity of what happened. “Evacuation” and “relocation” imply a sense of precaution, as if imprisoning

thousands of Japanese Americans was for their own physical safety. Furthermore, “evacuation” and “relocation” leave out the fact that the removal was targeted towards a single ethnic group and that Japanese Americans could have faced arrest had they resisted removal or tried to return to the West Coast (“Terminology”). I use “forced removal” to describe the mass exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast and into inland concentration camps because again, the phrase is more accurate. Lastly, I use the term “Japanese American” to include both Issei (first-generation) and Nisei (second-generation) because I believe separating the Issei as non-Americans not only supports the archaic language of the World War II era War Department, but also contributes to larger narratives of immigrants not being Americans because they were not born here. In my thesis, I center on the liminal identity of the Nisei generation being both Japanese and American at the same time because they were the first generation to be born in the United States. I specify which generation I am referring to but use the larger term “Japanese American” to include the first, Issei, generation and the generations that followed.

Japanese American Generations

Issei – first-generation Japanese American

Nisei – second-generation Japanese American

Sansei- third-generation Japanese American

Yonsei- fourth-generation Japanese American

For Kayo and Paul Watanabe

Thank you, Ahma and Ahmpa

Introduction

I never thought that I would relate all that much to Toyo Suyemoto, Yoshiko Uchida, and Miné Okubo. I viewed them as three women of my grandmother's generation, all incarcerated by their own country for no reason beyond the fact that they were Japanese. I read Toyo Suyemoto's memoir *I Call to Remembrance: Toyo Suyemoto's Years of Internment* during the spring semester of my junior year of college in a class called "War, Race and U.S. Literature from 1945-the present," with the "present" being prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Suyemoto's memoir scared me. The detail and the sheer power of her prose and her poetry frightened me not because of its accuracy, but because of its concreteness. Suyemoto's work put the questions that had permeated so much of my life as a fourth-generation Japanese American woman into clear, eloquent answers. Her writing spoke to my childhood wonderings of "what is an internment camp" and "was it like summer camp," and "were you scared in camp" that my grandparents, both of whom were incarcerated, never fully answered. I felt nervous when I read and analyzed Suyemoto's memoir because I did not know what I would find out. Would it surprise me? Would it upset me? Would it make me miss my grandparents?

The short answer: yes, to all of the above. Suyemoto's work was not the beginning of my interest and engagement with Japanese American Incarceration literature, but it was the catalyst for my interest about specifically Nisei, or second-generation Japanese American, women. Her work led me to Uchida's memoir, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family*, and Okubo's memoir, *Citizen 13660*, and dozens of other stories of Japanese American Incarceration from the Nisei perspective. I was hesitant for a long time to write about Japanese American Incarceration literature because of how real Suyemoto's work had felt to me. What struck me when I read Suyemoto's memoir was the feeling that finally, someone was talking

about a historical period that was so relevant to my own family but felt unknown to many others. Finally, someone was talking about what Uchida calls in her memoir “one of the most shameful episodes” in United States history, a moment that I knew very little about despite being Japanese American myself (Uchida 146). I can remember when we reached the World War II unit in my high school history class. In my history textbook, I read a paragraph on “Internment in World War II” and my teacher spoke about the topic for a total of 15 minutes. As a child, my parents and grandparents explained to me what incarceration camps were and which camps my grandparents had been in. Yet we never talked explicitly about how my grandparents or any of my other relatives had *felt* about their camp years because they themselves never spoke explicitly about their feelings about incarceration. There was a strange silence surrounding the topic and with Suyemoto’s memoir, I felt a breaking of that silence. At the same time, I worried about the information I would find out and more importantly, how I would react. I noticed a tension in my own curiosities about Nisei women’s incarceration experiences in the same way that I noticed a tension in Suyemoto’s and Uchida’s and Okubo’s memoirs. Their work began to get at something complicated that resonated with me as a Japanese American woman: being both.

Toyo Suyemoto, Yoshiko Uchida, Miné Okubo, and my grandma, Kayo (also known by her American name Mae) Watanabe, were all Nisei women. All were incarcerated first at the Tanforan Assembly Center, in San Bruno California, and then the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz camp) in Topaz, Utah. The Nisei generation embodied a middle-ness, a tension, a struggle ultimately between two cultural identities: Japanese and American. Nisei were the first Japanese Americans, and thus endured the difficulty of defining what being “both” looked like. Suyemoto’s memoir may have been the catalyst for my interest in the lives of Nisei women, but my curiosity about Nisei women began much earlier with a yearning to know more about my

grandma, my Ahma. My grandma was 16 when she and her family were forced to leave their home in Oakland, California for Tanforan in 1942. She entered the Tanforan and Topaz incarceration camps with her Issei parents and her three Nisei siblings as the eldest girl of a Japanese American family. After the war, she battled with tuberculosis, depression, and in the end endured a long and grueling loss of memory alongside my grandpa, my Ahmpa, Paul Watanabe, in 2011. She rarely spoke about her incarceration experience and when she did, she spoke with a matter-of-fact tone. She never used the word “incarceration,” she just said “camp.” She did not describe the fear and the uncertainty that she must have felt as a young teenager when she was told that she and her family had to abruptly leave their home and live in the desert for no reasons beyond the fact that they were Japanese. She never talked explicitly about her camp memories or the anger or any emotions that she must have felt in those years. My interest in the Nisei woman’s experience during incarceration comes from questions that I wish I had asked her. I wonder how much incarceration affected the trajectory of her life and question if and how her incarceration experience lives on in the lives of the rest of the Japanese American women in my family, myself included. I would not go so far as to say that Suyemoto’s, and Uchida’s, and Okubo’s memoirs answered all my childhood questions in the detail that I would have wanted, but each offered a start.

When I began this project, I had a mission of sorts: to write about a topic that was personal to my family, and to use my voice to center those of three women who wrote about their traumatic experiences with Japanese American Incarceration in World War II; an event that even in 2021 remained in a dark, untouched category of United States history because of how shameful of a decision it was. In my mind, I thought of the three women as different from me, not just because they were all from a different generation or even because of the simple fact that

they all experienced incarceration and I did not. I found myself relating to some parts of their memoirs, and making connections with my own family, but I did not explicitly see myself in any of the three Nisei women. I did not think that I would find myself relating to the fear of being Japanese American, specifically a Japanese American woman, until quite recently when suddenly my entire social media feeds and news headlines were filled with stories of a shooting of Asian American women in Atlanta and the phrase “Stop Asian Hate.”

Although I viewed the three memoirs as a way to answer my questions about Japanese American Incarceration, I cannot completely understand the Nisei experience of Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo just in the same way that they, if they were alive, cannot understand my experience as Yonsei, fourth, generation Japanese American. I cannot fully understand the firsthand trauma that all three Nisei women experienced when their own government forced them to leave their homes for prison camps, in the same way that the three women cannot understand my experience being a white-passing *hapa* woman, half Japanese and half white, in 2021. We cannot fully understand each other’s experiences because we did not live them. Yet in the days where I saw my various newsfeeds flooding with information about the Atlanta shooting and the rise in anti-Asian acts of violence across the country and countless statements and hashtags calling for an end to Asian hate, I felt a fear that I can only imagine Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo all felt in the years of their incarceration.

I felt a fear of my face. A fear of my eyes that slant slightly when I smile. A fear for my Japanese American mother. A fear that maybe had always been inside of me, inherited from the generations of Japanese Americans who came before me including my Nisei grandparents, quietly waiting for the time when it would need to reveal itself again. In addition to the hashtags of “Stop Asian Hate,” I saw social media posts, graphics, and articles about the history of Anti-

Asian acts within the United States, Japanese American Incarceration often appearing at the top of the list. The word that I characterize those days with is tension. I felt like I could connect on a deeper level to the confusion, the pride, the push and pull of being *both* Japanese and American that Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo so strongly present in their memoirs. At the same time, I felt like I did not have a right to feel that way because of my mixed identity. I am an Asian American woman, but I do not always look that way because I am also half white. I am not a first or even second generation Japanese American woman, but fourth generation, and firmly, legally, an American citizen. Here I was in the middle of writing about how three women grappled with being both Japanese and American in World War II, and I suddenly felt like in 2021 nothing had changed. I felt conflicted until I realized that my feelings were not unfamiliar to me because I had been reading about them for months in Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs. The liminal position of being two identities at the same time, Japanese on one side and American on another, captured the Nisei identity found in all three of the women's memoirs.

I have a personal interest in the lives of Nisei women during Japanese American Incarceration during World War II because of my family, but the memoirs of Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo showed me the power and the confusion that came with being a Nisei woman during incarceration; power and confusion that I started to notice in myself as I grappled (and continue to grapple) with what being *hapa* means for me. I argue that the Nisei identity goes beyond the generational label of "Nisei," meaning second-generation Japanese American. Instead, the term "Nisei" embodies a complex tension, a middle-ness, between the two "sides" of the Japanese American identity: the Japanese part and the American part. Toyo Suyemoto, Yoshiko Uchida, and Miné Okubo all grappled with the separate and conflicting parts of being the first natural-born Japanese Americans in their families. Each of the three memoirs focuses primarily on each

woman's incarceration experience during World War II. I focus on the memoirs of three Nisei women in the context of their camp years of World War II because each memoir, when read separately and in conversation with the other two, represents a silence breaking on a dark moment in United States history related to Asian Americans. Each memoir demonstrates the exacerbation of the Nisei identity's tension through the trauma and the dehumanizing event that was the incarceration of approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans from 1942-1945. Through reading Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs, I argue that Nisei is a liminal identity, and the multiplicity and ability to be *both* Japanese and American gives the Nisei identity its power, its complexity, and its necessity, all of which resonates through the memoirs of Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo.

We Were Japanese Too

“When the broadcast ended, and the announcer had finished with the local news, I sat still, stunned, with Kay held in my arms and my thoughts in a turmoil. We were Japanese too. What would happen to us? I learned soon enough” (Suyemoto 10).

On Sunday December 7th, 1941, Toyo Suyemoto was giving her infant son, Kay Kawakami, his morning feeding in her home in Oakland, California. At the time of the attack, Suyemoto was 25 and had been living with her husband, Iwao Kawakami, separate from her parents and siblings who lived in her hometown of Berkeley. The “we” in her statement “we were Japanese too” includes not just her and her son in the moment that she heard the news broadcast, but also her Nisei husband, her Issei parents, and her eight other Nisei siblings. Suyemoto’s immediate thought following the news of the attack was of her and her family’s racial identity, and what the white-American perception of them and the rest of the Japanese American community would be now that Japan had attacked a U.S. naval base. Her sentences convey a sense of doom, especially with her choice of the words “still,” “stunned,” and “turmoil” and the phrase, “I learned soon enough,” where she already implies the negative reaction of the rest of America to the attack without explicitly saying so. Physically, Suyemoto describes herself as still, unable to move from the shocking news of the attack. Mentally, Suyemoto is not quite as still because her use of the word “turmoil” suggests a kind of chaos to her mind and her thoughts. More than anything, uncertainty characterizes Suyemoto’s passage about her reaction to the news of the attack.

On Sunday December 7th, 1941, Yoshiko Uchida was at home in Berkeley, California with her Issei parents and her Nisei sister. In her memoir, she describes the day as “one of those

rare Sundays when we had no guests for dinner” (Uchida 46). Uchida’s family lived in a rented home in an area of Berkeley that used to only be exclusively available to white residents (Niiya). Out of the three memoirists, Uchida was youngest. She was a student at the University of California Berkeley and only 20 years old at the time of the attack. Uchida remembers her initial reaction to the attack and the shock of finding her Issei father missing from her home later that same day. Uchida writes,

It never for a moment occurred to any of us that this meant war. As a matter of fact, I was more concerned about my approaching finals at the university than I was with this bizarre news and went to the library to study. When I got there, I found clusters of Nisei students anxiously discussing the shocking event. But we all agreed it was only a freak incident and turned our attention to our books. I stayed at the library until 5:00 p.m. giving no further thought to the attack on Pearl Harbor. When I got home, the house was filled with an uneasy quiet. A strange man sat in our living room and my father was gone. The FBI had come to pick him up, as they had dozens of other Japanese men (46).

Uchida’s characterization of the attack as “bizarre news” and “a freak incident” and “shocking” demonstrate that while she felt blindsided by the attack, she did not wonder or worry about what would happen to Japanese Americans in the same immediate way that Suyemoto did. Her thoughts were not “in a turmoil” like Suyemoto’s but more preoccupied by her schoolwork. Not until Uchida returned to her home to find that her father was taken by the FBI solely for the fact that he was Japanese did she realize the severity of the attack. Uchida’s tone shifts with her phrase “when I got home” as does her diction. The “uneasy quiet” of Uchida’s house resembles the stillness and the shock Suyemoto described feeling in her memory of the attack. The simplicity and matter-of-factness of Uchida’s sentence “The FBI had come to pick him up, as

they had dozens of other Japanese men” points to the fact that Uchida felt the full impact of the attack when it affected her directly. Perhaps the difference in age between the two women points to the difference in their reactions. Uchida was a Nisei college student, and Suyemoto was a Nisei mother of a newborn. Both women experienced the same moment, but from different and more specific perspectives. The commonality between their experiences was that they were both Nisei women, American citizens, now faced with more uncertainty about their safety and future in their own country.

On Sunday December 7th, 1941, Miné Okubo was at home in the Bay area of California eating breakfast with one of her brothers. The eldest of the three memoirists, Miné had returned home from an art fellowship in Europe when the Second World War broke out in 1939, and in 1941-42 at the age of 29 she was painting murals commissioned by the U.S. army in Oakland (Robinson). In her memoir, she describes the period before Pearl Harbor with the phrase, “I had a good home and many friends. Everything was going along fine” (Okubo 7). Okubo remembers her reaction to the news of the attack, and writes,

Then on December 7, 1941, while my brother and I were having late breakfast I turned on the radio and heard the flash – ‘Pearl Harbor bombed by the Japanese!’ We were shocked. We wondered what this would mean to us and the other people of Japanese descent in the United States. Our fears came true with the declaration of war against Japan. Radios started blasting, newspapers flaunted scare headlines (8-9).

Okubo’s reaction connects more closely with Suyemoto’s than with Uchida’s because of her explicit expression of uncertainty. Her inclusion of a headline, “a flash,” offers more detail to the broadcast of the attack that each woman writes about. In this excerpt from Okubo’s memoir, she situates her reaction within the direct media headline of “Pearl Harbor bombed by the

Japanese” and then describes her shock, and wonder, and fear about the entire situation. Okubo’s sentence, “We wondered what this would mean to us and the other people of Japanese descent in the United States” expresses an uncertainty specifically grounded in her and her family’s Japanese identity. While she does not have the same personal realization of the attack’s severity as Uchida did when her father was taken, Okubo’s reaction provides a sense of looming doom as Suyemoto’s does, especially with her sentence, “Our fears came true with the declaration of war against Japan.” Okubo does not state any of the Japanese American-targeted laws that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor such as the issuance of Executive Order 9066 and the series of Public Proclamations enforcing curfews and exclusions for people of Japanese ancestry. Yet, her simple statement of “our fears came true” sets the stage for the timeline of the events that led her, Suyemoto, Uchida, and thousands of other Japanese Americans towards incarceration.

The words and emotions that resonate in each woman’s reaction to the news of the attack are shock, fear, and uncertainty. For Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo, the fear and the uncertainty that followed their initial shock of the attack is directly connected to the fact that all three women were Japanese American, specifically Nisei women. The day of the attack on Pearl Harbor represented a shift in Nisei identity that can most clearly be represented with Suyemoto’s phrase, “We were Japanese too.” The phrase alone is simple and true, all three women were of Japanese descent. Yet the addition of the word “too” conveys a sense that the women were something more than just Japanese; they were also American citizens. Japan attacked the United States, and Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo were Japanese *too*, like the men who had flown the Imperial Japanese aircrafts into the U.S. naval ships on U.S. soil. Despite the fact that Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo lived in California and despite the fact all of them were natural-born and legal

American citizens, in the eyes of the government the women were also Japanese just like those who had bombed the U.S. naval base in Hawaii and were now an enemy of the United States. Suyemoto's simple but rich statement of "We were Japanese too" comes through in Uchida and Okubo's memories of the news of Pearl Harbor, though not explicitly stated. Uchida had not thought of what she often calls her "Japanese-ness" as a danger to her or her fellow Nisei students until her father was arrested simply for being Japanese. Okubo expressed her uncertainty about what would happen to Japanese Americans like her and her brother and views her fears "coming true" based on the U.S. declaration of war on Japan, which in her eyes represented a shift in the comfort and security of her life as she knew it. All three Nisei women, both Japanese and American at the same time, express a reckoning with the intricacies of their Nisei identities as they learned and processed the news of Pearl Harbor. Not only did the Japanese attack on the U.S. naval base mark the United States' entrance into World War II, but for Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo the attack also exacerbated the existing tension of their Nisei identities.

Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo all touch on the liminality of their Nisei identities through their reactions to the attack on Pearl Harbor and while each woman's writing is different, each conveys the same thing. The fact that rings true for all three writers is that the attack on Pearl Harbor brought an uncertainty to the safety of being Japanese American, regardless of one's citizenship, in the United States. In each woman's memory, the focus is partially the shock of the attack. Yet the more complex and important focus that connects with Nisei as a liminal and powerful identity is the women's fear that something bad could happen to all of them simply because they were Japanese, no matter the fact that all of them were legally American citizens. Even before incarceration, Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo express in their memoirs their

grappling with being American citizens who were also Japanese women, and being Japanese women who were also born and raised in America.

Ichi, Ni, San

Generation, n. 4b. Modified by an ordinal number, forming adjectives, as first-generation, second-generation, etc.: designating a member of the first (or second, etc.) generation of a family to do something or live somewhere; spec. designating a naturalized immigrant or descendant of immigrant parents, esp. in the United States (“generation”).

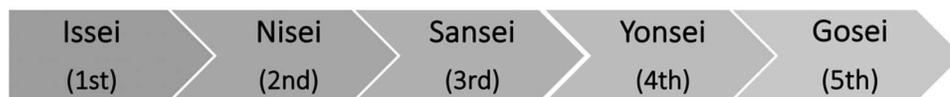
I never learned to speak Japanese as a child, but something that my Nisei grandmother did teach me was how to count in Japanese. “One, two, three” in Japanese is “ichi, ni, san.” When my mother taught me about the names for different generations of Japanese Americans, she explained to me that the first three generations of Japanese Americans, the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei, directly corresponded with the numbers ichi ni and san (one, two and three) and were ordered that way based on which generation came to the United States first. The Issei generation were the first to arrive in America, the Nisei generation were their American-born children, and the Sansei generation were the Nisei’s children and the Issei’s grandchildren, also American-born. The Issei, Nisei, and Sansei generations all have different temporal positions not just because of their age differences, but because of the differences in their experiences. Nisei children like Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo, could not fully understand the cultural and legal hardships of their Issei parents, who were not granted full legal citizenship in the United States until the 1950s, after incarceration and after the war (Hong). Some of the Sansei generation lived through incarceration, like Suyemoto’s son Kay, but experienced camp differently than their Nisei parents and their Issei grandparents simply because of their later generational position. Sansei are third-generation Japanese American, further removed temporally from the Issei and the Nisei, and did not endure the same struggle as the Nisei who

were the first to define what being both Japanese and American at the same time looked like. The Issei parents could not understand the tension and the confusion of their Nisei children, who often felt caught between two countries and never fully accepted by either the Japanese community or the American community.

The generations, like the numbers *ichi*, *ni*, and *san*, are separate. One is not the same as three, two not the same as one, and two not the same as three. The different temporal and experiential positions of the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei generations show that even though all the generations have Japanese ancestry, they are not all the same. Yet, there is something that connects the three generations of Japanese Americans in the same way that there is something that connects the numbers *ichi*, *ni* and *san*; they are a part of a larger collective grouping. Individually, neither *ichi*, *ni*, *san*, nor Issei, Nisei and Sansei are exactly the same, but all have a collective commonality. The Issei, Nisei, and Sansei are all generations unique to Japanese American identity, but their order in terms of which came first and their experiences that correspond with that order is what makes each of them different. The differences and the nuance of each generation is the very thing that connects them. The Nisei generation, shown through the memoirs of Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo, especially embodies the tension of being separate and connected through the confusion of being the second generation of their family in the United States yet the first to define what being Japanese American meant.

Nisei means second-generation Japanese American, but also means the first generation of Japanese Americans to be born in the United States. The “first” in the Issei generation points to the fact that the Issei were the first Japanese Americans to *arrive* in the United States as immigrants from Japan. The “second” in the Nisei generation points to the fact that the Nisei were second in the line of generations of Japanese descendants living in the United States, after

the Issei, but were the first of those generations to be *born* in the United States (Yamaguchi 35). The Issei generation came before the Nisei. In a complicated way the Nisei identity is both “first” *and* “second.” Donna Nagata, Jacqueline Kim, and Kaidi Wu use a flow chart in their article “The Japanese American Wartime Incarceration: Examining the Scope of Racial Trauma,” that demonstrates the order of the Japanese American generations and the middle-ness of the Nisei generation.



“Figure 1 Japanese American generations” (Nagata et al. 37).

Each box of the chart is shaped like an arrow pointing right, with a generation and corresponding number inside. The chart begins with “Issei” and underneath written in parentheses is “(1st.” The chart continues listing the Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, and Gosei generations with 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th, written in parentheses under the name of each Japanese American generation. The arrow shape of the boxes indicates not just the numerical ordering of generations, but also implies that each generation informs the generation that follows. The Issei generation influences the Nisei generation, and both generations influence the Sansei (3rd) generation because both came before the Sansei. Put simply, the format of Nagata et al.’s chart shows how each new generation inherits something from the generation(s) that preceded it.

The chart and its concept seem simple, almost obvious. Yet the chart also demonstrates the larger liminality and tension of the Nisei identity, even though in Nagata et al.’s article the chart functions solely as a numerical ordering of the Japanese American generations. If one looks only at the first three boxes, Nisei is clearly the middle identity because of its physical placement between Issei and Sansei. The shape of the boxes as right-pointing arrows and the

parenthetical labels of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd imply a sense of moving forward through time. Nisei, again, is in the middle between Japanese and American identities with the Issei (first-generation) representing the more Japanese part, and the Sansei (third generation) representing the more American part. Nagata et al.'s chart visually demonstrates that each generation of Japanese Americans informs and influences the generations that follow it and alludes to my argument that Nisei is a liminal identity occupying a powerful middle or twoness with their Japanese and American identities. The Nisei generation then, although different from the Issei generation of their parents, was influenced by their Issei parents and relatives in the same way that the Sansei, Yonsei, and Gosei generations of Japanese Americans embody influences from their Issei and Nisei relatives. To look at one generation is to look at the generations that precede and follow it because they are all connected.

Generation, n. 3b. All of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively. In later use frequently with implication of shared cultural and social attitudes” (“generation”).

In her chapter “On Being Japanese and American” Uchida describes some of the differences she felt between herself and her Issei parents prior to their incarceration. The title of Uchida’s chapter already conveys the tension of being Nisei. Uchida did not title her chapter “On Being Japanese American” but instead pulls the words apart and connects them with “and.” Uchida’s title suggests that Japanese and American were, or are, two separate identities that are still connected ones. Uchida describes the struggle between her desire to escape her Issei parents’ Japanese traditions and embrace American ones while also facing a rejection from the

white American community, in school especially, because of what she calls her “Japanese-ness.” Uchida narrows in on her pre-incarceration college experiences and describes a comfort in “retreating” to her own community of people who resembled her in both appearance and experience: other Nisei men and women who could empathize with her situation. Uchida writes,

We Nisei were, in effect, rejected as inferior Americans by our own country and rejected as inferior by the country of our parents as well. We were neither totally American nor totally Japanese, but a unique fusion of the two. Small wonder that many of us felt insecure and ambivalent and retreated into our own special subculture where we were fully accepted (45).

Uchida uses three important words here: “rejected,” “inferior,” and “retreated.” Uchida felt that she did not belong to either the Japanese part of her identity or the American part of her identity and hints at how other Nisei in her college community felt the same. The verb “rejected” indicates that Uchida felt like an outlier and the adjective “inferior” suggests a reason for why she felt this way. Uchida writes of how in the eyes of the Issei generation, Nisei were not considered fully Japanese because they were also American. The American side of the Nisei identity came through not just in their legal citizenship and the fact that they were the first generation to be born in the U.S., but also through their behaviors, customs, and attitudes. Uchida describes her reckoning with the generational gap between her and her parents and writes of feeling embarrassed of her parents when they did something “too Japanese” that made them stand out as different, like when her mother would customarily bow to greet other Japanese women on the street (Uchida 42-3). At the same time, Nisei were not accepted as fully American because they were not white, which Uchida explains in her neglects from university

social groups. Even before the war and the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the Nisei's citizenship meant almost nothing in settings like colleges. Despite the fact that Uchida was a United States citizen, other white students saw her as an outsider because of her Japanese heritage (Uchida 42-43).

If Uchida felt rejected and inferior by both her Japanese side and her American side, then where did she feel accepted? Her retreat into what she calls "our own special subculture," was the Nisei community, uniquely Japanese American, both identities at the same time. Yet the Nisei community was not entirely separate from the Japanese and American communities that Uchida felt rejected from. So why then does she use the verb "retreated" as if to imply that she left both the Japanese and American communities behind when in fact she was simply retreating further into an intersection, a "unique fusion," of the two? Again, is the idea, the tension, of something being both separate and connected in relation to Japanese American identity, particularly for the Nisei generation. Uchida uses the word "retreat" to signal both an escape from something uncomfortable (her rejection from Japanese and American communities) and a search for something comfortable (shared experiences with people who can empathize with her). Uchida uses "retreat" several other times in her chapter and when describing her distinctly Nisei college experience, she writes, "I retreated quite thoroughly into the support and comfort afforded by the Japanese American campus community, and in that separate and segregated world, I felt, at the time, quite content" (Uchida 43). Uchida's use of the word "content" demonstrates how in her college years, she felt happy, comforted, and accepted among other Nisei college students, each of whom embodied a similar combination of Japanese and American identity and experienced the same cultural moment as her. Although Uchida categorizes her Nisei community as one that was "separate and segregated" from the Issei/Japanese community

and the white/American community, that was not entirely true. Uchida's college community of other Nisei was unique, but not fully separate from the Japanese or American communities because the Nisei were both Japanese *and* American at the same time. Each embodied an aspect of traditional Japanese culture and American culture, except now they were able to embrace that intersection of cultures comfortably among each other because it was one that they could all understand. What made Uchida's college Nisei community comforting was the shared experiences and support among her Nisei friends. By forming a "subculture," as Uchida writes, Nisei were able to start to understand and define what being Japanese American meant.

Uchida conveys the liminality of the Nisei identity through her writing of her struggle to feel accepted anywhere other than within a community of other Nisei. Her embarrassment of her Issei parents and her rejection from predominantly white social groups on her college campus are not a representation of her total rejection of either community, but rather a point of complexity and tension between the two. Uchida's comfort in a retreat to other Nisei college students is not a refusal of an American college experience but is specific to her and her generation's struggles of being Japanese and American at the same time. The Nisei generation lived during the same cultural moment and shared similar experiences and cultural attitudes because of their age and position within Japanese American generations. Uchida's chapter is powerful because through her writing of growing up Nisei and combatting racial tensions in school, she not only demonstrates the complexity of being Nisei but also uses her voice and memories as examples of how she defined being Japanese American herself.

How is Uchida's explanation of her contentment in retreating to a distinctly Nisei college community reflective of both her, Suyemoto's, and Okubo's incarceration experiences? In his book *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*, Roger Daniels, a scholar of

Japanese American Incarceration during World War II, characterizes incarceration as a story of survival for Japanese Americans. Daniels writes, “But life behind barbed wire in America’s concentration camps was not, in the main, a story of resistance or of heroism, but essentially one of survival” (Daniels 65). Daniels describes a sense of “keeping your head down” that echoed throughout Japanese American camp experiences, like Uchida’s pre-incarceration college story of “retreating” into the comfort of those who understood her. Few Japanese Americans put up a legal fight towards incarceration and when they did, they were met with governmental challenges and backlash.

All Japanese Americans in 1942-1945, Issei, Nisei, and some Sansei, were forced to experience the injustice and trauma of incarceration together as one group of Japanese descendants, not as separate generations. While there was a gap between the Nisei and Issei generations, which Uchida describes in her chapter, something that rang true for all incarcerated Japanese Americans was Daniels’ claim that acceptance of the situation was the only sensible option, and that survival was the primary goal. What does survival mean in the context of Japanese American Incarceration? Does survival mean the same thing in camp as it did for Uchida’s college experience, where she retreated into the Nisei community in order to survive the rejections of her white peers? Daniels’ description of survival of Japanese American Incarceration as meaning the same thing as “enduring.” Enduring the hardships of camp even though the circumstances were unfair, connecting with Uchida’s idea of retreat into the Nisei community in order to “survive” and find contentment in her college experience. Daniels writes that because incarceration was so heavily supported by national leadership at the time, Japanese Americans of all generations had a slimmer chance of winning than they did of surviving (Daniels 58). Yet surviving in camp for Nisei like Uchida, Okubo, and Suyemoto meant having

to settle into a monotonous, incarcerated life and having to address the confusion of once again being two conflicting identities, only now they had to do so in a setting where they were no longer seen as American, only Japanese. Within the incarceration camps, the Nisei identity became even more complex with the U.S. government classifying them solely based on their Japanese heritage and disregarding their American citizenship. The Nisei generation found empathy, survival, and unity like how Uchida did in college because the entire generation was now living through the same shared cultural moment: Japanese American Incarceration. Surviving for Nisei like Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo now meant enduring hardship in their own country, a country that both imprisoned them and viewed them as threats.

Settling into a Strange Exile

Daniels' characterization of camp as a survival story resonates through Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's descriptions of their initial adjustment to communal living in camp at the Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, California. Tanforan had been converted from racetrack grounds for horses into one of several temporary holding spaces, called "assembly centers," for Japanese Americans while the more permanent camps, called "relocations centers," continued to be built. The barracks that housed thousands of Japanese American families including Suyemoto's, Uchida's, and Okubo's were horse stalls, stables, a place for animals now used for Japanese American people.

Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's descriptions of the stables/barracks at Tanforan demonstrate the dehumanization of incarceration. Okubo writes of how the stables were made livable in the most basic sense, because there was still evidence that the barracks had been horse stalls, citing the smell of manure as one example. Okubo writes, "Spider webs, horse hair, and hay had been whitewashed with the walls. Huge spikes and nails stuck out all over the walls. A two-inch layer of dust covered the floor, but on removing it we discovered that linoleum the color of redwood had been placed over the rough manure-covered boards" (35). Even though the barracks were now called something else, the essence of the horse stalls remained with a haphazard attempt at turning the stables into livable spaces. The linoleum covering the "manure-covered" wooden floorboards of the stable demonstrate the lack of effort in making the barracks at Tanforan anything other than what they were at their core, horse stables. Okubo's inclusion of details like "spider webs" "horse hair" and "hay" demonstrate not just the desertedness of the space, but also explicitly point to the fact that the place where Okubo and her brother were now supposed to live was also a space where animals lived. Now that she and thousands of other

Japanese Americans lived in the stables, there was an equation of Japanese Americans with animals.

Like Okubo, Uchida comments on the horrible and hastily thrown together condition of the barracks at Tanforan. Uchida specifically refers to the absurdity of the government and military's use of the term "apartments" to describe the barracks at Tanforan and like Okubo remarks on the poor conditions of the stables. Uchida writes, "That the stalls should have been called 'apartments' was a euphemism so ludicrous it was comical...dust, dirt, and wood shavings covered the linoleum that had been laid over the manure-covered boards, the smell of horses hung in the air, and the whitened corpses of many insects still clung to the hastily white-washed walls" (70). Similar to Okubo, Uchida comments on the manure-covered floorboards and the poorly white-washed walls, but Uchida takes the imagery of the barracks a step further with the sensory detail of the smell of the stalls. "The smell of horses hung in the air" forces Uchida's reader to think about what horses smell like and creates a sense of discomfort in having to think about what it would be like to live in a space that smells and feels like horses. The phrase "hung in the air" implies that the smell was lingering, and despite the governmental and military efforts to make the horse stalls "livable," and barely livable at that, there was no denying the fact that these barracks had first been home to animals, and now were home to a specific ethnic group of people in the United States. Like Okubo, Uchida's description of the dismal state of the Tanforan barracks hints at an equation of Japanese Americans with animals, and a dehumanization of Japanese Americans in camp.

While Suyemoto's description of the Tanforan barracks is similar to Uchida and Okubo's, hers is the most explicit in the connection of horses and Japanese Americans now occupying the same living space. Suyemoto specifically links the poor conditions of the stalls at

Tanforan to her son Kay, who developed a severe allergy to horse dander despite never having lived or come into direct contact with a horse. Kay developed subsequent lung problems, which ultimately led to death for him after camp in his teenage years, and in later chapters of her memoir Suyemoto writes of how the conditions of their barracks in Tanforan were what led Kay to become sick with pneumonia and eventually develop chronic asthma and respiratory issues (Suyemoto 39). On the barracks in Tanforan, Suyemoto writes, “Our living quarters had once housed race horses, and now human beings...The rear room showed distinct evidences of the former tenants, with deep, rough hoof-marks imprinted on the walls...on damp days, so frequent in the Bay region, a rank, pervasive odor hung in the air” (38-39). Like Uchida, Suyemoto describes the smell of the stalls as hanging “in the air,” as if there was no way to deny or forget the fact that horses had lived in these barracks before Japanese Americans did. Suyemoto’s detail of the “hoof-marks imprinted on the walls” adds another layer to the fact that these “apartments” were once home to animals before they were people. Suyemoto’s statement, “Our living quarters had once housed race horses, and now human beings” is explicit because she points to the fact that human beings living in the same space as animals was demeaning. Yet implicitly, Suyemoto’s sentence implies the overall dehumanization of Japanese Americans in incarceration camps like Tanforan. Suyemoto does not use the term dehumanizing, but in her connection of human beings and animals living in the same space, she points to the equation of the two. She points to the fact that the living spaces during incarceration put Japanese Americans were on the same level as animals.

The living quarters at Tanforan was one of the initial dehumanizing aspects of incarceration expressed in Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo’s memoirs, but not the only one. Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo all describe the adjustment to communal living at Tanforan, and

later at Topaz Relocation Center, beyond just the fact that they were forced to live in close, unsafe, and horrific quarters once occupied by animals. The three women also cite the shock and adjustment to communal latrines as another major challenge in getting used to the new way of life in camp. Okubo's words and illustrations convey the true sense of "community" in these bathrooms because quite literally, nothing was private. Okubo writes that not only were the bathrooms and showers a far walk from her barrack at Tanforan, but there were no partitions or modes of privacy in either the men's or women's bathrooms. Okubo writes, "Many of the women could not get used to the community toilets. They sought privacy by pinning up curtains and setting up boards" (Okubo 74). Okubo's sketch shows women sitting on toilets either with no partition or door in front of their stall, or a piece of fabric pinned to either side of the stall frame, covering less than half of their bodies. Okubo's statement "they sought privacy by pinning up curtains" indicates that there was a lack of privacy in the bathrooms in camp. Her writing and her sketch of Japanese American women physically putting up partitions to complete basic human functions like bathing and excretion demonstrates another side to the dehumanizing aspect of incarceration.

Similarly, Uchida describes her experience with the Tanforan bathrooms and writes, "The latrines were crude wooden structures containing eight toilets, separated by partitions, but having no doors...To the rear were eight showers, also separated by partitions, but lacking doors or curtains" (Uchida 75). "Crude" was an understatement. Like Okubo's description, Uchida describes the lack of privacy in the women's bathrooms in camp, but she specifies the lack of privacy into a lack of doors. Uchida's repeated phrase "separated by partitions" conflicts with Okubo's earlier expression of how there were no partitions. Okubo uses "partition" as another word for doors, and Uchida uses "partition" as a way to describe the separation of the actual

stalls that separated each toilet and shower, which still lacked doors. Both women communicate the same main idea: the communal bathrooms in camp lacked privacy, and those who were incarcerated were forced to use the bathrooms together as one gendered community, regardless of their age or generation. Privacy in this context means the ability to do basic human functions comfortably, without other people watching. Japanese American women of all ages now all used the bathroom in the same place, at the same time, without any kind of privacy unless they created privacy for themselves. Privacy is a distinctly human concept, and to take away privacy is to dehumanize. Animals, like the horses that lived in the Tanforan stalls before they were converted into barracks, perform the same natural functions (excretion, bathing) as human beings do, but they do not “use a bathroom” per se. The women’s bathrooms Uchida and Okubo describe in their memoirs communicates how the *lack* of privacy in camp bathrooms once again points to the dehumanization of Japanese Americans specifically that happened during incarceration.

Suyemoto’s description of the bathroom at Tanforan echoes Uchida and Okubo’s but conveys more about how camp was a story of “survival,” as Daniels writes, and was filled with an exacerbated tension of being an American citizen incarcerated by the American government because of ethnicity. Suyemoto specifically shares a memory of when she tried to use the bathroom in the middle of the night and was stopped by a guard at the camp. Suyemoto writes,

One night about 2 a.m., I awakened to go to the latrine located around the corner of our stable. I put on a bathrobe and wooden clogs and stepped outside onto the porch-like walk, with several steps leading down to the ground, that had just recently been added to the front of the stable. I thought I heard a voice call ‘Halt,’ but did not realize the command was for me. I took a few steps forward, my clogs clattering on the porch. I heard a swift, whistling

sound pass over my head. I stopped in fright. Then a searchlight was swung around, and I was caught in its glare. I stiffened, though I thought I could hear my own heartbeat. The sentry must have thought twice then because the searchlight moved away in an arc against the darkness. And I scurried off, my heart pounding, my legs shaky, on my necessary errand (41).

Suyemoto's memory is of the latrines at Tanforan, but different from Uchida and Okubo's memories, hers conveys the watchfulness and military control over Japanese Americans and the confusion of being an imprisoned American citizen who was also the child of Japanese immigrants. Suyemoto's statement "I thought I heard a voice call 'Halt,' but did not realize the command was for me" conveys more than just a lack of privacy about the camp latrines. She conveys the constant military presence and monitoring of Japanese Americans in camp, *even* in the most natural and private of what Suyemoto calls "errands," using the bathroom. The fact that Suyemoto did not initially think the command was for her demonstrates the tension, confusion, and the unfairness of incarceration especially for Nisei. Suyemoto did not realize that the command was for her because she did not think she was doing wrong, which she was not. Yet, Suyemoto's following of that phrase with the description of the searchlight sweeping over her and her statement of "I stopped in fright" shows the realization on her part that she was doing something wrong in the eyes of the guards and the larger U.S. military. As soon as Suyemoto saw the searchlight and heard the "halt," her demeanor and her emotions changed, which she demonstrates in her description of her body stiffening and her heart pounding. Suyemoto's initial confusion with hearing the command demonstrates her American side, and the fear demonstrates her realizing again that she was Japanese and that she was incarcerated for solely being Japanese despite the fact that she was a natural-born United States citizen. Suyemoto,

Uchida, and Okubo's descriptions of the communal bathrooms at Tanforan conveys a dehumanizing aspect to incarceration, an aspect that is not always explicitly stated in each of their writing. The bathrooms at Tanforan, and at other incarceration camps lacked privacy and comfort to say the least, but Japanese Americans like Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo used them because what other option was there? As Daniels writes, incarceration was a story of survival truly, and one that all Japanese Americans were forced to endure in close quarters all at the same time, which is evidenced by the explicitly communal aspect of camp.

Unlike her bathroom memory, in her chapter "Settling In," Suyemoto writes of her frustrations with incarcerated life once she and her family moved from Tanforan to the Topaz incarceration camp, and now had to "settle in" to yet another location that was not their home but was a prison. In her descriptions of the barracks at Topaz, Suyemoto does not cite hoof marks on the wall or the smell of manure like she did in her description of Tanforan, but instead writes of the anger that she felt as she and her family settled into a new "normal" way of life. Suyemoto's memory is especially important because it is one of the only times in her memoir where she clearly describes herself as frustrated. Suyemoto writes,

Nonetheless, in the evenings, as I looked about our room and saw the unfinished walls, the cots lined up in a row, Mother and Father quietly reading, Kay asleep, the mending on my lap, my mind protested: How long are we to be here in this forsaken place? What will I tell my son when he grows up? I could not openly speak of the pain I felt or ask the questions that assailed me, and poetry was my outlet...Was I more prone to think

emotionally than my parents? Were they more settled in than I? Or did they too mull over our strange exile? (85).

Prior to her protest memory from Topaz, Suyemoto describes how many of the Japanese Americans preferred the Topaz camp to Tanforan and worked to make the camp a “more livable habitat.” Suyemoto’s writing paints an image of herself, her parents, and her son in their barracks at Topaz. Instead of describing in sensory detail their barracks as she did with her initial memory of Tanforan, in her protest memory Suyemoto describes both the setting as well as the people in the barracks: her family. She focuses briefly on the appearance of her family’s barracks at Topaz, using the word “cots” instead of “beds” and the adjective “unfinished” to convey the discomfort and bareness of their barracks. Yet, the description of the barracks is not as important to Suyemoto as the way in which she and her family lived in those barracks. The questions she raises at the end of her memory, all of which are focused on the people present in this memory, point to her frustration not just with the *place* that she and her family were in, but more the reasoning for why they are in this place to begin with, and *reactions* of her family while they adapt or “settle in” to this new camp.

Suyemoto describes her parents, her infant son, and even herself as carrying on with “normal” and quiet nightly tasks. Suyemoto’s phrasing “in the evenings” implies a sense of routine, as if she and her family behaved in this way every night they were in camp. Suyemoto describes her mother and father “quietly reading” in their barrack at Topaz, seemingly unbothered by the cots and the unfinished walls. She describes her infant son, Kay, asleep in her lap, unaware of the severity of his mother and his grandparents’ situation. Suyemoto even describes herself with mending on her lap, another “normal,” quiet, individual, and traditionally domestic task. Yet Suyemoto writes of her mind “protesting” her family’s as well as her own

behavior. In her protest memory, Suyemoto's parents and her son are passive figures, while she is the only active one because of her expression of her thoughts "protesting" her incarceration. Suyemoto characterizes their barracks as "a forsaken place" and angrily wonders how long she and her family would have to stay incarcerated. Although Suyemoto does not vocalize her feelings or her frustrations to her family, and in fact writes that she felt she could not openly speak of the questions that ran through her mind, the inclusion of the ending questions in her memoir is powerful and points to another generation gap between Nisei and the Issei generations, as well as the Nisei and the Sansei. Suyemoto writes of her longing to know what her parents were thinking, and if they had the same feelings of frustration, anger, sadness, confusion, and depression like she did, but cannot bring herself to ask her parents or even begin to think about how she might express these emotions to her son one day.

Three of Suyemoto's five questions in the passage stand out when looking at her memoir through the liminality of the Nisei identity. The questions, "What will I tell my son when he grows up?" and "Was I more prone to think emotionally than my parents?" and "Or did they too mull over our strange exile?" all show Suyemoto battling with questions of identity and generation in relation to her incarceration experience. In these three questions, Suyemoto not only worries about the relationships with her parents and with her son, but also conveys the sense of "middle-ness" specific to the Nisei generation. On one side, Suyemoto worries about the generation before her, her Issei parents. Suyemoto's questioning of if she is more "prone to think emotionally" than her parents demonstrate her difference from the Issei generation, specifically a difference in emotions, as well as a lack of knowledge about her parents' inner thoughts and feelings. Suyemoto's question of whether her parents felt or "mull over" their family's incarceration convey the fact that she and her parents clearly did not talk openly about

their feelings on incarceration. Instead, there was a silent acceptance of the situation, demonstrated through the silence and routine of Suyemoto's protest memory.

On the other side, Suyemoto's questioning of how she will explain Japanese American Incarceration to her young son when he grows up presents her difference from the Sansei generation, and specifically a difference in experiences. Suyemoto's son Kay was an infant during their time in camp and her question of what she will tell him when he "grows up" shows how she as his mother will be responsible for detailing their incarceration years to him because he will not remember. Suyemoto's questioning in her memory is grounded in generational differences and complicated by the twoness of her Nisei identity. She questions the actions and emotions of her own parents, yet at the same time worries of her future choices as a parent to her son when the time comes to explain the trauma of incarceration to him. Would she restrain her emotions in the way that her Issei parents did? Or would she explain the depth of her own feelings about her time in camp?

In another chapter of her memoir Suyemoto cites the Japanese phrase *shikata ga nai*, and writes, "*Shikata ga nai* (it cannot be helped; it is inevitable)" (Suyemoto 87). She writes of how the simple phrase came up countless times in camp, primarily as a way of coping, and describes feeling confused about the "right time" or the right situation to use *shikata ga nai* (Suyemoto 194). Suyemoto's questioning of her parents' emotions, or the lack thereof, in her protest memory point to the presence and influence of *shikata ga nai* in camp, but specifically its tension in the eyes of Nisei like Suyemoto. Nagata et al. write that *shikata ga nai* meant "fatalistic acceptance" or an acceptance of what could not be helped or changed (39). The embodiment of *shikata ga nai* can be seen clearly not just through Suyemoto's family dynamic in her protest memory, but also in the descriptions of the horse stalls and the communal latrines from Uchida

and Okubo. Furthermore, the idea of *shikata ga nai* calls back to Daniels' point about incarceration being a story of survival and enduring the struggle of a situation; not pushing back but restraining oneself.

Restraint, perseverance, and enduring through hardship in incarceration connect not just with *shikata ga nai* but also with the traditional Japanese cultural practices of *enryo* and *gaman*. Precious Yamaguchi's book, *Experiences of Japanese American Women during and after World War II: Living in Internment Camps and Rebuilding Life Afterwards* focuses specifically on the voices of Japanese American women through interviews with Nisei and Sansei women and defines *enryo* and *gaman* as points of interest and conflict in trying to understand Japanese American Incarceration from a female perspective. Yamaguchi cites *enryo* and *gaman* as reasons for why Japanese American women might not openly speak about their feelings, especially about their camp years, and writes, "*Enryo* expresses the way in which a person practices self-restraint and *gaman* describes the way in which Japanese Americans suppress their emotions, both concepts are used to maintain harmonious effects in communication and go beyond face-saving strategies" (Yamaguchi 42). *Enryo* and *gaman* both revolve around the ideas of restraint and suppression, but the latter is focused primarily on suppression of emotions. Yamaguchi uses a moment from an interview with her grandmother as an example of *enryo* and *gaman* at work and describes her grandmother's laughter in response to a difficult question about her camp years. Yamaguchi writes, "It is not so much a laughter that represents humor nor does it indicate she is not taking the interview seriously, but it a way of transforming a somber topic into something much lighter and easier to discuss, and to put the other person at ease in a certain way" (47). Yamaguchi's analysis of her grandmother's laughter conveys something important: the need to make something that is uncomfortable or difficult for oneself more comfortable or

easy for other people. Yamaguchi notices a sense of accommodation and deflection in her grandmother's laughter and responses to questions about her incarceration years.

Why is there a need to "put others at ease" when talking about something like incarceration, which as shown through Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs was anything but easy? The phrase "maintain harmonious effects in communication" in Yamaguchi's definition of *enryo* and *gaman* connects to her earlier analysis of her grandmother's laughter when she interviewed her on her incarceration experience. Furthermore, Yamaguchi's phrase connects with Suyemoto's protest memory where she remarks on sitting in silent routine with her family instead of exclaiming the true emotions she felt about being incarcerated. Suyemoto's exact phrase, "I could not openly speak of the pain I felt or ask the questions that assailed me," shows *enryo* and *gaman* at work because she practices self-restraint (*enryo*) and suppresses her emotions (*gaman*) all the while to maintain the harmony of her family's barracks and camp environment. All three Japanese cultural practices, *enryo*, *gaman*, and *shikata ga nai* also resonate through Uchida, Okubo, and Suyemoto's memories of the communal camp latrines. Each woman's description of the dehumanizing bathroom conditions lacks any vocalization or explicit expression of their emotions. The three women's described attempts about what made the latrine situation more bearable point to *enryo*, *gaman*, and *shikata ga nai* at work in the camp experiences of Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo.

The interesting thing about Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs is that while all three embody aspects of *enryo*, *gaman*, and *shikata ga nai*, all three memoirs also contradict the traditional Japanese cultural practices through their form. The memoirs are a silence breaking on Japanese American Incarceration. Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs all depict their camp experiences, including the conflicts and points of tension, in clear detail. A complete

embodiment of *enryo* and *gaman* would have been to not write the memoirs at all. There is a sense of restraint in each memoir, especially through the tone and the details that women spend more time describing in depth and the ones they do not. Yet Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's memoirs all openly express their camp experiences in a way that had not been done before. Published in 2007, 1946, and 1983 respectively, the three women's memoirs wrestle with a tension in what to say and what not to say about their incarceration after they had lived through it. Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo embodied *enryo*, *gaman*, and *shikata ga nai* in their memoirs but also pushed back on them; the push back mirrors the way that the three writers wrestled with embodying their Japanese and/or American identities as Nisei women.

Conclusion

“I am a realist with a creative mind, interested in people, so my thoughts are constructive. I am not bitter. I hope that things can be learned from this tragic episode, for I believe it could happen again” (Okubo xii)

In the epilogue of her memoir, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family*, Uchida characterizes the mass forced removal and subsequent incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II as, “one of the most shameful episodes of our country’s past” (146). Uchida uses the word “shameful,” not “traumatizing.” She uses the word “episodes,” not “governmental decisions.” She specifically uses the pronoun “our” to describe the United States of America, and by doing so includes herself as a part of the shameful episode of history and claims the United States as her country. Her country that forcibly imprisoned her and approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were United States citizens, for no reason beyond the fact that they were Japanese. Age, generation, and even citizenship became irrelevant and the only thing that mattered was Japanese ancestry. Uchida’s word choice in the beginning of the final moment of her memoir conveys an important message about her position within the context of Japanese American Incarceration, as well as the positions of other Nisei like Suyemoto and Okubo. Her statement of incarceration as “one of the most shameful episodes in our country’s past” simultaneously conveys the wrongfulness of the United States *and* her loyalty to the United States. Her loyalty to her country resonates through the pronoun “our.” Her loyalty to her country resonates through her refusal to make herself a victim by using the word “shameful” instead of a more severe word like “dehumanizing” or “painful.” Uchida’s word choice demonstrates a disappointment and condemnation of the United States but denies

personal bitterness. Uchida does not distance herself from the country, her country, that wronged her and Suyemoto, and Okubo, and hundreds of thousands of other Japanese Americans. Instead, she occupies a middle ground between feeling ashamed for how the United States treated Japanese Americans and claiming herself as a part of that United States.

On the final page of her epilogue, Uchida remarks on why she wrote her memoir and states, “I wrote it for the young Japanese Americans who seek a sense of continuity with their past. But I wrote it as well for all Americans, with the hope that through knowledge of the past, they will never allow another group of people in America to be sent into a desert exile ever again” (154). Uchida’s memoir was written in 1982, 40 years after she and her family were first incarcerated, and six years before President Ronald Reagan was to sign into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which granted reparations to Japanese Americans who suffered through incarceration during World War II. She wrote her memoir hopeful that the forced removal and incarceration of Americans based in their ethnicity and prejudice would not happen again. She wrote her memoir years before Islamophobia would sweep the United States and detention centers at Guantanamo Bay would call back to America’s previous history of concentration camps, and she wrote it years before the phrase “Stop Asian Hate” would trend on social media because of a domestic terrorist attack that left six Asian American women dead. At the same time, Uchida wished for Japanese Americans across generations to understand their history, understand their family’s past. She powerfully wrote her memoir so that the younger generations of Japanese Americans, like mine, might begin to understand the complexity and the horror that was Japanese American Incarceration.

If anything can be learned from Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo’s memoirs it is that all capture the confusion and duality of being second generation Japanese American during

incarceration. Nisei is complicated, Nisei is liminal, Nisei is necessary to understanding Japanese American Incarceration in the United States during World War II because the middle-ness of the generation connects with the injustice of incarceration itself. Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's works demonstrate the dehumanization of incarceration, with the reduction of Japanese Americans to animals living in horse stalls and a lack of basic human privacy. At the same time, each woman's memoir lacks an explicit anger or bitterness that would indicate a refusal of their Americanness. Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo's expression of their incarceration experiences as Nisei women is powerful because each memoir communicates a necessity to understand the Nisei identity. The liminality of the Nisei identity took on a new complexity in camp because Nisei like Suyemoto, Uchida, and Okubo were incarcerated for being Japanese even though all of them were natural-born American citizens. The fact that the three Nisei women write about their camp experiences is powerful because it speaks to a silence breaking on not just Japanese American Incarceration during World War II, but also on the United States' general track record of inhumane, racist, and unjust treatment of Asian Americans.

I will not pretend to understand or equate the incarceration experiences of Suyemoto, Uchida, Okubo or any other Japanese American to my reckoning with my own Asian American identity. I will however firmly state how I never thought that I would have to be scared of my ethnicity, of my face, in the way that the three women and hundreds of thousands of other Japanese Americans did during World War II and prior. Uchida writes in the epilogue of her memoir that she wrote her memoir so that what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II would never happen again. I write this thesis to acknowledge that the hate and the racism referred to as "wartime hysteria" found in the history of Japanese American Incarceration lingers in our society today. The memoirs of Toyo Suyemoto, Yoshiko Uchida, and Miné Okubo are a

silence breaking on a dark part of United States history, one that even I naively thought was behind us as Americans.

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