WORLD WAR II INTERNMENT CAMP SURVIVORS:
THE STORIES AND LIFE EXPERIENCES OF JAPANESE AMERICAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

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On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 required all people of Japanese ancestry in America (one-eighth of Japanese blood or more), living on the west coast to be relocated into internment camps. Over 120,000 people were forced to leave their homes, businesses, and all their belongings except for one suitcase and were placed in barbed-wire internment camps patrolled by armed police. This study looks at narratives, stories, and experiences of Japanese American women who experienced the World War II internment camps through an anti-colonial theoretical framework and ethnographic methods. The use of ethnographic methods and interviews with the generation of Japanese American women who experienced part of their lives in the United State World War II internment camps explores how it affected their lives during and after World War II. The researcher of this study hopes to learn how Japanese American women reflect upon and describe their lives before, during, and after the internment camps, document the narratives of the Japanese American women who were imprisoned in the internment camps, and research how their experiences have been told to their children and grandchildren.
Dedicated to my beautiful grandmothers Toshiko Tabata and Michi Yamaguchi. Thank you for all your support, guidance, teachings, and love.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. CANTALOUPE SUNRISES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, 1937: From Cantaloupe Sunrises</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the Cantaloupe Farms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brawley-Westmoreland, 1942: “We All Have</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Leave”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Route to Poston, Arizona, 1942: “That is</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Poor Man’s Habit”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations of an Insider and Outsider</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Survival of Memories</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a Child, I Did Not Know I Was Japanese</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…As an Adult, People Do Not Know I’m American</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SILENCE</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Significance of Silence in Japanese</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Demographics</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second World War</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Japanese American Internment Camps</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Americans in the Media During</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational Research on Holocaust</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Concentration Camp Survivors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese and Japanese American People in</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Wave of Asian American Studies</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perimeters of Postcolonial</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcolonial Turned Anti-colonial Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previous Quantitative Research on Japanese Americans and Their World War II Experiences ................................................................. 38

CHAPTER V. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD....................................................... 40
Ethnographic Methodology in Relation to Globalization and Generations ............... 40
The Possibilities of Microaggressions During the Interview Process ..................... 42
Awareness of ‘Enryo’ and ‘Gaman’ in Japanese American Communication Ethnographic Methods ................................................................. 47
World War II Internment Camp Survivor Participants ....................................... 48
The Adaptive Interview Process ...................................................................... 49
From Issei to Gosei, a Chronological Generational Timeline ............................... 50

CHAPTER VI. INTERWAR ERA IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS ...................... 55
Evacuation ....................................................................................................... 56
Japanese American Women Claiming and Re-claiming Labor Positions .............. 60
Life Inside the Internment Camps ................................................................. 64
Artistic Re-Claiming of Culture Through Odori .............................................. 66
Liberation From the Barbed Wire ..................................................................... 72

Self-Recognitions and Moving Through Framed Conditions: “Please Serve Your Brother,” Part II .............................................................................. 74
The Mourning of the Past .................................................................................. 81
The Communication Gap of Japanese American Women's World War II Experiences ...................................................................................... 87
Locations of Racial Transitions ........................................................................ 89
CHAPTER VII. STORIES FROM A GENERATION OF WOMEN ............................... 93

The Stories Fade Away ............................................................................. 93

CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION ................................................................... 108

Saying Goodbye and Keeping the Story Alive ........................................ 108

Conclusion ................................................................................................. 111

REFERENCES ........................................................................................... 118

APPENDIX A. EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ................................. 128
CHAPTER ONE
Cantaloupe Sunrises

Los Angeles, 1937: From Cantaloupe Sunrises to the Cantaloupe Farms

She peaks through the blinds of the window to observe Los Angeles city in 1937 as the sun rises and casts a pinkish-yellow glow, as fresh as the inside of a ripe cantaloupe on the sidewalks and through the fan-shaped leaves of the palm trees. Two pigeons dart their beaks into a stale abandoned corn tortilla, causing the tortilla to flop, tumble, and tear into the gutter and then down through the cooing throats of the pigeons. Boyle Heights, the Latino-populated neighborhood of Los Angeles, wakes up as hopeful and new each morning as this 12-year-old child lying on her lilac-printed bedspread. She tosses her head back onto her pillow as newscaster on the radio in the living room announces that Japan has invaded China, but the girl listens over the radio’s noise to her mother’s friend at the front door.

“Have I got a man for you,” says her mother’s friend in a coy and delightful tone. The young girl can hear her mother’s shoe drag on the wooden floor as she shifts her hip and lets out a subtle, “Hmmm…” in response.

A week later, the young girl and her mother are packing up all their belongings into hard, cumbersome suitcases with weak hinges and clasps that pinch your skin if you get your finger caught between them. They walk to Union Station where her mother pays for two one-way tickets to Brawley, California.

“Where are we going?” she asks her mother.

“Don’t worry about it,” her mother responds in a stoic tone. “Your father is not coming back, we’re moving on without him.”
She looks up at her mother, who is looking straight ahead, determined and undaunted. Her red gingham dress moves back and forth as she restlessly shuffles her tiny Mary Jane shoes carelessly. The train arrives and they leave the City of Angels to the inland farmlands of the Imperial Valley to a miniscule-size town called Brawley.

_Brawley-Westmoreland, 1942: “We All Have to Leave”_

The young girl and her mother traded in their lives of beautiful cantaloupe-colored sunrises in Los Angeles for taking up residence on a cantaloupe farm. The mornings in Westmoreland-Brawley are hot, dry, and there are no tumbling stale tortillas, pigeons, or fan-shaped palm tree leaves. Instead, this weary little station town has nothing but coarse lumps of hay and farmland. There are other children the same age as the young girl living in Westmoreland-Brawley, but it is too hot to play, even for usually-energetic 12–year-olds.

Mexican workers from across the nearby border dig, hoe, and tend the soil. Her mother is out there with them, and so is her new father who is a cantaloupe farmer. He is quiet, hard-working, and has a gentle smile. His fingers are rough, as if they are wrapped with the canvas used for potato sacks and his personality is warm and hearty like a Midwestern stew slowly cooked. The only problem with him is he only knows how to make his new step-daughter bologna sandwiches which he packs for her everyday before her bus ride to Westmoreland Elementary School.

Years pass. Mornings waiting for the Westmoreland Elementary School bus transform into mornings waiting for the Brawley Union High School bus. In 1942, after the young girl who is now a teenager and a sophomore comes home from school and
hears her mother screaming at her father as usual. Her mother bursts through the kitchen door, dirty from picking tomatoes, zucchini squash, and cantaloupes on their farm.

“Pack up your suitcase now,” she demands. “We all have to leave.” The girl’s mother and father are now both inside the house scrambling, nearly flailing, to pack up as much as they can into one suitcase each.

_en Route to Poston, Arizona, 1942: “That is a Poor Man’s Habit”_

The families trudge down the dirt paths dragging their crumbling suitcases heavily like cenotaph slabs, leaving a trail of footprints large and small behind. Yelping, whimpering pet dogs are left in locked abandoned houses with just enough food and water to last them a few days. The people are like ghosts, except much more ornery and grave in spirit, wandering through a dusty limbo towards the town’s church near Brawley Union High School where several state buses waited for them. The girl and her parents ascended the stairs into the bus along with other families.

A young teenage boy stands outside as families in single-file lines board the buses towards Poston, Arizona. The image of a boy waving, almost mechanically, as the buses depart stays in the girl’s mind as the stagnant landscape of Brawley and the Imperial Valley fades into the distance under a black night time curtain. She is sitting next to her father, whose legs are slightly bouncing nervously, as he thinks of all he’s leaving behind.

“Hey,” snaps the girl’s mother to her father, “stop doing that! That’s wasted energy! You know shaking your legs like that is bad luck, like shaking a tree and making all the leaves fall off! That is a poor man’s habit.”
Her father stops shaking his legs and the girl falls asleep, fading with the darkness and not knowing of where the bus will take her.
CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

Many minority groups within the United States have faced challenges posed by discrimination. The painful pasts will always be engraved in the history of this country, and many of peoples’ stories contributing to U.S. history continue to go untold. My project is based on researching Japanese American women who were in U.S. World War II internment camps. This research provides an opportunity to record personal narratives by Japanese American women as they tell their stories from their past experiences and their present-day reflections. This study engages in overlapping fields within academia including communication, ethnic studies, psychology, cultural studies, Asian American studies, history, human rights, constitutional law, and political science. In the circumstance of the incarceration of Japanese American U.S. citizens, the use of race as the justification for national segregation and unequal treatment is a clear example of how the United States has responded to its fears during World War II. Such actions on the part of those in power in the United States have succeeded in producing inequities of power that use race as a primary characteristic for discrimination (Mosher, 2002). As a feminist, intergenerational, critical, and intercultural study, this project looks at how unequal justice has been placed upon a group of people and how it has affected their quality of life and their relationship with future generations.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 required all people of Japanese ancestry (one-eighth of Japanese blood or more) who living on the west coast of the U.S. to be relocated and imprisoned into internment camps. Over 120,000 people were forced to leave their homes, businesses, and all their
belongings except for one suitcase and were placed in barbed-wire camps patrolled by armed police. On June 21, 1943, the Supreme Court ruled that internment camps were constitutional. Eighteen months later on December 17, 1944, the U.S. War Department revoked the internment camps though all Japanese Americans had to demonstrate their loyalty by signing affirmatively on a loyalty oath questionnaire before they were released. It was not until January 2, 1945, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the internment camps as no longer constitutional. When the Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps most of them were homeless, unemployed, separated from their families, and had to start their lives over again (Luther, 2003).

There have been misconceptions of Japanese American people being viewed as a sick race (Daniels & Kitano, 1970) and as “aliens” in their own country (Bishop, 2000, p.71). The Los Angeles Times newspaper once published the headline, “Japanese Aliens Roundup Starts” which conveyed the notion that Japanese Americans were foreign although they were actually U.S. citizens (Bishop, 2000, p. 71). This study focuses on the present day lives of Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps and how their internment camp experiences affected and changed their lives throughout time. All of these women in the study are Niseis and Sanseis (second- and third-generation Japanese Americans) and were born in the United States. A postcolonial-turned-anti-colonial theoretical framework is used to research the ongoing effects and cultural struggles, accomplishments, and community-building Japanese American women have faced due to their experiences of the internment camps and World War II. Through ethnographic methods including autoethnography, interviews, and participant observations this research looks at the generation of Japanese American
women who experienced part of their lives in the American World War II internment camps. The women in this study are some of the last World War II internment camp survivors and are between the ages of 56 and 95 years old. With the expansion of knowledge of different ethnic groups’ experiences in the U.S., there lies hope that history can develop awareness in order to work towards the prevention of similar future shameful acts upon people such as internment camps and ethnic exclusion. My study documents the narratives of Japanese American women based on their stories and testimonies.

This research identifies with the goals of the Second Wave of Asian American studies in relation to Communication Studies. The Second Wave is defined by the communication scholar Kent Ono (2005) as a period of questioning and challenging the first phase as well as seeking lines of power beyond the discourse of victimhood and examining nationalism through historical, social, and organizational frameworks. Ono (2005) stresses the characteristics embedded in critical studies and rethinking the parameters of Asian American research. Furthermore, the Second Wave of Asian American studies stresses that while expansion of Asian American studies as discipline beyond the topics of immigration, acculturation, citizenship models, and national identities, commonly found in the First Wave of Asian American research and creating critical dialogue on generational, sexual, and social identities.

Locations of an Insider and Outsider

I have acquired entrance into this community of women from when I was a child since all my grandparents were once imprisoned in the internment camps in various locations in the United States. I observed how Japanese Americans have created tight-
knit and supportive communities after World War II since they faced an abundance of racism and financial difficulties post-World War II. Many Japanese Americans who lived during World War II have put great effort into maintaining friendships and loyalties with each other for generations.

As a Japanese American, I understand some of the Japanese American communication norms such as to enryo and gaman. These two Japanese words and practices express a variation of holding back, suppressing emotions, and maintaining harmony when communicating (especially when speaking about traumatic events or issues that can raise sadness, anger, or can threaten the balance of harmony.). These Japanese norms are sometimes overlooked in some of the previous studies on Japanese Americans’ communication. As an ethnographer and interviewer of the same culture, I know how to communicate within these norms, and explore a sense of deeper information and knowledge. However, though I am familiar with this community and have access to its members, it does not mean I am one of them because I have never been in an internment camp nor have lived in the times of World War II. I am both an insider and outsider to this research. The women in this study are some of the last Japanese American women who hold the knowledge, first-hand experiences, and memories of the World War II internment camps.

*The Survival of Memories*

The intergenerational dialogue between Japanese American children and their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents can create dialogue about the culture’s habits, fears, cultural practices, and accomplishments, which have stemmed from their
experiences before, during, and after the World War II internment camps. Our histories and genealogies are carried through our elders and ancestors and survive through the intergeneration communication of stories past down from generation to generation. In this research, when I speak of Japanese American female survivors, the word *survivor* is distinct and different than how it is used when discussing Holocaust survivors. The *surviving memory* in which Japanese American women have decided to share, will contribute to the survival of our cultural identity, where we have come from, and what Japanese Americans have accomplished. Those who are still *surviving* are the keepers of Japanese American culture and experiences during and after World War II. Many Japanese Americans have remained silent about their experiences and previous research reflects how little they tell of their stories. Many Japanese American women and men have chosen throughout their lives to not speak about certain memories. It is easy to miss the glimpses and subtle communication of Japanese Americans. Through the stories of Native American, African American, Latina, and many ethnic groups of women, the memories and communication are what contribute to the survival of the culture.

*As a Child, I Did Not Know I Was Japanese*...

As a child growing up in the diverse city of Los Angeles, I went to school with students of many races, religions, and ethnic groups. Though there was a wide range of cultures in our classroom, one would have never known it by the way we celebrated holidays such as Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for many elementary students is the day when “our” ancestors arrived to America on ships such as the Mayflower and were greeted by the Indians and natives to this new land. In our classroom we would make
pilgrim hats and “Indian hats” as our teacher would call them, cut out of paper. The boys’ pilgrim hats would be made out of black construction paper and formed into a geometric colonial shape resembling a cylinder. The girls’ pilgrim hats would be a made of craft paper folded into a simple bonnet. The “Indian hats” were unisex, which meant according to our teacher, American Indian men and women wore the same kind of headwear, regardless and without mention of the different American Indian Nations and customs that existed and without any explanation of why certain headwear was worn. We cut out a band of brown construction paper and added three paper feathers to it: one red, one green, and one yellow and that signified we were Indian for the day. There we were, a bunch of young African American, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, and White children of all different backgrounds sitting in the classroom wearing pilgrim and Indian hats on the last day of school before the Thanksgiving Day holiday break, believing all of our ancestors came on the Mayflower and had a friendly feast with the American Indians. None of the historical tensions, relocations, or massacres of Americans Indians was mentioned on this day.

I am embarrassed to say, not only did I take part in such simplified and racist festivities in elementary school, I believed all throughout my childhood that my ancestors landed on Plymouth Rock hundreds of years ago. Like most of my classmates, our ancestors came from countries rarely mentioned in our U.S. American history books. My ancestors came in the 1880’s to America, first to Hawaii and then to California. For most of my life the people around me did not mention that the people in my family arrived from Japan through opportunities to work as farmers, gardeners, or in factories and some even as mail-order brides! Why did they let me believe for so long my ancestors were
pilgrims, instead of Japanese people who worked hard to obtain the American life, and were even discriminated against?

I do not remember the exact moment when I found out my ancestors did not arrive via Mayflower, but I do remember wearing the awful paper pilgrim hat in class. At the time, it was not awful at all because I truly felt and thought I was very much just an American person. I believe many Japanese American people who were growing up before World War II may have felt similarly because they were born in America and were U.S. citizens. As I listen through the interview tapes of my conversations with Japanese American women, I am reminded many of the Japanese American women who recalled having an “ordinary” childhood, playing, going to school, and having fun.

...As an Adult, People Do Not Know I’m American

My autoethnography is part of this ethnographic research because when it comes to describing the Japanese American culture, I am part of the culture. I am a fifth generation Japanese woman, whose four grandparents were in the World War II internment camps. I have developed awareness that some of their stories have, unfortunately, not been told more to their future generations. I use my family history as just one example of a Japanese American family timeline.

As an adult I realize my mother and father have grown up and spent most of their lives not having ever directly asked their parents about the World War II internment camps. A small population of Japanese Americans represents the fifth-generation of Asians Americans like me. We are so far-removed from our ancestors’ stories it can be easy to believe we are just American until we are reminded through incidents or
stereotypical comments such as “you speak English well,” or “you must be good in math” that from our exterior appearance we are identified as Asian regardless of whatever generation we may be.

After moving to the Midwest in my mid-twenties, I realized no matter how Americanized I am, I am often perceived as an “international student.” In my childhood, I did not know I was Japanese, and in my adulthood, people often do not know I am American. It is important for me to write about Asian American and Japanese American experiences because we are part of the American population no matter how “international” we appear to be to others. Our experiences are meaningful though the stories may have been kept silent for generations. The Japanese American population is small in numbers so we do not always have a voice that speaks as loud as some other ethnic groups. It is through the combined success of many ethnic and gender groups, including Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, women, and more that have fought for civil rights that Japanese Americans too are able to participate in building an inclusive American history and future.
When I was growing up in California, I would accompany my grandmother everywhere she went. She lived in South Central Los Angeles, a mostly African American neighborhood, and was friends with every person who lived on her block. She would walk down the street and give away bags of fruits to her neighbors when my grandparents’ fruit trees were in season and her neighbors were just as caring. One day when she fell down on her neighbor’s lawn, he picked up my grandma in two arms like a baby and carried her into her house. Even in my twenties, I would still go grocery shopping with her and spend every weekend with her because I loved listening to her stories, jokes, and watching her interactions with her community.

One day, when I was in my early teens, we went on an errand outside of the neighborhood to a Honda dealership where she was getting her car worked on. We waited in line at the dealership and the customer in front of us was White and was furious at the Honda dealership employee. My grandmother and I stood quietly in line and waited patiently pretending not to listen (even though we were listening) as the man in front of us was cussing at the employee. The angry man abruptly turned around towards us, and said to my grandmother, “Stupid JAP!!” He stomped off, leaving my grandmother and I stunned. He was not mad at my grandmother nor was the employee he was yelling at Japanese, but I suppose since Honda was a Japanese automobile company and he turned around to see a Japanese woman, he associated her with the company in his fury. I had never even heard such a term said out loud and in-person, but I knew it was an awful
word to say. I looked at her and she appeared to be a bit startled, then I looked at him, and she said, “It’s okay! It’s okay!” She did not want me to say anything to him or to be angry with him. She laughed the incident off. We did not speak about it at all during our ride home.

Later that evening, when my grandfather came home from work, she told him about the incident. At first she was smiling and even laughing about it, she said, “He turned around and said, ‘Stupid Jap!’ to me! Haha.” Then immediately after I saw her eyes tear up and her mouth frown. She almost looked like she was going to cry. Then she smiled again.

What was happening?

The details of Japanese American communication, especially in women, can be displayed in a matter of seconds. An abundance of meaningful information can be lost in seconds if one is not watching and listening closely. If an outsider was viewing this scene and had not been looking closely, she or he may not have seen the flash of a frown or the presence of tears which she never let fall. They might have just heard her laugh and seen her smile before and after she told the story and thought the incident did not hurt her at all. The context of history, culture, and identity play roles in the way we communicate. In the next chapters, I will discuss Japanese American history, culture, previous studies and research on intergenerational communication about traumatic events.
CHAPTER FOUR

Review of Literature

*The Asian American Demographics*

Asian Americans are the fastest growing population of ethnic minorities in the United States. Over 10 million people reported their ethnicity as Asian American in the 2004 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Compared with the results of the 1990 census the number was increased by 63%. This population ranges from different ethnic groups, a variety of ages, genders, and generational differences in America.

The six largest ethnic groups of Asian Americans are Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. Seventy-nine percent of Asians age five years old and over speak a language other than English at home and about 40% speak English not fluently (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). English Fluency is different between ethnicities: 15% of Chinese, 18% of Korean, and 53% of Japanese speak English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Not only do these ethnicities possess differences in their language, religion, and culture, their consumer habits and identities are independent from one another. Asian Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Indian and Korean descent tend to be geographically concentrated in California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, Illinois, New Jersey, Washington, Florida, and Massachusetts (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2000). Demographically, the concept of generation-identity becomes a large issue to many Asian Americans’ identities. Generation-identity can influence where they live and their consumer-habits (Uba, 1994).
Japanese immigrants were the second group of Asians to come to the United States in the 1850s after the Chinese. Most of them relocated from Japan to Hawaii and then from Hawaii to the mainland of the U.S. They arrived in large numbers and the majority of them worked as laborers in plantation, industrial, and agricultural jobs in Hawaii and on the west coast of the U.S.. It was not until the early 1900s anti-Japanese American sentiments began to take place. In 1908 an agreement between Japan and the United States took place that restricted Japanese men to immigrate into the country but accepted women into the U.S. (Lee, 1999).

In 1909 all Japanese Americans were required to join the Japan Association of America formed by the Japanese Counselor General in San Francisco, California. This association controlled all the immigration and traveling documents from Japan to the United States. By the 1940s there was about 125,000 Japanese Americans in the U.S. and 80,000 of them had been born in the U.S. (which made them citizens). When World War II began, immigration from Japan to the United States was not permitted until 1952 when the McCarren-Walter Immigration Act took place. Due to the previous laws forbidding Japanese men to immigrate to the U.S. in the 1950’s, 86% of the Japanese American population consisted of women. By the year 1980, there were approximately 700,970 Japanese Americans in the United States. Only a small minority of 43,250 Japanese people were recent immigrants to the U.S. (Gudykunst, 2001).
The Second World War

The outbreak of World War II began on September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. The war was between the Axis and Allies. The Axis included the countries Germany, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. Hungary’s prime minister, Gyula Gömbös, brought the three countries Hungary, Germany, and Italy together to form an alliance. Gömbös died unexpectedly in 1936, lessening the potential trilateral power of the three countries and transforming a powerful bilateral axis between Germany and Italy. Gilbert (2004) writes of World War II as, “among the most destructive conflicts in human history; more than forty-six million soldiers and civilians perished, many in the circumstances of prolonged and horrifying cruelty” (p. 1). The German invasion into Poland targeted Jewish and Polish people. On September 3, 1939, the Germans attacked the Sulejow, a small Polish town of Polish and Polish-Jewish people (Gilbert, 2004).

Japan entered into the Axis power through the monarchist rule of Emperor Showa. Japan gradually allied with Germany in the 1930s and provoked its first major attack against China in 1937. The Japanese military led a brutal massacre in Nanking, China, and in 1940 occupied the French Indochina Empire of Southeast Asian countries. The British Empire, the United States of America, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) led the Allies of World War II. In 1945, World War II ended with the surrender of the Japanese (Gilbert, 2004).
The Japanese American Internment Camps

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor. Two months after the attack on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 that gave the United States Army permission to exile 120,000 Japanese Americans from the west coast and relocate them into what President Roosevelt himself called, “concentration camps” (Daniels, 2002). Any Japanese American who possessed one-eighth blood of Japanese ancestry was removed from their homes and put into relocation camps in remote areas of the U.S. away from the Pacific coast. Japanese Americans left their properties, homes, businesses, were forced to abandoned their pets, and fit as much of their belongings as they could into one suitcase each. They were persuaded to pack clothing for all types of weather, medications, and personal bathroom essentials all into one suitcase and many family relics and valuable objects were abandoned. On June 21, 1943, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the internment camps as constitutional. Though Japanese Americans on the east coast and in Hawaii were not forced to leave their homes and belongings, they faced brutal discrimination as anti-Japanese American sentiments took place all across the U.S.

Even when the Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps, they continued to feel a great need to prove their loyalty as Americans (Luther, 2003). In 1943 President Roosevelt recruited Japanese Americans into a U.S. military combat team, which contributed to the U.S. Army’s 442nd regiment and the 100th battalion where Japanese Americans fought for the U.S. American side in World War II. Many Japanese Americans wanted to join the U.S. Army to show their dedication to their American country (Luther, 2003).
On December 17, 1944, the U.S. War Department revoked the internment camps but the interned Japanese Americans had to demonstrate their loyalty by signing affirmatively on a loyalty oath questionnaire before they were released (Luther, 2003). Many Japanese Americans were happy to leave the internment camps but great challenges awaited them since most of them lost everything they had and the political climate of the country and its people still had negative feelings towards Japanese Americans. Many of the older senior citizens and adults who had children and grandchildren had a hard time leaving the camps because they had anxieties imagining how they would start their lives over again (Luther, 2003).

*Japanese Americans in the Media During World War II*

The “guard dog” function of the United States media supported aspects of prejudice against Japanese American citizens. The media coverage reported about the internment camps through the government’s version of the event, which caused Japanese Americans’ versions, stories, and voices to be ignored or silenced. The “guard dog” function, researched by Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1995), and its relevance to Japanese American internment during World War II is the focus of Bishop’s (2000) research.

According to Bishop (2000), journalists’ interactions and dependence of local authorities trained journalists “to suspect potential intruders” and create awareness for U.S. Americans even if they did not fully understand the events taking place (p. 65). It is important to acknowledge during the time of World War II, Japanese Americans were viewed as different, threatening, and less of an American citizen or even less of a human
due to their race, ethnicity, and the international conflicts taking place. The media coverage of the Japanese American internment created by journalists who took on the role of national “guard dogs” patrolled and sided with the U.S. government against Japanese Americans who were viewed as threatening (Bishop, 2000).

In the circumstance of the incarceration of Japanese American U.S. citizens, the existence of using race as a justification for national segregation and unequal treatment is a clear example in which the United States has responded to its fears and contributed to the inequity of power using race as a characteristic for discrimination (Mosher, 2002). Bishop (2000) applies the guard dog theory to how journalists assumed the position to “sound the alarm” to the U.S. population and communities, influenced by the political, social, and community leaders who maintained power in the U.S. during World War II (p. 65). Even when the power structures of the U.S. who may possess uncertainties about their initiatives the journalists were persuaded to take on the guard dog function. Bishop (2000) wrote, “groups who lack power and influence receive little attention from ‘guard dog’ journalists” (p. 65). He also argues “the guard dog theory rejects the notion that the media are ‘equal co-actors’ in society’s power structure” and end up submitting to the views that the Japanese Americans were threat to the U.S. (p. 67). As journalists supported the government’s views and versions of the war, Japanese Americans voices became further silenced and distanced to the majority of the American public through the media. The news stories of Japanese Americans being round up to move into the internment camps reflect a completely different view than the actual experiences of Japanese Americans who experienced having to leave their homes, jobs, schools, friends, pets, and established lives they had worked so hard to achieve to move to isolated camps.
The Los Angeles Times used phrases alerting people on the west coast about Japanese Americans, calling California “a zone of danger” and made statements of the possibility some Japanese Americans may be spies or saboteurs (Bishop, 2000, p. 70). The San Francisco Chronicle also doubted the motives of Asian American people living in San Francisco and created articles linking poverty and immigration to crime (Bishop, 2000). It is apparent these journalists miss reporting the perspectives of Japanese Americans’ experiences during this time. When the U.S. population becomes divided into ally verses enemy the proclaimed enemy becomes invisible as a person and only visible as a target or threat.

The portrayal of Japanese Americans in Bishop’s (2000) textual analysis of the guard dog theory in relation to the U.S. WWII internment camps used the national newspapers: New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and the Los Angeles Times. This study used the country’s “most important newspapers” to display the writings on the day after the Pearl Harbor attack to the day Executive Order 9066 was issued and Japanese Americans were removed from the west coast (Bishop, 2000, p. 68). The San Francisco Chronicle and The Los Angeles Times are two extremely important newspapers because they distributed information to people on the west coast and reported what happened in their residential and nearby cities and communities. The west coast was home to many Asian Americans, especially Japanese Americans (Gudykunst, 2001).

The discrepancies of the media coverage, especially those based on the guard dog functions of the journalists and the actual lives of the Japanese American people are faced with a large gap of difference. The surveillance of Japanese Americans through the media did not portray them as victims of the internment camps caused by the President
Roosevelt’s decision of Executive Order 9066, but portrayed internment camps as a solution towards Americans’ safety. As headlined in *The Los Angeles Times*, “Japanese Aliens Roundup Starts”, the notion that Japanese Americans were “aliens”, although they were U.S. citizens and that they could simply be rounded up like cattle missed the larger framework of the displacement of people in the U.S. based upon race (Bishop, 2000, p. 71). On the contrary, journalists occasionally would write stories on Japanese American loyalty, as Bishop (2000) notices it was often contradicted with other articles on the same page reinforcing the bi-polar identities concepts of ally or enemy. Patriotism and loyalty were often the themes of many articles. Bishop (2000) notices stories of Japanese American loyalty are often blatant and, “the average Japanese American citizen appeared in stories as a cartoon-like, flag waving caricature” (p. 75).

Contrary to the mass print media newspapers, Japanese Americans were able to create their own community publications while they were in the internment camps. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was in charge of overseeing all the internment camp operations in the United States. According to Luther (2003), the WRA allowed Japanese Americans to establish newspapers and events within the internment camps to create characteristics of communities. These newspapers showed a great deal of information about their daily lives in the internment camps although many of the writers and illustrators expressed their opinions very subtly so they would not create adverse affects amongst the American government. Within the internment camps Japanese American displayed their interests and characteristics through very American practices such as baseball and swing dancing (Luther, 2003).
Intergenerational Research on Holocaust and Concentration Camp Survivors

There has been literature, films, and documentaries based upon the Nazi concentration and holocaust camps and the intergenerational effects of Jewish holocaust survivors. Research in the psychiatric field has made significant contributions to the studies of concentration camp survivors, especially with the development of the concentration camp survival syndrome and studies conducted on survivors of Nazi persecution (Barocas, 1971). The research on children and grandchildren of holocaust survivors is still miniscule when it comes to various academic fields. Barocas (1971) states:

Although several studies have been conducted on concentration camp survivors since the end of World War II, relatively little has been done to investigate the development of the families formed in the post-war period. One can anticipate that the damage of the concentration camp did not end with the cutting of the barbed wire or the liberation of its victims (p. 189).

Psychiatric scholar Werner Koening (1964) found parents who were holocaust survivors used their children unconsciously to express their rage and attain self-identification for themselves. His research showed how the survivors possessed aggression in which they were unable to express directly, but acted-out towards their children (Koening, 1964). The study of the emotional development of children of holocaust survivor parents suggests different possible treatments for people who experience emotional trauma. Barocas (1971) states:

Concentration camp survivors remain bottled up with aggressive impulses which are seemingly expressed through their children. Therefore, the
process by which the concentration camp syndrome is perpetuated in the
children of survivors is a highly complex and fascinating one, worthy of
considerable clinical exploration (p. 190).

Case studies have shown survivors’ syndrome is transmitted across generations
from survivors to their children and grandchildren. Because of this, there exists a separate
children and/or grandchildren-of-holocaust-survivors syndrome (Weiss, Connell, & Siiter, 1986). The syndrome symptoms found in holocaust survivors by researcher
Solkoff (1981) includes inability to concentrate, mistrust of others, expression of
mourning related to survivors’ feelings of guilt, chronic anxiety and dread of future,
chronic depression, and various other symptoms. The survivors’ syndrome cannot
necessarily directly be linked to the Japanese American interment camp experience since
it is based upon studies which used Jewish holocaust survivors as their sample. However,
this information of how traumatic experiences have affected people throughout their lives
and future generations is important in the framework of intergenerational studies on
Japanese Americans who are survivors of the World War II internment camps.

Japanese and Japanese American People in Communication Research

In the overall discourse of intercultural studies the contrast between Japanese
people and American people are used to display differences. Hall (1976) sums up his
observations of Japanese people saying, “The Japanese are very consistent once you get
to know them, but unpredictable if you don’t” (p. 45). The initial placement of Japanese
people in intercultural communication studies contributes to the growth of the
intercultural theoretical framework and knowledge on collectivist cultures, Asians, and
Asian Americans. In Hall’s (1976) book *Beyond Culture*, he dedicates a chapter illustrating his experiences in Japan as a visitor and uses Japan as a contrast how one’s own culture brings new meaning when it is juxtaposed with another culture. The observations reinforce, again, the value of placing Asian and U.S. American cultures on an opposing bi-polar spectrum.

Rogers and Hart (2002) propose an important question about intercultural communication asking, “Who gains from such knowledge and who is disadvantaged?” (p. 5). The emergence of intercultural communication research from countries such as the U.S., Japan, and Korea have developed intercultural usually the concepts of individualism, collectivism, high-context, and low-context descriptions. The participation of global viewpoints in communication has challenged the way in which we write about culture and displayed some shifts towards critical and cultural studies (Rogers and Hart, 2002).

Orbe and Harris (2008) describe growing categories of intercultural communication research expanding the studies of cultural differences in relation to “age, race, ethnicity, abilities, sex, nation origin, and/or religion” (p. 6). Thus, the authors write, “interracial communication, then, is typically seen as one subset of many forms of intercultural communication” (Orbe & Harris, 2008, p. 6). The broadness of intercultural communication theoretical frameworks has become a limitation towards the theoretical creations directed towards race. Characteristics of age, sex, and religion are being shared all in the same intercultural paradigm can hinder the expansion of development on research specifically aimed at the issues of race (Orbe & Harris, 2008).
In intercultural research, Japanese are often used in numerous articles and research about individualist and collectivist communication styles. Research on the importance of ingroups uses Japanese as an example of how students at universities strongly influence each other throughout their lives (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Ingroup research using Japanese people as a representation of a collectivist culture are also found in research by Kim (1994) on the boundaries of ingroups; undifferentiated facets of collectivism using the U.S. as a model for individualism and Japan as a model for collectivism (Yuki & Brewer, 1999); measuring the degrees of collectivism between Japan, Korea, and the U.S. (Gudykunst, Yoon, & Nishida, 1987); and the levels of uncertainty avoidance in Japan (Hofstede, 1979). Yamaguchi (1994) researches the individual levels of collectivism in Japan between an individual’s private-self and collective-self and Gudykunst, Gao, Nishida, et al. (1992) researches idiocentricity using Japanese and U.S. Americans as their samples. In such studies, where do people who are Japanese American fit in, if the study is using a sample of Japanese people and American people? What ethnic groups are identified as American people and what characteristics determines a person being identified as American? These studies created between 1979 through 1999 reveal the differences of nationality more so than ethnicity and race.

In the research on language codes in relationship to kinship, the study created by Goldstein and Tamura (1975) uses Japanese grandparents, parents, and children using studies and the terms of kinship expressed through siblings. The interconnectedness used in the Japanese language to display one’s relationship is researched by Tamura and Lau (1992), as well as the emphasis on group identities in coherence to language, minimizing the use of pronouns such as I and you, (Goldstein & Tamura, 1975). Studies on
verbalization and agreement have used Japanese language and verbalization as an example of how Asians have high ambiguity in their messages (Morsbach, 1976) and the regulation of Japanese language (Barnlund, 1975) has also been compared to U.S. Americans in terms of assertiveness. Lim (2002) observes how the West and the East have different communication verbalization, as shown in research by Mizutani and Mizutani (1987) in how Japanese do not always say what they want and avoid precision. These examples in the article of language and verbal communication reveal the importance of context in the Japanese language. This begs the question: do these attributes also exist in Americans and/or Europeans who are of Japanese descent? Or can such characteristics also exist in people who are of American and/or European descent but have been born and raised in Japan? Are there generational differences in the way one’s culture communicates, for example the way a Japanese immigrant whom has just arrived in America, versus a fourth-generation Japanese American? These studies display the broadness of intercultural studies and research on Japanese culture. Even within a country such as Japan regional differences determine distinct cultural values, norms, and beliefs. Studies on Japanese culture have contributed to intercultural communication research but the culture as a whole cannot symbolize the identities of all Asian countries.

Have various approaches in intercultural communication research become too vague or even outdated with the changes in migration, nationalism, identities, and societies? Kim (1998) provides an integrative systems perspective which originally derived from a linear-casual approach in cross-cultural adaptation. Kramer (2003) finds her analysis naïve and instead, researches Japan using the work of some of Japan’s
greatest artists to reflect the transition of Japan’s influence by the Western world in their process of modernization.

In Kramer’s (2003) article “Gaiatsu and Cultural Judo,” the Japanese culture and how Japan experienced outside pressure from the United States is examined. Gaiatsu is characterized from the Japanese point of view and its inevitable modernization influenced by Western countries (Kramer, 2003). The article discusses research by Gudykunst and Kim (1997) about how immigrants should assimilate with their new country’s values and try to become an in-group member though they will never fully be accepted as one. Kramer (2003) steps away from the assumption that one must de-culturize or un-learn himself or herself in order to experience the modern world. In order to gain a greater understanding of how Japanese viewed the inflow of Western influences, Kramer (2003) looks at the work from some of the country’s most respected artists.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Second Wave of Asian American Studies

The field of Asian American studies is categorized into different waves (Ono, 2005). The First Wave of Asian American research was directed towards studies on national identity and Asian American issues of political, cultural, and intellectual communities. The Second Wave of Asian American Studies has defined itself as a period of questioning and challenging the first phase, as well as seeking lines of power beyond the discourse of victimhood and examining nationalism through historical, social, and organizational frameworks. Critical ways of rethinking the parameters of Asian American studies is the ultimate focus in Ono’s (2005) writing towards drawing attention
to the development of the second phase. The emergence of Japanese American women’s stories in this research strives to go beyond the focus of victimhood and instead reclaim their progress and transference of culture to their future generations.

Asian American rhetoric scholar Young (2004) uses his narratives and reflections of how he grew up in Hawaii and his experiences of being a Chinese American teaching instructor in Ann Arbor, Michigan as part of his scholarship writing. Young (2004) relates his life stories and experiences of literacy into examples of rhetorical practices of cultural and national identity in various communities of the U.S. The focus on Asian Americans’ ability to speak, understand, and immerse themselves into the English language becomes a way in which they display and confirm their identities. The theme of literacy and Asian Americans’ foreignness provokes a hyper-literacy importance to various ethnic groups including the author’s individual experiences.

Young (2004) examines the rhetorical practice of Asian Americans and literacy, as well as the assumptions and expectations of Asian Americans and the English language. For example, there are rhetorical displays that prove literacy is accomplished through acts such as winning a spelling bee or competitions asserting high levels of English vocabulary and literacy. The critique of the English language and the pressures Asian Americans have to master it reveals the visions of what society views as citizenship, even if the individual is of second, third, or fourth-generations. Intersections of race, ethnicity, nationalism, literacy, and American culture strive towards assimilation and stigmatize Americans who do not perform its standardizations of literacy, language, and writing (e.g., the construction of some Hawaiian students as being labeled as
illiterate). This extended analysis of personal experiences and reflections are useful in research relating to rhetoric, as well as pedagogy and critical studies.

Ono (2005) uses the phrase *critical mass* to refer to the status, the quantity of contributions, and support in Asian American studies. Furthermore, it relates to a description used in physics. Ono (2005) explains what *critical mass* means in the first footnote of the book:

I have used the term “critical mass” to pay homage to the use of the term by Asian Americanists, e.g. to the journal *Critical Mass*. By using it, I mean that there are now a significant number of people working in the field of Asian American studies, that there are many programs and some departments, that scholarship within the field is robust, that one can depend on annual conferences happening, that there are important book awards available in the field, etc (Ono, 2005, p. 13).

Ono (2005) marks and captures a phenomenon in time in which Asian American studies are experiencing an upward incline and expansion. The phrase *critical mass* relates to a philosophy founded within physics and fields outside of critical studies and communication:

Peter X. Feng helpfully pointed out to me that the term is often used in the term is often used in the field of physics to mean the amount of nuclear material needed to create a chain reaction. I might also add that in organizational and business contexts, mass refers to the point at which an organization undergoes a fundamental shift in the identity as a unit resulting from a change in the way it operates (Ono, 2005, p. 13).
The momentum and gathered mass of Asian American contributors have become a catalyst in the growth and turn of the field. The shift is identified by the expansive minds who have critically questioned what Asian American studies is and what its purposes are in academia, representation, identity, media, and more importantly, in communities. For Ono (2005) the field is lively, active, and ever-present with many opportunities in the interests of Asian American studies.

Literary analyses, narratives, life stories, and experiences are methods of research highlighted by Young’s (2004) research and writing. The process of writing a narrative becomes the research or the study of not just one’s self but of others like the writer and the people who surround, interact, and communicate with the writer. The process of reading, writing, and speaking becomes a reflective process of cultural interaction. Like Ono, Young’s approach in Asian American studies takes the creation, discovery, and the act of inquiry deeper than the theoretical frameworks seen in some older intercultural communication studies. Young (2004) reveals the process of Asian Americans’ reflections and their influences and tensions in communities, professional environments, and in the everyday-ness of Asian American lives (Young, 2004).

The concept of tensions is displayed both in Ono (2005) and Young’s (2004) writing about Asian Americans and communication. Much of their philosophies on the current status of Asian American studies and communication are based upon the existence of tensions within the disciplines and communities. Ono (2005) discusses the tensions involving Asian Studies versus Asian American studies, while Young (2004) emphasizes the tensions in literacy. Both authors contribute knowledge to Asian American Studies. Ono (2005) takes a strong stance as an active informant within the
scholarly realm, providing a mélange of various types of ethnic and gender critical research directed towards the expansion of the discipline.

Multicultural women’s stories contribute to U.S. history and feminism. The reclaiming of women’s experiences as an important part of U.S. history creates richness and power to different communities of ethnic women (Ruiz & Dubois, 2000). Women play important roles as carriers and teachers of their cultures to the future generations. There is a focus on difference in history between genders and amongst numerous ethnicities. The information on both gender and ethnicity is expanding as well as experiences with respect to sexual orientation and social class (Ruiz & Dubois, 2000). Japanese American women’s voices are contributing to the growth of feminist studies. Throughout American history Japanese American women faced “severe racism and traumatic family strain, but the experiences also fostered changes in their lives” (Matsumoto, 2000, p.478).

*The Perimeters of Postcolonial*

Studying anti-colonial theory requires one to understand the perimeters, boundaries, and limitations of postcolonial theory and the studies of colonialism. Postcolonial theory is a way of understanding effects of colonialism in cultures and the unfolding of the cultures after colonialism (Shome, 1999). Postcolonial studies on Asian, African, Latin American, and American Indian nations situate the history, location, context, and relationships through a colonial lens of analyzing the perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized, creating the need for determining the “postcolonial moment” in cultural experiences (Shome, 1999, p. 107).
In terms of anti-colonial theory, going beyond post-colonialism and the post-colonial moment should not be confined or allocated to a specific time period or generation of people. The way in which postcolonial theory interacts with everyday “enactments of whiteness” contribute to the normative qualities dividing postcolonial moments and abandonment of the complex identities of people who exist within the crevices in-between the colonizer and the colonized (Some, 1999, p.107). The measurement of time in postcolonial studies derives from elements of whiteness, using the colonizer’s thrust and fleeing (or sometimes defined as liberation) as the turning points of the colonized culture’s changes and transformations. Determining who is affected by colonization and how they are affected derives from the whiteness embedded in the privilege and power of the colonizers, locating only the moments of colonization and liberation.

Working from postcolonial theory creates groundwork to expand upon examining situated knowledge. The relationship between postmodernism and postcolonial, produce dialogues on the characteristics that contribute to modernism itself as a concept, “that posits a linear, teleological line of ‘development’ beginning with ancient Greece and culminating in eighteenth-century Europe (‘Western Civilization’)” (Krishnaswamy, 2008, p. 5). This timeline drawn upon the linear usage of locating modernity as it “represents a critical point of reference” for postcolonial studies, relying on the results of modernity as making sense of the postcolonial (Krishnaswamy, 2008, p. 5). Although postmodernism “problematizes rather than clarifies and destabilizes rather than stabilizes,” it is critical to inquire how does postmodernism and postcolonialism empower the cultures that continue to experience the various layers of colonialism that continue to
experience transformations throughout time? How can the problematizing and destabilizing benefit and empower the cultures being explored through postcolonial and postmodern frameworks it continues to identify the people of the culture as victimized through the actions of the colonizer? It is important to look beyond the postcolonial moments identified on a linear timeline and look beyond what the colonizer sees as their points of liberation. The events we use to indicate apparent changes in the culture cannot be based or defined through limited moments of colonialism or the successes or failures of modernism, but the ongoing power, privilege, and contextual negotiations that are always transforming.

*Postcolonial Turned Anti-colonial Theoretical Framework*

The issue of Japanese Americans being imprisoned in internment camps during World War II is researched here through an anti-colonial framework. The concepts of the history, context, knowledge, nationality, and power play major roles in the Japanese American internment camp experience. The work of Gandhi (2006) on post-colonialism-turned-anti-colonialism builds upon Foucault’s (1984) various concepts of technologies, genealogies, contextualizing and historicizing issues in relation to power and knowledge. Gandhi (2006) stresses Foucault’s argument of research and the uncovering of knowledge about genealogies will run “up against its own desire to postulate a competing and self-defeating enthronement or ‘majorization’ or ‘minor’ thought systems” (p. 182). When we observe history from a superficial level, utopianism seems possible through the bipolar lens of ally and enemy. Yet, when we take a closer look at the technologies interwoven in historical issues, the postcolonial lens becomes blurred as cultures overlap
and intertwine, such as those of Japanese Americans. This population of people who were of Japanese ancestry but culturally were both Japanese and American were imprisoned by their own nation. If research divides the Japanese American identity between the nations of Japan and America, the gist of the cultural and critical research is negated due to the fact that much of the Japanese American identity is both composed and influenced by characteristics from both nations. A contributing factor in the anti-colonial framework is to acknowledge “a growing awareness of the interconnectedness between diasporic domestic and foreign causes,” which is definitely relevant in relation to Japanese Americans’ experiences in the U.S. (Gandhi, 2006, p.123).

Foucault’s (1984) ideas of knowledge and power are referred to as technologies. Technologies are the joining of power and knowledge resulting in “the objectification of the body” (Rabinow, 1984, p.17). The ideas of technologies relate to the Japanese American World War II experience twofold: first, the technologies that were used to confine and segregate a group of American citizens were based on their ethnicity and blood quantum; and second, the technologies of the U.S. government during World War II affected the relationships and lives of the people who were once imprisoned even after they were freed from the internment camps. The act of relocating people from their homes and taking away everything they own including their jobs, education, pets, and opportunities, and placing them in desolate locations in the U.S. is an act of taking away their knowledge and power as a citizen, and placing them under the power of the nation that is imprisoning them. The knowledge and power used against Japanese American interned citizens was an institutional tactic to docile the bodies and affected the interned prisoners for years and generations beyond the actual internment experience. There are
various influences of power and knowledge in a time of war and they have the ability to create disciplinary control in time and space, to the point where the prefix of post- in postcolonialism becomes indefinite because it continues to influence the identities and relationships of the present and future.

Similar to the beliefs of Foucault’s distrust in universal truths (1984), Foucault’s ideas of historicizing the context of history follow similar goals of the Second Wave of feminism and Asian American studies. The U.S.’s prejudicial acts of imprisoning all people who possess one-eighth or more Japanese blood and who were living on the west coast does not only address the status of citizenship as “deviant or exotic” (Ruiz & Dubois, 2000, p.xi) but it also examines this event as a legitimate piece of U.S. history and how the wrongful act of imprisoning a whole ethnic group was produced by a set of technologies. As Rabinow states (1984), “For Foucault, there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society” (p.4).

Foucault’s philosophies of historicizing the power and knowledge used to manipulate individuals, create docile bodies, confine, and punish condemned bodies produces a rich awareness of diverse issues relating to various ethnic groups’ statuses, beliefs, and cultures in the present. The way Japanese Americans in the World War II internment camps were imprisoned reflects a type of “punishment as a complex social function” (Foucault, 1984, p.171). Feelings of “shame, frustration, and bitterness,” of their civil rights were enforced by being imprisoned and the loss of everything they owned (Matsumoto, 2000, p.485). The domination of the body, in terms of the Japanese American World War II internment experience did not end after they were released from the barbed-wire fences, but their bodies were changed after they were imprisoned;
shamed and segregated from society. The postcolonial moment in this event should not be recognized as the moment when Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps because they continued to struggle against many of the American people who still viewed them as enemies. It is also important to argue, that not all Americans hated Japanese Americans, which is why the anti-colonial framework of Gandhi (2006) is suitable for the study of Japanese Americans.

Foucault’s process in examining issues based upon their traceable histories and place within societies lends a philosophical approach to the communications between the interned generation and their future generations. It is necessary to identify the roles of power and knowledge in this study and to keep in mind its relation of the Second Wave of feminism and underlining caution against universal truths. In relation to Asian American studies, this examination goes beyond identifying the U.S.’s act of segregation and imprisonment as wrong. Its goal is to question how technologies were used against those who were imprisoned and how technologies can now be used to empower the Japanese American women and their children and grandchildren with a new sense of knowledge and power about their cultural identities. Women who were once imprisoned by the U.S. government can use the knowledge and power of their experiences to educate their future generations about their culture and the struggles the U.S. once used against them.

Krishnaswamy (2008) believes imperialism minimizes “the possibilities of representation of the subaltern within the state apparatus, and to suppress the very possibilities of dissent” (p. 13). The use of postcolonial theory and the issue of Japanese American internment camp survivors must go beyond binary ways of thinking of
separating the Japanese identity from the American identity. Gandhi (2006) produces philosophies on anti-colonial thought that surpass the creations of binarist perspectives of postcolonialism. The postcolonial theory framework is not sufficient because postcolonialism indicates the post status of colonialism when many events of colonialism, such as internment camps, have significant lingering colonial effects on the culture or group of people throughout future generations. Japanese Americans also existed in the crevice of the in-between and interconnectedness of embracing both characteristics from U.S. and Japanese cultures. Postcolonial theory often disregards the in-between-ness of other possibilities of colonialism and disruptive events that transform identities throughout history which bleed into the present, and the future.

Previous Quantitative Research on Japanese Americans and Their World War II Experiences

Quantitative studies by Nagata, Trierweiler, and Talbot (1999); and Nagata and Cheng (2003) contribute important information about the effects of the internment camps after the liberation. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) in 1997 redressed each interned citizen with a letter of apology and a monetary payment for the injustice served upon this ethnic group. The apology and payment represented an acknowledgement of the injustice that occurred but the lives of the civilians who were in the internment camps were affected even after they were freed from the internment camps. In Nagata and Cheng’s (2003) quantitative research on the race-related trauma Japanese Americans experienced, the researchers stated that in-depth analyses are necessary for intergenerational studies on trauma. The researchers surveyed
respondents through mail-back surveys and interviews, using scales to assess communication, degrees of comfort in discussing the topic of the internment camps, general attitudes about the internment camp experience, and the redress impact. Some interesting results of this study showed 3.5% of the participants never talked to their children about their internment camp experience and 70% of the internment conversations lasted 15 minutes or less (Nagata & Cheng, 2003).

In research about the long-term effects of the internment camp experience, Nagata, Trierweiler, and Talbot (1999) wrote that children of Japanese Americans who experienced the World War II internment camps relate and absorb some of their parents’ low self-esteem. Through a voluntary mail-back survey, the researchers compared three groups of Japanese Americans: those who were in the internment camps at a young age; those who were not in the internment camps but had parents who had experienced the camps; and those who had not been in the camps nor had parents in the camps. The authors measure their levels of communication, ethnic socialization, outmarriage (marriage outside of their own ethnic group), general attitudes, family impact, and attitudes on the redress. Important findings included that third-generation Japanese Americans who were in the internment camps at an early age experienced differences in communication with their family and communication than ones who were not in the internment camps and families of the interned third-generation Japanese Americans were the least likely to have discussed the camps as central topics (Nagata, Trierweiler, & Talbot, 1999). These findings represent the discomfort and effects the internment camp has on both the people who experienced them and their future generations.
CHAPTER FIVE
Methodology and Method

Ethnographic Methodology in Relation to Globalization and Generations

Terhi Rantanen (2005) designed the ethnographic study in her book *Media and Globalization* focusing on the concepts and dimensions of time, space, participants, mediated communication, generation, and globalization. The limitations of conceptual definitions and methodologies should not be a reason to force researchers to work within the boundaries of established epistemic frameworks but to extend the knowledge and possibilities outward. Rantanen’s (2005) research includes ethnographic case studies of three families of four generations, in which she calls a “multi-sitedness” research location (p. 14).

There are many similarities between Rantanen’s (2005) research and my topic of researching Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps. This research looks at a moment in history and how it affected Japanese American women. Ethnographic methods of interviewing and observing the generation of Japanese American women who experienced part of their lives in the American World War II internment camps have been completed. I have to gained information and insight on how Japanese Americans women faced challenges with their cultural identity, the socio-economic difficulties after they were released from the internment camps, the racism they experienced in American society, and how their experiences have been told to their children and grandchildren. Like Ratanen’s (2005) research, this project includes concepts of globalization, communication, generations, history, locations, time, and spaces.
Similar to Ratanen’s (2005) research on four generations of three families, many of the Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps also discuss their past and future familial generations. For example, it is likely for the women to discuss their parents and grandparents’ generation as well as their children and grandchildren’s generations. They may even be able to display a bit of information about their great-grandparents’ generation or their great-grandchildren’s generation, which would create perspectives of fifth and sixth generations of their family. Women have the power to possess information about several generations of people and can be located as the center of many of future generations’ cultural practices.

How is this type of research currently limited by the boundaries and current frameworks of intergenerational research? The intergenerational model comes from the family sciences discipline (Pollack, 2004) and strives to show how characteristics that are practiced in one generation within a family, such as violence for example, can be passed down to the next generation within the family. The thought to use this model with the research of Japanese Americans, who have been in internment camps and how their experiences affected the lives of their children and grandchildren, could be appropriate if one were to apply it along with a quantitative method, since the model uses statistical analyses to find significance. Since the intergenerational model displays the transmittal of traits or practices from one generation or another, it cannot be used with methods other than coherent linear quantitative methods.

The combination of generational research paired with ethnographic methods is complex. Ethnography is a method that strives to search for an understanding of human cultures through the participation of gaining membership in a culture (Spradley, 1979).
Membership in a culture guides the individual’s behavior and defines his or her point of view as an attempt to provide entry into the observed culture, phenomenon, or event (Heider, 1976).

The recollection and memories of Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps transcends time; the use of one’s memory as an account of occurrences and a source of information. The Japanese American women are obviously no longer in the internment camps or at the locations, but they are recalling a sequence of events in their own personal lives in which they have to imagine a setting they were once in and how that setting affected them based upon their surviving memory. Because the subjects are not physically at the specific locations of the internment camps at the time of the ethnographic interviews and participant observations, the realness of their narratives is nonetheless legitimate because the authenticity of their memories are what serves the continual building of identities which are very real.

**The Possibilities of Microaggressions During the Interview Process**

The microaggressions of Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps can be multi-dimensional. There are many cultural and gender constructs of being a woman of Japanese heritage, an American citizen, and a victim of the World War II internment camp that make this combination of identities complex. The microaggressions of Japanese American women can be racially, ethnically, nationally, and can be gender-related and influenced. In order to gain understanding of Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps and the microaggressions they may have faced during their interned process, it is important to
understand a bit about the ways in which Japanese American women in general may deal with aggressions due to their cultural upbringing and norms.

Racial-related microaggressions of Asian American women, specifically Japanese American women, deal with issues of citizenship, nationality, and both oral and written literacy. The problems Japanese American women who were in the World War II camps have faced throughout their lives are the issues of being treated as second-class citizens and the inequities of power as American citizens. Many of the Japanese Americans imprisoned in internment camps were second- and third generation American citizens whose ancestors came to the U.S. in the 1850’s (Gudykunst, 2001). A surprised look or comment from an interviewer of a Japanese American’s ability to speak English fluently is an example of what a microaggression may look like. Doubts of citizenship and ability to immerse one’s self into the American culture are constant issues of Asian Americans in general. Sue and Sue (2008) identify microaggressions towards Asian Americans in the form of questions and statements such as, “Where are you from?” and “You speak good English” (p. 114). These microaggressions can translate into the message, “You are not American,” which is hurtful to Japanese Americans who were in the World War II camps and all the struggles they have had to face after the camps (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 114). Sue and Sue (2008) acknowledge, “The forced internment of Japanese Americans are social realties” (p.90). Statements doubting a Japanese American’s commitment to their country such as, “that is unusual your brother fought on the U.S. side during World War II” can be identified as a microaggression because many Japanese Americans dedicated their lives to fighting for the U.S. as their country.
The psychological impacts of microaggressions can be detrimental to the research process and to the interviewee’s well-being. Cook (1990) emphasizes the multidimensional gender constructs related to the psychological problems of women and men. Cook (1990) states, “Psychological sex differences are more subtle and complicated than they first appear” (p. 371). This statement is very true especially with Japanese American women since the American cultural process of gender socialization often conflicts with various aspects of Japanese gender socialization. The two conflicting socialization processes combined with the difficult times of World War II makes the issue of identifying and analyzing the psychological impacts of microaggressions even more important and critical.

When World War II began, immigration from Japan to the United States was not permitted and immigration from Japan did not take place again until 1952 when the McCarren-Walter Immigration Act took place. Due to the previous laws forbidding Japanese men to immigrate to the United States in the 1950’s 86% of the Japanese American population consisted of women (Gudykunst, 2001). The U.S. American political system created a change in the familial relationships of Japanese Americans since the majority of the population was made up of women and laws restricted male family members from immigrating to the U.S. Microaggressions regarding statements of passiveness towards Japanese American males such as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, or friends can create negative views in relation to the counseling process as the manifestation of certain stereotypes (Constantine, 2007). The functions of Japanese American male influences were purposefully and politically minimized by the U.S. to lessen the impact Japanese American males could make in society and the political power
they could possess. The inequity of political and national power often creates the image of the Asian American male as being absent or passive. Cook (1990) writes, “This individualistic view of sex differences is that each sex is predisposed to experience certain psychological problems as a result of gender socialization” (p. 371). What makes this gender predicament even more culturally intricate is Japanese heritage derives from values in which individuals have the duty to bring pride and not shame to their families and communities. In regard to the diminished power of Japanese American men in the U.S., men seemed to remain invisible in order to protect the well-being of all Japanese American women, men, and children in the U.S. Because the were fewer Japanese men in the U.S. due to immigrating laws, Japanese women had to take on more responsibilities and create strong bonds to support their families and communities.

Interviewing Japanese American women may take more time than expected because of the Japanese American communication styles influenced by the Japanese communication values of modesty, harmony, and holding back. Though many Japanese Americans have adopted many aspects of American cultural norms, the tendency to possess embedded Japanese communication norms is apparent, especially for women. According to Ivey and Ivey (1999) interviewing, “may be considered the most basic process used for information gathering, problem solving, and information and advice giving” (p. 12). Interviewing Asians and Asian American people can turn this “basic process” into a much more complicated process due to Asian communication norms. A case study in Ivey and Ivey’s (1999) book by Weijun Zhang talks about the difficulty in counseling a Chinese man. The author states, “When Chinese people see the need to express disagreement, they usually take great care not to hurt the other’s feelings or cause
another to lose face” (p. 200). This concern of disrupting harmony or losing face is similarly applicable to the Japanese culture as well. A Japanese or Japanese American person may be answering questions in a polite manner so as to not create emotional or environment turbulence.

_Awareness of ‘Enryo’ and ‘Gaman’ in Japanese American Communication_

The ingrained communication styles to _enryo_ and _gaman_ are difficult to define in the English language; there is no one word to describe the value and define the natural acts of these words in a communication context. They are both words meaning to repress emotions and are displayed often, even in the circumstance of intergenerational oral transference. If the interviewer gains understanding of _enryo_ and _gaman_, she or he will realize Japanese Americans place an emphasis and deep value of the concepts of harmony or not want to show anger or let a stranger see them cry. In order to research aspects of Japanese American communicating their stories and life experiences it is important to know characteristics of their culture that derive from Buddhism and common Japanese beliefs, such as the concepts of _enryo_ and _gaman_. A Japanese American woman may choose not to express emotional feelings _not_ only because of concepts such as _gaman_ or _enryo_, but because she may feel as if others do not understand the context and history of her identities and stories in the first place. Nagata and Cheng (2003) refer to these inherited communication styles of Japanese Americans. _Enryo_ expresses the way in which a person practices self-restraint and _gaman_ describes the way in which Japanese Americans suppress their emotions, both concepts are used to maintain harmonious effects in communication and go beyond face-saving strategies (Nagata &
Cheng, 2003). These cultural practices of restraint can make the interviewer’s job difficult because if the interviewer asks a difficult question a Japanese American person may try to answer the question in an unbiased and vague way, especially if she or he feels like the interviewer has no or little knowledge of their history and/or culture.

The act of remembering and recalling World War II can be a very stressful situation. Ivey and Ivey (1999) emphasize relaxation or creating a relaxing environment as a directive strategy for the interview process. The strategy of getting an Asian person to relax in order to tell their story is effective. Many of the interactions with a Japanese family such as drinking tea, flower arranging, and meditating, are techniques used to create a relaxing and harmonious environment.

Sue et al. (2008) also states, “Because many racial microaggressions are usually unconscious, perpetrators are unlikely to be aware of the true motivation behind their actions” (p. 278). This awareness is crucial in the interview process of Japanese Americans. Many of women face dual and overlapping identities of cultural norms. The more recent generations of children and grandchildren, the third, fourth, and fifth generations, may have little knowledge about their histories and identities because their parents or grandparents were too ashamed to tell them. The act of interviewing Japanese Americans is not an easy task but without the knowledge of microaggressions and an understanding of their culture the process can be very threatening to the interviewee’s mental health.

Etnographic Methods
This study uses ethnographic methods, including informant interviews with Japanese American women who were in the internment camps. Yin (2003) stated that one of the most important sources of information in a qualitative study comes from an interview. Lindloff and Taylor (2002) concluded the best informants are ones who have had experience in the culture, are well-respected by their peers, served in the scene in many different roles, and are knowledgeable about the local language and context. The main purpose of ethnography is to search for an understanding of human cultures through the participation of membership in cultures (Spradley, 1979).

**World War II Internment Camp Survivor Participants**

The Japanese American women who experienced the internment camps are the epistemic community who are embodied with the knowledge of the internment camps because they possess the first-hand experiences. Ethnographic notes and interviews were gathered for this research. Japanese American women were selected through a purposeful sample of a couple individual Japanese American women who experienced the World War II internment camps who the researcher knows personally. Throughout time each woman began to refer other individuals with the characteristics of being a Japanese American woman who has experienced the World War II internment camps to the researcher. By the end of my data collection, I gathered 16 interviews from Japanese American women 80 to 95 years old who experienced the World War II internment camps and were living in California, Nevada, Ohio, or Michigan. The interviewees were asked open-ended questions face-to-face which were recorded with a tape recorder and
then transcribed. Code names were given to each woman to protect her identity. The interview questions are shown in the Appendix 1.0.

*The Adaptive Interview Process*

After having read studies about Japanese Americans who were in the World War II internment camps and how their interviews were guided by a list of questions in very formulated and academic settings, I realized how important it is to adapt to the interviewee’s comfort zone and environment in order to experience a deeper meaning of communication. The person being interviewed may feel most like her or himself in various informal settings such as their house or dance studio. The adaptive interview process takes into consideration the individual’s characteristics rather than just the researcher’s needs. For example, some interviews that took place in this research were in the women’s homes. Other interviews took place in public places and one interview even took place after the interviewee and I danced together in her studio. The process of adapting to a person’s individual qualities and her comfort zone, includes but is not limited to her age, ethnicity or ethnicities, generation, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background, religion, the region where she lives, occupation, hobbies, life experiences, preferences, and more. The adaptive interview process transforms and adapts the ethnographer’s questions and interests into ongoing conversations in hopes to bring more information about the individual’s life experiences, personality, and insights to the surface. I did not see myself as limited to a set of questions, hourly time limits, or environments for ethnographic moments to take place.
Accompanying and accepting invitations from some of the individual interviewees to various events were helpful in exploring the ethnographic sites and communities. In this research, the ethnographer is both an insider and an outsider. I view myself as an insider because I understand much of the context, culture, and the cultural relationships within the Japanese American community because I am Japanese American and have grown up closely with Japanese Americans who were in the World War II internment camps. I will also always be an outsider too, because of my generational status, age, location, and personal experiences. I never experienced growing up during World War II, lived in an internment camp, nor had to face the challenges Japanese Americans had to overcome post-World War II. I am not part of the community who helped other Japanese Americans baby sit each other’s children when they went to work, helped one another find jobs, or understood what it felt like to be evacuated out of my home and relocated to a desolate internment camp. It is important for me to express and understand the boundaries of where I will always stand as an outsider.

*From Issei to Gosei, a Chronological Generational Timeline*

In this ethnographic research I use my own family history as partial examples and explanations of the Japanese American generations and communities in the United States. This study is not only about my family, it is about Japanese American families. Because I am a fifth-generation Japanese American woman whose family experienced the World War II internment camps, I have personal experience on the cultural norms, relationships, interactions, and generational differences. Not all Japanese Americans have the same exact experiences and stories as my family and I, which is why I base most of this
research on the narratives and stories of many other Japanese American women outside of my family. However, many Japanese Americans, especially of the *Gosei* generation (fifth generation), may find similarities to my family’s stories.

In order to establish a history of my family’s immigration I will briefly show a chronological timeline of my mother’s side of the family because there is more information on the exact years and locations known than on my father’s side. In the beginning of the 1890’s my great-grandfather’s (my mother’s mother’s father) parents immigrated from Japan to Maui, Hawaii. His parents were the first generation of Japanese Americans to come to the United States. In Japanese language the word *Issei* describes the first generation of people to come to the country. Sometimes other cultures and individuals may consider the first generation of their family to be the first person who is *born* in the U.S, but in Japanese and Japanese American history, *Issei* usually describes the first generation of the family to *arrive* in the U.S.

Growing up in a city like Los Angeles where there were many different ethnic groups and generations of Asian Americans, I remember the acronym “F.O.B.” or “fob” was often used in junior high school and high school, which stood for “fresh off the boat.” I often times found while growing up, it was important for my Asian American friends to not “dress like a fob” or “act like a fob”, especially if they were of the first or second generations. When my great-great- grandfather and great-great-grandmother arrived to Maui, Hawaii in the early 1890’s they were literally fresh off the boat, a boat ride that lasted a little over 16 days. A few years after they immigrated my great-grandfather was born in 1896 in Hawaii. In this research we will call him “Gio.” Gio is not his name but is sort of child-like Japanese nickname used. The word Gio comes from
the word *Ogi-san*, which means grandfather in Japanese and this is what my mother, uncle, and most of the family called him.

Like my great-grandfather, Gio, my great-grandmother was also born in Hawaii. In this research we will call her Bayo, which is also not her real name, but a Japanese nickname given to her by her family. The word *Oba-san*, means grandmother in Japanese. The exact year Bayo’s family arrived to Hawaii from Japan is unknown, but it is speculated it was around the same time my great-grandfather, Gio’s, family arrived.

My great-grandmother, Bayo, was born in 1904 in Hawaii. During her birth, there was no official documentation or record made of her birth so when she chose to go visit Japan as an adult, she possessed no official documentation of her birth or U.S. citizenship. Therefore, in order to visit Japan she first had to take a U.S. citizenship exam even though she was born in the U.S., so should obtain official citizenship so she would be able to come back to the U.S. after her trip to Japan. Gio and Bayo moved to California after Bayo returned back from Japan (date currently unknown).

Gio and Bayo had their first and only child in 1925, which is my grandmother (my mother’s mother). My grandmother married my grandfather, whom was born in 1926, and gave birth to their son, my uncle, in 1953. A year later she gave birth to my mother in 1954. My mother married my father, whom is also Japanese American and he was born in Minnesota in 1947. In 1980, my parents gave birth to a set of twins; my twin sister and I. During childbirth my twin sister died and my mother, who was having a difficult childbirth, thought I might die too. Fortunately, I survived and my father named me Precious Vida, meaning Precious Life (*vida* means *life* in Spanish). In 1985 my parents welcomed my younger brother, and unexpectedly in 2007, my father passed
away. My grandmother (my mother’s mother) passed away the following year and thus the cycle of life, death, and generations takes its course showing how little time we have to gather information about each of our family member’s life experiences.

This research focuses on Japanese American women’s stories, narratives, and cultural identity as a contribution to U.S. history and society. The more knowledge is obtained and made accessible for people, the greater chances citizens can create awareness of instances of injustice. In a time of war, people may discriminate through irrational and inhumane acts of genocide, hate speech, and internment camps. These acts of injustice cannot be redressed through money and apologies alone. Acts of exclusion, prejudice, and segregation show their effects throughout peoples’ lives and are passed on to future generations. Therefore, the importance of including peoples’ struggles and stories in history, such as the Japanese American women in the World War II internment camps, as a significant event is one of the most important ways to redress this group who once faced injustice.

My autoethnography is only a portion of this research about Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps. I interviewed 16 individuals who grew up in California during their childhood and identified English as their first language. Most of the Japanese American women I interviewed came from middleclass families who owned small business such as markets, restaurants, beer parlors, and hotels. Some of the Japanese American families owned farms and produce stands. Some Japanese Americans worked at stores, hotels, and a variety of jobs before World War II. Most of these women are not from the same family as each other, though their lives were similar in that they grew up around the Los Angeles area and lived the simple American
lifestyles most children and teenagers lived during that time of going to school, participating in social activities, and doing chores around the house.
Los Angeles, California, 2009: “Please Serve Your Brother”, Part One

My extended family and I are sitting at the dinner table in my grandmother’s (my father’s mother) dining room. The place settings are all properly laid out and inclusive of all of the utensils one could use to eat a meal; it looks orderly and uniform like the black and white keys on a grand piano. The dishes, cups, napkins, spoons, knives, and forks create a framing border around the just-cooked food lying in the center of the table. We are having another pleasant family dinner and I am happy to see many of my family members, my grandmother on my father’s side, and my relatives. My grandmother is sitting to the right of me and my brother is sitting on my left-hand side. She turns to me and says, “Please serve your brother his food.”

I pause for a second, a bit perplexed, but not really surprised. She sporadically asks me about my studies, research, school, or the classes I teach and instead usually asks (almost every time I see her), “what do you know how to cook?” or “do you cook at home?” My brother who at that time was a young and very able man at 25 years old, says to our grandmother and I, “Oh no, it’s ok I can serve myself.”

He and I have a very good relationship and enjoy spending time together. My brother is one of the closest people in my life. We did not grow up in a household with my parents where I was taught to serve him because he is of the male gender or because I am a few years older.

My grandmother turns to my brother without looking at me and says, “No, no.” She looks at me and says, “Let her serve you, she wants to serve you.” I do not make any
kind of face nor roll my eyes, nor say any snappy reply back to my grandmother because I know it would be disrespectful and I love her very much. I take my brother’s plate and put two pieces of chicken on it, some vegetables, mashed potatoes, and a bread roll. At that moment it does not seem like the appropriate time for one of my feminist monologues at the dinner table. I respect my grandmother and do not want to tip the balance of harmony during our dinner, even though my nerves have been tipped over.

A few minutes later, my irritation dissolves and fades away. I realize there is some much I do not know about my grandmother on my father’s side’s life and I have never lived through the times she did nor had all the experiences she has had. There are reasons she does this, it is not because she loves my brother more or does she say things like this because she is a Japanese American women, because I know many Japanese American women in my family (the majority of them actually) who do not serve their husbands or the males in our family. I decide to interview her for this research so I can learn more about her as a woman who I know wants the best for my brother and I and demands for it in ways we sometimes cannot always understand. My interview with my grandmother on my father’s side and how her values and identity relates to Japanese American women’s life experiences, responsibilities, and relationships will be addressed later on in this chapter.

\textit{Evacuation}

After the Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast were forced to relocate into internment camps. The Executive Order 9066 affected their ownership of homes, businesses, education,
and even their relationship. All of the women I interviewed felt the American
lives their parents and grandparents built for them were very pleasant and seemed
to understand the sacrifices their parents made for them in order to create stable
lives. The transition from their daily lives in America as U.S. citizens changed
when Executive Order 9066 forced Japanese Americans on the West Coast out of
their homes, as Toshi T. stated:

When we were evacuated, we were only allowed to take one suitcase. I
was just a little girl at the time, so I stuffed as much clothes as I could into
the suitcase. At the train station, the hinges on my suitcase broke and all
my clothes spilled out everywhere. I started to cry, but my father stayed
very calm and helped me with my clothes. Everything around me seemed
so chaotic and I was scared.

- Toshi T.

Japanese Americans on the West Coast were allowed to only take one suitcase
each and had to leave additional belongings behind, including major financial
investments such as their cars, houses, and businesses. Community leaders, academics,
businessmen, and teachers of Japanese arts traditional or martial arts were the first to be
arrested (Wakida, 2000). The act of abandoning so many possessions and opportunities
such as homes, businesses, friendships, and education that Japanese Americans worked
so hard to establish contributed in external and internal changes in their individual
identities. Pets were also left behind, as one woman remembers:

We were evacuated into camp when I was 11 years old. Before the
 evacuation, my parents owned a hotel and beer parlor in Downtown Los
Angeles, which they worked very hard to get and establish. They had to leave their whole business, house, and lives that they made behind. We even had to give our dog to our neighbor.

- Fumi

During the World War II evacuation, Japanese Americans had no idea where they were going to be relocated to and how long they would be imprisoned. There was little time to find storage units or places to put their belongings. It was important for them to take only what was truly essential and valuable to them, such as warm clothing, shoes, and medications. Women who were pregnant had to also enter the interment camps, no exceptions were made.

Japanese Americans experienced life in different relocation internment camps in Arizona, Wyoming, California, Idaho, Utah, Arkansas, and Colorado. The majority of women in this study were evacuated from their homes in Southern California and relocated to the Santa Anita Horse Race Track, California, where they and their families were forced to stay in horse stables. As one woman recalls:

*First we were put into the Santa Anita racetracks. We stayed in the stables. Straw mattresses. We had to stuff them with straw and the smell and the stench of the horses, and the urine, and all that junk. And then from there we were sent to Arkansas; the bayou. Of course they set up these camps in very desolate areas.*

- Kinue

From Santa Anita, California, Japanese Americans were then relocated to different internment camps throughout the Midwest. They traveled by bus and train to
desolate areas where they were put behind barbed wire and kept as prisoners in their own country. One woman shared memories of her trip:

The first camp I went to was Santa Anita, the assembly center and we lived in the horses’ stalls (laughs) which had a really nice aroma (laughs). We all took showers together where they had the services for the horses. Ohhh, doesn’t that sound exciting? And we all ate at the mess halls and we were all teenagers then, right? So we didn’t have school at that time and we all kind of worked on the camouflage nets, you know, that they were using for the war and actually, we were just teenagers during that time and it was fun meeting all these different people from different parts of California. And then we went to Rohrer, which is the relocation camp in Arkansas. And I just remember the long train ride we had. When you’re young you just adjust to whatever...

- Michi

As shown in this the description above, the woman I was interviewing, who is my grandmother (my father’s mother) used brief moments of laughter to relieve a bit of the uneasiness in the conversation. I remember she and I were having a relaxed conversation and interview at the time, though when I listen to our conversation on the interview tapes I realize there are parts when she was talking about difficult times she would also laugh as a way of creating harmony and easing up the tension. Most likely, she and I may not have even realized her reaction of laughing when she was telling the story. I find myself as a Japanese American woman displaying similar reactions too when I am telling a difficult story or participating in an uncomfortable conversation. It is not so much a
laughter that represents humor, but a way of transforming a somber topic into something much lighter and casual, and to put the other person at ease in a certain way.

*Japanese American Women Claiming and Re-claiming Labor Positions*

Before World War II, many Japanese Americans were making their dreams come true in America. Chibby, a second-generation Nisei woman was born in 1928 in Los Angeles. Her parents came from Fukui, Japan when her father was 42 years old and her mother was only 18. They had met in Japan through an arranged marriage.

Chibby’s mother was one of the two first-generation Issei women to have a sewing school in Los Angeles. In the early 1900’s Chibby’s mother taught sewing and tailoring to high school and college girls in Southern California and her father was a farmer. In 1912 a terrible frost killed many farmers’ crops in Southern California. During this decade Japanese Americans worked in the agricultural industry and made up 85% of the population in the sugar-beet industry (Molina, 2006, p. 45). Fortunately, because her father’s farm was located in a valley, the frost did not affect his farm and he was able to make $10,000 that season which was a lot of money during that time. He gave away all the money he earned that season to the other farmers and families in the area. Being a farmer in California was no longer a stable job for a Japanese American citizen. With campaigns and slogans exhibiting people’s distaste for Japanese Americans and the agricultural jobs they were taking, slogans such as “Keep California White” were apparent by 1920 (Molina, 2005, p. 45). Chibby said:

*He was really a saint. Because of that, my mother suffered (financially)*

*and she decided she would have a career of her own so she started to take*
the horse and buggy and went to Sacramento and they were on the outskirts of Sacramento (Elk Grove) and she took the horse and buggy and went to sewing school. The next season, she decided to move back down to Los Angeles, with or without my father (laughs), and so she came down here and he followed her and he became a janitor at Bullocks (department store). He was one of the night crew of all Japanese people.

After Chibby’s mother graduated from sewing school, she opened up her own sewing school in Los Angeles. Later, she even bought a hotel with 20 rooms and ran her own hotel and business. While interviewing Chibby, I realized how her family is truly composed of strong and hardworking women. She tells me about when she was a child, her sister who was only 12 years old at the time, would drive them to their Sunday school across the city and they never missed a day of class in five years. Of course she did not have a license at that age but her parents were so busy it was the only transportation option they had. Chibby and her family tried to avoid getting relocated into the internment camps but they were unsuccessful:

...we moved to Sacramento because one of our relatives said they would not have to go to camp, and we got up there and then six weeks later we had to evacuate to camp. So we went to Fresno Assembly Center and from there we were sent to Jerome, Arkansas, and then the Jerome, Arkansas camp happened to close and then we were sent to...well we had four choices, it was either Amache, Heart Mountain, Rowher, or Hila, and Hila was our last choice and my father was quite elderly and we thought maybe
we could go to Colorado because my uncle used to live there. But anyway, we ended up in Hila (laughs).

Chibby went to school in the internment camp. During her time in the internment camp, it was the first time she ever had a Japanese American girl friend because most of her friends prior to when she entered the internment camp were of different ethnicities and races than Japanese American. Through the internment camp, she met a lot of different people and participated in Japanese American cultural events. I felt one of the most interesting aspects of her story was the consistency of the strength she and the women in the family possessed.

In 1945 Chibby left the internment camp to go finish high school. While she was in the internment camp she came across a posting seeking a Japanese American girl to work in a domestic position for a young couple who worked in Hollywood. She took the train from the internment camp to Hollywood and lived with the young couple while attending Hollywood High School. She felt lonely without her sister and parents and remembers during this time some people in Los Angeles would not even speak to her because she was Japanese American. Working as a high school student and a domestic house worker was difficult. Chibby said:

They made me work quite hard. They didn’t wake up until noon and I was just getting home from school at noon and I was like a full-time maid. I was young and the thing that would bother me was when she would give me her dirty personal laundry, but other than that it was ok because of the learning experience. Then after I graduated I realized I shouldn’t stay there because she had a baby and it was not even a week old and she went
out to dinner or something and left the baby with me. To me it was a challenge because I didn’t know what to do at that young age, but then again, like everything else when I finally had my own children it was easier for me because I used to bathe that baby and she (the mother) just left that baby alone with me and the baby slept with me in my bed. She didn’t get home until really late at night but that was really scary for me. It was really scary. But I don’t know, she trusted me enough to do that. To me, that was a hard experience because I was a full-time maid, when I was originally just supposed to be a part-time domestic school girl.

Eventually Chibby left the young couple, who were now new parents, and went to work at another house as a domestic worker. After high school, Chibby attended East Los Angeles City College and would have to wake up at 5 AM in the morning to take the bus to get to her 8 AM class. Later, she registered for the Art Institute in Chicago and spent a semester taking classes there. Eventually, she came back to California and opened up a small food shop in Torrance, California. After a couple years she closed the shop and she decided to start a catering business with her daughter that she and her daughter run together.

After Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps many of the young individuals similar to Chibby became domestic workers in white American households. Zia (2000) writes, “Still subjected to segregated housing and unequal treatment, young men and women who made it through high school and college could find work only as field hands and domestic workers, in the same limited occupations as their immigrant parents” (p. 39). The act of working in domestic, agricultural, and
industrial fields post-World War II changed the identities of Japanese Americans. Like most Americans of high school age, Japanese American teenagers did not usually have to work and live away from their parents at such a young age. However, because Japanese Americans had to give up their houses and everything they owned prior to entering the internment camps, when they were released there were no homes, jobs, and financial security to return to, especially since many Americans possessed prejudiced feelings against Japanese Americans.

Life Inside the Internment Camps

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor. Two months after the attack on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 that gave the United States Army permission to exile Japanese Americans from the west coast and relocate them into internment camps. Any Japanese American who possessed one-eighth blood of Japanese ancestry was put into relocation camps in remote areas of the United States away from the Pacific coast. They were kept unaware by the government about how long their stay in the camp would be and if they would ever be released from the internment camp. Yoshi, a Japanese American woman, and her family were forced to leave beautiful Oceanside, California, and she and her family were relocated to Poston, Arizona. Her memories include the following details:

I remember when we left Oceanside by train and then we had to take a bus to Poston, by the time we got there and signed in it was already dark.

When I think about that, I don’t know how we ever got to our little room.

There was no lighting. We were out in the beaten sun, in the desert, so we
had to carry our luggage, and 18 is an age where I would say, you knew what was going on but didn’t really understand the circumstances...When we first went to camp, we were all looking for some kind of work (in the camp). A lot of us worked in the canteen or mess hall with my friends. Of course we hated that job and then we eventually went to different kinds of jobs. I started working for the hospital as a nurse’s aid. Camp life was pretty miserable. But I guess we learned to appreciate the hardship.

- Yoshi

Japanese American families tried to stay together in the camps and create community activities in the camps such as classrooms, baseball teams, dance classes, and music performances. They lived in barracks and weather-proofed their living conditions when it snowed in the winters or became blistering hot in the summers. Together, Japanese Americans united as communities to keep each other safe, active, comfortable, and healthy.

The Japanese American people inside the internment camps tried to equip the internment camps as well as they could. Many of the internment camps had makeshift schools and clinics. Toshi K., who is the eldest Japanese American woman I interviewed and in her 90’s lives in Toledo, Ohio. Before entering into the internment camp, she was already married and had a baby daughter. While she was in the internment camp, she was scheduled to give birth to her first son. She remembers a traumatic experience in the Poston, Arizona camp:
I remember in camp, I lost a baby boy. (Face saddens, eyes turn a bit watery). The doctor, I will never forgive him, but he was a young doctor. In delivery, I lost my baby boy in the internment camp.

- Toshi K.

Toshi K. remembers this experience as one of the saddest moments in her life in the internment camp. She remained strong and faced numerous challenges while in Poston. While in the internment camp, she also worked as a hairdresser. She had graduated from beauty school before entering Poston and had worked at a salon in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles (Japanese town). The owner of the beauty salon that she worked at was also in the Poston internment camp. Through her skills she found a sense of empowerment and a way to keep herself busy in Poston. She recalls, “He [the owner of the beauty salon] had some equipment, but it was all very primitive, the resources. We would give perms for $5.” Toshi K. was able to use her skills to make some money while in the internment camp and was also able to get a job quite quickly at a beauty salon in Cleveland after she left Poston, Arizona.

Artistic Re-Claiming of Culture Through Odori (Traditional Japanese Dance)

Practicing a culture’s fine arts through acts of poetry, dancing, painting, calligraphy, singing, and many more creative engagements in the realms of tradition, culture, and art can create a pathway towards re-connecting with one’s culture and memories. Art becomes a part of memory and tradition. A painting can capture a feeling, experience, a visual moment influenced by the contextual
qualities of the artist and the time in which they lived. A dance, like a song, transforms a tradition physically, melodically, and communicatively throughout time, embracing the meaning and values of the singer or dancer. Researchers such as Phu (2008) and Tohe (1998) analyze photography and the writing of poetry to inquire deeper meanings about ethnic people’s life experiences and the way arts interact with time, location, audience, and the artists.

The youngest Japanese American woman I interview, June, the internment camp was where she first began her lifelong journey as an odori artist. As I was working on this research about Japanese American women, I had also been taking private odori lessons, traditional Japanese dance lesson, from a certified Sensei (Japanese arts teacher) in Monterey Park, a neighborhood in Los Angeles. I arrived at the house of my Sensei on a gray winter morning. She greeted me at the door wearing both a warm smile and traditional tartan-design gold and red kimono made of wool. We walked into her studio, and slowly and gracefully (she, more so than I) bent down on our knees and bowed deeply, saying, “Oni-gai-wa-tashi-mas” to each other. We did a traditional odori dance, to the tune “Sakura (Cherry Blossoms)” and created an imaginary spring season day filled with falling cherry blossom petals through our movements. Throughout our dancing she would tell me brief stories of her life and travels to Japan. The more we danced, the more relaxed she became. The tamotos (long swinging sleeves of kimonos) slowly cut through the air like the fresh life awakening in the spring time. When my Sensei, June, dances she is powerful though light and sensitive in her movements, and her skill and precision are expressed through her knowledge of Japanese female humbleness and graciousness. At
the end of the dance we bowed to each other, deeply, and with both hands on the floor and said, “arigato gozimashta” which means “thank you very much.”

June is the youngest of the Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps who I have interviewed. She sees herself as part Nisei and part Sansei because on her father’s side, she is second-generation, and on her mother’s side she is third generation Japanese American. She lives a very American life but possesses a talented and creative soul of a timeless traditional Japanese kabuki dancer, and more importantly, the knowledge of traditional Japanese arts. She was born in 1940 in Los Angeles, California, and was only two years old when she was relocated. Although June was a very young age when she entered into the Manzanar internment camp, the experience changed her life forever because it is where she first took odori lessons. June recalls:

*I had started Japanese Dance when I was in the (Manzanar) internment camp. I learned it from a lady, she wasn’t certified but she had learned Japanese Dance for a long time and she loved it, so she taught some of us it. That was my first exposure to it. I hardly remember that too though because I was only four years old. Basically, my mother was really anti-Japanese so she wasn’t for it, but my father loved Japanese Dance, and so did his mother so they’re the ones who must’ve wanted that for me.*

The events in June’s family influenced her lifestyle and professional career as a traditional Japanese dance teacher. Her mother, a Nisei woman, was born in Burbank, California, and her father was born in Japan in 1906. His parents came to the U.S. after he was born, and summoned him to come live with them in the U.S. when he was 19
years old. He traveled from Japan by ship, but did not like the U.S., so he went back to Japan. He came again to the U.S. a few years later, and for the second time, decided he did not want to stay in the U.S. The third time he traveled to the U.S., he was in his late-20’s and decided to stay in America. He met June’s mother when he was around 34 or 35 and she was 24 or 25, and they married even though there was a 10-year age difference between them.

Japanese familial surname and status play a significant role in a person’s lineage. June explains an issue in Japanese heritage, which is not uncommon:

*I don’t know why she married an Issei person because she was so Americanized and she wanted to be so American. My father was supposedly very good looking, and she was also probably attractive to him cause he was a city-slicker. My father married into my mother’s family.*

*There were no males in her generation, and he married into her family name in order to carry the family last name or else her family would just disappear. Like me, because I didn’t marry and there’s no one in my family and generation with my last name.*

When World War II ended in 1945, June and her family returned to Los Angeles, both of her parents went to work and they moved their family into different apartments several times. June changed elementary schools nine times because it was so hard for her family to find an affordable apartment post-World War II. She remembers housing was a real problem and she had to live with her grandmother for a year in Los Angeles.

Throughout our discussion June mentioned her mother’s anti-Japanese feelings often. I found this to be very surprising since June, my Japanese odori Sensei, knows and
loves so many Japanese traditions. She did not explain why her mother in particular was anti-Japanese, but explained some of the overall challenges of being from Japanese ancestry:

I think because there was an anti-Japanese feeling because of the war. But even before the war, Japanese were not allowed to buy property. I think there was some kind of law about that and that’s why Isseis couldn’t buy property. The Nisseis were eventually able to, the Isseis were not. I think the law was if you weren’t a citizen then you couldn’t buy property. I also think if you were a Nisei and you married some one from Japan, you also lost your citizenship. My Sensai said she had lost her citizenship even though she was born here and she had to be re-instated when she married her husband. But I think that was just prior to the war breaking out and there were already anti-Japanese feelings. The Japanese army was also in so many countries, like China…they were really viewed as the aggressor.

Though the Japanese traditional arts were not passed down to June from mother to daughter, one Japanese woman played an important role in her life and her decisions of practicing odori. After World War II and June was growing up as a teenager and she found it so difficult to live with her parents, specifically her mother, she decided to run away and pursue odori seriously. She had first learned odori in the Manzanaar internment camp, and as a teenager and young adult, it changed her life. Although June’s Japanese American mother was very anti-Japanese in many ways and chose to not embrace her own culture, June’s father and his mother (June’s grandmother) possessed an appreciation
for odori and introduced June to it as a young girl and it maintained a role in her life throughout time. June says:

> I got an AA degree. I wanted to get out of my house as much as possible because my mother and I were at each other’s throats. I had gone to city college, got a job, I wanted to move out on my own but my father wouldn’t let me because he said, all Japanese girls have to stay home until they’re married. I had run away a couple of times, I was nineteen years old. Then my Sensai intervened and said I should come stay with her to do Japanese dancing. I had met this Sensai when I was nine. The lady I originally learned Japanese dance from in the internment camp, she was not certified or anything like that and she only had so much ability, and the Sensai I moved in with her, she was much more higher ranking, better, and obviously more talented...Japanese dance was an excuse for me to get out of the house, but my Sensai told me, at least it was a way for my father to save his face, that I didn’t just move out of the house and go to an apartment. He really didn’t want me to move out and go to an apartment because I would be unsupervised.

June does not have many memories of the Japanese American internment camp, but it is the place where she learned odori which has remained one of the most important influences in her life even through all the anti-Japanese feelings she felt in her environment while growing up. She was able to explain the difficulties and challenges her parents faced after World War II, finding jobs and a place to live while taking care of their children. The odori lessons her father and her grandmother (her father’s mother)
introduced her to in the Manzanaar internment camp, led her to a lifelong journey of practicing traditional Japanese arts, travels to Japan, and sharing her talents with others. She lived with her Sensai up until her Sensai’s death, and still lives in her Sensai’s house to this day. She is a professional odori teacher and an artist of traditional Japanese arts. June has traveled to Japan and several places in the U.S. to teach her gift of odori.

Odori is viewed as a very intricate and complex art in Japanese culture. As an American-born and raised woman, June, engaged in the Japanese culture through odori. Practicing traditional dancing took her to travels and experiences in Japan, immersion in the fine arts culture, and altered her identity as a keeper of Japanese traditional arts and culture. Zia (2000) writes, “The responsibility of identifying which cultural traditions to maintain ultimately falls on the generation that grows up straddling the traditional and American cultures” (p. 262). Through performing arts such as dance, singing, music, and acting, the culture gains visibility via some of its most authentic and traditional practices in the American locations and spaces.

_Liberation From the Barbed Wire_

The United States government released the Japanese American prisoners gradually from the camps. Families were split apart and individuals were selected for various job openings. All the internees who were interviewed for this study were separated from their families during the internment camp liberations. Some of the internees’ brothers and cousins joined the U.S. army to fight against Japan as a way of showing their loyalty to the U.S. In coherence to the study conducted by Nagata and Cheng (2003), who wrote “suicides were documented in CWRIC testimonies, especially
among the elderly who felt a sense of shame and feared starting over again at an older age for a second time,” one of the interviewees stated:

*When we were let out from camp, some of us were given $100 to start our lives over again. Some people weren’t even given that… it was very difficult to find work. My cousin, who had graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, couldn’t find a job and was so depressed… he eventually hung himself.*

- Toshi T.

All of the women in this study went to school and/or work immediately after they were released from the internment camps. The majority of the women in this research were only teenagers when they left camp and traveled across the United States by themselves to find jobs. For the Issei, Nissei, and even some of the Sansei generations of women growing up in the 1940s, it was uncommon for Japanese American women to leave their families’ home until they got married. The World War II internment camps broke this tradition because it became a necessity for young Japanese American women to work in order to help their families and support themselves.

*When Jerome closed, we went to another camp that was in Arkansas and we went to Rohrer and we stayed there for over a year. In 1945, we came back to Boyle Heights and that’s when my mother’s half-sister, they had us a house. I was 14, and I was going to junior high school. I went to Roosevelt High School... Most people were like us. We lost our farm and everything and we couldn’t go back because nothing was the same.*
If a person were to read the description of the incident between my grandmother on my father’s side of family, my brother, and I during our family dinner where she requests for me to “please serve your brother,” she or he may think my grandmother is just being old-fashioned, sexist, even a bit cruel, or perhaps just being Japanese in coherence to whatever stereotypes they have about Japanese women. The reason why it is important for me to look at and analyze this incident is because my grandmother is anything but old-fashioned, sexist, or cruel, and on the contrary, she is very modern, has a deep appreciate for the women around her, and is extremely nice, gracious, and polite. Out of all my relatives, she is also the most well-traveled, independent, cultured, and active. The incidents that cause family members to view their actions and words at superficial levels can contribute to arguments, burned bridges, and misunderstandings. It has been important for me to learn about my grandmother’s past in order to make sense of some of her insecurities, values, accomplishments, and identities that she possesses in the present. Halualani (2002) writes, “discussions speak to the complex arena of identity as more than self-recognitions, natural essences, or invented traditions,” and to observe “how we are, as social-historical subjects, related to power in terms of the structural forces that invisibly inscribe how we see and enact ‘who are we’?” (Halualani, 2002, p. xxiii). As family members, my grandmother and I have so many characteristics in common such as we love to travel, socialize, dance, and are active. However, if I ask,
“who are we?” I know we have our differences as Japanese American women because of our histories, experiences, and the contexts in which we have grown up throughout time.

My grandmother grew up in Los Angeles during the late 1920s. Her father worked in the furniture department at the Robinson’s department store and her mother did intricate hand-sewing at home and cared for her family. When she was in the 10th grade in high school she and her family were evacuated to the Santa Anita Racetrack assembly center. She and other Japanese American teenagers her age contributed to the U.S. war effort by helping to make and repair camouflage nets. A few weeks later, my grandmother, Michi, and her family were re-located to the internment camps in Rohrer, Arkansas, where she attended school, made friends, danced, and painted a famous mural in the internment camp’s auditorium. My grandmother’s father left the internment camp to work in Minnesota and later, he sent for her. She tells me about her journey to Minnesota:

*I got to Minneapolis, and you know, I don’t know how much money I had, I think it was only $50 or something and I didn’t know any better and I got a cab from the train station and I had him take me to the hostel, which was a place for people to stay and when I got there it was about 12:30 or 1:00 am and the cab driver dropped me off and I went up to this door, and I walked in. I remember I was really thirsty so I drank a cup of water at the sink, and I didn’t want to disturb anyone so I fell asleep on the couch. And this fella came home from work and he worked at the Minneapolis Tribune and he walked in the door and saw me sleeping. I guess he was so shocked, he said, “What are you doing here?” But isn’t it stupid to be in a
strange house, in strange city and just fall asleep? (laughs). He said that was the first time someone had forgot to lock the door, so I was lucky. And he was a copy editor or something for the Tribune and we were all people from camp that didn’t have any place to stay at that time. My girlfriend Jennie came from Poston, and she joined me there.

- Michi

A few weeks after I had interviewed my grandmother about her World War II internment camp experience, she called me said her best friend, Jennie, would be interested in being interviewed for my research project. I had already met Jennie several times; she is like family to us. She is known by my family as being my grandmother’s closest friend and is also very artistic and creative. I met Jennie at her house in Gardena. Her story was filled with moments she shared with my grandmother after camp:

I left camp in June of ’44 to Minneapolis to join my good friend Michi (laughs)...Because Michi was going there [to Minneapolis] and her mother was going there, my mother finally gave in because she realized we’d have adult supervision. I was gone [in Minneapolis] for maybe 15 or 16 months. I got a job – they have this Bemus bag making sacks for potatoes...I went to work there, I went to the employment office got a job there. But the material that they use is so coarse that when you’re sewing it rips your blouse because it would shred it. So anyways, I think I worked there only a couple of weeks cause I was looking for a secretarial job so I got a job at a small metal manufacturer company and I worked there in a
small office. And of course the people I worked for never had a Japanese or Asian employee and they didn’t even know anything about evacuation. They were mostly Norwegian and Swedish.

- Jennie

Throughout the interviews with my grandmother, Michi, and her best friend, Jennie, I began to understand why they were such close best friends and realize how much they went through together. They both had to grow up very quickly as teenagers after World War II and did not have a carefree young adult lives. Instead they were working in factories, struggling to find housing, and helping their parents with expenses. The experiences they had after the World War II internment camps revealed how they relied on each other for more than friendship but through survival and hardships. For my grandmother, her best friend, Jennie, played an important and supportive role throughout her challenges after the internment camps:

When Jennie and I decided that it was time to move [out of the hostel] I got a job at Nabisco because my friend was working there and I packed crackers (laughs) on the assembly line. Gosh, I think we were paid $0.75 an hour, something ridiculous and Jennie got a job in an office doing clerical work. So we decided to move out, and at that time there was a shortage of housing and we found one room in a house and I remember the mattress was made of straw and we had one hot plate and we used to go out to eat but it was too expensive so Jennie decided we were going to have some dinners at home. We bought rice, they didn’t have rice cookers
in those days so we cooked it in the pot and I remember her mother sent umeboshi and funyou, do you know what funyou is? That fermented tofu?

And she would eat that, and I would say, “ohmigod, how can you eat that? It’s so smelly!” But by god, I learned to like it! (laughs). That would be our dinner sometimes – umeboshi, rice, and funyou (pickled vegetable)!

But that was our life.

When my grandmother’s mother finally left the internment camp, she came to Minneapolis. My grandmother, her mother, and her sister-in-law moved into a rented “backside of a house” where there were two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Her brother was in the military service at that time, contributing to the U.S.’s war effort. My grandmother remembers how her mother would feed other Japanese Americans coming out of the internment camps and have them stay with her and her family in their small rented residence. I began to understand the importance and value of hospitality to my grandmother when she told me this.

When my grandmother was still a teenager, she faced one of the most difficult and responsible challenges of her life when she found out her mother had cancer. My grandmother and her family were still living in very minimal and sparse conditions at the time. They had no financial stability. She says:

So a couple of years later, she had cancer. She had stomach pains. When Jennie first came out of camp, because she didn’t have a job, she took my mother to a doctor and they found out she had cancer. And she was treated. I remember giving her a bath at night, bathing her at night and she weighed only about 70 lbs., just skin and bones, and I would carrying
her to the bathtub and I was only 17 or 18 years old. (voice saddens)

Yeah, but you know...but the doctor predicted that she would die within that year. So when my brother left to Monterey, he told me, “mom may not last”, but she fooled all the doctors, lived to be almost 95, the doctor passed away before she did, so you know, she was an amazing woman.

After interviewing my grandmother, Michi, and her best friend, Jennie, I was thankful Jennie volunteered to be a participant in this research. So much of the support my grandmother received during post-World War II came from Jennie. Likewise, much of Jennie’s narrative consisted of moments and experiences with my grandmother. The bond between these two Japanese American women displayed how much Japanese American family, friends, and women relied and helped each other post-World War II. Had this been a survey, I would have not seen the ways in which each woman spoke of each other with so much sincerity and love for one another.

My grandmother’s experiences as a teenager taking care of her mother with cancer, carrying her into the bathtub, and taking her to the doctor revealed to me the amount of responsibility and emotional strength she had to possess at such a young age. By the time she was the age I am now as I write this, I realize she had already been married and had two children. To her, a woman in her 20s takes care of those around her and is a caretaker to the elderly, her husband, and her children. When she was in her 20s my grandfather was working out of state and she was taking care of her two children on her own.

After the Japanese Americans were released from the internment camps some of the Japanese American women enrolled into the public high schools while they worked on
the side so they could earn their high school diploma after they left the internment camps. Many of the Japanese American women in this sample worked as domestic workers, and some eventually worked in factories after the war. The majority of the American society was still very racist against Japanese Americans, regardless of their citizenship, skills, or education level. Because many Japanese Americans had to work full-time jobs just to receive the minimum amount of financial support to survive on, few of the women interviewed were able to attend college.

The challenges Japanese Americans faced after the war lasted for several years. They struggled not only financially and emotionally, but also to re-gain acceptance as U.S. American citizens. Years after World War II, Michi spoke about how she and her husband came to Los Angeles to buy a house. When the neighbors heard that Japanese American people were going to move into the vacant house, they had a neighborhood meeting to discuss the “dangers” of Japanese Americans moving into the area. She states:

*And this area, they said we shouldn’t buy in this area because Japanese were not…they were discouraged, because it was an all-White area. But this lady that had this house was having a feud with her neighbors so she just sold it to the first person who came along. So at one time, I found out the neighbors were so upset, I had been talking to Marci’s [her daughter] friends’ parents, I became close with one, especially, and she told me that they had a block meeting after we moved in because they were so afraid that because of us prices would go down, and yeah…there was so much prejudice. But we were unaware of all that. We were from Minneapolis so we just bought it. There were no Japanese in this area at the time.*
When Michi and her family moved into the neighborhood, she and her family did not even know racism existed against them until several years later. Throughout time her neighbors accepted she and her family. The act of Japanese American people moving into an all-White neighborhood threatened the value of the property due to their racial presence.

Interviewing my grandmother helped me to understand our life experiences have been so different. Halualani (2002) writes about how Hawaiians have gone through social and historical changes and these transformations are what contribute to their identities. This concept is similar with Japanese American women. World War II and the internment camps had historical, social, educational, national, and financial effects on the Japanese American women like my grandmother. The conditions of the interwar era transformed Japanese American teenagers into the roles of responsible adults, caretakers, and laborers. In my 20s I have had the opportunity to have a variety of jobs, live in different countries, and go to graduate school, but for her, she developed a greater and more gracious strength of caring for the people around her and being a mother. When my grandmother asks me to serve my brother I believe she is not demanding me to do so because he is a male, but because she hopes I can develop the selflessness and values of hospitality she acquired during her young adulthood years.

*The Mourning of the Past*

It was the fall season of 2007 and I was sitting at home one evening watching the DVD *American Pastime*. This film is about Japanese Americans in the Topaz Relocation
Camp in Utah. There was an eerie feeling inside of me watching this film. Not just because the film is about Japanese Americans who were imprisoned during World War II and the communities they built inside the internment camps, but because the main characters in this film, the twins Lane and Lyle, who are both played by actor Aaron Yoo, are loosely based on my great-uncles Lane Nakano and Lyle Nakano. They are my uncle’s father and his father’s twin brother (my uncle’s uncle) portrayed in the film. The film was co-created by uncle’s cousin, Desmond Nakano. My uncle’s father, Lyle, committed suicide almost 17 years ago, in the basement of his house where he shot himself. Sadly, his wife arrived home one day to find a note from him telling her to go to the basement, where she found his body. It is strange to watch a young and talented actor such as Aaron Yoo act out your relatives’ lives from when they were young men in the internment camps.

Before I viewed American Pastime on DVD, I had already begun to schedule interviews with Japanese American women in the Los Angeles area. I was scheduled to interview Kinue, a Japanese American woman, who was the widow of Lyle. The interview was going to take place at her house in Glendale. In September, my own father unexpectedly passed away while on a flight home from Hawaii to Los Angeles on September 11, 2007, a week before my interview with Kinue. It is important to recall there was definitely a presence of sadness surrounding us during our interview though as Japanese American women we did our best to place it aside.

Kinue was born in Lomeda, California, and is a Nissei (second-generation), Japanese American woman. I had met Kinue several times, as she is part of my extended family. Everyone in my family always speaks of how beautiful and vibrant Kinue is and
she is undeniably gorgeous in a very classic type of way. At 12 years old, she and her family were evacuated to the Heart Mountain internment camp in Wyoming. When she thinks back on the internment camps she says, “The purpose [of the internment camps] to me was horrific. No privacy, I hated the bathrooms, no privacy there.” It is understandable to see how a young girl at age 12 would feel self-conscious in a bathroom where there was no privacy.

After she and her family were released from the Heart Mountain internment camp, they moved to Chicago. Kinue says:

*And of course the insecurity...I was the only Japanese in the senior [high school] class. I hated it. Hated it, hated it, hated it. I didn’t have the tools, the self-esteem or whatever to make friends; I felt very cheated out of my senior year. I do take pride in my parents – I’m getting emotional (starts to cry) – they were quite old. And it’s not an option to go on any kind of welfare (crying). They got jobs at dishwashers... (starts crying a lot)... My sister, she had a full scholarship to go to the university but she gave that up because how can you go to college when your family needs help? So she got a job at the same place working in the salad bar. And of course, I took the streetcar and went to school.*

*I was so unhappy! I made myself anorexic. I wouldn’t never eat, but I was quite thin and then after that we left to California. My father was college-educated and such, law degree. And our dream, it was an option – we were going to college. All the classes we took [in high school]. But with this war and how can we go to school? So coming out here [to California]*
my sister got a job, I think it was with the city and then eventually I did get a job with [the Department of] Water and Power and through friends we borrowed money, my parents borrowed money and bought a duplex. My sister and I gave 50% of our paychecks to our parents to help pay for the little duplex. I don’t know how they did it. My father, as old as he was, would go to Japanese town and employment agency and leave on the bus and do housework. My father never lifted a hand at home (before the war) he didn’t know how.

We sat inside of Kinue’s beautiful and spacious house in Glendale, California. She collects antiques now and has an immaculately clean house. She even baked a whole carrot cake for me as a present. Her house is less than a mile away from the Glendale Community College and she thinks about her education often:

Of course there are no excuses because Niseis did go to college and working by day and going to school by night. I never did. But I guess my biggest regret was the insecurity of never having a college education. I could go now. I could walk to the thing [Glendale Community College], but I’m too lazy. With the discussion in my family, I’ve always used excuses cause, “Yeah, I didn’t get a college education because of the war.” I don’t have the motivation to do it.

...Of course my husband, he was not educated either. He had skills, which you can’t get in school, which are people skills. See, he was the most
charismatic person ever and if you were to talk to 10 people they would probably all say that too. But that in turn, became his downfall also.

Several years after the internment camps, Kinue and her husband became the owners of a very well-known restaurant in Los Angeles on Sunset Boulevard. This popular restaurant, bar, and nightclub was famous in the ‘80s. The restaurant was three floors and was in an excellent location. Kinue describes the restaurant:

See being in that environment, all the celebrities, Frank Sinatra and stuff, Lyle was on a first-name basis with them. That’s how he was. They gave him autographs but in that environment he started using drugs and alcohol and I went on him about Betty Ford. And so with the using of the drugs, the changing of the whole restaurant climate in L.A., we had customers that used to come every week. His drugs were getting totally out of hand, we were very fortunate to sell [the restaurant]. He sold [it] in 1984. Then in that point in time, I [already] knew in 1982, I knew I would have to get a job and so I did. I knew I was going to have to stand on my feet.

After Kinue and her husband, Lyle, sold Imperial Gardens, Kinue began working at the Los Angeles’ famous Great Western Forum night club. The Great Western Forum was home to the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team before The Staples Center was built. She never watched a basketball game before nor had she even heard for the Lakers basketball team. Nonetheless, Kinue began working at the nightclub during the mid-80s. Her work and career helped her build self-esteem and kept her life very active. When she talks about her job at the Forum, her face lights up and she says:
I heard that after I came in it was the largest generating venue of the private clubs. But that made me feel good and I thought, hey, without an education! (Laughs). I managed to...well, bottom line for me it managed to boost my self-esteem. They were so good to me and it was so fun. I kind of felt good...But I guess I have to say a lot of women of my generation – relatives – they worked. So with the dysfunction that was going on in my family, I’ve always felt ohhhh...well with my husband, 17 years ago he took his life, fortunately, I was working. And I went to work two weeks after and to me that was my salvation. You know you have to put your façade, your mask, whatever...and it’s just like your mom...your dad’s death. (Starts crying). I can imagine what you guys are going through. With my husband it was by choice, but (crying) finding him...it took me one year to feel that Lyle was not going to come through that door...My husband had left a note, he didn’t want a funeral. But it does put a closure.

As I have previously mentioned, during the time when I was interviewing some of the Japanese American women and spending time in their lives and culture, my own life was overlapping and intertwining in our discussions. Word spreads quickly in the Japanese American community in Los Angeles, and even if some people did not know my father directly, they knew of his name or his parents name and knew of his passing even if I did not mention it. Even if I did not display any signs of mourning such as wearing black, I believe some of the women already knew I was mourning which worked as a catalyst for their own mourning for various past events in their lives. These events
and feelings that occurred are all part of the ethnography when discussing the Japanese American community and our ways of communication.

The Communication Gap of Japanese American Women’s World War II Experiences

*I never told my children about my camp experience when they were growing up. I think they know about it now...but I never wanted to tell them about what happened to us because I didn’t want them to feel ashamed of who they were in this country. I didn’t want them to hate this country or themselves.*

- Fumi

As a Japanese American fifth-generation woman, I know many women and men in my grandmother and grandfather’s generation do not often speak about their internment camp experiences. After talking to several Japanese American women I found that some women never told their stories to their children or grandchildren, but felt an urgency to tell their story before it was too late. Some of the women acknowledged their age and how many of their friends are passing away. Toshi K. stated:

*If I go to Las Vegas for the reunion, that’s the only time I go away. I go there on Saturday and come back on Monday because I have to go to dialysis. There’s about 17 or 18 of us still living, they’re all in their 80s or 90s now, they come in their wheel chairs or canes. It’s sad, but when I get to see them, but I feel so happy.*

Even when Japanese Americans have had the opportunities to tell their stories, there are times when their voices have been silenced. One woman talked about how her
daughter was in elementary school and each student was given the assignment to talk about their families. She said:

My daughter had to do a report on her family history when she was in high school, so she interviewed me. She was the only Japanese American in her class. When she got up to present her report about how both her parents were in the World War II internment camps, her teacher wouldn’t let her present it. She was the only person who didn’t get to talk about her family history.

- Kinue

Several of the other women said they had not ever really discussed their internment camp experiences. One of the women said she has never talked about her internment camp experience with any of her three children or three grandchildren, because she “never thought they were interested.” The majority of the women have mentioned that they have also not told their stories to their grandchildren as well, though one woman said:

I never told my children about my experience. I guess we were just so busy when we were raising them...and they never seemed concerned. I did tell my grandchildren, when I told my grandchildren it also gave me a chance to tell my children too because they were present too. I just felt it was important for me to tell my grandchildren, to tell them what we went through.

- Toshi
In South Central, Los Angeles, I visited a Japanese American woman, named Grace, at her house. We talked over lunch and she told me about her life. The opportunity to visit her house and view all the photos of her ancestors hanging on her walls contributed to the context of her stories. She told me she has the black and white photos of her parents and ancestors hanging on the walls so her children could know a little about their heritage.

A block away from Grace’s house is my grandmother’s (father’s mother) house. She and Grace have been friends ever since they became neighbors. When I interviewed my father’s mother I was astonished to hear her answer when I asked, her if she ever told my father or aunts about her experiences during and after World War II. She said, “I don’t think they were curious (laughs). Well you know my children (laughs), they would never ask. I mean I don’t think it never came to them (laughs).” Surprisingly my grandmother was not the only Japanese American woman I spoke to who answered this way.

Locations of Racial Transitions

Both of my parents grew up in South Central, Los Angeles. The region had a small population of Japanese Americans and many people of my grandparents generations came to live in this area after the World War II internment camps. In order to gain a better sense of the neighborhood and the context of my grandparents and parents’ lives I interviewed one of the Japanese American women’s daughters about growing up in the area.

After World War II many Japanese Americans created communities in Los
Angeles neighbors and areas. The South Central Los Angeles area was home to several Japanese Americans and their families after they moved back to California from the internment camps. The Crenshaw neighborhood was in South Central, Los Angeles, and composed of Japanese American and African American residents. This neighborhood is where communication, culture, and race took place. Kurashige (2008) researches the ethnic relationships is Los Angeles neighborhoods of Japanese Americans. He writes of Japanese Americans living in Southern California, “Like the ‘Negro,’ the ‘Japs’ were welcome in Southern California so long as they confined themselves to the proper social and geographical place defined by whites” (Kurashige, 2008, p. 23).

Several Japanese Americans who were in the World War II internment camps lived in South Central, Los Angeles, especially what they called, “The Crenshaw Area” and in Baldwin Hills. Through ethnographic methods, I immersed myself in the lives of many of the women I interviewed and was able to speak with their family members, husbands, children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors. One of the women whom I spoke to introduced me to her daughter. Her daughter, Patricia, was 52 years old when I interviewed her and had a lot of memories of the Crenshaw area was like Post World War II in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

Communication within the Japanese American community living in the Crenshaw area developed with their own authentic characteristics, integrating Japanese words with English. This way of speaking Japanese is informal and would not be acceptable in Japan or in a formal Japanese setting. Patricia explains:

*I remember Japanese Americans speaking their own English*
language...Most words were English, but they would add a ‘no’ before a noun, maybe in place of ‘the’. It made it sound more Japanese, even though they were speaking English. Sometimes they would throw in a Japanese adjective because it was a better description, for example ‘gocha, gocha’, describing a little boy’s constant energy. They would always say there was no English word for it.

Even within the Crenshaw area Japanese American community there were divisions and borders. The street Crenshaw Boulevard was described as a dividing line between the some of the Japanese American South Central, Los Angeles communities. Though this account of memories about the Crenshaw area focuses on Post World War II experiences, Japanese Americans resided in this neighborhood before World War II. The Leimert Park sub-neighborhood was the center of the Crenshaw district and was targeted with as an undesirable place and “was a symbol of white privilege during the interwar era – a time when racial animus accumulated and patterns of racial oppression consolidated in Los Angeles” (Kurashige, 2008, p. 34).

The decades following post-World War II marked some of the most violent and racially charged events in the United States, especially in urban areas such as South Central, Los Angeles. Neighborhoods in Los Angeles were always changing, and the population of people and their cultures continue to do so in many urban areas. The Martin Luther King assassination was a catalyst sparking the flame of all the racial tension in Los Angeles during the 1960’s. Patricia explains how one day when she was walking home from junior high school with one of her white male friends, he was “jumped” by a
group of African American teenagers and was beat up very badly. After that incident, he and his family left the neighborhood and Patricia never saw him again. The combination of rising unemployment rates, racial tension, and a period of “swift racial transition” (Kurashige, 2008, p. 268) contributed to the “white flight” (p. 269) that occurred in South Central Los Angeles.
Chapter Seven

Stories From a Generation of Women

The Stories Fade Away

There is little difference in the way Japanese American women tell their experiences and life stories to their children and grandchildren. I had thought I would find a difference. From my own experience, my grandparents (my mother’s parents) told my brother and I in great detail about their lives in the internment camp. They did not tell us when we were small children but eventually as teenagers and young adults my brother and I found them speaking about it more and more. However, when I spoke to several of the Japanese American women in this research, I found some of their answers to be similar to their answers of when I asked about their communication with their children. One woman says:

I don’t think I’ve told them. If anything, I think my kids would tell them. But they never asked me about it. It was never like, I’m going to sit down and tell you about life and camp. So actually, I don’t know if they’re interested. I’ve heard there’s very little of it in the history books. So I don’t really know… I don’t know how much they know or how curious they are, because maybe they think we don’t want to talk about. That could be? Cause it was a black era in our lives. But actually in my life it wasn’t black, because if it wasn’t for that...well, when you don’t have anything, everything is good, right? Everything is good. I mean we never had any of this stuff, our own furniture, and we just made due with what we had.
Many Japanese American women in this research explained their experiences with elements of sadness but mostly spoke with a sense of strength and pride to still live in the United States and be an American. The “interlocking axes of power” are not divided between their Japanese identities and their American identities but are situated in contextual, historicized, and socialized ongoing negotiations between embracing their Japanese traditions and American patriotism (Shome, 1999, p. 109). When I spoke to my grandmother on my father’s side, even she said to me, “No, you’re the only one” who asked about our family history. On the contrary, many people in my family remember my grandfather (my father’s father) talking about the some of his experiences during World War II in the form of entertaining stories, especially one particular story about how he drove his brand new car to a isolated internment camp where his father was imprisoned. It was an internment camp where supposedly “dangerous” Japanese Americans were held. My great-grandfather who was in that internment camp was far from dangerous. My grandfather had driven his brand new car into the internment camp to visit his father and the guards confiscated his car. He was unable to get his car back, and he would tell this story often.

Throughout the interviews, thoughts about various people and generations in the Japanese American women’s lives would come up. When one of the women, Kinue, and I were discussing the communication between she and her grandchildren, she mentioned:

*My biggest regret is not asking my mother what life was like coming to this country. They have the series on TV about the war. I haven’t had time to look at TV, but this is what we experienced. We didn’t know what was*
going on but it was nice to know about it after...My mother, she’s [was] in Hiroshima, her father was a womanizer and alcoholic and she was the only child. No money. So she was left with her grandmother and her parents went to Hawaii to work in this plantation. So after she went to middle school, her grandmother said, “You’re going to America as a picture-bride.” Oh boy. She was only 16 years old. She came on the boat and came to America. And that I do know. She said to me so many of the guys would find younger guys, good-looking guys, and their send pictures. When they (the women) would come they would say, “Ohmigod, where’s the man?” She said some of the gals who had money, would turn around and go back home. She didn’t have a choice. So she stayed in America. It turns out this guy, I don’t know how old he was – he’s an alcoholic. She had one little boy, then her husband died from alcoholism, and she had one boy then I think he got killed on a tricycle bike hit by a car. So here’s my mother in America, with no education, she could barely speak the language, and I think she worked the grape fields in the Fresno area, I think. Then the marriage broker put my mom and dad together. Now, when they did that my father’s family disowned him because they were quite wealthy and that kind of stuff.

The lives of many of the women I interviewed consist of sad stories and struggles that they and their parents faced. Their route towards empowerment does not come from a postcolonial framework, viewing themselves as victims or powerless because of their
colonized histories. Instead, they are able to use their knowledge and strength they have gained to move forward, even if it meant not looking back.

Not all Japanese American women kept their stories silent. The eldest of the Japanese American women in this study, Toshi K., told me all of her children and grandchildren know about her life story. Her grandson who does media and web design even made an internet website dedicated to his grandmother’s story in the World War II internment camps. I visited his website and it was a very sophisticated media experience with art and audio features narrating her story.

There is one woman in particular, who has shared her story with her children, grandchildren, and the public. As I was driving to Reiko’s house in South Central, Los Angeles, I did not know what to expect from her story. She was one of the first people I interviewed for my dissertation project since I was referred to her by one of my family members. We had never met until the day of the interview. I entered her house and she had a plate of cookies waiting there for me. She welcomed me graciously into her house and we sat at her table.

Reiko was born in Los Angeles in 1928. Her father owned a wholesale produce market in Downtown, Los Angeles. When she was nine years old in 1937, she went on her first trip to Japan with her family. At first, I was not sure why she was telling me so many details about her trip to Japan, but the details of her Japan trip are important to the events that occurred later in her narrative. She said:

*My dad took us as a whole family [to Japan] because he wanted us to get our tonsils out and he didn’t have much faith in the American doctors. We combined it with a sightseeing trip, so we were there for about six weeks but we...*
spent two weeks in the hospital just to get our tonsils taken out because we were foreigners and they were treating us really good, like celebrities. So after our tonsils were out we traveled through Kyushu and he wanted to show us the different places in Kyushu and this was from summer into a part of a school semester in fall.

In Reiko’s narrative the purpose of her family’s trip to Japan reveals its significance. Because of her family’s medical and sightseeing trip to Japan in 1937, the United States government later suspected Reiko’s father of suspicious activity in World War II because he had gone in 1937. Thus, a long sad and surprising story of how their family was separated and then taken to Japan as U.S. hostages is told. From the beginning of her story, I was expecting her to tell a narrative very similar to the other few women I had interviewed, but her story started to sound very different. She said:

In 1941, after the war broke out, December 7, at 7:30 PM, two FBI agents and a policeman came and arrested my father that evening, so we didn’t know where he was for a couple of weeks. It was scary because my mother was only in her young 30’s with four kids and the eldest was only fifteen and a half. I really marvel that she was able to handle what she did. There was an English teacher at Poly High [School] that my cousin was going to and she had heard about all these fathers being taken after Pearl Harbor, so she made it a point to find out where they were. My brother had a learner’s driving permit so he drove my mother and my auntie, and they (the fathers) were being held at Terminal Island. They could see my father, but they (the guards) wouldn’t let them speak to him. Eventually, my
mother was told to pack clothing for him for both cold weather and hot weather. We found out after Terminal Island, he came over right here to the jail in Los Angeles, on the top floor of the Hall of Records off the freeway. I understand they were held there for a short while, and then from there they were sent to Missoula, Montana. During that time, we were still here in Los Angeles because we hadn’t been interned yet.

Terminal Island is located in San Pedro, California, slightly south of Los Angeles. It is a human-made island in an industrial port area owned by the Port of Los Angeles. Terminal Island became a temporary prison located, confining Japanese American men during the evacuation.

In the spring of 1942, Reiko and her family were relocated to the Santa Anita Assembly Center at the Santa Anita horse racetrack. While her mother, brothers, and she were at the assembly center, Reiko’s father was placed in a men’s-only Justice Camp. Reiko’s father had to stay in the Justice Camp while the rest of her family and she were relocated to the Amache internment camp in Colorado. Reiko felt it was important to describe her father and his character in order for me to gain more insight about their situation:

*My dad is the type of person who is very family-oriented... On September 1, 1943, we left camp. My father thought that he was going to die in camp if he couldn’t be with his family, and he was told he could go to Japan and then that way the family could be together. Actually, he really wanted to go to Crystal City which was a family [internment] camp but it was full*
and they couldn’t accommodate him, so he signed up to go to Japan to be with the family.

Their family was denied the opportunity to go to the Crystal City family camp. Note once again, Reiko’s father had never committed any crime or participated in any illegal throughout his entire life time, but the family’s medical trip in Japan made them suspects to the U.S. of being potentially dangerous. Reiko and her family signed up for the government’s program to go to Japan. They were not given many details or explanations of what kind of program it was. She says:

Later on we found out the reason for that was we were being exchanged for Americans. So the more Americans they could get on the ship, the more Americans that were trapped over there could come home. You know, my father and mother were legal immigrants, my three brothers and I were American citizens, so in other words they were exchanging American citizens of Japanese ancestry for American citizens of White ancestry. A lot people have not heard of this story. We went on the Swedish liner which was a neutral country and the ship was called Gripsholm and then that night all the lights would be on because we would have to go to the Atlantic Ocean. We went across the Atlantic Ocean, stopped at two ports in South America in Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo and then we swung around Africa at Port Elizabeth and then we went up to Goa, India, and that’s where the Japanese liner with Americans were on, and they literally exchanged cargo – humans and baggage – we were there for one day. On the Japanese liner we stopped in
Singapore and Manilla, and we were able to go ashore there because it was occupied by the Japanese army and then we went to Kobe and from there, Yokohama. I was 15 years old at that time. I had kept a diary but at that time my brother said they were confiscating everything so I had to toss it overboard into the ocean and here I had this journal that I kept everyday about what we did, what happened, and now when I think about it, I think what a waste, you know? It took us from September 1, 1943 to November 17, 1943 to get to Yokohama. We went three quarters away around the world because we couldn’t cross the Pacific Ocean.

While the family was en route to Japan, as Reiko had mentioned, they had the Swedish liner stopped in India where the exchange was scheduled to take place. Reiko tells me a short story about how the exchange was literally, “head for head.” She recalls, there was one man whom was on their ship as a hostage and he was in the mental ward of the ship because he had mental and physical disabilities. At one point before the exchange took place, the man got away from his supervising nurse and he wheeled his wheelchair over the railing. The ship’s crew threw out life jackets into the sea and lowered a life boat down and people were looking for him. His body was nowhere to be found during that time and that affected the outcome of the exchange because there was one person missing.

Throughout the interview, I noticed Reiko was able to tell her story very matter-of-factly and was able to remember very specific details, such as exact dates. She explains:
The sad story too is the U.S. kidnapped some Japanese people living in Peru and they brought them over to the U.S., put them in camp and they used them also to exchange. See, they are the ones that are fighting for redress. I did get redress after two years (after it was issued), I had to fight for mine because I had gone to an enemy’s country during the war.

What are you going to do if you’re a minor? You have to go with your parents. Unless they wanted to make arrangements to stay, I would have gladly stayed. It took me two years with the help of the NCRR, they took me to Washington D.C., I spoke my case, and after two years they finally gave me my $20,000.

Reiko’s participation with the NCRR encouraged her to remember and write down all the specific details of her experiences before, during, and after World War II. She has spoken about the hostage program she and her family joined several times when she had to fight to obtain her redress sum from the government. After Reiko and her family were exchanged as hostages in India, they were taken to Japan. She says:

I was in Japan until 1947. I was there four years. I was there for two years during the war, and then two years after and I worked for the Air Force base. They had schooling but after about six months the school was bombed so after, no more school (sadness). It was an experience you know, I think all this has helped me to cope with a lot of things. It took me three or four months to finally understand what the teacher was saying (in Japanese) because my Japanese was just conversational with my parents.

Until you go to Japan, you don’t realize there are a lot of words you don’t
know. When you talk to the Isseis here you’re throwing in a lot of American words which they understand but in Japan, everything has to be pure Japanese. It was very difficult. It was an experience.

My mother, instead of enrolling me into what they called a state school, she enrolled me into a mission school, a school run by missionaries, because they were more lenient. The principal there was a graduate of Boston College, so every so often she would invite me up to her house and we would have tea and I guess she just wanted to speak English to somebody.

In Japan, it was very difficult for Reiko to go to the Japanese state-run school. Although Reiko was Japanese American, the Japanese language and transition of suddenly attending a school in a different country was far beyond challenging. Reiko’s mother eventually enrolled her into a school run by missionaries. The principal of the missionary school was a graduate from Boston College in the U.S. and spoke English. The missionary school was an all-girls high school and she attended it for about six months before she started working.

Aside from Reiko’s challenges of going to school, during the time of World War II Japan was having food and resource shortages. She says:

By the time we got to Japan, Japan didn’t have a lot of young people because they were all involved with the war. They didn’t have much food. We were rationed with brown rice and with the brown rice, they would give us dried daikon, and rolled barley, and dried sweet potato and my mother would cook that in with the brown rice. And then we had one loaf
of bread for a family of five – a week -- of course no butter, no milk, no eggs, and so it got to the point that when my mother would go to the market, she would never buy meat, she would only buy fish because she didn’t know what the source of the meat was. She grew sweet potatoes and she would cook them and even the leaves she would cook into fukadami. So made us of every part of the sweet potato.

As I listened to Reiko tell her story, we sat at her dining room table eating cookies and having tea. Her husband walked around the house and every once in a while smiled at us. I realized even though she and her husband had both probably been through so much during and after World War II, they lived very relaxed, happy, and comfortable lives. Reiko went on to explain how she was able to make it back to the United States:

Then when I came back to the U.S. in 1947, I had just turned 19 and I brought my 15-year-old brother with me by myself because my parents couldn’t come. In order to get a passport I had to have someone vouch for me. There were a lot of G.I.’s that we knew that had gone to Japan on the occupation force so one of them came down to Fukoa to visit us. I went back to Yokohama with one of them and he took me to the Consulate in Yokohama and he vouched for me. He said that he knew me for over 10 years, we lived on the same street, and with that they gave me a special passport to return to the U.S. with my brother.

When we got back to the U.S., the first thing I wanted to do was enroll in high school. I didn’t have any high school education. We had to have a
financial sponsor so one of our good family friends took us in for two
months and after that my brother and I did school boy, school girl work,
which is you live at someone’s home and for $30 they give you room and
board and you do work around the house and they give you enough time
so you can go to school. I enrolled my brother in high school and I wanted
to go to high school too but they said I was too old. They suggested I go to
city college, so I went over to Los Angeles City College and took the
entrance exam and got accepted. Some how, the records got mixed up and
I never got my GED, but I did graduate and I did get an AA degree.

In 1955 Reiko’s parents and the rest of her family were finally able to make it
back to the U.S. It took a long time for Reiko and her brother to get her parents and
family back into the country. They had to hire a lawyer, and what Reiko finds most
interesting about her parents coming back to a country that once traded them as hostages
is:

You know, you think my father would be bitter but as soon as they were
allowed to become citizens, my father went down and became a citizen.
Isn’t that something? I don’t know if I could do that, a country that did
something like that. Before that, they were not allowed to become citizens,
they were not allowed to hold real estate.

Reiko’s mother and father both chose to become U.S. citizens despite the
hardships they went through and the politicized history that immobilized them from their
freedom, family, and homeland for ten years. Their patriotism was displayed in the most
complex of ways embedded in Japanese American history contextualized by politics,
citizenship, and devotion to their country. This act should not be mistaken as shame of being Japanese or as passiveness but as a claim rejecting an on-going life and victimization as colonized individuals. They saw themselves as neither the colonizer nor the colonized because for their country, they agreed to act as hostages in contribution to the war effort. Of course they did not know at the time what was truly happening, since the U.S. did not provide them with the knowledge and power necessary to fully understand what they were agreeing to. I use this as an example of the “historical colonial separation” Gandhi (2006, p. 4) mentions. Reiko and her parents live on-going lives with clinging qualities of colonization steeped into their identities, but they also contributed acts of patriotism through the colonial politics of the hostage exchange program.

Unlike many of the Japanese American women I spoke to Reiko tells me she talks about her experience often to her children and grandchildren:

*I talk to my grandsons about this. The reason I talk about my experiences is because there are a lot of people in my generation, and they don’t want to speak about their experiences, but the reason I do is I was sort of the spokesperson for the hostages... When I was appearing in these community programs and speaking about my experiences and why I felt I should get redress, Lucy and Lisa (her daughters) were very interested and whenever they would see any clippings they would clip it out because she wanted her boys to find out and know about my experiences. Like they know my husband’s experiences, he was in the occupation force in Japan, but not for too long. He wanted to keep a scrapbook so when the boys grew up they knew what our history was. The Gripsholm took two
trips. One was shortly after 1942 and that ship was filled with people from the embassy and people who were with big Japanese companies and then the second one was being formed they didn’t have too many left and that’s why they got the Latin Americans, the Japanese from Peru. Some of them did get redress, but many of them, they didn’t have the proper papers and I could understand that. I didn’t have papers but I was fortunate the Consulate gave me my passport.

There are really a lot of people that don’t know about this exchange program. It’s part of the U.S. history that is very shameful, you know, putting us into camps, taking our fathers away, shipping us to Japan so White Americans could come back.

World War II created a tremendous lifelong impact on Reiko and her family’s lives. The challenges she faced began when World War II started, on to when her father was imprisoned and her family was evacuated into the internment camps, to when her family was taken hostage by the United States for the hostage exchange program. The colonization did not end there, Reiko had to struggle through difficult times in Japan with her family, find a way to come back to the U.S. with her brother, and start her lives over again without her parents in the U.S. with her brother. In 1955, ten years after World War II ended, her parents were finally allowed back into the U.S. Several decades later, Reiko had to fight for her redress since the government said she had not been in the U.S. Japanese American internment camps. Her fight and story shared with her children and grandchildren bring to light a new sense of knowledge about the U.S. history which for most people, has been unheard of and silenced. She uses this knowledge towards
empowering her family, Japanese Americans, and U.S. Americans with knowledge of her experiences as a Japanese American woman.

Through Reiko’s story I was able to link her narrative to published research and literature regarding the Japanese-Peruvians and Japanese Americans interned and exchanges as hostages by the U.S. Gardiner (1991) writes about the Japanese – U.S. hostage exchange which derived from “the U.S. desire to retrieve the many American civilians in Japanese hands, the desire of Latin American governments to rid themselves of un-wanted aliens” (p. 144). United States American, Costa Ricans, and Peruvians of Japanese descent were abroad the Gripsholm liner that Reiko mentioned in her narrative (Gardiner, 1991).
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Saying Goodbye and Keeping the Story Alive

When I finally arrived to the hospital in Santa Barbara, where my grandmother was in a coma, I was exhausted from traveling. The doctors said she had severe brain and heart damage after her heart attack. My mother and I rented a room on the medical campus and stayed the night with her for a couple of days. In the middle of the night I could not help but wake up crying in my sleep, feeling as if each muscle strand that held my heart together was unraveling. My heart felt like it was breaking loose with sadness.

The next morning, I woke up and went to my grandmother’s hospital bed. The hospital is at a beautiful location and the staff is nice but no matter the room and hallways, it still smells like a hospital and consciously, I feel as if she is so far away from me. I was sitting on my grandmother’s hospital bed with her, talking to her even though she was in a coma. She hated being alone, especially in a new place. I thought of her as the young girl from Los Angeles, who moved with her mother to Brawley, California, after her father left their family and how she gradually learned to love her step-father, the cantaloupe farmer. The experiences she shared with me over and over again about her life in the Poston internment camp and how when after she was released for the internment camp she worked as a domestic servant when she was only 16 years old. My grandmother also worked as a domestic housekeeper. Because she grew up in a rural area, she and her family never owned a vacuum cleaner, nor did she know how to use one. She worked for a White family in Michigan. A few months later she was able to move to Chicago. Her parents moved to Chicago before she did so they could find jobs. My grandmother’s
father obtained a job as a janitor at a bowling company and her mother worked in a clothing sweatshop.

When my grandmother arrived in Chicago as a teenager, her mother got her a job a sewing factory, selling clothing at “high-end” department stores where she received a nickel for every dozen shirt collars she sewed. She worked for a few years at the sweatshop factory and she recalls, “And then I had to say to God, ‘Here I am, almost 21, if you don’t send someone [a man] soon I’m going to have to go back to school. I have to do something else. I can’t sew all my life.’” Eventually she and my grandfather met in Chicago. Before he moved to Chicago, he was working in a basket factory in Cleveland, and later he moved to Chicago and worked in a bowling alley. While my grandfather was in Chicago, he was living in a boarding house with 11 other men and was working very hard. My grandmother told me how he used to fall asleep on Chicago’s subway L car and wake up and go to work from the subway.

My grandmother and grandfather got married, and her parents moved back to Los Angeles. Her father, my great-grandfather, worked as a gardener. Eventually my grandfather bought a jukebox route, which supplied jukeboxes to the bars in Los Angeles. The relocation experiences my grandmother had from Brawley, California, to Poston, Arizona, to Jackson, Michigan, to Chicago, Illinois, and finally to Los Angeles, California, gave her an extreme distaste for traveling. When she would talk about her internment camp experience, she would follow-up by saying, “That’s why I don’t like to travel, the stress of all that. It stays with you.”

I think of all of this as I sit on the hospital bed next to her. As I was holding her hand, I felt her fingers stiffen and turn cold. She had passed away as I held her hand and
thought of so much of her life that she shared with me. A few minutes later the doctor came into the room and announced her dead.

Even though I had faced several challenges during my doctoral degree program, for a few months I could not bare the thought of having to write about the Japanese American women I had interviewed, especially my grandmother. I could not even fathom what it would be like to have to listen to the tape recording of the interview I did with her and transcribe it. The audio tape sat in a box tucked into my desk drawer for several weeks.

As time went on the women I had already interviewed would call me up and tell me they had a friend or family member who was a Japanese American woman and was in the World War II internment camps that they were interested in being interviewed for my research project. I could not say no to them. The more women I spoke with, the more I realized how important these stories stay alive, and they would not stay alive if I kept the audio recordings untouched in a box in my desk. After all the hardships these Japanese American women had faced in the World War II internment camps, and more importantly, their willingness to share part of their lives with me, I realized this was a gift I could not take for granted. If I kept their narratives hidden, I would be contributing to the notorious silence of Japanese American women’s lives and histories. Furthermore, I would not only be quieting their stories, I would also be silencing myself as a Japanese American woman, I would also be keeping my story silent. I realized how important it was that I continued to interview, transcribe, and write my dissertation in honor of the Japanese American women’s stories, especially my grandmother’s story.
Conclusion

The lives of the Japanese American women who were in the World War II U.S. internment camps were difficult and many of their stories have remained silent. Being seen as an enemy in one’s own nation, losing everything they owned, and having to start their lives over again in a country which expressed prejudice and discrimination was a challenge for all the women in this study. In coherence to the research conducted by Nagata, Trierweiler, and Talbot (1999) on third-generation Japanese Americans and their communication about their internment camp experiences was often avoided in intergenerational conversations or rarely spoken about to children and grandchildren. Findings from this research show the Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camps have had difficulty telling their narratives to their children and grandchildren. Most of the women expressed they have not told their stories or shared very little of their World War II experiences with all their children and grandchildren. I did not want to exclude Japanese American women who did not have children and/or grandchildren in this study, so I interviewed them too and asked if they had shared their World War II internment camp stories with relatives or friends. Most of them all replied they had not really talked about their experiences but may have mentioned it. The Japanese American women suggested in their interviews that they have only shared their stories with their children or grandchildren when they were asked about it. Though each individual has not shared their story openly with all the members of their future generations, every individual interviewed expressed the importance for not only Japanese Americans, but North American U.S. citizens as well, to know about the World War II internment camps.
In this study some of the women talked about not sharing their stories “because they (the children or grandchildren) did not seem interested, does not mean that they view their own stories as insignificant. As Nagata and Cheng (2003) wrote in their research, “historical race-based trauma can be transmitted intergenerationally through storytelling, over- and under-disclosure, and silence.” Some of the internees have chosen silence as a way of coping and other parents may have told their children about their stories to “promote awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination in society, messages that reflect a preparation for bias” (Nagata & Cheng, 2003).

Feminist and critical studies research are comprised of locating the relationships found through holistic methods of participant-observation and ethnography in epistemic and natural communities. The interdependence of ethnography, ethics, and theories is an important relationship within the realm of naturalized feminist research. Immersing oneself into the culture and entering the lives (when invited) of the women I interviewed brought me, as the ethnographer, into a new relationship with the Japanese American women. The ethnography became a method where the negotiations and connections of accountability, trust, and responsibility were examined, developed, and enacted upon with commitment. Although I had known some of these women for several years, such as my grandmother, my acknowledgement as an outsider to her experiences and knowledge provided her with the power and right to decide what and how she wanted to share her narrative and experiences with me. I use the experiences she has shared with me throughout her life time to illustrate locations, scenes, and dialogues in the opening introduction of Chapter One. In terms of her story, I did not have to piece together too many elements of her life because I heard about her life constantly, and lived part of her
life with her for 28 years. It did not seem possible to so vividly paint scenes of the other
Japanese American women’s lives I interviewed as I did with my grandmother because I
had only heard their stories a couple or a few times and some of the women chose or
could not remember as many details.

Ethnographic research is not without tension and self-inquiry, as it involves ones’
physical, mental, and ethical being to participate, which becomes vulnerable and
responsive to the community she or he is working with and the journey of the research.
Ethnography is not about the researcher writing about herself or himself as the subject,
but does involve the acknowledgement of one’s location in terms of privilege, race, and
power, in other words, the gaze or lens from which the experience is being perceived.
Lange (2000) writes, “The world is quite literally perceived and not just interpreted,” in a
postcolonial framework (p. 229). The importance in the process lies in the awareness of
the ethnographer to use “the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make
accessible – to penetrate the borders” to reach the voices “otherwise restrained and out of
reach” (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

The reflection of self and identity takes place in this ethnographic research on
Japanese American women. In the ethnographic study by Reddy (2005), she mentions in
the beginning of her book of how she tells her family and friends that she is going to go
study hijras and some of them disapprove she should not be interacting with them. The
community a researcher studies, especially when the community is stigmatized, opens the
researcher up to facing the same stigmatization as the community they are researching. I
found this to be true. Although I did not face the stigmatization, I was able to relate to the
Japanese American women as using silence as a way of coping. My silence was not based
upon my experiences in the internment camps, but my own personal challenges of writing about Japanese American women who were similar to me and were related to me.

Madison (2005) writes the performance of peoples’ lives helps to understand their experiences, and all humans perform in ways relating to their identities and communities; this can be said of Japanese American women too. Our identities change and transform due to many factors such as generation, age, regions of where we live, and more, but viewing the performance of Japanese American women who were in the World War II internment camp also made me realize my own performance of Japanese American female characteristics too. The inquiries of what women reveal and share about themselves relates to the critical concerns of feminist research made by Butler (2003) about humaneness and the dimensions in how humanness or loss of humanness are enacted upon. Drawing from colonialist perspectives of organized and ideal societies creates perceptions of the Japanese American women’s post-internment camp lives as stabilized, which they were not. Thus, the on-going qualities of colonization, imprisonment, relocation, and discrimination from World War II, contribute to the notions of physical imprisonment and physical liberation from the internment camps. The focus on physical imprisonment and liberation create a bi-polar status that ignores the mental and intergenerational concepts of colonization that can last far beyond the moment when people are liberated from colonization.

This research goes beyond the issues and life experiences of Japanese American women; it explores how history, identity, culture, communication, generations, and power are interwoven in countries around the world including the United States. During World War II there were several other Axis nations besides Japan, such as Germany,
Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, however, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were specifically targeted and placed in internment camps. The influences of identity, politics, race, nationality, and war continue to have affects on many individuals and groups of people living in the U.S. The lives of Japanese Americans and the effects of Executive Order 9066 are only a fraction of the inequalities of power and the struggles of race, ethnicity, identity, and culture in the U.S. Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economics, and various other components of identity continue to be politicized.

Current issues threatening individuals’ identities include the passing of Proposition 8 in California, where only a marriage between a man and woman is recognized in the state of California, Arizona’s law ordering immigrants to carrying their registration documents (or those who just appear to look like immigrants to be questioned if police or authorities suspect them to be immigrants), and post-9/11 acts of discrimination against people of Middle Eastern ancestry or of the Muslim religion. The Japanese Americans who have fought for their redress and have shared their stories follow in the civil rights movement of American Indians, African Americans, Latinas/Latinos, Asian Americans, and several groups of people who have fought for equality. There is an ongoing need for awareness, accountability, and responsibility for issues around the world that continue to promote acts of unequal, injustice, violence, and prejudice against people and their identities.

In relation to Gandhi’s (2004) philosophies on anti-colonial thought, the creations of dualist perspectives strive towards utopian societies often disregard the in-between-ness of other possibilities. The increments of power, stability, economy, and citizenship gained, have the ability to move individuals farther and farther away from
their ancestors of their own former identities of otherness (Ong, 1999). The way the
Japanese American women in this study have communicated or not communicated does
not rely upon them being Japanese or having a certain amount of Japanese blood running
through their veins but the contextualized, historicized, and socialized negotiations of
power, privilege, and politics. The ways in which they have responded to moving beyond
focusing on their victimization as colonized individuals should not be interpreted as the
interwar era did not affect them. On the contrary, it affected them with numerous
challenges and struggles. However, their identities as Americans and the patriotism many
of them expressed for their country created identities that do not fit within the
postcolonial framework. It was not their choice to be placed in internment camps but
many of the Japanese American women and their families made the choice to support the
American war efforts through showing their devotion, fighting for their country, and
enduring their hardships.

Many of the Japanese American women I interviewed said they did not talk about
their World War II experiences to their children or their grandchildren because they
suspected they were “not interested” or “they never asked about it”. These responses beg
further inquiry in future research about the children and grandchildren of the Japanese
American women who were interviewed. Perhaps, the children and grandchildren of the
Japanese American women interviewed in this research project do know a little bit about
their parents and grandparents’ experiences but have also chose silence as a way of
coping for themselves, knowing that it is difficult to see their elders mentally re-live and
talk about their experiences and challenges. Future research suggests we need to ask, how
do we approach our parents and grandparents about discussing their experiences,
especially when those experiences are traumatic? The stories and memories of our elders do not last forever. Yet, the importance of memories can be the most powerful pathway back to our culture’s identities and histories.
References


APPENDIX A

Examples of Interview Questions

1. What is your name?

2. What generation of Japanese American are you (first, second, third, fourth, etc)?

3. Can you briefly tell me about what your life was like before entering the U.S. World War II internment camp?

4. Can you please tell me about your experience living in the United States World War II internment camps?

5. What were some challenges you faced after you were released from the internment camp?

6. How did you tell your story about the internment camps to your children?

7. How did experiencing internment camp affect your identity as a Japanese American?

8. How you tell your story about the internment camps to your grandchildren?

9. Is there a difference in how you shared your story with your children in comparison to how they share your story with your grandchildren?

10. Do you feel that it is important to share your story about the U.S. World War II internment camps to future generations of your family?