

Crossed Wires: Japanese American Incarceration and the Environmental Frontier

by

Mika Kennedy

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Susan Y. Najita, Chair
Associate Professor John Blair Gamber, Utah State University
Associate Professor Victor Román Mendoza
Professor Susan Scott Parrish

Mika Kennedy

mikake@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-5732-7616](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5732-7616)

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Dedication

For—

My grandmother, Doris Aiko Velasco

My uncle, Bryce Tooru Velasco

And the inimitable Tammy Zill.

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Abstract

Crossed Wires: Japanese American Incarceration and the Environmental Frontier

focuses on the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. From this historical vantage point, I draw on ecocritical and settler colonial frameworks to theorize the relationship between immigrant and indigenous populations in the United States as they are produced by relations to land and acts of environmental transformation. My project intervenes in discourses of the U.S. carceral state, racialized policing, and border consolidation, and is additionally informed by a growing body of incarceration work in the fields of environmental history and geography. In this dissertation, I posit environmental transformation as a core element of Japanese American incarceration, examining the way the War Relocation Authority's agricultural projects rhetorically and materially sought to reclaim the "frontier" West for the U.S. (white) settler state. I examine how the stakes of the incarceration shift when it becomes not only an act of racial exclusion and war hysteria, but also a conscious reiteration of the settler colonial frontier—a frontier which, in the confines of an incarceration camp, is quickly denuded of its fantasies of a free West. In turn, I explore the ways Japanese Americans narrated their own relationship to their camp environments, imaginatively traversing geologic time, as in Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory*; performing cowboy outlaw, as in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*; and confronting the Native erasures that subtend every frontier "success story." My project's primary intervention lies in its ecocritical approach to narratives of Japanese American incarceration, which illuminates the ways that Japanese Americans' imaginative encounters with their

environment express alternative ways of being and belonging in a place. These ways of being foreground Japanese Americans' relation to Native peoples, as guests on their land and as potential allies and accomplices against the U.S. settler colonial state. When U.S. military spaces like Fort Sill can serve as a prison to Native warriors during the nineteenth century, to Japanese Americans in the twentieth, and to border crossers in the twenty-first, examining the intersections between Asian American, Native, and environmental studies is more crucial than ever to imagining radically different futures.

Introduction | World War Wild West

Abraham Lincoln is at a speaking engagement in LaCrosse, Kansas. In a side room off the main hall of the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum, he expounds before a small audience of grandparents and children, stovepipe hat and all. It is June 2016.

I politely decline the invitation to join in. I've come for the barbed wire. I note Lincoln's presence, however, as a reminder of the ways that reenactment serves to link time and place in unexpected ways. This Lincoln is a manifestation of the often curious spectacle by which these linkages are made. He paces the room, back and forth, and his tall hat bobs each time he turns heel dramatically to continue his pacing in the opposite direction. He performs for over an hour, booming proclamations only slightly muffled as I weave my way through the exhibits, looking for the barbed wire of World War II.

My first scholarly engagement with barbed wire came in 2010. I was designing a poster for UC San Diego's Day of Remembrance programming, which commemorates the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.¹ As chair of the 2011 program, I had opted to focus on the incarceration's representations through art and design. Creating a poster to advertise the event, I ended up engaging in my own representative act, hunched over my Macbook as I twisted

¹ What the camps have been called has shifted over the years. The signs that went up in 1942 called them Relocation Centers. For many decades thereafter, critics eschewed the euphemism in favor of "internment camp." More recently, Japanese Americans have sought to further sharpen the terminologies used, and the National JACL Power of Words II Committee now recommends "American concentration camp," "incarceration camp," or "illegal detention center" as the preferred nomenclature (National JACL). I will use "incarceration camp" throughout this project, because I feel it is the term that best highlights the camps' relation to the broader mechanisms of the United States as a carceral state, and most clearly implies the camps' environmental identity as carceral space.

a blocky Photoshop vector into the semblance of a metal barb. This act was part of a long tradition of expressing the incarceration through the metonym of barbed wire: Long before I'd ever been a part of the Day of Remembrance, the Manzanar Committee unveiled a logo that superimposes a snarl of barbed wire over a red sun. The original cover of John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) is criss-crossed by red barbed wire X. George Takei's graphic memoir, *They Called Us Enemy* enlists the power of typographic barbed wire, too, each word connected to the next by a tangled strand. In 2018 artist Bob Matsumoto released "Remembrance," a lithograph that declares "Executive Order 9066" in bold black print, with three strains of barbed wire lined up beneath it in red, white, and blue to emulate the American flag. Indeed, the history of Japanese American incarceration has been oriented to barbed wire in almost every way imaginable. Scour the shelves of incarceration monographs and you'll quickly find *Balancing on Barbed Wire*, *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*, *Beyond Barbed Wire*, *Birthright of Barbed Wire*, *Barbed Wire and Rice*, *Citizens Behind Barbed Wire*, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, *Transforming Barbed Wire*, *Within the Barbed Wire Fence*, and even *Barbed Wire Baseball*. Behind, within, and beyond it, the narrative of Japanese American incarceration is a narrative crossed by barbed wire.

The barbed wire displays in Kansas don't mention the incarceration, though we are less than 200 miles east of the Amache site in southeast Colorado; and the museum docent isn't sure what kind of barbed wire would have been used there. A few weeks later, I'll find some of the original fencing still standing at Topaz, though. To all but the most discerning barbed wire experts, it's nothing special—it's the barbed wire you imagine, a sturdy, double-twisted strand with versatile application. The Kansas Barbed Wire Museum is a celebration of exactly this versatility. Arranged thematically, the museum boasts a broad wooden display the size of a barn door that is dedicated to the barbed wire's application as a technology of war, first in World War

I and perhaps most famously in World War II. During World War II, barbed wire earned its notoriety as a tool of war confinement—the "foundation of the totalitarian management of space," according to philosopher Olivier Razac, with the capability of also "evoking the monstrous sublimity of the forces of destruction liberated by modern war" (55, 49). That is, barbed wire serves both material and symbolic functions, managing literal carceral spaces but also providing the arresting imagery of modern warfare.

Razac speaks mostly of the barbed wire that lined trenches on the Western front in Europe, the coils that topped the fences of the Nazi death camps, but as I've established, barbed wire also plays a central role in the way we narrate and visualize the Japanese American incarceration camps in the United States. Through barbed wire, narratives of the incarceration link themselves to the broader context of World War II and the enclosure of human bodies in punitive spaces.

Barbed wire's role in the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is also versatile, however. For instance, the Poston camp in Arizona was to have a man-proof fence all the way around its perimeter, complete with lights installed to clarify the camp boundaries at all hours. But the Wartime Civil Control Administration quickly learned that parts of Poston's sprawling footprint "include what appear to be exorbitant distances" (Santilli). In the face of this vast expanse (and the vast effort and expense of installing a fence that could enclose it), the administration suggested that if it did not seem truly necessary to install all of the fencing, perhaps they would forego the effort. One officer, Colonel Scoby, ventured to suggest that rather than install man-proof fences, their priority should be cattle fences.

"This is a stock fence, sir," his colleague Major Santilli said. (Cattle stock, that is.)

"It is? It is not a man-proof fence?" Scoby replied.

"No, sir. It isn't something that they couldn't get over if they made a determined effort."

(Santilli)

Unable to discern a cattle fence from a prison fence, Scoby suggested that perhaps it would be best to simply fence the whole area with cattle fence, particularly as the gardens Japanese Americans were cultivating were getting trampled by Indian cattle. The exchange was not indicative of a deep-seated commitment to build the fence as the United States' last line of defense against dangerous enemy aliens. Though Santilli would later have a separate conversation about the Poston fences with another colleague, affirming that General DeWitt adamantly desired his man-proof fence, the fences would remain incomplete, their actual utility landing somewhere between prison construction and agricultural operation. Rather than serve the primary purpose of deterring Japanese American escapees, the fence was commissioned to protect Poston's productive farmland from the deleterious hooves of roaming Indian cattle.

In this example, both elements of barbed wire's double stranded history—as technology of war, but also tool of agriculture—evince themselves in the case of the Japanese American incarceration camps. It's this double-strandedness I mean to explore in this project. While the incarceration's connections to World War II are obvious, its history as a project of environmental transformation often slips quietly out the back, even as the agricultural infrastructures built by Japanese American labor in the camps were arguably *more* important than the strict confinement of potential wartime saboteurs.

This agricultural emphasis is in keeping with barbed wire's origin story. When it was first developed, barbed wire was not intended as a weapon—at least, not a weapon of war, trenches, camps, prisons. Though multiple, similar barbed wire technologies were developed

independently in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they each had one thing in common: Barbed wire was intended to tame the American West. Joseph Glidden was awarded the U.S. patent for barbed wire in 1874. He had developed it as an agricultural tool, intended to allow Western rangeland to be fenced and demarcated. Lightweight and easily transported, barbed wire proved critical to the project of Western enclosure, where timber was too scarce and too costly to be used to build traditional wooden fences. It's the agricultural half of barbed wire's history that our time-traveling Abraham Lincoln had come to the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum to espouse: In 1862, Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, which was designed to "secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain" (United States, "An act"). The right to develop land in the West was legally offered by the Homestead Act and then made physically possible by barbed wire.

But who was an "actual settler," and what counted as the public domain? The Act's entitlements applied to any U.S. citizen over the age of 21, provided you had "never borne arms against the United States Government or given aid and comfort to its enemies," a designation which at the time excluded women, enslaved and free Black Americans, most immigrants, and all Native peoples (in addition to all members and sympathizers of the Confederacy) (United States). The public domain included all Western U.S. lands not already settled or retained by Native peoples via treaty agreement. With the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 on the horizon, however, even federally recognized Native lands were soon to be fair game. The Dawes Act began the process of allotting reservation lands to individuals under the pretense of establishing a system of independent Native farming, but ultimately opened "unused" land to white settlement.

In this sense, barbed wire has always been a technology of war, even as a tool for agriculture. It is a technology of Western expansion, and the process of laying claim to land as property of the United States and its citizenry. In 1942, Japanese American *issei* were ineligible

for U.S. citizenship.² At the time, some Japanese American families had been able to own and operate farms that were titled in their *nisei* children's names, but this loophole was closed by Executive Order 9066 and the removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans to ten incarceration camps in the interior West.³ Of the ten camps, two were built in California (Tule Lake and Manzanar); two in Arizona (Poston and Gila River); two in Arkansas (Jerome and Rohwer), and one each in Idaho (Minidoka), Utah (Topaz), Wyoming (Heart Mountain), and Colorado (Amache). I argue that these placements were motivated in large part by the U.S. federal government's desire to settle and develop infrastructure in the American West. While it's true the camps were built in remote and often desolate areas, seclusion was not the only factor that went into deciding where they would land. The WRA sought to place the camps on public land, so all improvements would accrue to the federal government, but letters from private citizens also flooded in, volunteering their own lands to house the camps—and to be developed by Japanese American incarceratedees (Nicholson). In many cases, the camps were not the first time the United States had sought to develop these lands. The Owens River Valley had once been home to bountiful orchards, before its waters were diverted to feed the growing population of Los Angeles. Topaz was previously failed farmland, passed over by both the Church of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century and by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the period of

² *Issei*, or first-generation. Japanese Americans who were born in Japan but lived in the United States. There are many ways *issei* have been described. Japanese, in deference to their country of birth and citizenship. Americans of Japanese Ancestry, which is most commonly used in the Hawaiian context. I've chosen to refer to *issei* and their descendants by the term "Japanese American," as a succinct catch-all. I define "Japanese American" as any member of a Japanese-descended family (including adopted children) who has chosen to live and work in the United States. In the next sentence, I use the term *nisei*, which refers to a second-generation Japanese American—the first generation to be born in the United States.

³ The "exclusion zone" from which Japanese Americans were removed included the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, and parts of western Arizona. Some Japanese Americans living in Hawai'i—Japanese language teachers, Buddhist priests, and other prominent community members—were also imprisoned, but in the Department of Justice camps, which were separate from those administered by the War Relocation Authority. Japanese Americans living in the U.S. outside of the exclusion zone were typically not incarcerated, including those living in proximity to the camps in Utah and Arizona.

Roosevelt's New Deal revitalizations. Poston and Gila River were built atop active Native reservation lands, in hopes of securing water rights and developing irrigation infrastructures on those lands, too. Each World War II incarceration site represents a project of Western expansion intended to finish what previous histories of settlement had not. They enacted war on another front. While the incursions onto reservation land at Poston and Gila River are the most flagrant example, I argue that every camp was a settler colonial project. Western expansion is a euphemism for Native dispossession.

This connection is only further clarified when we examine the euphemistic rhetorics that framed the camp experiment. The War Relocation Authority told Japanese Americans that they were headed for a "pioneer community" (War Relocation Authority). While this was in reference to the lack of modern amenities such as refrigeration and private toilets, the notion of the "pioneer" attached in deeper ways, as well. In response to complaints about the camp conditions, Topaz camp administrator Wade Head suggested, "A beautification and landscaping project is an important job facing us; and again, everyone should be prepared to do their share. You can live here in dust and dirt as it is at present, or you can have a beautiful city. It depends on you" (Head). The camps had the potential to be beautiful cities, rather than punitive prisons. And in the process of creating them, Japanese Americans could avail themselves of the Americanizing rigors of the frontier, pioneering the West as did white settlers before them. Through this rehearsal of the Western frontier, Japanese Americans might claim their stake in America. The camps were framed as an invitation—however incomplete or insincere—into the settler state, by means of an imaginary white settlers had previously invented to welcome themselves.

As with Abraham Lincoln, who trod the boards at the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum one summer afternoon in 2016, the Japanese American incarcerated were also invited to slip through

time, awaken the mythos of an old Western frontier in the new context of a modern war. With the reawakening of this frontier imaginary, sites of the camps serve as carceral space and settler project at once—and, perhaps unwittingly, as Native land, as well. The contestations mount and meld. They serve as palimpsests that frame, ghost, and materially affect each other. By framing the incarceration camp environments as palimpsestic sites of Western enclosure, I ask: How do the stakes of incarceration shift when it becomes not only an act of racial exclusion and war hysteria, but a story connected to the violent dispossessions and eliminations enacted by U.S. settler colonialism?

Does the *Nikkei* Speak?

This is a project about the role of imaginative acts, and in the way texts create a means by which to unveil, engage, and exceed the settler colonial mechanisms of Japanese American incarceration during World War II. It is a project invested in the practice of developing theory through art, by following the pathways and orientations that emerge from texts and the ways these texts present engagements with their surroundings, both material and fantasized. Writing while incarcerated at Poston, Hisaye Yamamoto published a gently satirical fable in *Poston Notes and Activities*, titled "Surely, I Must Be Dreaming." In it, she addresses the notion of camp as "pioneer community" by introducing Poston as a "boom town" (16). This description is factual in that Poston sprung up seemingly overnight, in a place none previously would have dreamed, but the phrase is generally reserved for Gold Rush towns; mining towns—the kind of town upon which the mythology of the West was built. In this case, however, the pioneers themselves are the precious resource to be mined. In the idyllic boom town, Poston, the story follows its young hero's quest to become a Block Manager. This goal is both overblown—to be block manager of

an incarceration camp is a far cry from seeking one's fortunes in San Francisco or finding spices in the New World—and assertion of the fact that in camp, the highest honor is acquiescence. It is to become he who upholds the current structure of rule, the mythology of the boom town, and the settler fantasies it feeds. Yamamoto offers no direct criticisms of this status quo, save for the spectacle she creates of the blatant falsehoods it rode in on. The hero lives his prosperous, managerial happily ever after. In the final lines of the story, however, Yamamoto writes, "And oh yes, I promised to end this story on a happy note" (50). This suggests that the story had not already concluded on a happy note, though the reader is assured of the hero's bliss. Looks are deceiving; the hero's purported happy ending isn't, for his happiness is not the reader's. Following the conclusion of the hero's story, Yamamoto adds, "Ha, ha." The true happy ending is that she and the reader are in on the joke—the joke of boom towns, prosperity, and of the impulse to maintain the status quo. In the final line, she returns to the title of the story and adds, "(PINCH ME)" (50). Surely, I must be dreaming. And it's time to wake up.

Painter Thomas Ryosaku Matsuoka engages the fantastical aspect of the prisoner-as-pioneer in his illustrations of camp, as well. Matsuoka was incarcerated at Topaz, and his 1944 piece, *What Should I Plant?* depicts a man, his back to the viewer as he overlooks the camp from a high bluff. Rake in hand and shovel on the ground beside him, the camp barracks are mere bars of faint color below him. The barbed wire fence has been invisibilized by distance and appears only as a line of naked mounting posts. In the far distance at the center of the horizon, Topaz Mountain is small and blue. While most camp artwork tends to be taken as documentary, as no cameras were allowed in camp (the fact that photography is also not inherently documentary notwithstanding), there's an air of fantasy to the painting. For one, even as the title asks *What Should I Plant?*, the figure wouldn't be planting on a high bluff; the farmland is in the flatlands,

at the same level as the camp. Nor would the figure have been allowed atop the bluff unsupervised. While Japanese Americans were eventually allowed on excursions—into town, on Scouting trips, beyond the camps for work, or for inter-camp visits—these small freedoms were often supervised by white guardsmen, or as part of particular programs. No man would have hiked alone. Yet here is the figure, surveying the camp from an impossible space, on the open side of the barbed wire, and so far away it's as though the fence does not exist at all.

In the context of frontier imaginaries, there's a danger to the invisibility of barbed wire. Razac describes barbed wire as a "furtive instrument" (x), less obvious than other mechanisms of control, and in *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity*, philosopher Reviel Netz argues that the goal of barbed wire is not to restrain its captives indefinitely, but to train them to avoid it (36). That is, to acculturate its prisoners to the idea of the fence until it becomes such a natural element that they cease to resist, or to see it at all. For the Japanese American cast as pioneer, leaning into the performance and touting agricultural prowess as evidence of Americanism might seem like a way of asserting belonging and freedom. To position oneself above the camps, hip cocked, armed with the tools of agriculture, asking *what should I plant?* might also be read as a donning of the settler posture and a recapitulation of the settler state. Maybe the imagined scenario in Matsuoka's painting is liberatory; perhaps it is liberation at a cost. It's a thin line to walk.



i. *What Should I Plant?* (1944), a watercolor by Thomas Ryosaku Matsuoka, painted at Topaz.

But Matsuoka paints other forms of wire, too. Telephone lines grid the skies of many of his paintings, and he is joined by multiple other artists in his use of this motif. Setsu Nagata Kanehara's minimalist charcoal *Block 14* and *Laundry* both create mirage-like vanishing points with its telephone lines; and in Charles Erabu Suiko Mikami's *Watching Over the Camp*, its telephone lines outnumber the human figures in the scene, forcing the viewer's attention away from the barracks and up towards the phone-lined sky. Both Seiko Nishiyama in *Watertowers of Topaz* and Chiura Obata in *Moonlight Over Topaz* depict phone lines that follow the barbed wire fences, diminutive and unimpressive below the strong aerial lines. Though narratives of incarceration tend to privilege the isolation and captivity of the experience, the prevalence of these phone lines reinforces the idea that the camps were also an infrastructural project. Phone lines went up, materially connecting the camps to the grid, but they also served to symbolically

connect the camps to a project of settlement. The superimposition of telephone lines and barbed wire fences reminds us that the carceral and the settler colonial go hand in hand. It is time to think beyond the fenceline, and consider the camps' imbrication with larger projects of Western expansion as central to their story.

It's a grim prospect. But I don't think narratives of Japanese American incarceration are automatically doomed to repeat and reify the monotony of settler power. There are other opportunities for alternative connections and redefined imaginaries. Mine Okubo, most famous for her graphic memoir *Citizen 13660*, painted a triptych at Topaz titled *Poles and Fences*. She too joins the motifs of barbed wire fences and telephone poles, but the menagerie of vertical lines refuse to align on the same plane. None of the fencelines connect, instead standing in piecemeal sections. Both poles and fences are surrounded by a color-blocked environment, bold blues and greens and purples unlike the white dust of Topaz. The Topaz Museum's copy suggests, "Okubo said her eye was attracted to the utility poles at Topaz, but the colors were all her imagination" (Wall Text). Inasmuch as this project is about entanglements, reawakening the musty invocations of the frontier that so shaped the camps' origin stories in 1942 and pushing us to see the settler colonial in every fencepost and every sugar beet, it is also about the imaginative acts that reach outward. It is about the ways that Japanese American writers, artists, and activists have negotiated their interpellation into the recursive settler fantasy of the frontier, and the ways they have sought to imagine otherwise. It is about the formation of alternative relations to the land onto which Japanese American incarcerated were forced—and ultimately, the work of seeking relation with the Native peoples that have continually inhabited this land, regardless of how ardently the settler state has sought their erasure.

Historical and Critical Contexts

Environmental Surround: The Role of Geography, Place, and Fantasy

In 2005, Dorothy Fujita-Rony proposed we think about the Asian American history of the U.S. West as one of "water *and* land" (566, emphasis original). Specifically, she proposes we imagine the U.S. West beyond the United States' land-based borders, for the Pacific is also a place "structured by U.S. economic, political, and cultural dominance" (556). This reorientation serves to emphasize the United States' colonial stakes in the Pacific, and the way its militaristic and economic designs have shaped the region. I argue that the paradigm of land and water applies equally well in the opposite direction, into the deserts of the interior West. While the "Westness" of the intermountain states has gone largely undisputed—Montana still considers itself the Far West, and most of the region was not "tamed" into statehood until decades after California was—the history of Asian Americans in the West rarely extends as far. In passing, Fujita-Rony references the irrigation systems built by Japanese Americans incarcerated at Poston, but leaves open the question of how this historical tidbit might also expand into more sophisticated analyses of place, Asian Americans, and U.S. colonialism (572).

Geography and environmental history have served as vanguard when it comes to sustained analyses of the camps and their environments. In 2010, geographer Karl Lillquist and environmental historian Connie Chiang both published articles that examine the "progressive narrative surrounding the WRA's program" in connection to the agricultural labor carried out by incarcerated Japanese Americans and the infrastructural afterlives this labor would generate (Chiang, *Nature* 2).⁴ Lillquist points out that in many instances, the camps made it possible for postwar "homesteaders" to come in and farm on the land Japanese Americans had left behind

⁴ Chiang's article would serve as the basis of her second book, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (2018). I reference both the original article and this monograph in this section.

(Lillquist 97). His article itself, however, focuses mostly on the success of the camps as sites of agricultural production, which he attributes to the labor-intensive techniques Japanese Americans had developed on their own farms on the West Coast (75). For Lillquist, the camps become an environmental history by virtue of the sheer bulk and range of their agricultural achievements: broccoli and cabbage, cantaloupe, onions, kohlrabi, cotton, flax, strawberries, ginger, okra—the list goes on, its cornucopia a far cry from the typical dust-choked wasteland imagery that so often emblemizes the camps (88). In this sense, taking an environmental view of the incarceration offers a narrative of stunning developmental success. However, although Lillquist opens his argument by asserting that the camps were part of a longer tradition of the United States' use of prison labor for agricultural development, he ultimately is more focused on the agricultural bounties than the bodies behind it. He mentions that this practice of coopting prison labor for farming "began in earnest after the Civil War," but does not explicitly name the end of slavery as the start of this new chapter. Similarly, his talk of the (white) postwar homesteads that benefited from the camps' agricultural infrastructures makes no mention of the Japanese Americans, suddenly absented.

Chiang addresses these absences by framing the camps' aspirations of environmental transformation as "another instance of environmental injustice in which one group used the natural world to assert authority over another group" (Chiang, "Imprisoned" 239). Chiang argues that the camp injustices Japanese Americans suffered were inextricably linked to the United States' agricultural ambitions, complicating both the frontier rhetorics used to frame the camps *and* the triumphalism of narrating them as a wasteland tamed by Japanese American labor. Celebrating this triumph uncritically would seem a sleight of hand, designed to draw attention from the structural injustice of the camps. She is careful to point out that Japanese Americans

weren't master farmers by birth—they lacked experience in the interior West's arid environments; often came from an urban population; had the education and desire to do other forms of work; and, as prisoners, lacked the financial incentive to carry out the work (Chiang, *Nature* 101). In addition to triumph and bounty, incarcerated Japanese Americans also responded to the camps' infrastructural agenda with anger and protest. The grapes of wrath grew heavy for the vintage.

Nevertheless, Chiang highlights the fact that Japanese Americans narrated their subversion of the camp project within the same framework of the pioneer on the frontier. She explains, "If they could turn desolate land into productive fields, like the white pioneers before them, their confinement might appear all the more undemocratic. The foreboding landscapes of the camps, in short, could become a source of power in their wartime struggles for inclusion" (98). In this framework, their agricultural triumphs served as a critique of the incarceration, but not as a critique of the broader assumptions of settlement, or of the United States. These remained structures and narratives into which Japanese Americans struggled to be included.

This is, I think, where the expansive potentials I see in taking an environmental perspective of the incarceration meet their first roadblock. Rather than follow the land and water toward a critique of the colonial U.S. settler state, per Fujita-Rony's call, we return to the mindset of the 1940s, where inclusion was the gold standard. Where, if only the United States' actions could be shown to be undemocratic, the nation might see the error of its ways. Yet, as Naomi Paik points out in *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps Since World War II* (2016), "While generally imagined as external to normal civil society, the prison regime is integral to U.S. statecraft, its methods of exercising and displaying its power" (7). The camps were a feature of U.S. democracy, not a bug.

This project seeks to explore the durability of the mythologies of the frontier, and the equal durability of the desire to refashion it for Asian American bodies. Proceeding from studies in geography and environmental history, which illuminate the extent to which the camps were *environmental* as well as political spaces, I take an ecocritical approach to narratives of Japanese American incarceration. If the goal of scholars like Lillquist was to clarify, importantly, the ways that the camps were anything but barren deserts, mine is to argue, *to what end?* Chiang draws attention to the ways Japanese American incarcerated understood the environment of the camps, and the multitude of ways they interacted with it. What I take from her history is the continuity of an orientation to the frontier, even in their defiance of the camp system.

While invocations of "environment" traditionally connote the natural world, or explorations of wild spaces without humans, Robert Hayashi notes that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, this association is an evolution away from its past life as a descriptor of the "action of circumnavigating, encompassing, or surrounding something" (qtd. in Hayashi 76). This older definition assumes active human engagement with and inclusion within environments. It also carries with it notions of mobility and transit in relation to place. By constraining our notion of "environment" only to the supposed natural world, Hayashi argues, we omit one of our environments' key qualities: their roles as "repositories of cultural meaning" (76). He goes on to argue that this omission invisibilizes the powerful ways Asian American identity itself emerged from environment—that is, from the exploration "the social, political, and cultural worlds inhabited by Asian Americans—their environment" (77). And these omissions were hardly happenstance. Rather, they are an afterlife of the frontier and its formulation of environment (the West in particular) as *terra nullius*, which required settlers to strip environments of their pre-existing cultural meanings by way of the physical removal and genocide of its Native dwellers

(76). The mythology of the frontier is then presented as the original narrative of the environment of the United States (and again, the West in particular). Chiang's environmental history of the camps does the work of laying out how Japanese Americans sought to return additional meanings to their environment—meanings as a site of injustice, as a mode resistance, as well as an opportunity for play and leisure. Yet these additional meanings still unfold within the notion of the frontier, circumnavigating the world within the settler state but not necessarily troubling its borders.

This troubling requires the poetic, the literary, the ecocritical. Ecocriticism is, broadly defined by Cheryl Glotfelty, "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment" (xviii). As generic as this definition might seem, even without further elaboration it already characterizes ecocriticism as relational; and if we take Hayashi's redefinition of environment, it is already about the relationship between what is literary and that which surrounds, encompasses, and circumnavigates.⁵ Thinking about environment and Japanese American incarceration ecocritically allows us to get at the particular funny business of the frontier mythology, by recognizing it as narrative, not history. Rather, it recognizes that history is narrative, and as such elements of the fictive and fantastical are part and parcel of its occurrences and tellings. In this project, I define "environment" as not only the deserts of and beyond the camps; their waterways; their agriculture; the built environments of the West, from gas pumps to adobe schools; but also, as Hayashi puts it, the environment that acts as a "repository of cultural

⁵ Hayashi has written more about Asian American literature and ecocriticism in his article, "Beyond Walden Pond: Asian American Literature and the Limits of Ecocriticism" in *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (2007). The Routledge anthology *Asian American Literature and the Environment*, edited by Lorna Fitzsimmons, Youngsuk Chae, and Bella Adams, followed in 2014. It illuminates a multitude of different forms of Asian American literary engagements with environment, from texts that deal overtly with environmentalist themes to other that theorize Asian American literature's setting in place, as in Fae Myenne Ng's 1994 novel, *Bone*, which offers a reverse-chronological freefall into San Francisco's Chinatown. In this anthology, Zhou Xiaojing also writes about invocations of the frontier in narratives of Japanese American incarceration in her article, "Contested 'Frontier' and 'Pioneers' in Writings about Japanese American Concentration Camps."

meaning." I do so in order to contend with the (forcibly) central drama of the frontier and the creative acts of Japanese American imagination that seek to redefine it, or elude it completely.

The frontier is, after all, “the mega-narrative, the super narrative of many names, one equally as good as other: the legend of national fulfillment, the saga of cowboys and Indians, the hardy pioneer epic” (Deverell 188). My emphasis on the frontier might seem unorthodox, given that my ultimate goal is to abandon it—particularly given that it has only begun to return to studies of the incarceration, through these new environmental studies in geography and history. But the fact that it makes this return in spite of its clear incompatibility with what we know of the camps is worthy of further rumination. The fact that the frontier returns so continually and reliably across every century of U.S. history, and every conception of U.S. as nation is worthy of further rumination. Writing about manifestations of the frontier in narratives of Japanese American incarceration, Zhou Xiaojing argues that these narratives “function as counter-memories that undermine the dominant pioneer myth and offer an alternative relationship between human beings and nature in shaping the environment” (73). In addition to counter-memory, however, I argue that Japanese Americans and the frontier may be yet more intimately entangled. Sometimes they don cowboy hats and endeavor to be counter to nothing at all. Other times, their cowboy hats signify a desire to raze the frontier from the inside out. And in still other instances, their radical reorientations to the frontier seek to *exceed* counter-existences, fleeing the constellations of the settler state for the “outerstellar,” as poet Mitsuye Yamada calls it. The frontier is relegated to the murky glow of light emitted long ago, arriving late (arriving on the shores of indigenous land, rather than undiscovered shores). If history and geography gesture toward the palimpsestic nature of the frontier and incarceration, my engagements with the poetic and ecocritical seek to extend it by focusing particularly on the ways narratives of Japanese

American incarceration confront the frontier by twisting the temporal in on itself until disparate timelines touch and meld; by focusing on the ways engagement with the (seemingly) endlessly transportable tropes of the frontier and the tropes of the unforgiving desert ultimately give way to engagements with the vanished Native; by examining the ways the West is continually reconstituted by material and rhetorical rehearsals of the frontier.

This project's eponymous "environmental frontier" refers to both the problem of the frontier, its durability in both U.S. federal and Japanese American narratives of the incarceration and its afterlives—as well as, perhaps, the path toward its unraveling. I am interested in the figures that accompany the frontier, unbidden. The frontier was a way of asserting a claim to land by erasing its prior inhabitants. When it is invoked behind the barbed wire of a prison fence, and its heroes are "enemy aliens," the performance and spectacle of what is "West" shows its thinness. That which was erased rubs through.

The Longest Twentieth Century (1492-): Japanese American Incarceration, Asian American Studies, and the Settler Colonial State

Sung in its traditional key, the narrative of the incarceration is as follows: On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Two months later, Executive Order 9066 ordered the removal of nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast, to be sent to ten camps in the desolate interior West, from inland California to Arkansas. (And let's not forget: Two-thirds of these Japanese Americans were citizens. Also: Barbed wire.)

For all that this description is bookended by places, and makes central the notions of removal and relocation, this summary does little to telegraph the motivations behind any of these movements or the impacts they had on the places named—outside of the obvious, of course. Pearl Harbor was razed; the Japanese American community was, too. In the absence of this

discussion, narrations and analyses of the incarceration have generally revolved around two major poles: 1) The abrogation of the civil rights of Japanese Americans and what that means for American democracy, and 2) the personal testimonies of the cruel and aberrant experiences of those incarcerated, in order to prove that the camps were detrimental to the character of American democracy.

Both of these poles are critically important, and have been instrumental in concretizing the incarceration as a moment in U.S. history worth examining, and one that ought not be repeated. As I have suggested earlier, however, there are additional valences to these discussions that would benefit from a more place-based, environmental approach—one that questions whether American democracy had been a wholly untarnished and benevolent institution prior to Pearl Harbor. For instance, in her memoir, *Letters to Memory* (2017), author Karen Tei Yamashita muses,

[T]he historian might ask, what of significant dates? Did the war begin on December 7, 1941, on a Day of Infamy? Or perhaps on September 5, 1905, upon the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth and Japan's defeat of Russia? Can it begin on April 30 as barbed wire fenced in one family among hundreds at Tanforan? (8)

Yamashita troubles the traditional bookends of the incarceration by placing it within a longer continuum of Japanese imperial expansion,⁶ while also acknowledging the ways that the incarceration is deeply personal, embodied, and intimately linked to the lived experience of barbed wire and forced removal. I might continue her travels back through history, to Japanese

⁶ Eichiro Azuma has written on the role of the frontier mythos, Japanese empire, and the way it beheld U.S. soil, in *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (2005). In the time it has taken me to write this dissertation, Azuma has published another book, *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese America and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan's Borderless Empire* (2019), which considers Japan's relationship to the rest of the world through the paradigms of settler colonialism. Azuma, however, focuses on a different sub-section of Japanese America than I do; the characters, authors, and other actors in the texts I consider tend to be ideologically more distant from Japan and any close national affiliations with Japan. They situate their origins in the United States rather than Japan. Even Teru, for instance, who is the main protagonist in Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill*—by the end of the novel, she is preparing to renounce her U.S. citizenship and repatriate to Japan; but she has never been there, nor does she know anything about the country, its language, its cultures.

wars with Korea, to its own fraught relations with the Ainu, indigenous to Japan. Perhaps to the arrival of Commodore Perry. I might also march eastward, toward the United States' historical dates: Colonization in the Caribbean, and at Jamestown. Across both continental divides. What this temporal widening shows is that to think about significant dates is also to think about spaces. More particularly, it is to think about the ways both time and space inhere in places, and the long history of Western expansion, U.S. nation-building, and settler colonialism that has carved itself into the material and imaginary West, into which Japanese Americans were sent and upon which the camps were built. The camps and the Japanese Americans imprisoned within them become a part of that long history; they are, in fact, hailed into it as actors and propagators.

Writing about Turner's frontier thesis, George Lipsitz points out that the frontier "does not prepare us to think about the Americans who crossed the Pacific rather than the Atlantic" (7). What, then, are we to do with the incarceration camps? However incompletely or disingenuously, the fact remains that 1942 saw the United States think about the Americans who crossed the Pacific, within the exact narrative that had previously rendered them invisible, or incompatible. To make sense of the apparent invitation, I'm reminded of sociologist Laura Barraclough, who describes the settler fantasy's simultaneous fragility and persistence, arguing that "conquest is never fully secured and must be maintained through ongoing acts of nation building and the production of hegemonic consent through cultural, ideological, and political-economic means to uphold an unequal social order" (8). The frontier rhetorics that framed the Japanese American incarceration camps take the production of hegemonic consent literally, in that production suggests the manufacture of more: The production of irrigation systems, of agricultural bounties, of loyal Americans by virtue of this agrarian relation to land. The primary goal of this manifestation of the frontier and its promises of belonging were not to include

Japanese Americans, per se, but to fortify the United States' power over land and way it would be used, imagined, and controlled.

I argue that this mismatch of settler fantasy and (unwanted) immigrant renders it more important, not less, to interrogate the place of Asian Americans in relation to the settler state. Indeed, Lipsitz completes his remark on the limitations of a Turnerian United States by also acknowledging its erasure of "the people who did not come to America ... but instead had America come to them with the brutality and sadism of conquest, slavery, and genocide" (7). As immigrants to a hegemonic white settler state, Asian Americans—again, unwanted—relate differently to these erasures than white settlers. While acknowledging this fact, however, Jodi Byrd argues that U.S. empire also propagates itself through means other than whiteness (joining the choral note of Barraclough's use of "production" of other forms of maintaining conquest), "through the continued settling and colonizing of indigenous peoples' lands, histories, identities, and the very lives that implicate all arrivants and settlers regardless of their own experience of race, class, gender, colonial, and imperial oppressions" (*Transit* 21). In the case of the incarceration, even as imprisoned "enemy alien," Japanese Americans maintain a relation (or atrophied potential for one) to everyone else's experience of violence, too.

In the last few decades, the field of Asian American studies has begun and continues to directly contend with its orientation to the broader racialized, colonial histories of the United States. Scott Kurashige's *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (2007) discusses the overlapping histories of displacement embodied by the Bronzeveilles that grew out of Los Angeles's Little Tokyo, emptied by Executive Order 9066. Regarding the indigenous peoples who had settlers "come to them," the case of the Pacific Islands is perhaps most salient within Asian American studies, where scholars like

Candice Fujikane, who edited the seminal anthology, *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (2008), have addressed the multiracial settler colonialisms of the Hawaiian islands. Regarding the continental United States, however, this perspective is less developed, though *Carceral States*, a 2016 special issue of *Amerasia Journal* edited by Karen Leong and Myla Vicenti Carpio makes huge strides in terms of situating discussions of Japanese American incarceration in relation to settler colonialism and indigenous sovereignty in North America. Iyko Day offers a Marxist interpretation in *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonialism* (2016), and Quynh Nhu Le's *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas* (2019) makes connections across the continental Americas to bring the United States into conversation with settler colonial structures in Canada and Latin America.

Narratives of Japanese American incarceration have proven such a fruitful entrypoint into questions of settler colonialism because they literalize and spectacularize the frontier mythologies that dress the settler colonial state, but also present a context where it feels morally difficult to critique any assertion of Japanese American resistance, power, or identification in the face of their dispossession and imprisonment. The incarceration has become so freighted by the United States' political shame, and by the role the incarceration has played as a flashpoint in Asian American history. Yet this critique is imperative. In their discussion of settler colonialism and its relationship to the project of decolonization, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang observe that part of the appeal of "playing Indian" is "the desire to be made innocent" (9). Yet for the Asian American, playing cowboy might be considered a move to innocence as well. Because surely the recipient of the white settler state's xenophobia and race hysteria couldn't also be settler! The costume is too audacious; the image too much spectacle.

Join me in illustrating this idea through an examination of two photographs:





ii and iii. *Top*—Two children on tricycles grin at the camera. They are wearing cowboy hats. *Bottom*—three members of JACL try on cowboy boots in Arizona, circa 1950s. From left to right, ? Okabayachi, Mike Masaoka, and Tadashi Tadano.

The first image has no known provenance, aside from the fact that it's now in the possession of the Japanese American Citizens League Detroit Chapter. Two small children on tricycles grin impishly at the camera. Both wear cowboy hats, and the elder sports a sheriff's gold star on his chest. I don't know who these children are, or where. They are displaced from their historical surround, yet they remain anchored in place, if I take that place as the West—the mythic West, the narrative West, and Japanese American incarceration West. In the absence of knowing whether this photograph was taken in Berkeley or Topaz or Detroit, the West offers a productively amorphous second home. It also stages an inquiry: What do we make of the easy

manifestation of the cowboy in this image, its childhood innocence? How seriously should we take the performance?

The second depicts JACL President Mike Masaoka and two JACL colleagues. The photo was taken sometime in the 1950s, in Arizona. Masaoka was likely visiting from DC. These men, too, are engaged in a playful moment. Masaoka is wearing a cowboy hat and tugging on a pair of ostentatiously decorative cowboy boots; the scene is made all the more ridiculous by the contrast between these props and the full suits and ties each man is wearing. The ridiculousness might seem to slip again into innocence. But that's the magic of the frontier: Its grandness and bombast, as Deverell describes it, is part of its seduction. It often feels innocent. But in November 2019, Nationals catcher Kurt Suzuki visited the White House following the team's World Series victory. He sported the new cowboy hat of the late 2010s, a bright red cap with MAGA emblazoned on the front. He defended this accessory as innocent, too. If decolonization is not a metaphor, neither are the images and signposts of the settler fantasy. These, too, are rooted in material impacts and powerful organizing structures that are rooted in place and relation to place. They are rooted in recognition of that place as one that can and should exist without adherence to the fencelines of the settler state.

For all this talk of responsibility and caution, I recognize that this project risks replicating some critical omissions. Based in the literature and archives of the incarceration, this project speaks a lot about Native land and Native presence, but dedicates little time to Native voices. The texts I have chosen feature no Native characters, and often I'd seek out the minutes of tribal council meetings in the archive, only to find the folders empty. I could make the argument that this means the voices are not there, but this is simply untrue; I don't need to have found them to know they exist. Paul Ozawa, for instance, was removed from Alaska and incarcerated at

Minidoka as a Japanese American. It was his estranged step-father who was Japanese, however; Ozawa himself was Native Alaskan. He does not hesitate to express his fury at the misidentification in his Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study interview, which he gave in Chicago after leaving Minidoka. Owens Valley Paiute Richard Stewart and Colorado River Indian Tribes chairman Dennis Patch have been long-outspoken on the incarceration and issue of Native-Japanese relation, and references to the incarceration have appeared in moments of at least glancing fascination in Native literary works like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000).⁷ While my next expansion of this project will focus on Paul Ozawa and the incarceration of other Native Alaskans "re-narrated" as Japanese Americans, this project focuses primarily on the perspective of Japanese Americans—on white settlers and settler states, and of Native lands and peoples. I believe that before seeking out Native voices, I must first do the work of thinking through the ways they have been invisibilized in the landscape of Japanese American narratives—the constellations of power that must be undone in order to clear the way for new forms of relation, not at the level of the individual or literary allusion but at the level of structure and surround.

Naming and confronting these constellations of power are what studies of settler colonialism in the Asian American context seek to accomplish. They are the constellations by which Asian Americans have historically navigated the United States, through the uneasy blackwaters of racial violence and against the closed ports of Asian Exclusion. They are also, however, the constellations that have guided triumphal narratives of Japanese American agrarian

⁷ In recognition that the incarceration of Japanese Canadians was a similar but not identical process, with its own specificities of narrative, I should note that Eden Robinson's novel takes place in Canada, and so references the Canadian case. Nevertheless, novels like Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child* (2002) also narrate the experience of Japanese Canadians by referencing pioneer stories like that of Laura Ingalls Wilder, so the permutations of pioneer, settler, immigrant, and indigenous continue to operate on either side of the border.

abundance in the camps; and, more broadly, assertions of a model minority proximal to whiteness. Focusing on these structures, and the ways they are borne out in the places we inhabit—both materially and rhetorically, fantastically—poses a threat to their dominance, or the sense that theirs is the only sky. It is part of the process of forming new relations, seeking out new dialogues—in particular with Native voices, Native concerns. At the level of scholarship in Asian American studies, these explorations open the field to more expansive ways of thinking in relation to processes of decolonization and the roles Asian Americans might play. It also reflects back on immigrant policies, offering new vantage points from which to approach issues of immigration that have always been central to the field of Asian American studies: racial quotas and racial profiling, undocumented immigration, the processes and primacies of citizenship, and illegal or prolonged detention at U.S. borders.

Chapter Summaries & Methodology

In this project, I posit environmental transformation and Western expansion as core features of Japanese American incarceration, emphasizing the way the War Relocation Authority's agricultural projects rhetorically and materially sought to reclaim the "frontier" West for the U.S. (white) settler state. These environmental transformations encompass, among others, the agricultural projects developed in camp; the permanent irrigation systems installed by Japanese American prison labor; the clearing of brush to create the dustbowls in which the camps were erected; and the ways Japanese Americans narrated their own relationship to their camp environments—as wasteland, frontier, and Native homeland. Ultimately, I demonstrate the ways that these imaginative and literary experimentations with their environment express alternative ways of being and belonging in a place. This way of being foregrounds Japanese Americans' relation to Native peoples first, as guests on their land and as potential accomplices

against the U.S. settler colonial state, which welcomes neither indigenous peoples nor subsequent arrivants.

The first chapter, "Looking for a Man Named Komako: *Bad Day at Black Rock*, Rea Tajiri, and the Carceral Western," begins by making a case for the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II as a history of the West. By examining the environment of the camps, and the ways that environment is inscribed with the United States' programs of Western expansion and dispossession, I open narratives of Japanese American incarceration to new dialogues with New Western History and Native studies. I read the Western film *Bad Day at Black Rock* and the way its cinematography subverts the generic expectations of the Western by presenting the intermountain desert as a carceral space—and one intimately connected to Japanese American incarceration. I then read the film's appearance as intertext in Rea Tajiri's experimental documentary *History and Memory* through an ecocritical lens, highlighting the ways landscape functions to frame both *Black Rock's* frontier murder mystery and Tajiri's evocations of camp as narratives of Western enclosure. Critically situated in the West, narratives of Japanese American incarceration become less a product of unusual "wartime hysteria," and instead an expression of long-established and ongoing U.S. settler colonialism.

In Chapter 2, "Be the Cowboy: Confronting the Paradox of the Prisoner Pioneer at Topaz," I revisit the War Relocation Authority's bid to figure their incarceration camps as frontier communities, examining the contradictory subjectivity through which Japanese American incarcerated were invited into the settler state. I argue that this invitation fundamentally alters the way incarceration narratives are typically understood. Victory in the face of the incarceration is typically read in valor proven through the all-Japanese 442nd's military exploits, or Japanese Americans' re-integration into American civic life after the war. These successes,

however, hinge on the inclusion of Japanese Americans within a U.S. state that is fundamentally settler colonial. This form of Japanese American triumphalism hinges on a project of Native dispossession. Exploring now narratives of Japanese American incarceration address (or fail to address) this potential complicity, I outline the present limitations of this address by tracing the figure of the cowboy from the archives into Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*. I read Otsuka's cowboy outlaw as an imaginative figure that dons all the accoutrements of the frontier, only to violently reject the act of becoming the "prisoner pioneer" the WRA so desired. I argue, however, that this form of rejection is limited insofar as it does not actively form relations with Native peoples, recognizing their sovereignty over and above the settler colonial state.

Chapter 3, "The Final Frontier: Desert Oceans, Indian Schools, and Outerstellar Darkness in Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill* and Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run*," focuses on an alternative orientation I term "the outerstellar," which is a neologism I borrow from poet Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run* (1988). I define the outerstellar as a horizon beyond the constellations of settler colonial power. In contrast to a frontier ethos that equates environmental transformation with power and agricultural settlement with ownership, I read Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run* as a display of intimate encounters with desert life that assert an alternative form of immigrant belonging, wherein the speaker identifies as a privileged guest on Native land, rather than its master. I connect the practice of reaching for the outerstellar to the ways the narrative of Japanese American incarceration has begun to dovetail with contemporary protests around incarceration at the US-Mexico border. Rather than pose "the outerstellar" as a place this narrative has always been linearly moving, however, I contextualize it historically by delineating the ways the outerstellar has fallen in and out of narrations of Japanese American incarceration

as the preservationist impulse of the incarceration pilgrimage intermixes with the activist orientation of place-based direct actions, such as those at Ft. Sill.

This project examines carceral environments as sites of critical relation between a multiplicity of Japanese American and Native histories—relations that, in our contemporary moment, continue to vocally assert their political urgency. I make environmental, place-based imaginations central to the study of Japanese American incarceration narratives, allowing me to explore the way radical, literary imaginations of the environment in Asian American literature produce new, mutually empowering ways of relating to nation, neighbor, and Native spaces.

Methodologically, my project bridges the literary and the historiographic. The narratives I study manifest by way of museum, memorandum, and tour bus chatter as much as they do in films, novels, and poems. In addition to my key literary texts, John Sturges's *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1954), Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor was Divine* (2002), Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill* (1996), and Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run* (1988), my archive for this project also comprises the literary magazines and newspapers printed and circulated in camp; photographs and artwork from museums that run the gamut in terms of narrative presentation, from the sleek halls of the Topaz Museum to the warm barn smell of the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum. It's comprised of letters, ledgers, and transcripts from the War Relocation Authority archives in Washington, DC and College Park, MD; from the collections at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, the Topaz Museum, the Arizona Historical Society, Arizona State University, and the Japanese American National Museum. I take as my archive the space of the camps themselves—the way monuments and fencelines, farmland and foundations abut the towns and lived presents of the areas in which the camps were situated. My archive is the pilgrimages and

occupations Japanese Americans enact within these spaces, and the dialogues opened or foreclosed by them.

I endeavor to bring some of the spirit of these archives into my writing for this project, because I believe that jumbles can be generative: The sharp disjuncture, the scattershot. Y  n L   Espiritu animates a version of this idea with her practice of critical juxtaposing, which she defines as "the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire." She goes on to explain,

Whereas the traditional comparative approach conceptualizes the groups, events, and places to be compared as already-constituted and discrete entities, the critical juxtaposing method posits that they are fluid rather than static and need to be understood in *relation* to each other and within the context of a flexible field of political discourses. (21)

To be reoriented towards pressing questions about the relationship between Asian Americans and settler colonialism, Asian American Studies and Native Studies, ecocriticism, or the New West, the already-constitutedness of mainstream narratives of Japanese American incarceration need to be undone. The regional variety, the frontier pieces left on the cutting room floor—in order to show their relationship to a new narrative of Japanese American incarceration (and by extension, a new narrative of the immigrant, settler, and Native), I am compelled to first show the ways they do not fit, and to take seriously the margins and aberrations of the narratives of the incarceration.

Though the thrust of my argument applies broadly to the advent of the incarceration wholesale, the objects and surroundings I've chosen to focus on three of the ten WRA camps: Manzanar, Topaz, and Poston. I also discuss, albeit in less detail, forms of Native-Japanese American relation that are sited at Minidoka and Gila River. While each camp is different in terms of its geographic particularities, land histories, social contexts, and the institutions and processes that have shaped the development of its narrative after the war, I argue that the forms

of relation that emerge—to the settler state, to environment and labor, to Native presence—are more global, transportable, than one might imagine. Rather than propose the camp experience was monolithic, I understand the camps as archipelagic, structurally related and actively in conversation with one another.

I didn't choose these foci because I believe they are the best examples of my thesis. It's not that I believe that they aren't good ones; I mean only that my ideas are no less apparent at Tule Lake, Heart Mountain and Amache, Jerome and Rohwer. Nor do I believe that the additional historical valences these sites offer, left out of this project, are less exigent. (Tule Lake preservationists are currently at odds with the Modoc; Heart Mountain resides on a federal reclamation project near the Buffalo Bill Dam on the Shoshone River; Amache is named for the daughter of a Cheyenne chief, and is 100 miles south of the site of the Sand Creek Massacre. Jerome and Rowher sat in the Delta silt of the Jim Crow South, and were crossed by the Trail of Tears—the forcible removal of Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole peoples, among others, from their East Coast homelands.) Rather, I have chosen to focus on the narratives of places I have returned to, and to which I have, with each iteration, come to understand in different ways. Places where the relations I have formed are many-layered, overlapping, palimpsestic.

Because sense of place guides so much of what this project means, in terms of the way the West is imagined and the ways relation to land structure and are structured by these imaginations, this project has taken on an experiential mode, as well. I spoke earlier of bringing the personality of my archives into this text. I have also let the texts and place-as-text guide my explorations as I've sought out narratives of the incarceration that cross the fenceline, connecting the space of the camps to all that lies beyond them, kissing close but too often forgotten. (What

of Delta, near Topaz? Parker, near Poston? What of the Great Basin, or the Parker Dam, or Lone Pine near Manzanar?) At points in this text I tend toward the conversational, because this is a conversation. In dialogue with place, I cherish the notion that there will be elements that cannot be readily explained or that refuse to heed expectation—and that it is a responsibility to place and being in place that invites us to take these as part of the story, part of the theory. There are cowboys in incarceration camps, and Abraham Lincoln is here, too. There are sea turtles in central Utah. The only way to know that they are there is to be there, too. The only way to know where they lead is to follow. What I find is that these strangenesses and their defamiliarizing juxtapositions are as critical to the project of placing Japanese American incarceration in relation to broader histories of Western expansion, settler colonialism, and forced removal as are the federal records and published literatures. They represent the impulse to imagine relation, fantastically and bombastically; they represent the ways these connections hide beneath the surface, made innocuous by their camp, their roadside innocuousness. They are never the destination but they are part of the transit. They are evidence of palimpsestic text erased, but showing through.

Working on this project, I've been asked often about origin stories. It seems it's imperative you have one, and that there is certainly no good project without one. People get frustrated when you refuse to name your origins. They need to know you had a spiritual epiphany, or that all this time, you've been manifesting a destiny. To this I might respond, *what of significant dates?* My connections are now. They precede me, and will continue.

Here is an image, both origin and ending: Every year, a man runs the 250 miles from Los Angeles to Manzanar. It's a relay run, but every mile is by foot. He traces the original removal of LA JAs to the Owens River Valley; he reawakens the transit. The camps were not only a place to

stay, but a place to be moved into, out of. A place to be transformed. A place always in relation to others—the city, the water, the mountains and the high desert scrub; the Spanish orchards; the Anglo farms; the Paiute villages. The first Manzanar 50/500 was run in 1992, on the 50th anniversary of the incarceration and the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's colonizing arrival in the "New World." Mo Nishida, the founder of the run, cites his inspiration as the indigenous Peace and Dignity runs, which also began in 1992 and "embody the prophecy of the Eagle and Condor. This prophecy mandates that at this time all Indigenous Peoples in the Western Hemisphere shall be reunited in a spiritual way in order to heal our nations" ("About"). He runs, he says, to remember. He runs for the camps. He runs for the Paiute.

He is still running.

Chapter 1 | Looking for a Man Named Komako: *Bad Day at Black Rock*, Rea Tajiri, and the Carceral Western

The meander of a river is the most efficient way through its terrain. We might associate the act of meandering with wandering, a river nestling into convoluted curlicues and rivulets difficult to map and harder to anticipate; and we may visualize efficiency in terms of the assembly line, of highways and railways that cut through mountains rather than abide by them. But for a river, efficiency is not a measure of time. For a river to carve its path through rock it has, in the most literal sense, all the time in the world. The Colorado River's timescale is geologic. Its efficiency is measured in terms of the energy it takes to flow a particular distance, in a particular direction. It takes the path of least resistance.

By contrast, the Parker Dam, which is one of the many hydroprojects on the Colorado River, must expend some of the energy it generates in order to move the river away from its meander, in another less river-efficient direction. The river becomes part of a different calculus, a feature not only of its own environmental surround and watershed, but also those of a distant elsewhere—in this case, Southern California. The dam's location signals this split, straddling the border between California and Arizona to the northeast of the town of Parker, Arizona. Of course, by the time I reach the dam, it's already my second crossing of the state lines: The California-Arizona border follows the meander of the river, flummoxing easily cartesian notions of east and west. Driving from Los Angeles, I crossed the border, then crossed Parker in order to get to the dam—only to cross the border again. Parker, Arizona is both east and west of

California, nestled in the arms of the river. Even as the area's environmental transformations, water diversions, are obvious, in Parker it's difficult to orient oneself to the notion of the frontier in terms of strictly westward expansion.

I'm a poor excuse for a dam tourist, and have little to which I might compare the Parker Dam. I've never even been to the more famous Hoover Dam, Parker's elder sibling upstream. But I'm reminded of my hometown, named for colonizer John C. Frémont. We have a canyon, and through the canyon runs part of the original Transcontinental Railroad, with tracks that follow the original alignment of those laid by Chinese laborers in the 1860s. Back then, the tracks were headed toward Promontory Point, West rushing to meet East. The canyon itself was "built" long before the 1860s, by the Alameda Creek, which flows down to the sea, east to west. Or it would, were it not for the dam at the mouth of the canyon, black and inflatable. In the summer of 2015, during a period of drought, vandals popped the inflatable dam, triggering the release of 150 acre feet, or 50 million gallons of water past the water-scarce municipalities it was meant to sustain and into the San Francisco Bay (Mercer). Now newly rebuilt, the dam again lies across the creek like a monstrous slug, or a freshwater whale, its black skin peppered with the barnacle patina of bird droppings and hazy with dried algae, mud, and mineral deposits.

Quite unlike the Fremont dam, unbeautiful, the Parker Dam is cathedral-like, and made of white concrete. The road that runs along the top of the dam is towered over by a crescent of columnal fixtures, while the dam itself drops low beneath red cliffsides. One of the deepest dams in the United States, its walls sink hundreds of feet below the riverbed. It is also fenced and manned. The Parker Dam will not be popped; it will not be meddled with. While not highly-trafficked nor strictly controlled, its chain-link fences, bold signage, and guardsman are enough to remind me that the dam is an apparatus of the state, and the state is watching.

I'm here because I'm interested in the dam as both bastion of state power and of frontiersman-like transformation. I'm interested in the way the dam functions to stake Los Angeles's claim to land and water far beyond its borders. From the California side of the dam, outside the chain-link fence and the Restricted Access signs, I turn my back to the dam and gaze westward. Past the calm, blue expanse of what remains of the Colorado River beyond the dam lies the town of Parker, glittering in the distance on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. Eventually, out of sight, the river will flow downward, from 438 feet above sea level to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Arizona to Baja. It will meander past the US-Mexico border 150 miles south, and another hundred miles into the Gulf. The water that the Parker Dam holds back, on the other hand, will lurch improbably up the mountains; then another 144 feet, up more mountains, another 438 feet, another 441 feet even higher, until this water is 1800 feet above sea level. It will be pushed through the Mohave and underground toward the coast of California, in part to San Diego but primarily to the greater Los Angeles area. Today, the Colorado River supplies 50% of Los Angeles' water supply.

From California's perspective, the Parker Dam, built between 1934 and 1938, was a New Deal gift of water that allowed for the expansion of Los Angeles and its surrounding urbanizing area. From Arizona's perspective, the dam was unauthorized and the water was stolen. When the building first began, then-Governor of Arizona Benjamin B. Moeur dispatched Arizona's National Guard to halt the project and guard the river. While the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ruled against Arizona's objections, control of the waters remained—and continues to remain—embattled ("California"). Riparian rights in the West are often metaphorized as "water wars," but these wars have always been literal, too.

The Dam has further associations with war, as well: By World War II, the Colorado River was a major energy supplier to the Burbank-based aircraft manufacturer, Lockheed. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, it was deemed important enough to warrant armed guards in case of Japanese attack; and when Japanese American incarcerated began arriving in the area, many "concerned citizens" wrote to their legislators, voicing their consternation at Japanese Americans being allowed in such close proximity to the Parker Dam (Linenberger 64).⁸ While the Dam straddles the California-Arizona border, however, it is nearly 300 miles from the California coast; it is seventeen miles of winding uphill canyon from the town of Parker. Poston is 15 miles outside Parker. As I wind my way down the canyon with Whitefish, my rental Corolla, we pass the tribally-owned BlueWater casino, where in 2019 several hundred Japanese Americans convened to honor the history and memory of Poston.

I drive to the train depot. Opened in 1907, the main building is a long wooden structure painted corn-yellow, with a smart green trim around the roof. The depot is no longer in operation, but it's the same depot that stood in 1942. It's the train depot at which 10,000 Japanese Americans would disembark, over the course of that year. For many, it would have been their first glimpse of their new "home," as the trains from California traveled with the blinds drawn. Coming mostly from coastal Los Angeles and San Diego, or from the rolling farmland of Salinas or the San Fernando Valley, flat brown Parker would have been a world apart. When I arrive in 2019, a sign on the train depot fence proclaims, "NO TRESPASSING." A police car pulls in after me (and Whitefish's California plates). I leave.

I leave the town of Parker later that night, headed to Los Angeles. Parker is quiet, and but for the border checkpoint, for hundreds of miles there's nothing but my headlights against

⁸ This guard detail was short-lived, as the soldiers were ultimately shipped overseas to the warfront.

tarmac, the moon, and the blue-darkness around us. They'd have been able to see the moonlight, I tell Whitefish. In the trains, I mean. Slipping in from under the blinds.

I leave the river, but follow its waters west.

Poston, however, is not the only scene I need to set, and the Colorado is not our only river. Just after Barstow, tack abruptly northward up Highway 395 instead of following I-40 (which itself follows old Route 66), which was built in 1926 and roughly follows the path of the Carson and Colorado Railway. After about a hundred miles, this path leads to Owens Lake, the Owens River, and the Owens River Valley—the site of the Manzanar incarceration camp. This is not Los Angeles, but the city's footprint is here, too. For the last hundred years, the waters of the Owens River have also been diverted west to feed Los Angeles, and the story plays out in similar fashion. Prior to the entrance of Los Angeles in 1902, the Owens River Valley had been most recently colonized by white settlers in the 1850s. The Valley owes its name to John C. Frémont—yes, the very same—who named it after his lieutenant, Richard Owens (Walton 14). Soon after its "discovery" in the 1850s, settlers in the Valley dispossessed the region's indigenous Paiute through both military and congressional force, for these lands fell under the Homestead Act of 1862, which I mentioned in the Introduction. These agrarian ambitions, however, were short-lived, and ousted by yet another piece of legislation. After the city of Los Angeles purchased rights to water from the Owens River, the passage of the 1902 Newlands Reclamation Act granted federal authority to greenlight water diversion and retention projects in the West. In spite of the protests of Owens Valley residents, the river was rerouted. By 1930, there were 58% fewer farms in the Owens Valley and agricultural production had sunk even further, by 84% (191).

Ultimately, the farms in the Valley fell victim to the United States' colonizing impulse—that is, to the same United States they'd imagined themselves a part of, as its pioneers on the frontier. Yet, as John Walton argues in *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California* (1992), "Moral claims based on pioneer achievements were self-congratulatory, ignoring the supporting policy of state expansion and the means it supplied for settler supremacy" (192). The Owens Valley farmers' claims to land were effectively superceded by the western expansion promised by the Los Angeles' burgeoning industries. Beginning in the 1920s, the Valley experienced a second wind as a hub for Hollywood film production, linking the region to Los Angeles yet again: Towns along the Owens River, such as Lone Pine, served as backdrop to a number of Western films, and the Valley's hills and troughs played home to a number of silver screen cowboys. This too, however, was short-lived. The film industry moved on. In the Owens River Valley, the United States' repeated cannibalization of its own settler projects recalls Laura Barraclough's assertion that "conquest is never fully secured and must be maintained through ongoing acts of nation building" (8). Thus, it's poetically ironic that by 1941, the Valley seemed an ideal place for a federal incarceration camp for Japanese Americans, many of whom had been forcibly removed from their homes and businesses in Los Angeles.

If you leave Manzanar for Los Angeles, you'll find the road littered with protrusions from different times, different periods of boom and bust, settlement and resettlement: Pieces of Route 66, as previously mentioned. Pieces of the Southern Pacific railroad, which was instrumental in shipping materials that built the dam on the Owens River and allowed for the passage of its waters westward. It was instrumental in shipping Japanese Americans east. If it's 2011, as it was when I last passed it, you'll drive past the carcass of the Cockey Bull, a Western-themed line dancing mainstay for many decades until its demolition in 2013. (It's now a Wendy's restaurant.)

I bring this up because, like the Parker Dam, the history of the Owens River Valley and its relationship to Los Angeles bespeaks their inextricability. The removal and relocation of water ties all three locations together just as surely as do their roles in Japanese American incarceration. Across both water and camp, the U.S. state acts as both champion of the settler fantasy of the frontier and its cannibalizer, encouraging settlers to claim Paiute lands under the Homestead Act; only to help Los Angeles usurp these farmers in the Owens Valley with the Reclamation Act; only to usurp the city's will in favor of its incarceration camp; only to claim that it is the Japanese American incarcerated who are the pioneers who will make the Owens Valley fertile. Pieces of each transformation of the Valley, each imagined frontier, continue to ghost the Valley's roads, rails, and rivers.

In this chapter, I will examine how the Hollywood film, *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955) and the experimental documentary, *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991) confront these ghosts. Filmed near Lone Pine, *Black Rock* initially evokes the aesthetic sensibilities of the West—its frontier towns and sweeping vistas—as well as those of the many Westerns once set there. Following a similar convention, *Black Rock* opens with a man venturing into a small town in the west, only to be swept up in the aftermath of the brutal murder of a Japanese farmer. However, rather than follow generic expectations—a lone ranger returns justice to the town—I argue that the film ultimately de-centers its would-be cowboy as well as his heroic plot. In his place, the primary element becomes the environment itself, and the way its presence wends itself into both murder and cover-up. Indeed, I find *Black Rock* difficult to watch without finding my gaze constantly thrown to the Sierras, or without finding myself altogether too conscious of the enclosed, almost carceral interior spaces in which so much of the film takes place. Following my preoccupation with the film's environmental surround, I trace the ways the

incarceration of Japanese Americans is thematized in *Black Rock*, and the way this thematization is in turn linked to environmental transformations in both the Owens River Valley and along the Colorado River near Poston. Because while *Black Rock* was filmed at Lone Pine, the film itself never confirms that's where it takes place; instead, its characters name their surroundings in terms of Arizona landmarks, which conjure Parker rather than Lone Pine, and Poston in place of Manzanar. *Black Rock* also serves as one of *History and Memory*'s many intertexts, as filmmaker Rea Tajiri narrates the effervescent intergenerational traumas suffered by her family at Poston and afterward.

To offer an itinerary of these explorations: I'll begin by illuminating *Bad Day at Black Rock*'s expression of Western tropes. I am particularly interested, however, in the points at which the film deviates from these tropes—namely, the absence of the traditional hero-cowboy and the way its landscapes come to signify incarceration and internment, rather than the freedoms so deeply associated with the sprawling West. In order to make sense of these departures, I will then introduce what I term the "environmental gaze," a way of viewing the film that focuses on the film's setting as surround rather than background. Following this gaze, I'll offer a way of investigating the productive potential of *Black Rock*'s environment, steeped as it is in the specters of internment, and riddled with long histories brought to life by *Black Rock*'s engagement with the Western genre. Finally, I will also consider *Bad Day at Black Rock*'s role as intertext in Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* in order to further explore *Black Rock*'s unstable location in place, even as the histories each place evokes are crucial to unearthing the ways frontier fantasies, Japanese American incarceration, and Native dispossession entangle. In this chapter, I explore the ways evocations of "place" are the process by which narratives become counterintuitively

unmoored, and imbued with vestiges of multiple times and places intersecting, frontiers eclipsing one another.

A Western Without Heroes

A train cuts through desert, its metal siding almost brilliant enough to reflect the mountains that frame its passage. As though from the sky, suspended like a wind hovering bird, we see it from afar. Then we're above the tracks, flying to meet the train head-on. We sweep up and over, hold our line over its black roof before we nestle into the brush and rock, now peering at the train from down low—low enough to catch a glimpse of shadowed undercarriage. This is the opening scene of *Bad Day at Black Rock*, replete with establishing shots of mountain and scrub. *Southern Pacific* is emblazoned on the engine. As the opening credits roll, we return to the center of the tracks, facing the train head-on, but it's different this time. Rather than sweep up over the top of the train like a bird, we hold position. We maintain speed with the train, our backs toward the destination. (*Angelus novus.*) It feels like a confrontation, with the straight shot⁹ suggesting that the train's coming is powerful and plot-driving. The film's dramatic, brassy score rises to a sinister crescendo, and as the train approaches the town, multiple figures break their small town routines to witness its coming: A man in a rocking chair at the train depot rises abruptly from his seat, gaze fixed on the train. A woman sitting in the office of the mechanic shop leaves her workspace to watch the train. Every man wearing every cowboy hat in town watches the train come; even the cook for the town's bar and grille, still wiping his hands on his apron, comes to witness the coming of the train. When protagonist John J. Macreeedy (Spencer Tracy) finally disembarks, he's met by the man in the rocking chair, who serves as mouthpiece

⁹ Throughout this chapter, I will adopt the cinematographic terminologies used by Millard Kaufman in the shooting script for *Bad Day at Black Rock*.

for the town when he asks, "You for Black Rock? ... what'd'ya want?" The man is uneasy; he reveals he's the telegraph operator and wasn't informed anyone would be stopping by. Macreedy figures aloud that perhaps his visit didn't bear announcing, but the operator's anxiety goes unassuaged. The townspeople's guarded curiosity follows Macreedy to his hotel and beyond. He captures their attentions, and he is the force to which all others react. By all accounts, the coming of this train and its mysterious passenger seems a capital event.

But is it? A defining feature of travel by train is that it must always be, to some degree, expected. Trains run on schedules and stop at stations. The tracks to Black Rock were likely laid decades to a hundred years ago. To be sure, Black Rock's station is little used, and Macreedy's stop comes unannounced. The operator claims no one has visited Black Rock in four years. But the fact remains that Macreedy boarded a train on a regular schedule, which followed a designated route, and stopped at a predetermined station. His mystery is limited. Within minutes of his arrival in town, Macreedy offers his name and point of origin (Los Angeles), and shortly thereafter also divulges his reason for coming (he is looking for a man named Komako)—all markers of specificity that undo what little mystery he had. The immediate resolution of his mystery suggests that he was never an enigma to solve. Macreedy may be a new addition to the scene, but perhaps the mystery of *Bad Day at Black Rock* belongs to the town itself. Again: Or is it? Because before the film is even halfway over, Black Rock's mystery *also* resolves. The town's secret is so poorly kept that its resolution requires almost no sleuthing on Macreedy's part: The entire town is complicit in the murder of the man named Komako.

While the West and the Western are typically built on storied places and criminal acts—one need only think of the overlapping vengeance plots in John Sturges' *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, which spans the Texas plains, Dodge City, and Tombstone—the third element that

completes the trifecta of the traditional Western is the hero-protagonist—the man of action, the cowboy, the lawman. The Wyatt Earps of the story. When a heroic stranger comes to town, he is expected to act. However, *Bad Day at Black Rock* diverges from this tradition by evacuating the need for action, at least where looking for Komako is concerned. In the first third of the film, confessions come and mysteries unravel regardless of whether Macreeedy undertakes any heroics; he doesn't need to solve anything. Even if Macreeedy is a man of action, in *Black Rock* he is not required to act. Nor is Macreeedy a cowboy, nor a lawman. He is a soldier fresh from the Western Front in Europe, and with his arrival in *Black Rock's* different, wild West, Westness explodes with new definitions: Macreeedy's backstory is different from that of the typical incoming stranger, as are his actions (or lack thereof) in town. In reaction to his mere presence, the murder plot in *Black Rock* effects its own unearthing. But what is a Western without its hero?

This question arises provocatively in *Black Rock* in part because of the film's unique placement in the filmography of the Western. Produced well after the silent, half-reel Broncho Billy Westerns¹⁰, and before director John Sturges's aforementioned and better-remembered *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), as well as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960)¹¹, *Black Rock* entered a scene where the Western had never stopped being produced, but also never stopped staging the nineteenth century. *Black Rock*, by contrast, is set in 1945, and the lingering specter of World War II looms large—Indian Wars and ranchers and stagecoaches accosted by outlaws give way to thoughts of gas rations and lingering O.P.A.s,¹² scarcity rather than resource-rich lands and boundless opportunity. In *Black Rock*, the threats are more contemporary, less freely

¹⁰ Broncho Billy half-reels and other early Westerns were filmed in Niles Canyon, through which runs the Alameda Creek (the one with the inflatable dam).

¹¹ Though not the focus of this chapter, *The Magnificent Seven* is itself an interesting product of the post-World War II Western given that it was adapted from an Akira Kurosawa script.

¹² The O.P.A., or Office of Price Administration, was established shortly after the United States' entrance into World War II. The O.P.A. set price ceilings on goods and also had the authority to ration scarce items.

fantastical; the atmosphere is muted.¹³ In keeping with this tone, film historian Dana Polan additionally notes that the generic influence of film noir in *Black Rock's* West, popularized in the decade preceding *Black Rock's* release, also lends a brooding, cynical tone to its West, and its Western outpost sick with secrets. This West is hardly evocative of the self-evident grandeur explorers like John Muir or Frémont once espoused. Rather than abundance, Black Rock's wide open empty connotes absence and subterfuge. For instance, although most of Black Rock's residents appear to make their livelihood from ranching, no ranches or livestock appear in the film. The railroads have already been built. Shootouts must happen under the cover of darkness, and never at high noon. Ambitions for empire have come and gone—even town kingpin Reno Smith (Robert Ryan) admits to journeying to Los Angeles "now and again" (Sturges).

Smith also enlists the help of an urban private detective to figure out why Macreeedy has stopped in Black Rock. Even as Macreeedy seems an intrusion into the town, as a traveler from Los Angeles, and as a soldier from the war, these "intrusions" were also already a part of life in Black Rock. As with Lone Pine in the Owens River Valley and Parker on the Colorado River, however geographically distant each might be from Los Angeles, the city's footprints are still there. Connected to this larger society, with its courts and legislative mores, in Black Rock it is neither the time nor place for the classic Western's cowboy heroics, independent of all but the immediate showdown. It appears that, as Marita Sturken argues in her analysis of *Black Rock*, the film memorializes the "end of the American West" (697). Reno Smith and the other would-be hero-cowboys are not needed. So instead, they murder a man named Komako.

¹³ Indeed, producer Dore Schary originally intended the film to be scoreless. In his autobiography, he describes his vision for the film's opening scene, carried by ambient sound, without musical accompaniment: "First the quiet speck of a station in the heart of desolation. A wind blowing, a wowl of a coyote, the far-off-horn of a diesel engine, then the roar of the train. The music department hated me" (qtd. in Nixon). Schary, however, ultimately decided the scene didn't work without the score, and so the final cut of the film carried the orchestral, anxious bombast described earlier.

Komako's presence—or more accurately, his conspicuous absence—lends *Black Rock's* iteration of the Western yet another modification. When asked to account for Komako's absence, Smith shakes his head and informs Macreeedy, "[Komako] got here in '41—just before Pearl Harbor. Three months later he was shipped to one of those relocation centers" (Sturges). Although Smith's suggestion is a red herring, as Smith himself led the townspeople to immolate and then shoot Komako to death, his suggestion draws on the film's uniquely postwar setting. His lie puts notions of "the end of the American West" in conversation with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Oddly, *Black Rock* is not as black a sheep as one might imagine, with respect to Hollywood's interpretations of Japanese American incarceration. Although the incarceration is only mentioned once and no Asian actors appear in the film (Komako and his son Joe exist only in name¹⁴), even mainstream Hollywood films more overtly about incarceration have tended to relegate the realities of internment to the background. Instead, many tend to privilege narratives focalized through non-Japanese characters. This held true even well into the 1990s, after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which acknowledged the injustices of Japanese American incarceration and established a process for redress. Most often, these narratives concern the interracial romance between a white man and a Japanese American woman. Taunya Lovell Banks, in her article "Outsider Citizens: Film Narratives About Japanese Americans," argues that even later films like *Come See the Paradise* (1990) and *Snow Falling on Cedars*

¹⁴ Komako's name is neither a typical Japanese male given name, nor a family name. Hara Komako (原駒子), however, was a prominent silent film actress in Japan during the 1920s and 30s, though Komako is still her given name, not her family name. Additionally, although it is romanized in the film script as "Komako," Tracy and his cast members pronounce the name "Komoko." This likely speaks to the production crew's lack of knowledge regarding Japanese names, resulting in an arrangement of syllables that seem vaguely Japanese.

(1999) displace any social commentaries on internment with tales of white infatuation, and the power of white heroism (782).

Banks also dismisses *Bad Day at Black Rock* as one of these narratives, citing Macreeedy's character as yet another effort to "reestablish white innocence after internment" (775), and much of the film would seem to support this reading. Macreeedy, after all, comes to Black Rock as a proxy for Komako's absent son, and is positioned as the hero that will bring Komako's killers to justice. He is the "good white man," the man repulsed by the racist acts of others, who has returned from the war with accounts of the valor of the 442nd Battalion. Speaking derisively of Komako, Smith scoffs, "Loyal Japanese Americans—that's a laugh. They're mad dogs. Look at Corregidor—the Death March" (McGuire 44). To which Macreeedy replies, "What did Komako have to do with Corregidor?" (44). He has come to Black Rock, after all, to deliver a medal to Komako, attesting to the bravery of his son's sacrifices as an American soldier. Macreeedy is well-positioned to serve as the white sympathizer, able to denounce the troubled histories of anti-Asian racism and incarceration while also redeeming the role of the white man. He is the hero unmarred by old nineteenth-century notions of racial exclusion, or the cowboy claims that turned Komako's presence in the West into a reason to eliminate him. In contrast to Banks's interpretation, however, I argue that Macreeedy ultimately fails in his purported role as the *Black Rock's* white savior. *Black Rock* is about what arises in the wake of his failure—what alternative narratives and foci become part of the Western that is not a Western, the war story after the war, and the incarceration narrative without incarcerated.

When Macreeedy first steps off the train in Black Rock, the parallelism written into screenwriter Millard Kaufman's stage direction emphasizes Macreeedy's self-assurance. When the telegraph operator asks, incredulous, "You for Black Rock?" Macreeedy replies "easily." He

offers a laconic, "That's right." The operator replies, "uneasily." He says, "There must be some mistake" (5A). Macreedy ease directly contrasts the town's unease, and when the operator tells him he hadn't been expected, Macreedy responds with "the ghost of a grin." Again, his grin contrasts against the operator, who speaks after "swallowing nervously" and "as if he wanted everyone in town to know" what this stranger from the train was looking for. Macreedy embodies an unflappable coolness that seems the antithesis of Reno Smith's reactionary anti-Japanese response, as though he's part of a different narrative. And again, perhaps he is. In Macreedy, the nineteenth-century meets twentieth, and the Western and the war tale intermingle. He is a soldier returned from World War II. If the cowboy hero of the traditional Western is measured by his rugged independence, Macreedy operates otherwise; and if the six-gun standoff is the centerpiece of the cowboy's repertoire of actions, Macreedy opts to turn the other cheek. In one of Macreedy's first encounters with the townsfolk of Black Rock, one of them suggests to Macreedy, "You look like you could use a hand" (Sturges), in reference to the paralyzed arm Macreedy keeps in his coat pocket—a war injury. Meant as an emasculating barb, Macreedy ignores it. Yet he also does not hesitate to enlist the assistance of a young woman, who supplies him with a Jeep. Similarly, once he learns of Komako's fate, Macreedy does not attempt to exact justice on his own; instead, he tries to enlist the help of the town's phone and telegram operators in order to contact the state police. Rather than discover the murder and take it upon himself to exact vengeance (and/or justice), he reaches for the judicial structures of the state. While perfectly logical, Macreedy's strategy is emblematic both of *Bad Rock's* infrastructurally networked twentieth-century, as well as the mediated actions of the film's new model of heroism. The logic by which Macreedy operates gestures toward the broader infrastructures in which

twentieth-century Black Rock is indelibly enmeshed: There's no solitary frontier, if ever there was.

Rather than see his reliance on others and his muted reactions to their brinkmanship as emasculating, the townsfolk at Black Rock perceive Macreedy's coolness, his seeming lack of hypermasculine pretension, as a threat. When Macreedy first attempts to check into the town's hotel, a townsfolk named Hector (Lee Marvin) forces Macreedy to switch rooms with him, claiming that Macreedy's room is his—it's always his. It's reserved for him when the cattle and its cowboys are in town. Macreedy lets him have it without a fight, but Hector does not see this as a victory. He tells the others that Macreedy "is a pretty cool guy," which he finds disconcerting because "he pushes *too* easy" (Sturges). When Macreedy doesn't fight, he upends the mechanism of social hierarchy in Black Rock—that spirit of the frontier, where you take what's yours or get left with nothing. Mechanism unseated, the circumstances surrounding Komako's disappearance also begin to falter. Smith's tit for tat logic—the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, so of course Komako had to pay—loses its automatic righteousness, because here is Macreed turning the other cheek. Refusing to assert his right to a space, yet somehow filling it all the more. Rather than see him as inferior, Macreedy's unassuming nature is dangerous—he's the hero who might betray them to the world as villains, supercede their way of life with another way of justice.

At the same time, however, the infrastructures that connect Black Rock to Los Angeles, and to the U.S. state are hardly infallible. Even as they are revealed by Macreedy's actions, they also prove unstable, unreliable, and contingent. For instance, when Macreedy attempt to call the state police, the telephone operator lies that "the lines are busy"; the telegram Macreedy attempts to send, care of his anxious greeter, is of course never delivered. For twenty-four hours,

Macreeedy is, in fact, alone in the midst of a not-so mysterious murder—which might be a bad day at Black Rock, indeed.

Macreeedy loses his cool. After one too many provocations in the town's bar and grille, Macreeedy lashes out at his menacers with violence, incapacitating one of the townspeople working under Smith. He strikes the man multiple times, expertly targeting pain centers (the nose) and vulnerable organs (the spleen and trachea). Though he leaves the man alive, he does not hold back—any one of his blows has the potential to be life-threatening. He loses his grasp of cool non-confrontation and retaliates. Perhaps Macreeedy's retaliation in self-defense is technically defensible; perhaps it is not. The more salient point, however, is the fact that Macreeedy's excessive use of force returns him once more to the independent, vigilante impulse of the small town in the West, where there's no law but the law one makes. He flummoxes the cool approach that had, to that point, so crucially differentiated him from the cowboys at Black Rock, rendering indistinguishable the law he meant to bring to Black Rock and the lawlessness already afoot.

By the end of the film, Macreeedy's actions land him squarely beyond the reaches of the very parameters for cool heroism that his appearance at Black Rock initially forecasted. Attempting to get out of town before the same fate that befell Komako also disappears him, Macreeedy enlists the help of Liz (Anne Francis), who works at the town's mechanic shop and has use of a Jeep. On their way out of town, however, Macreeedy and Liz are ambushed by Reno Smith. The Jeep stalls out in a darkened canyon on the outskirts of town, only to be suddenly bathed in spotlight. As suddenly, rifle shots ring out, and they see Smith shooting at them from a high ridge. Smith makes short work of Liz. With Liz gone, it's a shootout between Smith and Macreeedy under the cover of night—opposite high noon.

Theirs is never a true cowboy duel, with Smith shooting from high ground and Macreedy unarmed. Still, the nature of Macreedy's violence is viscerally brutal. Without a gun, Macreedy fashions a Molotov cocktail from the flames of the Jeep's broken headlight and fuel from a ruptured gas line. He hurls it at Smith. Smith goes up like a beacon in the desert—a beacon eerily reminiscent of the arson Smith himself committed against Komako. In this scene, the audience receives a visual echo of the violent act of arson that set the plot of the film in motion. Just deserts, perhaps, but the spectacle of the flames as they eat away Smith's clothing, persisting in patches where the fire finds flesh to feed it, offers the viewer more violence than justice. The air is empty but for Smith's screams, and as his body writhes on fire the camera does not waver from the scene, capturing his prolonged agony. Macreedy kicks sand at Smith's body ineffectually, and says nothing. He stands above Smith and watches his body burn. Then he takes Smith's car back into town. Perhaps it would be just vengeance, if the audience had ever met Komako, or if Macreedy's motivations could be traced back to a desire to make amends for Komako's wrongful death. But Macreedy's mission is perfunctory, his demeanor cool—until it isn't.

Banks sees Macreedy as Komoko's white savior. Similarly, media critic Marita Sturken views *Black Rock* as a film about "a morally bankrupt America [that] is redeemed only by Macreedy, the wounded veteran with a sense of justice" (697). Yet Macreedy's unintended violence in the bar and grille—and his unflinching violence in the canyon—blur the boundaries between *Black Rock's* morally bankrupt America and whatever Macreedy would offer in its stead. If he too can set a man aflame, his tactics blurring into Smith's, then how different are they? Macreedy's takedown of Smith, his service to Joe Komako, returns no one to innocence, and sets no heroes apart. Macreedy's "win" savors only of anticlimax. The film wraps up quickly;

in the last five minutes, the police and the train coming to Black Rock to resolve the story with a perfunctory neatness.

So what is a Western without its hero? Why tell a war story that takes place after the war, or call *Black Rock* an incarceration narrative when it stars no incarcerated? To the last, I'd argue that *Black Rock* becomes an incarceration film when Smith uses the incarceration as an excuse for Komako's absence. He draws on a specific place and time to fabricate his alternative history to craft a narrative that seeks to hide his own violence beneath the societal violences of Pearl Harbor and the incarceration. In this sense, Smith's lie accomplishes two things: 1) He places Black Rock in a particular historical narrative that is very much entangled in the town's broader environmental surround (that is, the camp), and 2) he weds the feeling of the closing of the frontier to yet other feeling of enclosure: The camps, of course, but also the United States' unwillingness to narrate them. Smith might use them as a hasty cover for his own misdeeds, but in the end Komako's murder nearly solves itself. Every townspeople's knowledge of Komako's death, and their complicity in the act, bleeds into the streets, resounds and magnifies in their every interaction with MacCreedy. Komako may be absent and his body buried, but the town grows heavy with the bounty of histories that his absence implies. Yet the brooding, haunting nature of the film—the anxiety of things held back—is unremitting, even after Komako's mystery is solved, Smith is stopped, and the film draws to a close.

In his commentary on *Bad Day at Black Rock*, film historian Dana Polan notes the film's unusual preponderance of interior scenes—unlike the traditional Western, wed to wide open spaces and the freedoms they signify. For Polan, the effect is claustrophobic. Polan imagines this as a visual invocation of the frontier's closing, of freedoms ending, but I argue that this claustrophobia has greater potential to suggest that some *cannot*, in fact, be closed. Again, *Black*

Rock is not just a Western, set in a town at the edge fading frontier. It is also a postwar film. It is an incarceration film. Just as Komako's death wells up so readily in the minds of Black Rock's townsfolk, the incarceration wells up, too. Even when *Black Rock* sets scenes outside, creating space with long shots and capturing the valley's sharp blue sky, the mountains themselves become carceral to Black Rock, a sharp fence that is less majestic than imperious. There's no solace to be found in the open—just more fire and burning flesh.

If Macreedy is meant to be Komako and *Black Rock*'s savior, he fails in this. But a film is more than its plotline, and I think what is valuable about the nature of Macreedy's failure is the emptiness it leaves in its wake, the anxious thrumming with which it leaves the audience, the way it colors Black Rock and its environmental surround, rendering them carceral. *Black Rock* is not *about* Japanese American incarceration, but it is an incarceration film. When the telegram operator tells Macreedy that no one has stopped in Black Rock for four years, he means Macreedy is the first stranger to come to town since Komako's murder. He means that Black Rock spent all four years of the United States' involvement in World War II without outside interference. But the war is not, was never "outside." Like Komako's murder, the war, the camps, and their aftermath ghost Black Rock whether its denizens like it or not. It's in the mountains; it's in the soil. And it's in the water, too.

Let me show you.

The Environmental Gaze

First, a return to the train. If Macreedy does not herald the coming of a hero, a man of plot-driving action, then why would *Black Rock* make such a spectacle of his arrival? Similar to the Lumières's iconic *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896), the opening sequence of

Black Rock moves from long, establishing shots to medium-shots before the straight, close shot that puts the audience in the path of Macreeedy's moving train—a flourish that recaptures the mythic shock that made *L'arrivée* famous.¹⁵ *Black Rock's* sequence then continues, however, reverting to multiple iterations of long and mid-shots of the train. The opening sequence spans almost two full minutes, which is double the entire length of the Lumières's short. The most critical difference between the two sequences is not time, however, but movement. Where the camera is stationary in the Lumière brothers' short, *Black Rock's* moves: When the camera faces down the oncoming train, the camera does not remain stationary. Instead, it rushes forward. It outpaces the train. Outpaced, the train becomes the frame of reference, rather than the object in motion. For the audience, the train is no longer approaching; rather, it is being approached. This reversal troubles the idea that it is the train alone that commands the action of the scene, and that the scene's focus is the arrival of the train, or the passenger it carries. When the camera moves, the train's slower pace renders it almost stationary on screen. For a moment, it makes me question whether the train is passing the mountains, covering ground. Logically, I think, of course the train is moving, for it must eventually arrive. But for a moment, the train takes on a passive role, the role traditionally relegated to the surroundings of an object in motion.

The scene I always remember from *Bad Day at Black Rock*—and indeed, the one that inspired this chapter—occurs in the first two minutes of the film as part of this train sequence. Like all the others in the sequence, the train is moving through the desert. It's not the focal point of the shot, though. The train becomes background, more leading line than subject as it cuts the

¹⁵ In the world of film, Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896) entertains its own mythic status, having been the center of an urban legend that claimed that its first audiences were so shocked by the image of a train speeding toward them that they leapt from their seats, unable to distinguish between film and reality. For more information about the veracity of this tale, see Loiperdinger, Martin, "Lumiere's Arrival of the Train: Cinema's Founding Myth," *The Moving Image*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, pp. 89-118.

frame diagonally. The foreground, however, is populated by large black rocks—one assumes the eponymous ones. As a viewer, you can see the rocks in incredible detail. They're pock-marked and twisted. Igneous. That is, volcanic. Not only do they dominate the front half of the frame, drawing my attention—they also send it elsewhere. In that moment, the train is not of consequence, because I am busy wondering about the place it runs through, grasping for its geologic past. The rocks in this scene compel me to wander, away from the heroic or would-be heroic plotline of *Black Rock*, and toward the black rocks themselves, toward the long history they represent, and the geologic transformations they suggest.



iv. A moving train bisects the frame diagonally, with black rocks protruding in the foreground, in *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955).

I've referenced Dorothy Fujita-Rony's call to consider U.S. history in terms of water and land; and again, while her argument was intended to consider the United States as part of the colonial Pacific, I think the paradigm applies to consideration of the rivers and deserts of the interior West in Asian American studies, as well. Fujita-Rony calls this reorientation to water and land "refocusing the gaze" (566). While Kent Ono warns against the ocularcentrism of gazing—the idea that "what is seen is what is known" (100), I am interested in the practice of

wandering gazes. Gazes that seek to bring into focus that which cannot be seen—or, like the odd protrusions along the highway between Lone Pine and Los Angeles, can only be seen partially, and never quite resemble a fully coherent narrative. I am interested in the palimpsestic gaze that sees multiple temporalities and multiple spaces at once. Fu-jen Chen and Su-lin Yu also write about the gaze, in their 2005 article "Reclaiming the Southwest; A Traumatic Space in the Japanese American Internment Narrative." They argue,

[W]e need to rethematize the space of the Southwest and the camp surroundings. We must regard them not as aesthetic products but as aspects of the process of the "gaze." To make such changes, we must refocus our gaze by inserting important indicators—signs—of the internment experience. Most notably, we must reestablish the guardtowers, the barbed wire, and the original toilets that made private life communal in the camps. Resisting the overpowering gaze from the guard towers above or the voyeuristic gaze from outside the fence, we must return to a gaze from within and deposit those three signs back upon the physical, imagined, and textual spaces of the Southwest. We must do that in maps, tourist brochures, historical accounts, internment narratives, desert ruins, national museums, and within the American Other. (563)

They, too, call for readers to "refocus our gaze," this time tying the notion specifically to the Southwest. They lament that too often narratives of the incarceration "unfold the traumatic events of the internment sequentially through time but give little awareness of space. By eliminating the internment's location in a concrete place, a real landscape, the standard narrative cloaks rather than addresses the trauma" (555). According to Chen and Yu, attending to the particular place of the incarceration might serve as a much-needed redirection for narratives of the incarceration, in order to address the trauma of the camp experience. They want to populate the landscape of the West with visual markers of the incarceration—signposts that prove it happened, that the experience was material and real. In terms of developing means of

interpreting and remembering sites of Japanese American incarceration, I think the process of actualizing Chen and Yu's proposals are well underway.¹⁶

Where *Black Rock* is concerned, however, I'd argue direct signposts were superfluous. Komako was buried in an unmarked grave, but Macreeedy was still able to discern it. There are no Japanese faces, no guardtowers, no barbed wire—yet as Polan and I demonstrate, the carcerality of the film's environmental surround needs nothing of the sort. The gaze I posit invites us to focus on what *isn't*, just as *Black Rock's* camera invited me to wander from the train to the rocks beside it—and then to the volcanoes that are no longer visible, long dormant. For this reason, I will call it the environmental gaze.¹⁷ Focusing on the work of the environmental gaze in *Bad Day at Black Rock* allows the audience to see how the film's deconstruction of heroic Western tropes lays the groundwork for our potential to levy broader commentaries about not only the American frontier and its incarceration camps, but also ways these histories refuse to be buried in the deserts of the West.

Contemplating the role of place in narratives of American history, and the way public memorials (of the sort Chen and Yu propose) invite visitors to see the narrative of a place, Jennifer Ladino writes that "this 'reckoning' happens at affective registers—textual, corporeal, and especially, environmental" (198). Gazing environmentally, then, I aim to see where narrative of the film—its text—allows what is corporeal and environmental to show through.

¹⁶ However imperfect and always-developing this process might be. I will discuss questions of remembrance and preservation of sites of incarceration in more depth in Chapter 3.

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey introduced the term "male gaze" in 1975, theorizing the tendency of the filmic gaze to depict its subjects— notably women—from a masculine point of view. This is not the gaze my thinking proceeds from, though I feel it bears mentioning because of the widespread usage of the term. Whereas an example of Mulvey's male gaze might be a camera lingering on a woman's breasts the way a heterosexual man might, where the woman is depicted on camera as something viewed from the perspective of a man, for the pleasure and interest of a man, I am using "gaze" in a sense far more similar to Fujita-Rony and Chen and Yu. I, the viewer, bring my environmental gaze to places I inhabit, or media I consume, whereas Mulvey is speaking of the gaze a viewer inherits from elsewhere. For more on Mulvey, see Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

Beyond the excitement of meeting Macreeedy's train head-on, what I notice about *Black Rock*'s cinematography is that often, it is watchful. In the medium shots that comprise the bulk of the opening scenes, the black rocks that give the town its name are framed in the foreground. These shots follow the traditional rule of thirds, establishing depth by using objects in the foreground to frame the larger scene—yet the presence of the black rocks in the foreground suggests that they cannot be relegated to mere background. Shot at a low angle, below the sightline of a man who might stand beside the train—or disembark it—the camera gives the perspective of the rocks themselves. And then the camera takes to the air, to capture the train from above, it also captures mountaintops. It wavers in the wind, far from steady—movement that continually trouble the fixity of what I see as a viewer. When the camera meets the base of the mountains, or catches its peaks as distant prison walls, I feel invited to wander beyond Macreeedy and Smith and even Komako, and to imagine in their place what else these mountains once enclosed and oppressed. Ladino notes that while she understands the mountains as beautiful, adventuresome opportunities, the monumental signposts at Manzanar remind her that the mountains were not an escape, but "a natural barrier" (206). She writes, "[C]ontradictions' are embedded in, and even emanate from, Manzaar's physical environment" (198). Because *Black Rock* is filmed near Lone Pine, in Manzanar's Owens River Valley, these contradictions feel particularly salient, because Manzanar's signature mountains are forced to signify in two directions at once. They must conjure the glorious West of Lone Pine's Western film industry (itself long past glorious), but if you've ever been to Manzanar, you can't help but know those mountains differently, carcerally.

But the practice of gazing environmentally is not just about eschewing narrative for its surroundings. I see it also as a way of actively drawing relation between the plot—the Western

tale—and the corporeal forms that animate it. For environments are not backgrounds—they are surrounds, and bodies and objects are not entities apart from it. *Black Rock* often intercuts close shots of the human characters' faces when they are engaged in conversation with one another. Just as often, however, the human actors serve as frames for objects in their environment. The camera's deep focus renders these elements as crisply immediate as the interlocutors themselves, centering them in the scene and drawing them into the narrative unfolding. For example, when Macreeedy and Smith exchange thinly veiled accusations as to Komako's whereabouts, and the fate he met, their bodies frame Black Rock's gas pumps. While not part of the "natural" desert, per se, I take the gas pumps as part of Macreeedy's environmental surround. Blood red, the pumps remind the viewer that Macreeedy is beholden to the car he borrowed, and stranded in town without it. As I reach through time, imagining embedded histories, I also imagine that during wartime, gas was in short supply. Perhaps, then Smith might feel justified in keeping outsiders from what little resources Black Rock has at its disposal. In the scene, the pumps visually double the meaning of the scene's dialogue, emphasizing the war and the West, and the primacy of where the two intersect. And when Macreeedy then turns to the town doctor/veterinarian/mortician for help leaving town, the environment renders salient that which cannot be verbally expressed. Macreeedy and the doctor frame an adult casket, which recognizes what the doctor will not admit, and what Macreeedy is all too grimly aware: Because of what Macreeedy has learned about Komako, Smith and the others aim to kill him. The casket between them becomes an active forecast of what might come, just as surely as it confirms what has already transpired. (That is, Komako is dead. Should he linger too long in Black Rock, Macreeedy might be next.)

I've argued previously that while the film is not about the uncovering the mystery of Komako's murder. Neither is it a tale of Macreedy's new heroism and white men returned to innocence, having escaped the shadow of Japanese American incarceration. In order to make sense of the hole left in the wake of these familiar narratives, gazing environmentally clarifies the connection between *Black Rock's* murder plot and the vivacious histories that populate Black Rock's streets and its abutting desert. The reason the mystery of Komako's whereabouts is resolved so expediently relates directly to the environment's activity: When Macreedy first visit's Komako's former home, he notices flowers in hard soil. These flowers require nutrients to flourish so, and as Macreedy has seen bloom over the graves of the dead, it's not a leap to imagine whose body sustains them here. Yet this is less a revelation to Macreedy and the audience than it is a confirmation. The major conceit of *Black Rock* is not that Komako has been murdered. Macreedy never accuses anyone of the deed outright, because he does not need to voice what is already known. He specifically does not exhume the body, because proof is not required. Though Komako's death settles into the creases of the town like so much dust, *solving* this murder is not the focus of the film. This distinction is important because solving Komako's murder depends on Macreedy's quality as a detective to push the plot forward. Instead, the town all but admits its guilt when they react to Macreedy's arrival so defensively, and the desert blooms belie Komako's absence. Gazing environmentally, I find Komako cannot, in fact, be absented. It's as though this murder is a secret the town is powerless to keep at bay. The expedience of this resolution—then a full two-thirds of the film remain—suggests that the trouble with Black Rock does not lie with the death of one man. The audience is hardly surprised that this is what has become of Komako. It's almost expected that this Japanese American man,

in his classical Western town, should be murdered. There is no catharsis, no heroism, in Macreedy for simply bringing this to light.

Of course, the basic plot of the film proceeds as though there is. An early review of the film in *The New York Times* went so far as to drawing the film's central conflict around Macreedy, just as Sturken does. For the reviewer, Bosley Crowther, the film's suspense hinges less on uncovering Komako's murder than on Macreedy's own mortal peril; that is, the threat Smith and the others pose to Macreedy's safety in the final two-thirds of the film. Crowther, however, also points out that "[w]hy these small-time tyrants ... should assume it necessary to murder the stranger, whom Spencer Tracy plays, is a point that the script of Millard Kaufman never makes reasonable" (Crowther). Crowther's point is a gesture toward *Black Rock's* tendency toward spectacle and Hollywood histrionics, but the reason Smith and the townspeople's reaction to Macreedy seems so overblown is that when this plan is hatched, Macreedy has done little to warrant this escalation to murder. Though the threat exists that he will expose their deeds, what real proof could he offer? He did not collect any. Smith's fixation on Macreedy isn't designed to be dramaturgically defensible, so much as it is a hasty cover-up—an attempt to forestall the anxiety of chancing to look elsewhere, or of letting one's gaze wander from the storyline prescribed.

Black Rock's second murder plot, with Macreedy in the line of sight, can only be "made reasonable" if Komako is not Black Rock's only secret. What Macreedy stumbles upon is larger than one town, one body, and only by connecting the drama of Macreedy and Komako to this larger history can the audience begin to make sense of the film's spectacle. The story of Komako's death is revealed in three parts: In the first, Macreedy discovers Komako's disappearance, and Smith claims he was interned. In the second, wildflowers reveal Komako's

grave. It is not until the third revelation, in the latter third of the film, that the audience learns the motivations for his killing. Though sometimes attributed to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the consequent anti-Japanese sentiment—Smith offers this explanation when Macreeedy insinuates his knowledge of Komako's grave—another towns person ultimately confesses that the war was only a pretense. Smith leased Komako what he thought was useless land, but Komako found water. He found wealth—wealth that was not meant, in Smith's view, to belong to a Japanese man. The problem of Black Rock and its cowboys, then, is not that there is no room for cowboys in the twentieth century—it's that these cowboys do not want to share their West. Komako dug a well, found water where no others could, and was murdered for his trespass. It's not about the war. It's possible that Komako was killed before Pearl Harbor had ever been bombed.¹⁸ But to admit this is to recognize a much longer, insidious history of racism in the United States—and the ways that the mythic freedoms of the West are built less on manifest destiny than dispossession and exclusion. And so Komako's death wells up.

Tracing the many tributaries that feed this longer history requires an act of imaginative cartography, however, because the specific history *Black Rock's* environment is meant to recall is not immediately clear. The most critical aspect of gazing environmentally, however, is its invitation to invoke the histories with which a place is saturated, and to speak to historical throughlines that would be otherwise invisibilized. Black Rock, however, is not an actual town. It is not a place that exists beyond the story of the film. Various critics, including John Streamas, Marita Sturken, and William Deverell, assume that Black Rock is a fictionalization of the town

¹⁸ According to Smith, Komoko arrived in Black Rock just before Pearl Harbor, only to be shipped off "to one of those internment camps" several months later. It seems like in order to have been murdered by Smith, the killing would have needed to happen before Komoko would have been rounded up and—ironically—saved from Smith via his incarceration. But neither locations nor timelines are exact when it comes to *Black Rock*. Forced removals under Executive Order 9066 only began in the spring of 1942, several months after Pearl Harbor. They continued throughout 1942.

of Lone Pine, because that's where it was filmed.¹⁹ This assumption makes sense, given that the site the former Manzanar internment camp was only seven miles from the film set and, as I mentioned earlier, its mountains are impossible to mistake for any others. However, Rea Tajiri's experimental documentary *History and Memory* (1991) uses clips of *Black Rock* in conversation with Tajiri's mother's experience at the Poston internment camp, near Parker in western Arizona²⁰ Additionally, the film's script makes mention at multiple points of major cities in Arizona. It doesn't seem invested in placing itself at Manzanar at all. Instead, the town of Black Rock straddles the camera's unmistakable peaks of the Sierras near Manzanar and the script's Arizona landmarks—Phoenix, Tucson, Mesa—inhabiting both places, each with their own regional specificities, and their own histories.

The only way to recognize this double emplacement is to take *Bad Day at Black Rock's* environments as important components of the narrative the film aims to tell. What comes next is not a matter of privileging one set of potential places and histories over the other, but of using this double emplacement as a productive contradiction, and gazing environmentally in two directions at once. Both California and Arizona, Manzanar and Poston, have strong claims to Black Rock. Manzanar's are perhaps the most self-evident. Black Rock itself may be fictitious, but a particularity of the live-action film is that it must necessarily be filmed in a real place. In this way, a live-action film always inhabits at least two places—where it is filmed, and where its story comes alive. Whether the set and setting are one and the same, the set always influences the setting in ways that are impossible to predict. This is particularly true of *Black Rock*, because its mountains and deserts visually populate the film's surround. Yet gazing environmentally is about

¹⁹ See Deverell, William, "Fighting Words: The Significance of the American West in the History of the United States," *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 185-206.

²⁰ See Tajiri, Rea, *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takeshige*, Women Make Movies, 1991.

gazing beyond what can be seen. When Black Rock's sheriff asks Macreeedy where he came from, the sheriff suggests that perhaps Macreeedy might have hailed from Phoenix, Mesa, or perhaps "up Tucson ways" (Sturges).²¹ Tucson is located at the southernmost tip of the state, a location which does not immediately bring "up" to mind. However, if one abandons an abstract cartographic perspective, and instead imagines place from the lived perspective of a towns person in Arizona, Tucson gains 2000 feet in elevation over Poston. From this lived perspective, Tucson becomes "up." The sheriff's turn of phrase suggests that Black Rock's ambiguous location is not simply the result of a careless oversight. In the script, the fictional world of Black Rock is deeply localized to Arizona, and Poston, lived environment affecting even its residents verbiage, such that its specificities cannot be easily collapsed into, or be mistaken for, those of California and Manzanar.

Instead, *Black Rock* commits to ambiguity. After Smith justifies Komako's absence by claiming that Komako had been shipped off to an internment camp during the war, Macreeedy asks him which camp. Smith replies, "Who knows?" (Sturges). Smith's claim about Komako is a lie, of course, which perhaps explains his inability or disinclination to name a particular camp. But at the level of the film itself, this disinclination can also be read as a refusal to limit the implications of Komako's absence to one particular camp, or the fate of one particular body. This ambiguity is in direct contrast to the tenets of bioregional thought, or even historical specificity writ large, because without this specificity, it is difficult to access the layers of experience and inhabitation that create make place out of space. It is easy to imagine that *Black Rock's* refusal to name the town's nearest landmark of internment functions also as a refusal to engage that

²¹ In the original film script, a stage direction describes a road sign that proclaims Black Rock's nearest landmarks: Phoenix, 156 miles. Sand City, 32 miles (McGuire 7). This sign does not appear in the final cut of the film, but its suggestion of Arizona remains.

history—to make Black Rock a fictional town, the hi-jinks of which are not responsible to real and potentially unsavory intersections with local history. In the context of internment narratives, it is also common to champion individual narratives, granting human particularity to an otherwise amorphous "Asian threat."

But championing particularity can also be myopic, and there are limits to its usefulness when the issues being faced—anti-Asian sentiment, internment—are systemic. When the issues being faced exceed one bad day in one town, or the murder of one man pinned on one bombing of a harbor. It is not that *Black Rock's* location is not specific, as it claims down to the finest detail both its California and Arizona placements; rather, it claims place doubly. The impossibility of Black Rock's forces the audience to view it uneasily—because something is not quite right. Like Komako's absence, Black Rock as an environment in itself draws suspicion, and invites further interrogation as to what histories these places share. These moments of intersection magnify in *Black Rock* as it reaches for the histories of two internment camps, two deserts, two water wars (that are, indeed, connected. They are the same war). Under the watchful eye of the environmental gaze, the environment of Black Rock comes alive—and it has questions.

Beyond Unearthing: When History Refuses Burial

In the original short story that inspired *Bad Day at Black Rock*, Macreedy hails from Chicago, not Los Angeles.²² He rides the rails westward, and finds himself in a small town on the

²² The original short story is titled "Bad Time at Honda," and was published by Howard Breslin in *The American Magazine* in 1947. The title and eponymous town were renamed for the film version because *Hondo* (1953), starring John Wayne, had recently been released. Producers feared the names would be too similar, given that both films were westerns (Niiya). Incidentally, *Hondo* takes place in nineteenth-century Arizona, and John Wayne plays a soldier who wanders into a frontier town.

American frontier. In the film version, however, Macreedy comes to Black Rock from yet further west—Los Angeles. This shift in location from Chicago to Los Angeles re-frames *Black Rock's* notions of the West, and the Westerns that play out within it, because a frontier suggests there is nothing further beyond it. To have Macreedy come from a booming metropolitan area beyond Black Rock's frontier questions this basic assumption of the frontier—namely, that the frontier is the edge of civilization, and that as such it is boundless. In the previous section, I argued that the environmental gaze diverts attention from a human-engineered plot to one entangled inextricably to the memories and agencies of the environment. *Black Rock* presents an interesting case, in that its environments are multiple, but identifying the shared histories that shape both *Black Rock's* California and Arizona contexts demonstrates how these overlapping histories anchor the film firmly in narratives of the incarceration, and how this anchoring illuminates the necessity of considering incarceration in the context of the West as environment and imaginative, discursive space.

Though *Black Rock's* script pays fleeting attention to the incarceration itself, it does not shy away from the notion that the West exists as a constellation of many ideas. In the film's most iconic monologue, Smith defines the West for Macreedy: "Somebody's always looking for something in this part of the west. To the historian it's the Old West. To the book writer it's the Wild West. To the businessman it's the undeveloped West" (Sturges). In his definition, Smith highlights several key features of the West that *Black Rock* stages. At least to the historian, "this part of the West" is a relic of the past—perhaps an exciting past as the writer's Wild West suggests, where cowboys rule. Yet even as that rule is challenged, *Black Rock* resists relegation to the past. It has a working telephone system, which Macreedy uses; it's on the Southern Pacific's route, even if the train does not stop there often. Even Smith drives to Los Angeles

"now and again" (Sturges). And if Black Rock is the businessman's undeveloped West, somehow its opportunities for development are also too sparse to share. Smith finishes his monologue by admitting, "We don't even have enough water" (Sturges). Thus the West becomes defined by its water, or lack thereof. The West becomes defined by the lengths to which a town might go to keep a perceived outsider—that is, Komako—from profiting from what little water there is.

The thirst for water, and control over/profit from water, becomes the point of convergence between the explicit drama of *Black Rock* and narratives of the incarceration. Before Manzanar was home to barracks and barbed wire, it bore plentiful fruit. Its name, "Manzanar," or apple orchard, inscribes this memory, even after its waters were diverted and Los Angeles began to flourish instead. Both Valley and Komako fall victim to the war for water—a war that turned Manzanar from a land of opportunity to a desert fit for a prison. Ironically, the dawn of a different war, World War II, posed an opportunity to win it back: the camps themselves.

Thinking environmentally about the incarceration highlights the importance of the placement of the camps, and their place in the war for water in the West. As I discuss in the Introduction and elaborate upon further in Chapter 2, the War Relocation Authority's decision to place the camps as they did hinged on several factors: The camps needed to be an adequate distance from the coasts for reasons of purported national security, but the land was also required to provide an opportunity for reclamation and development. This, argued the WRA, would give the Japanese American internees a means of productively contributing to the war effort. Officially, the WRA described internees as "pioneers," albeit involuntary ones, stripped of their West Coast homesteads and committed to a life behind barbed wire. This incentive was perhaps even more descriptive of Poston than Manzanar; at Poston, Japanese Americans labored to create

irrigation infrastructures that are still used in the region today. The incarceration is as much a continuation of the water wars and agricultural ambitions of the West as it is a part of World War II.

And what of the Western? If the environmental gaze offers a means of tracing longer histories across *Bad Day at Black Rock*, then the conventions of the Western as genre serve to politicize that gaze, for these tropes are continually entangled within and utilized by the apparatus of the U.S. settler state. With incarceration posited so consistently by the Valley's mountains made carceral, and the water wars that straddle both Manzanar and Poston, each scene in *Bad Day at Black Rock* inherits these attentions. When Macreedy fails to live up to his new definition of heroism in the film's climactic scene, he not only fails to restore white innocence and act as white savior to Komako—his failures also speak to larger, allegorical claims about the larger histories that inhere in his confrontation of Smith. Though investigating the brutal murder of Komako suggests that Macreedy's role is to champion the Japanese Americans unable to win this fight for themselves, he demonstrates his inadequacy to the task when he blurs the distinction between his actions and Smith's.

Macreedy is, after all, an American war hero. His heroism originates in his participation in World War II as an American soldier, and it is this origin that brings him to Black Rock in the first place, in deference to Komako's deceased soldier-son. But Macreedy's tactics diverge from the cool diplomacy he performs in the first half of the film, and he resorts to strategies of incredible, spectacular violence. This divergence calls into question the perceived distinction between the violences on the war fronts. That is, the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor was violent spectacle. U.S. retaliation, on the other hand, was showcased as civil, orderly, and morally superior. Macreedy was one of its soldiers. Similarly, conditions in the Japanese

American incarceration camps met with common comparison to Nazi death camps—comparisons that made the incarceration admissible, because its violences were not nearly as extreme. Yet violent they were.

I don't mean to imply a direction equation between Smith and the Axis Powers of World War II. Smith's antipathy is reserved for the "Japs" moreso than the Nazis, but his loyalties are, foremost, American—where this designation belongs to the white, western men who have allegedly claimed the frontier for their own ambitions. White supremacy has many flavors. Correspondingly, the import of Macreedy's failures have less to do with his specific enemies than the nature of his self-definition, and by extension, the self-definition of the United States. The reason Macreedy's showdown with Smith is able to suggest alternative readings about both the war front and the frontier is because that self-definition proceeds along two axes, geographic and temporal. On one hand, the United States of World War II and the postwar landscape endeavored to define itself as a world power on the basis of liberal democracy (against the fascism of other countries, and later the Communism of other countries). On the other, the United States sought to define its liberal democracy as something separate from rowdier pasts, exchanging slavery for the Fourteenth Amendment; Indian Wars for reservations—and ultimately, assimilation and termination; and anti-Asian crime for a belief in an Asian model minority. Through his own act of spectacular violence, Macreedy exposes the impossibility of closing one frontier and cleanly becoming some new order, and of the persistence violences that continue to characterize the United States' liberal democratic politics. The incarceration was not a safety measure, or an opportunity to build an idealistic pioneer community. It was a forcible removal with fantasies of forced assimilation. What the WRA's invocation of the "frontier" intended to obfuscate

ultimately ends up being brought into clearer focus, functioning like the glass lenses of a telescope as they bring an image together.

This critique becomes all the more salient when comparing the resolution of *Black Rock* with Howard Breslin's original short story, "Bad Time at Honda." In "Honda," the dramatic tension resolves when Macreeedy offers a heated monologue, condemning Komako's murder. He finishes by informing the town that "Jimmy Kamotka was killed in Italy. I think maybe this town should know that. And remember it" (Breslin 138).²³ By emphasizing the war heroism of Komako's son, Komako's murder becomes criminal, shameful, *because* his son proved his loyalty to the United States. This implies that had he not, there would be no reason for shame, or for the denizens of Black Rock to re-examine the deep-seated racism that propelled their violent actions. It also implies that, although Macreeedy is himself a white man, he is innocent of Black Rock's racism, and in a position to cast judgment on their backwardness. His own societal status, and the society he keeps in the world beyond Black Rock, require no further interrogation. In the film's version of events, however, Macreeedy makes no speech to the townspeople, and when he gives the town Joe Komako's war medal, it bears no promise that the recognition it bestows—Japanese American loyalty, war valor—is enough to enact change, or that it serves as any kind of necessary, talismanic "proof" of Japanese American worth.

Bad Day at Black Rock does not leave room for simple condemnations of purportedly past-tense U.S. racism, where Macreeedy as a white outsider, a traveled, liberal urbanite, can be fully absolved of responsibility for Komako's murder, or his part in the history of Japanese American internment—and perhaps most importantly, its future legacies. Instead, it brings the Western into the twentieth century and enacts purportedly bygone tropes in a distinctly modern,

²³ In Breslin's short story, Macreeedy is looking for a man named "Kamotka," rather than the Komako of the film version. Breslin's "Japanese" name is even further from any known or likely Japanese name than "Komako" is.

postwar context. In *Dirty Wars: Landscape, Power, and Waste in Western American Literature* (2009), John Beck describes this postwar context as one defined by "a rewriting of history" compelled by a postwar generation of writers, historians and other narrative craftspeople "attempt[ing] to make visible the concealed legacies of conquest" (19). And the stakes of this past concealment loom large. In *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (2001), Caroline Chung Simpson argues,

As an almost ghostly 'absent presence' in postwar America, the narrative or discursive representation of Japanese American internment encompasses the paradoxical authority of counter-histories or ethnic/racial memories, which serve as the *necessary occlusions* of national history. As the nation's unstable attempts to remember Japanese American internment in the immediate postwar period suggests, even the faintest sense of what is forgotten or excluded may prove as vital to ensuring the meaning and unity of national history as the event that is centrally remembered and endlessly repeated. (19)

In *Bad Day at Black Rock*, the incarceration functions as "necessary occlusion" in two ways, wherein one ultimately serves to undo the other. Smith uses the incarceration to occlude his murder of Komako—but the memory of the incarceration, nearly as fresh in 1955 (when the film was released) as it was in 1945 (when the film is set), then serves to undo the notion that *Black Rock's* narrative is only about the West, the failure of the frontier for white settlers. It's also about the failure of this same frontier fantasy for the Japanese Americans who incarcerated, yet labeled "pioneers." The film necessitates a re-reading of incarceration as something deeply intertwined with frontier mythologies, and the racisms and exclusionary biases that underpin the frontier's "freedoms." By showcasing the environmental surrounds that stand as record and reflection of these histories—unburied, and hardly disposed of—*Black Rock* posits that the United States, and the modern identities it seeks to embody, cannot form in the absence of what came before. The occlusion is only necessary if the goal is to uphold the liberal democratic identity the United States has crafted for itself through settler fantasy. But the past cannot be silenced.

Nor can a postwar United States be shaped in the absence of that war. Caroline Chung Simpson understands incarceration narratives as "a project in understanding how history and memory are negotiated when the need to remember an event challenges the ideals of democratic nationalism and the narrative unity of nation that historical discourses ostensibly provide" (4). In the context of *Black Rock*, this "need to remember" evinces itself in the town's inability to keep Komako's murder secret, and the ways that internment and carceral visualities seep into each frame by activating the memories of Manzanar's mountains, and magnify the presence of internment in the film by doubly-siting this remembrance, invoking Poston as well. What makes *Black Rock* additionally powerful, however, is the fact that it reaches both forward and backward simultaneously. In the 1955 of the film's release, America's Cold War liberal democracy must contend with its own checkered wartime actions and the haunting legacy of internment; but these legacies cannot be traced purely to World War II, and the 1940s of the film's basic plot, because *Black Rock* is also a Western, and with this genre comes an additional century of histories with which to contend. The history the United States must contend with, then, is not a small piece that can be traced back to a single action or injustice; it is the history of the United States in its entirety that must be faced, and the very structures that allowed for its inception, growth, and persistence.

History and Memory

"Without the land, American mythmaking would not exist," writes Deborah A. Carmichael (1). She's speaking specifically about the role of landscape in Hollywood Westerns, and *Black Rock* is no exception. But perhaps what is most interesting about *Black Rock's* landscape is not the bold and obvious ways it signifies the West, but the ways in which it

conjures what cannot be seen—at least, not entirely. Contemplating Ruth Asawa's abstract sculptures, Ikyo Day describes these forms of powerful surrounds through their function as negative space, or "an invisible force field that defines and directs the flow of energy" (117). Asawa's sculpture, Day argues, acts as "a visual metaphor for the negative space within and surrounding Japanese internment in North America," in contrast to the seemingly "natural" white settler identity typically conjured by WRA camp rhetorics (117-18). The environmental surround in *Black Rock* exerts a similar force as powerful and attention-arresting negative space, against which more conventional Western narratives are meant to play out. In *Black Rock*, of course, the frontier fantasy is fading, and even the white savior narratives that arise postwar fall away. As viewer, I am left with only negative space, as though walking the dry riverbed of waters that have been diverted.

Day considers Asawa's work in excess of "the empiricism of national historiography," (118) and I think that's an especially useful phrase to think with, given the intimacy of the United States' national historiography and its fantasies of the West and Western expansion. The West, the strange permutation of it represented in *Black Rock*, makes salient the profound absence of Japanese American incarceration in postwar narratives. For a United States on the rise, uncontested victor over imperial Japan and European fascism, there is no time nor space to linger with the shame of its carceral underpinnings. Yet these underpinnings become the critical fascia that link the two places *Black Rock* straddles, not only conjuring the legacy of Japanese American incarceration, but also the multi-layered legacies of conquest on which the incarceration builds. Merging Manzanar and Poston, the feature that links these places together most strongly is their relation to the water wars of the West, and the federal infrastructures that won and lost the wars. Through *Black Rock*, the incarceration's own linkages to water and

environmental transformation in the West become more clear. However far removed from Japanese American experience its narrative might seem, the expansionist frontier fantasies that drive *Black Rock* shape not only the United States' self-perceptions in the wake of World War II—it also shapes Japanese Americans' processes of reckoning with the incarceration, as well.

Black Rock serves this function directly in Rea Tajiri's experimental documentary *History and Memory* (1991), which features fragmentary slivers of multiple, mediated interpretations of Japanese American incarceration. These fragments include newsreels from the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor; clips from films like *Come See the Paradise*; clips of wartime propaganda videos explaining the function and necessity of the camps; clips from Hollywood films contemporary to the propaganda, but not readily distinguishable from it in terms of message (e.g. the popular and patriotic musical, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* [1942]); and *Bad Day at Black Rock*. According to Tajiri, there are four forms of history and memory: "There are things which have happened in the world while there were cameras watching, things we have images for," she explains in the documentary's voiceover, over the Pearl Harbor newsclip. And then, "There are other things which have happened while there were no cameras watching, which we restage in front of cameras to have images of." This pronouncement falls over clips of the interior of bomber jets. "There are things which have happened for which the only images that exist are in the minds of the observers, present at the time," Tajiri says, of the absent histories. The unspoken narratives, "while there are things that have happened for which there have been no observers except for the spirits of the dead." These last are the narratives of those who have been absented, like Komako.

Foregrounding the presence of impossible memories, for which there were no observers but the dead, Tajiri offers yet another instance of a narrative that "exceeds the empiricism of

national historiography" (Day 118). Naomi Paik describes Tajiri's project as "less interested in producing an authentic history of internment than in elucidating history as an unsettled, complex process imbued with power" (82). Even pieces of story seemingly out of time exist as part of these cartographies of power, speaking toward a history that manifests in snatches and protrusions, hauntings and meanders. The film opens with an image that Tajiri has held in her mind for many years: Her mother in the desert, filling a canteen with water. The sound of the water, spilling from the pipe. Her mother, younger than Tajiri has ever known her. A memory of Tajiri's from before her conception. The scene recurs throughout the film, and scholars like Carolyn Chung Simpson have focused on the way it illuminates Tajiri's relationship to her mother, and the ways she is haunted by her mother's memories of Poston. I am interested in another form of intimacy that the scene provides, however—that of Japanese American and water, and water and desert.

Tajiri uses flashes of scenes from *Bad Day at Black Rock* to set her documentary in Poston (again blurring the boundary between what of *Black Rock* signals Poston, what is Manzanar, and what can only be both). As the motif of her mother filling her canteen continues to recur throughout the documentary, however, Tajiri's use of *Black Rock* becomes more intimate. She chooses to focus on Komako, and the way his death is motivated by his discovery of water. He transforms his environment by digging a well, and is punished rather than rewarded for it. "His absence is his presence," she says. A shot of massive, bountiful flowers growing in her mother's garden is captioned, "Flowers for Komako's grave." With this gesture, *Black Rock* ceases to be background, and becomes a narrative and environment Tajiri seeks to form relation with. She brings Komako into her mother's garden, into her family history. For Tajiri is not telling a history of her family so much as she is telling the history of the powerful forces that

have made her family as it is—that have given them the ghosts that haunt them. Tajiri takes Komako on as another the ghosts she will remember.

Tajiri also makes explicit reference to the fact that Poston was built on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. By also drawing attention to the fact that Komako's property in Black Rock was called Adobe Flat, Tajiri triangulates a series of conquests at Poston, from Native dispossession to Japanese American incarceration and back to Spanish intervention in the region as well. And at the heart of each lies the Colorado River. Writing about the role of rivers in films of the American West, Mary Pinard suggests that the river "emerges as an expressive text with which directors enrich and complicate their filmic visions," acting as a "repository of loss and memory, a primeval sanctuary" (127). No river appears in *Black Rock*, to be sure, but neither do the camps, Japanese Americans, or Native peoples. Yet just as surely as Komako guides the action of the film and the incarceration ghosts its environmental surround, Native presence is a part of this narrative.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say it should be. Native presence is continually absented, in ways I find difficult to address. At least Komako leaves a body; at least the incarceration lingers in the shadows of the film's overall postwar pall. By contrast, the assumption that Black Rock's townsfolk are both its original and final settlers goes nearly uninterrogated. Yet before white settlers came to the Owens River Valley to begin their farms (only to have them desiccated by the city of Los Angeles), Paiute hunted, fished, and gathered in the Valley. And yes, they also farmed, making use of acequias (Walton 13). Along the Colorado, the Colorado River Indian Tribes—in the 1800s, predominantly the Mohave and Chemehuevi—farmed pumpkins, beans, and maize in accordance with the river's flood patterns (Michaud 26). These histories, however, are as invisible in *Black Rock* as their rivers. In *History and Memory*, they're mentioned

fleetingly. In the following chapter, a similar pattern unfolds. Even in Japanese American narratives of the incarceration, Native peoples rarely feature. But as I continue to trace the way frontier imaginaries and the ways they inhere in the figure of the cowboy, this absence grows only more prominent. As Tajiri says of Komako, "his absence is his presence." This much is true—at least until that presence can no longer be absented. Until it wells up.

Chapter 2 | Be the Cowboy: Confronting the Paradox of the Prisoner Pioneer at Topaz

I visited Topaz, in northwestern Utah, for the first time in July 2016. I drove up from Poston, through the Mohave and past the Valley of Fire and the Great Basin and America's Loneliest Road.²⁴ If I'd been traveling in September 1942, in northern Nevada I would have hit a crossroads with the trains that brought the WRA's Japanese American prisoners from California. From there, the trains and I would have both headed east toward Salt Lake City. By truck, the prisoners would then backtrack south through the town nearest Topaz, called Delta.

Delta's main street is expansive, flat, and dusted white. Once upon a time, it would have needed to be wide enough to allow an ox-drawn covered wagon to turn around in it (Beckwith). In the fashion typical of small towns, most of Delta's business establishments run along this street: I remember a grocery (a stalwart from before 1942, though in the intervening years it has migrated down the street), a hardware store, a dollar store, several restaurants, and a collection of motels. The motels are the kind that decorate in appreciation of the region's history. In the Rancher Motel Cafe, the light fixtures are made to resemble candle-lit chandeliers, and the carpets are a thick, bison-colored shag. For the most part, however, Delta doesn't give the impression of having self-consciously preserved or recreated its Western kitsch—not in the way, for instance, of the Bar S Chuckwagon off US-6 in eastern Utah or the Old West streets of Dodge City, ripe for reenactment. Its streets hold Buick dealerships and Sinclair gas stations; its

²⁴ US-50 was christened "America's Loneliest Road" by *Life* magazine in 1986. Before it was a highway, it was a cattle driving and major transportation route from 1859 until 1869, when the Transcontinental Railroad took up these duties.

Westness is less artifice than artifact, palimpsestic in ways that sidestep the overt showmanship of a Wild West Show.

I don't mean to suggest that their difference hinges on some proportion of authenticity. All iterations of the West are crafted, and all environments carry in them rich imaginaries just as surely as they do their materiality. But Delta does so in a particular way. It is Western in ways that show its histories of settlement (and Native dispossession)—of cattle and barbed wire and the land transformations that came with them—without staging a version of the nineteenth century in contemporary space. Those histories already show. As with *Bad Day at Black Rock* in the previous chapter, I'd like to explore the ways Delta holds time in close quarters, existing as a Western space shot through with colonial repetitions. The story Delta tells about the West is one that can only be told through triangulation across books and museums, main streets and alfalfa fields, gridded towns and hazy mountain silhouettes, which together form a narrative built on their relations to each other. Across from the Sinclair gas station, in the center of town, a small park houses a plaque that pays tribute to Topaz. The camp itself was sited some miles past Delta's wide main road.

The town also boasts two museums, the Great Basin Museum and the Topaz Museum, which is dedicated to the history of Japanese American incarceration at Topaz. With the grand opening of the Topaz Museum in July 2017, Delta became home to ten times as many museums per capita as Los Angeles. In order to understand why the spaces between are just as critical as the spaces within, I think it's prudent to begin with the tales of these two museums. It might seem from their names the two museums house two discrete histories: There is Topaz, and then there's the rest of the Great Basin. This split would be in keeping with the formal narrative of Japanese American incarceration from its beginnings: Executive Order 9066, which set in motion the

incarceration of Japanese Americans, was justified by Lt. General DeWitt as a "military necessity," with respect to the purported crisis of national security following the bombing of Pearl Harbor (DeWitt). That is, the bombing of Pearl Harbor created an exigent circumstance where measures not usually taken were justified. These were exceptional times. Even when the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 conceded that the incarceration had in fact been unjust and unwarranted, the Act maintained the incarceration's exceptionality. While it deemed the assessment of "military necessity" inaccurate, the Act described the incarceration as a result of "racial prejudice, wartime hysteria and a lack of political leadership" (United States, Public Law 100-383). According to this Act, the incarceration of Japanese Americans was an unusual failure of the U.S. political system and, while not a military necessity, still a product of a delineable, finite, and unfortunately hysterical chunk of temporality called "wartime." When the U.S. government issued its formal apologies to living survivors of the incarceration, the letter assured recipients that "your fellow Americans have, in a very real sense, renewed their traditional commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice" (qtd. in Guise). Whether the federal archive seeks to justify or repudiate the actions of the United States, the incarceration is always framed as an aberration—a snag in the weft of American history. It is something that must be extracted and itself corralled away.

But this is not actually the history Delta's museums tell. Consider, for instance, Shigeru Kawamoto, the eldest son of Topaz's incarcerated family #38824. In the Topaz Museum, you can find his official records in the grand edger of the names of those incarcerated: You can find the names of his father and mother (Fudekichi and Kishino). You can learn that while he spoke some Japanese, he could read and write only in English. You can find that he was born in California in 1926; he had never been to Japan. He had two years of high school upon entering the camps in

1942, and three when he enlisted in 1945. You can find that on July 6th, 1945, exactly one month before the United States bombed Hiroshima, Kawamoto enlisted as a Private in the U.S. Army (Kawamoto). The Topaz Museum's approach is broad—its building's modern styling lends itself to open halls that discuss the incarceration in relation to the histories of the other camps, the camps' enduring artistic legacies, and the racial conditions that shaped federal legislation regarding Japanese Americans both after Pearl Harbor and after the war. For the Topaz Museum, the incarceration's history expands beyond the temporal bookends of 9066 and the Civil Liberties Act, and remains deeply embedded in Delta and its surrounding area. The digitized ledger that offers all federal data collected on Kawamoto situates him squarely in this complex history. But you won't find any photographs of Kawamoto in the Topaz Museum. For that, you must range further—to one photo album atop an unassuming curio cabinet in a corner of the Great Basin Museum.



v. The main hall of the Great Basin Museum in Delta, Utah (2017). An indoor walkway flanked by two rows of unmarked miscellany (roll-top desks, washboards and washbasins, headboards, a framed drawing of a horse, an armchair, a sewing desk, patterned curtains set up to frame non-existent windows, and a playpen).

Like the town of Delta itself, the Great Basin Museum has a palimpsestic quality, pieces of its collection all piled in a room together. While the Topaz Museum is crisply professional, designed by Brereton Architects, a design firm based in San Francisco,²⁵ the Great Basin Museum feels geologic—as though its contents have been pushed together by time and plate tectonics and the meander of water through canyons. The exhibit's contents exist within an

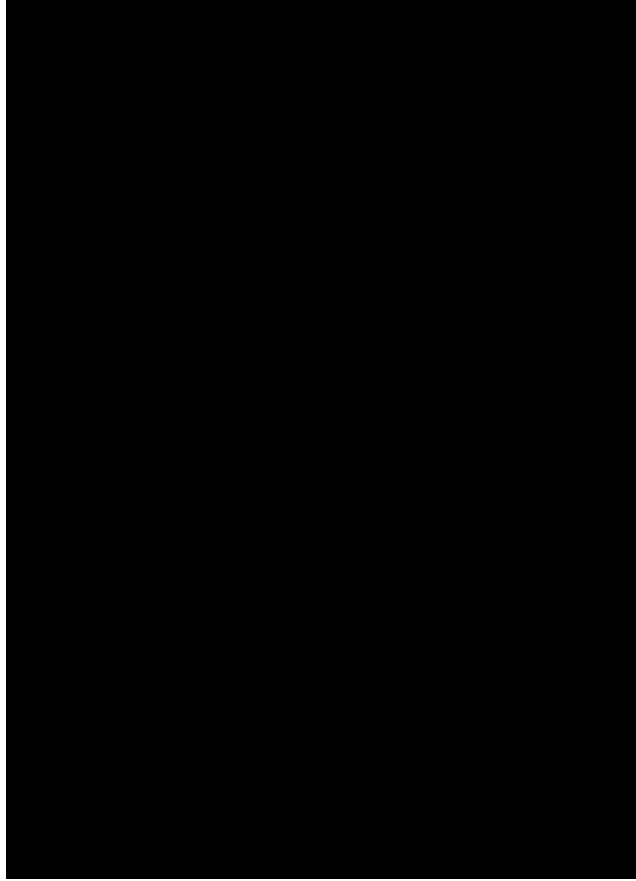
²⁵ By sheer happenstance, I Girl Scouted with a woman who now designs for this firm. On learning I'd visited the museum, she told me Brereton had worked on the project.

interconnected sprawl of historical ephemera, ranging from relics of Delta's small-town commerce, to jumbles of eclectic housewares, to rolls of barbed wire, to pictures of birds and bison and rocks. The only part of the collection that is housed separately are the trilobites and rocks, as some of them glow alien under blacklight. Shigeru Kawamoto, and the rest of Topaz, are part of the unbroken sprawl. Housed in such a context, it becomes substantially more difficult to conceive of Japanese American incarceration as an aberration of history or policy, or as having taken place in a space and time ("wartime") separate from Delta, the Basin, the West.

Shigeru Kawamoto was a cowboy. His photograph in the Great Basin Museum captures him astride a horse. He is dressed in cowboy gear—dark brimmed hat, thick boots, lasso. In the background there are grazing cows. It's in the Great Basin Museum I learned from an elderly docent that while incarcerated, Kawamoto worked the Bolan cattle ranch. Kawamoto wasn't a bred ranch hand; he and most of the other Japanese Americans at Topaz had never ridden a horse before. But under the tutelage of Sherman W. Tolbert, the then-newlywed not-quite-thirty-year old proprietor of the Bolan ranch, Kawamoto went to prison to become a cowboy—that gunslinging, hard-riding, emblem of the freedom of the American West.

What does it mean for a Japanese American prisoner to become a cowboy?

It's not just an occupation, after all. Not behind barbed wire, and not in 1942.



vi. Kawamoto, cowboying (circa 1942).

Tucked away in an unmarked photo album, Kawamoto's photograph might seem to exist at the fringes of the archive of Japanese American incarceration. I argue that the incarceration is Western all the way down. In the same way that the Great Basin Museum is sited 100 miles from the federally-designated Great Basin National Park, and the way that the Great Basin itself far exceeds the boundaries of either, the history of Topaz and those who lived there does not hew to the boundaries of the Topaz Museum.

I was compelled to introduce the character of Delta and its two museums because I wish to make clear that the history of Japanese American incarceration is inextricable from its broader contexts, and that these broader contexts are heavily inflected with imaginations of the American West. As the fields of geology and environmental history have expanded to consider sites and

histories beyond the White milieu, they have brought the history of Japanese American incarceration into larger pictures of the American West.²⁶ Within literary studies, however, readings of Japanese American incarceration have not similarly concerned themselves with this larger West. The prototypical narrative of Japanese American incarceration is character-driven, focused on the individual, and often testimonial in nature. It is largely assumed to take place in a punitive wasteland, with its ecocritical meanings and potential connections to prior history held in abeyance alongside the incarcerated's past lives and civil freedoms. By contrast, I argue that both rhetorical and material encounters with "Westness" inflect the literature of Japanese American incarceration, and that the stakes of this growing body of literature have the capacity to expand correspondingly, tuning narratives of Japanese American incarceration toward participating in broader discourses of carcerality, settler colonialism, and U.S. nation-building.

In this chapter, I offer a picture of how the archival narrative of Japanese American incarceration changes if we take Kawamoto's identity as cowboy to heart. Invocations of the frontier and of pioneering spirit structured life in the camps from the start, resulting in a paradoxical mode of existence that I term the prisoner pioneer. I then offer a reading of Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor was Divine* (2002), a novel that takes the prisoner pioneer to its furthest extreme in its telling of a story of Japanese American incarceration rife with wild mustangs, spectacular cowboys, and fantasies of the frontier.

Calling All Prisoner Pioneers

"Be prepared for the Relocation Center, which is a pioneer community," ordered an official WRA pamphlet, as Japanese Americans living within the military exclusion zone

²⁶ I discuss the works of geologists and environmental historians like Karl Lillquist and Connie Chiang in more depth in the Introduction.

reported for their removal to the interior West. Titled "Questions and Answers for Evacuees," the pamphlet was intended to prepare Japanese Americans for their lives in still-undisclosed locations. The pamphlet recommended families store their household goods, which could be shipped to them later, "except refrigerators and stoves, which will not be needed." The pamphlet does not specify whether these appliances would not be needed because they would be provided, or because the urban infrastructure required to run them would not exist. It goes on, however, to reiterate that because the camps were pioneer communities, Japanese Americans were advised to "bring clothes suited to pioneer life" (War Relocation Authority), a recommendation that relies heavily on a particular cultural understanding of how a pioneer lives. On one hand, "clothes suited to pioneer life" simply means clothes that could withstand the harsh conditions of the camps, and which could constitute workwear as Japanese Americans raised buildings, laid pipes, and scratched new infrastructures from undeveloped lands. But "pioneer" is not a synonym for "hard labor." Even as the "Questions and Answers" pamphlet evaded an explicit definition of the term, to cast Japanese Americans as pioneers and the camps as pioneer communities implies that the incarceration was not meant to be carceral at all, but instead an opportunity. An opportunity to be the first at something—to trailblaze, to conquer, to settle the frontier. The camps have been known by many names, but "pioneer community" is by far the most euphemistic.²⁷ Naming Topaz as such softens Japanese Americans' upheaval from the communities they built on the West Coast by making them pioneers still seeking home, and re-envisioning the barbed wire meant to imprison them as a tool meant to secure their newfound homesteads.

Casting the incarceration camp as a "pioneer community" is as notional as the idea that white "pioneers" were the first to lay claim to the American West. But while this kind of

²⁷ As discussed in an earlier footnote in the introduction to this dissertation, I use the term "incarceration camp." Other common terminologies include internment camp, internment center, relocation camp, relocation center, etc.

rhetorical slippage undoubtedly made it easier to justify the incarceration to newspapers and the public record, the WRA's invocation of the frontier was more than a game of smoke and mirrors. The WRA also explicitly intended for its "pioneer communities" to transform both the land and its human subjects in the same way that frontier mythologies were supposed to have done in the late nineteenth century. Just as Frederick Jackson Turner felt that the rural character of the frontier West was the environment in which "the American character was produced" (Barraclough 12), both WRA Director Milton Eisenhower and his successor Dillon S. Myer believed that participating in the taming of the frontier, so to speak, would instill the all-American values of self-sufficiency, loyalty, and national fervor in Japanese Americans.

Appeals to the imaginary of the Western frontier would not have broken new ground during the 1940s. The same general sentiment powered President Roosevelt's New Deal reforms, many of which aimed to bolster economic development in the United States by tapping the productive potentials of the rural West. Frederick Jackson Turner might have proclaimed the closing of the frontier in 1893, but the New Deal still saw a West waiting to be settled—rough country that needed regional planning, sweeping legislative management, and labor-intensive agricultural development. But when the United States entered World War II following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the New Deal's labor pool was redirected to the warfront. Left without a white, Depression-era workforce to galvanize, the New Deal's pioneering invocations found new employment with the WRA. One of the reasons Millard County, the eventual location of the Topaz Camp, was so amenable to its placement was because the region had been previously passed over for New Deal projects with the Civilian Conservation Corps. While the CCC had gone onto actualize development projects in eastern Utah near Moab, Millard County in the west

had been left to decline (Hayashi 18). Millard County would reap the benefits of the jobs created by the camps, and later from its infrastructures, once the camp was gone.

Though Executive Order 9066 was carried out by the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command, the camps themselves were administered by the WRA, a separate government agency within the Executive Office that had far stronger ties to the Department of Agriculture than the Departments of Defense or Justice. Before being appointed the first director of the WRA, Milton Eisenhower had been a spokesman for the New Deal in the Department of Agriculture. He'd had no previous experience administering prisons. Opposed to the incarceration, Eisenhower resigned after only three months, but his successor, Dillon S. Myer, similarly had a background in the Department of Agriculture. Myer served the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and went on to become the assistant chief of the Soil Conservation Service before replacing Eisenhower (Imai). Agricultural development was a top priority for each incarceration camp, such that the camps would be largely self-sustaining, and would not create a drain on federal resources (Lillquist 78), but agricultural projects in camp were also conducted with the goal of developing infrastructures that would benefit the long-term agricultural productivity of the area. For instance, Topaz employed incarcerated Japanese Americans to repair forty miles of fence and construct eighteen new miles of fencing. This type of infrastructural work took approximately fifty percent of all workers' time (Lillquist 84), and resulted in the permanent development of lands owned by the U.S. government.²⁸ With New Deal-type development goals in mind, it followed that the WRA would adopt the same pioneering rhetoric.

²⁸ The use of Japanese American labor for federal benefit was intentional, as the WRA explicitly sought to place the camps on public land "so that improvements at public expense become public, not private, assets" (Jeffrey 38-40).

In addition to Western development, WRA officials also saw their invocation of pioneer spirit as serving a secondary "humanitarian" purpose. Speaking in his brief capacity as head of the WRA, Eisenhower reasoned, "[The development of public works] would give to these citizens a measure of assurance and trust should we afford them an opportunity to do their part in the war effort, with the possibility that recognition of this contribution eventually may be accorded by the American public" (Eisenhower). Though Eisenhower himself opposed the incarceration, his attempt to reconcile it to his own ideals still demonstrates the ways Japanese Americans were understood to be other-than-American. Framing the incarceration as an opportunity to hone—and prove—one's Americanness first requires a narrative where Americanness has to be earned, and where the frontier is the place where Americanness is born.

Indeed, associations between camp and frontier, prisoner and pioneer, occupied the forefront of narratives aiming to construct the camp experience—and its rhetoricians were not only the WRA. Caroline Chung Simpson writes, "The concept of the camps as a revival of the mythological pioneer spirit of America was common to most of the early postwar attempts to reinterpret the severity of the rugged living conditions of camps" (Simpson 34). Such revivals handily made the connection between Japanese Americans' experience of the West and the social promises of the frontier, just as the WRA had. For example, Methodist Reverend Taro Goto's official dedication of the Topaz camp—reprinted in *The Topaz Times*, one of Topaz's newspapers—enthusiastically proclaims,

Topaz is more than just an engineering marvel. It is more than just an isolated settlement for evacuees. It is the sum total of dreams, deep thinking, courage, and faith—it is a living personality. Topaz is born of the great Mother America. We are again the pioneers, blazing the road into the wilderness of our social frontiers. (Goto 1)

Goto explicitly evokes the rhetoric of pioneers beating back the wilderness, while also highlighting Topaz's potential as a "social frontier." Of course, Goto does not speak for all Japanese Americans, but he would have been joined by prominent leaders within the Japanese American community at the time. The Japanese American Citizens League, which today proudly boasts that it is "the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States" ("About"), has spent generations justifying and/or distancing itself from the party line it adopted during World War II: Go quietly and willingly. In 1940, the Japanese American Citizens League's young leader, Mike Masaoka, proclaimed before the U.S. Senate, "I pledge myself to ... actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without any reservations whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a greater America" (qtd. in Niiya, *Creed*). This proclamation quickly came to encompass the JACL's official response to the wartime incarceration, and would ultimately become (and remain) the JACL's organizational creed. Goto's salutation echoes Masaoka's, but at Topaz, rather than the Senate floor, the act of becoming a "better American in a greater America" takes on a particular flavor. It constructs the camp environment as part of the West's imagination of the frontier, in ways that critically altered the stakes of living and working within it.

With regard to the infrastructural and civic gains promised by the pioneer experience, the reinvocation of the frontier mythology in the camps had much in common with its earlier iterations, though not in the way its believers would have preferred. No matter the rhetoric, the destinies of Japanese Americans at Topaz were hardly manifest: Only a handful of Japanese Americans incarcerated at Topaz had been farmers prior to their removal from the coast (Ernst). Overwhelmingly, they had lived in urban areas like Berkeley, California, and found agricultural and irrigation work foreign and often distasteful (Chiang 252). Far from a fertile West ready to

be sown with a bounty, northwest Utah was desert. When its greasewood was cleared to make its land arable, its topmost layers took to the wind in the form of vicious dust storms, and 70% of Topaz's land was classified as unsuitable for farming (Bell 18). Even the promises of irrigation development were limited. Though the construction of the Sevier Reservoir in 1907 allowed for tracts of irrigated farming around Delta, the area's corrosive alkaline soil meant that these irrigation systems required frequent and extensive repairs (Chiang 252).

That the promises of the frontier bore little resemblance to the realities of living in the West was not an experience unique to incarcerated Japanese Americans. What did separate Japanese Americans at Topaz from their Millard County neighbors, however, was the intended permanence of their settlement. A crucial element of the allure of the frontier was the sense that at the frontier, there was land free for the taking. Whether this was strictly true or not (it wasn't), white settlers would have come to northwest Utah with the expectation that as pioneers, it would be their right to own the land upon which they farmed and built their home. Legal scholar Cheryl Harris argues that these expectations were racialized, coining the phrase "whiteness as property" to describe the way expectations to property and upward mobility became central to white identity (Harris 1709). If property was a right of whiteness, then upward mobility required assimilation to whiteness. Indeed, when early Japanese American settlers like Shigeki Ushio, whose family moved to Delta in 1906, wrote that they considered themselves part of a "typical pioneer family," they likely courted those same expectations of property ownership, permanent settlement, and the upward mobility these gains would afford (Shigeki 3). Yet although this process of assimilation and its bounties were key to the WRA's characterization of the camps, and to Reverend Taro Goto's "social frontier," there remained a critical stumbling block: Topaz was never meant to be permanent.

In the same breath that Topaz Director Charles F. Ernst welcomed Japanese Americans from the coast, he added, "[P]ersons who come to live at Topaz are welcome to stay but they're equally welcome to go. It is the purpose of the War Relocation Authority to depopulate the relocation centers as quickly as opportunities for relocation can be found for the residents" (Ernst).²⁹ Ernst's welcome performs the same work as more overt invocations of the pioneer by insinuating that Japanese Americans were not prisoners, and were "welcome to go" and in fact expected to do so. It's true that the boundaries of most incarceration centers were porous to some degree—incarcerated Japanese Americans were permitted to apply for work visas to farm sugar beets outside the camps, or work beyond their barbed wire fences in other necessary capacities. The camp administration also issued permits for shopping trips, Scout activities, and university study. However, these freedoms were incomplete. Incarcerated Japanese Americans could not return home, and were subject always to heavy surveillance and scrutiny. And in camps intended to be temporary, they were also unable to *make* home. In his analysis of land transformation at Tule Lake, geographer Robert Wilson noted that while incarcerated Japanese Americans worked to develop lands originally intended for white homesteaders in the Klamath Basin, these lands—and the infrastructures put in place by incarcerated Japanese Americans—still ultimately benefited white settlers (Wilson 424). By the closing of the final Japanese American incarceration camp in 1946, no incarcerated Japanese Americans were still farming the lands into which they'd given all their wartime labor (Lillquist 98).

The rhetoric of the frontier aimed to make pioneers out of prisoners. Yet in assuring incarcerated Japanese Americans (heavily-mediated) mobility, the U.S. government excluded Japanese Americans from the promises of the frontier—of settlement. This exclusion effectively

²⁹ The WRA began internal discussions about resettlement almost immediately after establishing the camps (Daniels 91-103).

fashioned a prison out of mobility, or freedom. The incarceration of Japanese Americans was not confined to the camps behind barbed wire, but also existed in the denial of Japanese American community when families were uprooted from the coast, and in their scattered resettlement across the United States thereafter. As I've mentioned before, Laura Barraclough contends that "conquest is never fully secured and must be maintained through ongoing acts of nation building and the production of hegemonic consent through cultural, ideological, and political-economic means to uphold an unequal social order" (8). Unlike invocations of the frontier meant to genuinely secure land for newly-fashioned twentieth-century white "pioneers," such as in Barraclough's examination of the effects of rural urbanism in the San Fernando Valley, the frontier rhetoric deployed in the context of Japanese American incarceration ultimately functioned to abruptly deny Japanese American claims to land, even as these rhetorics claimed to imagine otherwise.

What results is a positionality I term the prisoner pioneer. The prisoner pioneer is incarcerated, but lives in an environment potent with Western imaginaries of the frontier. The prisoner pioneer lives and works on the land, which in the Western imaginary affords the prisoner pioneer claims to freedom, land, and belonging. Yet these promises are never and can never be actualized, because imprisonment by definition excludes the prisoner pioneer from all of those things. The prisoner pioneer is offered the frontier only because the prisoner pioneer will be required to leave it. The prisoner pioneer is not a personal identity so much as it is a mode of existence determined by a simultaneous offering/disavowal of the prisoner pioneer's connection to land and the cultural meanings attached to it. For the prisoner pioneer, the mythology of the frontier is not liberatory. The frontier is carceral.

Horses of America

I have never been to a horse race, but I can name Tanforan, the racetrack where nearly 8,000 Japanese Americans were detained from April to October 1942 before being shipped to Topaz, Poston, and Gila River (Kawahara). One of these Japanese Americans was Toshiko Shimoura, who was born in my hometown before being incarcerated at Tanforan, and then at Topaz. She eventually settled in Michigan, and it would be to her I'd write when I moved to Michigan to complete my doctoral studies. Before her death in 2015, I received one letter from her, welcoming me to the Japanese American community here.

She died before I could meet her in person.

However, in joining a community she had only just left, I became well-acquainted with her afterlife. She had been instrumental in building Japanese American community in Detroit, particularly for those finding their way to the Motor City after camp; she was equally instrumental in recording the lives of Japanese Detroiters "after camp," in a collection titled *Exiled to Motown*. However many afters she lived, her memories of Tanforan remained vivid: "There were people who actually lived in horse stalls," she explained, in a 2003 interview with Scott Kurashige, then a professor at the University of Michigan. "They white washed it, but then, you know how it is with whitewash. You just rub it a little bit, and it all crumbles down. It was a really terrible place" (Shimoura).

Toshi's is the kind of Tanforan narrative I have grown up familiar with, and it is those horse stalls that have always defined my vision of the horse in narratives of Japanese American incarceration. Tanforan was a prison pretending to be housing that could not quite hide the fact that it was built from horse stalls. Tanforan still stands today, though it is now a shopping mall surrounded by million-dollar homes. It commemorates its history as a racetrack with statuary and

its history as a prison not at all. But once upon a time in the West, it was a stopover town on the Southern Pacific Railroad line. In the 1840s, it was an inn on a stagecoach route. It was pastureland for Spanish missions. It was the site of an Ohlone village. There are histories for which Japanese American incarceration is already the afterlife. If we are to speak of histories rubbing through—and actively pursue our palimpsests, in defiance of the stories told by Silicon Valley shopping malls—perhaps we must rub harder.

Writing about Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor was Divine* (2002), *Densho* content director Brian Niiya described it as "deceptively simple," a description widely echoed in the novel's public reviews, due in part to its sparse and restrained prose. Still, Niiya admits that "perhaps because I've read so many similar accounts, I found myself a little bored" (Niiya, "Twelve"). He goes on to describe his affinity for more unusual approaches to the incarceration narrative, such as Perry Miyake's novel, *21st Century Manzanar*, set in a semi-apocalyptic future Los Angeles.³⁰ Niiya is correct in that *Divine's* plot plays out in expected and familiar ways: Its protagonists, a Japanese American family of four, are living in Berkeley, California when Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. The father is arrested by the FBI and spends the bulk of the novel separated from his family, imprisoned in a Department of Justice camp. The rest of the family, a mother and two children, are incarcerated at Poston. There, they experience the hardships of the desert, the dehumanization of incarceration. At the end of the novel, they are released and return to Berkeley, their lives in ruins. However, in spite of the familiar skeleton of its plot, I argue that Otsuka's novel *is* an unusual approach to the telling of the incarceration, in ways that stem first from its stylistic departures, as well as its own generic departures. If Miyake's novel brings the

³⁰ Miyake's novel was written in the 90s and published shortly after 9/11, which ends up getting quickly referenced before it went to print does not—could not—engage the actual beginnings of the twenty-first century with much depth. Its historical referent ends up being the Gulf War. The result is a novel that both anticipates and also could not possibly have begun to anticipate the War on Terror, nor its afterlives.

lens of speculative fiction to the incarceration, Otsuka summons the cowboy. In *Divine*, the incarceration meets the Western.

Divine's genre play is quiet. It's not that the novel *is* a Western, or that it employs formal qualities reminiscent of a *Broncho Billy* half-reel, or even *Bad Day at Black Rock*. But it's also remarkably unlike landmark incarceration narratives like John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), or Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), which privilege the psychodramas and narrative interiority of their protagonists. By contrast, Otsuka's understated prose describes its characters at a distance. In *Divine's* opening pages, an unnamed woman—referred to only as "the mother"—is in the middle of returning a library book. On her way to the library, she catches sight of a poster pinned to the door of the YMCA—Executive Order 9066 (Otsuka 3). She immediately returns home to begin packing, but otherwise offers little indication of her thoughts about the Order's portents. Instead, a later passage indexes the disruption by noting her receipt of a library overdue notice nine days later. The mother's distress, substituted for ellipsis, then manifests itself as the overdue library book. When the mother in *Divine* buys a newspaper, she notes that "[t]he Burma Road had been severed and one of the Dionne quintuplets—Yvonne—was still recovering from an ear operation" (4). The two clauses appear to be topically independent, but the mother links them together in a single breath. No grammatical pause demarcates the Burma Road from the quintuplets, which creates an equivalence between their subject matter. The two headlines blur together into a single perception of that day's noteworthy news. Though history remembers the severing of the Burma Road as one of the Pacific Front's major events, the mother in *Divine* offers little suggestion as to her own impressions. The elliptical writing style Otsuka deploys in *Divine* decenters her protagonists and their potential interiority within the narrative, which signals a stark departure from the testimonial mode

common to most narratives of Japanese American incarceration, whether fiction, memoir, or oral histories like Toshi's. *Divine* lacks that intimacy. The story this family tells is explicitly not a tale of personal lived experiences in the way that so many incarceration narratives are (and with good reason). The characters don't present so much as individuals as they do the archetypal unit of the incarcerated family.

What this distinction signals is that *Divine's* project is actually very different from "similar accounts." It shifts our attention from the lives of this mother and father, this girl and boy, to the way their archetypal unit fits within a narrative. More specifically, it opens the novel to an exploration of the way this narrative engages with its palimpsestic intertexts; and it is through these textual engagements we find the West. Once the family arrives at Topaz, *Divine's* primary narrators are the two children, a young brother and sister, whose narrative voices are critically shaped by stories they have read—ten-cent comic books; Western reels like *When the Daltons Rode*; copies of the *National Geographic* magazine; and Audubon's *Birds of America*. What is Western about *Divine* enters by way of these intertextual references, opening its pages to fantastical iterations of the frontier alongside texts like the WRA's *Questions and Answers*, or Ernst's *Welcome to Topaz*, or Taro Goto's salutation in *The Topaz Times*. Like the narrative of Japanese American incarceration broadly writ, *Divine* appears to have no relation to the West until the archive within it reminds us otherwise.

The power of these Western references evinces itself most clearly in the way the boy and girl engage imaginatively with the horses—spectral, figural, and real—they encounter throughout the novel. Their engagements are, again, very different from familiar accounts, like Toshi's. Their story is not personal; it is not traumatic in the same ways. They are archetypal children, in many ways as figural as the frontier stories through which they narrate Topaz. When

Divine's youngest narrator, the eight-year old boy, catches a glimpse of the Nevada desert as their Topaz-bound train trundles across it, he asks with excitement, "Do you think we'll see any horses?" (Otsuka 29). Having spent his summer stabled at Tanforan likely influenced his fascination for horses, but back in Berkeley, cowboy-and-Indian curtains had already hung in his bedroom (68). He already had the reference. His sister, the girl, is also culturally well-acquainted with horses. She knows that Nevada is home to the largest number of wild mustangs in the country, and predicts that yes, they will see horses. "Quite possibly, eight," she tells her brother (30). The girl's certitude in the face of an unfamiliar landscape speaks to her investment in and reliance on the imaginaries that precede her personal experience of the West. She learned of the West and its wild mustangs in magazines; she knows not only to expect them, but how she can expect them to be. The horses in *Divine* are part of the boy and girl's present in ways that are always in relation to a narrative that pre-exists them.

So let us return to the horse. Like Toshi, *Divine's* family is sent to Tanforan before their incarceration at Topaz, and they encounter similar conditions. The girl watches as her brother "plucked stiff horse hairs out of the freshly whitewashed walls" and "smelled the smell of the horses rising up through the damp linoleum floors" (30). By using the phrase "smelled the smell of the horses" Otsuka emphasizes that the horses at Tanforan are actually a lingering olfactory presence, rather than the horses themselves. The horses are present, but they are also absent. When the boy picks hair from the walls, it seems that walls are almost alive with horse-ness, nearly a being with a coat of hair rather than a coat of paint. Through this slippage, the background structures of the stables fuse with their past horses, blurring temporal lines as well as spatial ones. When the boy and girl arrive at Topaz and see its barbed wire fences it's important to think of this barbed wire as signaling similarly: Towards a continuance of the dehumanization

incarcerated Japanese Americans faced at Tanforan, and towards the longer histories of barbed wire as a tool of war, as well as barbed wire's starring role in the dramas of the Western imaginary. According to Razac, whose history of barbed wire I discuss in the Introduction, "The simple act of placing men behind barbed wire produces superimposed images of men and beasts ... it produces a kind of shock when it is used to enclose people, shaking their certitude that they are human" (89). Put another way, what side of the barbed wire one finds oneself determines one's identity as either prisoner or pioneer, animal or human.

Yet the superimposition of men and beasts is not always a tool of malicious dehumanization. For instance, in *Citizen 13660*, a graphic text detailing artist Mine Okubo's incarceration at Topaz, Okubo offers a liberatory vision of the horse—ornery, recalcitrant, vindictive. In depicting the military inspection of incarceratedees' living quarters at Tanforan (that is, their horse stables), Okubo's soldiers sloppily upend the stables with little regard for the incarceratedees' space and belongings. On the wall, however, hangs a drawing of a horse, its eyes narrowed and teeth bared at the round buttocks of a bent-over officer. For every narrative that registers the injustice of the removal and incarceration through associations between Japanese Americans and dehumanization, there are some that find resistance in their relation to the other-than-human.

This is where the boy's and girl's relationship to horses diverges from Toshi's, away again from testimony and toward another form—a Western form that opens *Divine* to its narrators' imaginations of a past and Wild West. In addition to the ghosts of horses at Tanforan, *Divine's* boy and girl catch sight of the wild mustangs that roam the deserts while on the train to Topaz. The impossible pleasure of the horses' freedom strikes a visceral chord. Otsuka writes,

The sky was lit up by the moon and the dark bodies of the horses were drifting and turning in the moonlight and wherever they went they left behind great billowing clouds

of dust as proof of their passage. The girl lifted the shade and pulled her brother to the window and pressed his face gently to the glass and when he saw the mustangs with their long legs and their flying manes and their sleek brown coats he let out a low moan that sounded like a cry of pain but was not. He watched the horses as they galloped toward the mountains and he said, very softly, "They are going away." (45-46)

These horses are not only un-stabled, but are barely earthbound. Their bodies drift and turn, ephemeral, as though they are of the same substance as the moonlight itself. Here, the dust storms that will later function as one of the camp's commanding sensorial memories are not part of a wasteland that must be weathered, but a visible testament to the mustangs' powerful mobility.

I find it difficult to argue that the bombastic freedom of the horses of the Wild West have any place in the narrative of Japanese American incarceration, because the flipside is an experience so traumatically counter to that—even for *Divine's* figural boy and girl. Coupled with the boy's whispered recognition that the horses are going away, increasing the distance between their wild state of being and his own incarcerated one, the diametric opposition of their two circumstances would seem to alienate the boy and girl from the promises of the West. At least, it seems to alienate them from the sort of West with which the children are familiar, and that animates the ephemeral beauty of these mustangs. Indeed, literary scholar Stephen Hong Sohn critiques the romantic lilt that the boy and girl manage to retain in relation to these wild mustangs, arguing that for the children in *Divine*, because their vision of the West relies so heavily on their cultural archive of *National Geographic* and Western movies, the desert becomes a "screen on which to project fantasies of fertility, romance, production, and possibility." These fantasies ultimately lose their luster, because "[t]he girl's idealizations are constantly endangered, already collapsing in on themselves through the intrusions of wartime practices" (Sohn 170-71).

Yet these are the impossible juxtapositions at stake in my formulation of the prisoner pioneer. In addition, anthropologist Elizabeth Lawrence writes in *Hoofbeats and Society*, "The story of the White Mustang expresses the freedom-captivity or savagery-civilization dichotomy that is intimately tied to the Western frontier mystique" (119). Even before the desert was subject to "the intrusions of wartime practices," the mustang already embodied uncollapsible dichotomies always in tension with one another. Indeed, every invocation of the West in *Divine* is not intended as a romantic diversion that can't help but end in heartbreak; sometimes, the wild mustangs of the West are invoked with the explicit intention of narrating dark truths. The last question the boy asks of horses is, "The horse meat [in our mess halls] ... Where do they get it?" (Otsuka 88). His sister replies, "From horses." When pressed, however, his sister admits, "They round them up in the desert ... and then they shoot them" (89). She then directly connects these ill-fated horses to those that had spurred her brother's encounter with the ecstasy of the Western:

She asked if he remembered the wild mustangs they had seen through the window of the train and he said that he did. They had long black tails and dark flowing manes and he had watched them galloping in the moonlight across the flat dusty plain and then for three nights in a row he had dreamed of them. "Those are the ones," she said. (89)

The frontier is perishable. In the end, it will be consumed. This dark turn seems to again allegorize the siblings' own trajectory, as Japanese Americans forced from the relative luxury of their Berkeley, California home into an unforgiving desert—albeit a desert animated with the imaginative richness horses turned to moonlight, with the power to command all dust. But this is just one more tale of horses in a desert of many. With every iteration of the horse, *Divine* highlights anew the tensions between narratives of war hysteria; the WRA's pioneer communities; dehumanizing nights spent in whitewashed horse stalls, and the terror of hirsute walls; and the ways the frontier can conjure liberation, or forcefully deny it. Where it feels like perhaps there should be only one horse, there are, quite possibly, eight.

Rather than whitewash testimony with a superficial and easily dismantled Western fantasy, I argue that it is exactly the ways the desert in *Divine* becomes a screen, populated by figments and fantasies of the West, that allow the desert West to become a space wherein paradox, multiplicity, and palimpsest come alive. In fact, the girl in *Divine* is quite aware that the mustangs have their own long history of captivity and migration, alongside the untrammelled freedom they would seem to represent. She recognizes that the mustangs were brought to the West, and states that according to *National Geographic*, "The Spaniards brought them over hundreds of years ago and now there were thousands of horses just roaming around wild" (Otsuka 29). These origins call into question the seemingly inherent Americanness of the horse what it represents through that Americanness—the West, freedom, the prisoner's antithesis. It is not even the Anglo settlers that brought the horses to the West but Spanish conquistadores, who introduce an additional history of settlement and matrix of power into an already lushly imagined desert. When we consider these origins, the mustangs are as alien to the West as any Japanese immigrants. Yet there is nothing more Western. The mustang stands at the nexus of its own paradoxes, which are not so different from that of the prisoner pioneer. The boy moans because the mustang is living a complexity with which the boy is also trying to contend. The mustang becomes not a vision of alienation—a foil of freedom to the boy's incarceration—but an image of something that exists in contradictory multiplicity.

Yet it doesn't seem adequate to luxuriate in this multiplicity of meanings. When the mustangs serve as a reminder of Spanish colonization, which leaves its mark on both the imagination and materiality of the West, they also draw attention to the fact that many of these multiplicities have been created by force—forced removals, migrations, dispossessions. This is the baggage of the West, which the fantasy of the frontier seeks to dispense with but which, like

the prisoner pioneer attempting to actualize its fantasy, it ultimately cannot escape. Instead, the revival reveals its trouble. *Take only what you can carry*, Japanese Americans were advised on the eve of their removal to what many considered an empty desert. It turns out the cultural baggage of the West is heavy enough on its own.

Be the Cowboy

The boy and girl in *Divine* don't stop at imagining their relation to the wild mustang. They know that part and parcel with the mustang comes the cowboy who seeks to claim him. Yet the girl seems reluctant to name the inherent violence of this relationship. The girl explains, "If a cowboy needed a new horse all he had to do was go out into the desert and get himself one. It was as simple as that" (29). She understands the horses' plenty as a resource for the cowboys of the West—a resource that is not only easy to acquire, but also one to which the cowboy appears to have an inherent claim. That the act of acquiring a horse is "as simple as that" implies that it is also rightful, even benevolent. The girl goes on to imagine "a cowboy snapping his fingers and a horse, a wild white stallion, galloping up to him in a cloud of hot swirling dust" (29), which implies that the stallion's subjugation is voluntary. In this fantasy, the girl's fantasy naturalizes the power dynamic between cowboy and mustang—as it should be, according to the mythos of the West, and according to *National Geographic*. This notion is additionally in keeping with the idea that these cowboys possessed a Manifest Destiny and frontiersman's right to the West and all its productive capacities—its horses, its waters, its soil. The figure of the cowboy reminds us that fantasies of the West hinge on the pursuit of dominance and settlement. That's what makes the prisoner pioneer a paradox.

Perhaps it's strange, then, that the boy chooses to imagine his father as a cowboy. By now I've established that we can't read this move as wholly liberatory; there are too many tensions at play, too many impossibilities and failures. Still, when the boy thinks of his father, the image he conjures is always the same: It is sundown, and his father is leaning against a fence post in Lordsburg, the New Mexico DOJ camp from which he'd received his father's postcard. In Lordsburg, the boy "pictured his father in cowboy boots and a black Stetson, riding a big beautiful horse named White Frost" (83).

In part, the boy creates his father in the image of a cowboy to counteract the trauma of his arrest—in this case, imagining him a cowboy *does* become a performance of fantastical liberation. The day the father was taken by the FBI, he had been led from the house in his slippers, without his coat or hat. The boy recalls, "He had never seen his father leave the house without his hat on before. That was what troubled him the most. No hat" (74). The boy is so arrested by this detail that when the novel first introduces him, he is refusing to remove his own hat at the dinner table. His hat had been a gift from his father (14), and it becomes the boy's tie to his missing father. It is also, however, a reminder of his father's subjugation. When his father was arrested, it inverted what it meant to be "home." Rather than exercise the authority to invite guests into his house, the father is forced unexpectedly from it. He is made alien. By envisioning his father in a hat, the boy works to undo the dissonance he'd felt seeing his father naked before the law, made prisoner in his own home.

When the boy envisions that hat as a *cowboy* hat, however, and not simply the hat his father had truly worn, this new hat suggests that not only does the father regain his old freedoms—he might lay claim to more. Cowboy hats served a variety of crucial utilities for their wearers, particularly in the service of making home on the frontier. In *The Cowboy: An*

Unconventional History of Civilization on the Old-Time Cattle Range (1936), cowboy-lawyer Philip Ashton Rollins explains that in addition to offering shelter from the elements (notably, an element of civilization that Topaz often lacked), a cowboy hat might also serve as "the only drinking-cup of the outdoors" (105), providing not only shelter but also vital sustenance. The cowboy's hat grants him the ability to traverse unforgiving landscapes, the ability to harness natural resources like water for his own ends, and ergo the independence promised by the frontier. That the boy imagines his father in a Stetson in particular, rather than a nameless cowboy's hat, further layers the meanings of this imagined hat. John B. Stetson himself had traveled West seeking a cure for his own enervations—in his case, tuberculosis—and returned home in 1865 as the creator of the Stetson hat, which would come to define the cowboy imaginary ever after. His success indelibly branded the Stetson with the promise of the frontier, and the intoxicating notion that its wearers might do more than survive the frontier—they could conquer it. They need not stop at wrangling cattle; they could wrangle empires. Colloquially known as the "Boss of the Plains," the Stetson was not just a tool for survival, but also a symbol of dominance and ownership. When the boy imagines his father in a Stetson, he positions his father as an inheritor of the West and all its landed bounties. It would seem that imagining his father as cowboy aligns neatly with the rhetoric of the WRA and its intentions to interpellate Japanese Americans into the narrative of the Western frontier. He is made pioneer.

Again, however, for all that the father leaning against the fence post connotes an easy, dominant relationship to his surroundings—the fence is not meant to house *him*—his status as cowboy is tenuous. The fantastical liberation doesn't stick (as we knew it wouldn't). It all too easily slips back into memories of his dispossession and imprisonment. If the act of imagining his father a cowboy is intended as solely a recuperative act, it is not a particularly successful one.

As with the wild mustangs and the memory of racehorses, there are too many ways for the fantasy to break down. So the boy concedes that his father, if he is a cowboy, must be an outlaw. Since his father had been arrested, the boy reasons, "Maybe he'd rustled some cattle, or robbed a bank, or held up a stagecoach, or—like the Dalton brothers—even a whole train, and now he was just doing his time with all of the other men" (Otsuka 83). "Just" doing his time suggest that were this the case, then this father's imprisonment—and the boy's—could be justified. If the father is a cowboy, the boy can only imagine him as a captured one.

Imagining an incarceration camp as a pioneer community doesn't make it so; imagining a prisoner a cowboy does not make him free. The 1870 Naturalization Act named all Asians living in the United States "aliens ineligible for citizenship," on the basis of their perceived unassimilability to U.S (that is, white) domestic life. This status would later prohibit Japanese immigrants from owning land in California, according to the Alien Land Law of 1913. This law further foreclosed Japanese Americans' access to the frontier ambitions of white settlers in the American West. If the WRA's frontier rhetoric purportedly offered Japanese Americans the opportunities of the pioneer cowboy, it was only within the space of an incarceration camp; because these camps, by virtue of being prisons, did not belong to the Japanese Americans, value of their labor was displaced elsewhere. If they were invited to "settle the frontier," it was on behalf of something else's freedom.

I maintain that within the context of Japanese American incarceration, invocations of the cowboy at the time were never meant to conjure freedom. Although the mythology of the frontier and its cowboys hold within them a sense of the unbounded, the limitless, the seduction of the frontier is the opportunity to conquer it. The true potential of the pioneer community has less to do with the limitless freedom of its occupants than it does its potential to regulate its landscape.

Horses move north en masse after the Pueblo Revolt (1680), so that element might be worth considering here. When it came to pioneering the West, the most impactful settlers were systems, not frontiersmen—that is, the real estate developers, railroad companies, and corporations investing in resource extraction in the region, all of which had the power to control large enough swathes of land to bend the region to their needs (Barraclough 7). A cowboy might dip his hat in a stream in order to drink, but a railroad can move the river. Perhaps it makes all the sense in the world that the "pioneer community" of Topaz was hardly the product of, or at all invested in, the individualistic wills of its Japanese American pioneers. Topaz was an act of state—one tied to the federal government's investment in infrastructural development in the West. Its cowboy imaginaries weren't an invitation to freedom; instead, the WRA cowboy descended from a particular lineage of figural cowboys that roamed the twentieth-century West.³²

One such cowboy was the singing sensation, Gene Autry. In *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy* (2016), Western Studies scholar Michael Duchemin states, "The most important goal of the New Deal in the American West involved modernization" (94). Gene Autry, the famous singing cowboy, was brought in to sing the praises of the frontier, not for its untrammelled wildness but for the *problem* of its wildness—the unrealized potentials the New Deal's programs needed laborers to extract, and through this extraction, lay claim to. Autry performed cowboy not to return his listeners to the frontier, but to make a case for large-scale environmental modernizations that would ultimately obviate the need for cowboys. The New Deal cowboy was not interested in producing cowboys; he was interested in using the figure of

³² I must emphasize that the *figural* cowboy I discuss here and throughout this chapter bears little resemblance to actual working cowboys in any century of American cowherding. Cowherding was hard and ill-paid labor, rarely carried out by the owners or beneficiaries of the land. Laura Barraclough's forthcoming book, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity* (2020) offers a more accurate account of the cowboy labor, as well as the cowboy's racial diversity.

the cowboy to secure separate ends. After all, when barbed wire was first developed as an agricultural tool, it was no friend to the cowboy; barbed wire made the fencing in of the Western plains feasible, and transformed the landscape to reflect individual apportionments and discrete land claims instead of unruly frontier. Barbed wire turned rangeland to settler homesteads, critically altering the life of the working cowboy—in ways that, in many respects, eliminated them from the heart of settler society. Barbed wire has always been a double-edged tool, enriching one party while eliminating the viability of another. The cowboy is no exception to this rule.

I established earlier that the New Deal was central to early intentions for and administration of the incarceration camp system, and that its pioneering rhetorics were sibling to the New Deal's own reiteration of the cowboy fantasy. What I propose now, however, is the disambiguation of cowboy from that which he was deployed to promote. In both the context of Japanese American incarceration and New Deal projects of environmental transformation, the end goals had little to do with the unbridled energy of the cowboy as motif. While he may have functioned to galvanize efforts toward environmental transformation, those efforts in themselves did not necessarily—and often, were wholly counter to—actualize the freedoms implied by the cowboy figure. Rather than guarantee a future where Japanese Americans might "become cowboy," the cowboy figure had itself already been subordinated to the designs of larger national structures, such as New Deal efforts to secure land claims in the American West and assure use of this land toward the formation of the U.S. as nation. Even as the imagination of the frontier was deployed in New Deal contexts, and New Deal programs offered "freedom" from poverty by creating jobs, the end goal was never to renew the frontier, but to actively end it. That is, the goal of projects of environmental transformation in both New Deal and Japanese American

incarceration contexts was not to revive the cowboy but to corral him once and for all. By considering the status of Japanese American incarceratedees in relation to the figure of the cowboy, and the cowboy figure in relation to the prisoner, these comparisons serve to clarify how each functioned in relation to the environmental transformations effected in the name of the frontier, and for whom the benefits of these transformations would accrue.

The WRA's pioneer rhetoric not about securing freedoms for Japanese Americans; it was always foremost concerned with securing the fortification of the United States as a settler nation. Even as the WRA's administration saw the camps' potential to "Americanize" Japanese Americans and thus grant them entrance into whitestream society, this inclusion did more to fortify the United States' idea of itself as a multicultural liberal democracy than it guaranteed equalities for Japanese Americans. Furthermore, the pioneering cowboy that incarceratedees were invited to aspire to is part of larger structures of settlement and claiming, environmental transformation, and U.S. nation-building. For a Japanese American to imagine his father a cowboy is not liberatory in itself, because that imaginative act confirms and bolsters a frontier imaginary that has need of its cowboys only so far as they serve to produce benefit for the state—and that state can never truly include the Japanese American. Rather than paradoxical opposites, the prisoner and pioneer become one and the same—not the subject of a frontier fantasy, but its mechanism.

Iyko Day reaches a similar conclusion in *Alien Capital* (2016), wherein she argues that the characters in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Tajiri's *History and Memory* are presented with a romantic anticapitalist vision of nature and the environment via the camps' pioneer rhetorics.³³ In

³³ It's worth noting that Kogawa's book is about the incarceration of Japanese Canadians, which followed patterns similar but not identical to the incarcerations in the United States. Here I respond to Day's argument about *Obasan*, but cannot claim to address the particularities of the Canadian incarceration overall.

both narratives, however, Kogawa and Tajiri "denaturalize the settler landscape in relation to labor," drawing attention to the mechanization of Japanese American labor in the service of the settler state (Day 119). Rather than actualize a romantic future where purportedly indigenized, Americanized Japanese North Americans engage with the natural world, both Kogawa and Tajiri depict the camps as denaturalized, and in the same move draw attention to the camps as sites of capitalist labor exploitation.

Though Day's reading of the denaturalized space of the camp may hold true in many narratives of Japanese American incarceration, however, *Divine* does not portray Topaz as a "landscape of neglect and ruin" (Day 147). Even as its narrative is frank about the hardships its characters face there, *Divine's* desert remains an environment of multitudes.³⁴ Within the pages of *Divine*, the desert is imagined as a powerful ancient sea, as the site of Wild West adventure, as a punishingly dusty, shelterless prison. Its desert is not wasteland. Rather, it is a palimpsest of many layers—and a place capable of vitality, even without the memory of its waters. In one scene, the boy observes a scorpion, and in the same breath, "an old man in a red silk kimono with a tin pail in his hand who said he was going down to the river" (52). He draws no strong distinctions between the two. The scorpion is not a pest or a potential threat, but one more living, vital part of Topaz. The complexity of Topaz's environment cannot be contained within Day's wasteland vision. Furthermore, although Day demonstrates the breakdown of romantic associations with nature and indigeneity in Kogawa and Tajiri's works, she is not ultimately concerned with breaking down the assumptions that undergird notions of a romantic and free nature in opposition to a captive and enervating city. Meanwhile, with its many horses, *Divine* insists on the simultaneity of (and relation between) both. Japanese American incarceration,

³⁴ The desert in other narratives of Japanese American incarceration are similarly multitudinous, or at least ambivalent about the way the desert signifies, as in Mitsuye Yamada's poetry, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

however, makes it impossible to work with respect to such a binary. Although the camps lacked critical infrastructures and were located in purported "wastelands," they often became the most populous cities in their areas; and much of the motivation for building them stemmed from the federal government's desire to industrialize, modernize, and "reclaim" pieces of the American West. This desire to industrialize was not separate from the romantic frontier rhetorics in which the incarceration camps came dressed.

So we return to the cowboy, who figures both romance and mechanization at once. He excites impossible notions of the wild frontier while also hewing to the New Deal's projects of modernization and industrialization prior to WWII. He is the figure where the dichotomy Day sets up collapses into itself. If interrogating the figure of the cowboy shows his romance to be false, makes pioneer impossible to distinguish from prisoner, he also manages to retain some of his allure. Never free, he is also not fully prisoner. But if the romantic, pioneering fantasies he's been enlisted to peddle were never made to be realized by Japanese Americans—and in fact, would serve to actively empower the very settler state working to exclude Japanese Americans—then understanding the role of the cowboy in narratives of Japanese American incarceration, and in broader relationship to the settler state, becomes a task of imagining the alternatives he can present, rather than the inclusions he never could.

The cowboy forces us to think about the free and modern elements of the West in the same breath, inviting new paradigms. Shigeru Kawamoto, for instance, worked as a literal cowboy on the Bolan Ranch at Topaz. He was a literal body involved in the labor exploitation Day outlines—labor exploitation that I do not contest. But at the same time, he was also *playing* cowboy. I'm reluctant to let go of this aspect of the story, to flatten play out of the narrative. Because it does feel like this prickly, strange reminder to think critically about the place of

Japanese Americans in the settler colonial paradigm—not indigenous, not settler. Still, as Day states, subordinate to "a settler colonial mode of production" but also not quite absolved of his potential to fortify the settler colonial state. Part kitsch, part marker of exploitation, there's almost an element of the trickster to the cowboy. It seems gauche to bring up cowboy play in the context of dispossession and incarceration. Yet nevertheless, he rides.

Free the Cowboy

Earlier, I pointed out that in the boy's ideation of his father as cowboy, the boy had already renegotiated his father's ability to take on this role by imagining his father an outlaw, doing time for crimes committed. In the father's case, these crimes ultimately panned out to being of Japanese descent in a country that would rather he disappear. The 1913 Alien Land Law act forbade non-citizens from owning land in California, and immigrants of Japanese (or other Asian) descent were ineligible for citizenship. Although many Japanese Americans skirted this law by putting their farms in the names of their American-born children, Japanese American occupation of California's arable lands, and the desire to reclaim these lands for white farmers, primed the United States' response to Pearl Harbor and the declaration of Executive Order 9066. One of the chief lobbying groups for the forced removal of Japanese Americans was the Salinas Valley Vegetable Grower-Shipper Association (Krebs). An outlaw is, by definition, outside the law. Traditionally, an outlaw earns such distinction by acting outside of the law, or engaging in a criminal act. But the term also suggests a state of existence that does not hew to the general law of society, or the formations that organize it. It suggests a figure that is not, perhaps cannot be, accepted into the order of a society. By definition, an outlaw lives outside the law; by nature, that life is criminalized. To be enemy alien is to be an outlaw already.

However, if following the figure of the cowboy across the history of Japanese American incarceration shows inclusion within the settler system to be impossible, then perhaps there is more to be said about being invited to become cowboy, only to choose to go outlaw instead. When the boy imagines his father as cowboy, he is not the genial Gene Autry cowboy; nor is he a Japanese American Lone Ranger, as much as his white stallion and his Stetson might suggest it. When the boy states, "My daddy's an outlaw," he also whispers, with relish, "He liked the sound of that word. Outlaw" (83). The boy is arrested by the sound of the word. *Outlaw*. Although the outlaw may be visually similar to the cowboy in the boy's vision, aurally, the two figures stand emphatically apart. His investment in his image of his father in cowboy boots and black Stetson isn't about his father's ability to play cowboy, or achieve the all-American quality of having become one. To be outlaw is to assert an identity outside of the frontier narratives used to present life in the camps.

It is not, however, simply a fanciful way of accepting one's status as "enemy alien." While counter to the Americanizing impetuses of the frontier, accepting the "enemy alien" narrative still aligns with state narratives of Japanese American identity. Prior to imagining his father as a cowboy outlaw, the boy goes to a showing in camp of *When the Daltons Rode* (1940). In *When the Daltons Rode*, two brothers lose their land to a corrupt institution attempting to expand its railroads. When a false murder accusation turns their pioneer town against them, the Dalton brothers, already dispossessed of their land and social standing, turn their backs on the law. With some artistic license, the story of the Daltons can be understood within the same general structures of Japanese Americans and their forced removal from the coast. In this Western tale, the Dalton brothers, too, become outlaws. But the Dalton brothers function more as foil to the boy's experience than blueprint. When the Daltons rode, they were accused of a crime,

and so condescended to criminal acts. If there were ever a time when the Emperor was divine, however, the boy pays little heed to it. One moment, the boy is eavesdropping on his barrack neighbor saluting the Imperial Palace (83); in the next, he's envisioning his father in a Stetson, reposed commandingly against a fence post. The boy shouts "Jap! I'm a Jap!" only to cascade into a new imagination of himself shaking hands with the United States' General MacArthur, being awarded a Purple Heart (81). These imaginings share the frenetic instability of the boy's imaginations of his father as cowboy, and then as prisoner (83). But rather than shore up the idea that becoming cowboy is impossible, the fluidity of the boy's imagination, in this new paradigm, adopts new meanings: He refuses to imagine himself bound to the dichotomies of American or alien, loyal or disloyal, cowboy or prisoner. The boy's imagination of his father as outlaw might reject the compulsion to prove U.S. loyalty, seek inclusion into the state, but this rejection is no accession to the rank of enemy alien. To be outlaw is not to become the enemy; it is to exceed the system.

This outlaw excess is the most salient characteristic of the narrator that closes the final act in *When the Emperor was Divine*. The penultimate chapter returns the father to the family, and the family to California. After these reunions, however, the family finds their lives still fractured and their freedom redolent of anticlimax. The elliptical anxiety of Berkeley after Pearl Harbor becomes the quiet of the desert becomes an experience that cannot be spoken, even as the perils of their absence manifest themselves clearly in the shambles of their house. Then, in the novel's epilogue, titled "Confession," the narrative tone abruptly shifts. It's like a house on fire.

The narrator assaults the pages with a vitriolic first-person address, unabashedly furious. The narrator identifies himself as the father, but he bears no resemblance to the skeletal presence who had returned to Berkeley with the family, nor even to the man who'd written careful

postcards to his children during his imprisonment. The father had never been a character, per se; he'd been a figure, spectral. In "Confession," he becomes spectacle. He opens fire on the United States, taking raucous pleasure in mocking its narrativization of Japanese Americans as enemy aliens, its justifications based on military necessity and national security. "Everything you have heard is true," he begins, before launching into a litany of supposed confessions:

I admit it. I lied. You were right. You were always right. It was me. I did it. I poisoned your reservoirs. I sprinkled your food with insecticide. I sent my pears and potatoes to market full of arsenic. I planted sticks of dynamite along your railroads ... I stole your last bag of sugar. I took a swig from your best bottle of brandy. I pulled out the nails from your white picket fence and sold them to the enemy to melt down and make into bullets. (140-141)

As the confessions mount, their hyperbole satirizes the accusations levied against Japanese Americans. Initially, the crimes to which the narrator confesses strike directly at the United States' societal infrastructures, highlighting the Japanese American presence in the agricultural industry in particular. By the end of the litany, the crimes move into a more intimate domestic sphere—and also become more ridiculous. The narrator, dangerous enemy alien, confesses to petty sugar thefts and brandy swigs—acts that are more personal slight than they are acts of national treason. Their juxtaposition draws attention to the arbitrary nature of the confessions by refusing distinction between the two criminal registers. Stealing a swig of brandy and dynamiting a railroad are equally silly accusations, because neither are true. When the narrator finishes by confessing to the harebrained scheme of pulling nails from white picket fences to create bullets, his confession becomes full spectacle. His confession is not testimony; it is not truth-telling. He does not speak within the realm of the documentary. He is spectacle and specter—he is not the father in truth, if there is even such a being. He is the voice of the boy's father, the cowboy outlaw.

The cowboy outlaw's confession is not an admission of guilt; it is a performance of all the incredulities that accrue when considering his position in this narrative. Whether cowboy or enemy alien, pioneer or prisoner, it's all ridiculous. After the confession, the narrator levies another imperative: "Inform me of my crime," he requests (143). Given that he has already listed his supposed crimes, he is clearly not asking for clarification at that register. In another, he knows it is a request that can never be fulfilled, for he is innocent. Beyond his innocence, however, he is outlaw. His request cannot be answered within the narratives made available to him, so he asserts his place outside of them.

Though *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani has critiqued *Divine* for its sensationalist closing pages, calling them "bluntly didactic" and arguing that "[s]uch enraged declarations, however understandable, do not possess the subtle, emotional power" of the rest of the novel (Kakutani), I think the split between "Confession" and the rest of the novel acts as an invitation to examine these fault lines. In the opening chapter, the reader follows the mother through her life in Berkeley, where the novel's characters are presented as embedded in an environment and cultural context that holds incredible sway over their lives and the way these lives are understood. Once at Topaz, the boy and girl are similarly attentive to the narratives that reveal themselves through careful consideration of their surroundings—from the history of the wild mustangs in the West to the scorpions with whom they live in the desert. While this environment and the narratives within it are often structured by fantasies of the frontier and broader settler colonial paradigms, the children's relation to the horses that metonymize their environment suggest the multiplicity of these narratives, and the alternatives that are available through reimagination of surround, trope, specter. What *Divine's* epilogue attempts is exactly the kind of imaginative alternative that narratives of Japanese American incarceration so urgently

require. Faced with the option to contort himself into either singing cowboy—model minority— or enemy alien, the cowboy figure who soliloquizes *Divine's* epilogue seeks to redefine the bounds of these rhetorics. He produces a version of cowboy that is outlaw, always in relation to the cowboy's Western imaginaries, but reaching outside of the systems that imaginary aims to reproduce.

Of course, one might argue that the outlaw is as much a player on the Western screen as the cowboy is. Perhaps the Japanese American cowboy outlaw presents an added danger, because he thinks he is beyond the state, where in actuality he has merely found a new and expansive mechanism of complicity. He must, after all, be even more exceptional than the white exception; he must be even more righteous in his claim to land, in order to combat white exclusions. Perhaps that makes him the most dangerous of all. In his 2015 article, "The Settler Unchained: Constituent Power and Settler Violence," literary scholar Alex Trimble Young questions "whether any political ontology that imagines a mode of violent popular sovereignty posed against the state's monopoly of violence as its radical horizon offers a genuine alternative to settler colonialism, a process whose violence has never been entirely contained by state instrumentality" (10). That is, if alternatives to settler colonialism still hinge on the exercise of violence, do they exist outside the system? The outlaw is still part of the cowboy's world, in the same way that the figural cowboy is part of the U.S. state's bid to consolidate land.

What spares the cowboy outlaw is, ironically, also what renders his escape incomplete (again). He performs the seemingly endless permutations of horses, specters, figures because the cowboy outlaw never quite ceases to be a performance. He never leaves the realm of spectacle, because his threats of violence are absurd; they were never actualized, could never have been actualized. His admissions of guilt never elicit the question, *but was he guilty?* His is a spectacle

that knows it has no teeth. The point of the cowboy outlaw isn't his potential to enact violence, seize glory, claim the frontier; rather, he makes a spectacle of that desire, and in so doing asserts the need for alternative imaginations. He is not quite the alternative. The last line of "Confession" reads, "Now can I go?"(Otsuka 144). Whether plaintive or exasperated, he still must ask permission, which suggests that the power relations that structure the settler colonial frontier remain intact. Alone, the cowboy outlaw cannot dismantle them; he can only name his desire to leave them behind—which is a critical desideratum in its own right.

In August 2018, Japanese American indie singer-songwriter Mitski (Mitski Miyawaki) released an album titled *Be the Cowboy*, which entreats its listeners to become the "imagined cowboy" ("Mitski"). She is careful to separate the cowboy she conjures from the realities of the historical cowboy's hard labor, instead calling for her cowboy to recollect the brash, take-all attitude of the imagined cowboy—in essence, the same cowboy conjured on behalf of the camps during World War II. She, too, however, seems more eager to leave him behind than step into his boots.

Mitski sells memorabilia themed around her album, though for an album titled *Be the Cowboy* it's not what you might expect. In fact, the music itself makes no actual reference to cowboys, the West, or the frontier. Nor does the album's visual vocabulary, from its cover art, to Mitski's outfits when performing, to the merchandise associated with it. The cowboy is at once conjured and then evaded, for what is playful and strange about being the cowboy is that you actually can't be him—you're not allowed. If you're a Japanese American woman like Mitski, or if you're a Japanese American incarcerated at Topaz, your cowboyness comes with a qualifier. You're a prisoner pioneer. At best, you're a cowboy outlaw, which feels more proximate. But at

the same time, you also cannot really be a better version of him, a better cowboy in a greater America, because that still leaves you a (settler colonial) cowboy in America.

By conjuring the cowboy and then denying his appearance, Mitski throws into question what it means to "be" the cowboy. Maybe becoming is not the goal at all. In place of Western kitsch or cowboy referents of any kind, Mitski's memorabilia store offers a small, red combination lock that reads in plain white text, "Free the cowboy." Free him, rather than become him. The shop also sells a T-shirt that visually alludes to the poster art for William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). Though *The Exorcist* would seem to have little to do with the West (it takes place in 1950s Georgetown), Mitski replaces the film's title on the poster art with her own entreaty to "be the cowboy." With this superimposition, Mitski asks her listeners to become cowboy as well as exorcist: To be the cowboy in order to exorcise a violent haunting.

To "be the cowboy" becomes less about assimilation into whiteness and into structures of white supremacy than it is about wresting the cowboy from his whiteness. When Mitski asks her listeners to join her, to "free the cowboy," she argues that contrary to the very basis of the fantasy of the Western, the cowboy wasn't already, always free; rather, he is entangled in structures of power. This tension is highlighted further by the fact that this demand is written on a lock. Opening a lock might free something, but only because a mechanism of control—the lock itself—preexisted. With freedom comes its opposite. The cowboy may signify freedom, but he also rides at the head of the many erasures, dispossessions, and enclosures required to create him. To be the cowboy is to exorcise him. To refuse assimilation into white supremacy or settler culpability, even as those possibilities remain dangerously real. To intentionally occupy an identity neither settler nor indigenous.

Of course, what this reformulation makes clear is that there is another figure that has been noticeably absent from these frontier fantasies, as well as from outlaw/exorcist gestures beyond them: What of the Indian? My analysis of *When the Emperor was Divine* and the Topaz camp has, to this point, been almost singularly focused on the accoutrements of the frontier and the settler colonial state, without naming the indigenous presence that preceded, survives, and will succeed it. Jodi Byrd points out,

[O]ne of the challenges facing indigenous studies in conversation with settler colonial studies and frontier histories is to resist the continual prioritizing of an effect for a cause, of requiring the settler and frontier rather than the indigenous as the structuring analytic through which to assess the consequences of colonialism. ("Follow" 153)

She argues that in focusing so much on the settler colonial paradigm, and the way that the settler state is materially and rhetorically concretized, it achieves a primacy that is counterproductive to the goals of indigenous studies and decolonization. My analysis in this chapter is certainly guilty of this flawed prioritization. But I contend that it is guilty in ways that are productive and perhaps necessary—at least for the moment. This guilt is symptomatic of the historical documents and literary texts I've made my archive, and of the typical narrative of Japanese American incarceration. In *When the Emperor was Divine*, Native presence evinces itself only in relation to the cowboy (as with the boy's cowboy and Indian curtains, or his wooden Indian figurine from a settler colonial state fair), or as quiet afterlife. It is arrowheads in the sand, or shards of pottery. They are hauntings yet to be exorcised—in order to be recovered and re-centered, rather than laid to rest. In the next chapter, I will consider *Divine's* hauntings in relation to Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill* and Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run*, two texts that begin to leave the frontier, and move toward forms of relation to land, and forms of Japanese American-indigenous relation, that seek to distance themselves from the structures of the settler frontier. You might wonder, why engage frontier at all? Why not retire the notion, and forego all this talk

of cowboys? Because he has not yet been exorcised. He is in *Divine*. He is in the Great Basin Museum. And yes, he's in *Treadmill* and *Desert Run*, too. I began this chapter by insinuating that the narrative of Japanese American incarceration was Western all the way down. We need to work through the palimpsests. We need to know what to do with the cowboy when we see him.

Shigeru Kawamoto's portrait in the Great Basin Museum is a photographic reminder that the cowboys of incarceration were not purely rhetorical, clumsy attempts to indoctrinate Japanese Americans to the desires of the WRA. If the lived reality of cowboys was hard and undesirable labor, the fantasy of cowboys was their freedom. It's not a stretch to suggest that Kawamoto's enjoyment of his newfound horsemanship and of his becoming cowboy were indebted to the fantasy. In Kawamoto, rhetorical verbiage coalesces into embodied life, and in his becoming cowboy—as a civilian previously unversed in any cowboy but the fantastical, and as a Japanese American unwelcome into a narrative of the West—the real and rhetorical become inextricable from one another. Kawamoto, of course, was no outlaw. If anything, he appears its antithesis. The work he performed at the Bolan Ranch was in direct service to the U.S. military. I can't resurrect Kawamoto's thinking, however. I can't ascribe him roles. I can only observe the spectacle his portrait offers. This spectacle has its own outlaw spirit, because of the way it opens the narrative of Japanese American incarceration to visions of the West, and relation to the Basin. It is not the WRA's nor the Western imaginary's frontier that unfolds behind Kawamoto in this portrait. Reading with this photograph, however, allowing it to guide my focus on the figure of the cowboy in unexpected places, is its own incitement to "free the cowboy"—and in this gesture, to propose new ways of thinking about the West and its relationship to migrants, indigenous peoples, and whiteness. Through spectacle, the cowboy is reassigned. He is exorcised. He exceeds the narrative.



vii. A red combination lock reads, in white text, "Free the Cowboy."

Chapter 3 | The Final Frontier: Desert Oceans, Indian Schools, and Outerstellar Darkness in Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill* and Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run*

The interior West is an ocean. To explain this, I could spin you a tale of Nebraska by way of tired metaphor—the ripple of wide, flat fields; the summer storms that blur the boundary between sky and earth by turning everything to tempest—but the ocean is present in stranger ways, too. All down the highway, the bodies of great white wind turbines loll on flatbeds, round and smooth like whales. Leave Nebraska for Colorado and finally for Utah and you'll hit Helper before Topaz: Helper is a railroad town. It's home to a Western Mining and Railroad Museum, which is home to a basement exhibit that informs visitors of an important fact about the West, and mining, and railroads: *Turtles have changed very little since the Mesozoic Era (150 million years ago).*

Sea turtles.



viii. At the Western Mining and Railroad Museum in Helper, Utah, part of a white shelving unit enumerating various facts about sea turtles bookends the display of a Gibbs breathing apparatus, a nineteenth-century mining tool.

Maybe the sea turtles aren't supposed to be there. The actual exhibit displays a Gibbs breathing apparatus, developed in the early 1900s not for underwater use, but for mining operations. Still, their application is similar—to allow humans to go where they could not otherwise. I like to think that the sea turtles in the mines of northern Utah are the most Western thing about the entire operation, because the structure of the exhibit itself seems to already beg the question: What of the West—the historiography of the West—is "supposed" to be, and what is not? The shelf that houses the Gibbs apparatus has clearly been recycled from a different exhibit about sea turtles; there's no great conspiracy, nor avant garde intention behind it. Yet

however workmanlike this explanation, the fact remains that the sea turtles *are* there; the idiosyncrasy exists in the world. The West is a place of strange company and loose associations. Built with the bones of some other space, the exhibit's past life is kept in plain view, and stories overlap. Palimpsests evince themselves.

Cartographically speaking, the Pacific Ocean is the United States' westmost point; it is the point at which westward expansion supposedly ends. Or at least, it is the point at which it becomes significantly more difficult to differentiate this expansion from obvious, extra-continental imperialism. Jodi Byrd argues that the transit of U.S. empire is carried out through the weaponization of "Indianness," which functions to re-narrate spaces like the Hawai'i, the Philippines, or Guam (*Transit* 148). The Pacific Ocean is also the point at which, as World War II made clear, the United States might become someone else's frontier. Fear of Japanese invasion—indeed, settlement—of the United States' Pacific Coast played handily into calls for the incarceration of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor. Eichiro Azuma's *Between Two Empires* suggests that Japan had historically understood the United States as a potential Japanese colony, and narrated a frontier mythos of their own (13). From the anxious perspective of a white U.S. settler, Japanese Americans living on the Pacific Coast already posed a threat, even prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. They were an eastern incursion that no manner of exclusion acts nor Alien Land Laws had been able to stymie. Then, with Executive Order 9066 and their forced removal, Japanese Americans became the unwitting stars of a new frontier—one which served the needs of the United States. This new frontier was a recursive frontier, having hit the Pacific, recoiled, and headed east to claim the West.

The exhibit of Western Mining and Sea Turtles notes, "Only seven species of sea turtles exist today, endangered by human interference of their habitat." The implication behind these

words is quietly accusatory. Due to human interference, entire species of sea turtle have ceased to exist. It is, specifically, interference of habitat, which signals both that the interference has been indirect, and that it has proven no less devastating for that indirectness. We have not needed to make a game of killing sea turtles in order to devastate them. We need only to have diminished, transformed, taken over the place they once lived.

The decision to build and populate the incarceration camps was interference of habitat, too. The heart of the decision was and has always been a project of land acquisition, western expansion, and multiple, relational dispossessions. It was a project of environmental transformation, acting in the service of the settler colonial state. The incarceration has been resoundingly challenged, erstwhile rhetorics of the frontier buried in favor of powerful, necessary focus on and assertions of the civil rights of Japanese Americans. But some losses continue to go un-indexed. Should we continue to think with our sea turtles, perhaps the story unfolds like this: The camps did not need to be death camps in order to prove devastating. They need only to have uprooted and disenfranchised the Japanese Americans within them, removing entire communities from the cities and suburbs and rural farmlands that they'd called home. These are the losses Japanese Americans fought to name, and that mainstream tellings of U.S. history are becoming slowly, often grudgingly, familiar with. But just as we've lost more than one kind of sea turtle, "interference of habitat" plays out here in more ways than one. Japanese Americans were removed from one West, but sent to another—and the interior West is habitat, as well; it too can be changed. It too has its histories and dwellers that came long before and have lived long after World War II.

Thinking both about "interference of habitat" and about what is supposed to be, what is not, I want to return to Poston, the camp in western Arizona. Poston is all but equidistant from

Los Angeles and Phoenix, and is one of the spaces that coalesces to form the setting of John Sturges's *Bad Day at Black Rock*, as I discussed in Chapter 1. I want to return to that space in order to think more expansively about Poston as habitat—in particular, habitat interfered with, and habitat transformed. Let us follow in the wake of the camps and their recursive frontier, beginning in Los Angeles. Let us head east to get West.

For Los Angeles, I-10 eastbound is an escape route. On this Friday in October 2019, it's a particularly popular one. The highways are almost always thick with traffic in Los Angeles, but our slow, trundling procession persists through Riverside and beyond it. From the car rental hub at LAX to Indio, the desert gateway, my intrepid rental Corolla—whom I name Whitefish—and I average 35 miles per hour on the Interstate. It's not until Indio that the crowd thins. Indio begins Los Angeles's inland desert, home to oases and hot springs. When the traffic kicks up its pace, makes a breath of freedom seem innate to the place, it's easy to fall into the habit of separating city from desert. Visually and temporally, my experience of the place favors the divide: Los Angeles is human habitat and the desert is raw, wild.

But Los Angeles is desert, too. Recall the story of Manzanar, and the diversion of the waters of the Owens River Valley. Recall the rail line that splits at Barstow—the northern fork leading to Lone Pine and Independence, and the eastward one toward Parker, the town nearest what remains of the Poston incarceration camp. That rail line is 60 miles north of I-10, and follows what is now I-40 and was once Route 66, a bustling corridor for business and development. For all that the camps were meant to be remote, their proximity to the rail lines such as these was also key. If human development is what is supposed to break the desert into two, the city on one end and the empty on the other, it is also what persistently connects them.

Poston was not so remote its inmates could not be taken by train, en masse. Los Angeles is city; it is desert. Poston was a city, too.

While the Japanese Americans imprisoned there may have been restricted to only what they could carry, the U.S. federal government was subject to no such restrictions. In 1942, urban accoutrements poured in from all across the West. From Albuquerque, three pickup trucks, a Ford and two Chevys; from Colorado, 152 second-hand iron bedsteads. From Phoenix, kettles. A 1939 Chevy Suburban, more Fords, more Chevys, heaters, and first aid kits. Typewriters upon typewriters upon typewriters. 42 typewriters, from all across Arizona. From Los Angeles, wool blankets. And from Oklahoma, more Fords, more Chevys. Drawing boards, fans, fire extinguishers, accounting machines, acetylene welding torches, telephone stands, sheet metal (Indian Service).³⁵ The list continues. In 1942, Poston became Arizona's third-largest city, and a far cry from a small frontier outpost where pioneers had settled with nothing but their bootstraps. By the time the Japanese Americans arrived at Poston, the United States had already settled in. It continued to settle around them. Its developmental intentions for the space far exceeded a temporary wartime prison—and it did not leave when the Japanese Americans did.

Maybe you wouldn't know it if you saw it, then or now. Appearances can be deceiving. Today, a mile east of Parker, my road turns to dirt, and then to a sea of potholes. The town falls away. The sky goes purple and the outcroppings of rock turn orange on their western face and black to their east. I scope fifteen miles of road, which begins to follow the meander of old water, coiling through craggy hills. For seven and a half miles in either direction, I am alone, but for the road, and the yellow road signs that warn of flash flooding. When I double back to the

³⁵ These items were enumerated as part of an accounting of assets that had been transferred from the Office of Indian Affairs to the War Relocation Authority. They were shipped from Indian Service Agencies across the Western United States to Poston in order to "carry on the work" of building the camp.

section of road that is straight and open, I wheel Whitefish into the sand and beach him in a broad clearing, far from the road and hidden by tall desert bramble. It won't rain, but if it does, I figure, the water will fan out over my clearing, rather than sweep us away.

It's unclear who "owns" this desert. I know I'm on the Colorado River Indian Reservation, but the United States' Bureau of Land Management also claims this road and its surroundings. It's their claim, in fact, that allows me to stay. Under the stewardship of the BLM, this space is public land—generally defined as land held in abeyance, or set aside for the "benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" rather than urbanized or otherwise developed ("America's"). This claim, however, seems to compete with the idea that this land belongs to the Colorado River tribes, and that it is within their purview to decide what it will be, or whose generations it will serve.

Whitefish and I could claim this land as wilderness if we wanted to. Wasteland, if we didn't like it so well. No headlights sweep the road; there is no chatter, no siren, no cell signal. I hear only quiet and coyotes. According to the BLM, this kind of public land is officially characterized by "simply throwing a sleeping bag on the ground in the backcountry" ("Camping"), which reminds me of the young girl in Otsuka's *When the Emperor was Divine*. The girl imagines that if a cowboy wanted a new horse, "all he had to do was go out into the desert and get himself one. It was as simple as that" (Otsuka 29). It was, of course, not as simple as that. Similarly, the road I'm on is not so simple, either.

Case in point: It's empty tonight, but the wash I'm parked on and the hills that surround us are home to numerous off-road races, and have been for almost fifty years. On some other evening, more than two hundred dirt bikes and ATVs launched themselves into the air out here, wheels catching sky. And just because there aren't sirens now doesn't mean there haven't been; a

smattering of drunk driving incidents haunt this space as well. And that's only this space's recent history.

I am not alone.

I've brought you through this piece of the West, with its sea turtles and cities, backcountries and ATVs, because I want to situate this chapter amidst the question of what both the West and the camps are meant to be, and what we withhold from our attentions if we do not question these boundaries. Namely, I aim to highlight the intersections of Japanese American camp and Native reservation at Poston, and then to consider these intersections more broadly—that is, to consider not only the federally-recognized Native lands of the Colorado River Indian Reservation, but also the Native lands beyond those borders, and the way immigrants, such as the Japanese Americans at Poston, form relation to place and people. In this chapter, I pick up where Chapter Two leaves off—with the figure of the Indian, notably absented from the frontier. I will discuss the way Hiroshi Nakamura's novel *Treadmill* addresses the Native lands of the Poston incarceration camp head-on, and makes the concept of "making Indian" central to his imagination of the camps, and his critique of the settler fantasy that undergirds them. Then, by way of the 2019 Poston Pilgrimage and Mitsuye Yamada's poem, "Desert Run," I will then begin to trace the ways that the narrative of Japanese American incarceration has fallen in and out of relation with and responsibility to Native presence and Native peoples. I will close with an exploration of "the outerstellar," a horizon that seeks space to form alternative relations to Native land and peoples, outside of and in solidarity against the constellations of power within the settler colonial state.

—

The sky is clear and the moon is full. I lock the doors, shroud the windows, and hunker down in the backseat of my rented Corolla. It's hot.

I dream of flash floods.

Be Like Water

In *Bad Day at Black Rock*, we encounter Manzanar and Poston in shimmering, mirage-like combination. Set in a place not entirely one nor the other, this *un-sitedness* actually serves to emphasize key elements of the film's environment, and of the environment of the camps.

Layered against one another, what Manzanar and Poston shared are brought into harsh relief, making clear the primacy of the Western water wars; the agricultural transformations at the heart of these wars; and the reminders of Native presence that accompany Japanese Americans at every twist in the incarceration narrative. In keeping with the production and productivity of this imaginative space, I want to first return to Topaz in order to lead us to Poston, because the prisoners of Topaz also encountered ocean.

By my second visit to the Topaz Museum in 2017, the museum had officially opened. In the gallery room, the walls are adorned with a series of lightboxes that display samples of the delicate craftwork Japanese Americans produced while incarcerated at Topaz. The craftworks make use of the materials incarcerated found available in their new environment, such as the twisted forms of desert brush, as well as tiny shells, bleached sun-white. In the incarcerated's hands these shells became simulacra of roses and irises and other flowers the desert could never grow. This is itself a narrative of environmental transformation; if you listen to the museum docent's official explanation, visitors are meant to look upon the craftwork as an aesthetic sublimation of

the incarcerated's resilience—their determination to make beauty from wasteland. They built beauty in the desert out of relics of an ancient sea.

In *When the Emperor was Divine*, the boy dreams of this sea, too:

All night long he dreamed of water. Endless days of rain. Overflowing canals and rivers and streams rushing down to the sea. He saw the ancient salt lake floating above the floor of the desert. Its surface was calm and blue. Smooth as glass. He was drifting down through the reeds and fish were swimming through his fingers. (Otsuka 59)

Together with the vision of the wild mustangs and the cowboy outlaw's vitriolic epilogue, which I discuss in Chapter 2, this dream is one of *Divine's* rare moments of poetic effusion. In a novel that typically reports what *is* (and no more than what is), these effusions imagine loudly. Water bursts forth in multiple forms; it bends space and time. The ancient salt lake floats around the boy, not a buried history but one he conjures all around him. It fills old impressions, voids, but also supports life—reeds, fish, and the boy himself. In his dreams, he is not at Topaz, in a world constrained by barbed wire. The water is endless, overflowing.

Blurring the ancient past with the boy's present moment, the boy reimagines his environment in order to transcend his carceral experience. Like imagining his father the outlaw, the boy's dream of water attempts to imagine himself beyond the Topaz of 1942. In this iteration, however, he does not follow the WRA's rhetoric of the frontier to the pioneer's golden age; here, he reaches for primordial space-time, when this desert was not an incarceration camp, or pioneer community. In fact, it was not a desert at all.

It's his sister that tells him the history of the desert and its older forms, and she shares his impulse. I can imagine her reading *Trek*, a literary magazine published at Topaz. Its introductory issue included a two-page history of the Topaz area, titled "Landmarks of Pahvant Valley."³⁶

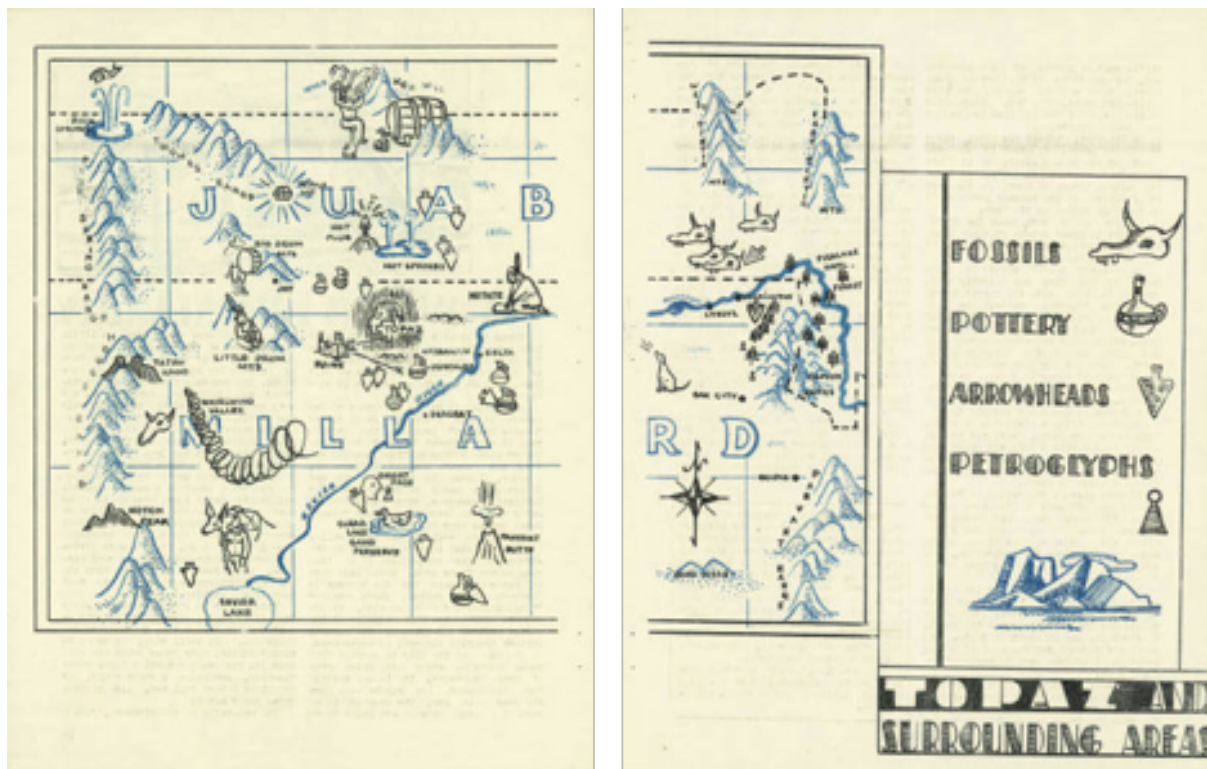
³⁶ The Topaz incarceration center opened on September 11, 1942. Three months later, the first volume of Topaz's literary magazine, *Trek*, was published, and two additional volumes would be published before the closing of the camp. In each edition of *Trek*, readers found a melange of short fiction, satire, traditional reporting, histories, and art by *nisei* who would later become

This history was contributed by Frank Beckwith, who was then the head of the nearby town of Delta's *Millard County Chronicle*, the local newspaper. Rather than begin on September 11, 1942, or even December 7, 1941, Beckwith's history of Topaz leads with the Pleistocene (Beckwith 17). For Beckwith, the history of Topaz begins with the glaciers that carved the valley in which Topaz would ultimately come to rest.

When the girl falls asleep, she dreams herself a part of these distant histories. However far removed from her immediate reality an ancient salt lake might seem, the connection she feels is intimate. The girl feels that "even in her sleep the sound of the rippling water came to her ... she did not remember the sound of the rippling water but it was with her, without her knowing. The sound of the lake was inside of her" (Otsuka 46-47). When she explains that she does not remember the sound of the water, but that it is still with her, the girl affirms her relationship to a history that she needn't have experienced herself. This makes sense, given that her relationship to both desert and salt lake are heavily mediated by texts, tropes. But she also suggests that these relations exist within her "without her knowing." It is not only about what she knows, or what she has read. The boundaries break down between her bodily experiences and sense memory from elsewhere, and parts of this imagination lie beyond her ken, even as she recognizes they are within her. Like her brother, the girl's imaginative forays allow her to exist beyond her material circumstances, and to alter their experience of their environment by tapping into its history on a geologic timescale, which is a history she and her brother understand to be far larger and longer than their own experience. Through their connection to these histories, they depart the desert, the camp, and the narratives that shape them—in ways that even the cowboy outlaw can't.

household names to the Japanese American community—among them Jim Yamada, Toshio Mori, Toyo Sunemoto, Larry Tajiri, and Mine Okubo. The inaugural 1942 issue, where "Landmarks of Pahvant Valley" was published, was edited by Jim Yamada, and dedicated the bulk of its pages to a summation of the way the governing structures and daily camp life were beginning to develop in those first three months of camp life.

Yet even then, we can't ever seem to abandon the cowboy completely. Beckwith's article is attended by a hand-drawn pictographic representation of the Topaz incarceration camp and its surrounding geography, though cartographic accuracy clearly wasn't its intent. There's no sense of scale, nor a compass rose; the space the map creates is theatrical, not geological. The map is most concerned with charting the Western imaginary, deeply seeded and gridded by colonial power and its undertakings, rather than lines of longitude or latitude. The map's pictographs advertise locations where one might find fossils, pottery shards, arrowheads, and petroglyphs. A number of human figures also grace the map, yet again issuing the reminder that the incarcerated are not alone in this wasteland. A befeathered Native figure beats a drum in the Little Drum Mountains, and above him, in the Big Drum Mountains, a settler figure in a cowboy hat beats a bigger, European-style marching drum. (The map may not have a compass, but it does apparently articulate a pictographic pecking order.)



ix. A two-page spread from the inaugural issue of *Trek* depicts a map of Millard County.

While dreams of an ancient sea illustrate the boy and girl's imaginative engagements with their environment, and attempt to envision and inhabit an alternative to both the prisoner and pioneer at Topaz, perhaps this imaginative space is not so far from the Western imaginary as it seems. It's the cowboy outlaw who has the last word in *Divine*. The boy's dream of water ends when, "[i]n the morning he woke up longing for a glass of Coke" (Otsuka 59). The poetry falls away, and what's left is a yearning for a Coke. A yearning for something industrial and all-American. The boy actually conjures his cowboy outlaw after he's awoken from, left behind his dream of that overflowing and unstoppable river.

The West is, as I've said, a place of strange company and loose associations. In the Western Mining and Railroad Museum, Mesozoic sea turtles and frontier mining found themselves unexpected shelfmates. In *Divine*, the boy and girl reach for the primordial and prehistoric. Their reaching constitutes a liberatory act—but one that ultimately isn't as far from the frontier as it might seem. The dream of water still ends with Coke. A primordial sea might predate a cowboy's rangeland, but by the time the cowboy steps foot in Topaz, he has already from a free-roaming figure to one under the employ of the New Deal, committed to building up U.S. infrastructures and public works projects; he's already seen to the partitioning of the frontier via statehood, and via the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887; he's already witnessed Turner's mythic "closing of the frontier"; he's watched barbed wire enclose rangeland, transition the West from wild plains to cultivated property. Romantic gestures toward a watery, primordial past? Yes, he's been there, too. He's been there first. The frontier also conceives of itself as originary space,

untrammelled wilderness. A place undiscovered. In order to be undiscovered but for the cowboy pioneer, the Indian cannot exist.

Even as *Divine's* boy and girl seek to imagine beyond the fences at Topaz, and beyond the rhetorics of the frontier that organize their experience of place, they seem unable to genuinely imagine Native presence. Neither the girl nor boy cast themselves in particularly heroic or pioneering roles in their dreams, and their mode of engagement with the water bespeaks harmony and unity more than it does ownership; yet in their dreams of water, they appear to be the only ones who have ever inhabited the desert. It's not that the text upholds this notion: In *Divine*, the boy "often wandered the firebreak with his head down and his hands in his pockets, looking for seashells and old Indian arrowheads in the sand" (52). Back in Berkeley, he'd owned a wooden Indian he'd acquired at a state fair (7); he yearns for his old bedroom, complete with "the cowboy-and-Indian curtains his mother had sewn for him the summer before last, gently billowing in the breeze" (68). It's just that the Indian never quite leaves the realm of the figural.

Of course, neither does the cowboy; that's his power. But the Indian is different. He doesn't appear on his terms, in the swell of *his* imaginary. He's just there, unspeaking and unspoken to, present in an unexpected place—because this is frontier space; this is wartime space; this is East versus West space. But it's also Native space, and with every moment the Indian isn't quite conjured, his absence is increasingly felt.

Promised Land

Like *Bad Day at Black Rock*, *History & Memory*, and *When the Emperor was Divine*, no Native characters appear in Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill*. Still, the novel takes place at the Poston incarceration camp, which you'll recall from Chapter 1 was built on the Colorado River

Indian Reservation against the wishes of the tribal council. While Nakamura's characters never engage directly with members of the Colorado River tribes, the palimpsestic nature of camp and reservation makes itself readily known throughout the novel, and actively shapes the characters' perceptions of life at Poston, and the social and infrastructural projects intended by it.

Beyond the undifferentiated, nameless environment of the camp's mess halls, barracks, and latrines, the first place *Treadmill's* protagonist, Teru, finds herself is "the Indian school" (Nakamura 86). She is an aspiring teacher, and all those interested in teaching in camp are invited to a meeting there. The opportunity to teach had been floated with high-minded aspirationalism, and Teru "remembered how enthusiastic Mr. McBain was about the educational system planned for Poston" (85). Mr. McBain proclaimed, "You young people are entering upon an exciting career...to mold character...to build healthy minds...to build a better future...." (85) In the context of the incarceration camps, this proclamation carries what should by now be a familiar overtone—that the camps might serve as crucible for the formation of a loyal and indubitably "American" character. The narration continues, "They were told that they would be privileged to work with a new method of teaching. Their main purposes would be to make the individual ready for society" (87).

Teru, however, finds her material circumstances less bombastic. "The Indian school was built of adobe but it was hot" (87), she notes, returning the notion of privileged work to the reality of her environment. Moreover, adobe are earthen bricks intended to act as natural insulators that keep the interiors of their buildings cool. "But it was hot," thinks Teru, and the building's failure to keep cool foreshadows the failure of the pedagogical experiment. Or perhaps more specifically, it signals the inadequacy of the plan to the situation—the desert heat overwhelms what the adobe can offer, and the carceral space of the camp already threatens to

overwhelm the bold idealism of this "Americanizing" curriculum. Indeed, Teru complains, "All they teach the demonstration classes is about Indians and the surrounding country" (89). This leads another to suggest that rather than make Americans, or pioneers, perhaps the camps were actually "trying to make Indians out of us" (89).

It's quite possible, of course, that the aim was to make them both.

The practice of "going Native" to achieve a deeper connection to the land that is now the United States, or to legitimize an evermore American American identity is a foundational practice of the settler colonial state. Native Studies scholar Shari M. Huhndorf elaborates the term in *Going Native* (2001), arguing that "widespread conviction of adopting some vision of Native life in a more permanent way is necessary to regenerate and to maintain European-American racial and national identities" (8), particularly in the context of a United States that must simultaneously justify its violent, genocidal past while also making sense of its response to immigration in the present. In *Transit of Empire* (2011), Jodi Byrd elaborates this phenomenon as the creation of Indianness as a means of transit. She argues, "Indianness becomes a site through which U.S. empire orients and replicates itself by transforming those to be colonized into 'Indians' through continual reiterations of pioneer logics, whether in the Pacific, the Caribbean, or the Middle East" (xiii). In the context of Japanese American incarceration, the camps form "colonies" of people who must be converted to the doctrine of Americanism, but also "pioneer communities" who might earn their Americanism by entering into a particularly defined relationship to the land—that is, a settler relationship. Byrd explains, "As both captives and settler, interned Japanese Americans are forced to play out in an abridged trajectory the U.S. frontier discourses, in which the only way to become 'true' American citizens is to first go native and then carve democracy out of the wilderness" (192).

It's the notion of going native—or "making Indian," the phrase which I will use to distinguish the practice in *Treadmill*, with respect to particular coercive and paradoxical state of the prisoner pioneer—that I find most striking, not least because the prospect is introduced so negatively. In contrast to the trajectory of the settler fantasy Huhndorf and Byrd outline, *Treadmill's* Japanese Americans bristle at the idea of being "made Indian," as they are quite certain the transformation will earn them little in the way of rights or belonging. They insist that they are different, because what they know about how Native peoples have fared under the rule of the United States is not a horizon they want to repeat. And in contrast to the ways the boy and girl in *Divine* seek solace and exploration from their environment, the imaginative space that opens before them as they think of their desert in terms of geologic timescales, Teru's colleagues deride the information they're offered about both the desert and its peoples. They bristle at being taught how to make adobe bricks (Nakamura 94), and complain about the medical care they receive, because the doctor's methods are different than what they were accustomed to back home; they suggest that the camp doctor, a former Indian Service doctor, was offering subpar care, "[m]aybe because we look so much like Indians" (94).

At the same time, however, as surely as they resist being "made Indian," *Treadmill's* incarcerated also refuse to entertain the fantasy that they might be the permanent settlers of the lands they are being asked to develop. Rejecting the Native doesn't necessarily signal valorization of the settler, or desire to align themselves with the settler state. They point out,

These lawns they're having us seed these trees they're letting us bring in to plant, they're not for us. Just about the time we get things fixed up, we'll be shoved out. Do you think that million dollar canal they're building from the Colorado River is for us? Not a chance! By the time all the improvements bear fruit, the barracks will have fallen to pieces. (108)

"Letting us bring in" trees frames the planting of trees as a special allowance the federal government made on behalf of the incarcerated. But trees, especially, only show their full bounty

after a prolonged amount of time. The true beneficiaries of the trees and the canal meant to feed them could not possibly be the same population forced to live in flimsy, temporary barracks. The timescales at which the camp functions are out of sync, and this asynchronicity severs the association between working land in order to lay claim to it.

While the incarcerated do not have to recognize the land as Native to understand that it is not theirs, what reading *Treadmill* offers is a space where the reality of Native presence functions as a spanner in the works, ultimately rendering impossible full Japanese American participation in the settler fantasy. The process of Americanization set forth in Teru's teacher training depends upon the idea that working on the land can make one native to it. When proclaimed from within the Indian School, on the Colorado River Indian Reservation, however, the settler fantasy of becoming native to land runs up against the lived reality of actual Native peoples. This lived reality sharply distinguishes the process of "becoming native" from the process being "made Indian"—and, indeed, highlights the fact that neither of these processes are the same as actually being indigenous.

What these distinctions clarify is the extent to which the "native" relation to land the WRA hoped to inspire in Japanese Americans functions only if the persistence of actual Native peoples is masked, or denied entirely. As I further expand on this idea, I will continue to read and think with *Treadmill*, which was the first novel written about Japanese American incarceration, though it was not published until 1996. Focusing on the way Nakamura makes explicit its setting on the Colorado River Indian Reservation, I will think through the ways this spatial orientation opens the drama of the incarceration narrative to its broader surroundings, allowing us as readers to pursue more expansive opportunities to imagine Japanese American incarcerated in relation to the settler state.

On that count, however, it's also important to note that in *Treadmill*, the way the United States has treated Native peoples is never quite disambiguated from what it means to be Native; they come across as equally undesirable. Nor does naming the "Indian School" appear to elicit much thought on the characters' parts about what it might mean for such a school to have been formerly Indian, and now theirs. Although *Treadmill's* Japanese Americans recognize the similarities between their situation and that of Native Americans, these similarities compel them to reject any relationship to their Native neighbors, rather than see them as potential allies similarly disenfranchised by the settler state. In place of these relations, Teru and her colleagues' rejection of the settler fantasy still relies on anti-indigenous sentiments. To more fully consider the ramifications of these sentiments, I will return to the desert, and to the October 2019 Poston Pilgrimage. Even as the Pilgrimage is made possible by and encourages further development of Native-Japanese American relations, the Pilgrimage narrative focuses on the plight of Japanese Americans to the near exclusion of all else; in so doing, it continues to participate in the erasure of Native presence from Poston, and from the past, present, and future of the lands of the Colorado River.

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Treadmill is the only known novel that was written while its author was himself incarcerated. As such, however, its discussions of race and culture tend to hew strongly to the racial essentialist paradigms of the 1940s. The novel's primary protagonist Teru, for instance, is introduced by way of her "soft Oriental look" and "inevitably brown eyes" (1). These descriptions assume a high degree of racial fixity in describing Teru's dark eyes as "inevitable," or certainly indicative of her racial identity—which itself carries inherent assumptions about softness or demureness. By contrast, one of Teru's friends argues, "Look, we talk American. We

act American. We are Americans. It'd be strange if we weren't, after being exposed to it all these years in school and at work. They'd call it indoctrination or the making of an American" (51). Straddling debates between racial fixity and the potential for cultural assimilation, *Treadmill* dramatizes what historian Brian Masaru Hayashi identifies as the incarceration's organizing struggle between race and culture. Hayashi argues that contemporaneous to World War II and the incarceration, race was considered fixed and inherent; culture, however, could be taught (2). The camps were an experiment: Could the camp experience instill in its prisoner (pioneers) enough "Americanness" to overpower the inherent alienness of their Japanese blood?

I won't spend time entertaining the question, or elaborating the thought process behind it, except to affirm that this form of race essentialism has been critiqued into the ground in the years since World War II. I bring it up, however, to better introduce *Treadmill* and the context within which its question of "making Indian" plays out. When Teru's colleague suggests, "Maybe they're trying to make Indians out of us," (Nakamura 89), she does so in a context already saturated by discussions about what is and isn't malleable about one's identity, and a context deeply preoccupied by the racialization of national loyalties.

In *Treadmill*, the question of "making Indian" becomes inextricable from these discussions, and again, it's this centrality that captivates me. I can't help but wonder how typical narrations of Japanese American incarceration might differ, had we had the opportunity to take *Treadmill* as our literary centerpiece. Although Hiroshi Nakamura sought a publisher for this novel after the war was over, he was unable to find one. The novel went largely unnoticed until a then-graduate student named Peter Suzuki located it in the National Archives in the early 1990s and had an edited version published with the independent Canadian printing house, Mosaic Press. Its scholarly uptake has been relatively sparse, as well, with its most sustained readings in

John Beck's *Dirty Wars* (2009) and Sarah Wald's *The Nature of California* (2016).³⁷ In the mid-2010's, *Treadmill* seemed slated for reprinting, but at time of this writing these efforts have yielded few results. I suspect the novel's roundabout publication history has contributed to its relative obscurity, but had it enjoyed the same circulation, critical attention, and anthological inclusion as John Okada's *No-No Boy* or Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, would the question of "making Indian" have changed the way we have heretofore come to understand Japanese American incarceration?

When introducing the camps, Nakamura clearly signals their imbrication with Native space and lands. The first time *Treadmill*'s characters catch wind of where they will be heading, that place is mapped and imagined in relation to the Colorado River Indian Reservation:

Young and old pored eagerly over the rare, contraband maps that unexpectedly turned up. A few had an on-the-scene broadcast from Poston but they could pass on only a smattering of information. It was located near a town called Parker on the Colorado Indian Reservation and that was as close as they could place it on the map. The whole region was dotted to indicate desert topography. The Colorado River flowed somewhere nearby and there was a lot of mesquite, whatever that was. Some said a shrub, some a tree. (62-63)

In a moment where information is unexpected, haphazard and incomplete, Poston's most defining feature is its proximity to Parker. Where exactly the river is, and what exactly mesquite is, remain largely mysterious. But whatever these features mean, one thing is certain: The place they're headed is enveloped by the Colorado River Indian Reservation.

³⁷ Beck and Wald both discuss *Treadmill* in the context of the importation of the Jeffersonian republic onto the incarceration camps, and the failure of this project. Wald draws attention to the ways agrarianism frames the lives of *Treadmill*'s characters in California as well as in camp, and Beck explores the notion of "desertification," where the camps become wastelands rather than would-be paradises. I extend these conversations by focusing more particularly on the way these frameworks play out when we think about this land as Native land, as well. In "Narrative and Gaming," a chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature* (ed. Rachel Lee, 2014), Tara Fickle has also written about *Treadmill*, functions of power in the camp, and game theory.

Treadmill is told from multiple Japanese American perspectives, but primarily follows Teru Noguchi, the *nisei*³⁸ daughter of Japanese farmers. Teru and those incarcerated alongside her navigate the poor construction of the barracks and mess halls; the infamous Loyalty Questionnaire; and the complexities of inter-camp romance. Teru also finds herself faced with the aforementioned propagandism of the school curriculum, while her male compatriots find ways of leaving camp—either through military service or as agricultural laborers, both of which contributed directly to the United States' war efforts.³⁹ In *Treadmill*, however, all of these staples of the Japanese American incarceration narrative play out in an environment that has been explicitly identified as Native land.

On arriving at Poston, Teru expresses her dismay at the camp conditions vis-à-vis a history of Native genocide: "Measles! I didn't think people died of that anymore ... They said that when this Indian reservation was first filled, over half of the total number of Indians who were earmarked for this reservation died either on the march here or within the first months after arriving" (79). Not only does this quote establish similarities between the unsanitary (and potentially deleterious) conditions faced by Natives and Japanese Americans, it also places Poston within a longer history of its surroundings. Rather than ride on the silent assumption that the boundaries between settler land and reservation land have always been as they stand, Teru points to the notion that the reservation, too, was created, its fences built, distinctions manufactured. Its inhabitants had not chosen those fencelines—and in many cases, were

³⁸ *Nisei*, second generation. The children of first-generation Japanese immigrants.

³⁹ Though initially barred from enlisting, Japanese American men were later made eligible for military service in 1943, and served primarily on the European Front, in the 442nd Infantry Regiment. Throughout World War II, Japanese Americans were permitted to leave the camps to work as agricultural laborers—most commonly on sugar beet farms. The traveling exhibit *Uprooted: Japanese American Farm Labor During World War II*, which showed at the Japanese American National Museum in 2016, tells this story through a collection of Farm Security Administration photographs from sugar beet farms in Oregon and Idaho. Advertisements for and reports back from sugar beet camps also feature prominently in camp newspapers like the *Gila News-Courier* and *Poston Chronicle*. While some sugar beets were used as food, they were heavily farmed because of their role in the production of munitions and synthetic rubber, which were products critical to the war effort (Mori).

indigenous to other lands, some quite far afield. In fact, the longer history that arises speaks not only to Native presence on the reservation, but also to the pattern of forced removals that have brought these populations into relation with one another.

Similarly, when Teru leaves Poston her experience is again indexed by Native presence on the Colorado River Indian Reservation around her. "It didn't seem possible that Indians could still be living in the dilapidated shacks she saw over the fields of stunted maize," she reflects as she passes through Parker. "For some reason she'd always pictured Indian reservations as well kept because they were under government protection" (193). The disjuncture between the environmental conditions she can see and the government "protection" she'd assumed is reflective of her own experience as well. She'd come to Poston hoping to become a teacher; she was promised a curriculum that would help her craft better Americans in a greater America, in the words of Mike Masaoka. But instead, she'd had students drawing rising suns, sinking U.S. battleships. Teru prepares to leave Poston, not as an indoctrinated loyal American, but as a dissident bound for Tule Lake.

The reality of Native presence signals a breakdown of settler fantasies of the frontier. Its power is twofold: First of all, the existence of the Native at all is counter to the logic of the frontier and its vanishing Indians. Additionally, the conditions on the reservation belie the promises of settlement, of working the land. While narratives of Japanese American incarceration have hardly needed to acknowledge the Native in order to dismantle the flimsy promises of the frontier, I think making Native presence central to my analysis better explains White anxieties around the development of Native-Japanese American relations, and ultimately affords me a better vantage point from which to contend with the role of Japanese Americans within (or apart from) the settler colonial state. Not only does the endurance of Native presence

in the narrative of Japanese American incarceration break down the fantasy of incarceration camp as "pioneer community"; it also threatens the very basis of settler colonial claims to land. It is almost as though the incarceration intended to hearken back to an imagined nineteenth-century frontier in order to shore up the power of the pioneer, only to instead conjure the Indian it had endeavored to vanish.

White anxiety around the intermixing of Native and Japanese Americans, and the potential threat this posed the settler fantasy, comes alive in an epistolary drama that erupted in August 1943, when Japanese Americans from the Leupp camp in northeastern Arizona were purportedly spotted at a Hopi Snake Dance. In response to this apparent travesty, Judge W. E. Ferguson sent a letter to Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, alleging that a number of his constituents had seen Japanese Americans in and around the Holbrook area: shopping in stores, teaching in Navajo schools, and, worst of all, in attendance at a Hopi Snake Dance. Ferguson couched his concern in terms of the war, explaining that "while I agree with you that any injury done to the Japanese would be taken out on our captured soldiers in Japanese, [sic], don't you think our conduct here in permitting these Japanese to run at large is inviting just such trouble" (Ferguson). He conflated the Japanese Americans held at Leupp with Japanese POWs, assuming that imperial Japan would view harm done to Japanese Americans as a reason to retaliate against white soldiers on the Pacific Front. He went on to suggest that Arizonans might be particularly compelled to harm Japanese Americans because of a recent communique from General McArthur, "which made known the beheading of one of our captured flyers, I believe in New Guinea" (Ferguson). Therefore, he argued, it was especially important to keep Japanese Americans in isolation. Race and nation, Arizona and New Guinea conflate and collapse under

the rubric of war. What also goes unaccounted for in Ferguson's letter, however, is his preoccupation with Japanese American run-ins with, specifically, Native communities.

Amidst Ferguson's stated concern for national security, his letters also make consistent reference to Native space, whereas he seemed less concerned with Japanese Americans in Arizona generally (though this was also a cause for anxiety for many). For instance, even as he accepted explanations for various other sightings of Japanese Americans around Holbrook, he continued to write about the Snake Dances, despite assurances that no Japanese Americans had been permitted to attend "the Hopi dances or any other similar events" (Ferguson). Ferguson replied, "It has been recently proved, I believe, that you can't believe all the Relocation representatives tell you." After naming his suspicion, he insisted, "My information regarding the Japanese at the Snake Dance was given me by our Sheriff who saw them there ... It was certainly no place for them to be" (Ferguson). He also named the area as Indian country, stating, "In fact no Japanese should be permitted in Indian country." While Ferguson clarified his concerns by noting the proximity of the Boulder Dam to the Snake Dances, implying that Japanese Americans might attempt to sabotage the dam, I'm more interested in his investment in Indian country. Regardless of whether Japanese Americans attended this Snake Dance or not, these letters express a willingness of white officials to police Native space—and more particularly, Japanese American access to Native space. When Ferguson claims "no Japanese should be permitted in Indian Country," this claim is more specific than the opinion that no Japanese American should be permitted beyond the camp. He is specifically against the idea of Japanese Americans sharing space with Native peoples.

I don't mean to suggest that Ferguson or any other government officials were blatantly, or even consciously, working to uphold what they knew to be an imaginary and performative

frontier. Ferguson was not the man behind the green curtain of Japanese American incarceration. I do, however, argue that officials like Ferguson were committed to keeping Japanese Americans in isolation, and considering the project of incarceration in isolation from its surroundings (and their histories). I argue that part of this isolationism focused squarely on keeping Japanese Americans a world apart from the Native peoples with whom they were sudden, uninvited, and unwilling neighbors. After all, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who famously opposed the camps, voiced her opposition by warning, "if we don't look out we will create another Indian problem" (qtd. in Robinson). For Roosevelt, the conditions of the camps and the nature of the incarceration project bore too many similarities to the reservation system; the "Indian problem" she references is Native reliance on government assistance.⁴⁰ She did not want what she perceived as a failure of the reservation system to bleed into a failure of the incarceration camps—a failure to assimilate.

Ironies abound here, not least of which is the fact that Japanese Americans were imprisoned at Poston in order to serve as literal proxies for both settler and Native bodies. Concerning the Colorado River Indian Reservation, a 1940 report from the Office of Indian Affairs stated:

It is certain that the combined Mohaves (875 in number) and Chemehuevis (312) will be unable to make effective use of the full 100,000 acres of irrigable land. If the project is carried to completion and water is available for the entire reservation, 75 to 80 percent of the land must be used by other Indians, or leased to white farmers, or there will be an irresistible [sic] demand to have Congress open the unused land to sale. (qtd. in Fontana 172)

Before the land was ultimately leased to "other Indians" (Hopi and Navajo relocated from the east), Japanese American incarcerated met that need. One of the primary reasons the Office of

⁴⁰ That is, the "Indian problem" that resulted from the settler colonial genocide and dispossession of Native peoples and the erosion of Native sovereignty.

Indian Affairs—led by Commissioner John Collier—agreed to house the Poston camp was because the camp would put bodies on the reservation. In order to preserve the reservation's rights to water from the heavily-diverted and much-coveted Colorado River, the Office of Indian Affairs needed to prove that it was using the water. This proof would come in the form of irrigation projects, which would be augmented by means of incarcerated Japanese American bodies, and Japanese American labor. In effect, Japanese Americans took on the role of both Native and settler placeholder.

In *Treadmill*, however, the novel's Japanese American characters disidentify with both potential transformations. The process of "making Indian" runs aground when confronted by the realities of the reservation and the continuing survivance of the Native peoples living there. Rather than perform the transactional settler fantasy of working land in order to make oneself native to it, Teru and her colleagues understand themselves as the dispossessed. "Our places will have been taken over by *Hakujin* and they won't want us back," they recognize (Nakamura 26). Specifically, they recognize they have more in common with the vanishing Indian than the pioneer mythos they've been promised. "If our skins were white, it'd be another matter," they allow. But they're not white. Instead, they argue, "Look at the Indians around here" (135).

Look at the Indians around here.

See them.

Again, there are no Native characters in *Treadmill*. As readers, we see them only indirectly, through Teru's references to conversations we were not privy to, meetings the novel did not let us observe. Nevertheless, Native presence functions as a primary organizing feature of the novel. At a certain point, however, perhaps presence alone is not enough. What is the

difference between acknowledging that land is Native, and creating genuine relation on the basis of this fact?

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The former site of the Poston incarceration camp is home to the only still-standing elementary school built in any of the ten camps. It was designed by Yoshisaku Hirose and constructed from over 500 adobe bricks; after the war, and after all the Japanese Americans had departed, the Colorado River Indian Tribes used it as a schoolhouse, too. If the Indian school in *Treadmill* serves as a material reminder that Poston is linked to the Native community that preceded it, and continued life contemporaneously around it, the Poston elementary school is a reminder that this Native community also persisted afterwards. It is an ongoing presence in narratives of Japanese American incarceration, and in the narratives of how the incarceration is memorialized and encountered in the present day.

At 9AM on October 12, 2019, a procession of towering tour buses embarks from the parking lot of the BlueWater Resort and Casino in Parker, Arizona.⁴¹ These buses comprise the second annual Poston Pilgrimage, organized by the Poston Community Alliance in partnership with the Colorado River Indian Tribes. On my bus, only four riders are actually from Arizona. Most are from California, split evenly from the northern and southern halves of the state. A smattering of riders identify themselves as Coloradans, Minnesotans, Oregonians. Some have come from as far as Massachusetts. Almost all are Japanese Americans, or married to one. Most of the riders have some familial relation to Poston, whether they were themselves incarcerated or they have an immediate relative who was. While Manzanar is probably the best-known camp, Poston was the most populous. This pilgrimage is a family affair.

⁴¹ On October 12, 1492, the purported New World was “discovered” by Christopher Columbus’s ships.

"What are the 5 Cs of Arizona?" our group leader asks us. "I'll give you a hint. They're not 'cowboy' or 'cactus.'"

"Casino?" someone jokes.

The actual answers are copper, cotton, cattle, climate, and citrus, all of which can be corralled under the big C, commerce. The guide mentions the role of commerce in Poston's history as well. She tells the group that from 1942 to 1943, Poston was the only camp not run by the War Relocation Authority, but the Office of Indian Affairs. As part of the negotiation, the OIA wanted to have control over the development of Poston's infrastructures, and the completion of the region's long-promised irrigation systems. Even as this history is part of the pilgrimage, for most of the participants it does not frame the experience. They are not so interested in federal machinations, governance shuffled from one entity to another.

The guide is silent as we drive past fields and homes, southwest to the Poston Monument, and disembodied bus chatter soon takes today's story in another direction.

Manzanar is "like a National Park but not," a voice explains. "It has a docent even though there's not a whole lot there."

Another woman shares her experience at a Tule Lake pilgrimage. It had "more activist types, they were the defectors," she says, in reference to the Tule Lake resisters—those derogatorily known as "no-no boys."

"This isn't like that," her seatmate assures her. The Poston Pilgrimage doesn't have Tule Lake's chip on its shoulder. She believes it is more about personal experiences. "I think it's getting more activist-y because of Trump," she allows.

"I mean, you know, definitely after 9/11," adds the first woman, the one who'd been to Tule Lake.

It's difficult for me to imagine a way of thinking about the incarceration in a way that is not inherently political, or in a way that divorces the personal from the political. But if there is one thing that is essential to understanding the way most Japanese Americans currently narrate the incarceration, it is this. The incarceration is an aberration. It is a "failure of political leadership," rather than the plan all along. For a long time, the incarceration's primary genres were legal testimony and intergenerational trauma, and as such it is an act of isolation that happened only to Japanese Americans. It sent them to wastelands where no one was around, and it is a personal story that many carried with them without ever speaking a word about it. (I once asked my grandmother what it had been like to be a Japanese girl living in Hawai'i after Pearl Harbor. She told me to turn on Lawrence Welk; it was time, and we couldn't miss him. It was a re-run.)

By 2019, Poston has held only two pilgrimages—at least, in any official sense, and at this scale. While the genre of the pilgrimage is old, it is new to this space.

Eighteen miles down Mojave Road, the buses pull into the parking lot of the Colorado River Indian Tribes Fire Department, which it shares with the Poston Memorial Monument. The monument is ringed with palm trees and surrounded by flat green alfalfa fields. Today, a number of rally tents are set up with white folding chairs clustered beneath them. The first few rows are reserved for camp survivors. Local high school students hand out plastic water bottles.

The pilgrimage is a wily genre, difficult to pin down. The notion of pilgrimage suggests reverence, and there is of course a seriousness attached to commemorations of wartime. But the dress code is casual, bright T-shirts and baseball caps, foam visors and fanny packs. Only U.S. Congressman Paul Gosar is wearing a suit, and only Miss CRIT and Little Miss CRIT, the reservation's recently crowned pageant winners and cultural ambassadors, dress in regalia. The

opening ceremonies are a combination of small talk and breakfast snacks, prepared speeches and the National Anthem. It's not a funeral, nor holiday parade; nor graduation, nor sporting event, though it manages to entertain elements of all of these. The pilgrimage is an expression—elliptical, bombastic, not quite defined—that something happened here.

Mid-way through the opening ceremonies, Johnny Hill, a Chemehuevi of the Colorado River Indian Tribes, is invited to take the mic. He is there in place of Dennis Patch, tribal Chairman, who is in a tribal council meeting. Though the pilgrimage is an all-day affair, twelve hours of ceremony, exploration, educational programming, and honor banquet, his remarks make up most of the space the pilgrimage has reserved for input from the Colorado River Indian Tribes.

The pilgrimage is meant to commemorate the experience of Japanese Americans at Poston during World War II, he says. He notes that his people are no strangers to the hard life, too. And that maybe because of that, he's more interested in focusing on tomorrow than he is history.

He doesn't elaborate, but his words invite a certain energy to the space. The struggles faced by the CRIT, either historically or presently, bear no further mention at the pilgrimage. Any connections between the Japanese American experience and his go uninterrogated. And the pilgrimage is not quite ready for tomorrow, except in the abstract—dedicated to the conviction that something like the incarceration should not happen again. I think it's a limitation of the genre. This is the nature of pilgrimage. Perhaps on October 12, 2019, it is enough that the pilgrimage is happening at all, and that Japanese Americans from all places elsewhere and La

Perra high school's Native teens are occupying the same space.⁴² This was largely the relationship the two groups had entertained during World War II, adjacent but not conversant, aside from some baseball games.

Before we get back on the bus, we pilgrims are allowed to explore the monument freely. Some people *oshoko*, or offer incense at the monument. Others take selfies, the edges of their wide smiles almost touching the bottoms of their sunglasses. They chat in the shade of the rally tents. They wander to the road, looking up and down its dusty expanse and the alfalfa, and alfalfa, and alfalfa. The pilgrimage hasn't quite decided what it is, how it should be approached. But something happened here. So here we are.

Miss and Little Miss CRIT pose for photographs.

On our way to the remains of the Poston camp, we pass through pieces of reservation, and drive the length of a chain-link fence before turning into its only opening. On the bus, someone asks about the CRIT and their participation in the pilgrimage.

"Here they really have them because otherwise we couldn't have it here," a woman offers. That is, Poston is on Native land. The pilgrimage required permission.

Poston is on Native land. Like *Treadmill*, the pilgrimage opens with this fact, but it's still difficult to apprehend what it really means. Perhaps what is invisible is the relationship-building it took to get this far. By failing to clarify the CRIT's role in the pilgrimage, the historical relationship forged between the Japanese American and Colorado River Indian communities the moment the U.S. government built an incarceration camp on Native land also falls to the wayside. This in turn serves to further invisibilize future opportunities to create relation between

⁴² My assessment of the pilgrimage is not intended as an excoriation, but rather an acknowledgement that building these forms of community narrative and dialogue are labor-intensive in ways that require a sedate pace and small but continuous change, rather than spectacular paradigm shifts or epilogic cowboys.

the Japanese American visitors and the CRIT, the pilgrims and the Natives. Again, I think this is the nature of pilgrimage. It's a limitation of the genre. The Poston Pilgrimage tells the story of 1942-1945 at Poston Camps 1, 2, and 3. It does not discuss what came before, or after.

The pilgrimage is defined by its project of moving bodies through the desert—moving bodies through Native space and camp space. But even at the pilgrimage, it's the buildings, structures, and the land itself that tell more stories than these bodies are yet ready to.

Beyond the chain-link fence, topped by barbed wire to deter climbers, we explore the pieces of Poston that still stand.

Some make the layers of their construction known. Their undoing mirrors their process of construction, reversed slowly. Missing hunks of plaster show wire, show adobe bricks. Wooden doorframes lose their footing, lean away from the bricks. They inhabit their space askance. One day they will fall, and become a pile of lumber again.

Wire straps hang from the roofs of some of the buildings, tinsel-like. These are relics of past preservation efforts; they are not original to the structures. They were meant to strap down tar paper roofing, to keep it from blowing away. Some buildings have no roofs at all. Japanese Americans climb through V-shaped chasms in the adobe walls.

Poston is remarkable for the number of buildings that remain of the camp. At Manzanar, for instance, most of what you see are foundations—empty concrete squares labeled "dining hall" or "hospital." Amache is the same. Topaz, too, though many of the Topaz barracks were repurposed into small homes that line the outskirts of Delta to this day. But although the ruins are fenced off and the buildings since retired, these spaces do not stand as monuments to the camp years alone.

The elementary school, for instance, was used by the CRIT. When the war ended and the Japanese Americans left the camps, new residents moved into the barracks: In 1945, the Office of Indian Affairs relocated Hopi and Navajo from elsewhere in the southwest onto the Colorado River reservation (Fontana 164). The largest building within the fence is a sheet metal gymnasium that postdates the incarceration camp entirely. Today, it is filled with boxes and piles of paper ephemera, textbooks, and office tech long past the point of obsolescence. A soil survey of the area papers the ground beside a newsletter titled *Smoke Signals*, advertising National Indian Day. An Omnifax machine dates a pile to the late 1990s, and a nearby *Practical Physics* textbook overlays Congressional Records, hay surveys, and a boxy telephone. This is Poston's informal fossil record, and what it shows me is the continued presence and importance of the history that follows the camps—the present that continues to hold the memory. Like the Great Basin Museum and its holding together of Topaz, the Bolan Ranch and Shigeru Kawamoto, barbed wire, and ox-drawn wagons; like the Helper museum and its Mesozoic sea turtles, its Gibbs devices from the mines; there are palimpsestic histories here, eschewing linear time to present fragments from each one, and to create a place where these layers touch, interact, and refuse to be considered piecemeal.

This vision of history, and of the narrative of Japanese American incarceration, however, runs counter to where the future of the Poston site is headed. The Poston Preservation Alliance, in partnership with Scheuber-Darden Architects and the Japanese American Confinement Site federal grant program, is hoping to re-create the space as it would have stood in 1942. They want to restore a barrack and turn it into an interpretive center. They want to remove buildings, like the metal gymnasium, that hadn't been there during the camp years. While this seems like a natural course of action, I hesitate to endorse this telling of history. What do we gain by

preservation? What do we lose? Can we call it preservation if the act requires erasure and recursion by design?

The efforts to preserve and maintain the Poston site have been plagued by violent destruction, not only by the passage of time but also vandalism. In 2019 alone, buildings had walls kicked in; the best-preserved barrack was burned to the ground—victim to suspected arson. Graffiti decorates Poston's plaster walls. But at the same time, at what point does what came after Poston cease to constitute Poston's history? If the site is returned to a simulacra of 1942, perhaps the narrative loses more than it gains. It loses the material linkage between an incarceration camp built on tribal lands without tribal consent, and the linkage between the skeleton of that camp and the role it plays in the subsequent dispossessions and relocations of the Hopi and Navajo who were sent to live there. It loses the fact that Poston still stands on CRIT land. At what point, after all, does graffiti cease to be a destructive act, and become instead a vital reminder? "Native pride," reads one of the walls at Poston.⁴³ An anachronism, on a wall intended to replicate 1942. But maybe it's not. Maybe it's an environmental act. It changes the place by naming it differently. Multiple timelines close in on one another. Perhaps this is an expression of what it means to focus on the future—to allow history to bear on the future, rather than attempt to recreate a version of the past, to paraphrase Johnny Hill, who gave voice to the CRIT on the morning of the second annual Poston Pilgrimage. The other option, someone at the pilgrimage suggests, is to build a bigger, better barbed wire fence.

⁴³ An expression of enduring Native presence, the graffiti is also a gang tag. But the prevalence of gang activity is not to discount the power of the tag—it's an admission of its importance, and the vital ways life in the present has been shaped by the policies of the past (as well as those ongoing).



x. Graffiti on a wall at Poston in 2019 reads “Native Pride.”

The Outerstellar

Perhaps I am too dismissive of the notion of pilgrimage and its tendency to focus inward, to think of the past as something that must be crystallized and beheld. In April 1973 Sue Embrey, former incarcerated and Manzanar Committee co-chair, addressed the sea of 1500 primarily Japanese American faces in attendance at the Manzanar Pilgrimage that year. It was cold, but bright. Manzanar's is a white dust, and you squint to see when the sun is out. You squint against spring gales. Although surrounded by the Sierra mountains, Manzanar itself is flat and wide. There are no windbreaks.

"Today, the person in charge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is the same person who was in charge of the relocation centers for Japanese during World War II," said Embrey. "He must know as we do, that it doesn't matter whether you call it a reservation or a relocation center, it is in reality a concentration camp" (qtd. in Murase, "Manzanar" 4). Eschewing the nominal

distinctions between camp and reservation, Embrey follows the literal body of law—Dillon S. Myer's body—from one office to the next, and links the experience of Japanese Americans during World War II to the experience of Native Americans in the United States. The history they share is one of federal oppression, removal and dispersal. This focus on the camp, the reservation, particularizes this relationship; it ties it to place, and the management of bodies in place. Invoking Myer's continuing presence and influence also makes clear that the relationship is not only historical—it is an enduring part of the present, as well.

The experience of Japanese Americans at Manzanar compels a return, a pilgrimage. But that return is also a new experience of place, just as Myer's new role begins a new linkage between Japanese and Native Americans. Embrey does not simply equate camps with reservations; she suggests that the structures of power that built the reservations also built the camps, and that those structures of power continue to animate the spaces that Japanese and Native Americans share today. The year was 1973, and it was Day 46 of the AIM occupation of Wounded Knee. "Today," said Embrey, "we must realize that Manzanar is right now, this minute, our Wounded Knee. If we support one, we must support the other. It's the same struggle with many fronts" (5).

The occupation of Wounded Knee was a return as well. Over 2000 Oglala Sioux and supporters of the American Indian Movement took to Wounded Knee, South Dakota in order to protest the United States' failure to uphold treaties with Native nations, and to demand that these treaty negotiations be reopened. They chose Wounded Knee because of its significance as the site of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, where several hundred Lakota had been slaughtered en masse. While the 1973 Manzanar pilgrimage was not an occupation in the sense of unauthorized takeover, nor did it have a particular political goal in mind, Embrey argues that the

pilgrimage—the act of being in the space of a former nightmare—is compelled by the same spirit, and therefore *should* go hand in hand with occupations elsewhere. It would be a contradiction to engage in the act of pilgrimage without also supporting the return to Wounded Knee.

Embrey wasn't alone in her expression of solidarity, either. A vocal minority within the Japanese American community in 1973 was deeply invested in manifesting these relations. In the May 1973 issue of *Gidra: A Monthly of Asian American Experience*, a radical magazine with a primarily Japanese American staff based out of Los Angeles, contributor Merilynne Hamano described multiple Japanese American organizations invested in supporting the American Indian Movement: The Manzanar Committee, of which Embrey was a member; the Los Angeles chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League; the students who produced CSU Long Beach's Asian American week, who partnered with Native students to present on pressing issues in the Native community. Indeed, Japanese Americans occupied Wounded Knee, too. Hamano reported, “At one in the morning, Easter Sunday, a contingent of Asians from the Los Angeles areas reported that they arrived safely in Rapid City, S.D., to join the pilgrimage... They are participating in a peaceful march which began Monday, April 23, from Rosebud Reservation into Wounded Knee” (8). She calls the march to Wounded Knee a pilgrimage, rhetorically linking the previous week's Manzanar pilgrimage with this new occupation—the bodily movement of Japanese Americans into relation with Native peoples and Native causes. This march was particularly significant, because by Hamano's estimation, “This act of support in body as well as in spirit by the Asians representing us at Wounded Knee is one of the first times that we are coming together with other Third World people to fight, to stand up against a common enemy. And this is just the beginning” (8).

Thirty years later, in her 2001 essay "Imaginary Borders," Kandice Chuh asks, "[A]t what (or whose) expense are the rights and entitlements accruing to legitimized Americanness being materialized?" That is, in the context of Japanese American incarceration narratives: What is the cost of continuing to narrate, and continuing to embody, a vision of something like the incarceration of Japanese Americans, *without* also recognizing that it is "our Wounded Knee"? If what is at stake in the narrative of incarceration is Japanese Americans' "Americanness," and an immigrant's right to belong in the United States, what prepositional reframings does this orientation to Wounded Knee necessitate? To belong "in" the United States is to lay claim to its soil. Yet that soil isn't just the United States'; it's also Native land. To champion rights to citizenship is to fight for the opportunity to belong "to" the United States. But this also means fighting to belong to a structure that has systematically disempowered Native peoples. Without seriously rethinking Asian American orientations to the United States, both belonging "in" and belonging "to" place Japanese Americans within the United States' settler colonial framework. Chuh continues,

By claiming ownership of U.S. national identity, Asian Americanists must also then claim responsibility for the cultural and material imperialism of this nation... Simultaneous to the work of realizing justice for Asian Americans must be [the] confrontation of U.S. imperialism. (278)

Chuh is speaking about U.S. imperialism broadly writ, beyond the borders of the United States. But the responsibility she names applies equally to the settler colonial constellations that manage space within its borders. In the last twenty years, the question of settler colonialism has continued to gain purchase within Asian American studies. These discussions are most developed in the context of the Hawaiian islands, as in the work of scholars such as Candace

Fujikane, Dean Saranillio, and Haunani-Kay Trask.⁴⁴ Recently, however, scholars such as Quynh Nhu Le and, as aforementioned in Chapter 2, Jodi Byrd and Iyko Day⁴⁵ have also probed the relationship of Asian Americans to settler colonial paradigms across the Americas. In his 2019 article, "Asian American Studies, Comparative Racialization, and Settler Colonial Critique," Antonio Tiongson Jr. offers a survey of work in Asian American studies that has begun to address—however unevenly—the problem of settler colonialism as it relates to formulating Asian American life. However, he concludes, "the task that still remains is to come up with fully fleshed-out comparative analytic frames that reckon with ongoing colonial violence in a way that unsettles the various critical projects that fall under the rubric of Asian American studies" (438). The task of imagining forms of relation to land and Native peoples that exist beyond the settler state (and actively seek to undo its violence) remains an open bid.

It's not enough to name Manzanar "our Wounded Knee," if the insinuation is that these experiences are synonymous, and the positions of those involved are interchangeable. They may be similar enough to arrest each other's attention, but as Tiongson notes, citing Tuck and Wang's "ethic of incommensurability," Asian American and Native experiences within a settler colonial framework are not actually the same (437), just as being "made Indian" and being Native are not the same. Nor, I argue, does Embrey's comparison truly suggest that they are. Manzanar and Wounded Knee are "the same struggle with many fronts" because they are products of the same constellation of settler colonial power.

⁴⁴ See *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, ed. Candice Fujikane (2008); Saranillio, Dean Itsuji, "Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters: A Thought Piece on Critiques, Debates, and Indigenous Difference" (2013) in *Settler Colonial Studies*; and Trask, Haunani-Kay, "Whose Vision? Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai'i" (2000) in a special issue of *Amerasia Journal*.

⁴⁵ See Byrd, Jodi, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011) and Day, Iyko, *Alien Capital* (2016).

What is needed, then, is a way of belonging in place that doesn't require the settler validations of Americanization, assimilation, or even citizenship. What is needed, I argue, is a form of relation that asks its invitation not from the settler, but the Native. Over the course of this dissertation, I've considered texts that wrestle with fantasies of the frontier, the seeming unimagability of Native presence. I've focused mostly on exploring images, tropes, and spatial explorations that make the frontier come alive, in order to seek out ways to leave it. In closing, I will offer a place to land—or at least, a means by which to ask permission to do so. If the interior West is an ocean, perhaps its tides are governed by the skies above; if the settler colonial state rules these western skies, then I propose the outerstellar.

The outerstellar is a horizon beyond the constellations of settler colonial power. This horizon emerges from imaginative re-inscriptions of one's relation to place. It aligns immigrant belonging with indigenous sovereignty, as opposed to the settler state. I borrow the term from Mitsuye Yamada's poem "Desert Run," which, like the pilgrimage, executes a series of returns to the desert after the speaker's incarceration during World War II. Mitsuye Yamada was born in 1923, and grew up in the Seattle area until 1942, when, at the age of 19, she was incarcerated at Minidoka. Yamada kept voluminous journals filled with observations about her life in camp; pieces of these journals ultimately became *Camp Notes*, which was published by Shameless Hussy Press in 1976. She published her second book of poetry, *Desert Run*, in 1988. In its opening and eponymous poem, the speaker tells us, "the outerstellar / is only an arm's length away" (4).

The neologism has stayed with me. It's the word on which the entire poem turns, and by virtue of this, I think, a useful starting point for imagining a frontier beyond frontiers. Before we begin, however, I find it useful to first ground the abstraction of the outerstellar in a portrait of

Mitsuye Yamada, which was illustrated by New York-based artist Yuko Shimizu. The portrait was originally published as a cover for the University of Chicago Magazine in 2017, before being exhibited in October 2018 in a Los Angeles art installation called *Seeds of Our Grandmothers' Dreams*.



xi. Yuko Shimizu's portrait of a young Mitsuye Yamada.

I read Shimizu's portrait as a visual mnemonic for the outerstellar: We see Yamada surrounded by the desert camp—a settlement, as evinced by the barracks, the telephone poles, even as she herself is itinerant. The bags all around—just arrived, but already leaving. She's dressed in cowboy boots, but the rest of her outfit is not "suited to pioneer life," if you recall the

WRA pamphlet that sought to welcome Japanese Americans to their pioneer communities. Instead, she reaches upward and outward, pen held skyward as her poetry issues forth butterflies. She writes a rip into the sky above her, the clouds on either side of the rip twisting as though captured in a fish-eye lens. The fish-eye lens's original application was for astronomy. And so, to the outerstellar we proceed.

"Desert Run" is a poem in five parts. The outerstellar does not make an appearance until the fourth. Before introducing the outerstellar, the speaker makes clear the circumstances of her initial visit to the desert in the first two parts of the poem: She was sent there as a prisoner. It's a place of criminals, vermin, wreckage, insistently bothersome flies, and "desolate stillness." Yet at the same time, the speaker also displays a hesitation to condemn it entirely. While the imagery of scorpions, spiders, and snakes is typically unsavory, here they live in "outcast harmony" (Yamada 1). In Part I, these creatures are defined by two qualities: The way they have been treated *by others*—as outcast—and by the way that they actually live, in pleasing combination. The sands, too, are gentle, and the speaker suggests that there is more to this place than she had been able to hear in her first encounter.

Part II displays a similar ambivalence toward the desert—a lifting up out of the speaker's old associations. As prisoner, there hadn't been much to see. Was the sand gentle, or lifeless? Was the landscape a marvelous fascination, or nothing at all? It's important to note, however, that the speaker does not disavow her original associations—not entirely. When the speaker says, "I watched the most beautiful / sunsets in the world and saw nothing" she expresses her current impression—that the sunsets are beautiful here, in ways she had not previously appreciated—but does not suggest that this should, or could, have meant anything before (2). "I died there," the speaker explains (2). She returns to the desert to give herself a ritual burial, but the act of burial

is not about burying the past. It's not about having seen the desert wrong the first time. The speaker returns to the desert to re-form the way the bones lie—to change her relationship to her past, to the desert, and to those that live there.

In Part III, the mode of the speaker's reflections begin to shift. She begins to grapple with what should now be familiar to you as the paradox of the prisoner pioneer. She is there to confront her own incarceration, her own trauma, but she's also there to contend with an additional history, where she and 120,000 other Japanese Americans were "part of someone's plan" (3). On one hand, she sees her incarceration in the desert as a plan to "spirit away spies," or to remove the potential threat of Japanese American sabotage (3). The speaker frames her incarceration through the familiar narrative of wartime hysteria. On the other hand, however, the speaker identifies with the bull snakes, which were brought to the desert to be a tool for transforming the desert.⁴⁶ Identifying with the bull snake, the speaker orients herself to the desert as an agent of environmental transformation—as a pioneer, making a frontier more habitable. (Or at least, a creature working in the service of the pioneer.)

That's not the word she uses, though. Rather than leave off with the contradictory formulation of prisoner-pioneer, she says, "we were predators at your service." She recognizes her role, very specifically, as prisoner-*predator*. Predator—from the Latin for "plunderer," or *praedari*, "to rob" ("predator"). This switch in identification marks the speaker's movement from a prisoner with aspirations of pioneer-dom to a prisoner who recognizes that to be "pioneer" is to be "plunderer." She is not a prisoner in an empty desert. She is not a pioneer on an untrammelled frontier. She recognizes that this is someplace stolen.

⁴⁶ Folk knowledge suggests that bull snakes eat rattlesnakes, and therefore can be used to keep down rattlesnake populations if introduced into a given area. Whether this is biologically true is suspect, but like many elements of the imaginary of the frontier, the actual veracity of the notion is neither here nor there.

Once the speaker has envisioned her fraught relationship to the desert as prisoner plunderer, rather than pioneer, she reaches out for the outerstellar:

At night the outerstellar darkness
above is only an arm's length away
I am pressed by the silence around me
the stars are bold as big as quarters
against the velvet blue sky
their beams search for the marrow
of my bones
I shiver as I stumble my way to
the outhouse. (4)

In this stanza, the speaker acknowledges the stars as these bright, dazzling, even beautiful things—with the power to penetrate her to her very marrow. Yet it's the darkness she opens with, that which lies beyond the stars, and it's the darkness to which she returns at the end of the stanza, hidden away from the starlight in the outhouse. Whatever the allure of the stars, the speaker's attentions are always directed outwards and beyond them—towards the *outerstellar*, towards the *outhouse*. The structure of the stanza pushes us as readers always *outward*, away from the stars' seeming intimacy. The stars may seek her marrow but they do not find it.

In a poem that spends its first three parts in a tug o' war with an unnamed dictator, who not only imprisoned her in the desert but also puts her to work as a pioneer-predator, I read the allure of starlight as tantamount to the allure of assimilation into the American settler state. Embraced by starlight, she'd be afforded certain privileges as a model minority. Yet the speaker rejects this, along with its glittering affordances. These affordances, self-assurances, would have been granted by a settler state that professed to see beyond the speaker's Japanese American skin to the pioneering marrow of her—even as it looked upon that same skin and made her prisoner. It is what buried her bones in the desert in the first place. The speaker stumbles *out*.

In the morning, she finds herself in different company. Kangaroo rats—night creatures, outerstellar creatures—have built homes from the desert's leavings. They've accepted the speaker's presence, even as both they and the speaker acknowledge that this presence is alien. After stepping outside of the constellations of settler colonialism, the desert is different. Its purview is no longer wreckage and lifelessness. "The desert is the lungs of the world," Part V begins—the progenitor of full, capacious breaths. In an interview Yamada gave in 1988, she speaks to the way her relationship to desert has shifted since her teenage exile at Minidoka. *Desert Run* reflects her "coming to see the desert with new eyes." She says, "Having been exiled into it for almost two years during World War II, I fell naturally into the cultural bias of thinking of the desert as a sterile and nonproductive place, a place where ... we must water it to make it more attractive or more useful to us" (Jaskoski and Yamada 107). Yamada's description of the desert exceeds mere cultural bias. She speaks to the ways that the desert itself has been interpellated into the settler colonial state, or as a place that must be settled and made productive in ways that serve the settler colony. By contrast, in "Desert Run," the speaker heeds the desert that already is. Rather than assent to the work of claiming and remaking the desert, she carefully considers her relationship to those that live there—in this poem, the kangaroo rat, the lizards, the ants—and positions herself as an alien presence that they can choose to accept (or not).

As we come to the final stanza of "Desert Run," the speaker makes clear her understanding that she is welcome within the settler state only if she is "brought back in a cage / to grace your need for exotica." That is, she is welcome only if she hews to the way the settler state has imagined her, and only at its pleasure. But under the cover of outerstellar darkness, the speaker refuses the invitation. She reaches beyond the stellar, toward what lies beyond the constellations of power that make up the settler colonial state. That is, beyond the narratives of

the frontier, the promises of Americanization and belonging—beyond the models of an agrarian republic and the miles of irrigation ditches built up by Japanese American prison labor, behind fences punctuated by barbed wire starbursts. While submission and assimilation seem the brightest path, she chooses to stumble to the *outhouse*—to reach for the *outerstellar*. There's a self-assured elegance to the stars, whereas the speaker shivers, stumbles, excretes. She commits to the work of inhabiting an outerstellar elsewhere. And she warns, "I will not keep a discreet distance" (5).

Once again, however, "Desert Run" never quite names its counterpoint to the settler. Native presence is left only to implication. But of the texts I have discussed so far, the poem goes furthest in animating that presence, and placing its Japanese American speaker in relation to it. As the speaker in "Desert Run" prepares to leave the desert, she insists, "We must leave before we can / change it." On first reading, the line sounds like a challenge to the environmental transformations and irrigation infrastructures intended to salvage the Japanese American and the desert alike. Rather than enact this labor, she argues, they must leave the desert in its original state. Yet it's unclear whether she can ever truly leave. The line break here introduces ambiguity—we must leave before we can change the desert, but we must also leave before we can. We must leave before we can leave. She can't cut ties entirely; the desert has already changed. Now she is a part of it, and alien presence or not, she is still relationally tied to the desert. This relation stems from, and is constitutive of, the outerstellar. In "Desert Run," Yamada's poetic subjects step *outside* of the constellations of settler colonial power, ultimately aligning immigrant belonging with indigenous sovereignty, as opposed to the settler state. When Yamada's speaker insinuates that she "will not keep a discreet distance," should her captors prescribe her the role of second-class settler, her fight is not only for herself, an Asian American,

but also in collaboration with the Native American, on whose land she is buried. On whose land she is a guest. On whose land she is an accomplice—not pioneer, nor predator.

The poem that immediately follows "Desert Run" opens with an epigraph: "*I understood why Geronimo / had fought for so long to hold / the land he loved*" (6, emphasis original). It's a quote from Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929). Smedley was a journalist and spy most famous for reporting on the Indian revolution against British rule. In her book, she was speaking broadly of wresting power from occupying forces, but Yamada's poem returns Geronimo to the specificity of the American Southwest. The poem that follows "Desert Run" is titled "Hole in the Wall." Its poetic subject reaches through this hole, reaches for the outerstellar and her hands find Geronimo's.

Yamada's poetic engagement with Geronimo underscores her long-standing activist commitments, having been involved with Amnesty International since the 1960s and then elected to its Board of Directors in 1987. In 1992, four years after the publication of *Desert Run*, Yamada also served as a distinguished juror for the 1992 International Tribunal of Indigenous Peoples and Oppressed Nations in the United States of America. On the 500th anniversary of Columbus's invasion of the Americas, this tribunal found the United States guilty of 37 counts of crimes against humanity, in its inheritance and upholding of the legacies of colonialism that undergird it ("International"). These counts spanned the United States' involvement in slavery; the creation of the U.S.-Mexico border; and the seizure of Native lands, the genocide of Native peoples, and the ongoing elimination of indigenous presence in the United States. As juror, Yamada found the U.S. guilty.

What became of the tribunal from 1992 and its 37 charges, 37 guilty verdicts? The Attorney General at the time, William Barr, refused to acknowledge the indictment.

At time of writing in 2020, William Barr is also the current Attorney General. But Barr is not the only body to execute a return. In 1890, the United States proclaimed the so-called "closure of the frontier." This declaration, however, did not take into account the many displays of Native survivance and their ongoing contestations of settler colonial power. Geronimo, for example, who led hundreds of Chiricahua Apache warriors fighting to assert their right to land. For their efforts, they were imprisoned at Fort Sill, in Oklahoma, in the early 1900s. Forty years later, under the destructive haze of Pearl Harbor, Fort Sill would serve as prison to American community leaders of Japanese descent. In places such as these, the carceral history of the United States rubs through, drawing critical attention to the ways these places transform and are transformed by the interrelations that transpire on contested ground. Indeed, Fort Sill's carceral resonances span all three centuries of its existence: In June 2019, Japanese Americans returned to Fort Sill, this time to protest the detention of migrant children separated from their families at the U.S. border. "We will not keep a discreet distance," Yamada's speaker intoned in "Desert Run." Never again, the protesters at Fort Sill chanted. Not here. This land holds memories. Rather than accept the star-studded mantle of model minority within the settler state, these protesters reject the settler colonial enclosure of land and the settler's determinations of who belongs and who does not.

These protesters are part of an organization named Tsuru for Solidarity, headed by former incarcerated Satsuki Ina; *yonsei* Mike Ishii; and *sansei* Nancy Ukai⁴⁷, whose family was incarcerated at Topaz. The protests take the form of occupation, as bodies in place. They also work to reimagine carceral space. Standing before places like Fort Sill; Dilley, Texas; or Crystal City (also Texas), they hang long, colorful strands of *tsuru*—origami cranes—on the fences. This

⁴⁷ *Yonsei*, fourth-generation. *Sansei*, third-generation.

shifts the dominant imagery away from the barbed wire confinement with which I began this dissertation, burying chain-link and barbed wire in favor of flight.

Granted, this is all happening in the same breath as the Poston Pilgrimage. It's happening in the same space as the Nakamoto Group, a Japanese American-owned consulting firm that came under fire in 2019 for not only taking on an ICE contract, but greenlighting substandard conditions at a number of detention centers ("Nakamoto"). This is not a developmental narrative, in the style of the frontier, its progress Westward, its Americanizing potentials. I don't mean to pitch my explorations here as a charting of the gradual yet continual rise of interethnic consciousness and solidarity. Given the recursivity of the "frontier" idea as applied to Japanese American incarceration camps, pitching what is ultimately just another kind of progress narrative doesn't seem appropriate. The fact is, Asian Americans have been falling in and out of relation with indigenous peoples in the United States since they arrived as strangers from a distant shore, as Ronald Takaki named us. These intimacies have waxed and waned, like moon cycles and their tidal patterns. What this clarifies for me is the continual work required of these relations. To recognize the tide work is to recognize what is still powerful about prisoner pioneers and cowboy outlaws, never quite freed; dreams of ancient, primordial seas that turn to wistful yearnings for Coke; arrowheads and pottery shards that never quite conjure their makers, or the makers' descendants; Indian Schools that promise, within their walls, an American education but fail—or perhaps succeed, in manners unintended; and what still arises from acts of pilgrimage, the act of moving into and being in place—however jolting and fleeting their engagements with desert, with Native presence, and with the constellations of power that undergird both historical and present moments. It is to recognize how a poem from 1988 can open us to places we have not yet been.

If I define the impulse to reach for the outerstellar as a renegotiation of immigrant and Native relation, and a desire to rewrite the narrative of these relations, then this impulse is ongoing. We grasp it unevenly. This is true both in the ways the narrative of Japanese American incarceration does and does not actualize Native relations, both in places like the Poston Pilgrimage and beyond. It is true in the relational extensions that proceed from that willingness to reach for the outerstellar, out from under the bright and protective promises of the settler state.

My intention for this chapter has been to reach for the outerstellar darkness, an imaginative horizon from which we might establish critical relations between a multiplicity of immigrant and Native histories. In our contemporary moment, these relations continue to vocally assert their political urgency. They expand outward to consider not only the exigencies of Japanese Americans, or Native peoples, but to reconsider what bodies have the authority to determine who does and does not belong in this land we call the United States. Without this horizon, and without clearly demarcating the structures of the U.S. settler state, historical moments like the incarceration can still be twisted to disempower vulnerable populations rather than support them. In June 2018, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court finally stated that *Korematsu v. United States* had been "overruled in the court of history" (qtd. in Bomboy). That is, incarceration on the basis of one's ethnic background is unconstitutional. In the same breath, however, the Supreme Court also ruled that the "Muslim ban" was permissible, as these potential travelers had not already made their homes in the United States, and were not already citizens (unlike two-thirds of incarcerated Japanese Americans had been in 1942). They were not a particular kind of settler. Rather than unite the two issues in their dealings with the United States' carceral reflex, the Supreme Court separated them on the basis of citizenship and land presence.

This basis additionally recasts *Korematsu v. United States* as a tool of settler colonial power, rather than as a castigation of the United States' legacy of xenophobia and racism.

We see this time and time again. In February 2020, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) was slated to show a recorded keynote address from Senator Maizie Hirono as part of their Day of Remembrance, which commemorates the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Twelve days before the program, however, the museum's Board of Trustees moved to pull the video from the program because they felt it was too partisan, and too risky. The controversy stemmed from the fact that Hirono named President Trump explicitly, and criticized his administration's handling of issues surrounding immigrant rights, in particular his executive orders regarding his "Muslim Ban." Yet she begins her video by critiquing President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and characterizing his own Executive Order 9066—which set the incarceration into motion—as "hateful and discriminatory" (Hirono). This criticism adorns the walls of JANM's own permanent exhibit halls. Leave the apparent safety of the historical past, however, and suddenly the critique has teeth.

In response to JANM's decision to pull Senator Hirono's address, Mike Murase—one of the founding members of *Gidra*, the magazine that published Embrey and Hanano's thoughts on Wounded Knee—wrote an open letter titled "Vox Populi," voice of the people. He addressed the letter to former Secretary of State Norman Y. Mineta, chair of the JANM Board of Trustees. In 2001, while serving in the Bush administration, Mineta had called the planes from the sky after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. He also advocated for the rights of Arab and Muslim Americans in the wake of 9/11 and vehemently opposing the use of racial profiling, citing the experience of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor as something that should never be repeated. But with regard to Hirono's address, he felt that "in the uncertainty of the current

political climate, we cannot ignore the reality that the Museum runs the risk of placing our nonprofit status and our ability to operate in jeopardy if we are considered partisan" (Mineta). He went on to imply that one of the key elements that hung in the balance was funding for the Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program, which is up for renewal as part of the federal budget. The grants support the preservation of sites and artifacts related to the incarceration (such as the barrack at Poston).

In his open letter, Murase is less inclined to err in the interest of caution and preservation. He points out that the theme of JANM's 2020 Day of Remembrance program was "Democracy in *Crisis*" (emphasis mine). "Mr. Secretary, you referred to 'the uncertainty of the current political climate,'" Murase writes. Rather than react within that climate, and take it as the prevailing structure within which one must act, however, Murase says, "I think we should all be uniting to change the climate" ("Vox Populi").

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In June 2020, Japanese Americans from all over the United States plan to march on Washington.⁴⁸ The march will protest ICE detentions; the separation and incarceration of children and parents at the border; and the Muslim ban. They are bringing 125,000 origami cranes to hang on the gates of the White House—one for every incarcerated Japanese American and Latin American *nikkei*. "We expect this to be the largest gathering of Nikkei since WWII, when we were forcibly removed from our homes and incarcerated in U.S. concentration camps," says Mike Ishii, of Tsuru for Solidarity (qtd. in "Tsuru"). If the pilgrimage to Wounded Knee was the first Japanese American action of its kind, this one will be the largest.

Take flight.

⁴⁸ In light of the COVID-19 global pandemic, this march has been postponed to an as-yet-unknown later date.

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