CULTIVATING AMERICANS: NATURE AND NATIONALITY

IN A WORLD WAR II RELOCATION CENTER

by

MICHELLE R. McLACHLAN

(Under the Direction of PAUL SUTTER)

ABSTRACT

The wartime evacuation and relocation of those of Japanese descent from the U.S. West Coast was motivated, to a surprising extent, by competition over natural resources, particularly agricultural land, and by ideologies that defined both Asians, and what it meant to be an American, in environment-centered terms. The removal of evacuees to deserts and swamps in the nation's interior culminated decades-long efforts by white Americans to restrict Japanese Americans to marginal lands; in the relocation centers, as in their pre-war lives, Japanese-American farmers met their forced encounters with marginality with innovative agricultural, technological, and labor strategies. In addition to implementing successful farming operations, Japanese Americans transformed their wartime surroundings through gardening and landscape design, revealing in the process important clues to their collective cultural and political values, as well as the values and motivations of their captors.

INDEX WORDS: Japanese-American History, Asian-American History, Environmental History, World War II, Evacuation, Relocation, Relocation Center, War Relocation Authority, Internment, Landscape, Gardening, Nature, Environment, Assimilation, Americanism, Eugenics, Agricultural History, California Agriculture, Immigration, Alien Land Laws

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, who always said I could do or be anything I wanted, and didn't try to take it back when I decided to be, first, a low-paid writer and, second, a liberal academic; and to Warren, who, after this thesis, knows what he's getting into but wants to marry me anyway.

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## INTRODUCTION

*You want to buy a house or a farm, that can't do nobody harm.*

*– Woody Guthrie, "If You Ain't Got the Do Re Mi,"* Dust Bowl Ballads

Today, in the dry, dusty Owens Valley of California, Manzanar stretches flat and nearly lifeless between the towering peaks of two parallel mountain ranges. The only vegetation is the short, scrubby sagebrush and a few gnarled trees that have somehow clung stubbornly to life since 1913, when the city of Los Angeles rerouted the Owens River to water the growing metropolis some 230 miles to the southwest. On a typical, 116-degree summer day – you would have to drive 65 miles east to Death Valley to find a hotter, drier locale – it's hard to imagine this landscape with any hint of green, let alone cloaked in suburban-style lawns and dotted with vegetable and flower gardens, parks and picnic areas, a golf course, and elaborately landscaped ponds. But for four years during World War II, isolated from other Americans, interned Japanese Americans built and maintained a city of 10,000 on this fenced and guarded square of California desert. And their city was green.

With the issuance of Executive Order 9066 in February of 1942, two short months after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, then-President Franklyn D. Roosevelt – under pressure from the public, the press, and state and Federal governments, and responding to his own fears of subversive "fifth column" activity on the World War II home front – authorized the United States Army and Department of

Justice to uproot citizens of German, Italian and Japanese descent, from their homes, businesses, and communities along the West Coast. Army officials ushered nationals of the three Axis powers out of designated military zones on the coast, required even those living outside such zones to register as "enemy aliens," restricted their movements to within five miles of their homes, and imposed an 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew.

A few months later, the federal government created the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) to carry out a blanket removal of all Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals from California and parts of Oregon, Washington, and Arizona. Sometimes with only a few days' notice, Japanese families packed their belongings; sold or turned over possession of their homes, farms, and businesses to Caucasian neighbors or tenants; affixed to their suitcases and their bodies the military-issued "citizen number" tags that would act as their new official identification; and boarded trains headed to temporary assembly centers, often converted fairgrounds or race tracks where evacuees slept in former horse stalls. Over the following six months, some 110,000 Japanese – two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens – were then shuttled into ten, more-permanent relocation centers in the nation's interior, where many would remain until the war's end. Some 10,000 of those evacuees would step off buses into the desert landscape of Manzanar.

By one historian's count, there are 1,058 published oral histories and books based on the Japanese relocation experience.[1] Many, including one Danielle Steele novel, clearly target non-academic audiences. Most of these popular histories espouse what Paul Spickard terms the "WRA-JACL Interpretation"[2]: relocation was a mistake on

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[1] Arnold Krammer, *Undue Process: The Untold Story of America's German Alien Internees* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 166.

[2] The WRA, or War Relocation Authority, was the agency created to take over the administration of the relocation centers from the WCCA. The JACL, or Japanese American Citizens' League, was a Nisei

the part of the federal government and a vocal, racist minority of the U.S. population, but the injustice was ultimately overcome by the loyal, dignified evacuees in compliance with the sympathetic officials of the War Relocation Authority. This version of events also posits that this wartime mistake was a singular smudge on the United States' otherwise good record of racial tolerance on the West Coast.

More recent historians have rejected the WRA-JACL interpretation for a variety of reasons. Gary Okihiro, Ronald Takaki, Roger Daniels, Sucheng Chan, and other scholars of Asian America have documented exclusionary campaigns by white, West-coast Americans against Asian immigrants long before World War II.[3] As Carey McWilliams wrote many years ago, "mass removal of the Japanese [to wartime relocation centers] was merely the logical end-result of the earlier campaign for exclusion," including the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907, the anti-alien land laws of many Western states, and the National Origins Act of 1924, which closed U.S. borders to all further Asian immigration.[4] In light of this string of exclusionary measures it is indeed difficult to rationally view relocation as an isolated "mistake" rather than part and parcel of decades-long efforts to limit Asian immigration, access to agricultural land, and the full benefits of American citizenship.

One aspect of relocation and the preceding exclusionary efforts that historians have not yet examined is the role of nature in shaping anti-Asian ideologies. White Americans' exhortations against Japanese immigration, which began promptly in 1869

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association organized to promote the acceptance of Japanese Americans in business, political and educational circles.

[3] See, for example: Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in California's Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino, Calif.: Calif. History Center, 1985); Ron Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989); Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice* (Berkely: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1977); Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1986).

[4] Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1944), 231.

when the *San Francisco Gazette* sounded the alarm about a small group of Japanese planning an experimental agricultural colony in California, were often couched in environment-centered terms. Newspaper editors, politicians, social reformers, small farmers (who, unlike large landowners, had no need for a cheap labor force), and labor leaders painted Japanese farmers and farm laborers as threats to the American yeoman-agrarian ideal, as "pests" or insects, or as potential contaminators of public health or precious natural resources; Japanese women were described as the "verdant" producers of the "brown horde" that would overrun and obliterate the white race in America. Seen by the dominant class as racially inferior and culturally inassimilable, Japanese immigrant farm families, in particular, were limited through alien land laws and other measures to occupying land that white farmers either did not want or had previously tried and failed to cultivate. As I argue in Chapter One, wartime relocation was not only symptomatic of ongoing prejudice against Japanese and Japanese Americans, it also represented a continuance of the decades-long history of the relegation of Japanese immigrants and their families to marginal lands – culminating, for my subjects, in the desert environs of Manzanar – justified by widespread ideologies that naturalized, in white minds, Japanese occupation of an inferior place in both the social and natural environments of the United States.

Another problematic component of the WRA-JACL version of relocation history is the idea that Japanese Americans unquestioningly cooperated with every aspect of the WRA's program, quietly and patriotically accepting the wartime necessity of their fate. To the contrary, many evacuees were keenly aware of the fact that they were prisoners precisely because they had not convinced white Americans that they "belonged" in mainstream society. In the camps, they were subjected to "Americanization" programs

and English-language classes. WRA officials strongly discouraged them from speaking or writing in Japanese and exhorted them to dress in Western style clothes. Initially, camps would not allow the open practice of Buddhism, and Shinto remained banned throughout the camps' existence. Under such pressure to act like "mainstream Americans," Okihiro argues, any maintenance of ethnic culture constituted a form of resistance.[5] And evacuees did express their Japanese culture, not least of all as they transformed the dry, dusty landscape of Manzanar to a green city.

A growing number of cultural historians are exploring the relationships between culture and politics in the lives of ordinary Americans. Liz Cohen, in her study of Chicago industrial laborers' roles in demanding the social programs of the New Deal, writes, "How people live, work, spend leisure time, identify socially, and do a myriad of other things shapes their political perspectives." Tera Hunter argues that members of the black working class in pre-Civil Rights Movement Atlanta chafed against the control exerted by their white employers – an impulse, at bottom, closely related to the overtly political struggles black Americans would later undertake – by participating in leisure activities that whites thought were immoral and imperiled their employees' ability to perform their labor.[6]

Following the lead of these scholars, I will focus on Manzanar residents' transformation of its landscape as an expression of their cultural and political values. "We regard all landscapes as symbolic," writes cultural geographer D.W. Meinig, "as expressions of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon

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[5] Gary Okihiro, "Religion and Resistance in America's Concentration Camps," *Phylon* 45 (Third Quarter, 1984), 220-233 and "Japanese Resistance in America's Concentration Camps: A Re-evaluation," *Amerasia Journal*

[6] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

particular localities over a span of time."[7] If, as Meinig argues, we can regard landscapes as expressions of cultural values, and, as Cohen argues, culture shapes political perspectives, then we should be able to read the Manzanar landscape in transition like a document to decode not only the cultural values of the evacuees and the WRA officials who set the limits of their efforts, but also evacuees' political responses to relocation. This is the subject of Chapter Two.

Press releases and reports prepared by the Army and the War Relocation Authority painted relocation centers as laboratories of assimilation, promising to transform evacuees through a frontier-like experience into Jeffersonian agrarians and democrats. As part of their initiation, the Japanese would turn the grounds of the ten relocation centers – all located in remote desert or swamp lands – into American agricultural settlements. Some among the Japanese took this frontier rhetoric to heart. Abiko Kyutaro, an immigrant to San Francisco in 1885, had founded an agricultural colony in the San Joaquin Valley in 1906, theorizing that farming could turn Japanese immigrants – most of whom had come from farming families in their homeland – into Americans, just as it apparently had for Europeans.[8] "Issei," the term adopted by Japanese Americans to describe first-generation immigrants to America, quickly became synonymous, for generations of Japanese Americans, with "pioneer." The publishers of the Amache center's evacuee newspaper chose the moniker *Pioneer*, while the *Manzanar Free Press* called the first residents of its camp "pioneers," and the *Grenada Irrigator*, another evacuee newspaper, proclaimed, "Our great adventure is a repetition of the

[7] D.W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
[8] Kesa Noda, *Yamato Colony: 1906-1960* (Livingston, Calif.: Livingston-Merced JACL Chapter, 1981), xv.

frontier struggle of pioneers against the land and its elements."[9] In reality, the first-generation immigrants had already struggled against the elements and converted some of the West Coast's most inhospitable land into small, independent agricultural operations, not unlike the yeomanry lauded by Thomas Jefferson himself. In Chapter Three, I will describe how evacuees relied on their own agrarian ideals and the techniques they had developed over decades of coaxing an agricultural existence out of marginal lands to implement thriving agricultural operations at Manzanar, as in all of the relocation centers.

Scholars have written widely about the political and constitutional issues surrounding relocation and the subsequent movement for redress. Aside from a few other topics, though, such as incidents of overt resistance, they have left explorations of life in the camps to popular historians and the evacuees themselves, several of whom have published diaries, memoirs, and fiction based on their experiences. By employing environment as a category of analysis, and using Manzanar Relocation Center as a case study, we can better understand how Japanese Americans experienced the daily realities of life in relocation centers. Such an exploration also reveals multiple ways in which white American ideologies about race and environment, competition over natural resources, and competing notions of what a healthy, "American" landscape looked like shaped every phase of evacuation and relocation, from the initial decision to relocate, to arguments over where the camps should be sited, to the ways in which administrators ran the camps, to the white public's reception of the relocation program.

Popular histories may not tell the full story of wartime relocation, but the sense of outrage at the injustice of relocation and the sympathy for Japanese immigrants and

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[9] See, for example, "Pioneers Celebrate Second Anniversary," *Manzanar Free Press*, 18 March 1944, p.1; Quoted in Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," *Journal of American History* (Dec. 1992), 1046-1047.

Japanese Americans that these books typically evoke are not misplaced. Some 110,000 West Coast residents, approximately two-thirds of whom were American citizens by birth, were systematically rounded up and ushered into prison camps, where many remained for four years. Such a blanket measure, while justified by Army officials at the time as military necessity, was not taken against nationals of America's other wartime enemies, Germany or Italy. No attempted act of wartime sabotage or espionage by anyone of Japanese descent was ever uncovered in the United States. And, while I will argue that evacuated Issei and Nisei, second-generation Japanese Americans, exercised considerable agency in shaping their camp environments and experiences, they nonetheless remain the victims in an episode that cost most, in addition to a great measure of human dignity, their homes, businesses, farms, and financial savings: in short, the lives they had built in good faith as immigrants and the children of immigrants to the United States.

**Notes on Terminology**

Since the 1970s and the beginning of the movement for reparations for the victims of relocation, there has been much debate as to the most appropriate label for the camps housing Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants during World War II, with some writers and activists preferring "concentration camp" or "internment center." While "relocation center," the official terminology of the United States government, is clearly a euphemism, I have chosen to use it, largely for the sake of clarity. The label "concentration camp" cannot be divorced from the gruesome images of Nazi death camps. I feel that its use lends a sensationalism to discussions of relocation that simply is not necessary to appreciate the depth of the injustice and struggle to which evacuees were subjected. Other, less sensational terms are also problematic if one wishes to

avoid confusion: the War Relocation Authority also operated a segregation center, which housed Japanese nationals and American citizens who renounced loyalty to the United States, and isolation centers, to which "troublemakers" within the relocation centers were sent. Additionally, the Army and the Department of Justice operated prisoner-of-war camps housing enemy soldiers in the United States and internment centers, which housed German, Italian, and Japanese nationals from the United States and Latin America who were – often for the thinnest of reasons and, in many cases, constituting civil rights violations as well[10] – considered by the FBI to be potentially dangerous. I use "relocation center" to refer to the camps built by the U.S. Army and operated by the War Relocation Authority for the purpose of housing Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants affected by wholesale evacuation from the West Coast military zones as a result of Executive Order 9066. I refer to those living in the relocation centers as either "evacuees" or "residents," even though neither of these terms adequately denotes the involuntary nature of their existence in the centers.

When I refer to first-generation immigrants only or to second-generation Japanese Americans only, I will use the terms "Issei" and "Nisei," respectively. By-and-large, I will use the term "Japanese Americans" to refer collectively to first-generation Japanese immigrants and their Japanese American children, particularly when I am discussing the subjects of relocation. By 1942, Japanese immigrants, aside from rare exceptions, had resided in the United States for at least eighteen years, as the National Origins Act of 1924 cut off immigration from Japan. The majority of male immigrants had been in the country for more than thirty years, as the Gentleman's Agreement of

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[10] Krammer, *Undue Process*; Stephen Fox, *America's Invisible Gulag: A Biography of German American Internment and Exclusion in World War II* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Stephen Fox, *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans during World War II* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

1907 excluded all but students and wives or family members of immigrants already residing in the United States. As such, the Japanese immigrants had already made significant, ongoing contributions to the economic, agricultural, and social development of their adopted homeland, and it is safe to assume that most would have chosen to adopt American citizenship had they not been barred by U.S. law from doing so.

**Notes on Methodology**

In 1992, the site of the former Manzanar Relocation Center became Manzanar National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park System. Park system historian Harlan D. Unrau completed a historic resource study, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center*, in 1996. Unrau's study was invaluable as a starting point for my research, both as a means for reconstructing the events and environment of Manzanar during its years as a relocation center, and because of its inclusion of long excerpts from many primary sources, which aided my interpretation of the events my study examines. I also relied heavily on many published oral histories of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans, including those of the Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project collected by Arthur A. Hansen and his students at California State University, Fullerton, and a survey of four years of the *Manzanar Free Press*, the evacuee-published camp newspaper, in my attempts to understand evacuees' responses to relocation. The *Free Press* itself is an invaluable representation of the ways in which evacuees managed to meet their own needs – in this case for information – while negotiating the demands of the War Relocation Authority administrators, who reviewed the newspaper prior to publication. The *Final Report* prepared by WRA administrators

upon Manzanar's closing and the memoir of Dillon S. Myer, national director of the agency, are the basis of much of my interpretation of camp administrators' viewpoints.

In Chapter One, my retelling of the events leading up to the establishment of Manzanar as the first relocation center is based on coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Inyo Independent*, both of which also helped reveal the attitudes and expectations of white Californians during the war. The oral interviews published in *Camp and Community*, by Jesse Garrett and Ronald Larson, were particularly useful in illuminating the reactions of Owens Valley residents to the siting of Manzanar Relocation Center. My interpretation of the importance of competition over natural resources and ideologies about Japanese Americans and nature are built upon a foundation laid by many other historians of race and environment, including Linda Nash, Ian Tyrell, Gregg Mitman, and Philip Paully.

In addition to a lengthy oral interview of evacuee Harry Ueno, Chapter Two is based upon information I gathered from various books about Japanese garden design and applied to historical photos, and my own observations of the remains of, landscape installations at Manzanar. I used another Park Service publication, a draft *Cultural Landscape Report*, to supplement my own findings. Also helpful to me were Gary Okihiro's and Roger Daniel's writings about the nature of resistance and cultural expression in relocation centers and the works of D.W. Meinig, Rebecca Fish Ewan, and Deborah Tall examining the significance of landscape in people's lives.

Masakazu Iwata's exhaustive, data-rich study of Japanese-American agriculture in California, *Planted in Good Soil*, along with community studies of four West Coast Japanese-American farming communities by Linda Takemura, Timothy Lukes and Gary Okihiro, Kesa Noda, and David Mas Masumoto, were invaluable as I wrote Chapter

Three. Combining these sources with the many available oral histories helped me piece together the range of experiences of Issei and Nisei agriculturalists in the first half of the twentieth century. As I read the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences and attitudes before, during, and after relocation, important patterns emerged: the encounters with marginality, both personal and environmental, of so many first- and second-generation Japanese immigrants, and the similarities between the circumstances they faced upon arrival in the United States, during relocation, and when they returned to the post-war West Coast. The *Manzanar Free Press* coverage of camp farming operations and the out-of-center relocation program revealed ways in which agriculture was an arena of contest over Americanization, evacuees' self-determination, and what post-war America would look like for Japanese Americans.

## CHAPTER ONE

## "PREJUDICE AND BARREN LANDS"

*"At the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken, and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not* tabula rasa*. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity."*[1]

*"The Issei and Nisei speak of trouble with prejudice and barren lands."*[2]

The American frontier was closed, according to U.S. Census takers, in 1890. But that's not how the men of the Owens Valley in California seemed to see things in March of 1942. A makeshift militia gathered in the home of one irate Independence resident to sketch out a plan of defense for their town, population 500, nine miles north of the old irrigation colony of Manzanar, where the Army planned to relocate untold thousands of Japanese Americans from Los Angeles and its vicinity. The vigilantes' strategy called for the methods of "Indian fighting" their fathers and grandfathers had used back in the 1860s to drive the resident Paiutes out of the valley they were determined to claim for white, American agriculture, justified, of course, by the Native Americans' "under-use" of the irrigatible valley's potential.[3] The modern defenders planned, for example, to rely upon a "delaying action" by which they would fall back from boulder to boulder in the rocky terrain when pressed by the "superior forces" of the thousands of "enemy aliens"

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[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 38.
[2] Kesa Noda, *Yamato Colony: 1906-1960* (Livingston, Calif.: Livingston-Merced JACL Chapter, 1981), xv.
[3] Rebecca Fish Ewan, *A Land Between: Owens Valley, California* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

who might escape from Manzanar or, worse yet, try to remain in the Valley once World War II was over.[4]

Though geographically isolated, the people of the Owens Valley, since the attack on Pearl Harbor, had nonetheless read the same sensational and frightening accounts as the rest of the country. Their local newspapers, the Los Angeles dailies, and national magazines as well-respected as *Life* described underhanded, blood-thirsty Japanese military tactics and the danger that Japanese Americans might carry out their supposed loyalty to the Emperor through sabotage inside the United States. "There were people in Independence [in the Owens Valley] who were just frightened out of their wits," remembered one store keeper's wife to an oral historian. "They thought the Japanese were going to break out of Manzanar and we'd all be slaughtered in our beds." Another resident recalled the leader of the vigilante group, "who formed his own militia of trained people and they were going to march. . .They were going to save the women and children of Independence when the Japs broke loose."[5]

"We dynamited the aqueduct a couple of times [in a 1914 fight with Los Angeles over access to Owens River water], but that wasn't vigilante work. That was just an advertising campaign," veteran Owens Valley newspaper publisher Billy Chalfant told a reporter in 1942. "Maybe you'd call it public relations work now. That was just to give a little hint to Los Angeles – showed 'em what we thought about things."[6] What residents of Independence, Bishop and Lone Pine – the three towns of the Owens Valley, which, between them had not a single Japanese or Japanese American resident – thought in

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[4] Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center* (1996), by Harlan D. Unrau. Available online at: www.nps.gov/manz/hrs/hrs.html; Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, *Final Report: Manzanar Relocation Center* (1946), by Robert L. Brown and Ralph P. Merritt.
[5] Jessie A. Garrett and Ronald C. Larson, eds. *Camp and Community: Manzanar and the Owens Valley* (Fullerton: Calif. State Univ. Fullerton Japanese American Oral History Project, 1977), 9.
[6] Ibid., Appendix 26, "The Henderson Story."

1942 was that L.A. had stolen their water a quarter-century before[7] and was now trying to dump on them its dangerous "Japs," of whom most Valley residents were none too fond. "It's a plain case of survival of the fittest. It's either us or the goddamn Yellow-bellies," a Lone Pine flight school operator told a reporter. "What are we stalling for? The Army needs target practice on those sons-of-bitches." A resident barber prescribed, "with an ominous flourish of his razor," wrote reporter Milton Silverman, that Californians should "'take these Yellow-tails right down to the edge of the Pacific and say to 'em: O.k., boys, over there's Tokyo. Start walkin'.'"[8]

Two-hundred-thirty miles away, white Los Angelinos were none too happy either about the Army's choice of Manzanar as a "processing center" that might house as many as 60,000 Japanese Americans one mile east of the Owens River aqueduct, from which the metropolis received the bulk of its water. Over the previous several decades, exclusionists and public health officials had painted Asians as probable carriers of disease due to what they perceived as Asians' low standards of living and refusals to adhere to public health norms of the day.[9] L.A.'s public officials would soon sound a general alarm, warning that a mere mile was not buffer enough to prevent imprisoned Japanese Americans from inadvertently tainting, or perhaps intentionally sabotaging, the city's water supply.

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[7] See Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 52-103, for the full story of L.A.'s acquisition of the Owens River water rights and the L.A. Department of Water and Power's many deceptions.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See, for example, Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2001) for more on the belief among health officials and the public that Asians' "low" standards of living often created threats to public health. Mexican immigrants were similarly connected in the public mind to outbreaks of plague in Los Angeles; see William Deverell, "Plague in Los Angeles, 1924: Ethnicity and Typicality," in Valerie Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, eds., *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1999), 172-200. Tera Hunter discusses white Southerners' blaming of African Americans for spreading tuberculosis in *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 187-218.

When administrators of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), which operated the camps for wartime evacuees from the West Coast, set about choosing locations, they made a short list of property requirements: each site should be at least 7,500 acres and possess "agricultural possibilities" in order to support, preferably, large-scale crop production or some other endeavor that would provide year-round employment for internees (with the provision that they not displace local white labor); each must be isolated from civilian population centers, military installations, and "strategically important areas," by order of the War Department; each should be relatively accessible to a railhead and sources of water and electricity; and each should be, preferably, on government property so that necessary improvements would not increase the value of private lands. In searching for appropriate sites, the WRA enlisted the help of several agencies: the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Soil Conservation Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Farm Security Administration, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Public Health Service, and the National Resources Planning Board. It received 7,300 proposals and visited nearly 100 sites before finalizing its choices.[10]

Two sites – Manzanar and Poston, on the Colorado River Indian Reservation in La Paz County, Ariz. – were chosen by the Army before the WRA took over. The Army's Western Defense Command, led by General John L. DeWitt, was not nearly so politic as the WRA would later be in its methods of imposing eminent domain on the "locals," but its criteria for site selection were largely the same. "The sites for the relocation centers were much alike in their isolation, rugged terrain, primitive character, and almost total lack of conveniences at the start. More than any other single factor, the requirement for

[10] *Evacuation and Relocation*.

large tracts of land virtually guaranteed that the sites would be inhospitable," wrote Harlan Unrau for the National Park Service fifty years later.[11]

Established in 1910, Manzanar had been a small, fruit-farming community until the city of Los Angeles built the aqueduct that diverted the Owens River to the growing metropolis. With an average annual rainfall of less than six inches, agriculture at Manzanar, as in the rest of the valley, became impossible with the loss of the river, which captured snow melt from the Sierra Nevadas. The town was deserted by 1920. Then in the 1930s, with better roads and an increasing Southern California population, the Valley experienced a bit of a renaissance as a recreational area. The city of L.A. sold back some of the land it had purchased and leased some ranches. Manchester Boddy, publisher of the *Los Angeles Daily News* – which, unlike the Hearst-owned papers, including the *L.A. Times*, was not a propagator of "Yellow Peril" tales – was one businessman interested in the revitalization of the Valley. He was also "a friend of the Roosevelt Administration." It is unclear exactly who asked Boddy's advice regarding a locale for evacuated Japanese Americans, but, when approached, he suggested the Owens Valley as a site that could handle as many as 50,000 evacuees, reasoning that a relocation center could somehow figure into local citizen-group plans for economic revitalization.[12]

Boddy set into motion the chain of events that soon would embroil L.A. residents and officials, Owens Valley residents and officials, and the Army in a battle over the site of the first relocation center. Boddy met with the public relations director of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which owned the Manzanar site; Robert L. Brown, executive secretary and public relations director for Inyo-Mono

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.; *Final Report*; Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*; Ewan, *A Land Between*; Garrett and Larson, *Camp and Community*.

Associates, an organization dedicated to promoting the Owens Valley as a tourist destination; and the head of staff for the Army's Wartime Civil Control Administration, a civilian arm that organized evacuation and relocation until the WRA took over. Boddy informed them that the Army had already chosen the Valley as the site for a "processing center" – at that point in time, the Army and the WRA were still unsure whether evacuees would have to be housed in camps for the duration of the war or simply moved inland to temporary sites and then sent to new homes outside the West Coast evacuation zones – and wanted their assistance in handling the delicate matter of relations between the residents and officials of Los Angeles, the residents and officials of the Owens Valley, and the Army. The men decided to convene a group of Owens Valley citizens headed by Ralph Merritt, an Independence rancher and chairman of the committee on relations with Los Angeles, with which the Valley was negotiating ongoing land and water issues.[13] The next day, Merritt and others surveyed the Valley and settled on the site of the former Shepherd homestead in Manzanar. The site was relatively level and had access to water from several small streams running through it, plus portions of a drainage system and concrete conduits still intact that could be used as the basis for an irrigation system for agricultural operations.[14]

Quiet negotiations turned into public debate when Army Corps of Engineer personnel, acting without permission from Clark or DeWitt, called upon LADWP Chief Engineer H. A. Van Norman to obtain a lease from the department. Van Norman, who had not previously been apprised of the situation, refused the lease, and immediately began contacting his own acquaintances in Washington. He informed F.B.I agents that, back in 1934, the Japanese consulate had inquired about the construction and operation

[13] *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[14] Ibid.

of the Los Angeles municipal water system. In the following years, various city agencies, including LADWP, had hired twelve Japanese workers as civil servants, as a result of which Van Norman was sure the Japanese consulate had surreptitiously acquired all of the information it desired. These incidents, Van Norman had already warned the Dies Committee, were clear evidence of a Japanese conspiracy to sabotage the city's water system. Now, he was sure, the Army would be playing right into the enemy's hands by housing Japanese American evacuees at Manzanar, so close to the aqueduct. Van Norman was never clear on exactly how he thought evacuees might either sabotage the aqueduct or inadvertently pollute it. His threats, though, played upon two stereotypes of Asians widely held by the white public: that of the "inscrutable, sneaky" Japanese and that of the Asian living in squalor, far below the standards of white Americans, making themselves susceptible to, and thus probable carriers of, disease. Chinese and Japanese immigrants had been accused of spreading plague in San Francisco, leprosy in the Santa Clara Valley, and other diseases in various locales throughout California. [15]

L.A. Mayor Fletcher Bowron and Congressman Thomas F. Ford from Los Angeles immediately took Van Norman's threats to heart. They led the attacks in the newspapers against the planned site, despite the fact that both had called insistently for the speedy removal of Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Ford said in a statement to newspapers:

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[15] See, for example, Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2001) for more on the belief among health officials and the public that Asians' "low" standards of living often created threats to public health. Mexican immigrants were similarly connected in the public mind to outbreaks of plague in Los Angeles; see William Deverell, "Plague in Los Angeles, 1924: Ethnicity and Typicality," in Valerie Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, eds., *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1999), 172-200. Tera Hunter discusses white Southerners' blaming of African Americans for spreading tuberculosis in *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 187-218.

> In my mind, I can see Tokio [sic] grinning with joy because of the opportunity this action will afford to sabotage the water supply of 1,500,000 people. I cannot penetrate the mind of the General [DeWitt]. . .I must vigorously protest this action as in my judgment as [sic] an inexcusable piece of stupidity.[16]

Rumors flew around Los Angeles and the Owens Valley about the dangers of housing Japanese Americans near the aqueduct. Van Norman himself had been the chief source in an *L.A. Times* article, "Water Poisoning Fears Baseless, Says Engineer," in which he argued, "'Truckload after truckload would have to be dumped into the reservoirs to have any effect whatsoever.'" The city already employed enough guards to prevent any such occurrence, he said, but even should it happen, the "trained chemists and bacteriologists" who checked "300 or more samples per day" would immediately catch any evidence of contaminants. Further, even "should the aqueduct be blown up. . .Los Angeles would have ample water for several months" in its reservoirs.[17] Van Norman's comments to the press are perplexing, as he was most likely interviewed for the article *after* he learned of the Army's plans for Manzanar – it ran on March 3, and does not seem like a piece a daily paper would have held before running – and had already begun warning Washington of just such threats of sabotage by Japanese American evacuees. Plans for Manzanar, though, had *not* yet hit the press, it appears; the article was written in response to "a tip phoned in to Capt. Vernon Rasmussen of the homicide squad that an attempt might be made" to poison L.A.'s water. Did Van Norman feel it his civic duty to mitigate public panic even while he was himself sounding the alarms to officials? Or was it only a concentrated mass of Japanese Americans that, in his mind, constituted an actual threat to the water?

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[16]Quoted in *Evacuation and Relocation*.

[17] "Water Poisoning Fears Baseless, Says Engineer: Bureau Manager Explains Sabotage of City's Supply Virtually Impossible," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1942, sec. II, p.3.

The only clues that exist as to how Van Norman feared Japanese Americans would sabotage or pollute L.A.'s water are the specific evacuee activities to which LADWP officials objected after the lease on Manzanar was granted. Evacuees dug holes for swimming pools in which they might find relief from the sweltering Owens Valley summer heat, but were forced instead to seed them with grass because LADWP feared swimmers would contaminate the aqueduct. Military police stationed outside the camp investigated allegations by Owens Valley residents claiming to have seen evacuees swimming in nearby creeks, which LADWP also considered potential sources of contamination. Under pressure to reduce such tensions, WRA officials instructed residents to sterilize their *furo*, or Japanese-style baths, with chlorine to avoid contagion. (Ironically, the traditional bathing procedure called for scrubbing and cleansing the body thoroughly *before* soaking in the hot bath, so bodies were relatively clean entering the water.) Center farmers had to delay completion of the hog farm awaiting clearance from LADWP, because the department thought that washing the hog pens might somehow pollute L.A.'s water supply. A 1.25-million-gallon-per-day capacity sewage treatment plant, including four settling ponds, served the center. But, because LADWP was concerned that the settling ponds would attract and become breeding places for ducks, which might then contaminate the aqueduct, the liquid sewage generated by Manzanar's 10,000 residents was instead chlorinated and dumped into an open ditch that flowed back to the Owens River below the aqueduct intake.[18] Regardless of what he told the papers and why, Van Norman clearly thought evacuated Japanese Americans living a mile from the aqueduct posed an ongoing threat to non-Japanese Los Angelinos.

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[18] Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (1999), by Jeffery F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord.

On March 3, the same day the article assuring safety of L.A.'s water supply ran in the *Times*, the proverbial cat made its way out of the bag in the Owens Valley, when an independent builder looking to bid on a construction contract stored his car in a garage in one of the Valley towns, telling the garage owner that he had come to look over the site of the "sixteen miles of prison camps" the Army was building for "those damn Japs." Realizing they had a public relations nightmare on their hands, the WCCA, L.A. Mayor Bowron, Van Norman and the LADWP board members, the president of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and George Savage, publisher of the three Owens Valley newspapers, met to hammer out a public stance intended to calm residents. The group agreed upon press releases to run the next day in all three Owens Valley papers and the four L.A. dailies.[19] News coverage and editorial comment over the next few days stressed Californians' "patriotic duty" to comply with the Army's decision and to put before other concerns "the main objective – that of restraining the aliens from any possible acts of sabotage against our military installations, plane plants, power stations and other essential wartime key centers."[20] The 6,000-acre site would house 10,000 to 15,000 evacuees, rather than rumored 60,000, and, for the time being at least, would remain under the strict, heavily armed control of the military. Finally, Savage's editorials stressed the potential for economic development for the Owens Valley.[21] The public officials had agreed to put the best possible face on things, and the height of the rumor-mongering was past. But not all residents' minds were set at ease, at least not in Independence, where the home-grown "defenders" were readying themselves in case of a massive "Jap" escape.

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[19] *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[20] "Placing Japanese in the Owens Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1942, sec. II, p. 4.
[21] *Evacuation and Relocation*; "History in the Making," and "Mono [County] Envies Inyo's Getting Jap Camp," *The Inyo Independent*, 20 March 1942, both excerpted in Garrett and Larson, *Camp and Community,* 6.

The potential for vigilante action was not the only common element between the fight over Manzanar and the earlier fight over the Owens River. Residents of both Los Angeles and the Owens Valley considered the Manzanar issue to be one essentially concerning natural resources. White Los Angelinos wanted to be sure their water was safe. Owens Valley residents could not fully extricate the siting argument – as the center would be on LADWP property and the evacuees largely from the metropolitan area – from their historical battle with the city and contemporary negotiations in which Valley counties were trying to regain access to enough land and water to build a new local economy.

To understand what motivated these many actors and why environmental concerns were so central, we must examine the history of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans on the West Coast of the United States, particularly in California agriculture, as well as the larger issues of access to environmental resources in the arid Western United States. Work on the West Coast evacuation and relocation program began before anyone, even the administrators charged with heading the process, knew exactly what it would entail or how it would work. Press reports immediately following the release of Executive Order 9066 astutely noted that the mandate could provide for the evacuation of residents of German and Italian descent, not just Japanese and Japanese Americans. At least one article in the *L.A. Times* suggested that all 100,000 Japanese-Americans expected to be evacuated might be "processed" in the Owens Valley. The Army initially assured the public that Manzanar would be a temporary facility only. The public seemed to prefer that "enemy aliens" be kept under strict, armed watch by the Army, but worried that evacuation and relocation would instead be

assigned to a civilian agency, which it was. There was bureaucratic disagreement as to whether the Works Projects Administration, which provided administrative personnel and procurement and distribution expertise to the WCCA, would run the program for the duration or a new agency, the War Relocation Authority, would be created.[22] On April 7, 1942 – nearly a month after construction had begun on the relocation center at Manzanar – Milton Eisenhower, the initial director of the WRA, met with the governors of the inland Western states to present a plan by which Japanese Americans would be resettled in the mountain region, where the WRA would find them farm work and homes within their new communities. All attending governors, however, flatly refused to accept any Japanese Americans not kept soundly behind barbed wire.[23]

The one thing most everyone – the press, the non-Asian public, and government officials both military and civilian – seemed to agree upon was that relocation was essentially a "farm problem." In the coverage leading up to the selection of relocation sites, the *L.A. Times* reported on the government's consideration of "large community farming centers" and accurately predicted that Eisenhower, "who has been in the Agriculture Department for more than 15 years as a farm program builder and agricultural economist," would likely be selected to head the civilian agency overseeing relocation. The paper continued, "Eisenhauer [sic] is regarded as one of the country's ablest students of farm problems."[24] In an Associated Press piece on March 8, 1942, in which reporters asked Eleanor Roosevelt her opinions about the developing plans for relocation, one newspaper man inquired what she "thought of the idea of moving the

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[22] Jason Scott Smith, "New Deal Public Works at War: The WPA and Japanese American Internment," *Pacific Historical Review* 72 (Feb. 2003), 63-92.
[23] Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority During World War II* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Ariz. Press, 1971), 127-28.
[24] Kyle Palmer, "Sites Surveyed for Japanese: Rapid Construction of Farming Centers for Evacuees Contemplated," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 1942, p. 11.

Japanese in California into unirrigated areas similar to those which they have so successfully cultivated." The first lady replied that the "idea seemed wise because this country must also protect its vegetable supply and the Japanese have been heavy producers of winter vegetables."[25] In fact, Japanese American farmers did at the time produce from 60 to 95 percent of several of California's fruit and vegetable crops. General DeWitt's strict and repeated public announcements that any Japanese American farmers found plowing under their crops would be arrested and "prosecuted as saboteurs" revealed just how seriously Californians took the inevitable agricultural side-effects of corralling their state's "enemy aliens" into "safe places."[26]

In addition to economic concerns about agricultural production, though, ideological issues were at work behind the white public's assumption that the "Japanese problem" would be solved as an agricultural policy. There never seemed to be any doubt, for one thing, that evacuees would be moved to barren, inhospitable lands, despite their mandate to continue producing fruits and vegetables. A group of West Coast Japanese Americans attempted to comply early with the evacuation order by purchasing farm land outside the exclusion zone in New Mexico. Putting it bluntly, the mayor of Albuquerque said in reaction to this news, "California can keep her Japs – she has plenty of desert to keep them in, and so has Arizona."[27]

Given the widespread agricultural development in West Coast states in the first half of the twentieth century, the need for large tracts of land isolated from population centers nearly guaranteed that relocation sites would be inhospitable, as National Park

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[25] "Mrs. Roosevelt Says Pacific Coast Japs Wise in Realizing They Must Move Inland," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1942, p. 9.
[26] "Evacuation of Japanese Expected to Start Soon: City Council Told Removal of Enemy Aliens to Owens Valley Center to Begin in 10 Days," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1942, p. 6; "Arrest Ordered for Japs Who Plow Under Crops," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 1942, p.11.
[27] "Japanese Colony Plan Protested: Project for Settlement in New Mexico Stirs Bitter Opposition," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1942, p. 6.

Service historian Unrau observed. But the U.S. government offered an additional reason for routing Japanese-Americans into wilderness areas of sorts: press releases and reports prepared by the Army and the WRA – once it had accepted that camps were unavoidable – painted relocation centers as laboratories of assimilation, promising to transform evacuees through a frontier-like experience into Jeffersonian agrarians and democrats. A WRA pamphlet – printed ostensibly to help evacuees prepare for the relocation experience, but not distributed until most were already in camps – defined the term "Relocation Center" as "a pioneer community." The frontier rhetoric, along with descriptions of the barren Western landscapes of the camps, the government officials hoped, would evoke visions in the public imagination of Japanese American evacuees replicating the process through which historian Frederick Jackson Turner described previous waves of immigrants becoming Americans. Turner's infamous thesis, which he posited in response to the Census Bureau's announcement of the closing of the frontier in 1890, described the nation's shifting border of settlement as "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization," where settlers throughout American history had stripped off the trappings of European culture and, through hard work, built up communities out of the wilderness, continuously re-creating democratic institutions and transforming themselves into Americans.[28] Now, publicity about relocation suggested, the Japanese could do the same: through their own struggle with the austere environments of the relocations centers, they could build pastoral communities and emerge assimilated.

It was clear to the administrators of the WRA that white Californians had not accepted the assimilability of Japanese Americans and considered it one of their duties

[28] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt and Co., 1921), 4.

to solve this aspect of the "Japanese problem."[29] To that end, they relied upon one of the oldest tropes in American history. It was not until 1893 that Turner penned what would be regarded as the most complete, eloquent version of immigrants becoming Americans by wrestling the wilderness into a productive garden, but his tale harkened back to Thomas Jefferson's brand of agrarian democrat, Crevecoeur's exaltation of the American farmer, and, the very impetus that had driven many Pacific residents to the U.S. West in the first place: Manifest Destiny, all of which incorporated a central role for the natural environment in "making" Americans.[30] What's more, from California's earliest contact with Japanese people, white vilifications of the "small, brown men" were couched in terms of either Asians' appropriate place in nature, the influence of Asians on the natural environment, or both. Eventually, these mental links merged to form an ideology which held that Asians were naturally, racially inassimilable.

Take, for example, the media response to a planned Japanese colony in California in 1869. John Henry Schnell, a Prussian diplomat who traveled to Japan, made the country his home for a time, wedding a Japanese woman with whom he had two daughters. Inspired by reports of the Western United States as an agricultural promised land, Schnell decided to lead a group of Japanese immigrants to California to establish an agrarian colony, or in his words, "a village" in which residents would raise mulberry trees for silkworms.[31] The San Francisco *Gazette* responded immediately and virulently to news of the migrating farmers in an article titled "The New Asia":

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[29] Dillon S. Myer, Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II (Tuscon, Ariz: Univ. of Ariz. Press, 1971).

[30] For more general information about historical American ideas about democracy, nation, and the conquest of nature, see, for example, Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1967) and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950).

[31] Masakazu Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil: The History of the Issei in United States Agriculture, Volume One* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 37-42.

> And now come the Japanese. . .
>
> These people come to *literally take root in the ground, and with the foul purpose not only of multiplying themselves in the land, but of spreading over it a vegetation that is as foreign as themselves*. . .*Shall Los Angeles be made a tea-garden and Santa Barbara a mulberry field?* Shall joss houses and pagodas rise side by side with the school-houses and churches, the civilization of effete despotisms grapple with the civilization of an athletic democracy, and the philosophy of Confucius be taught in climes dedicated to the conquests of Christianity?. . .
>
> Here be these pagans and barbarians coming in such multitudes. . .*bringing with them not only their habits, customs, manners, politics and religion, but actually the very trees, shrubs, plants, insects and animals to build up a New Asia in our very midst.*
>
> And are not American institutions in peril? What if the 15th Amendment should prevail, and the multitudinous barbarians actually obtain. . .the franchise. . .Is it not palpable as the Roman nose that they will use it to *convert us into a nation of Asiatics*. . .*We must smash the cockatrice*[32] *in the egg*, shut out these corrupting pagans, debar them from all civil and political privileges, or we are lost.[33] [emphases added]

Schnell's colony did not succeed in transforming the California landscape into a new Japan or even in turning enough profit to stay in existence. The colony failed after a few short years, without access to enough capital or enough water for irrigation, and because the northern California climate simply wasn't suitable for the plants that the colonists had, in fact, brought with them.[34]

While the *Gazette* did not accurately predict the spread of tea gardens and mulberry fields across the Western United States, its editorial did foreshadow many of the arguments that white Californians would use in Asian exclusion efforts throughout the following seventy years, cultivating the ideology that, eventually, would even help shape the implementation of the wartime relocation policy and evacuees' relocation experience. Here begins the evolution of a vague yet powerful notion among white Pacific-Coast Americans that Asians represented vile elements of nature – and thus that it was natural law, not the prejudices of man, stating that Asian peoples were vile – and that the dangers they posed to the natural environment and the white race were, like

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[32] A cockatrice is "a legendary serpent that is hatched by a reptile from a cock's egg and that has a deadly glance," according to Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.
[33] Quoted in Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 40-41.
[34] Ibid., 42.

the extraordinary cockatrice, of mythic proportions. It also is significant that this, one of the first public outcries against Japanese immigration,[35] warned that the "multitudinous barbarians" would alter the California *landscape* as the first step in a process of actually transforming (white) U.S. citizens, racially and culturally, into Asians.

In addition to the struggle between man and nature, Turner's frontier thesis implied a particular landscape aesthetic that "Americans" would create, and it definitely did not include tea houses, pagodas, or Japanese plant species. Horticulturalists and social reformers between 1860 and 1930, historian Ian Tyrell writes in *True Gardens of the Gods*, had a distinct "garden landscape," not unlike the pastoral vision implied by Turner, in mind for improving the environmental, economic, and social health of the California countryside. Promoters of this garden ideal, Tyrell argues, promised to heal the degraded environment of the scars left by grazing and gold-rush mining. They also intended to reverse California's trend toward large-scale, mono-crop agribusiness that produced primarily wheat and grain and institute instead an "improved" natural landscape, lush with trees, divided into small farms that would produce fruit, vegetables, and flowers, and dotted with interconnected small towns. Reformers hoped to create a middle-class yeomanry that would promote temperance, health, and family values.[36] To these reformers, their prescribed landscape functioned as a necessary element to ensure white, middle-class, "American" values.

Promoters of the horticultural ideal – which included boosters of irrigation projects, who latched onto the concept of independent, democratic farmers and promised that irrigation could make the appropriately sized 160-acre plots both

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[35] There was almost no migration from Japan to Hawaii until the 1880s and to the continental United States before the 1890s; See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 42-43.

[36] Ian Tyrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian-Australian Environmental Reform, 1860-1930* (Berkeley, Calif., Univ. of Calif. Press, 1999) 1-19, 27.

productive and affordable to the idealized yeomanry[37] – along with existing small agriculturalists throughout California viewed Japanese immigrants – more than half of whom entered the United States and initially went to work as farm laborers[38] – as a threat to independent farmers everywhere. The rise in California of large-scale agriculture requiring a landless, mobile labor force "acquired additional significance," wrote conservationist George Perkins Marsh, also a propagator of the horticultural ideal who held that racial homogeneity was key to its success, "from the threatening waves of Asiatic immigration whose first ripples are breaking upon our shores." Asians, cast as racially inferior and willing to work for low wages, would become to large California farmers what African slaves had been to southern planters, Marsh warned: with a ready supply of cheap labor, agribusiness would edge out the family farm, dashing all chances of a democratic agrarian society in California. What's more, the garden landscape of small farms linked with small towns called for racial homogeneity, which would create social harmony, horticultural promoters promised, championing Anglo-Saxon superiority. "The idea spread quickly" in the aftermath of the Civil War, wrote Tyrell, "that intensive agriculture would save California from racial and class conflict."[39] There was no place for Japanese farmers or farm laborers in the new landscape reformers desired for California.

The horticultural ideal promised not just a panacea for the social ills of race and class; it promised also a countryside more auspicious for human physical health. "Pastoral landscapes were not merely pleasing to the colonizing eye," writes historian Linda Nash, "but better for the white American body." In the second half of the

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[37] Ibid., Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985).
[38] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 93.
[39] Ibid., 5,39-46, 11.

nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, Nash finds, Americans of European descent, both settlers and physicians, believed that new environments posed health threats to humans, threats that differed by location depending upon factors such as climate, aridity versus humidity, winds, and type of vegetation. The potentially unhealthy environments of the American West might not just make one sick, though; they could actually threaten one's racial purity. Nash writes:

> The regions West of the Mississippi were unfamiliar, often treeless and arid, and filled with non-white populations, and the differences of climate and environment in western lands was a subject of constant commentary. Many feared that white settlement in the West would be marked by illness, racial degeneration, and high mortality.[40]

Physicians writing about the relative healthfulness of California generally divided the state into three regions: the coast, the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the Central Valley, which actually consisted of the two valleys of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. (See map at the end of this chapter.) It was the Central Valley with which physicians and white settlers were most concerned in terms of health. The heat and the high rate of illness among travelers through the central part of the state during the gold rush led observers to label it tropical, despite its solid location within the temperate zone, a classification that automatically marked the Central Valley a dangerous location for whites. Heat in combination with hard, physical labor, such as that which would be required to drain, clear and plow swamps and deltas of the river valleys into productive farm land, was thought to be particularly threatening to white bodies.[41] Such notions linking health and environment heavily influenced medical thinking in a pre-germ theory

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[40] Linda Nash, "Finishing Nature: Harmonizing Bodies and Environments in Late-Nineteenth-Century California," *Environmental History* 8, 1 (2003), 25-52, 32. See also Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) and Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10, 2 for more on nineteenth-century ideas about the effects of new environments on health and human bodies.

[41] Ibid.

age.[42] During the 1850s and '60s, physicians noted among travelers through the region high rates of dysentery, diarrhea, and malaria, the final of which contributed to the Central Valley's tropical image. The most central parts of the valley, closest to the major rivers, were fertile and well-watered, but also considered to be the most unhealthy. Much of the inner valley was seasonal swamp, fed by "streams that easily overflowed their banks. . .dispersing into multiple ill-defined and slow-moving channels as they approached their outlet." These supported tule-filled marshes where water from frequent floods was trapped.[43]

Nineteenth-century concerns about racial fragility aside, these were quite unpleasant places to live and work. One Japanese immigrant farming on an island in the San Joaquin River delta offered this description:

> A white horse working in the field within an hour or so becomes a red horse, literally bloody red as a result of being attacked by swarms of large, dreadful mosquitoes. What about the man driving the horse? Of course, he faces the same problem, but the man takes preventive measures by covering his hands and face and exposing only his mouth, nose, and eyes. In the habitat of mosquitoes, many people succumbed to malaria.[44]

Farming in the Central Valley posed health risks, real and imagined, but the delta lands around the rivers were fertile, with soil composed of decayed vegetation and silt; there was plenty of available water; climatic conditions were ideal for raising cereals, alfalfa, potatoes, vegetables, and deciduous fruit; and the rivers provided ready transportation to markets in Sacramento, Stockton, and San Francisco.[45] White physicians believed Asian bodies to be less susceptible to certain diseases, such as malaria and small pox, and to the ill effects of combining heat with hard labor. And, of course, as a "colored

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[42] These ideas did not vanish entirely, though, with the spread of germ theory. In fact, the *Inyo Independent* published an article in 1942 ("Japanese are Lucky As to the Climate: Healthful Climate of Owens Valley Stressed in Survey," 10 April 1942, p. 3) citing the opinions of "medical climatologists" that Manzanar's climate would be healthy for both crops and people.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Quoted in Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 232.
[45] Ibid.

race," Asians were immune to the racial degeneration that could be caused by an unhealthy environment. What's more, unhealthy landscapes could be made healthy, even for white bodies, if they were transformed in keeping with "nature's intention" into the groomed gardens of pastoral landscapes.[46]

So, despite health concerns, large landowners engineered the clearing of many areas around the San Joaquin and Sacramento, beginning in the 1850s and '60s, employing largely immigrant labor: first Chinese and, after Chinese exclusion, Japanese. Laborers first had to build levees around a plot of land, then pump water out or drain it via ditches. More ditches had to be dug from the rivers to convey water, in controllable amounts, back to the drained crop land for irrigation. Workers cleared the fields of tule and willows, and usually had to plow several times before planting. In the first few decades, none of this work was mechanized. Even after crop land was cleared and planted, it was prone to frequent flooding, and the drainage and irrigation systems required ongoing maintenance. Initially, valley farmland was devoted to grain and hay production, crops grown by large agriculturalists who could pay laborers, mostly Asian, to perform such unpleasant and potentially unhealthy work; there were few independent farmers.[47]

By the first decades of the twentieth century, though, Japanese immigrants were eager to move up from the ranks of farm laborer – where, because of racial discrimination, they were generally paid lower wages and provided poorer living conditions than white workers and were afforded no opportunities to rise above unskilled jobs – to share tenancy or land ownership. Racial discrimination, California's Alien Land Laws, and pressure on white owners from other farmers not to sell or lease

[46] Nash, "Finishing Nature."
[47] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 231-39.

to Japanese farmers meant that generally desirable land was usually not available to them. But, their willingness to invest the extra labor and hours into improving lands, or to perform the "stoop labor" and hand labor required for very intensive cultivation of crops that could be grown on small plots, made the Issei, or first-generation immigrants, appealing tenants to some land owners. Issei farmers were often willing to pay higher rents/shares or purchase prices, even for marginal lands, because they reasoned they could re-coup their investments by working long days, and they knew that they had little choice if they wanted to realize their own aspirations of settling down as independent farmers.[48]

As a result, Japanese farmers, whether owners or tenants, were generally limited to land that white farmers either did not want to work or had tried and failed to cultivate. By 1909, first-generation Japanese immigrants, or Issei, owned or leased 27 percent of the reclaimed land along the Sacramento River and 21 percent of the cultivated land on the islands of the lower San Joaquin River. In both areas, they introduced more intensive crops than the existing cereals, specializing in sugar beets, strawberries, potatoes, onions, beans, asparagus, celery and deciduous fruits.[49] Elsewhere on the West Coast, Issei farmers similarly found their only opportunities on marginal lands. In Washington, they bought or rented former timber stands, covered in stumps owners or tenants had to dynamite and haul away in order to create farmable land. In other parts of California, Issei cleared chaparral lands, drained marshes, or perfected dry-farming techniques in the absence of available water or irrigation systems. In Los Angeles County, the pre-war home to more than 90 percent of Manzanar Relocation Center's residents, Japanese and Japanese American farmers cultivated

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

mostly the undeveloped plots of land that freckled the growing metropolis, too small to produce any but the most labor-intensive of crops.[50]

By all fair standards, Japanese immigrants were following Turner's equation for Americanization through agriculture, moving up from farm laborer to tenants and then owners within their first two decades on the Pacific Coast "frontier" and wrestling with the most brutal of environments to create productive, agricultural land. What's more, they most often farmed small plots, using little hired labor, and engaged in the intensive agriculture Tyrell's horticultural idealists prescribed. Still, white detractors criticized the Issei as "messy farmers" because they would, for example, plant strawberries, potatoes, or other quick-yielding crops between rows of fruit trees, allowing them to make money on one crop while they waited years for the fruit trees to produce.[51] It was not unlike the reaction of white settlers in the Eastern half of the United States to American Indian agriculture, which also failed to meet certain requirements of the American agricultural ideal. "Americans viewed agriculture as a year-round process, one intrinsically related to the repeated use of specific plots of ground under the supervision of a male owner," explains Conevery Bolton Valencius. European-American settlers of frontier Missouri and Arkansas dismissed the growing of beans, corn, and squash on rotating sites by Indian women. "Farming a piece of land meant taking it over; agriculture yielded not simply crops, fruits, meats and grains, but also the social, and then legal, prerogatives of ownership," writes Valencius. "Native American agricultural systems entirely eluded American understandings of farming and ownership."[52] In addition to rendering virgin

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[50] Ibid.; Noda, *Yamato Colony*; Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in California's Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino, Calif.: California History Center, 1985; Linda Tamura, *The Hood River Issei: An Oral History of Japanese Settlers in Oregon's Hood River Valley* (Urbana: The Univ. of Ill. Press, 1993); John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942* (Urbana: Univ. of Ill. Press: 1977).
[51] Tyrell, *True Gardens*, 118.
[52] Valencius, *The Health of the Country*, 195-6.

soil productive, for many Americans, fulfilling the agricultural ideal also meant meeting certain race, gender, and aesthetic landscape requirements.

What inflamed anti-Japanese opinion even more than the look of Issei fields was what white Californians called the Japanese "standard of living." White farm owners reported that room and board for Japanese workers cost them about half what they spent on white workers, mainly because they housed Asians in the most dilapidated structures on the farm and because rice, the dietary staple of the Japanese immigrants, who generally did not like to eat meat, was inexpensive. As Issei moved from the ranks of laborers to tenants and land owners, the higher rents and mortgages they were forced to pay, combined with the poorer condition of the lands they were forced to farm, meant they had to work longer hours than most white farmers and had to perform more intensive labor, such as transferring celery seedlings from indoor plantings to the fields, delicate weeding, and other tasks that had to be done by hand and required the farmer to bend or squat to reach low-growing crops. White men could not be expected to perform such "stoop labor," for which the shorter Asian body with smaller hands was naturally suited, detractors argued.[53]

What's more, Issei land owners and tenants did, for the most part, live Spartan lifestyles. The average delta farmer spent ten to twelve dollars per month on living expenses. Farmers built rough, two-story houses, with minimally furnished living space located on the second floor as a safeguard against flooding.[54] Ironically – aside from the fact that the Issei farmer had only his labor and his willingness to live simply to make up for his lack of capital – it was, in part, the stories of U.S. "great men," such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, to which Japanese were almost universally

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[53] State Board of Control of California, *California and the Oriental* (Sacramento, Calif.: California State Printing Office, 1920).
[54] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 231-239.

exposed in the Meiji-era public education system, that inspired such frugality.[55] Still, to the white, American mind, this standard of living could not support a white man, and, therefore Japanese immigrant laborers posed an unfair source of competition for jobs and tenancy opportunities. And, by providing the labor force for large landowners, or by cornering the markets for various crops as a result of their stellar production rates, they posed competition for small, white farmers.

This argument led to the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement, a diplomatic arrangement between the federal government and the Japanese government that Japan would disallow further emigration of laborers. Consequently, only students, some merchants, and the wives or family members of immigrants already residing in the United States were eligible for entry. These new restrictions, combined with the Isseis' movement into the ranks of more secure tenants and owners, who could support wives and families, led to an influx of Japanese women. The Issei men were ready to marry. Those who could afford the trip traveled back to Japan to find wives; those who couldn't used an agent, who, in keeping with Japanese tradition, acted as a marital match-maker. For those who did not make the return trip to Japan, the match was usually arranged based on recommendations from family acquaintances and the exchange of photos of the bride- and groom-to-be. This "picture bride" process horrified Americans – it seemed not only unromantic and a little barbaric, but a dishonorable circumvention of the Gentlemen's Agreement – but it was a relatively slight modification of the marriage arrangement any Japanese couple of the time would have followed.

With the arrival of the brides, American scrutiny of the Japanese standard of living shifted from farm laborers to farm tenant/owner families. White Americans

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[55] Ibid., 4; Peter Duus, *The Japanese Discovery of America: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedfod Books, 1997), 27-33, 75-78.

expressed little sympathy for the Issei woman, who generally rose in the morning before her husband, prepared breakfast and a packed lunch for the family members and any hired laborers, then worked a full day in the fields with her husband, only to return home, prepare dinner, and complete any other household tasks, such as repairing clothing or making *sake* (rice wine) for the men's later enjoyment. Instead she was only, in the minds of exclusionists, another laborer and further enabler of the low Asian standard of living. Japanese-American children often contributed to the farm work, too. And, farmers of truck crops, especially flowers, had to work on Sundays so that their produce would be fresh in the markets on Monday morning. White, largely Christian Californians protested that they would not make their women and children work in the fields like men, nor would they work on Sundays, and they could not fairly be expected to compete with the Japanese, who did all three.

The Gentlemen's Agreement was clearly not working and neither were the Alien Land Laws, exclusionists argued; it was time to put an end to Japanese immigration just as completely as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had stopped Chinese immigration. "[Japanese and Japanese-American farmers], by very reason of their use of economic standards impossible to our white ideals – that is to say, the employment of their wives and their very children in the arduous toil of the soil – are proving crushing competitors to our white rural populations," warned the California State Board of Control in *California and the Oriental*. It was a report commissioned by Governor William D. Stephens in 1919 for the purpose of presenting the "California point of view" to Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby and the nation. "Based entirely on the principle of race self-preservation and the ethnological impossibility of successfully assimilating this constantly increasing flow of Oriental blood," the California point of view was that if immigration of

all Asians – "Japanese, Chinese, and Hindus" – was not stopped by federal legislation, the problem presented by Asian "immigration, population and land ownership" would eventually become a national problem. California exclusionists appealed for political support of their policies to Southern segregationists, believing they could empathize with the "Japanese problem," plagued as they were with their own "Negro problem."[56]

Land ownership was another primary concern of exclusionists. "The Japanese in our midst have indicated a strong trend to land ownership and land control," the State Board of Control reported. "Indeed, at the present time they operate 458,056 acres of the very best lands in California." The report unabashedly attributed the fact that Issei farmers controlled some of "the very best lands in California" to their "pioneering" improvements in places like the Sacramento and San Joaquin river valleys. It was decidedly not evidence of potential for Turner-style assimilation: that was "ethnologically impossible." It was simply more evidence of the land-hungry character of the Japanese and the inability of white farmers to compete with them, especially in the production of truck crops, which "all require a stooping posture, great manual dexterity and painstaking methods of work which other laborers with long legs unsuitable for stooping can not endure." The report also cited the hot climates in locales where fruit such as cantaloupes were grown, like the Imperial Valley in California and Rocky Ford in Colorado, where temperatures at harvest time could exceed 140 degrees. Once again, these were areas where white laborers would not follow. Agribusiness employers responded that it was white workers' unwillingness to perform the tasks necessary for so many vital crops that made Asian workers necessary to fill what would otherwise be a massive farm labor shortage. Not true, countered the State Board of Control: there was

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[56] *California and the Oriental*, 7-15.

plenty of white labor to fill employers' needs if the employers would simply pay wages adequate to support a white man's standard of living. [57]

The final concern laid out in *California and the Oriental* was population. The State Board of Control warned that the birth rate of Japanese women in California was three times that of the state's white women, reasoning that those of "inferior social, economic and intellectual status. . .always suffer from high birth rate. . .But as they advance, their power of fecundity falls. . .The birth rate among 'old' immigrant races is fast falling." [58] The State Board did not take into account the fact that, unlike the established white population with a full range of generations, the Issei women joining their husbands were almost exclusively of child-bearing age, and their husbands were sick of the bachelor life and ready to start families.

California orchardist, lecturer, and outspoken opponent of Asian immigration, Montaville Flowers similarly warned in his diatribe, *The Japanese Conquest of American Public Opinion*, that the extraordinarily high Asian birth rate meant that Asians produced four generations in the time it took white people to produce three.[59] Japanese immigration, in Flowers's mind, thus posed a threat to the very nation:

> A true nation is like a great family living in one home; its members are one in blood, one in language, one in government, equal in rank, mutual in interest, dwelling in peace. . .*A nation is an ethnographical unit occupying a geographical unit*; *that is a race unit living in a land unit*. Nation therefore has two units, race and land. Whatever disturbs these two units causes trouble.[60] [emphasis added]

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[57] Ibid., 8, 42, 104-106.
[58] Ibid., 37-41.
[59] Montaville Flowers, *The Japanese Conquest of American Public Opinion* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1917), 188, 225-227. Interestingly, a 1917 review of Flower's work in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (4, 2 [Sep. 1917], 237-238) summarily dismissed it as "based on no adequate knowledge of the Japanese" and "a waste of time and space"; however, the CSBC's report and Lothrop Stoddard's well-reviewed *The Rising Tide of Color*, which I discuss later, both advance arguments and logic similar to Flowers's. Eugenicist writings like those by Stoddard's mentor Madison Grant were also well-received.
[60] Ibid., 209.

Japanese immigrants and their children were a threat to the American nation's race and land, in Flowers's estimation. "The Asiatics come here by the thousands with their racial characteristics set forever. They raise their babes in their own way, imparting to them the soul of their race," he explained. The low standard of living practiced by the Japanese was not a result of social circumstances, white discrimination, or the economic hardships faced by an immigrant population making its way in a new land, but an inherent "racial characteristic" that they would pass on to each subsequent generation, with whom subsequent generations of white Americans would be forced to compete:

> Under good conditions the white man can best the yellow man in turning off work. But under bad conditions the yellow man can best the white man, because he can better endure spoiled food, poor clothing, foul air, noise, heat, dirt, discomfort and microbes. Reilly can *outdo* Ah-San, but Ah-San can *underlive* Reilly.[61]

And who were these white farmers, the victims of "Japanese aggression upon white lands," who would be forced to lower their standards of living to that of Asians? "These are the free and independent spirits of [the Midwestern states from which many Euro-American West Coast settlers came], hearts brave enough to venture, minds open enough to see and think. The West is the virile East."[62] Not only were Asians ineligible for Turner's Americanizing process; in the minds of exclusionists, they threatened its very ability to produce democratic institutions on the final continental frontier. Neither was the fire under the proverbial melting pot hot enough to assimilate them: according to Flowers and other eugenicists, the melting pot was only effective in melding the mildly dissimilar white "races" of the various European nations.[63]

But Asian immigrants would not stop at lowering the American standard of living through economic competition in agriculture; this standard was, after all, a part of their

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[61] Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Dominance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 273-274.
[62] Flowers, *Japanese Conquest*, 21.
[63] Ibid., 201-204.

racial make-up, according to Flowers and other subscribers to eugenic theory. Because land ownership, particularly of the agrarian variety, was so integral to American notions of citizenship – for which Asian immigrants were legally, racially ineligible – Japanese immigrant land ownership and even tenancy seemed to white Californians like a slippery slope that would eventually lead the Issei (or at least their American-borne children) to claim the full rights of American citizenship. And that, according to Flowers, meant the right to inter-marry with white citizens, which would, through the undeniable laws of nature, lead to the obliteration of the white race itself. Racial characteristics were biologically determined and unchangeable, he and others argued, but racial purity was fragile and unstable. In the mixing of two races, only the worst qualities of each race would survive, creating a new race lower than either of the original two, just as "when the two species [of dissimilar plants] are joined [the shock of the protoplasmic adjustment] injures the vitality of the resulting plants." In particular, there was no way that white racial characteristics could withstand interbreeding with the genetically dominant "pigmented" races, eugenicists warned.[64]

The bureaucratic collection and presentation of data by the California State Board of Control and eugenicists' biological explanation of racial differences added the weight of science and rationality to white, West Coast Americans' home-grown ideology (and the accompanying economic anxiety) that Asians inhabited a lower position than white people in the natural world and that Asians' naturally lower standard of living and less legitimate means of interacting with the landscape posed a threat to white Americans' privileged place in the natural world. The logical conclusion of all this "natural" reasoning was that white Americans should take steps to keep the naturally

[64] Flowers, *Japanese Conquest*, 209-224.

inferior and dangerous Asians in inferior environmental positions, such as marginal lands unwanted by white farmers.

Lothrop Stoddard, an American political theorist, eugenicist, and anti-immigration advocate with a Ph.D. in History from Harvard to his credit, placed the "Asian problem" in a broader framework. In his book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Domination*, Stoddard describes what amounts to a global frontier process, although the most important frontiers for Stoddard are "race frontiers," the boundaries between lands claimed and controlled by white men and those controlled by "colored races." Increasing populations in the "colored world," the weakening of colonial control after World War I, and the natural impulse of all races to expand, he argued, had created "a tremendous and steadily augmenting outward thrust of surplus colored men from overcrowded colored homelands." [65] What would inevitably follow was a search on the part of colored nations for new land for their surplus populations.[66] Stoddard's prediction that peoples from overpopulated nations would seek out less cramped regions smacks of Turner's notion that the American West provided an "escape valve" for population pressures in Eastern U.S. cities.

It was pure environmental determinism that would make it "Asiatics, and above all, Mongolian Asiatics, who form the first of the rising tide of color." Population pressure and the amount of arable land would determine how much of Japan's naturally driven and inevitable "race expansion" could occur within Japanese territorial borders. In Stoddard's estimation, Japanese territories were not sufficient to support its growing population. What's more, unlike nineteenth-century California physicians, Stoddard wrote that "the Japanese, like the white man, does not thrive in the tropic heat, nor

[65] Stoddard, *Rising Tide*, 9, 236.
[66] Ibid., 16.

does he possess the white man's ability to resist sub-Arctic cold." Furthermore, Japanese intellectuals purportedly believed that Euro-American settlers in Australia and the United States were allowing large swaths of free land to go to waste by limiting Asian immigration. All these factors ensured, argued Stoddard, that the Japanese were preparing to storm the "inner dikes" of white lands.[67] "These mighty racial tides flow from the most elemental of urges: self-expansion and self-preservation," Stoddard explained. And it was equally natural that white men should fight off the "racial swamping of lands settled by its own flesh and blood," where future generations had "a right to demand of [them] that they be born white in a white man's land." [68]

Stoddard described the mandate for white Americans to control the arrival of Japanese immigrants in the same language he used to call for the conquest of the natural environment: through the erecting and diligent maintenance of "dams" against the "floods" of Japanese who would, if not controlled, "swamp" the Western United States. The white race's very survival depended upon keeping Asians out of the country, argued Stoddard, and so there was no desire on the part of white Americans more natural than strict immigration control:

> Just as we isolate bacterial invasions and starve out the bacteria by limiting the amount of their food supply, we can compel an inferior race to remain in its native habitat, where its own multiplication in a limited area will, as with all organisms, eventually limit its numbers. . .On the other hand, the superior races, more self-limiting than the others, with the benefits of more space and nourishment, will tend to still higher levels.[69]

Stoddard was not the only public commentator of his day to couch debates over immigration in the scientific terminology of plants, insects, and micro-organisms, particularly when it came to Asian peoples. In the mid-nineteenth century,

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[67] Ibid., 231, 44-47, 21, 52-53.
[68] Ibid., 43, 46, 226.
[69] Ibid., 270-71, 259-60.

horticulturalists, gentleman farmers, and acclimatization societies had begun importing novelty plant and animal species out of a developing "cosmopolitan" ideal. Among lay people and scientists, writes historian Philip Pauly, there developed a public debate between those who favored this cosmopolitanism and those who favored an isolationist stance, and thus, government restrictions on the importation of non-native plant and animal species. The nativists warned of the dangers of foreign pests that could be transported on "immigrant" plants. When such pests, (for example, the Japanese beetle), made appearances on the American landscape, the public quickly identified them with the ethnic group of their country of origin, tapping into racial animosities. Debates over imported flora and fauna were not simply technical; they were also "bound to. . .ethnic sensibilities cultivated over centuries of political conflicts and ecological displacements," argues Pauly.[70]

Between 1890 and 1920, with tensions over immigration growing, Pauly writes, those debates were finding their way onto the national stage. In 1909, Tokyo presented Washington, D.C., with a gift of two thousand ornamental Japanese cherry trees. Washington had initially agreed to replace a recently planted grove of American elms on the Washington Monument grounds with the Japanese trees, a "symbolic compensation for the recent American demand, in the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement, that Japanese immigration cease." Before that could happen, though, acting chief of the Bureau of Entomology Charles Marlatt, who had a history of fighting with other bureaucrats to exclude foreign species, pronounced the trees infested with "crown gall, root gall, two

[70] Philip J. Pauly, "The Beauty and Menace of the Japanese Cherry Trees: Conflicting Visions of American Ecological Independence," *Isis* 87. no. 1 (March 1996), 53-56.

kinds of scale, a potentially new species of borer, and 'six other dangerous insects.'" President Taft followed Marlatt's recommendations and had the trees burned.[71]

According to Pauly, it is no coincidence that California's Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, one year after the state's quarantine act outlawed the importation of foreign plant species, or that plant nativists in the federal government later rode the same wave of post-World War I xenophobia that spawned the National Origins Act to triumph over their professional adversaries. And, the rhetoric used by both supporters and detractors of plant importations bears striking similarities to the language of contemporary debates over immigration policy.[72] Pauly's research suggests that at least some Americans saw certain immigrant ethnicities as threats not only to Jeffersonian democracy, but to the very environment and people of the United States. At the least, these debates over immigration and foreign pests set a precedent in the public imagination for dangers from "enemy alien" humans to be conceived of in terms of infestation or, in the case of the Manzanar-bound evacuees, possible sources of contamination of human bodies or natural resources.

During World War I and World War II, this potential came to fruition. Throughout World War I, the Federal government undertook propaganda campaigns to persuade farmers, whom it lacked the regulatory authority to compel, to increase pesticide use in order to increase agricultural output. Posters and advertisements relied on Allied war messages, maligning insects as insidious, crop-eating incarnations of the enemy that would sabotage farmers' ability to produce needed food for the troops. This line of thinking also promoted the idea that insects could and should be the target of complete eradication. During World War II, faithful use of DDT by soldiers to combat

[71] Ibid., 1.
[72] Ibid., 69-72.

typhus and malaria was encouraged in a barrage of government-produced educational material that once again equated disease-carrying insects with human enemies. With Japan now a military enemy, advertisements in military publications featured such creatures as "Louseous Japanicas," which combined an arthropod body and a human head with stereotypical Asian features. Advertisements for pesticides on the home front relied on similar imagery. Americans came to identify pest control for crops, as well as human health, with the killing of military enemies.[73]

Military strategists during World War II cultivated this ideological association between insects and enemies to promote the virtues of "total war," against lice, mosquitoes, Nazis, and the Japanese. The American public supported the use of incendiaries such as napalm to wipe out large areas of Japanese cities: soldiers, civilians, crops, structures, and all. One reader wrote to the editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, "Japan is a terrible evil in the world, as were the brutal Nazis. Then why isn't the evil wiped away, completely, once and for all? When one sets out to destroy vermin, does one try to leave a few alive in the nest? Most certainly not!"[74]

From the bombing of Pearl Harbor on, Americans were inundated with this type of incendiary press coverage. "The Japanese were routinely referred to and pictured as literal or figurative animals, something less than human. . .compared to rats and ants. . depicted as leering monkeys raping and pillaging Western women and civilization."[75] Moreover, individual articles rarely, if ever, made clear whether the author was using the ubiquitous racial epithet "Jap" to describe Japanese military forces, Japanese immigrants residing in the United States, or Japanese Americans. For example, the *L.A. Times*

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[73] Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[74] Russell, *War and Nature*, 142-3.
[75] Susan D. Moeller, "Pictures of the Enemy: Fifty Years of Images of Japan in the American Press, 1941-1992," *Journal of American Culture* 19: 1 (Spring 1996).

article initially announcing the potential selection of Manzanar as a relocation site, "Japs May be Interned in Owens Valley," ran directly under the banner headline for another story: "Jap Hordes Advance in Java."[76] This type of coverage played directly into the ideologies developed over decades that painted Japanese and Japanese Americans as racially inferior, as natural threats to the white race and to the garden paradise of the Pacific. White Californians were more than ready to see the "enemy aliens" rounded up and relocated on the most marginal lands in the West.

The ideology of the racially inferior Japanese occupying a degraded status in the natural world played out in very specific ways in the public debate over the location of Manzanar. White Los Angelinos had to weigh their fears that evacuees, as Asians associated with ill health, would carry disease into the city's water supply against their fears of the racially inassimilable – and therefore inevitably disloyal – "enemy aliens" remaining free on the West Coast. While the LADWP's Van Norman was sounding the alarms to government officials, he had reassured the general public that their water was safe. When the Army promised barbed wire and armed guards as a barrier between evacuees and their water supply, city residents accepted a relocation center in the desert valley as a natural destination for racially "different" and economically competitive Japanese Americans in their midst. While Japanese and Japanese-Americans were not racially eligible for the Americanization function of the frontier process, but they were judged adequate to wrestle "the stubborn American environment" into landscapes suitable for white Americans, as admitted by the California State Board of Control and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which wrote in 1918 of the "many cases in which the

[76] "Japs May Be Interned in Owens Valley" and "Jap Hordes Advance in Java," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 March 1942, p.1.

Japanese farmer has discovered and proved soil possibilities for the benefit of American farmers coming after." [77]

As for residents of the Owens Valley, who initially "wanted no prison camps, wanted no Japanese, and particularly wanted no deal wherein any part of the City of Los Angeles was concerned,"[78] they had read contemporary press reports and were fearful of the evacuees and what their presence might mean for the Valley. But the proposed camp, situated as it was on LADWP-owned land, was in residents' minds yet another link in the chain of events begun when William Mulholland, first chief of the LADWP, began quietly buying up Owens Valley land and water rights, leading to the city of Los Angeles's surreptitious acquisition of the Owens River water and the end of successful farming in the Owens Valley.[79] Inyo County, within whose borders Manzanar lies, also feared that its taxpayers would be forced to pick up the tab for housing, feeding, and schooling evacuees. Once initial fears were alleviated somewhat, the WCCA's tentative approval of a number of public works projects that evacuees were to undertake in the Valley "was spectacularly significant in modifying public opinion."[80] The proposed projects included: agricultural development; broad-gauging the railroad between Lone Pine and Mina, Nevada to provide for the transport of apples from hoped-for resuscitated orchards; construction of mine-to-market roads for development of strategic materials and metals; national forest and national park protection and development; and development of wildlife conservation.[81] For many in the Owens Valley, after the initial shock, the biggest question concerning Manzanar Relocation

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[77] Quoted in Noda, *Yamato Colony*, 65-66.
[78] "Silverman Report," Appendix 25, *Final Report*.
[79] Again, see Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 52-103, for the full story of L.A.'s acquisition of the Owens River water rights and Mulholland's many deceptions.
[80] "Silverman Report."
[81] *Evacuation and Relocation*. According to Unrau, none of the projects were "implemented as a result of conflicts between WCCA and WRA and opposition by Western state officials."

Center was whether it would represent a net loss or net gain in access to natural resources and economic opportunity. And, perhaps the "pioneering" Japanese and Japanese Americans, between the roster of public works projects and the application of their agricultural expertise, could do in the Owens Valley what they had done for so many other marginal areas of the state. As Inyo dentist J. J. Baxter admired produce grown by Manzanar residents "from former sage and cactus covered desert acreage," he encapsulated the hopes of many residents when he said to a group of evacuees, "'We need some of you out here to show us how to grow this kind of stuff, after this thing is all over.'"[82]

[82] "Henderson Story."

## CHAPTER TWO

## LANDSCAPE, GARDENING, AND ASSIMILATION

*Barren camps were being transformed gradually into attractive homes and communities. It was a thrilling revelation of a fine innate culture.*[1]

*They are exotic and have little place in our American culture. . .A Japanese garden in America can hardly be less than a travesty.*[2]

In late April 1942, a bus filled with members of the Wakatsuki family rolled across Southeastern California, between the rugged peaks of the White-Inyo mountain range and the Sierra Nevadas. Pulling into Manzanar Relocation Center late that afternoon, the passengers were greeted by a "yellowish swirl across a blurred, reddish setting sun." The bus was pelted with what sounded like rain, but was, rather, "a billowing flurry of dust and sand churned up by the wind through Owens Valley," a phenomenon with which the family members would soon grow intimately familiar. George Fukusawa, a thirty-two-year-old photographer from Santa Monica, similarly arrived with his children and new wife "in the middle of one of those windstorms that were very common in Manzanar. . .Everybody that was out there had goggles on to protect their eyes from the dust, so they looked like a bunch of monsters from another

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[1] Allen Eaton, *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire: The Arts of the Japanese in Our War Relocation Camps* (New York: Harper, 1952), 3-4.
[2] Thomas Hubbard McHatton, *Armchair Gardening: Some of the Spirit, Philosophy, and Psychology of the Art of Gardening* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1947) 102-103.

world or something. It was a very eerie feeling to get into a place under conditions like that."[3]

The month before internees began arriving, the Army had cleared the sagebrush, loosing the ubiquitous grit that evacuees would find in their cots, clothes, hair, coffee, and bowls of rice. Housing consisted of crude, barracks-style structures built of tar paper and unseasoned boards, which shrank as they dried, leaving gaps in walls, floors, and ceilings. As many as twelve people, sometimes from two or three families, were assigned to each 20- by 25-foot, one-room apartment. The Army had built only the basics required for camp housing and administration. Even that was not complete before the influx began: Some three thousand residents arrived before the camp had running water. Construction of schools, stores, recreation facilities, and any improvements to the existing buildings or the barren landscape was up to the Japanese-Americans.

Evacuee Harry Ueno, assistant mess hall cook, became an early architect of the landscape transformation when he determined, in July 1942, to build an elaborate pond and garden complex in his housing block. As he explained years later:

> In the beginning, when I watched people standing in line [for meals], one day I figured we should have a pool. So I talked to one of the young fellows working in the mess hall. I said to him, "Hey, how about digging a pond out here because we have ample water. [The WRA had leased water rights for the purpose of irrigation along with the land from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.] We could make a good pond out here, and the people can enjoy it while they are waiting for the mess hall bell to ring to line up." So one day we stared digging a great big hole. It was about eighty feet long.[4]

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[3] Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 18-19; George Fukusawa, Oral interview by Arthur A. Hansen of the Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project, Calif. State Univ., Fullerton, Aug. 12, 1974.

[4] Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview by Sue Kunitomi Embrey, Arthur A. Hansen, and Betty Kulber Miston, Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project, Calif. State University, Fullerton, Calif. Oct. 30, 1976.

Ueno's activity soon attracted the attention of Akira Nishi, a resident who had been a landscape artist and nursery owner before evacuation. Nishi offered to create plans for the pond. "Let me draw a map for you," Nishi told Ueno, "so you can build the perfect pond." Nishi's brother, another professional gardener, and other members of the housing block got involved, too, borrowing an Army truck and trailer to transport boulders from the nearby foothills and obtaining bags of cement from camp administrators to line the pond. By the time work was complete, Ueno's project had grown into a large, figure-eight-shaped, cement-lined pond crossed by a concrete footbridge, which today remains as testament to the ephemeral landscape changes wrought by the Japanese-American residents at Manzanar. Nestled between parallel rows of black locust trees, the perimeter of Ueno's pond, as well as the surrounding area, was edged with decorative stone work and boulders large enough for visitors to recline on as they waited for the mess hall bell. The "perfect pond" that Nishi had mapped out was a component of a classical Japanese Momoyama style garden installation.[5] Later that month, assistant camp director Ned Campbell recognized the installation with the first-place award in a center-wide pond-building contest.

Initially, the harsh physical conditions of the camp had dealt a debilitating psychological blow to many at Manzanar. "The cruel transition of living habits and lifestyle from a civilized society to this degrading situation was hard to understand," one evacuee later wrote.[6] Others recalled, in interviews and memoirs, members of their families reduced to tears, or worse, as they surveyed their new homes. "I looked at

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[5] Ibid., Author's observations of installation remains at Manzanar National Park, September 2004; *Draft Cultural Landscape Report: Manzanar National Historic Site*, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2005, 131.

[6] Quoted in Harlan Unrau, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry during World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

Mama's face," writes Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, who was seven when her family arrived at Manzanar,

> She lay very still on our mattress, her eyes scanning everything – bare rafters, walls, dusty kids – scanning slowly, and I think the mask of her face would have cracked had not [my older brother] Woody's voice just then come at us through the wall.[7]

Soon, though, Jeanne's mother's emotion would turn to anger. "Her eyes blazed then, her voice quietly furious," writes Houston. "'Woody, we can't live like this, animals live like this.'"

Not only were new surroundings primitive and uncomfortable, they were disorienting. The main portion of the camp, which housed evacuees, consisted of thirty-six uniform housing blocks laid out with military rigidity on a grid. With building exteriors identical to one another and the landscape consistently bare, evacuees complained bitterly of getting lost inside the camp. The rocky peaks that rose on three sides of the center – the Sierra Nevadas to the West, the White-Inyo range to the East, and the Alabama Hills to the South – reminded some of the mountainous landscape of Japan, but they also created an imposing natural enclosure, and for some, they were a source of fear. Rumors circulated among the evacuees in the early days of relocation. One held that the U.S. government's true intention was to corral Japanese Americans between the mountain ranges and open the gates of the Los Angeles aqueduct to drown them en masse, another that the Army planned to launch bombers from the small, nearby airport, pilot them down the valley and bomb the camp, where evacuees would have no escape route.[8] Those scenarios may have been far-fetched, but evacuees did live with the very real presence of barbed wire fences, guard towers, and armed military guards confining them within the relocation center's borders. Japanese Americans, who

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[7] Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar*, 23-24.
[8] *Evacuation and Relocation*.

had done so much to transform the environment of the West Coast United States into productive agricultural communities and beautifully landscaped urban and suburban neighborhoods, suddenly found themselves in an unforgiving wasteland they would have to learn to call home.[9]

Resentment over internment only deepened as evacuees took in their new surroundings and learned that they would be expected to do most of the work building the prison community. Some residents refused to pitch in, believing their cooperation would only render them complicit with their captors. Their reticence was addressed in the *Manzanar Free Press*, the camp newspaper, published by evacuees, mostly Nisei, who felt the best way to respond to evacuation was to prove their loyalty through unflinching compliance. An editorial in June of 1942 acknowledged that the camp's system of work left much to be desired, particularly for many "who sincerely feel that they have answered the call of their government by coming here at the sacrifice of everything they held dear to their hearts, including their personal freedom." However, the editors continued, "Work is not compulsory here; neither is self-improvement. But for lack of either, one will soon find himself being left behind."[10] A sizable contingent of evacuees adopted this accommodationist attitude. They stoically, or even cheerfully, undertook their own or contributed to WRA construction projects, organized educational and recreational programs, or worked with the administration to provide social services to residents.

In July of 1942, Ueno the pond builder seemed to represent what administrators and cooperation-minded residents would have considered a model evacuee: making the

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[9] In the early decades of Japanese emigration, immigrants were instrumental in the clearing of forests and other lands in the Pacific states for conversion to agricultural production. Later, they and their children were heavily employed as agriculturalists, as well as gardeners and landscape artists in urban and suburban areas, particularly in Southern California.

[10] Staff Editorial, *Manzanar Free Press* (June 2, 1942), page 2.

best of it, working to improve the physical circumstances of camp life, and helping to build a sense of community within his housing block. His effort to make mealtime more pleasant involved many residents in a cooperative improvement project early in the life of the camp, when physical conditions were still desolate, camp operations were characterized by confusion, and spirits were generally low. It seems also to have inspired a wave of pond building in camp: at least nine more empty ponds dot the site of the former relocation center today, and *Manzanar Free Press* articles announced the winners of two different pond-building competitions. Ueno's project also represented the development of the "mess hall garden" as a specific type in the camp. The National Park Service counts remains of mess hall gardens in at least twelve Manzanar housing blocks. Five of them, including Ueno's, mimicked the Momoyama style, dating back to sixteenth-century Japan. Such gardens are laid out on a north-south axis in three levels, with the northernmost level representing mountains and the headwaters of a stream, which dominates the second level and flows into the characteristically gourd- or cloud-shaped pond on the third level.[11]

But five months later, Ueno no longer seemed the ideal, cooperative evacuee. In the intervening five months, Ueno had organized a contentious kitchen workers' union and accused Campbell of stealing sugar to sell on the black market. Because sugar was a federally rationed commodity during the war, Ueno's charge had brought FBI agents to Manzanar to question Campbell. Then, on the night of Dec. 5, 1942, the assistant director and the assistant cook faced each other, not next to an award-winning pond complex, but inside Campbell's car, en route to the town jail in nearby Independence, Calif. Campbell, Ueno later recalled, turned from the front seat to face him in the back

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[11] *Confinement and Ethnicity*; *Cultural Landscape Report*, 129.

and, “with hatred in his face,” threatened, “Nobody is going to know where you are going to. I won’t let anybody know where you are. And you are going to stay there for a long time.” That night, Ueno stood accused in an incident that ultimately snowballed into a riot in which two Manzanar residents were killed by military police. Ueno quickly became what historians would later term a “resistor,” but he was also a man who had earlier done exactly what the WRA wanted evacuees to do in regards to Manzanar’s environment.

The architects of relocation had promised to simulate an Americanizing frontier process for evacuees, and part of that process would be the re-landscaping of Manzanar. Shortly after the WRA took over from the Army, Manzanar’s first project director, Roy Nash, described the camp in a speech, “There is nothing beautiful about Manzanar except its background of the Sierra Nevada.” A WRA project report from 1942 reads, “There is very little in the physical construction of Manzanar to indicate permanence; the entire center impresses one with its temporary nature.”[12] The WRA enlisted the Farm Security Administration to design a park that could accommodate one thousand people and the Soil Conservation Service to prepare a planting plan, which called for some 21,000 trees and 25,000 shrubs to secure the soil and combat dust. The WRA created positions for two evacuee landscape professionals with six evacuee staff members working under them to maintain camp parks. The administration also encouraged evacuees’ individual efforts. In the July 27, 1942, issue of the *Manzanar Free Press*, Nash called for residents to undertake a “beautification campaign,” pledging to supply grass seed to any residents willing to clear and plant the areas around their

[12] Excerpted in *Evacuation and Relocation*.

barracks. The administration also provided concrete and other building materials, seed, and irrigation water, as well as Army trucks to retrieve boulders from the nearby foothills. On one occasion, Nash allowed evacuees to travel to Death Valley to harvest Joshua trees for transplant. After nursery owner F. M. Uyematsu offered to donate one thousand Japanese cherry trees, the WRA secured permission from the Army to allow him to return to his L.A. nursery in his own truck and retrieve the trees, which were planted near the orphanage in what became known as Japanese Cherry Park. Another installation, Rose Park (later renamed Pleasure Park or Pleasure Garden and, eventually, Merritt Park after subsequent project director Ralph Merritt), boasted one hundred types of flowers, including roses. A modified stroll garden of classical Japanese origin, it also featured a tea house.[13]

Ostensibly serving to spur the center's transition from barren desert to semi-permanent pastoral town and the Japanese Americans' assimilation to mainstream American culture, the administration's enthusiasm for evacuee landscaping projects is nonetheless surprising when one considers that many of the residents' installations featured recognizably traditional Japanese landscape gardening elements such as tea houses, rustic wishing wells and benches, classical compositions, or Uyematsu's cherry trees. While Manzanar was, "in most ways. . .a totally equipped American small town," Houston wrote in her memoir, "those parks and gardens lent it an oriental character." At least some outside the camps would have argued that such an "oriental character" was not compatible with the Americanism the WRA was supposed to promote. Indeed, the head of the Department of Horticulture of the University of Georgia wrote in 1947 of Japanese gardens in general:

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[13] *Manzanar Free Press; Evacuation and Relocation; Cultural Landscape Report*

> They are exotic and have little place in our American culture. . .A Japanese garden in America can hardly be less than a travesty. . .Had it not been for Pearl Harbor, some household decorator would have had us sitting on the floor and drinking tea. I hope the American cocktail hour will never be presided over by three twisted sticks representing heaven, man and earth, or some other foreign idea.[14]

As for the residents of Manzanar, attitudes toward improvement projects and work in the center were largely divided. Some published a newspaper, organized a buying cooperative and general store, staffed the hospital, or worked for the evacuee police force. Others at Manzanar saw workers as "dogs," stooges more loyal to the administration than their fellow inmates, sell-outs willing to relinquish their dignity and ethnic identity to be accepted by an America that had imprisoned them. Newspaper and retail cooperative staff members were the targets of death threats during the unrest leading up to the December riot. The workplaces and physical environment at Manzanar created multiple battlefields on which evacuees struggled, in overt or subtle ways, with each other and administrators, to define the relationship between the Japanese Americans and the "Caucasian" administrators representing the American government that had imprisoned them.[15] Landscaping and gardening projects did not represent a complete exception, but they elicited far more widespread support among evacuees than other endeavors embraced by the adminstration. By August of 1942, Manzanar residents had planted 155 lawns between barracks, stocked six fish ponds with carp, and built several rock gardens. A WRA project report from that month identified the beginning of the "transformation of sagebrush covered semi-arid land into a green-studded landscape." The relocation center was beginning to look strikingly similar to a Southern California residential neighborhood. And even those like Harry Ueno, who was accused of instigating the most violent protest of Manzanar's four-year existence,

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[14] McHatton, *Armchair Gardening,* 102-103, 121.
[15] Non-Japanese employees and administrators in the camps were referred to as "Caucasians," even the small handful of black WRA employees.

embraced landscape design, gardening, and park construction as acceptable improvement projects. At Manzanar, it seems, the only common ground was green.

University of Oregon art professor Allen Eaton, whose specialty was folk art, was an admirer of traditional Japanese arts and crafts and the artists who created them. In 1952 he published a book, *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*, of photographs and descriptions of gardens and other nature-related art work of the residents of the relocation centers. Penning the foreword to his book, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote of the gardens she had seen during her visits to relocation centers that they "were truly beautiful even in camps where the desert surrounded them." Further, she wrote, the gardens and artwork created by Japanese Americans in the camps "show how well the War Relocation Authority did its work. . .[They] tell the story of the remarkable cooperation between the Authority and the residents in the settlements, and how this helped toward their future reabsorption into American life." Reacting to *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*, historian Patricia Nelson Limerick has posed the question: "If one admires the gardens, is one inadvertently joining Roosevelt and Eaton in a round of applause for the institution that provided the challenges for the gardeners to meet?" Were gardens and landscape installations like Harry Ueno's symbols of "defiance, a visible statement of unbroken will," as Limerick interprets them, or evidence of Japanese compliance, as Roosevelt and Eaton assert?[16]

The gardening and landscaping work performed by evacuees and encouraged by administrators appears at first glance to fit neatly the popular WRA-JACL version of

[16] Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," *Journal of American History* (Dec. 1992), 1046-1047.

relocation history described by Paul Spickard. Take, for example the following excerpt from the photographic account *Manzanar* by Ansel Adams and John Hersey:

> Two cultural traditions among the Nisei [second-generation Japanese] helped them survive the psychological burdens and physical difficulties of life in the prison camps. The first was the concept of *on*, which denotes the lifelong obligations of every citizen to his government and to his parents.
>
> The second was *giri*, or the obligation to the dignity of one's name. . .Regardless of circumstances, no matter how difficult or humiliating, it is the obligation of each person to accept those circumstances, and to behave well despite them. . .
>
> This sensibility was reflected in the Pleasure Garden that the Nisei constructed in the middle of Manzanar.[17]

A large park built around a creek that ran across the southwest corner of the center, the Pleasure Garden can tell a particularly salient rendition of the popular story. Evacuees constructed the park, including picnic grounds, ball fields, and a stage for live performances, on their initiative and their own time, and donated a public address system and other amenities. The administration allowed a handful of residents to travel to Yosemite National Park and return with trees, lumber, and stone to build the garden component. Evacuees even renamed the renamed the park after center director Merritt.

Loyal Japanese evacuees working hand-in-hand with benevolent camp administrators was not an image that emerged only after the war; it was promoted by the WRA from its inception. In fact, Ansel Adams visited Manzanar and took the photographs that later constituted *Manzanar* and his other account, *Born Free and Equal*, at the request of his personal friend Ralph Merritt, who succeeded Nash as project director. Merritt also invited Farm Security Administration photographer Dorothea Lange to shoot images of the camp. While official WRA communications directed at the American public espoused the value of the relocation centers as an Americanizing experience for the Japanese, the liberal bureaucrats running the agency

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[17] Ansel Adams and John Hersey. *Manzanar* (New York: Times Books, 1988), 115.

did not themselves believe that the evacuees constituted a security threat.[18] WRA officials did, however, consider it an important part of their responsibilities to create a level of acceptance of the Japanese among the mainstream American public.

Most of the upper-level officials of the War Relocation Authority felt that the West coast evacuation of Japanese, and particularly internment, was unnecessary. In his memoir of his years as director of the WRA, Dillon S. Myer wrote:

> When good men like [U.S. Attorney General] Earl Warren and [journalist] Walter Lippman were convinced that such unrealistic thinking [i.e., belief in the existence of Japanese "fifth column" activity on the West Coast] was valid, it is proof of the growing panic that had been fostered by the repetition of rumors, racist attacks, and fears of a possible Japanese attack.[19]

Like the good New Deal bureaucrats that most WRA administrators were, Myer and his colleagues assumed that eventually cooler heads would prevail, once things were explained rationally to the American public and decision makers in the West . On April 7, 1942, Milton Eisenhower, the first director of the WRA, called a meeting of the governors of the inland western states to present his plan: evacuated Japanese would simply be relocated from the coastal states and resettled in the mountain states, such as Colorado and Utah, where they would provide much-needed farm labor. The labor shortage created by the war would be solved; the Japanese would have to leave their homes, but they would not have to be interned. Expressing the same fears as West Coast Americans, the governors flatly refused; they would accept no Japanese migrants unless they were securely contained and under armed guard in prison camps. A few

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[18] This is not to let the WRA off the hook: Myer and many of his administrators expressed clearly demeaning and paternalistic attitudes toward Japanese Americans. Myer himself, who would head the Bureau of Indian Affairs after the war, became known in the relocation centers as "The Great White Father." Still, members of the WRA were opposed to internment and were generally more permissive than Army officials in terms of both physical security and Japanese cultural expression.

[19] Myer, *Uprooted Americans*, 22.

months later, intimating to his successor Myer that he could not "do the job and sleep at night," Eisenhower left the WRA for a post in the Office of War Information.[20]

When Myer took over, evacuees were already being transferred into WRA centers from the temporary assembly centers into which they had first been moved by the Army. Myer quickly concluded that the camps constituted an unnatural, demoralizing environment, and that evacuees should be moved out of them as quickly as possible to avoid the "institutionalizing" effect of forced dependency. He feared that the relocation centers would become analogous to Indian reservations – which Myer held in low esteem – leaving residents impoverished and unmotivated to participate in the workforce or democratic institutions once the war was over.[21] Myer and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, under whose purview the WRA was moved in March 1944, continually lobbied the attorney general and the president to reverse the exclusion order; simultaneously they worked to relocate evacuees from the camps into more receptive communities in the Eastern half of the United States, where they could attend colleges or work as farm or factory laborers. In an introduction to the final report on relocation prepared by the WRA's community analysts, Edward Spicer writes, "It was the obligation of the government, since the government had uprooted them, to find more 'normal and natural' places to live, wherever that should be possible in the United States. This was the foundation position of the WRA."[22]

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[20] Ibid., 127-128, 3.

[21] Myer expresses such sentiments about relocation centers and reservations throughout his memoir, *Uprooted Americans*. He was adamantly opposed to BIA director John Collier and the policies of the Indian New Deal, believing that Indians would be better served by being cut off from federal aid and thus forced to assimilate into mainstream America.

22 Spicer, Edward H. and others, *Impounded People: Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Ariz. Press, 1969), 7. Originally published as a report by War Relocation Authority community analysts, 1946. The WRA contracted several anthropologists and sociologists as "community analysts" to observe and report on life in the camps.

In addition to being opposed to the "unnatural," communal style of life in the relocation centers, Myer seemed to believe that the root of the "Japanese problem" was the Japanese tendency to settle in urban clusters or insular agricultural colonies – in reality, a survival technique developed in reaction to white racism and economic pressure – and the resulting anxiety this caused white West Coast residents. He was like the confident teacher, sure that he could use the opportunity of wartime evacuation to straighten out the "problem class" by dispersing Japanese Americans throughout the country, where they would be less visible and cause less alarm. But the white communities into which Myer envisioned the Japanese Americans melting were not always willing recipients. Before laborers and college students could be relocated to the East, Myer and his colleagues would have to counter some of the same anti-Japanese sentiment – although markedly less virulent – that they'd experienced in the West. The WRA set up Area Relocation Offices in Chicago; Cleveland; Denver; Salt Lake City; Kansas City, Mo; Little Rock, Ark; New York; and Boston. Myer and area staff members undertook significant public relations campaigns in these areas targeted for out-of-center relocation. Among other efforts, they cultivated local citizen groups to assist relocated evacuees and to encourage public acceptance.[23]

In the meantime, on a national level, the WRA was still contending with what Myer called "the continuing battle of the racists." The agency was subject to intense scrutiny and sharp criticism from the press, members of Congress, and organizations such as the American Legion, which passed a resolution in September of 1942 calling for all Japanese who had managed to leave the West Coast during the brief, largely unsuccessful period of "voluntary" relocation to be rounded up and returned to the

[23] Myer, *Uprooted Americans*, 127-136.

camps under military control. Most accusations fell into one of two categories: Critics tended to charge either that the Japanese represented a dangerous, inassimilable group of people who should be kept under strict control in the camps, and that the WRA was too lax in the area of security; or that the WRA was coddling evacuees by providing them too much meat, milk, and other rationed luxuries, and not forcing them to work in the camps.[24]

Public information portraying Japanese evacuees as "pioneers" provided a foil for both sets of criticism. First, stories and photographs of evacuees wrestling with the harsh desert conditions countered public impressions that they were living in unemployed luxury. Secondly, the frontier rhetoric offered the promise of Americanizing evacuees, thus neutralizing much of the threat that white Americans feared they posed. The strategy was not unprecedented: historian Neal Maher finds that the Roosevelt administration "promoted many of its New Deal programs as having an Americanizing influence on the general public, particularly on recent immigrants." In the case of the Civilian Conservation Corps, it was specifically the physical labor in American nature performed by ethnic youths from urban areas that produced the professed acculturating effect. Not unlike Japanese evacuees who adopted the frontier rhetoric in their own newspapers, CCC enrollees often professed to feel more patriotic as a result of their experiences. New Deal administrators, some of whom would later be involved in relocation, did not embrace the notion themselves, Maher argues, but found it a powerful response to attacks like those by the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, later an ardent critic of the WRA.[25] Given that WRA officials did not believe Japanese Americans represented a security threat – and given that, as New

[24] Ibid., 91-107. *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[25] Neil M. Maher, "A New Deal Body Politic: Landscape, Labor, and the Civilian Conservation Corps" *Environmental History* 7 (July 2002): 446-449.

Dealers responding to the Dust Bowl catastrophe caused by the very type of settler agriculture touted by Turner, many were disillusioned with the frontier approach to nature[26] – it is logical to assume that Myer, Nash, and other Manzanar administrators also considered the rhetoric about Americanizing the Japanese via a contrived frontier process as nothing more than an expedient public relations strategy.

Nonetheless, while administrators were not concerned that evacuees transform their surroundings into strictly conceived, traditional American scenes, they were consummately concerned with appearances. It was critical, they believed, to cultivate acceptance of Japanese Americans among the broader public, not only to the success of the out-of-center relocation program, but also to ensure that evacuees would not return to the same hostile, West Coast environment after the war. To that end, Manzanar director Merritt invited photographers he knew to be sympathetic to capture images of Japanese Americans working with dignity to improve their surroundings, contributing to the kind of sentiment about Japanese values expressed in Adams's *Manzanar*. Administrators also arranged displays of evacuee craft work and agricultural produce in the post offices and chambers of commerce of nearby towns. Evacuee art even circled the nation in a traveling exhibit. And, while administrators allowed wide latitude when it came to the cultural content of evacuees' landscape projects, they did intervene when they thought that content leaned too far East: Merritt objected, for example, to the

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[26] Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).; see, for example, Chapter 12: "Facing Up to Limits" and pages 53-63. In fact, unease with Americans' historically conquest-oriented relationship to nature may have created in some liberal bureaucrats and conservationists a budding esteem for traditional Asian approaches to nature. Christopher Tannard, a lecturer on landscape architecture for the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, wrote in a piece for the professional journal *Landscape Architecture* that Americans were beginning to accept "the part man must play in ordering the natural environment, tempered by the necessity for keeping the balance by an understanding of the natural processes and evolutions." Further, he argued, this new understanding was "something akin perhaps to the Oriental manner." ("Modern Gardens for Modern Homes: Reflections on Current Trends in Landscape Design," *Landscape Architecture* 32 (Jan. 1942), 56-64.)

Japanese-language inscription on a monument in the camp cemetery, warning that it might not be thought well of by Owens Valley locals who would have to maintain it after the war. In fact, administrators continually negotiated the fuzzy line between promoting activities they thought would endear Japanese Americans to the broader public and those that garnered criticism. Nash, for example, unwittingly drew sharp accusations from Owens Valley observers that he had relaxed security standards and wasted precious fuel by allowing the trip to Death Valley for Joshua Trees.[27]

Beyond contributing to a general impression of the evacuees' work ethic and tolerance for their unfair circumstances, administrators hoped garden and landscape projects would help assuage white Americans' wariness of Japanese Americans in two specific ways. One consideration was utilitarian. Anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast had historically revolved, in part, around job competition. In response to hostility from white workers and employers, Japanese Americans in Los Angeles (home to the majority of Manzanar's residents) before World War II developed insular communities and limited their economic forays into a narrow range of fields, as historian John Modell has written. Japanese immigrants and their children had largely gained acceptance as growers or marketers of truck crops and food. They had also established themselves as gardeners and landscape artists.[28] Landscape professionals like Nishi volunteered to train youngsters in Manzanar, giving them the skills to fill employment posts in which Japanese faces would be acceptable to their post-relocation neighbors back on the West Coast.

Beyond smoothing potentially ruffled economic feathers, Manzanar administrators hoped that publicizing evacuees' elaborate garden creations, as well as

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[27] *Evacuation and Relocation.*

[28] John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accomodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

other artwork, would help gain the Japanese a measure of cultural acceptance in the mainstream. The Horticulture Department head at the University of Georgia, along with other plant species "nativists," argued against Japanese foliage and landscapes, but they were reacting to a cosmopolitan aesthetic popular in home décor and garden design since the turn of the century. It also seems reasonable to assume that the preponderance of Japanese-American landscape professionals on the West Coast, who relied in part on classical Japanese gardening principles, had had a considerable hand in the development, beginning in the 1920s, of what cultural geographer D.W. Meinig calls "the landscape of California Suburbia," which he argues was "idealized and rapidly diffused to the nation."[29] It was the popularity of that aesthetic into which camp administrators thought the Japanese might be able to tap.

*Beauty Behind Barbed Wire* author Allen Eaton had initially approached Myer with a proposal for a traveling exhibition of handicrafts created in the centers. Myer "liked the idea," according to Eaton, but said that the WRA would not fund art projects for fear of feeding public perceptions that the centers treated evacuees too indulgently. When Eaton visited several relocation centers he found to his surprise that residents were creating many works of traditional Japanese art, from rock gardens to flower arrangements to miniature landscapes, without the benefit of supplies from the WRA. "Barren camps," Eaton recalled,

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[29] Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, 171. For more on plant species nativism, see, for example, Philip J. Pauly, "The Beauty and Menace of Japanese Cherry Trees," *Isis* 87, 51-73 or Gert Groening and Joachim Wolschke-Bulman, "Some Notes on the Mania for Native Plants in Germany," *Landscape Journal* 11 (Fall 1992), 116-126. On cosmopolitanism, see Kristin Hoganson, "Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920," *The American Historical Review* (2002).

> were being transformed gradually into attractive homes and communities. To some of the camp administrators and the few visitors from the country round, it was a thrilling revelation of a fine innate culture.
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> Now, how could this story be told to the world outside the centers?[30]

Eaton was sure that if those who feared Japanese Americans could only see the evacuee art he had viewed and photographed in relocation centers, they would not only realize that the evacuees posed no security threat to the United States, they would also appreciate the capacity for "beauty" in the Japanese culture. As director of Manzanar, Merritt explicitly promised evacuees that they could eventually expect such a reaction from the American public, if they could just be patient. Delivering an address at the commencement ceremony for Manzanar High School in 1943, Merritt "asserted that the country needed and wanted the 'God-given talents of those of Japanese ancestry for work, for family loyalty, for the creation of the beautiful.'"[31]

While the WRA administrators did not take the frontier rhetoric to heart, some among the Japanese did. Abiko Kyutaro, an immigrant to San Francisco in 1885, attended classes at the University of California at Berkeley, where he learned about the historical importance of agricultural land ownership to American traditions. Theorizing that farming could turn Japanese immigrants – most of whom had come from farming families, anyway – into Americans, just as it apparently had Europeans, Abiko founded Yamato Colony in the San Joaquin Valley in California in 1906. He parceled 3,200 acres into forty-acre plots and sold them to Issei farmers. "We believe that the Japanese must settle permanently with their countrymen on large pieces of land if they are to

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[30] Eaton, *Beauty*, 3-4.
[31] *Evacuation and Relocation*.

succeed in America," an advertisement for the colony preached.[32] Nearly forty years later, JACL leader Mike Masaoka wrote WRA director Eisenhower, imploring him to respond to the exclusion order by establishing camps that could be both agricultural communities and experiments in democracy for the Japanese.[33] Regardless of exactly how they felt about the Turnerian method of Americanization, there was a segment of the population at Manzanar and in the other centers who felt that winning the acceptance of mainstream America was their own responsibility, and they were willing to work with the WRA to do it. The strategy prescribed by the Japanese American Citizens League, for example, was similar to that of the WRA: model good behavior in the camps, comply with administrators, demonstrate loyalty by putting the best face possible on internment. Manzanar resident Fred Tayama and other JACL representatives went so far as to lobby Congress to institute a draft in the camps so Nisei could prove their loyalty by fighting against Japan in the Pacific theater.

Harry Ueno, on the other hand, although an early contributor to the new landscape of Manzanar, which fit neatly the WRA's plans for the camp and evacuees, was not motivated by a desire either to please administrators or to prove Japanese Americans' loyalty to suspicious whites. This seeming contradiction raises the question of what exactly landscape projects meant to evacuees, if an infamous "resistor" was also a garden designer, and warrants a closer examination of Ueno's personal history and camp activities leading up to the December disturbance. Born in 1907 to moderately successful parents in Hawaii, Ueno was a Kibei, an American citizen who had been sent back to Japan as a child to learn the Japanese language and culture. Wearied by consistent discrimination, his parents eventually returned to their home country, too,

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[32] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 195-197.
[33] Spickard, *Japanese Americans*, 112; Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 68.

"where they would have more freedom," Ueno explained. He left home in 1922, trained to work on merchant vessels, and on his first voyage jumped ship in Tacoma, Wash., at age 16. Ueno did not harbor nostalgic sentiments for Japan, but neither did he have much patience for hostile white Americans – Asian immigrants had, after all, contributed significantly to American industry, in Ueno's opinion, and deserved better treatment – or for Japanese who tried to ingratiate themselves to white Americans inside or outside the camps. Before the war, he complained, "there was so much pressure from the American society. Japanese people began to act like inferiors. . .even though deep in their hearts they knew they were not."[34] Judging by the frequent placement of celebratory-toned *Free Press* articles about evacuee gardens, the cooperation-minded among the evacuees agreed with the administration's sense that landscape projects helped present an agreeable portrait of their culture and their reaction to internment. But for others, like Ueno, such projects were important for very different reasons.

Ueno's immediate reaction to the evacuation order was pragmatic: he did not embrace the "pioneering" experience of relocation as a chance to prove his loyalty, which he didn't believe should be in question, but at least in the camps, he reasoned, he and his family would be safe from the violence he feared in Los Angeles after Pearl Harbor. In reaction to the rough physical conditions of the camp, he said,

> Well, we weren't too happy about that but, you know, we had a lot of hard times during the Depression. We could overcome some hardships. We always pitched in together and worked it out, you know. . .We tried to make the best of the situation.[35]

As one of the oldest male evacuees, at age 35, in the early days at Manzanar, Ueno may have felt particular pressure to lead efforts to make the best of the situation. First-generation Japanese immigrant men had typically waited until middle age to start

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[34] Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview.
[35] Ibid.

families in the United States. As a result, there was a large age gap between the Issei and most of the Nisei and Kibei. Ueno was one of the few American-born men over the age of 20 (they constituted less than eight percent of Manzanar's population), and most Issei men were initially absent; as non-citizens, many spent the first few months of relocation in Department of Justice enemy alien camps. Upon arrival, Ueno volunteered to work with a team of men clearing sagebrush to make way for additional buildings. After about a month, when a mess hall was opened in his housing block, Ueno was one of the first to volunteer for work in the kitchen.[36]

As an assistant cook in the mess hall, Ueno soon came to the conclusion that food represented an aspect of camp life critical to the morale of Manzanar residents. Many of the kitchen workers had no culinary experience, and even the trained chefs struggled with cooking at Manzanar's high altitudes. Rice and eggs would appear done on the outside, but remain uncooked in their centers. Wartime rationing combined with the challenge of stocking large quantities of non-perishable food in the desert, not to mention administrative ignorance of Japanese food preferences, meant that cooks had to serve odd assortments of dishes. Residents would go from block to block seeking the mess hall with the least objectionable food. As Ueno explained:

> Everyone in the camp had a base pay of $16. Financially, you couldn't gain anything. That was your limit, so people had no other aspirations. The only thing was that they would like to have decent food. Food was the most important thing in the camp because you hadn't any opportunity to gain financially or to get a better job or anything like that, see. So everybody would come into the kitchen and say, "Well, what are they going to feed me today? What kind of cook do they have?"[37]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid. Ueno's argument should ring true with anyone who has ever been fed (or not fed) in a compulsory environment. Airplane food, hospital food, and school cafeteria food all bear disproportionate stigmas as unappetizing, perhaps even a bit "scary." Most employees will not stand for a work-related meeting of more than thirty minutes at which the employer does not provide food and beverages; the quality and quantity of such provision can make or break the meeting.

Believing as he did in the importance of food to camp life, Ueno felt compelled to act when, in October of 1942, he discovered a shortage of sugar in the mess halls. After noticing the disappearance of the sugar bowls that had been made available on hall tables for evacuees' coffee, Ueno visited all the mess halls in camp, and calculated that up to Sept. 30, 1942, they were collectively short more than 20,000 pounds of sugar. He approached the mess steward, and then assistant director Campbell. In October, the administration admitted to a 6,100-pound shortage for the month, which it pledged in a statement in the *Free Press* to replace. Not long after, Ueno reported, oranges and cookies that had been supplied for snacks for pre-school-age children disappeared from the mess hall supplies. After he complained, the administration reported that a shipment of cookies had mistakenly gone to the camp canteen, where they were being sold, instead of to the kitchens for free distribution. Ueno was fashioning a new role for himself in the camp. After the cookie blunder was cleared up, he said:

> Every time you made a complaint like that, something would come out into the open. Unless you complained, everything was covered up and nobody would know what was happening. You know, Japanese people usually don't complain much; they always kept to themselves. But I figured that in the camp we had better do the best we could at least. Whatever they promised to give out, we wanted to have it.[38]

With this new activist mindset, Ueno organized a union of mess hall workers in the camp. The union would represent kitchen employees, by far the largest group of workers at Manzanar, and convey to the administration any resident concerns or complaints related to the mess halls. Ultimately, Ueno saw his organization as serving the entire camp population because everyone ate in the mess halls. The Mess Hall Workers Union operated within Manzanar rules, obtaining permits from the administration to hold its meetings. The group continued to pursue complaints about

[38] Ibid.

issues of basic comfort and fairness to residents, such as the disappearance of choice cuts of meats. Then Ueno accused Campbell of stealing the missing sugar, after an evacuee police officer working the sentry station reported having seen four sacks in the trunk of Campbell's car. When Campbell refused to respond to Ueno's charge, Ueno contacted the FBI, which sent agents to investigate. Ueno was becoming a thorn in Campbell's side.[39]

Another contentious issue addressed by the Mess Hall Worker's Union involved Fred Tayama, a JACL representative and ardent supporter of the proposed Nisei draft. Tayama was also widely suspected by evacuees of having spied for the FBI and openly admitted providing the Bureau with names and addresses of Issei he believed to be disloyal. Tayama's brother Tom was assistant mess steward, in charge of supplying food to all the mess halls. Another brother, Harry, was the head chef of the mess hall in Block 24. According to Ueno, Tom Tayama directed the choicest food to his brother's mess hall. Further, Ueno charged, Harry Tayama fed a large group of young evacuees before he opened the mess hall to the block residents; in exchange, the young men purportedly committed to protecting the reviled Fred against physical attacks in the camp. Residents of Block 24 complained to Ueno when, on Thanksgiving Day, there was not enough turkey to go around after Fred's aides-de-camp had sated themselves. Ueno confronted Harry Tayama and then began lobbying for his replacement as head chef of Block 24.[40]

A few days later, tensions in camp came to a head in a way that Ueno might never have predicted. When Fred Tayama returned from a JACL meeting in Salt Lake City, where he had had the ear of WRA director Myer and advocated drafting Nisei from

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[39] Ibid.; *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[40] Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview.

the camps, he was assaulted and severely beaten in his barracks by six masked men. Although he could only see the attackers' eyes, Tayama reported that he believed one to be Harry Ueno. Campbell ordered Ueno and a number of other suspects arrested. Later that night, Campbell drove Ueno to the jail in Independence. Convinced that Ueno had been unfairly targeted because of his accusations against Campbell, roughly two hundred evacuees met in a mess hall the next morning to discuss his arrest and ways to force the administration to return Ueno to camp. By 1 p.m., the crowd had grown closer to two thousand, and its constituents were angry; nine months of tensions over evacuation, camp conditions, administrative policies, and the role of the unpopular JACL contingent began to boil over. Throughout the day, the new project director, Ralph Merritt, would engage in negotiations with evacuees, but events ultimately spiraled out of control, ending with the shooting of 12 residents by military police.[41] Ueno never returned to Manzanar. WRA officials held him in a series of jails, then transferred him to the Tule Lake segregation center for evacuees who renounced their American citizenship. He never received a trial or a hearing to determine his guilt or innocence in the beating of Fred Tayama. Ueno maintained, however, even thirty years after the fact, that he had not been involved. Given Ueno's confrontation with Tayama's brother in the Block 24 mess hall, Tayama certainly had a reason to identify one of his masked attackers as Ueno. And the physical assault on Tayama does not seem to fit into Ueno's pattern of resistance: Ueno had no history of violence; he seemed reasonably sure that his attempts to replace Harry Tayama would be successful; and he had not to that point engaged in public debate over political issues such as Tayama's JACL participation.[42]

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[41] *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[42] Ibid.; Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview.

Harry Ueno's activism in camp was limited to addressing specific inequities or unacceptable conditions of camp life, including long wait times in an unpleasant outdoor environment before meals. His approach to dealing with the administration was neither accommodationist nor purely combative. Recalling his days at the Tule Lake segregation center after his removal from Manzanar, Ueno expressed frustration with both the eager accommodationists and the hard-core resisters, whom he saw as making life harder on other residents.[43] Ueno cooperated with administrators when it seemed the best way to achieve his goals; he confronted them when confrontation seemed expedient. The way Ueno secured the necessary materials to build his pond is an example of this hybrid strategy. He approached Ned Campbell, in his first interaction with the assistant director, and requested concrete for the installation. Campbell wrote Ueno a permit for three sacks of concrete. Ueno explained that his plans called for twenty-three sacks, but Campbell refused to allot more than three. Ueno accepted the permit and sent one of his colleagues to retrieve the three sacks. They then returned to the supply area with the same permit and continued to retrieve concrete, three sacks at a time, until they had finished the pond.[44]

Ueno's apparent agreement with Manzanar administrators over the merit of landscaping projects belied the fact that, in Ueno's mind, nothing about his installation was for the "Caucasian" administrators, the JACL, or anyone from the outside world. The pond and garden was designed by a Japanese landscape professional skilled in Japanese gardening, it was the idea of a Japanese-American man, and it was built by members of a coagulating community of Japanese-American evacuees with materials they viewed as owed to them by the government that had moved them to a relocation

[43] Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview.
[44] Harry Y. Ueno, Oral interview.

center in the desert. Most importantly, though, the installation was for the enjoyment of the center residents, an oasis in the middle of their dusty new home. When an oral historian later asked Ueno, "Basically, how would you describe your life in Manzanar?" he responded, "You know, Manzanar was at a high altitude, and a lot of wind from Mount Whitney would kick up dust and a lot of pebble sometimes. People standing in line would be affected." Thus begins Ueno's retelling of the birth of the first mess hall garden at Manzanar. That Ueno would respond directly to a general question about camp life by telling the story of the pond indicates that a garden could be one of those small things, like food, that became so critical under the unusual circumstances of camp life. In the words of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston:

> Near Block 28, some of the men who had been professional gardeners built a small park with mossy nooks, ponds, waterfalls and curved wooden bridges. Sometimes in the evening we would walk down the raked gravel paths. You could face away from the barracks, look past a tiny rapids toward the darkening mountains, and for a while not be a prisoner at all.[45]

For Houston, the changing condition of Manzanar's landscape was a barometer of sorts for her family's quality of life in camp. She recalls in her memoir that her family moved to housing block 28 in the spring of 1943 as space became available in barracks from which families had relocated out of camp. The new Wakatsuki home was next to one of the pear orchards from the pre-1913 farming community. "Those trees," she writes, "stand in my memory for the turning of our life in the camp, from the outrageous to the tolerable. . .At night the wind through the leaves would sound like the surf had sounded in Ocean Park [Calif.], and while drifting off to sleep I could almost imagine we were still living at the beach."[46] For Houston's father, Ko, Mount Whitney looked like Mount Fuji, and he daydreamed of returning to Japan for a visit. "It was very beautiful

[45] Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 99.
[46] Ibid., 95-96.

when I was boy," he told his wife. "I still remember our garden in my mind. It was one of the loveliest in Hiroshima."[47]

Whether it was memories of Southern California or of Japan that sustained them, evacuees endeavored to re-create a home-like environment at Manzanar, posits landscape architect Rebecca Fish Ewan. "[Evacuees], like many Americans, tried to bring their landscape traditions into the desert," she writes. "Surrounded by strangeness, they cultivated familiarity. . .[They] did what they could to transform [Manzanar] into a home they could understand and recognize."[48] Humans invest particular significance in the landscapes in which they live, argues Deborah Tall, so that to lose or be removed from one's home environment "can be fundamentally deranging. It means the loss of personal landmarks – which embody the past – and the disintegration of a communal pattern of identity." She cites the documented psychological distress of urban Americans relocated due to slum clearance, a Polish concentration camp victim whose hometown was razed by Nazis, and victims of enclosure in England, all of whom mourn the loss of their landscapes of home.[49]

As they transformed the landscape of Manzanar, evacuees addressed needs both physical and psychological, individual and communal. They cultivated a sense of community and alleviated the suffering of fellow inmates as they installed mess hall gardens, built shade-providing structures, and planted cherry trees outside the orphanage. They planted lawns to control the dust. They grew Japanese vegetables in the 3,600-square-foot community Victory garden to supplement their paltry food rations

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[47] Ibid., 98; Jeanne Wakatsuki and James D. Houston: *Farewell to Manzanar*, 107 min., Universal Studios, 1976, videocassette.
[48] Ewan, *A Land Between*, 162.
[49] Deborah Tall, "Dwelling: Making Peace with Space and Place," ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson, *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 104-105.

for the sake of both personal and cultural culinary preferences and nutrition, which historian Gwenn M. Jensen identifies as one of the most pressing health problems in the relocation centers. They also raised medicinal herbs, trusting their own traditional, homeopathic remedies over the Western medicine doled out by sometimes openly racist, white WRA doctors.[50] Gardens became landmarks in the camp, giving some legibility to the landscape as they distinguished one block from another. Small porches and personal gardens at barracks entrances helped to differentiate and create transitions between public and private space. Evacuees posted nameplates outside their doors, fashioned addresses from pebbles, and traced their initials in concrete, expressing ownership both of the camp as a whole and of particular personal spaces. They found the means to exert a measure of control over their environment and quality of life; the many possibilities of their natural surroundings – with a supply of water from the LADWP, materials and equipment from the WRA, found objects in camp and the surrounding hills, and plants and seeds brought from home or mail-ordered from the Sears-Roebuck catalogue – helped to compensate for the discomfort and inflexibility of Manzanar's interior spaces.

Gardening made use of the increased leisure time adult evacuees suddenly found on their hands. They built recreational spaces for children and adults: baseball diamonds, volleyball courts, picnic areas, and a golf course, but also facilities for kendo, judo, and sumo wrestling. Nurseries housed flowers grown and harvested for the traditional Japanese art of flower arranging. The act of gardening itself could be meditational, a variety of spiritual poultice. Some evacuees were practicing Christians, but others retained Japanese religious beliefs, which commonly combined elements of

[50] Gwenn M. Jensen, "System Failure: Health-Care Deficiencies in the World War II Japanese American Detention Centers," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73.4 (1999), 602-628.

Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. At the root of Shinto was a love for the land, where followers believed protective ancestral spirits resided, and Buddhism – Zen in particular – "emphasized enlightenment and harmony with the cosmos," writes Gary Okihiro, who argues for a resurgence of traditional Japanese religiosity, if not strict religious practice, among relocation center residents.[51] Even for the non-religious, elements of the landscape could provide emotional fortification. "[The mountains] represented those forces in nature, those powerful and inevitable forces that cannot be resisted," writes Houston, "reminding a man that sometimes he must simply endure that which cannot be changed."[52]

Most evacuees were keenly aware that they were imprisoned, not because they had committed any crime, but because they had, as a group, failed to convince mainstream America that they were suitably American; they had not stripped off enough of their Japanese heritage to compensate for their physical distinctions and slip quietly into the melting pot. In the camps, WRA administrators allowed them to practice traditional art forms, but they also discouraged the use of the Japanese language, disallowed the practice of Shinto, encouraged Issei to take English language and American citizenship courses, and worked to relocate evacuees into non-Asian communities where they would be isolated them from their ethnic brethren. Under the circumstances, Okihiro argues, any expression of traditional Japanese culture – be it attending Buddhist services, holding a meeting in Japanese, or building a tea house – constituted an act of resistance.[53]

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[51] Gary Y. Okihiro, "Religion and Resistance in America's Concentration Camps," *Phylon* 45 (Third Quarter, 1984), 220-233.
[52] Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 98.
[53] Okihiro, "Religion and Resistance"; Gary Y. Okihiro, "Japanese Resistance in America's Concentration Camps: A Re-evaluation," *Amerasia Journal*.

As the first mess hall garden and a site related to Harry Ueno, who became a galvanizer of evacuee self-assertion, his block 22 garden held special significance for Manzanar residents. It came to be known in the camp by two nicknames: "Three Sack Pond," referring to Ueno's circumvention of Campbell's inadequate concrete allotment, and "Otaba no Ike," derived from the Japanese "O to wa no Ike," the "source of pure and sacred water that flows to the Kiyomizu Buddhist temple in Kyoto, Japan."[54] Evacuees celebrated both the flouting of camp rules and the Japanese tradition embodied in the garden. Manzanar's desert environs were a canvas for such Japanese cultural expressions.

But, ultimately, the new landscape of home that evacuees fashioned was a hybrid. They built kendo and judo arenas, but also baseball diamonds and a golf course. They grew Victory gardens. And they liberally modified classical Japanese landscape compositions. A classical stroll garden, for example, would never be the setting for a tea house, as in Manzanar's Pleasure Park. Japanese landscape philosophy calls for the use of materials and plants suited to the surrounding natural environment, but evacuees turned their desert home green. Even the widespread participation in landscape design smacked of American democratization. In Japan, landscape gardening was an elite profession, requiring years of apprenticeship, study of ancient texts, and strict adherence to compositional principles.[55] In their manipulations of Manzanar's environment, evacuees expressed pride in their Japanese heritage, but also in their American heritage.

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[54] *Cultural Landscape Report*, 131.

[55] For more on classical Japanese landscape gardening, see Teiji Ito. *The Japanese Garden: An Approach to Nature* ( New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1972); Holborn, Mark. *The Ocean in the Sand: Japan: From Landscape to Garden* (Boulder, Colo.: Shambala Publications, 1978); David A. Slawson. *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* (Tokyo: Kodansha Intl., 1987); Newsom, Samuel. *A Thousand Years of Japanese Gardens* (Tokyo: Tokyo News Service, 1955); and Conder, Josiah. *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (New York: Dover Publications, 1893)

Planting a garden or building a tea house, for most evacuees, was neither a conscious act of resistance nor an effort to cooperate with the WRA's plans for presenting them as culturally acceptable Americans. But they were making a statement about their loyalty to the United States. "On a political level, we are, of course committed to the American system," said one Issei man. "But on a cultural level, we can introduce our cultural heritage and contribute our cultural wisdom to American society."[56] As evacuees transformed Manzanar's desert landscape to one they could call home, they rejected the strict definition of Americanism that the U.S. government and white Californians had tried to impose upon them, and along with it the notion that an American must speak English, give up his cultural heritage, and interact with the natural environment in prescribed fashions. Ejected from their adopted homes on the West Coast, evacuees cultivated their Americanism, to the extent that they could, on their own terms.

[56] Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *The Issei: Portrait of a Pioneer, An Oral History* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Pacific Books, 1983), 267.

## CHAPTER THREE

## OUT OF THE DESERT'S BOSOM

*Out of the desert's bosom, storm swept with wind and dust;*
*Out of smiles and curses, of tears and cries, forlorn;*
*Mixed with broken laughter, forced because they must;*
*Toil, sweat and bleeding wounds, red and raw and torn.*
*Out on the desert's bosom – a new town is born.*[1]

Manzanar's first Japanese American residents, one-hundred-fifty men whom the *Free Press* dubbed and referred to throughout the life of the center as "the pioneers," arrived on March 21, 1942, a mere six days after Army equipment began ripping up the desert vegetation to make way for the first war-time relocation center. Throughout the month of May, the majority of the men worked in four crews, in six-hour shifts around the clock, to establish the center's first farm operations. It was late in the season to begin planting and, aside from one rented tractor, plow, and cultivator, Manzanar had no powered equipment, so the farmers had to clear sagebrush and other vegetation (on all but the three acres or so the Corps of Engineers had cleared before their arrival), level the land for irrigation, till the soil, and plant one hundred acres of crops, all by hand. The men had volunteered to journey to Manzanar early, before mandatory evacuation from the West Coast began, before even barracks were constructed in camp, to help ready the center for their fellow evacuees. There were no stoves or bathing

[1]Excerpted from untitled poem in " Special Anniversary Edition," *Manzanar Free Press*, 20 March 1943, p. 1.

facilities, and the pioneers had to erect a cabin by hand – which was promptly blown down by the fierce Owens Valley wind – before they could sleep indoors.[2]

These men had made sacrifices, some even leaving families behind on the coast, to brave the elements and perform heavy labor in an undeveloped section of desert, all the while cooperating with government agencies dedicated to corralling West Coast Japanese Americans into relocation centers. So, WRA administrators were no doubt surprised when one hundred of these seemingly cooperation-minded "pioneers" staged a strike in June 1942. Strikers refused to work in protest of the white foremen assigned to escort agricultural work crews to and from the fields, which were outside the camp's fenced residential area. The foremen, inexperienced as farmers, were essentially collecting competitive war-time wages to keep an unarmed watch over the evacuee agriculturalists, who were not only laboring far harder for their mere $14 per month, but had arrived willingly at Manzanar *before* the barbed wire that by June 1942 demarcated the one square mile within which Japanese Americans could move in the Owens Valley without the escort of a white man.

That the striking farmers had cleared and cultivated the fields on which they were being guarded by white foremen was not the only rub. Unlike the foremen, the Japanese American farmers were experienced and highly skilled agriculturalists who resented the oversight of men whose only qualification for their supervisory positions was their race. Three-fifths of the Japanese immigrants to the United States came from the agricultural class in Japan – often second or third sons who did not stand to inherit the family land – and many went directly to work as farm laborers. Many more of their

[2] "Pioneers Celebrate Second Anniversary," *Manzanar Free Press*, 18 March 1944, p. 1.

peers who began their lives on the West Coast working for railroads, logging companies, or mining operations moved into agriculture as opportunities in those fields disappeared. In the Los Angeles area, home to 88 percent of Manzanar's residents, two-thirds of the Japanese-American labor force before World War II worked either raising, catching, preparing, retailing or marketing food, according to historian John Modell. Aside from the fishermen, most Japanese Americans who did not work directly on farms made their livings in fields dependent upon farm produce. In 1940, Japanese Americans owned or leased 1,523 farms in Los Angeles County. Japanese-American farmers produced fifty percent or more of fourteen different California crops by the eve of the war. What's more, these agriculturalists were particularly skilled in the cultivation of marginal lands, having transformed swamps, deserts, hilly regions, the remainders of timber harvests, and diminutive plots into highly productive farmland. Even white exclusionists publicly recognized the contribution Japanese Americans had made to the California landscape and agricultural industry. [3] To be lorded over by better paid yet inexperienced white foremen, then, added the injury of devaluing Japanese-American environmental knowledge and skills to the insult of pay differentials and relocation itself.

The relocation of evacuees to the inhospitable lands of the wartime centers was the most extreme incarnation of white exclusionists' recurrent attempts to keep Japanese Americans on marginal lands and off more desirable farmland. For evacuees, too, the agricultural realities of center life resembled old experiences, as many had spent four decades or more responding to exclusionary efforts with strategies to successfully farm lands rejected by whites. In their capacity as farm laborers, Japanese immigrants made large-scale contributions to the draining and subsequent irrigation of

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[3] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 93, 294; Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accomodation*, 9; *Evacuation and Relocation*.

the swampy lands of California's Central Valley, where white farmers feared their own bodies could not stand up to the environmental health dangers. Laborers tended to work in gangs, each under a boss who spoke better-than-average English. Often, the groups coalesced on the basis of the men's *ken*, or prefecture, of origin. (Nearly all Japanese immigrants before the turn of the twentieth century were either bachelors or married men who left their wives and children at home, planning to eventually either return to Japan or bring their families to the United States.) Labor bosses negotiated jobs with large farm owners, contracting entire groups to work for set periods of time. This was attractive to employers because it saved them the time and trouble of procuring large numbers of individual workers. For the duration of the job, workers lived in labor camps run by the bosses. Camps usually included a mess hall, where a hired cook or the wife of the labor boss cooked communal meals over a wood fire, and spare, hastily built sleeping quarters.[4] Sometimes, though, even indoor living was not a luxury afforded workers; remembered one former Issei laborer:

> I started to work picking grapes. Dozens of people came into the camp to pick, but there were no houses for us to live in. We had to make our own beds. We piled up raisin boxes under a peach tree, put some hay on the boxes, and covered them with canvas. . When we slept, we hung up mosquito netting. One side was slung from the branch of a peach tree and the other side over a stick we had driven into the ground.[5]

Another Issei laborer remembered frequent bouts of typhoid fever among his co-workers, the result of drinking river water downstream from the sewers in Sacramento and Stockton.[6] Manzanar's desolate landscape and primitive built environment were a shock to newly arriving evacuees, but the shock must have come in part, at least for the Issei and older Nisei, from its striking similarity to their early American homes. The

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[4] Linda Nash, "Finishing Nature: Harmonizing Bodies and Environments in Late-Nineteenth-Century California," *Environmental History* 8, 1 (2003); Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 153-162.
[5]Masao Hirata, Oral interview in Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *The Issei: Portrait of a Pioneer: An Oral History* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Pacific Books, 1983), 80.
[6] Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 102.

perforated walls of their barracks offered incomplete protection from the natural environment, but they had lived with such exposure before.

Gradually, the *ken*-based labor groups living in such rough camps evolved into ethnic farming "colonies" in which members first managed to lease and then, for a few, buy small farms.[7] As this transition took place, particularly after the Gentlemen's Agreement limited immigration of laborers from Japan, resulting in the arrival of more women, more and more Issei men married and started families. The move out of the ranks of laborer, though, was not necessarily accompanied by more comfortable living quarters. "The houses where they lived were just like chicken coops, narrow and small, and looked like remodeled stables," remembered one Issei of his fellow farmers. Short on capital, the immigrant farmers could afford only minimal building supplies for constructing houses. One man whose family built a house with fifty dollars' worth of lumber later described for oral historians how the house was hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and shook during storms. Family members pasted newspapers over holes in the walls to keep out bees and mosquitoes.[8] An Issei woman explained that she had given birth without the aid of a midwife rather than suffer the embarrassment of allowing a stranger to see her home:

> Wherever we worked in those days, the housing was just makeshift, because everyone stayed only for a year or two and then moved on. All the houses were patched up with pieces of board on the sides, so drafts blew in through slits here and there. I couldn't possibly ask a doctor or a nurse to come to such a house.[9]

Sometimes when leasing farms, Issei renters even agreed to inhabit the barn or other outbuilding, allowing the landowner to continue living in the house. Such a concession

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[7] Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in California's Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino, Calif.: California History Center, 1985), 24, 30-31.
[8] Juhei Kono and Shoichi Fukuda, Oral interviews in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 75, 143-144.
[9] Kane Kozono, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *The Issei.*, 127.

could make the critical difference in persuading a reluctant landowner to lease to an immigrant Japanese farmer.

Issei farmers also paid higher rents and purchase prices, but their most important strategy for obtaining lease or sales agreements from white landowners who preferred not to do business with Asians was their willingness to improve and cultivate areas unwanted by white farmers. "Like the pattern established elsewhere in California," write historians Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Okihiro in their community study based in the Santa Clara Valley, "Asians were generally relegated to places that were not preferred by the earlier-arriving whites." Issei farm colonies were limited to the "lowland crescent" of the Santa Clara Valley, which includes the towns of Alviso and Agnew, and hugs the Southern-most curve of the San Francisco Bay. There, farms were susceptible to frequent flooding and the occasional seepage of salt water into the water table, which could kill an entire year's crops. The area also tended to collect refuse from the San Jose River as it drained toward the bay.[10]

Japanese and Japanese-American farmers employed a variety of strategies in order to produce enough crops to support their families on the lower-quality lands and smaller farms they owned or operated. In 1910, California Japanese paid an average $23.29 per acre rent, compared to the average $8.95 per acre for white farmers. Premium rent prices necessitated higher per-acre yields to break even, let alone make a profit. To that end, Issei and Nisei farmers employed methods of intensive farming. The Issei arrived with a background in intensive cultivation, according to Iwata, having raised crops in a country with a small amount of arable land relative to its population, but they learned techniques particular to the environments they faced in the United

[10] Lukes and Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy*, 55.

States during their tenure as farm laborers and tenants. Typical lease agreements spelled out in exacting detail the various tasks to be performed throughout the year, providing tenant farmers with a blueprint for raising a particular crop.[11]

Immigrant farmers also built upon what they learned in their "apprenticeships" to native American landowners. They invented new equipment, such as the "Japenese leveler" or "Fresno scraper," which consisted primarily of an iron blade mounted on a wooden frame. A user hitched the implement to a horse, then used a lever to direct the soil collected from high areas of the property toward the low spots, where the excess was deposited, resulting in a level field. Irrigation technology of the time consisted generally of man-made channels with hand-operated spill gates; gravity provided the only force for moving water through these channels. Only a perfectly flat field could be properly irrigated. Later farmers replaced the Japanese leveler with the slightly more sophisticated "box leveler" in the 1930s and developed other equipment, including row sprayers, particularly suited to the challenges of their crops and fields. To save money, they used chicken manure, fish meal from Japan, or other organic materials rather than more costly commercial fertilizers. They trained their horses to follow the close-set rows of vegetables without damaging the crops. In some areas, they used dynamite to blast apart the stumps left after timber harvests or hardpan, a layer of clay and minerals hardened into rock-like plates just below the surface of the land, and then loaded the detritus onto wagons or trucks to haul it out of their fields. They cultivated every available inch of farmland, including the banks of irrigation channels, where they often planted vegetables for their personal consumption. When they rented established orchards, they planted vegetables for personal use between the rows of trees; when

[11] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 46, 168, 193, 198-99, 298.

planting new orchards, such intercropping gave them a faster-growing product, such as strawberries or sweet potatoes, to market during the three to fours year required for fruit trees to mature.[12]

As land ownership and tenancy among the Issei increased, they settled most heavily in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, which together make up California's Central Valley.[13] In one example, near Livingston, Issei settlers founded Yamato Colony, the first project of immigrant leader Abiko Kyutaro, who preached the virtues of permanent settlement and agriculture for transforming Japanese immigrants into a yeomanry acceptable to the American mainstream. The thirty-nine original Yamato "pioneers," as they called themselves, faced a barren landscape not unlike the one wartime internees found at Manzanar: "Frequent sandstorms obliterated familiar landmarks and light. Thousands of rabbits roamed between low scrubs and tall weeds. There were no trees for shade or fuel, no streams for drinking water," writes Kesa Noda. But the site also offered hope for the settlers. It was affordable, removed from urban hotbeds of anti-Asian sentiment, yet accessible to Los Angeles and San Francisco by rail. There was a rudimentary irrigation system in place, and a few grapes and fruit trees remained from a previous settlement, promising potentially fertile soil.[14]

Colonists helped each other build houses and dig wells, sharing quarters and drawing from communal wells in the meantime. It was common practice in Japanese-American farming communities – as it had been in Japanese agricultural villages – to share wells, equipment, livestock, and even laborers, with families working on each other's farms on alternating weeks or seasons. In Yamato Colony, farmers planted long-term crops instead of truck farm crops, even though it meant a five-season wait for a

[12] Ibid, 393-439; Lukes and Okihiro, Japanese Legacy, 61, 63-84; Masumoto, *Harvest Son*, 119.
[13] Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 262.
[14] Noda, *Yamato Colony*, 17-31.

financial return. Then, they fought sand storms, insects, and rodents to protect their crops. They burned the tall weeds for fuel; they also got lost amongst them walking to and from each other's houses, as the weeds grew taller than most of the men. Still, by 1910, one pioneer's visiting daughter was able to write the following description of her father's farm:

> He had everything there. He had Thompson Seedless [grapes]. Oh, he had *beautiful* Thompson Seedless. He had Tokay grapes, Malaga grapes. . .Elberta peaches, apricots, a big alfalfa ranch, and he had a hay field close to the town of Cressey. And then he planted eucalyptus all along the sides of the house. . .And I remember the time I went was in the spring, so I remember the apricot blossoms. . .There must have been fifteen acres or twenty all in apricots. And I saw the blossoms.[15]

Small family farms, blooming with flowers and fruit, lined with eucalyptus trees, connected to nearby small towns: Not only had Yamato colonists effected a Turnerian transformation of a veritable wilderness into an agrarian community, just as Kyutaro had hoped, they had developed their settlement into a recognizable image of the garden ideal described by Ian Tyrell's California horticulture promoters. Much as the social reformers trumpeting the horticultural ideal dreamed of a racially homogeneous countryside, it was immigrant labor that, in large part, made California's agricultural transition from grains to more intensive crops possible. Conversely, the various forms of discrimination white Californians used to keep Japanese immigrant farmers on marginal lands left them no choice but to adopt intensive farming techniques on small parcels of land and to settle in close-knit communities where they could share resources.

Wherever their exact location on the West Coast and whatever specific environmental challenges they faced, the common element in Issei and Nisei farmers' formula for surviving on smaller, lower-quality farms was intensive labor. "The Japanese way of farming was just incredible," recalled an Issei farmer. "We just worked

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[15] Ibid., 31; Smith, Thomas C., *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959), 50-54.

and worked and worked desperately." Many of the vegetable crops in which Japanese and Japanese-American farmers specialized required back-breaking "stoop labor" and painstaking handwork. Celery was one example: "In those days, we held the celery in our hands and walked on our knees to plant. It was hard labor."[16] Sugar beets, strawberries, grapes: all required intensive practices in which most white farmers were unwilling to engage. What's more, Issei and Nisei cultivators, for the most part, had only their own bodies with which to perform the heavy labor of farming because they lacked the capital to invest in tractors and other machinery, which other farmers began using in the 1920s. They planted crops that required harvesting in different seasons, working nearly year-round to maximize farm output. They worked long hours, seven days a week, and employed children, wives, and extended family members. On vineyards growing grapes for raisins, for example, the parents might pick the bunches into pans, while older children followed them down the row, spreading the grapes to dry on paper trays laid out by the younger children. "The meaning of family became inseparable from the farm operation," writes David Mas Masumoto, who grew up on the farm owned by his Nisei parents and Issei grandparents, "life was planned around summer harvests, winter pruning and daily chores, a family rhythm that became fused with the land, crops, and cycles of natures." Others held less idealistic views of family farm life: "On the farm I worked as a family slave," remembered an adult Nisei of his childhood. "I did anything that had to be done on the farm, picking, packing, box boy."[17]

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[16] Masao Hirata and Osuke Takizawa, Oral interviews in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 81, 101.

[17] David Mas Masumoto, *Country Voices: The Oral History of a Japanese American Family Farm Community* (Del Rey, Calif.: Inaka Countryside Publications, 1987), 197-198, 196. It should be noted that the Issei shared a strong commitment to the education of the next generation. Unlike many immigrant youth employed in East Coast factories, virtually all Japanese American children attended elementary and high school. Their work on farms was scheduled before and after school hours and in the summertime.

Issei and Nisei farm women had perhaps the most difficult lives of all, so much so that some expressed gratitude for what, to them, was the relative ease of their Manzanar days. "I had never been on a vacation for even a day until that time," recalled one Issei woman. "I had an easier life in camp than ever before." Women performed hard physical labor alongside the men; one Issei man told an oral historian that, when faced with a choice between two different women to marry, he chose the one who looked more physically fit for farm work. Masumoto describes his and his young siblings' perception of the biceps his grandmother, an Issei, maintained well into her seventies: "We asked if there was an egg underneath her skin. . .she clenched her fist tighter and the 'egg' contracted, becoming rock hard." Many farm women, eighty percent of whom worked in the fields, rose as early as 4:30 in the morning to prepare breakfast for their families and any hired laborers, cleaned the kitchen, and then joined the men, only to return home at lunch and dinner time to prepare meals again. After dinner and a full day in the fields, women performed any other necessary household chores. Often in the evenings, they built wood fires and prepared Japanese-style baths for every member of the family or made sake for the men's consumption. "I just worked and cried," recalled one Issei woman of her first year after joining her husband in the United States. [18]

Motherhood added to the workload. While they labored in the fields, women either laid sleeping infants in the shade of fruit trees or grapevines, or carried them on their backs. Ironically, these women's hard work gained not the approval of native Americans, but fueled the fire of anti-Asian criticism. One writer for a national magazine described

[18] Kane Kozono and Riyo Orite, Oral interviews in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 83-85, 176, 194; Kiyo Miyake and Setsu Yoshihashi, Oral interviews in Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, 401; David Mas Masumoto, *Harvest Son: Planting Roots in American Soil* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 223-224.

> the squat forms of the diminutive little women grubbing the earth, moving slowly about as they sat on their heels, frequently with children strapped to their backs. From a distance they look [more] like giant bugs crawling across the paths than human beings.[19]

Meanwhile, Japanese American women labored on, wearing large, floppy bonnets they had stitched together from rice sacks in attempts to maintain the delicate, pale faces prized in Japan.[20] In contrast to the pests or the unthinking, unfeeling beasts of burden to which exclusionists likened them, the women clung to what remnants they could of their femininity even as the layers of calluses grew on their hands.

The pervasive discrimination that evacuation represented, and Japanese-American adults' acute awareness of it, were also nothing new by the eve of World War II. An Issei mother described a day shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor:

> My daughter came home from school with tears in her eyes, and said, 'I'm a Jap.' They had called her a Jap. . .But, you see we had always been called 'Japs.' Americans wouldn't even sell us land.[21]

By the 1940s, Japanese-American adults had come to expect a certain level of discriminatory treatment from white Americans. In order to minimize their exposure to it, they settled in relatively insulated farming colonies or ethnic neighborhoods within urban areas. In Los Angeles, they developed an "ethnic economy," concentrating themselves (and achieving a vertical monopoly) in an economic niche related to food production: from raising crops to marketing, distributing or retailing produce to preparing food in restaurants.[22]

Initially, though, many Japanese immigrants had been surprised by the discriminatory treatment they received in America, the country they had been taught

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[19] Quoted in Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 295.
[20] Masumoto, *Harvest Son*, 222.
[21] Katsuno Fujimoto, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, 171.
[22] Modell, *Economics and Politics*; Robert M. Jiobu, "Ethnic Hegemony and the Japanese in California," *American Sociological Review* 53 (June 1988), 353-367.

during their childhoods in Japan was a land of freedom and opportunity for anyone willing to work. Scrimping and saving while they endured Spartan lifestyles fit into an ethic of hard work and frugality promoted in Japan not only by Confucian and Samurai values but also by the public schools' inclusion of stories about the "great men" who founded the United States. Oral histories of Issei men and women discussing their early years as American farmers often read like pages from Ben Franklin's autobiography.[23]

Nonetheless, Japanese immigrants found themselves faced not with a land of freedom and equal opportunity, but a population who regarded them as racially inferior sources of economic competition, and with federal, state, and local governments that passed measures designed to balance the West Coast's need for their labor with its citizens' desires to erect barriers between themselves and the immigrants. In 1906, the city of San Francisco attempted to segregate white children from Asian in its public schools. The federal government stepped in to avoid a national slight to Japan, with whom the U.S. was trying to maintain relatively new diplomatic relations. In return for preventing school segregation, national diplomats appeased Californians by negotiating the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement, under which the Japanese government stopped the emigration of laborers to the U.S. Several states on the West Coast passed measures barring "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning land and limiting their ability to lease. California's Alien Land Laws, passed in 1913 and 1920, did not stop Issei farmers from leasing, and in some cases owning, land, but they made the immigrants vulnerable to exploitation by whites who wielded the threat of enforcement. Issei also faced occasional violence and other humiliating acts, such as being pelted with horse dung in public, perpetrated by individual native Americans. Remembered one immigrant, "When

[23] Duus, *Japanese Discovery of America*, 27-33, 75-78; Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 3-6, 55; Sarashon, *Issei Women*, 17 and *The Issei*.

I made a trip to Marysville to look for land, someone threw rocks. It took strong determination to decide to buy land and live here permanently."[24]

Over the decades, the Issei developed many strategies for surviving the discriminatory policies aimed at them. They bought land in the names of their American-borne children or white acquaintances, or formed corporations to buy land, or negotiated rental agreements with landlords willing to break the land laws. After the stricter 1920 incarnation, which illegalized all leases to aliens ineligible to citizenship, an adult Nisei might lease a large parcel from a white landowner, then unofficially subdivide it amongst several tenant families headed by Issei. They employed their myriad strategies for eking out a living on lands rejected as unproductive by white farmers. They segregated themselves in residential ethnic enclaves and limited visible, public cultural expressions.

In the early years, when most Issei still worked as gang laborers, they staged strikes to force employers to pay better wages or allow them to take regular cigarette breaks or in protest of the firing of a Japanese co-worker, such as in the May, 1904 strike at Santa Clara. In 1907, the San Jose Mercury News bemoaned the local labor situation, writing, "When the vineyardists of San Joaquin County got ready to employ grape-pickers, they found the little brown men all ready for them and were compelled to pay $2.50 per day or let their grapes rot on the vine. What one Jap said, all Japs said, and there was no help to be had." At times, if a landowner refused to lease to a Japanese or Japanese-American farmer, area laborers would collectively refuse to work for the employer until the labor shortage forced him to concede. Iwata writes that by 1910 farm owners had begun denouncing Japanese immigrant laborers for their

[24] Choichi Nita, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 64.

demands for higher wages and strike threats, vexed by the Isseis' refusal to adhere to the stereotype of the accommodating and slavish Oriental.[25]

The Manzanar "pioneers" relied on the strategy of collective bargaining from their old days as contract laborers to protest the indignity of being watched by Caucasian foremen while they performed work in which most had decades of experience. After extended negotiations with Army officials, the WRA secured permission to allow evacuees to work in the agricultural fields without accompaniment, and the white foremen were replaced by Japanese-American foremen. Productivity increased as strikers went back to work, and the *Manzanar Free Press* reported on August 21 that, "Their attitude as a whole and the marked improvement of [farmer workers'] morale has made the farm project a huge success." As was its general practice, the *Free Press* only vaguely alluded to episodes of unrest, such as the farm workers' strike, with post-resolution references along the lines of "the marked improvement of morale."[26]

It must have rendered the desolate landscape of Manzanar all the more demoralizing – and can help historians to better understand the evacuee experience – that Japanese Americans had by 1942 spent decades improving not only farmlands but their houses and surrounding environments, developing psychological attachments to what had become the familiar landscapes of home. "It was sad for me to leave the place where I had been living for such a long time," one Issei woman explained as she described her reaction to news of the upcoming evacuation. "Staring at the ceiling in bed at night, I wondered who would take care of my cherry tree and my house after we

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[25] Lukes and Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy*, 28, 51; Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 164-65.
[26] E*vacuation and Relocation*; "Local Farm Project Acclaimed Success," *Manzanar Free Press*, 21 August 1942, p. 3.

moved out." Remembered one Issei incarcerated by the FBI immediately after Pearl Harbor, "I worried about my wife and six little children I had left behind. I also worried about the land already planted with seedlings." One Issei farmer was more explicit about what relocation meant after decades of gradually improving his family farm: "And, at last, came the year right before the war. Every bit of effort we put in up 'til that day amounted to absolutely nothing."

Despite the frustration of being forced to start over in an environment, both natural and built, dishearteningly similar to the ones they'd faced as new immigrants, many evacuees dutifully set about improving their new home, planting gardens and designing parks within the central residential area of camp, or cultivating the desert soil of the agricultural fields just outside the barbed wire. That first year at Manzanar, evacuees cultivated 100 acres of crops. The main goal of the first growing season was to experiment with various crops and commercial fertilizers, which the WRA provided, to determine what could cost-effectively be grown in the Owens Valley climate and soils, which were extremely alkaline in some areas near Manzanar. By the end of the fall 1942 harvest, the farmers had produced 800 tons of vegetables and rehabilitated the long-neglected orchards, which yielded roughly $2,000 worth of apples and pears that year. In October, the *Free Press* reported that "the season just terminated by the local farm aggregated $43,496.63 according to the Los Angeles market quotations." After experimentation, the farmers settled upon thirty-two varieties of vegetables that grew well, suited the tastes of residents, and provided nutritional value, including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, melon, squashes, string beans, and cabbage. Many of the vegetables desired by residents were not available on the open market due to wartime shortages, particularly traditional Japanese vegetables such as daikon, uri, and

kaboucha, so they were grown in camp, too. Lettuce, peas, dry beans, and sweet potatoes did not make the final cut, as none produced well in Manzanar's hot, arid summer climate. Over the winter of 1942-43, the farm operations acquired tractors and other machinery, as well as a team of mules. In order to ready the fields for cultivation, they cleared and leveled land and constructed irrigation channels and diversion dams in the streams, which were fed by snowmelt from the Sierras. Additionally, the center relied upon water from two wells on the property. Center farmers employed greyhounds to hunt the hordes of rabbits that menaced their crops. Eventually, farm operations included a hog farm, poultry farm, and a short-lived beef cattle program[27], which the WRA ultimately deemed not cost effective because the area around the center could not support adequate feed crops in the late summer when the streams ran partially dry. By the spring of 1943, evacuees were farming four fields, totaling approximately 400 acres.[28]

Before Manzanar farmers could expand operations from 100 to 400 acres, though, the WRA was forced to revisit its quarrel with the city of Los Angeles over the siting of the center. Stubbornly resisting the only way it could at that point, the LADWP charged the WRA for irrigation water, using the rates based on the price of domestic water consumption in L.A., rather than standard commercial rates. In June 1943, a federal court mandated more reasonable rates, allowing the WRA to lift operation restrictions on the farm project. Additionally, LADWP officials protested and held up

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[27] According to Iwata, a small number of Japanese American farmers had ventured into poultry and swine raising, but only as specialists. Fruit and vegetable farmers generally did not try to also raise livestock. In my primary and secondary research, I have not found any references to Japanese Americans raising cattle before relocation.

[28] *Evacuation and Relocation*; "Increase in Farm Acreage Mapped," *Manzanar Free Press*, 19 October 1942, p1.

approval of the hog project, insisting that it would contaminate the city's water, despite WRA promises to locate it at least one mile from the aqueduct.[29]

Even with the increased water supply made affordable by the new rates, Manzanar farmers faced water shortages and other environmental challenges. An article on the *Free Press*'s front page on Oct. 15, 1942, described the "blustering" winter storm that had abruptly ended the ninety-degree days of early fall: "the thermometer did a power dive and storm clouds sheathed the mountains on either side, leaving frosty covering of white on the higher peaks last Monday morning." An adjacent page-one article about the WRA's plans to clear new agricultural tracts reported, "More than $10,000 worth of vegetables remain to be harvested from the local farms *if frost does not damage the remaining crops*." The following May, severe winds and unusually high temperatures did indeed damage many young plants, including green peas, potatoes, and alfalfa, the leaves of which were "burned off the ground." A *Free Press* article warned that, unless June saw cooler temps in the mountains, the snowmelt run-off would be gone early, creating water shortages in August and September. That did, in fact, come to pass. On Aug. 18, 1943, the paper reported that the "irrigation ditches [were] very low," and water pressure in some areas of camp was not enough to adequately fight a fire should one break out. Camp residents were consuming 1.5 million gallons of water per day, or 212 gallons per person, their consumption no doubt increased by the hot weather. A staff editorial on page two admonished readers to "ask [yourself] – 'Am I willing to conserve water now to provide sufficient water for fire protection?'" By the end of the month, the administration had mandated a conservation plan requiring residents to "discontinue use of water for lawns, gardens, trees and

[29] *Evacuation and Relocation*.

shrubs and the use of running water for fish ponds, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m." in order to ensure enough water remained for the farm projects and fire protection.[30]

The WRA's initial goal for Manzanar's agricultural operations was to provide as large a proportion as possible of the center's food supply, in order to save money, and to create meaningful work for evacuees. In other words, to some extent, the project was not an absolute necessity, as the Army budgeted enough money to feed evacuees from quartermaster supplies – although not with food Japanese Americans found palatable – and no one in the camps was required to work. By mid-1943, though, both food production and labor had become critical issues, as the nation faced wartime food-shortages and Manzanar faced a dearth of agricultural laborers to keep the farm projects going. Frequent front-page articles in the *Free Press*, beginning in June, warned of the dangers posed by both, as well as describing the consequences of reduced crop production for center residents: in-camp food shortages and a return to the unappealing diet of Army-supplied non-perishables they had endured before fresh produce from the center farms was harvested.

It is logical to assume that the out-flux of furlough workers, who were contracted to leave the centers to perform much-needed agricultural labor in the mountain states and elsewhere, was the dominant reason for the sudden shortage of farm labor in camp. Manzanar's total population, at its peak in January 1943, was 10,121; however, that included a large number of children and elderly people. At its peak, the Manzanar population between the ages of 19 and 60 was 5,899; of those, only 3,296 were men.

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[30] "Summer Gives Up" and "New Land Tract Cleared as Additional Farms Planned," *Manzanar Free Press*, 15 Oct. 1942, p. 1; "Unusual Weather Dangers Crops at Local Farm," *Manzanar Free Press*, 12 June 1943, p. 1; "Plan to Control Consumption of Water Pending" and "Are You Conserving," *Manzanar Free Press*, 18 Aug. 1943, p. 1,2; "Conservation of $H_20$ Requested," *Manzanar Free Press*, 1 Sept. 1943, p. 1.

In contrast to the pre-evacuation norm, relatively few women – initially no women – worked on the camp farms.[31] Adult evacuees provided nearly all of the labor for camp operations, including the schools, hospital, dental clinic, newspaper, social services, waste management, and administrative services. Mess halls and related operations alone employed 1,562 workers by May 1942. So, 1,500 evacuees out on furlough, as was frequently the case during harvest seasons, could create a serious shortage of labor. That the furlough program competed for center farm labor is evident in a July 1943 *Free Press* article, which dispelled rumors that anyone would be "drafted into the local livestock project when it is ready to begin" rather than being allowed to return to Idaho for the rest of the beet season, where workers were paid much higher wages than in the relocation centers.[32]

Still, the national WRA Agricultural Division Chief Ervin J. Utz, quoted in a June *Free Press* article, pressed:

> The nation is now facing one of the most critical food shortages in certain foods in its entire history. WRA is going to experience increasing difficulty in buying certain types of food. Moreover, public opinion just will not allow any group such as the center residents, with access to plenty of land and other facilities for home production, to further burden the already critically short commercial food products.

The food and labor shortages clearly posed very real problems, but it is surprising how little responsibility national WRA administrators took in addressing the situation, considering that it was caused by the forced evacuation and relocation itself, which had replaced Japanese-American farmers on the West Coast with white farmers who were

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[31] Married women were allowed to – and significant numbers did – work in the furlough programs if accompanied by their husbands. Single women were generally not eligible for furlough, as the WRA felt their presence in labor camps might lend itself to sexual improprieties. Unrau's explanation of the gender requirements for leave includes the following disconcerting statement, "In several instances, however, the Welfare Section at Manzanar arranged for seasonal agricultural work for the third party in marital triangles, thus contributing to 'peace and harmony' within the center." I'm not sure whether that means that single women could leave on furlough if sponsored and accompanied by a married couple, or that administrators broke up extra-marital affairs by sending involved women out of camp on furlough.

[32] Numbers compiled based on data in Unrau, *Evacuation and Relocation*; "Cattle Program Clarified by Farm Division," *Manzanar Free Press*, 14 July 1943, p. 1.

never able to match their productivity, and was compounded by the WRA's allowance of evacuees to work for large landowners in the very states that had refused to allow Japanese Americans to resettle within their borders. Rather, the WRA chose to blame evacuees for what administrators perceived as a reluctance to work, adopting a tone of admonishment in their public communications. In a June 9, 1943, *Manzanar Free Press* article, director Ralph Merritt responded to evacuee anxiety about the possibility that some centers might close as the WRA ramped up its out-of-center relocation program with the caveat, "If we produce our food and do the necessary work of the center, Manzanar will be Manzanar as long as it serves a useful purpose." Merritt was apparently not above playing on evacuees' fears that they would once again be forcefully moved in order to scare up more workers. Another *Free Press* article warned that evacuees' diets for the year would depend upon their willingness to provide enough labor to operate the center farms and described how women outside the relocation centers, along with "various members of farm families from grandfathers to school girls" were now contributing to food production. Suddenly, a practice for which Japanese Americans had been criticized for decades had become a patriotic act. Dutifully, Manzanar women headed back to the fields, with forty to seventy-five employed at various times throughout 1943 and 1944. "This was better [than working in the mess hall], because I didn't have to stay inside the barbed wire," remembered one Issei woman. "I felt that my mind was liberated and I was happy. . .I regained my sense of well-being."[33]

Whether they relished a little time outside the fences, considered it their patriotic duty, or wanted to contribute to the well-being of fellow Japanese Americans, Manzanar

[33] "Menu This Year to Depend Upon Farm Products," *Manzanar Free Press*, 19 June 1943, p. 1; Unrau, *Evacuation and Relocation*; Iyo Tsutsui, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, 155. "Four Questions on Evacuee Future Discussed by Ralph P. Merritt," *Manzanar Free Press*, 9 June 1943, p. 1.

farmers took great pride in the fruits of their labor. Crop conditions, harvests, the availability of new fruits or vegetables in the mess halls, and Manzanar's ability to ship surplus produce to other centers all regularly made front-page news in the *Free Press*. Food, as evacuee cook and garden builder Harry Ueno pointed out, acquired added significance within the confines of camp, and so, by proxy, did the food producers. Beginning in August of 1942, fruit served in the mess halls was displayed with a "Made in Manzanar" label. After the war, as some Japanese Americans achieved "the agrarian dream of a family farm," writes David Mas Masumoto, farmers developed distinctively designed and named fruit labels that both expressed family pride and helped to command higher prices for crops grown by operations recognized for higher-quality produce. Around the turn of the century, Issei George Shima had been the first to sell potatoes under a brand name, Shima Fancy. Shima was also credited with a list of other agricultural firsts, including the practice of grading potatoes according to quality, and his Fancies commanded a significantly higher price than other growers' potatoes based on their reputation.[34] Japanese Americans were proud of the farms they'd built from near wastelands and their contributions to California agriculture. An open letter to President Roosevelt, printed in the *Manzanar Free Press* and signed by 129 center residents, pled for evacuees to be allowed to contribute to the wartime "Food for Freedom" campaign as laborers on farms across the country, invoking "the splendid record established [by Japanese Americans] in many decades of farming in the California area."[35]

Agricultural operations provided fodder for the WRA's strategy for painting evacuees as good, American farmers to the outside public. Robert Brown, who assumed

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[34] "'Made in Manzanar,'" *Manzanar Free Press*, 31 Aug. 1942, p. 1.; Masumoto, *Country Voices*, 213-218; Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil*, 249

[35] "Food for Freedom Campaign," *Manzanar Free Press*, 31 Aug. 1942, p. 2.

the head of WRA public relations for Manzanar after helping to negotiate the details of its site selection, took sample fruits and vegetables to a display at the chamber of commerce in the nearby town of Bishop, "to give proof that Manzanar's farms can vie with the nation's best farms," a *Free Press* writer quipped. The prize vegetables included two "giant" Hubbard squash – the largest of which weighed in at 35 pounds – four watermelons, one banana squash, six other melons, and twelve "extra fancy cucumbers." The exhibition was undoubtedly part of the WRA's public relations campaign. Still, before the produce was taken to Bishop, local farmers staged a weight-guessing competition, in which forty-four contestants contributed five cents each to a jackpot for a chance to guess the weight of the largest Hubbard squash. This seems to indicate that, regardless of whether they supported the WRA's p.r. strategy, Manzanar residents found something to celebrate in the success of the "local" farms, as residents referred to them. In September 1943, the evacuee-staffed Community Activities Department organized a two-day Fall Fair with concessions, food, games, music, a "Queen of Manzanar" pageant, and other entertainment. Along with evacuee art projects, fruits and vegetables were once again on display. On the second day, the fair was opened to Owens Valley residents, who were treated to tours of the camp and farm operations and served a dinner of fried rice and Manzanar vegetables with melons for dessert.[36]

With agricultural operations, as with in-camp landscape and gardening projects, evacuee needs and interests overlapped with WRA desires to present an acceptable image of Japanese Americans to the outside world. This does not mean, however, that evacuees were deliberately cooperating with the War Relocation Authority, as early

[36] "Manzanar Farm Products Displayed," *Manzanar Free Press*, 7 Sept. 1942, p. 1.; "Community Activities to Hold Two-Day Fall Fair," *Manzanar Free Press*, 28 Aug. 43, p. 7-8; "Exhibits Hi-Lite Camp Fall Fair Opening Today," *Manzanar Free Press*, 18 Sept. 1943, p. 1.

historians and observers of relocation claimed. Rather, farming was intimately linked to an important "pioneering" ideal shared by the Issei and Nisei. WRA administrators were not the only ones to use the term pioneer in reference to evacuees: the *Free Press* heralded the contributions of Manzanar's original one-hundred-fifty "pioneers" in anniversary issues in March 1943 and 1944. Sometimes, the paper referred to participants of the out-of-center relocation program as pioneers, as they often moved to towns in which no Japanese Americans had previously lived. In camp, Manzanites observed an annual "Pioneer's Day" at which residents aged 70 or older were honored; festivities included Japanese cuisine, along with traditional dancers, singers, and musical recordings. The first observance honored 101 such "pioneers." Long before relocation, though, "pioneer" was an important part of the Japanese-American lexicon, becoming synonymous with the term Issei, as Sansei (third-generation) historian Eileen Sunada Sarasohn writes in the introduction to her collection of oral histories *The Issei: Portrait of a Pioneer*:

> Although these people arrived several decades after the 1849 Gold Rush, they consider themselves pioneers of the West too. They pioneered the fledgling agricultural industry in California, planting the first citrus orchards, establishing the rice industry, and helping to structure the marketing system for the entire state's fruit and vegetable crops. These immigrants also marked out new areas in small businesses along the Pacific Coast. They call themselves "Issei," first-generation pioneer.[37]

The term was used in so many different ways – to refer to the first generation to leave Japan for a new country, to the elderly, to the first arrivals at Manzanar, and to those who left the center for new communities without Japanese-American populations – that it is difficult to say exactly what "pioneer" meant to whom, and surely generations and individuals embraced or emphasized various aspects of the definition. For the Issei, hard work and individual determination of one's fate was an important element of the

[37] Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 5.

pioneer ideal. Complained one Issei man who had to support several members of his extended family after their post-war return to the West Coast: "Those people did not have the pioneering spirit, so I had to carry them until they could stand on their own feet." Abiko Kyutaro, founder of Yamato Colony, had studied American history at Berkeley, and he defined the pioneer experience as a process of agricultural development through which immigrants became assimilated, much the same as Turner himself.[38]

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the Yamato colonists, who also called themselves pioneers, considered their work transforming the sandy landscape as a literal Americanizing experience. Kesa Noda, in her 1981 history of the colony, explains some of the differences in meaning of the term between generations:

> People in the colony today refer to the early group of people who moved to the land as the "pioneers." The Nisei use the term loosely, focusing on the time of arrival. They apply it to the first settlers, to women who came as early brides, and to non-landowners who arrived as workers, only later buying land. In contrast, the Issei men and women of today apply the term strictly, emphasizing action. To the Issei, the pioneers are those who owned land, built houses, planted fields, and dug their own wells.[39]

Pioneering, for the Issei, regardless of how much or how little they preferred to adopt American cultural norms, meant building a legacy on which future generations could build, most often in the area of agriculture. "As pioneers, the Issei laid a foundation," asserted one first-generation immigrant of his cohort. "Their tears and sweat lie at the bottom. . .The struggle and hardships of the Issei are the very basis of the prosperity that Japanese [Americans] enjoy today." Another Issei man shared his prescription for success for younger generations of Japanese Americans:

> [They] must become intimate with the land. . .A farmer's life is very hard, but there is a great deal of freedom and also greater possibilities. But young people don't like to get

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[38] Ibid, 253; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 195-97; Noda, *Yamato Colony*, 9-11.
[39] Ibid., 18.

> their hands dirty. They want to buy big houses and big cars. These are just for outside looks only. They don't give you real roots.[40]

For an aging member of the first generation, his grandchildren's desire to work outside of agriculture endangered their ability to build on the foundation he and his fellow pioneers had built in Beikoku, the Japanese term for America, which also meant "rice country."

For the Nisei, pioneering represented something important their parents had accomplished. (Many Nisei and Sansei historians documenting the Issei experiences, including Noda, Sarasohn, Iwata, and Masumoto, tend to write with obvious respect for their parents' and grandparents' pioneering efforts.[41]) The Nisei had grown up hearing stories about their parents' pioneer days. Some, born before the Alien Land Laws and the National Origins Act reduced exclusionist activity and the most virulent anti-Asian sentiment, shared experiences relatively similar to the Issei. At Manzanar, generally speaking, these would have been the roughly 600 Nisei over the age of 30. But, for the approximately 2,300 Manzanar Nisei between the ages of 19 and 30, [42] who had experienced relatively little white animosity before the outbreak of war, yet knew the American public considered them something less than full citizens, the WRA's frontier rhetoric combined an appeal to the pioneer ideals with which they'd been raised and a tantalizing promise of acceptance into the American mainstream. Now *they* could be pioneers by participating in the WRA's out-of-center relocation program, dispersing and immersing themselves in communities throughout the United States, prying open the doors for younger Japanese Americans and future generations to attain the full benefits of the American dream, something their parents had not quite been able to do.

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[40] Nisuke Mistumori, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 264,
[41] Takaki, Okihiro, and Yuji Ichioka (*The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924*) have resisted the convention.
[42] Population figures from *Evacuation and Relocation*.

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Almost immediately after the relocation centers opened, top WRA administrators – first and foremost, national director Myer – decided that the centers represented "unnatural," communal living conditions in which evacuees were too dependent upon the federal government (despite the fact that the centers were largely self-supporting, with evacuees producing most of their own food and providing virtually all the labor to run them), and thus dangerous to the psyches of residents. Executive Order 9066 did not authorize the Army or any agency to *require* Japanese Americans to live in camps. It allowed the Army to designate military zones from which persons of Japanese descent could be excluded and evacuated, and to supply any provisions for the feeding and sheltering of evacuees necessitated by their relocation. The camps became a necessity as a result of the rapid, wholesale removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast coupled with the refusal of governors and citizens of the inter-mountain states to allow them to migrate freely into their region. That did not mean, however, that the War Relocation Authority could not arrange for the subsequent relocation of evacuees to areas outside the exclusion zone, as long as local governments or citizens did not put up strong opposition. Thus, the WRA devised its out-of-center relocation program, and national administrators quickly made it top priority to move as many evacuees as possible, as quickly as possible, to the outside, and do away with the relocation centers altogether.[43]

Many evacuees, however, did not want to relocate once again, particularly after they had put forth so much effort building communities in the centers, establishing agriculture, and creating landscapes they could call home. Remembered one Issei:

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[43] Ibid.; Myer, *Uprooted Americans*; Spicer, et. al., *Impounded People*.

> We were Japanese, after all, so no one spent lazy days [in camp]. Some people planted various kinds of trees in the compound, and between the trees we grew vegetables and other things. When we first came to the camp, we all wondered what was going to happen to us. But when we were leaving, people were even saying that living in the camp was better than where they had come from. The trees had grown very big by then, and we could find nice shade under them and everything.[44]

Despite Myer's enthusiasm for dismantling the centers, there is evidence that some officials entertained the notion of maintaining at least one permanent center, similar to the camps the Department of Agriculture operated for migrant farm laborers during the Depression, which John Steinbeck had portrayed as the single bright spot in the demoralizing journey of the Joad family in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In May 1944, the non-profit Public Affairs Committee distributed a pamphlet, *What About Our Japanese-Americans?*, penned by Carey McWilliams, published to educate the public about (and generate sympathy for) the plight of the West Coast evacuees. In it, McWilliams suggested that the WRA might "convert one, possibly two, centers into genuine relocation projects which could eventually be turned over, on a cooperative basis, to the evacuees who will not leave the camps."[45]

The reality McWilliams recognized, which had somehow eluded Myer, was that many evacuees did not want to start over a third time – after building homes, farms, and lives from scratch, first as immigrants and again as evacuees in relocation centers – in yet another region of the country. What's more, evacuees had created within the centers comfortable, appealing landscapes and agricultural operations that satisfied their agrarian ideals. Even when the exclusion order was lifted and Japanese Americans were permitted to return to the West Coast, the move out would mean starting from scratch. Most did not have houses, farms, or businesses to go home to, as tenants' leases had been terminated and many property owners sold before relocation, either realizing they

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[44] Hanayo Inouye, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 196.
[45] Carey McWilliams, *What About Our Japanese-Americans?* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1944), 23.

could not keep up mortgage payments while they were interned or deciding in the face of the uncertainty of relocation to sell while they could. From out-of-center newspapers and the letters of early returnees to the West Coast, evacuees learned of the critical housing shortage and still-rampant anti-Japanese sentiment among California whites. Plus, more than 4,000 of Manzanar's residents were either minors or adults over the age of 60, meaning that able-bodied adults were outnumbered by the dependents they would have to feed and shelter as they started anew.[46] Many were simply ready for their pioneering days to be over. But Myer – whose insensitivity was never more apparent than when he remarked in a speech encouraging Manzanites to resettle yet again that he "recognized the heartaches and problems which arise in making a new life in a strange community because *he experienced the same thing during his college days*"[47] – interpreted evacuees' hesitance as laziness bred in them by the abnormal conditions and psychological stresses of center life rather than a reluctance to yet again leave behind an environment that, out of marginality, they had made fertile, prosperous, and home-like.[48]

A little more than half of all evacuees eventually returned to the Pacific states (about 57,000, compared to 50,000 who went East).[49] What they found there were conditions, once again, remarkably similar to both their earliest experiences as immigrants and the first months of relocation center life. With no farms for most to go home to, adults were back in the ranks of laborers, migrating from farm to farm when the crops were ready to be planted or harvested. Some families were forced to split up,

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[46] Unrau, *Evacuation and Relocation*.
[47] "D. Myer Compliments Evacuees on Fine Morale: WRA's Chief Concern is Youths Under Strained Conditions," *Manzanar Free Press*, 24 Aug. 1943, p.5. Emphasis is mine; as was their custom, *Free Press* writers reported such inanities with the verbal equivalent of a straight face.
[48] This is the interpretation Myer provides in his memoir, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II* (Tucson, Ariz.: Univ. of Ariz. Press, 1971): see chapters 10, 13, 14, 15, and 17, for example.
[49] Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 60.

like the Washizus, whose two daughters worked for one white family as schoolgirls (performing domestic labor before and after school hours), while the mother worked as a live-in domestic for another white family, and the father and son worked and lived as laborers on a large farm. Because of the acute housing shortage created by the influx of war industry workers and homebound soldiers, returning evacuees were back to living in cramped quarters, sharing houses among several families, living in basements, churches, and storerooms, hanging blanket partitions, as they had done in their barracks, just to get a little privacy.

David Mas Masumoto's Nisei father returned from a tour of duty in the Pacific to find his Issei parents living in the back room of a friend's grocery store along with three other families. Together the Masumotos moved into a "shack" on a tenant farm and worked there until the Nisei son decided to take the calculated risk of buying a raisin farm near Del Rey, Calif. He bought the property from an Italian farmer who had himself purchased it just before the war from a Japanese-American farmer about to be evacuated. It was affordable because twenty-five percent of it was underlaid with hardpan and could not be cultivated until it was improved. The family would spend three years digging, dynamiting, and hauling out the hardpan under their soil. When the time came for the family to move, though, the Issei mother refused to go, as paralyzed with fear as Grandpa Joad, convinced that the risk was too great, that "they can take it away." Mother and son matched wills, and she relented.[50]

Myer was right that relocation had been traumatic for many evacuees; it was the nature of the damage he did not understand. Rather than creating dependency, the camps had bred fear and uncertainty among a people who had never done anything but

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[50] Masumoto, *Harvest Son*, 232-234; *Country Voices*, 185-186.

make their own ways, surmounting through sheer determination the related challenges of marginal lands and white prejudice. Japanese immigrants had journeyed to a frontier, not only in the sense that they were arriving in a new country, but also in the true Turnerian sense of suffering at the hands of an inhospitable environment. They had wrestled the various unwanted lands of the American West Coast into productivity and made a place for themselves in the agricultural economy. They had passed onto their children their pride in their pioneering exploits and their dedication to self-determination.

Making new starts even more difficult, the WRA had made it a goal of the out-of-center relocation program to spread the Japanese American population as thinly as possible around the country, as Myer reasoned that the root of the "Japanese problem" was their tendency to reside in groups that seemed threatening to white West Coast residents. Historian Richard Drinnon likens Myer's sympathy for Pacific slope whites to that of Andrew Jackson for white Georgians as he orchestrated the removal of the Cherokee Indians to the West. Myer simply had to reverse the directional flow of people, sending his "undesirable" charges eastward. When he testified in 1943 during Senate hearings on relocation centers, Myer predicted the outcome of his scattering re-relocation campaign:

> I think you will find, other than color, that after about four or five generations these people will be living under the same standards as any other American citizens. They won't know anything else.[51]

Myer did not particularly care whether Japanese Americans embraced agriculture or industry, but his philosophy retained Turnerian tones nonetheless.

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[51] Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 56-57.

The farm colonies and communities that Myer targeted for disintegration, though, had been a critical component in Japanese Americans' survival strategy, providing the communal resources that helped them overcome discrimination, lack of capital, and marginal lands. In Myer's estimation, the agriculture and the communities that evacuees developed in the centers, no matter how productive, free of racial animosity, and functional, could never be "normal" – and, more importantly, were not American – because they were communally operated, rather than based on the all-important American principle of private property. As head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs after the war, Myer would make this bias even more clear in his policies toward Native Americans. He consistently blocked tribal plans for land use ventures – including farming their own marginal lands that were not environmentally suited to the model of the small, independent yeoman – that he considered too communal. At times, he accused tribal leaders of cavorting with communists. Eventually, he targeted Indian reservations, which he saw as the ultimate example of abnormal communal life, for extinction in the program he modeled on his wartime relocation strategy and candidly labeled "Termination."[52]

Manzanar residents knew that, once they left the center, they would have to start over yet again, but this time without the community resources that had been key to their previous successes. Through the vehicle of the *Free Press*, WRA administrators exhorted them repeatedly "not to segregate themselves by living near each other, going to all-Japanese social affairs, [or] organizing Japanese clubs and associations" in their resettlement communities. Demonstrating their "basic policy of directing the relocation program toward the ultimate objective of resettling as many evacuees as possible in

[52] Ibid., 268. See Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, particularly chapters 8-11 and the epilogue.

widely scattered areas of our country," regional WRA officials closed eight "saturated" counties in Colorado to evacuee resettlement. The *Free Press* announced the closure on page two. In December1944, the Army announced that it would lift the West Coast exclusion order on Jan. 1, 1945. The WRA announced plans to close the centers before the end of 1945.[53] There was not much evacuees could do about it: they would have to begin anew a third time, stripped of many of their old community ties. "My farm had not been touched for five years, and I didn't even have any tools to cut down the tall weeds," Issei farmer Masao Hirata later explained. "Every Japanese person had to start again from the beginning. Because we were not all living in our old neighborhoods, we couldn't ask for help from anybody."[54]

Japanese immigrants had arrived on the shores of the West with notions of themselves as pioneers, much like their white counterparts from the Eastern United States. They and their children shared agrarian ideals surprisingly similar to the traditional American agrarian ideal with its roots in Crevecoeur, Jefferson, and Turner. Their version was simply a bit more flexible. It was shaped and re-shaped by repeated encounters with marginality that forced Japanese American pioneers to continually adopt new strategies to respond to the new challenges of the various environments they faced. It could accommodate tenant farmers, communal farm ownership and operation, and women's and children's contributions. It did not require that they strip themselves of all vestiges of Japanese culture. It did not require a narrowly defined landscape aesthetic. And, most importantly, it did not equate American citizenship with whiteness.

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[53] "Making Right Impression Up to Evacuees, Is Advice," *Manzanar Free Press*, 30 June 1943, p. 1; "Colorado Counties Closed to Resettlers: Choate Names Eight 'Saturated' Areas," *Manzanar Free Press*, 4 Aug. 1943, p. 2; *Evacuation and Relocation*.

[54] Masao Hirata, Oral interview in Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 237.

## CONCLUSION

"The national problem," in 1914, as Frederick Jackson Turner explained, was no longer "a question of how to avoid or cross the Great Plains and the arid desert. It [was] a question of how to conquer those rejected lands."[1] Turner was delivering an incarnation of his famous "Frontier Thesis" at a University of Washington commencement ceremony. The frontier was gone, according to the 1890 Census Report. Western settlement was such that an uninterrupted line of unsettled lands no longer existed, only scattered pockets of resource-poor wilderness: a dilemma in Turner's eyes, because Americans had developed their defining national ideals of individualism and democracy by conquering the "free lands" of the continent. The national problem had thus become, for Turner, how to continue as Americans – with a population increasing more quickly than food production and "hordes" of "alien" immigrants still flocking to U.S. cities – in the absence of a new frontier.[2] While one of Turner's proposed solutions was to exploit the scattered pockets of rejected land, he could probably never have guessed that, thirty years after his address, ten of those spots would become home to some 110,000 forcibly evacuated Japanese immigrants and their offspring, commonly referred to by U.S. officials and the evacuees themselves as "pioneers" rather than "prisoners."

The eugenicists and anti-Japanese exclusionists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were more likely to speak in terms of the melting pot, rather than

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[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The West and American Ideals," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 293-4.
[2] Ibid., 290-295.

the frontier process, and its inability to melt down the alien characteristics of Asian peoples, who were, they said, too inherently and unalterably racially different from white Americans. Their rhetoric, which defined race as biologically determined and fixed, had the effect of naturalizing white Americans' fears about Japanese and other Asian immigrants. Arguments like Stoddard's that Asians, because of innate racial characteristics, could "underlive" whites, allowing them to accept lower wages and poorer living conditions than any white man or family could tolerate, inextricably linked white Americans' fears of Asian racial difference to their anxieties about economic competition. And, while average white Americans living on the West Coast didn't share Turner's concern about whether there was enough wilderness left to Americanize new immigrants, they did seem to have a sense that there wasn't enough land to go around. It seemed only natural, then, that to save themselves and their country for their white progeny, white Americans should restrict Japanese immigrants' and Japanese Americans' access to natural resources and quality agricultural land. So, Japanese and Japanese-American farmers were pushed to farm the lands that had been rejected or overlooked by white farmers: in swamps, deltas, unirrigated areas, land with rocky soils, the remains of timber harvests, small plots tucked between developments in rapidly urbanizing areas. Rhetoric that identified Asians with insects, rodents, and other pests, or that cast suspicion on them as potential fomenters and carriers of disease – linking them, essentially, with all that is vile in the natural world – only confirmed the naturalness of containing them in the least promising natural areas of the West Coast so that they could not make desirable areas "unlivable for white men," as many exclusionists charged they would.

But the Japanese immigrant farmers and their wives and children armed themselves with mosquito netting and hard-earned muscles. They built dikes and levees, drained delta areas, irrigated dry land, dynamited and hauled out stumps, and busted apart layers of hardpan, transforming the landscape of California and the other Pacific states in myriad ways. They invented new scrapers and other tools suited to their challenging environments; they experimented with new crops and new techniques. They worked longer hours, employed their entire families, worked collaboratively with other families, and planted short-term crops between the rows of slow-starting fruit trees to sustain themselves in the interim. They scrimped and saved and lived simply, just as the Benjamin Franklin they'd studied in elementary school back in Japan would have advised. For their efforts, they incurred the sustained suspicion and disdain of white workers and farmers. Not only did the immigrant farmers' habits of working seven days a week, including Sunday, and employing the entire family create so-called "unfair competition" and reaffirm white suspicions that the Japanese could not be assimilated to "American" habits and virtues, immigrant farmers and their families improved marginal lands so successfully as to make them highly desirable to white farmers. The California State Board of Control concluded in its 1919 report, *California and the Oriental*, that Japanese farmers controlled "458,056 acres of *the very best lands in California*."

Eventually, allowing Japanese immigrants to cultivate only plots that white farmers did not want was not enough; Issei and Nisei farmers managed to corner the markets on many crops despite their limited access to agricultural land. West Coast exclusionists continued to assail Japanese and Japanese Americans' agrarian opportunities by passing ever-more restrictive land laws – California passed a bill

tightening the 1920 restrictions even in 1943, while its intended subjects were exiled in the nation's interior – and lobbying their national representatives for increasingly restrictive immigration control, until in 1924, the National Origins Act sealed the door to all further Japanese immigration. California's Alien Land Laws, like those of other Pacific states, relied on the legal construction "racially ineligible to citizenship" to bar the economically competitive and racially "different" Japanese immigrants from legally owning and, later, leasing land, while maintaining a thin veneer of non-discrimination. (Exclusionists occasionally expressed the fear that the protection of the Fourteenth Amendment might one day be extended to all races. Also, state officials faced pressure from the federal government not to pass laws that would jeopardize diplomatic relations with Japan. These seem the most logical reasons that white exclusionists would feel the need for a pretense of non-discrimination.) Over the decades, though, white Californians came to accept what had been a legal loophole as a very natural reason for excluding all Asians from land ownership, immigration and other privileges. Aliens ineligible to citizenship by definition could not become Americans and, therefore, remained dangerously inassimilable. Born in the United States, the second-generation Nisei were citizens, but, because their parents' inassimilability was a *racial characteristic*, the logic proceeded, they must have passed this innate un-American-ness on to their offspring. In this way, white Californians' desire to restrict Japanese immigrants' access to one natural resource – agricultural land – played a critical role in creating what Mae Ngai has identified as "alien citizens," racial groups perpetually denied access to the full rights and privileges of citizenship, and reinforced "the ideology of white entitlement to the resources of the West."[3]

[3] Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 8, 109.

And then, when the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor, white Americans found a new reason to fear Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans. The logic that defined this population as political, cultural and racial citizens of Japan made them, once war with Japan began, embodiments of the military enemy living right in the United States. The logic that Japanese were inherently inassimilable precluded nearly any possibility in most white minds that either Issei or Nisei could be loyal to the United States. So when Army officials, politicians and journalists clamored for evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, white residents supported those plans. As a result, they saw their ultimate exclusionary desires realized as all Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were removed from the West Coast to the most marginal lands of all: ten relocation centers in deserts or swamps, surrounded by barbed wire. In 1942, a representative of the California Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association wrote to a Congressman representing Santa Clara County,

> What can you suggest that I do and thousands of Californians be led to do, that may make it possible to get rid of all Japs, sending them back to Japan either before or after the war is won. I am convinced that if it is not done or at least the action completed before the war is over, it will be impossible to get rid of them. . .the Japanese cannot be assimilated as the white race [and] we must do everything we can to stop them now as we have a golden opportunity and may never have it again.[4]

As one point in the decades-long continuum of Pacific states' discriminatory treatment of Asians, wartime relocation was shaped, to a surprising degree, by both white ideologies entangling nature, nationality, and race, and by competition for agricultural land and market share.

The public battle over the placement of Manzanar Relocation Center in the Owens Valley revealed even more ways in which competition for access to natural resources shaped public policy toward this racial minority. Non-Japanese Los Angelinos

[4] Quoted in Lukes and Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy*, 6.

faced a dilemma: Should they be more concerned about removing their county's "enemy aliens" to a remote locale or about the physical proximity of 10,000 Japanese Americans, whom many whites believed to be repositories of disease as well as potential saboteurs, to the most precious natural resource in the arid West: their water supply? In the minds of Owens Valley residents, on the other hand, the proposition that Japanese-American residents of Los Angeles be housed on Los Angeles Department of Water and Power property – not to mention the fear that it might be at the cost of Valley taxpayers – could not be fully extricated from their memories of L.A. officials' commandeering of the Owens River earlier in the century. It seemed to many that the city was not only foisting its dangerous aliens onto Owens Valley residents, but perhaps preparing to tap their resources once again. Residents eventually accepted the siting of the relocation center at Manzanar, due in part to promises that evacuees would perform public works projects that would create new or regained opportunities for residents to exploit the natural resources of the Valley, including road construction to encourage both outdoor-recreational tourism and mining ventures, and broad-gauging of the railroad to accommodate renewed shipments of apples from the old orchards. Some of the more open-minded among the residents saw an opportunity to learn intensive farming techniques from Japanese-American farmers well-known for their ability to cultivate seemingly hopeless lands, a chance to regain the Valley's agricultural past without the cooperation of the water-controlling LADWP.

Manzanar did indeed provide opportunities for the U.S. government, industry and the scientific community to harvest some of the knowledge and skills Japanese Americans had developed over decades spent wrestling with the challenges of marginal environments. Department of Agriculture officials visited Manzanar to observe and copy

the design of evacuees' vegetable dehydration plant. Evacuees designed and staged a large-scale experiment with techniques for growing guayule, used for rubber production during the war, on marginal lands in order to free more fertile areas for agriculture. Scientists from the federal government and various California universities co-sponsored and carefully observed the project. Evacuee researchers developed new strains of the plant that grew well in dry soils; they published their results in professional journals, thus sharing their findings with the scientific community at large. Manzanar residents also experimented with new ways to grow pyrethrum, a flower that produced the main ingredient used in certain varieties of insecticides and chemical weapons, which, Edmund Russell has pointed out, the U.S. military used so enthusiastically in attacks on Japan.[5]

Inside the relocation centers, the Army and the War Relocation Authority claimed that they would simulate a frontier experience that would turn Japanese immigrants and their children, so often labeled as inassimilable, into true Americans. But, rather than creating the traditional pastoral landscapes implicit to the Turnerian process, evacuees designed and built a uniquely hybrid Japanese-American landscape. WRA officials not only allowed but encouraged this. These liberal administrators, by and large, did not believe evacuees were dangerous or that they needed to Americanize themselves a la Turner. They did believe, however, that the agency and the evacuees themselves bore the responsibility for solving the West Coast "Japanese problem," which entailed creating acceptance of Japanese Americans among the mainstream population. To that end, some WRA officials and supporters of Japanese Americans, such as Allen Eaton, Eleanor Roosevelt , and Ansel Adams, thought they saw important opportunities in

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[5] *Final Report* and Russell, *War and Nature*.

evacuees' interactions with nature. Thus evolved a two-pronged public-relations approach: first, demonstrating evacuees' agricultural expertise, which, with wartime shortages, had gained a decidedly patriotic allure in addition to the age-old American idealization of the yeoman farmer. Secondly, the WRA marketed evacuees' "creation of beauty" from the most unpromising of landscapes as evidence of both Japanese Americans' "fine innate culture" and their resilient good spirits and loyalty.

Evacuees, for their part, made use of the expertise that some among them had developed as professional landscape designers and, more commonly, personal creativity to transform the landscape surrounding their living spaces in ways that met a variety of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, with little regard to the WRA's marketing strategy or the sentiments of the outside world. In relocation centers, away from the prying eyes of white communities with whom they had to maintain congenial relations, and with more leisure time than most had ever enjoyed before, professional and amateur gardeners and landscape designers indulged their pride in their native Japanese culture. They adapted the cultural traditions of classical Japanese landscape garden design to both their own habits and attitudes, which had naturally attained certain American characteristics, and to their challenging new environment. Most saw themselves as loyal Americans but were no longer willing to give up their cultural heritage to prove their political stance.[6]

Evacuation and relocation represented not only a continuation of long-standing policies of official and unofficial discrimination against Japanese Americans, it was the

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[6] From the early days of Japanese immigration to the West Coast, immigrant leaders had exhorted Japanese-Americans to make efforts not to stand out in mainstream society by wearing Japanese-style clothing, gathering in large groups in public, speaking Japanese loudly in public, or through ostentatious displays of traditional holiday celebrations. Then, immediately following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, many Japanese Americans burned, buried, or otherwise destroyed Japanese flags, photos of the Emperor, photos of relatives in Japan, equipment for traditional sports, swords, and other artifacts of Japanese culture.

extreme incarnation of white Californians' efforts to limit the group to marginal lands. As such, conditions at Manzanar were not entirely new to most evacuees. Having decades of experience transforming wastelands to productive agricultural communities, evacuees effected just such a transition in the Owens Valley. The physical and emotional dedication required of Manzanar residents as they did this can help us understand what at first glance seems utterly mystifying: that many did not want to leave, even when the West Coast exclusion order was rescinded. Having fulfilled their own agrarian ideal twice over, many Japanese Americans did not want to start anew a third time.

But even those who did want to leave were forced to, and returning to the West Coast did indeed mean starting over. For some, it meant migratory farm labor until they could work their way back up to farm ownership, and then transforming new lands to productive fields. For many, though, the closing of Manzanar was the end of their agrarian dreams. The industry had become far more mechanized during the war years, and many Japanese-American farmers were simply not able to catch up with the changes, having left the camps with any pre-war capital depleted. In the midst of the post-war labor surplus, others were never able to save enough money to acquire their own farms, and share tenancy was a thing of the past. Meanwhile, white hostility against Japanese Americans still ran high in the aftermath of the war. Returning evacuees found themselves once again dodging hurled insults and rocks in the streets of their former homes. In the end, Turner's promise was an empty one for Japanese pioneers to the Pacific Coast and their children: no matter how many times they completed the frontier process, they could not strip off the physical characteristics of their race as Europeans had shed "the garments" of the former civilizations, and, as a

result, white Americans refused to recognize them as legitimate claimants to the full privileges of citizenship.

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