Behind Barbed Wire:

How Bachelors, Bachelorettes, and Beauty Queens Reconstructed Nisei American Identity During World War II

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あなたが　だいすきです。

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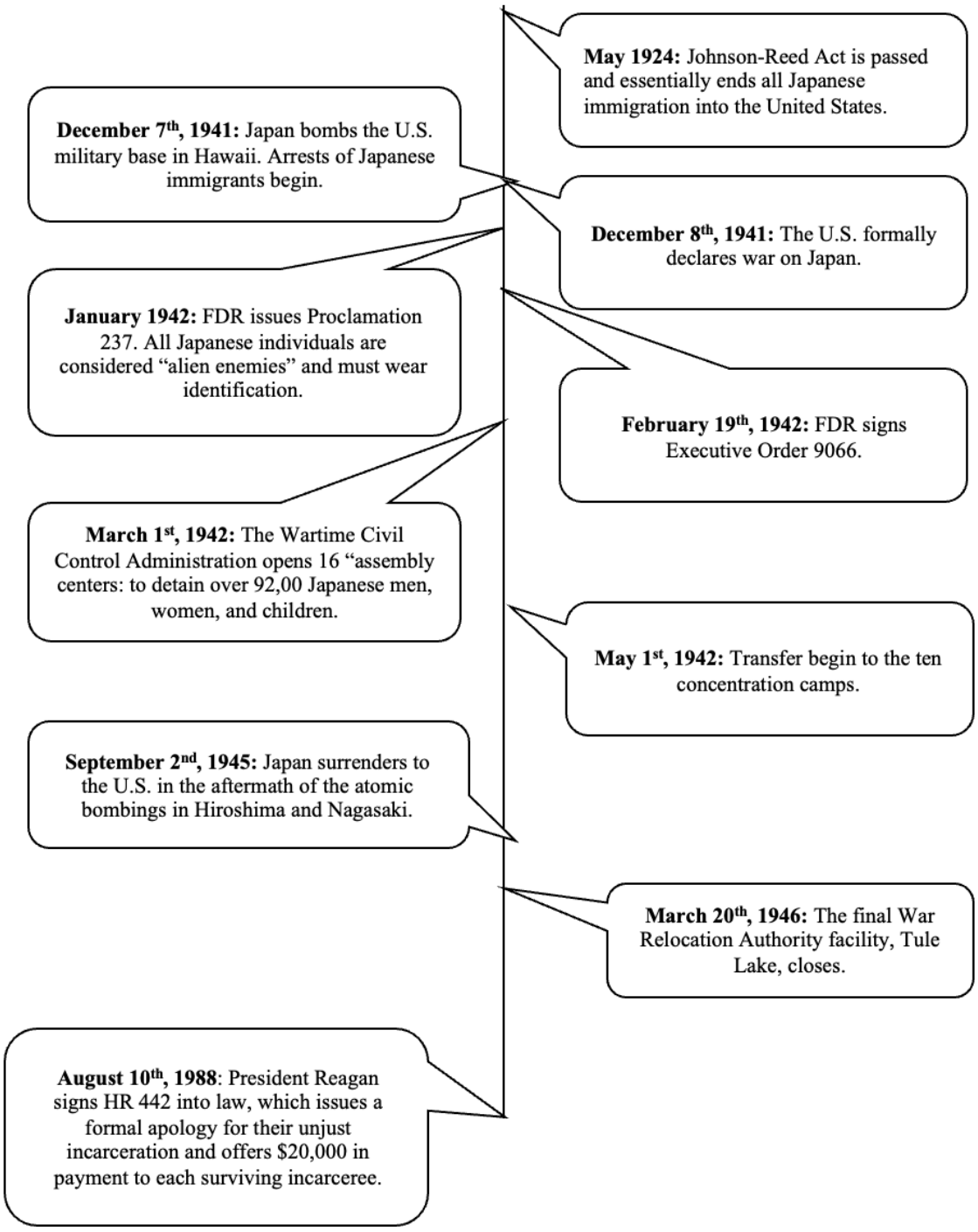

[1] "Timeline," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Last modified January 2020. https://encyclopedia.densho.org/timeline/.

Notes on Terminology

In order to understand the intention placed behind each term that was employed in this research, it is necessary to explain the significance of the terms I chose to use that align with that of many scholars of this dark period in United States history. Below, I define some common terms in Japanese American parlance, the all-important agency which ran the camps, and the reasoning behind my word choice for two key terms.

Issei vs. Nisei

Making distinctions between different generations of individuals of Japanese descent, especially those living in the United States at this time, is key to understanding the way they viewed themselves in relation to their family members, their community, and mainstream society. *Issei* is a term regularly used to describe individuals of Japanese descent that migrated to the United States between 1885 and 1924. They were considered the "first generation" to settle in the U.S. and were typically middle-aged or older by the outbreak of World War II.[2] *Nisei,* is a term used to define the group of (second-generation) Japanese individuals that will be the focus of this thesis. They were typically born and educated in the United States. And most notably, the vast majority of Niseis were U.S. citizens by birth and typically children or young adults when they were sent to the camps.[3] Although the question of one's citizenship status mattered little to the U.S. government, this divide between the generations significantly shaped the way they understood their own identities and interactions with one another.

War Relocation Authority (WRA)

The War Relocation Authority was a federal agency created solely for managing the approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans that were forcibly removed from their homes on the

[2] "Issei," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Last modified March 19, 2013, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Issei/.
[3] "Nisei." *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Nisei.

West Coast during World War II. While briefly headed by Milton Eisenhower, the WRA was ultimately led by Director Dillon S. Meyer, who managed the building and operation of the ten concentration camps that incarcerated the Japanese Americans from Pearl Harbor to V-J Day. Among the many notable policies they enacted, the WRA established an economic policy of equal pay for men and women within the confines of the camps. Although many argue that this was aimed to demoralize the patriarchal figures within families, it also resulted in the increased socioeconomic independence of an entire generation of Japanese American women. The agency is also relevant to this thesis because of its influence on camp newspapers and their explicit desire to "Americanize" the Japanese Americans to prepare them for resettlement in the postwar period.[4]

Why "Concentration Camps" and not "Internment Camps"?

Throughout this thesis, I refer to the facilities which imprisoned over 110,000 Japanese Americans during World War II as "concentration camps". Although this is the preferred term among Japanese American activists, scholars, and those who were incarcerated in them, the facilities are often referred to in popular culture as "internment camps". Similar to the U.S. government's use of "relocation centers" as a euphemism for such prisons, the phrase "internment camp" fails to truly capture the hardships that Japanese Americans experienced during their forced removal and incarceration. Such sites functioned as prison camps for holding large groups of civilians of Japanese descent for purely military and political purposes, unquestionably meeting the criteria of what constitutes a "concentration camp".[5]

[4] "War Relocation Authority," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/War%20Relocation%20Authority.

[5] "Terminology," *Densho Encyclopedia,* Accessed November 2021, https://densho.org/terminology/#concentration_camps.

Why is the hyphen absent in "Japanese American"?

Drawing from decisions by the *New York Times*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and the *Associated Press Stylebook*, I chose to not include a hyphen when referring to the term "Japanese American" in both noun and adjective forms. My decision aligns with voices from various Asian American communities, where activists have expressed that the hyphen has often been weaponized to assert the supposedly inherent inferiority and "Otherness" of our identities. In an effort to lift up the stories of Nisei youth during their incarceration, it makes the most sense for my research to utilize the terminology that best reflects the resilience and power of my fellow Japanese Americans.[6]

[6] Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, "I am Asian American. No hyphen required," *MIC*. 31 May 2021. https://www.mic.com/impact/i-am-asian-american-no-hyphen-required-81037228.

Introduction

> Once more I felt like a despised, pathetic two-headed freak, a Japanese and an American, neither of which seemed to be doing me any good.[7]
> -Monica Sone, former incarceree and author of *Nisei Daughter*

Less than twenty-four hours after President Roosevelt made his "Day of Infamy" speech following the bombing of the Pearl Harbor military base, the FBI began rounding up and arresting hundreds of Japanese immigrants because of their role as "community leaders". By January of 1942, Japanese American families like Monica's were certain that their parents and grandparents were going to be arrested and detained by the U.S. government, forced to relocate because their (unconfirmed) ties to Imperial Japan posed a "security risk" to the nation. And while Japanese American adolescents, the *Niseis*, were prepared to step up and manage family businesses and properties during wartime, they were shocked to learn that Executive Order 9066 determined that they were "enemy aliens", too.[8]

The early weeks of 1942 consisted of lobbying campaigns by xenophobic farmers on the West Coast and mounting pressure on President Roosevelt to contain national security threats related to the Axis Powers (Japan, Germany, and Italy). And beginning in March 1942, approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes, taken to temporary "assembly centers" made up of straw mattresses and vacated horse stalls, and eventually imprisoned in one of the ten concentration camps across the most inhospitable regions of the United States: Manzanar (CA), Poston (AZ), Gila River (AZ), Topaz (UT), Granada (CO), Heart Mountain (WY), Minidoka (ID), Tule Lake (CA), Jerome (AR), and Rohwer (AR).[9]

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[7] Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 158-159.
[8] Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 158.
[9] "American Concentration Camps," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October

Within these camps enclosed by barbed wire and armed guards, over half of the incarcerees were Nisei children and adolescents, the majority of whom were American citizens. Forced to live their key developmental years in crowded barracks, often lacking clean water, sufficient food, adequate educational resources, and privacy for themselves and their families, these young people were confronted with several important questions: Who were they? Were they Japanese? Were they American? Would they ever be accepted in either society or would they have to forge a new set of identities?

Figure 1: An American flag is shown at full mast in front of the barracks at the Manzanar concentration camp, the first of the ten to open in March 1942.[10]

Acknowledging Assimilation Discourse

These questions have long been a source of debate among historians and sociologists discussing Japanese American "internment". As recent as 2021, scholars across various disciplines have argued that Japanese Americans uniformly responded to discriminatory sentiments against them by attempting to assimilate to the ideals of white American society. In a

2021, https://densho.org/learn/introduction/american-concentration-camps/.

[10] Dorothea Lange, "Rarely Seen Photos of Japanese Internment," *New York Times*, December 2017. https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/rarely-seen-photos-japanese-internment-dorothea-lange/.

comparative study of pre-war census data and logs from the concentration camps of chosen baby names, one scholar argued that the increased number of "Americanized" names of Nisei children (e.g., Kenneth instead of Kenji) is one example of their desire to perform their "Americanness" following the attack on Pearl Harbor.[11] This belief in the desire of Japanese Americans to assimilate to "American ideals" (read: white Protestant America) is also reflected in internal government documents during World War II. In a memorandum on Nisei assimilation, a WRA official challenged the stereotype that the "Orientals" were unassimilable by saying the following:

> The recreational activities of [the] Nisei are also characteristically American…The two most popular sports in the centers are baseball and basketball…not only do the Nisei play those American games, but they play them skilfully [sic]…the typical behavior of the second generation Japanese Americans is clearly much more characteristic of American culture than it is of Japanese culture. Beyond a doubt, if present tendencies continue, the Japanese will continue to become increasingly American until they achieve complete acculturation.[12]

Simply put, government workers who closely watched and hoped to successfully "Americanize" the imprisoned Niseis believed that their participation in recreational and other social activities is what distinguished them from the Issei generation and would ultimately aid them in their "acculturation" to mainstream society in the postwar period.

But what did the Nisei youth think? What was the driving force behind their organization and participation in recreational activities and sociocultural events within the confines of the camps?

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[11] Martin Saavedra,"Kenji or Kenneth? Pearl Harbor and Japanese-American Assimilation," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, Vol. 185, (2021). https://www2.oberlin.edu/faculty/msaavedr/kenji.pdf.

[12] Philleo Nash,"Nisei Assimilation Memorandum," The War Relocation Authority Collection, Harry S. Truman Library. July 1943. https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/memorandum-nisei-assimilation-july-21-1943-papers-philleo-ash?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1.

Acknowledging the foundational research of assimilation theorists of the mid to late twentieth century can help one to understand the complicated position of the second-generation Japanese American incarcerees. Unlike more recent scholarship, sociologist Milton Gordon recognized the self-awareness by racial minorities that they were not given the same "siren call of welcome" to the social institutions of white Protestant America as other second-generation Americans.[13] Gordon's recognition of the heightened exclusion experienced by racial minorities helps current observers understand the tendency of immigrants to build a "society within a society". Similar to the legalized discrimination other racial minorities faced, Executive Order 9066 was a turning point in the trajectory of Nisei youth identity formation. Confronted with their imprisonment *because of* their racial/ethnic identity, their incarceration declared that their path to achieving the "American Dream" would be much more arduous than they previously imagined. As such, their myriad of actions within the camps represents their diverse responses to such a realization.

In this thesis, I seek to refocus conversations about Japanese American incarceration and assimilation on Nisei youth, analyzing the role of the press in bringing community concerns into the public record and highlighting how Niseis actively reconstructed their own identities following their legalized exclusion from the rest of the American citizenry. Through an examination of internal press coverage of important sociocultural activities – dances, beauty contests, female-advice columns, and marriages – it will become clear that these concentration camps were liminal spaces where two divergent developments occurred simultaneously: Issei community leaders and WRA officials clung to hopes that Japanese Americans would

[13] Milton M. Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," *Daedalus* 90, no. 2 (1961): 263–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026656.

successfully assimilate to white America, while Nisei youth used their lived experiences to enter complex (and at times, contradictory) negotiations to reconstruct their intersectional identities regarding race, sexuality, gender, and communal preservation.

Chapter One:

'Hey Gals, Get Yer Man!': How Press Coverage of Dances, Hops, and Proms Influenced Constructions of Nisei American Identity

During an early Saturday morning in the spring of 1943, there was a persistent buzz of excitement among the nearly one hundred young Nisei women as they piled into buses and made their way to Hattiesburg, Mississippi for the weekend's festivities. By the evening, they had found themselves far beyond the barbed wire fences that had kept them, and their families imprisoned for the last twelve months. The women chattered with one another, scrambled to iron their dresses, and quickly freshened up before they met their most gracious hosts for the evening.[14] In a massive ballroom at Camp Shelby, the women (and their dutiful chaperones) were greeted with programs and corsages by the men of the 442nd Regiment: an infantry unit comprised almost entirely of Nisei men. Quickly after introductions, the Nisei youth found themselves spinning, bopping, and swaying to the swing melodies of the Station Hospital Medical Detachment Orchestra. As reported by *The Reveille*, the highlight of the night came when the young men presented a lei to their respective dancing partners.[15] Less than twenty-four hours later, the same young women found themselves back on buses to the Jerome and Rohwer concentration camps. In addition to their participation in (at least) two USO-sponsored dances (documented by the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations) at Camp Shelby, the young women regularly entertained the men of the 442nd regiment within the confines of the Jerome and Rohwer camps.

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[14] Margaret, Sorenson. letter to Mary Tsukamoto, 26 May 1943, record group 210, entry 48, box 262, folder 67.011, War Relocation Authority Records, National Archives, Washington DC. *Rohwer Outpost*, 5 May 1943.

[15] John Howard, "The Politics of Dancing under Japanese-American Incarceration," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 52 (2001): 124, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289750.

Figure 2: Japanese American soldiers of the 442nd Combat Team slow dancing with Japanese American women of the Jerome and Rohwer camps in Arkansas.[16]

Amidst a globally devastating war and a xenophobic cultural crusade against Japanese Americans, why was the U.S. War Department dedicating already limited resources to put on dances for young Nisei adults? Through the organization and media promotion of dances, the WRA (War Relocation Authority) and Japanese American community leaders sought to "Americanize" the Nisei youth specifically by reinvigorating the strength of patriarchy and encouraging heterosocialization. The spring dance at Camp Shelby is the most extreme manifestation of their commitment to the cause, as the U.S. government was willing to shirk previous labels of Japanese Americans as national security threats to carry busloads of young women beyond barbed wire and into the world of corsages, programs, and proms.

Before examining the press' role in the persevering popularity of dances throughout Japanese American "internment", some logistics need to be considered. First and foremost, the newspapers --whether high school ones or those for the camps at-large-- were decidedly not

[16] Bureau of Public Relations, War Department. "Japanese American soldiers of the 442nd Combat Team at dance, Camp Shelby, Mississippi, with Japanese American girls from Jerome and Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas: Dancing a Slow Dance," *Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division*, June 1943. https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97506926/.

"free": the pre- and post-publication of issues were constantly subjected to review by the WRA.[17] Equally important, the organization of dances was a group effort, often the combination of work by various student committees, chaperoned by WRA staff or community elders, and ultimately approved by WRA leadership.[18] Furthermore, the regularity of the dances (and more importantly, the normalization of such heterosocial activities) is evident by the diversity of reasons given for their occurrence: as part of larger festival celebrations, holiday parties, or even weekly "socials".[19]

The following chapter will focus on newspaper coverage of dances within the concentration camps across the U.S., specifically examining how they represent a crucial aspect of the authorities' and community leaders' desires to prove that Nisei youth were "assimilable" via participation in heterosocial events. Focus on press coverage will also uncover the tensions between the Issei and Nisei generations particularly as it relates to the newfound socioeconomic independence of Nisei women, while also acknowledging the diversity of views that complicated the formation of a distinct identity among Nisei youth. Although the press overwhelmingly reinforced sexist gender norms and promoted heteronormativity through these articles, the chapter will break down the slight variations in coverage as follows: first, those that expressed community disapproval of 'singles' through mention of couples-only events and varying admittance fees; second, their sexist targeting of young women to obtain dates to dances; third, functions in which "everyone" was invited; and fourth, the coverage that proved exceptional to such categorization.

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[17] Takeya Mizuno, "Newspapers in camp," *Densho Encyclopedia,* Accessed November 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Newspapers%20in%20camp.

[18] "Senior Prom Next Week," *Rohwer High School Hi-Lites* (Rohwer, AK), May 11th, 1945.
"300 to Enroll in Social Dance Class," *North Portland Evacuazette* (Portland, OR), July 7th, 1942.

[19] "Servicemen's Dance and Baseball Game Cancelled," *Heart Mountain Sentinel* (Ralston, WY), July 10th, 1945.

'Couples Only' and Different Admittance Fees

Just as the USO-sponsored dances at Camp Shelby encouraged young Niseis to couple up, relocation centers and concentration camps' newspaper articles across region and time demonstrate how frequently couples were glorified by the press, how the youth were financially incentivized to date in order to participate in evening events, and ultimately, the central importance of heterosociality to youth culture in the concentration camps.

In a September 1942 issue of *The Tulean Dispatch*, a dance was put on for the sanitary corps. The article expressed few details beyond the location, time, and dress code (coat and tie), but was sure to mention that it was to be a "couples-only invitational affair".[20] Often covering issues of food scarcity and national disloyalty, *The Tulean Dispatch* provided the incarcerees with the necessary information and WRA-approved procedures for social affairs such as dances.[21] In this particular case, it displayed the paper and the community's decided requirement for young Niseis looking for a social life: couple-status is required. The press of the Tule Lake camp frequently ignored the possibility of "going stag" or with platonic friends to such functions. For an article entitled "March of Dimes Dance Slated" --a dance organized to fundraise for those experiencing infantile paralysis-- the paper noted that admissions fees would be twenty-five cents per couple, with no mention of tickets being sold to anyone else.[22] Presumably, the sponsors could have sold more tickets by allowing singles to attend. Despite the fundraising nature of the event, the sponsors remained persistent in promoting heterosociality even when doing so was counterproductive to supporting important community causes.

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[20] "Sanitary Corps to Dance Tonight," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Newell, CA), September 15th, 1942.

[21] Patricia Wakida, "Tulean Dispatch (newspaper)," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tulean%20Dispatch%20(newspaper).

[22] "March of Dimes Dance Slated," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Newell, CA), January 23rd, 1943.

And while *The Tulean Dispatch* tended to publish more succinct explanations of upcoming social events, other papers like *the Gila News-Courier* and *the Amache Hi-Lite* sought to explain in greater detail both the accepted social procedures *and* the celebratory nature of the dances which singles would sorely miss. Here is a section in a December 1943 issue of *the Gila News-Courier*:

> As a spirited 1944 chases a decrepit 1943 down in the pages of history...the CAS-inspired "As Time Goes By" and Canal at the Girl Scout-sponsored "Eve Dance," aim to start the new year in style. Both dances are for couples only and both promise a 'heck of a good time'.[23]

Although *the Courier* hoped to invigorate excitement among those planning to attend, the publication also displays the regularity with which young Niseis who identified as stags were excluded from major community events (including holidays) because of their nonconformity to the increasingly explicit heterosexual dating culture. The promotion of heterosocialization by the press was seen at the high school level as well, when *the Amache Hi-Lite* released an article about how bids to the "much-awaited midterm prom" would be extended to couples, exclusively.[24] These articles illustrate a burgeoning heterosexual culture within the camps, one that rhetorically and literally isolated those that were not in heterosexual, monogamous relationships by prohibiting them from the restricted social activities they were allowed inside the camps.

[23] "Eve Dance -- Gila Celebrates as Time Goes By," *Gila News-Courier* (Yuma County, AZ), December 31st, 1943.

[24] "Mid-Term Prom to be held tomorrow night," *Amache Hi-Lite* (Granada, CO), January 14th, 1944.

Figure 3: Young Nisei couples of Tule Lake slow dance at the New Year's Dance held at the camp's hospital.[25]

Equally important to the newspapers' veneration of couples is how their articles reported on the financial disadvantage that single Nisei youth experienced, specifically if they hoped to attend the frequently held evening dances. Once again *the Gila News-Courier* provides helpful insight into the conditions of such social events, explaining that the upcoming Halloween Dance of 1942 would have varying admittance rates based on one's relationship status: "Couples admitted free until 8:30. Stags will be charged 10 cents".[26] The disparate treatment of couples versus stags was not isolated to one camp either, as *The Poston Chronicle* pragmatically reported that the camp's benefit dance for tuberculosis patients would be free for servicemen, 40 cents per couple, and 50 cents per single.[27] These are just two documented examples of how preferential treatment of couples (by those that organized and approved the dances, as well as the newspapers) financially punished those who did not adhere to heterosexual norms if they wanted to be included in camp social life at all.

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[25] Bagley, "This New Year's dance was held at the camp's hospital," *National Archives and Records Administration Collection*, January 1945, https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-128/.

[26] "Dances, Past and Present," *Gila News-Courier* (Yuma County, AZ), October 31st, 1942.

[27] "Benefit Dance Date Set for Tuberculosis Patients," *The Poston Chronicle* (Yuma County, AZ) February 12th, 1944.

Singles were made to feel like outsiders, social pariahs if they were unable to find a date, and at times excluded from nighttime social events altogether. Ultimately, both the 'couples only' framing and the difference in admittance fees display how dances were used to promote and normalize heterosocialization at a time when Nisei youth were questioning and reconstructing every facet of their identities, including their sexuality.

Hey Gals, Get Yer Man!

Newspaper articles also promoted dances specifically by targeting young Nisei women to find a date. Through this gendered media campaign, the press and community leaders attempted to diminish Nisei womens' identities as autonomous individuals, insisted that their value stemmed from their relationship status, and burdened them with the responsibility to find a suitor if they were to be accepted by Japanese American society.

Perhaps, a brief background on how Nisei dating culture was perceived in Japanese American communities (particularly by Issei parents) *pre-internment* is necessary to understand why the media's emphasis for young women to find dates during their incarceration is so jarring. In *Nisei Daughter*, Monica Sone discussed the significant events of her life as a Japanese American girl in Seattle during the early 20th century, including the persistent miscommunications and fundamental disagreements between Issei parents and their Nisei children. One occasion she cites is extremely effective in exhibiting the general opinion of Isseis on heterosexual dating. After her parents found that Monica was hiding a photograph of a boy following her graduation from grammar school, they scolded her and exclaimed that thinking of boyfriends would lead to the "softening of the brain" and the "weakening of the character".[28] Even before this confrontation, Monica knew not to pursue her crush because doing so would

[28] Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), 126.

"bring an avalanche of disapproval" from her parents.[29] In other words, Sone's retelling of this moment in her teenage life *before* internment displays the common view of Issei parents and the universal understanding by young Nisei women at the time: dating was not allowed.

The promotion of heterosocialization, particularly the designation of responsibility on young Nisei women to "find a man" occurred early in the internment process but continued throughout their incarceration. In the early days of the Marysville Assembly Center in California, an *Arbo-Gram* article read:

> HEY GALS, GET YER MAN: tonight is the TolOptional dance. The procedure is: Date that bashful beau if he doesn't...or vice-versa. Let's all pile in that bandwagon and beat a path for the Reception hall around 8:30 pm.[30]

Although this could be interpreted as allowing young women to make their own choices about who they would like to take to the "TolOptional" dance, it still contained the assumption that they need some form of male approval (i.e., a "yes" from their potential male date) in order to participate in camp social life. Furthermore, it included an explicit demand and endorsement by the press of heteronormative social procedures similar to those mentioned in the "couples-only" articles.

Another example of targeting a young female audience is seen in *The Tulare News*, where limited space to report on social affairs did not prevent the paper from instructing Nisei girls to "Get that date, quick!" if they hoped to attend the "girl-date-boy street dance" the following Saturday.[31] Once again, the concentration camp newspapers give observers of the present and past an opportunity to see the role the media played in reinforcing social norms that

[29] Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 125.
[30] "Tolo Dance," *Arbo-Gram* (Marysville, CA), June 13th, 1942.
[31] "Girls to Date Boys for Dance," *The Tulare Times* (Newell, CA) July 29th, 1942.

placed young Nisei women in a metaphorical box, just as they began to gain socioeconomic independence and challenge the patriarchal structure of their families.

Figure 4: Several couples pose for a photo at the Sweetheart Dance at Minidoka Concentration Camp.[32]

Through the publication of such articles, newspapers were doing more than simply encouraging heterosexuality, they were targeting young women, normalizing for the community-at-large the practice of measuring a young woman's worth according to her ability to find a date. Alongside the role of WRA authorities and Issei community leaders, these articles prescribed restrictive dating requirements for one to be included in camp social activities, while endorsing the idea that sexist gender norms were endemic to "real" American culture. These examples also display, again, that these dances were not just social activities for young people trying to cope with unjust incarceration on the basis of ethnic identity, but institutions of power used them as quasi-mating rituals, encouraging these activities in the hopes that it would help Nisei youth become real "Americans" and consequently policed the behavior of newly independent Nisei women.

[32] "Attendees at a Sweetheart Dance," *War Relocation Authority, Minidoka Collection,* 1942-1945. https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-fom-1-65/.

"Everyone Invited"

Although the aforementioned articles present the most overt examples of how heteronormativity and gender shaped the way young incarcerees navigated their social life, there are other key ways the press wrote about dances that had a similar effect on the Japanese American community during this period.

One month prior to the official opening of the Poston camp in June 1942, Niseis held a high school dance that was reported on in the daily camp bulletin.[33] Among informational bits about open jobs, typhoid vaccine appointments, and Sunday school meetings, the bulletin also noted that a "social dance" for high school-age girls and boys would be the following Friday, specifying that *everyone* was invited.[34] Notably, the article about this dance differs from the exclusionary or sexist overtones of previous pieces. Arguably more important than its seemingly inclusive sentiments, however, is the urgency in which this dance was organized and published by camp leaders. More specifically, the fact that Poston reporters and authority figures held and wrote about such social events in the earliest days of Japanese American incarceration displays how closely tied dances were to the social order of the camps.

Encouragement of "inclusive" teen participation in dances was not uniquely associated with the Poston press. In an issue of the Stockton (California) Assembly Center's *El Joaquin*, the press hoped to rally Nisei youth to the "Midsummer Mixup":

> A starry sky, a soft breeze, and scintillating melodies -- it's the 'Midsummer Mix-up' for the dance lovers this Saturday evening…Everybody, come out and be part of a merry, merry mix-up.[35]

[33] Thomas Fujita-Rony, "Poston (Colorado River)," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Poston%20(Colorado%20River).
[34] "Dance!" *The Poston Official Bulletin* (Yuma County, AZ), May 20th, 1942.
[35] "Midsummer Mixup!" *El Joaquin* (Stockton, CA) July 15th, 1942.

Using positive rhetoric and enticing imagery to describe a dream-like night amidst the daily monotony of their imprisonment, this paper clearly hoped to play a role in increasing Nisei attendance at an intentionally romantic event, even if people in attendance hoped to platonically socialize with their peers.

During the later years of Japanese American incarceration, some newspapers broadcasted events in ways that were not explicitly exclusionary, but still normalized the concept that dances were specifically meant for heterosexual socialization. One example of this is a July 1945 issue of the *Manzanar Free Press*. An article titled "To Hold 'Penny Dance' Tonight in Auditorium", instructed Niseis to bring their pennies and come as "couples", "stags", and "stagettes".[36] The explicit use of gender binary vocabulary (e.g., girl/boy, stag/stagette) is evidence that heterosexual union, rather than encouraging general socialization between Nisei youth, was the primary goal of the press' articles.

These publications may have been ostensibly more accepting of "singles", but it was ultimately to serve the same ends as the previous articles: to encourage heterosocialization in a way that did not occur at the same scale in the pre-WWII period within Japanese American communities. These serve as additional examples of how pivotal the press' role was in shaping community views on dances, while exemplifying the intensity with which community leaders sought to influence the construction of Nisei youth sexual identities and culture.

Sponsored by the Press: An Exception and a Reinforcement

Certainly, the press within the various camps and relocation centers proved significant to the popularity of dances among adolescent internees, encouraging them (particularly Nisei

[36] "To Hold 'Penny Dance' Tonight in Auditorium," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), July 14th, 1945.

women) to rush to the latest prom or hop to "couple up". Each previously mentioned article, however, exemplifies the press' *verbal* endorsement of such activities. The WRA-censored media's financial sponsorship was found in a July 1942 article of *The Mercedian*. Not only did the article mention that the "Vice Versa Hop" was sponsored by the press, it also instructed girls to "go out and get those boys" because the newspaper and community leaders had planned the event for *their* benefit.[37] One of the fascinating aspects of this article is that it contains every archetype of "encouragement" that previously mentioned articles used to pressure young Niseis, especially women to get into serious, heterosexual relationships (e.g., only admitting couples, targeting young women to find dates, etc.). Furthermore, the fact that it explicitly mentioned that it was sponsored by the press, although only one article was found, displays how the press played a multitude of roles (including financial) in the establishment of heteronormativity in Nisei youth culture.

Whether it was through social isolation, explicit encouragement, or the normalization of heterosocial activities, the press held a significant role in the shaping of young Nisei lives, especially in their frequent publication of articles about dances, hops, and proms. The press worked hand-in-hand with Issei community leaders and WRA authorities to set a precedent for how they understood heterosocialization, reactionary sexism, and adolescent dating to be significant aspects of mainstream American culture, complicating intergenerational relationships and influencing the construction of Nisei sexual identities during World War II. Ultimately, this coincides with a larger assimilation movement by Isseis, demonstrating the inextricable tie

[37] "Vice Versa Hop' Set; Girls, Your Chance!" *The Mercedian* (Merced, CA) July 25th, 1942.

between patriarchy and mainstream American society, and the tangled milieu which Niseis had to navigate through to construct a new set of identities during their incarceration.

Chapter Two:

Miss (Japanese) America – "Queens Contests" & Female Advice Columns as Sites of Social Change and the Press as a Public Forum

Little Tokyo, a bustling ethnic enclave in Downtown Los Angeles, hosted its first "Nisei Week" in the late summer of 1934. As the Great Depression continued to wreak economic havoc in communities across the United States, the second-generation Japanese Americans established this annual festival to symbolize their role as leaders in the community, to bring new business to the area, and to display pride in their Japanese heritage.[38] The following year, the festival added pageantry to its itinerary, crowning Alice Watanabe as the first "Nisei Week Queen". And what began as a way to increase participation in the annual ethnic community festival, the Nisei Queen Coronation became the main attraction, as Japanese American girls filled the streets of Little Tokyo hoping to catch a glimpse of the kimono-clad queen. Similar to how Miss America came to embody the "American Dream" in the early 20th century, Nisei Week Queens represented the perseverance of the Japanese American community in an environment that was hostile to racial "others".[39] Just seven years later, the same people who celebrated the annual coronation of a young Nisei Queen and the "spectacular growth" of local businesses, gathered in the town square before being shipped off to concentration camps that sprawled out across the most desolate regions of the United States.

[38] Gwen Muranaka, "Nisei Week History: A Love Letter to Little Tokyo," *Nisei Week*, https://niseiweek.org/about/#legacy.

[39] Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1983), 254.

Figure 5: The first Nisei Week Queen, Alice Watanabe (center), is crowned in August 1935. She is pictured with the rest of the royal court and their male chaperones.[40]

The tradition of pageants continued in the camps, where Labor Day celebrations and successful harvests culminated with the frequent coronation of a Miss *insert concentration camp name here* from the rudimentary "relocation centers" of 1942 to the tail-end of the war years in the largest concentration camps such as Manzanar.[41] Several questions arise for those attuned to the traumatizing struggles of camp life. After being forcefully removed from their homes and "relocated" to concentrations camps because of institutionalized racism and xenophobia, why were "Queens Contests" continuing to take place?[42] If resources were so scarce in the camps that barracks lacked running water and schools rarely had up-to-date textbooks, how were camp queens being awarded pearls and ornately designed crowns?[43] Scholars have previously explored these questions, commonly arriving at the conclusion that the presence of such pageants amidst wartime hysteria was an attempt by the incarcerees to transform young Nisei women from "alien

[40] "The first Nisei Week Queen, Alice Watanabe, was crowned in 1935," *Nisei Week Foundation*, 1935. https://niseiweek.org/about/#legacy.

[41] "Senior Hi Co Ed Queen Contest Reaches Climax," *The Rohwer Outpost* (Rohwer, AR), December 6th, 1944.

[42] Newspapers used "queens contest" and "queen contest" interchangeably when covering these beauty pageants, but for the sake of consistency, this paper will simply use "queens contest".

[43] "Miss Poston To Be Chosen By Residents; Huge Campaign Planned," *Poston Press Bulletin* (Poston, AZ), September 29th, 1942.

others" into "quintessentially all-American girls".[44] Although previous scholars plausibly contended that race and racial assimilation played a significant role in the types of activities that young Niseis engaged in during their incarceration, the pageants had existed long before World War II, with purported aims that were much more complex than merely adhering to the repressive beauty ideals present in white America.

This chapter will examine how newspaper coverage of beauty contests and the popularity of female-focused advice columns in weekly publications illustrates how both served as sites of social change as gender relations shifted because of WRA policies and Nisei-specific cultural sentiments. In order to fully and accurately analyze the importance of queens contests to gendered social relations in the camps, the operational specifics of beauty contests and female-focused columns must be addressed. These beauty contests, which were often organized by mixed-gender committees led by community leaders, also involved the funding and participation of War Relocation Authority (WRA) officials.[45] Following the traditions established by the Nisei Week Festival, these contests were often a part of larger community celebrations and occasionally chaired by former Nisei queens.[46] The female advice columns (e.g., The Feminine Forum in the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*), although heavily censored by the WRA, were often written by young women who gave each other advice on cultivating character, dating, and the challenges of homemaking in the barracks, while also debating how to handle misogynistic comments from Nisei men.[47]

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[44] Malia, McAndrew. "Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows: The Performance of Gender and Race by Nisei Youth During World War II," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, Vol. 7, No.1 (2014): 48.

[45] "Queen Contest Voting Closed; Results Awaited," *Denson Tribune* (Jerome, AR), May 25th, 1943.

[46] "15 Cuties Entered in Queen Contest," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), August 27th, 1942.

[47] "Feminine Forum," *Santa Anita Pacemaker* (Santa Anita, CA), September 2nd, 1942.

Through an analysis of how these contests were used to invoke civic pride and initiate conversations around the "ideal" qualities of a Nisei woman, it is evident that race was not the sole defining characteristic of Japanese American life in the camps. Instead, a spectrum of views on race and gender created a Nisei youth culture that was complex and at times, contradictory. Furthermore, considering the public forum of female-advice columns alongside frequent participation in camp beauty contests, one can begin to see how Nisei women were constantly confronting what it meant to be an *American* Beauty, to themselves and to the world.

Queens Contests to "Invoke Civic Pride" and "Thrill the Fibers of Democracy"

In the early 19th-century, American beauty contests and community festivals were largely in their infancy, but their presence was still viewed as significant enough to American culture that some scholars suggested that they existed to invoke civic pride, bring communities together, and "thrill the fibers of democracy".[48] One hundred years later, it seems as though these theories could explain the abundance of queens contests across every Japanese American concentration camp during World War II. Newspaper coverage of these contests displays how the focus of festival pageants went beyond the objectification of Nisei women's bodies or potential motivations to appear more "American" to the outside world. Through an emphasis on the large crowds of spectators, the lavish prizes presented to the royal courts, and the democratic nature of the queen's selection, it becomes clear that these pageants and by extension the camp queens were tasked with raising group morale and confronting what it meant to be a *Japanese* American during tumultuous times.

Despite the volatile conditions of Japanese American life following Executive Order 9066, queens contests began taking place just a few short months later and camp newspapers

[48] Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States*, ed. John William Ward (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1961), 305-308.

were determined to publicize and emphasize their success. A September 1942 issue of *The Tulean Dispatch*, the newspaper described how a crowd of 6,000 "knelt before the altar of beauty" as Tule Lake crowned its first "Labor Day queen". The article continued by explaining in great detail the ballot counting process and described the affair as having "all the atmosphere of a presidential campaign," with supporters of particular contestants making passionate stump speeches and dancing music confirming the celebratory nature of the festivities.[49] Certainly, the assertion that the queens contest successfully invigorated the community with hope and excitement is evident through the article's documentation of attendance rates, with nearly half of its 15,000 residents participating in the Labor Day celebration.[50] Even more curious is the article's comparison of the evening's atmosphere with the well-known antics of American presidential politics, as they suggested that the rally was not merely a contest measuring the beauty of its participants but presented the community with an opportunity to participate in a democratically inspired social event. Some historians might attribute this to the Japanese Americans' desire to perform and project their proximity to whiteness even if the contests were not solely focused on "American Beauty". However, it is possible that this was an attempt by community leaders and newspaper editors to reinvigorate civic pride and inject hope into a population that was mourning the loss of the lives they had built for themselves outside the barbed wire fences.

Another fascinating theme present in newspaper coverage of camp pageantry takes the form of its reports of the lavish prizes that Nisei women received once they were crowned Queen or named to Her Majesty's court. In one February 1943 issue of *The Rohwer Outpost*, Miss

[49] "Queen Contestants Draw Record Crowd of 6,000," *Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA) September 1st, 1942.
[50] "Camp Layout - Tule Lake Unit," *U.S. Department of the Interior*, https://www.nps.gov/tule/planyourvisit/upload/Camp_Layout.pdf.

Shigeko Nakano was not only crowned the "queen of Rohwer", she was issued a silver crown and a gold wristwatch, while her two attendants were each given a sterling silver vanity set.[51] The generous bestowal of luxurious prizes to the Nisei women of the court was not unique to the Rohwer camp, as other locations such as Poston gifted its winner with a gown, pearls, and a crown, while also noting that the lucky winner would be recognized as "THE gal" of the facility.[52] Although a number of scholars have insisted that the publication of such prize packages was a "performance" and strategy by Japanese Americans to reinsert themselves into a narrative of American prosperity, the newspaper archives require a more nuanced analysis. While it may certainly be possible that the desire to belong to larger American society partially motivated the existence of and publications about such contests, it is also reasonable to propose that they were performing a level of gilded opulence for the Japanese American communities to push back against the humiliating and hopeless conditions of camp life.

Equally important was the queens contests' relationship to community values and incarcerees' negotiation with facets of their American identity, which can be seen through newspaper coverage that carefully documented the democratic voting process before the announcement of camp queens. One example of this is in a May 1943 article published in the *Denson Tribune*:

> Her Majesty will be selected from the three top contestants by a representative committee…Mary Ikeguchi was leading the semi-final field of six candidates with 127 votes…she was followed by Bessie Nakashima with 88 and Kiku Nakamichi with 57.[53]

[51] "Miss Shigeko Nakano Chosen Center Queen," *The Rohwer Outpost* (Rohwer, AR), February 28th, 1943.
[52] "Miss Poston to Be Chosen By Residents; Huge Campaign Planned," *Poston Press Bulletin* (Poston, AZ) September 29th, 1942.
[53] "Queen Contest Voting Closed; Results Awaited," *Denson Tribune* (Jerome, AR), May 25th, 1943.

The democratic roots of the queens contests extended past the voting process, with community participation and enthusiasm for these events visible through the use of posters showing favor for one particular Nisei woman over others, which was especially common if she was representing a specific "block" within the barracks. Pictured below is one example:

Figure 6: Two signs posted on a barrack advertising board at Tule Lake Concentration Camp campaign for Louise Matsuura and Lillian Takagaki to win the Labor Queens Contest in September 1942.[54]

Overall, the publication of the intricacies of the voting procedures for the respective contests as well as the campaigns that mobilized enthusiasm for the camp coronations, exemplified that the pageants required incarcerees –particularly the younger Niseis– to recognize these events as necessary to community survival just as the Nisei Week Festival was for Japanese American businesses a decade prior.

Each of these articles displays how the intention of beauty contests acted as more than just a form of gendered subjugation for Nisei women participants. And while camp newspapers were always subjected to vigilant censorship by the WRA, they nevertheless reveal – through the large crowds at these contests, the ornate prize packages for camp queens, and the insistence on

[54] "Beauty Queen Contest Advertising," *National Archives and Records Administration Collection,* September 1942. https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-318/.

the inclusion of a democratic voting and campaign process – that these contests were not merely attempts by Nisei women and their peers to recast themselves as close to the (white) American ideal, but sustained efforts to solidify their roles as leaders in the community in order to "thrill the fibers of democracy" and invoke civic pride as they were being alienated and imprisoned from the rest of the nation.

Queens Contests Spark Complex Conversations: Popularity Over Beauty

Amidst the regal pomp of the frequent beauty contests and the degrading monotony of daily life in the camps, a group of young Nisei women decided to organize a protest against such conditions. In "Fems Vie in Repulsiveness", published in an August 1942 issue of the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, twenty-three girls, all a part of the Gamma Atinans' social club, participated in a satirical take on the popular queens contest. Run by fellow young women in the club, they competed for the title of "the most repulsive" with Amy Akizuki earning the title.[55] Though unusual, this episode displays the tensions that existed, especially among the Nisei youth as gender relations were shifting dramatically during this short period. Moreover, its publication in the relocation center's main newspaper also suggests the event was recognized as legitimate, resulting in the newspapers serving as an essential public forum for complex conversations regarding the contests and gender norms at-large, beyond their collective status as racialized "others".

Often times the nature of such contests are quickly categorized as sexist and repressive of women by feminist observers and some scholars, insisting that the public display of Nisei women's bodies is not only objectifying but simultaneously a failed attempt by the Japanese American community to recast themselves in the public culture as "culturally indistinguishable"

[55] "Fems View in Repulsiveness," *Santa Anita Pacemaker* (Santa Anita, CA) August 1st, 1942.

from white American women.[56] The following articles suggest the prominence of a number of queens contests in the concentration camps that (at least nominally) prioritized personality and/or popularity over beauty, again invoking the importance of community participation in such social events.

The promotion of "personality" as an ideal for Nisei women was highlighted in an article for *The Tulean Dispatch* in August 1942, which succinctly listed the event's sponsors and explained the secret ballot selection process while specifying that it was a *personality* queens contest.[57] Unlike previously mentioned news accounts of such pageants, this reporter reinforced the notion that characteristics beyond a Nisei woman's physical appearance were valued in the Japanese American community as the queens were viewed as important representatives of the minority group, especially once they reintegrated into American society. Just one month later, *The Tulean Dispatch* celebrated the crowning of Queen Shiz Tamaki, including an illustration of her with a caption that read: "The Most Popular Girl". The article added that Tamaki was met with a "huge, cheering throng" at her coronation, as she expressed thanks for the special support from "the gang at Canteen #3".[58] The Tule Lake journalist's inclusion of Tamaki's speech suggests the newspaper's desire to elevate the camaraderie present in the camps because of the contests.

And while this article highlighted Miss Tamaki's popularity and close ties to those in her unit of the Tule Lake concentration camp, the original promotional article for this contest complicated the narrative that the queens contests were solely meant for community development. Dubbed a "Search For Beauty" that would coincide with that year's Labor Day

[56] McAndrew, "Japanese American Beauty Pageants," 48.
[57] "15 Cuties Entered in Queen Contest," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), August 27th, 1942.
[58] "Canteen 3 Miss Crowned Queen Shiz, The First," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), September 6th, 1942.

celebrations, the camp's Recreational Department released the following rules for Nisei women who wished to participate: they must be 16 or older, single, and able to receive more than fifty petition signatures from other members of the camp.[59] The requirement that one must be single *and* able to amass more than fifty signatures from the community implies that not all contest organizers had the same motivations and aspirations for the young Nisei women who participated in these pageants. In fact, for chairmen from the Issei generation such as Bette Sato, these contests may have been a way to set young women up for lives as wives and homemakers and reinforce the prewar social order, just as Nisei women were gaining socioeconomic independence. The journalists and community organizers at Tule Lake were not the only ones hoping to draw attention to the way queens contests could help Nisei women become successful wives and mothers. In an early issue of the *Manzanar Free Press*, an article was published about the return of past Nisei queen attendants to the camp:

> Masa Fujioka Kunitomi, Dorothy Iijima Fujino, and Maye Noma, past nisei queen attendants are here in camp. Two are happily married while Maye Noma is working as a dental assistant.[60]

The newspaper's decision to identify two of the three returning women according to their marital status is just one example of the spectrum of values that were being promoted (e.g., beauty vs. personality/popularity; marriage) as well as the complex conversations that took place because of the queens contests. In a monoracial environment, other structural inequalities were being placed at the forefront of community conversations, including the proper role for Nisei women in the family and the world. Queens contests served as a way for both participants and viewers to

[59] "Search for Beauty - Queen to Reign Over Labor Festivities," *The Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), August 21st, 1942.

[60] "The Women's World," *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, CA), June 6th, 1942.

confront the changing social relations precipitated by their forced removal and mass incarceration.

Perhaps the emphasis on popularity over beauty exemplifies how community involvement was of central importance in the existence of these beauty contests, contradicting previous historical assumptions that their main purpose was to prop up young Nisei women as "indistinguishable" from beautiful white women. However, coverage of these contests also confirms the repressive nature embedded in such contests and how Japanese American community leaders used it as an opportunity to promote marriage and domesticity for Nisei women as a response to their increased independence in the camps. It is at the convergence of these contradictory views that observers can begin to understand the significance of the beauty contest to Nisei women and Japanese American incarceration.

Figure 7: A Nisei queen and her attendants at the Granada, Colorado concentration camp in 1942.[61]

Even though a woman's ability to get married continued to shape the "ideal" Japanese American woman, the beauty contest served as a complex site of negotiation for Nisei women

[61] "Queen Contest," *George Ochikubo Collection*, 1942. https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-159-70/.

and their understanding of how their identities intersected. As some of them protested the contests and others promoted them, these contests drove Nisei women to constantly confront the boundaries between the Self, the Other, and the Community. To them, it was not about just performing as Americans, but unraveling what being a Japanese American woman meant during a global war.

Sites of Social Change and Debate: Female-Focused Columns

As many Niseis and their families were rounding out their third year in the concentration camps across the United States, in early 1945 the *Rohwer Hi-Lites* published an anonymous and pointed opinion piece:

> Hi Editor! Don't you notice how the girls are walking around with their noses so highly situated upon their domes?...Man, the way them rugged women walk around with that masculine swagger…you couldn't make them look worse than what they do now. I tell you, I regret that so-called Woman Suffrage Bill! - A Disgruntled Male[62]

Such sentiments reflected the rising frustrations among Nisei men, as this generation of Japanese American women were the first to experience equal pay due to WRA policies. As a result, young Nisei women gained a level of socioeconomic independence that upended the rigid patriarchal social structures of previous generations. The growing pains that resulted from this change are well-documented in newspaper archives from this period. From the most rudimentary high school newspapers to the main camp publications, Niseis were debating what it meant to be a "fem" in a world with no privacy, but unprecedented economic and social opportunities for young women.

Examination of the pervasive presence of female-focused columns is necessary to develop a thorough understanding of Nisei youth culture, especially how Nisei women were

[62] "Very Pop - Them Gals," *Rohwer Hi-Lites* (Rohwer, AR), February 14th, 1945.

beginning to contend with their intersectional identities, combat repressive power structures, and determine the possibilities for their lives after internment. Consideration of these discussions alongside those that were sparked by queens contests, especially because neither occurred in isolation, shapes a narrative in which race is clearly not the lone issue plaguing Japanese American youth. Instead, the concentration camps represent a complex site of social change, especially as it relates to gender that would be seen on a larger scale in the postwar United States.

Male anxieties such as those expressed in the aforementioned op-ed did not go unrecognized by the young women of the camps. Lily Shoji, who had an ongoing column in *The Mercedian* (California) titled "Femi-a-Lites", wrote about the "rudeness" women encountered from the "stronger sex". Upon acknowledging these social problems that emerged early on in camp life, Shoji went on to declare that everyone should have "a little more respect for the fems".[63] Shoji's weekly column not only displays the demand for a female-led, female-focused section of the newspaper, it also exemplifies how Nisei women were beginning to recognize and demand changes to the ways they were being treated on both a personal and systemic level. Issues facing young women living in the camps were also expressed in the *North Portland Evacuzette*, which published an article offering sympathy for the specific struggles women faced because of the lack of privacy innate to barrack-style living. The article even went as far as to say that, "...it is a woman's privilege to do what she wishes,".[64] Even with censorship by the WRA, these publications illustrate that a conversation was taking place amongst Nisei youth about the impact of changing cultural norms on everyday camp life.

[63] Lily Shoji, "Femi-a-Lites," *The Mercedian* (Merced, CA) August 21st, 1942.
[64] "No Privacy," *North Portland Evacuzette* (Portland, OR) August 7th, 1942.

Small forms of protest by young Nisei women, demanding a right to their autonomy and equal treatment to young men, were also documented in camp newspapers. In a short piece printed on the last page of the Rohwer High School newspaper, a writer expressed the need for young Niseis to be frank about the "barrier" between girls and boys and "pitch in" to knock it down.[65] As a result, this article encouraged candid conversations among young people about gender inequality and urged them to contribute to progressive societal changes. Objection over the treatment of women took an interesting form in August 1942 at the Portland Assembly Center. The local paper advertised the Alumni Girl Reserves' "All-Girl fun night", advising Nisei women to come in informal attire. The aim of the evening was to "show the boys you can have fun without them".[66] Both the organization of the event and its intentional advertising style in the *Evacuzette* align with the notion that Nisei women were confronting and navigating the boundaries placed on them in unique ways, all of which went beyond the scope of race and racial assimilation to whiteness.

Not all camp columns were staunchly progressive in their views and conversations that centered on the Female Question. For example, in an August 1942 issue of the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* (California), the "Feminine Forum" celebrated Nisei women's ability to create a "homelike atmosphere" in the relocation centers. The author recognized that "some women must have their careers" but praised those who embraced domesticity during such unprecedented times.[67] And while they exalted the Nisei women who settled in their roles as domestics and dismissed the importance of increased independence that came with working outside the home, the author still participated in a conversation about the varying roles that Nisei women could

[65] "Here's Why," *Rohwer Hi-Lites* (Rohwer, AR) February 14th, 1945.
[66] "Gal-A-Vant for Girls," *North Portland Evacuzette* (Portland, OR) August 7th, 1942.
[67] "Feminine Forum," *Santa Anita Pacemaker* (Santa Anita, CA) August 29th, 1942.

inhabit in this new age. This form of complex, and at times contradictory, discourse also took place at the high school level. Again, we return to an issue of the *Rohwer Hi-Lites*:

> This is the story of how to chase a boy, which tells mostly what not to do. One thing that doesn't change in this changing world is male psychology. Man and boy alike – they all want to feel that they are in charge of the situation – that they are the ones to give chase if there's any chasing to be done![68]

Even columns that instructed women on how to date fellow Nisei youth possessed a palpable frustration with the gendered experiences of dating and everyday life, threading many of these publications together and shedding light on the possibility of change that newspapers facilitated as public forums.

Rather than claiming that race singularly shaped the "Japanese American experience" during the War, it is important to employ an analytical lens that accounts for intersectionality, as Nisei women who participated in these contests were challenged to navigate a world that discriminated against them on account of their race and gender, *simultaneously*. Scholars such as Dr. Anne Cheng explain how the "aesthetic question" impacts race and feminism. Women of color, she notes, initiate a "confrontation with boundary", where they are in perpetual negotiation between the categories of "Self" and "Other".[69] Engaging with Dr. Cheng's theoretical framework and the presence of beauty pageants in the Japanese concentration camps leads to a multilayered narrative. Instead of merely assimilating to white American ideals of womanhood, camp newspaper coverage of these beauty contests suggests that Nisei women were participating in intricate negotiations with themselves, their ethnic peers, and the nation in order to understand their own identities. This is not to say that these contests were pinnacles of progressivism, but

[68] "Sub-Debs," *Rohwer Hi-Lites* (Rohwer, AR) February 14th, 1945.

[69] Anne Anlin Cheng,"Wounded Beauty: An Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and The Aesthetic Question," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19, no. 2 (2000): 208.

their coverage represented a site for which camp social relations can be examined and further understood. Additionally, an assessment of the almost ubiquitous presence of female-focused columns provides even more insight into communal anxieties surrounding Nisei women's newfound socioeconomic independence.

Ultimately, these articles –both in their coverage of queens contests and female-focused advice columns– show that navigating one's female identity was far more complicated than trying to become "more American". Nisei women were confronting what it meant to be simultaneously raced by the Outside and gendered by the men in the camps, all through the lens of beauty.

Chapter Three:

"Marry in Haste" - Media Promotion of Homogamy & Marriage as a Navigating Tool for Nisei American Identity

By the summer of 1942, incarcerees had found new ways to cope with their incarceration through schooling, social events, and marriage. Surrounded by stories about absentee voting, the upcoming Obon cultural festival, and the deaths of several community members, a July 1942 issue of The Tulare News (California) posted the following:

> Attention gals. Do you 'go' for men in uniforms and brass buttons? From way out "deep in the heart of Texas" comes a request for girls galore to join the 110 lonely nisei boys stationed at Camp Wolters.[70]

The advertisement, paid by a member of the United States Army, continued by explaining that they were in search of Nisei girls ages eighteen to twenty-five and that the young women should take advantage of this opportunity to "get [their] man"! Although paid advertisements for marriage in the camp newspapers were fairly rare, community discussions of dating and marriage were pervasive across nearly every concentration camp.

This raises two important questions about camp life for young Niseis. First, why were U.S. government authorities and Japanese American community leaders actively promoting marriage and dating as usual during war and internment (and why were labels of Niseis as "security risks" dropped for such purposes)? Second, what does this top-down encouragement mean in the larger conversation of how sociocultural events shaped Nisei youth culture and their understanding of their American identities during the war years?

[70] "For Girls Only," *The Tulare Times* (Tulare, CA), July 29th, 1942.

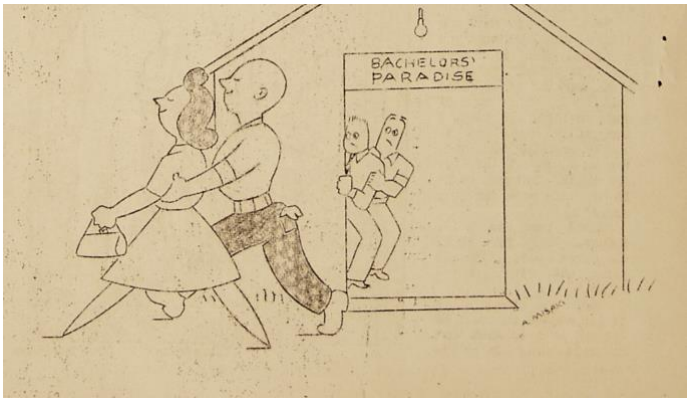

Figure 8: A cartoon graphic depicting the divide between happy couples and anxious "bachelors" in the Tule Lake concentration camp.[71]

An in-depth analysis of camp newspaper archives surrounding marriage –particularly via community forums, promotional op-eds, and the curation of marriage-specific community services– reveals that the trend toward homogamy among Niseis in the postwar years was preceded by a persistent and intense press campaign by community elders and WRA officials to encourage in-group marriage during their incarceration, consequently shaping cultural debates among Nisei youth.

The Marriage Forum

Only a few months had passed since Executive Order 9066 before the Japanese American community began to publicly contend and converse about what their incarceration should mean for the matrimonial prospects of the Nisei youth. The question of whether or not marriages should continue to take place seemed to be on the forefront of everyone's minds, on the basis of religious, moral, and morale concerns. By the late summer of 1942, camp newspapers across the United States began sponsoring surveys and frequently publishing articles on the inner workings of community-run forums that focused on the all-important issue of marriage.

[71] "Should We Get Married Here," *Densho Digital Repository,* September 1942. https://f001.backblazeb2.com/file/densho-public/ddr-densho-65/ddr-densho-65-36-mezzanine-fd2d9ddd8a.pdf.

In August 1942, *the Tulean Dispatch* surveyed sixteen individuals of the Tule Lake concentration camp from various age groups and asked them, "Should Marriages Be Encouraged in the Colony?". The following are some of the responses:

> *Hisaye Nihijima:* Marriage is a customary event. The surrounding state of affairs should not be of any influence.
>
> *Anon:* Should be encouraged to raise morale.
>
> *John Ito:* Should be encouraged because of prevalent moral conditions.[72]

Across gender and generation, a significant number of respondents seemed to agree that their status as incarcerated people should not undermine what many viewed as a necessary next step in every young person's life. Interestingly, discourse did contain some fervent dissenting opinions including "three emphatic feminine Nos" and an insistence from one young man that the "uncertainties" of camp life should dissuade everyone from marriage.[73] Even as one considers the "emphatic feminine Nos", the very presence of such conversations displays how marriage was a primary concern for the community even while they were experiencing unprecedented adversity. While other cultures may have viewed marriage as a choice solely driven by romantic love, these responses indicate that within the Japanese American community, marriage also served as a morale booster for all in the colony. Furthermore, this survey exemplifies the central role that the local press had in shaping community discussions, particularly what marriage *should* look like in a world of heightened exclusion. As a result, the aforementioned evidence shows that Niseis used discussions of in-group marriage as a navigating tool, strategizing how to persevere

[72] "Should Marriages Be Encouraged Here?" *The Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), August 21st, 1942.
[73] "Should Marriages Be Encouraged Here?" *The Tulean Dispatch.*

in this liminal space and eventually contend with the complexities of post-war resettlement, rather than simply assimilate to the White majority.

Figure 9: A photograph of a wedding at the Tule Lake concentration camp in 1943.[74]

Heightened concern about the appropriateness of marriage in the camps was not isolated within the barbed wire fences of Tule Lake. Published within a set of weekly "interest stories" at the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, an article relayed in great detail the marriage debate which took place at a Town Hall meeting at the Southern California relocation center that same summer. Describing the convention's conversations as akin to "produce dealers discussing the relative maturity of tomatoes", this paper made it clear that disputes about marriage were as important to community members as was the successful sale of produce in the marketplace.[75] This metaphor was presumably employed by the reporters at *the Santa Anita Pacemaker* because the cultural significance of such discussions would be easily understood by readers, especially considering that farming was the main source of Japanese American wealth prior to their forced relocation.[76] The article continued by outlining the divergent views of two young men. Described as a "mature man" who chose to marry two days before their evacuation, Earl Yusa argued that

[74] "Wedding," *National Archives and Records Administration,* 1943. https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-226/.
[75] "Story of the Week: Tomatoes, Corn, and Marriage," *The Santa Anita Pacemaker* (Arcadia, CA), July 25th, 1942.
[76] Natasha Varner, "The WWII Politics of Farms and Labor," *Densho*, October 12, 2018, https://densho.org/catalyst/the-wwii-politics-of-farms-and-labor/.

marriage was a "stabilizing factor" during such unprecedented times and helped him lead a more comfortable life in the Santa Anita relocation center. Charles Kikuchi, labeled by the press as a "bachelor" and a "famed ripe tomato", asserted that getting married in the camps was unwise because a man could not be sure that his wife could cook or successfully adapt to postwar life.[77] The documentation of the incongruous views of these two Nisei men offers insight into how incarcerees used the community forum as a vehicle to actively confront how marriage fit into their identity and how they would navigate their everyday lives as Japanese Americans in the postwar period. Equally important to this is the need to recognize the notable absence of Nisei women's voices in this particular discussion. Although the article included the pro-marriage opinion of Mrs. Ruth Yamauchi, every other documented stance treated Nisei women as mere objects in the lives of men like Earl and Charles, revealing how prewar gender norms and the rapidly growing socioeconomic independence of Nisei women clashed during such conversations that shaped a dynamic and complex Nisei culture.

Confrontations with the importance of marriage to camp life also included the publication of opinion pieces by community leaders, such as Reverend Shigeo Tanabe in a long-form magazine version of the Tule Lake newspaper in September 1942. Reverend Tanabe directly addressed the "rank and file youth", advising them to make life in the camps as normal as possible by continuing their participation in sociocultural activities like dating and marriage. The pastor discouraged postponing marriage, particularly focusing on the impact it would supposedly have on Nisei women:

> But postponement until we are fairly well resettled may mean forever spoiling the prospect of a happy married life. Especially is this true for our girls. After a girl is past twenty-two the prospect of marriage grows less and less with increasing age. So it really simmers down to the choice of marriage now or never.[78]

[77] "Story of the Week: Tomatoes, Corn, and Marriage," *The Santa Anita Pacemaker*.
[78] Reverend Tanabe, "Should We Get Married Here?" *The Tulean Magazine* (Tule Lake, CA), September 15th,

While the Reverend's suggestions to try and establish normalcy may have been comforting to many in the camps, he also used his authority as a religious figure to reaffirm patriarchal notions about the limited possibilities for Nisei women. Reverend Tanabe insisted that marriage was not only a strategy to strengthen community ties during a tumultuous time, but could be a tool to undermine the newfound independence of Nisei women.

Ultimately, debates surrounding the Marriage Question were on the minds of most concentration camp communities as newspapers published surveys and stories shortly after their forced resettlement. With a specific focus on the proliferation of the marriage forum, the archive suggests that in-group marriage was of central importance to those of all ages and afforded Nisei youth (whether they were in favor or against) with the opportunity to grapple with what their life should or would look like in postwar America, without any explicitly stated concerns of assimilation to mainstream America.

"Love Conquers All" - The Media's Promotion of Nisei Love and Marriage

Equally important to the presence of community forums was the active and persistent campaign that camp newspapers engaged in to promote stories of love and marriage amongst the Nisei youth. Alongside articles about sports games, community events, and political op-eds, newspapers across the relocation centers and concentration camps made a concerted effort to publish positive stories about heterosexual romance and in some cases, offer material incentives for those who legalized these homogamous unions.

In January 1943, Japanese American writers for the *Gila News-Courier* published an article titled: "Love Bug Bites Innocent Little Bystander". The piece noted the "unexplainable frenzy" that a young Nisei man was experiencing in the throes of romantic love. The reporter

1942.

concludes with a dramatic discovery, "Gosh sakes, I guess you men are dumber than I thought you were. Man, the only thing which is wrong with you is that YOU'RE IN LOVE."[79] Interestingly, this particular piece not only reflects the media's concern with centering romance, dating, and matrimony within the public conversation but illustrates (in a playful manner) the changing dynamics between young men and women of the Nisei generation. In other words, it offered a challenge for young Nisei men to lean into and recognize their romantic feelings, encouraging them to move away from traditional ideas of masculinity. Features focused on love were not isolated to this piece from the Arizona camp. Long-form love columns appeared in issues as long-standing as *The Tulean Magazine* (which ran for over a year) to the *Fresno Grapevine* (which ran for less than six months), exemplifying how regardless of the longevity of the periodical itself, the interest of the media to promote love and marriage among Niseis remained a high priority.[80]

This promotional campaign for young Nisei love and marriage was a central issue for even the most freshly formed publications. In the first few months of *The Fresno Grapevine*, an article read:

> Now it can be told, told in all its glory! The age old story of boy meets girl will once again have the same happy ending which novelists like to use…Love conquers all, even the Provost Marshall; for according to Miss Fujimoto, she had no difficulty obtaining the permit to join her fiance…The love smitten pair plan to obtain their marriage license this week.[81]

By relaying the apparent ease with which one could obtain a marriage license and elevating this narrative that "love conquers all", the staffers of *The Fresno Grapevine* were engaging in a number of significant social processes within the context of camp life. First, they were outlining

[79] "Love Bug Bites Innocent Bystander," *Gila-News Courier* (Rivers, AZ), January 26th, 1943.
[80] "Dutch Treat: Tada Learns How Fickle Girls Are," *The Tulean Magazine* (Tule Lake, CA), September 15th, 1942.
[81] "Love Conquers All 'White Zone' Girl Joins Betrothed," *Fresno Grapevine* (Fresno, CA), July 15th, 1942.

for already engaged couples the steps they needed to take to bypass bureaucratic red tape to obtain the marriage license, a strategy of survival, to ensure they would not be separated as they were set to be relocated (again) to more permanent concentration camps. Second and arguably most important, the article uses descriptive and idealistic language to cultivate a narrative that a "happily-ever-after" was possible in the camps. By telling this "boy meets girl" story that ended in a successful union, the paper was displaying an idealized version of marriage, arguing that it could serve as a source of hope and positivity among the monotony and dangers of life as an incarceree. To be sure, this piece in particular encouraged heteronormativity and indirectly reinforced the idea that marriage was the marker of success for young women (notice how the excerpt focuses entirely on how Miss Fujimoto benefits from this union). This is not surprising, considering the staying power of patriarchal norms in Japanese American communities during this period. Nonetheless, this piece also highlights another outcome: Nisei youth could use marriage as a tool to endure their indefinite incarceration, establish lasting community ties following the fracture of the traditional family structure, and navigate their complex identities.

For some community leaders and WRA authorities, the desire to encourage marriage among the Nisei youth was so strong that they invested and actively promoted material incentives for couples who decided to marry in the concentration camps. Acknowledging the lack of privacy and loss of material possessions that was endemic to life in the concentration camps, one October 1942 article entitled "Honeymoon Cottage Tenants Dwell in Peace, Quiet Seclusion", listed in great detail the opulent furnishings that a couple could exclusively experience if they decided to get married. This list included a large bed with a "beauty mattress", eight lounging chairs, individual mirrors, and an ornately decorated dresser. And while not visible, the newspaper made sure to emphasize the abundance of a most prized possession that

couples would have during their stay at the "honeymoon cottage": uninterrupted privacy.[82] Both the existence of the cottage and the systematic promotion of its tangible and intangible benefits displays how important it was to community leaders that in-group marriages grew in frequency, despite the major inconveniences of their incarceration. In an environment where basic necessities such as clean water and school supplies were lacking, the presence and promotion of this "honeymoon cottage" clearly demonstrates how crucial many felt marriage was to the social fabric of Japanese American life.

The press played a pivotal role in shaping Nisei views and actions regarding marriage within the camps. By publishing love stories and promoting the incentives available for newlyweds, the press was actively influencing and at times, reconstructing Nisei youth culture. Frankly, it would be superficial and a disservice to the intricacies of the archive to argue that the media's role in encouraging Nisei marriage was universally positive or undoubtedly regressive. Rather, a deep look into the archive displays the complexities and contradictions present in a community that was facing external discrimination and internal changes. So, while marriage may have been encouraged to re-establish a patriarchal social order, it simultaneously served as a beacon of hope for the community and a way for Nisei youth to navigate their identity and exclusion in mainstream American society.

A Communal Effort: Classes, Services, and Advertisements to Promote In-Group Marriage

As the press continued to publish pieces on the importance of love and marriage to Nisei social life, members of the community began investing and organizing more drastic efforts to encourage and *facilitate* in-group marriages among the Nisei youth. Again, one can track the proliferation of such community-run classes, services, and advertisements by analyzing the

[82] "Honeymoon Cottage Tenants Dwell in Peace, Quiet Seclusion," *Gila News-Courier* (Rivers, AZ), October 31st, 1942.

various camp newspapers. In a February 1943 issue of *the Tulean Dispatch*, the writer mentioned that a "marriage class" was to start the following week where leaders of the community would discuss the particular issues and aspects of "marriage and family life". The reporter noted that this class would be held on a regular basis, where both newlyweds *and* young Niseis that were considering marriage were invited to attend.[83] This weekly class was notably organized and run by Reverend Tanabe. Here we see where religious values can intertwine with larger community concerns, as the Reverend spearheaded the effort at the Tule Lake concentration camp to allocate valuable time and resources to supporting in-camp weddings and the continued success of Nisei marriages, most likely in the name of communal stability. The presence of this class displays the intensified concerns of members of the community regarding the future prospects of Niseis, as they upgraded from mere conversations about marriage to providing salient advice and actionable suggestions for Niseis to find love and lasting marital unions amongst one another in response to their heightened exclusion.

Figure 10: A young Nisei couple and the officiating minister pose for a photo following their wedding at the Minidoka concentration camp.[84]

[83] "Marriage Class to Start Tuesday," *Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), February 12th, 1943.
[84] "A couple at their wedding," *War Relocation Authority Minidoka Collection*, 1945. https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-fom-1-453/.

Some camp communities facilitated Nisei marriages by establishing a "bureau" to bolster the chances of marital unions amongst young people. During the summer months of 1943, for example, the incarcerees of the Poston concentration camp in Arizona announced the establishment of a "Matrimonial Service Bureau", employing a Red Cross member, a lawyer, a physician, and two religious workers to aid those looking for love. The Bureau announced that they would provide people with a plethora of services, including matchmaking and "services to lovers who are facing difficulties to marry".[85] Once again, the allocation of resources and the frequent reporting by camp newspapers (the establishment of this particular organization was documented by those as far as Tule Lake, California) displays how the community made the success of Nisei romantic relationships a top priority amidst their incarceration, hoping that the abundance of aid would encourage the young adults of the camp to embrace the stability that supposedly came with settling down alongside a fellow Japanese American. Furthermore, the seemingly ubiquitous presence of these classes and services offers insight into strategies that were employed to persevere the degradation of camp life and lay the foundation for robust community connections that they felt may have been necessary for their resettlement after the war.

Occasionally, the urgency that individual incarcerees felt to get married was enabled by the newspapers of the relocation centers and concentration camps as they posted paid advertisements or "want ads" for those looking for a wife. For Mr. Tadao Tada, the desire to marry in haste led him to post an advertisement in the local newspaper of the Turlock Temporary Assembly Center. The advertisement included a sketch of Mr. Tada and a list of his accomplishments, such as his degree from Fresno State College and his championship-winning

[85] "Plan Marriage Bureau at PRC," *Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, CA), August 19th, 1943.

tennis skills. It concluded with a direct call to Nisei women: "By the way, girls, Mr. Tada is single and capable."[86] The awareness by newspapers of the need to directly address Nisei women for these advertisements to succeed, in which young men essentially auctioned themselves off in exchange for an expeditious marriage, was not isolated to Mr. Tada. In a set of "want ads" published in the *North Portland Evacuzette* in June 1942, an advertisement said the following about a young Private Judd Sawarati: "Something to cure a lonely G.I's heartache. Anything besides pills. So girls take a hint…Who's going to be the lucky gal?"[87]

By marketing these young men as eligible husband material, one that "girls" would be lucky to marry, these advertisements again illustrate how central the promotion of Nisei marriage was to the social fabric of life in the concentration camps and how the newspapers played a significant role in this promotional process. Moreover, the way that these advertisements spoke directly to young women highlights the changing gender dynamics of the Nisei generation. As Nisei women became economically and socially independent, due to WRA equal pay policies, the newspapers and the young bachelors had to adjust and present themselves as desirable to these newly autonomous women. These social changes were certainly met with challenges from older patriarchal views, which is evident in the infantilizing language of the advertisements and the implication that young women needed marriage at all. As for the Nisei men, the popular use of these advertising tactics offers one example of how marriage was a tool for Niseis to understand their individual identity, their identities in relation to Nisei women, and the possible pathways following their incarceration.

Many scholars contend that Japanese Americans were more likely in the postwar resettlement period to marry other Japanese Americans rather than Caucasians, directly

[86] "Let's Meet Mr. Tadao Tada," *TAC No. 7* (Turlock, CA), July 17th, 1942.
[87] "Want Ads," *North Portland Evacuzette* (Portland, OR), June 2nd, 1942.

challenging arguments by many assimilation theorists that Japanese Americans were singularly focused on achieving both structural and marital assimilation in the years after World War II.[88] Meanwhile, other scholars have proposed that white Americans preferred to exclude Japanese Americans when their own privilege was threatened, with their heightened exclusion being culminated by Executive Order 9066 and continuing to impact them in the years following their resettlement. These articles offer a response to such academic theories, displaying that Niseis themselves were not passively assimilating, but rather, they engaged in such conversations as a strategy of active response to their heightened exclusion and fracturing of their American identity. In doing so, Nisei youth were marrying each other as a way to make sense of their complex identities and find ways to survive within a deeply segregated and racialized America.

By way of publishing articles about community forums, matrimonial-focused services, and paid advertisements of Nisei bachelors, the press played a central role in shaping the discourse of Nisei youth and the larger camp community with respect to dating and marriage. In each facet of this social phenomenon, it is evident that the fervor behind these discussions and decisions was a complex and at times contradictory response to their heightened exclusion (read: mass incarceration). In fact, one can trace the exponential growth of postwar homogamy within the Japanese American community (especially Niseis) to these well-documented efforts during their "internment", as they anticipated the micro-level hostility and macro-level racism that they would experience after they resettled beyond the barbed wire fences. In tracking such developments in the archive, one can begin to see how assuming that assimilation was the immediate goal for Niseis during and after World War II is an oversimplified and inaccurate

[88] Hiromi Ono and Justin Berg, "Homogamy and Intermarriage of Japanese and Japanese Americans With Whites Surrounding World War II," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 5 (2010): 1249–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40865607.

observation. Instead, through an analysis of such sources it is evident that Niseis were carefully navigating the intersecting and overlapping layers of their American identity in this liminal space through matrimony, creating a robust "society within a society" that they hoped would persevere once they resettled outside the barbed wire fences of the camps.

Conclusion

As World War II came to a close in September 1945 and formal resettlement beyond the camps began, Japanese Americans had already been on a long and arduous path to reconfiguring their relationships to one another and re-establishing their role in mainstream American society. In the decades following the war, many Niseis joined the ranks of other civil rights activists to demand systemic changes and government acknowledgment of the devastating effects of discriminatory legislation. These efforts eventually culminated in a "Redress Movement" in which Japanese American activists successfully lobbied for Isseis to become naturalized citizens beginning in 1952 and for the U.S. government to issue $20,000 to each surviving incarceree in August 1988.[89] The Niseis cultivated strong ties to one another in the postwar period through the continuation of sociocultural events (e.g., Nisei Week) and consistent investment in Japanese American media outlets (e.g., Rafu Shimpo) as well as ethnic enclaves (e.g., Little Tokyo) that still exist today.[90]

Prior to their resistance efforts in the resettlement period, Nisei youth utilized their experiences with race-based imprisonment and various sociocultural events (dances, beauty contests, etc.) to construct both a unique set of intersectional identities and a new kind of "society within a society". Scholars of assimilation theories have often suggested that Japanese Americans have universally situated themselves at either end of the assimilation spectrum, in effect, reproducing stereotypes about the racial minority acting as a mindless monolith. The sources in this research have shown that the story is much more complicated.

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[89] "Redress Movement," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed October 2021, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Redress_movement/.

[90] "About the Collection," *Rafu Shimpo Digital Archive*, Accessed October 2021. https://gpa.eastview.com/rafu/.

In 1994, sociologist Ruben Rumbaut interviewed 5,000 second-generation immigrant children across various American cities. He found that rather than taking a "uniform assimilative path", the discrimination they faced led the children to "segmented paths of identity formation".[91] Simply put, there were a spectrum of strategies employed by second-generation children to make sense of their position within American society that went beyond the bounds of assimilation as previously theorized. Similar to the children in Rumbaut's study, some Nisei youth also recognized the legalized disparagement and heightened exclusion of their incarceration as an opportunity to reaffirm ethnic solidarity and consciousness, while others reacted to their physical and cultural exclusion by adhering to calls from elders and WRA authorities to assimilate. In each case, Nisei incarcerees forged unique sets of identities that were informed by the complexities of their lived experiences. By utilizing the camp newspapers as a community forum, Niseis publicly grappled with the meaning of their presence (or absence) at various sociocultural activities (e.g., dances, beauty contests, and weddings) and renegotiated what their racial, sexual, and gender identities meant to themselves and their community. Without question, Nisei youth were active participants in their daily lives *especially* during their incarceration.

The newspapers that consistently ran throughout the duration of Japanese American incarceration offer deeply informative insight into their daily lives, which presents scholars with an opportunity to engage with the cultivation of a social culture that was constrained by larger, unprecedented political conflicts. When the presence of such events in the camps are acknowledged in scholarship, they are often treated as entirely separate from one another, despite the fact that they were all occurring simultaneously and shaping the daily lives of Nisei youth.

[91] Ruben G. Rumbaut, "The Crucible within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants," *The International Migration Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 754.

By engaging in a focused analysis of dances, beauty contests, female-advice columns, and marriages in the newspaper archives, I not only hope to refute the idea of Japanese American incarcerees as docile individuals who uniformly hoped to assimilate to white Protestant America but uplift the reality that being Japanese American was (and continues to be) multidimensional, messy at times, and without question, remarkable.

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